

'We see a huge opportunity for backhoe loaders'

GIRIPRAKASH KV



Sandeep Singh, MD, Tata Hitachi

Sandeep Singh, MD of Tata Hitachi, is upbeat about the new offering, Shinrai

Tata Hitachi Construction Machinery is riding the wave of infrastructure development, which has fuelled demand for its excavators.

The joint venture of Hitachi Construction Machinery of Japan and Tata Motors is now gearing up for a comeback in the backhoe loader space.

Sandeep Singh, Managing Director, discusses more in this email interview. Excerpts:

What has prompted Tata Hitachi to re-enter the backhoe loader market?

We are seeing more irrigation and infrastructure spends across sectors. Backhoe loaders are used in practically all infrastructure projects and now account for nearly half the construction equipment industry's sales by value and volumes.

With our infrastructure still needing substantial investments, the backhoe loader market is expected to retain decent growth rate well into the future. This scenario presents us with a huge market opportunity with our large distribution network that can address this market.

Could you tell us more about this new model?

Shinrai, our new backhoe loader, can work in the deepest, highest and toughest of job sites. Its hydraulic system saves fuel by making oil flow only when required. Customers can track all machine parameters like location, operational parameters, machine health and services due from their mobile phones using INSITE, Tata Hitachi's telematics suite.

Shinrai's engine delivers high torque at low rpm and uses an in-line fuel pump.

Its driveline is designed for loading and dozing as it maximises the tractive effort. Its components are market-proven and extensively tested by Tata Hitachi.

Will it be made in India?

Yes, Shinrai will be manufactured at our Dharwad plant. This facility has been upgraded using learnings from Hitachi Japan and our own experience. It is a digitally-enabled assembly facility.

We have gone through an extensive process of 100 per cent certification of all vendors supplying components for Shinrai, starting from the humble nut to full-fledged structures. Our personnel are regularly trained long-term at Hitachi manufacturing plants in Japan. Many of them were involved in the Shinrai project from the inception stage.

How about the kind of investments made for Shinrai?

We have made substantial investments from three standpoints: Product development, production and sales and marketing. All these would add up to more than ₹40 crore.

Beyond this, we will focus on strengthening our equipment range in excavators, both for road construction and mining. We will also concentrate on our wheeled equipment: Wheel loaders and backhoe loaders.

How will you address the issue of shortage of trained operators for backhoe loaders?

Skilled manpower is in short supply across the infrastructure industry. The Centre has recognised this issue and created the National Skill Development Corporation. This, in turn, funds the Infrastructure Equipment Skill Council (IESC), promoted by the Indian Construction Equipment Manufacturers Association and supported by CII, to spearhead skilling of workforce. Under the aegis of IESC, we have set up dedicated training facilities and certification programmes at our Kharagpur and Dharwad plants.

And, finally, what is your take on the Tatas seeking to exit from Tata Hitachi?

This is the longest standing JV between the two partners and the next course of action needs to be decided by them. Hitachi, as an organisation, believes in long-standing partnerships and maintaining good relationships with partners.

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