

RUNNING THE SUNWARD MINIS

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The Waikato/Auckland border is where Deals on Wheels lined up five Sunward mini excavators so the team could take a look over the latest F-Series models.

With the temperature nudging a little over thirty degrees in the shade, DOW tester Josh Simpson and I were both keenly eyeing the air-conditioned Sunward closed-cab models from the line-up of five mini excavators that New Zealand distributor Endraulic Equipment had earlier dropped off at a rural block on the Auckland/Waikato border.

The Sunward F-Series machines have proven themselves popular with utility companies and owner operators, due to their strong price-point that doesn't skimp on power availability, safety features, and add-ons usually seen on the more expensive brands.



Five mini excavators in the Sunward F-Series line up for the DOW crew to try out

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Sunward's mini range from 1.8 to 5.6-tonnes delivers a variety of excavators suited to a myriad of jobs and our mission was to spend some time learning more about the features of the latest F-Series, and then bust into a pile of topsoil to get a feel of how each machine performed. Granted, we wouldn't be operating in conditions that the mini excavators were really intended for, but it would still give us a good indication of the capabilities of each machine.

One such example on the models 3.5 tonnes and above are the anti-drop valves on the dipper arm and in my opinion one of the biggest leap forwards in safety technology in the past 10 or so years.

Another feature of the F-Series are the Yanmar engines, which on the two smallest models, the 1.8 and 2.0-tonne models (SWE18UF and SWE20F), now feature a larger 18hp Yanmar engine, a bigger KYB pump and drive motors.

The Sunward F-Series models also come fully piped with dual auxiliary piping.

"We've got high flow and low flow, so if you were to put on your hydraulic tilt-head there is no exiting the cab to switch between your drive unit when you're drilling holes and your tilt mechanism, so it can be operated from inside the cab," says Anthony Smith, sales executive for Endraulic Equipment.

Piping that extends all the way down to the boom comes standard on all the F-Series models, making the addition of a hydraulic hitch a straightforward process.



Sunward 18UF in foreground

With pretty much all the size bases covered in the Sunward F-Series models, a closer look at the closed-cab models shows good attention to detail including radio with twin-cab speakers and obligatory cup holders.

For the operators across all the Sunward models, they will find the auxiliary hydraulic controls on the floor and Endraulic say there is an option of moving these to the operating sticks if required.

Time to hit the dirt

So, with a better understanding of some of the key features of the Sunward F-Series models, it is time to do a bit of earth moving. As mentioned earlier we had been given a stockpile of topsoil to dig into.

Due to the drought-like conditions of the upper North Island and length of time the pile had been consolidating, it proved to be a formidable foe especially in the upper layers of the pile.

THE ED SAYS: SWE25UF – machine weight: 2650kg

My first excavator choice was the middle of the range SWE25UF. The 2.5 tonne open-cab model looked just right for contractors who like to trailer their equipment to site behind the work ute on weekdays, while swapping out for a boat trailer at the weekends.

Operation-wise, the compact mini excavator felt well-balanced, with good hydraulic oil flow throughout the arm movements. I did have to slew the arm ever so slightly to get a good view of the bucket, but I did have a digging bucket on the end of the arm as opposed to a wider weed bucket.

The removable canopy should prove handy for contractors who work in confined spaces and the reach for a machine of its size while still maintaining a stable footing impressed me.



Sunward 20F

SWE20F – machine weight 1940kg

I've been considering purchasing a second-hand mini excavator for my small block of land, so opted to move down through the range of Sunward machines, while Josh busied himself with the larger models.

Next on my list was the two tonne SWE20F and I was interested to see how much vision the cabbed version provided. While this model doesn't come with air-conditioning, the opened windows and door provided good airflow and the cab kept the sun from beating in. After using the machine for a good while, I think my first choice would be a cabbed version as along with protection from the elements, all-round vision was fine, along with the not half-bad sounds coming from the twin speakers.

Power and performance felt on par with a number of other different brand mini excavators I have used previously and operating comfort was surprisingly good for a guy of my semi-generous proportions.

SWE18UF – machine weight 1880kg

Smallest of the Sunward F-Series range is the 1.8 tonne SWE18UF model. Frequently seen being used by utility companies and often sandwiched between the ground and the largest operator available, these sturdy little workhorses are probably responsible for a significant amount of our underground-placed connectivity.

The reason for their popularity as I see it is their simple design, along with no-nonsense control layout and ease of maintenance, not to mention pricing that bean counters find attractive.

In action, the SWE18UF worked well and at a good pace. The open cab model is a popular option and similar to the SWE25UF the canopy can be easily removed for low height work such as under house excavations.

JOSH SAYS:

SWE60UF – machine weight 5630kg

First off the rank, I was keen to try the only machine with a tilt

bucket, whilst also making sure I had the luxury of the air conditioned cab on such a stifling hot day. Climbing into the machine is assisted by a half grated step outside of the cabin door, really handy for kicking the muck off the boots before entering. Looking around the cab from the operator's seat, all your usual mod cons seem to be at your fingertips and come equipped with a LCD screen with all your usual information displayed.

Climbing up the stockpile was tackled with ease and did not show any sign of letting up in the track motors, the hydraulic pump power proving adequate with the arm being used at the same time to pull the machine up the steep slope.

The tilt bucket was operated by the factory standard proportional control toggle on the joystick and cleared up foot space on the floor, which is something you usually only find on higher priced spec'd machines.

Ground trimming seemed to be done with ease, with equal flows being supplied to all rams simultaneously.

SWE35UF – machine weight 3850kg

Next on the list was another cabbed air-con machine to have a play on, the SWE35UF. First impressions are it seems very similar to the previously SWE60UF model but on a smaller scale. Again, these machines seem to be equipped with a lot of features that are generally only seen on higher priced spec'd machines like LED lights and anti-drop valves as standard.

Climbing into the cab, I noticed the floor seems to dip downwards from the door, a bit annoying when having to sweep out the cab, but maybe only to certain individuals.

Digging through semi virgin ground was done without too much fuss and again seemed to have good flow and power to all rams.



Sunward SWE60UF

Sunward SWE35UF



SUMMARY

The Ed says:

In my opinion the Sunward F-Series models represent good value for money. It's not difficult to find many older Sunward models still in regular work, which attests to their reliability and build quality. One of the reasons a lot of bean counters choose Sunward is that they realise how much extra chargeable work needs to be done to make up the price differential over more expensive brands. This alone should make the Sunward-branded mini excavators worthy of investigation by prospective purchasers.

Josh says:

In my opinion these Sunward F-series models have a lot on offer for the price tag and have some significant improvements over past models. With well-known and trusted main components, accompanied with a 3000-hour/three-year warranty, any potential purchaser's mind should be put at ease when looking at the F-series range. When comparing apples with apples, these machines are definitely a leading contender. ■

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