

HIRE INTELLIGENCE

UP IN THE RED DIRT COUNTRY OF THE PILBARA, BENEATH THE COBALT BLUE SKIES AND THE SEARING HEAT OF THE SUN, IT IS TOUGH TERRITORY FOR ANY MACHINE AND MOST PARTICULARLY TRUCKS. T&TA HEADED TO WA'S RUGGED NORTH WEST TO TAKE A LOOK AT KARRATHA MACHINERY HIRE AND ITS OPERATIONS IN THE PILBARA.

It's tough for all trucks but even tougher for trucks on a hire fleet, with a range of different drivers, heavy workload, a touch of occasional mistreatment and that ever present hot weather and choking red dust.

For Karratha Machinery Hire running a fleet of trucks in the tough Pilbara means you have to pick trucks that will last in such tough conditions and you have to make sure you keep up with the maintenance.

Steve Griffiths is the general manager of Karratha Machinery Hire and has been living in the Pilbara for the past 13 years seeing the highs and lows of a town that rode the wave of the resources boom in the early 2000s before the downturn in 2015.

"Its definitely a tough place to do business, you have harsh conditions, tight deadlines, the whole lot really," Steve Griffiths told us when we visited him in Karratha.

"The heat and the dust are probably the hardest things to cope with, they put the most pressure on machinery, the dust gets into every corner of a truck and the heat really pushes the wear and tear on every part of the machine," he tells us.

If that isn't enough the aforementioned roller coaster business environment in the Pilbara poses its own challenges. Legendary stories about the massive wages earned, rents being paid and no expense spared operations in the boom have been matched in more recent times by a plummeting real estate market, mass redundancies, shuttered mining operations and yards full of parked up machinery.





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"The downturn in 2015 meant the whole town was in a bit of a holding pattern and that made it tough for businesses and it was tough but we hadn't put all our eggs in one basket and survived," he added.

Karratha Machinery Hire has been around for more than two decades, and was started by Steve's father in law, Phil Patterson, establishing a hire fleet of excavators, graders and other machines as well as tip trucks, water trucks and service trucks.

While the big lure are the large mining corporates, KMH made sure it wasn't totally dependant on just one sector and actively serviced the domestic market looking after the smaller companies

as well as the large.

Another factor that Steve reckons helped was having the right machinery, that was reliable and durable, particularly he says in regards to the trucks on the fleet. The majority of the KMH fleet are Hinos with a couple of other brands including a single Fuso tipper and a Freightliner prime mover that hauls the low loader trailer delivering excavators and other machines to customers.

"We have found the Hinos are good all round trucks, they're well built, perfect for what we need, parts are easy to get when you need them and they are super reliable," said Steve.

"We have a pretty strong relationship with Paul McGovern and his team at WA

Hino in Perth which helps, but the Hinos last up here and our customers like them as well," he said.

The KMH fleet includes three 700 series heavy duty models, eight medium duty 500 series and 11 of the light duty 300 series models. With the fleet being a mix of tippers, water trucks and service trucks, the demands of customers can be met all the way across the Pilbara.

"The customers might want to use them close into Karratha or way out hundreds of kilometres away on a mine site, which means a potentially long drive, and the Hinos are comfortable and easy to drive, the air conditioning doesn't hurt up here either," said Steve with a smile.



“All our Hino medium-duty trucks are equipped with Allison’s because it is the only transmission that will live out here on a hire fleet,” said Griffiths.

“A hire truck gets rough treatment from a wide variety of drivers who don’t have ownership of the vehicle, so they are much harder on the machinery. If the truck is a manual, the clutch and transmission get very tough treatment. With Allison Automatics we don’t have to worry about replacing clutches or damage to the gearbox.

The Allison is favoured by our customers because they are safer and easier to drive,” he said. “We get long periods of consistently high temperature over 38 C in the Pilbara, which creates its own problems for all machinery, but the Allison has never let us down.”

During our trip to Karratha we witnessed some of the Karratha Machinery Hire trucks in action working with customers,

admittedly close to Karratha and not out in the wild remote parts of the Pilbara where they often work.

One of the 700 series Hinos is configured as a prime mover towing a water tanker trailer and it was out tackling the wild red dirt roads with the tanker transporting water to keep dust down for a construction project.

Similarly down on the sea front at nearby Dampier one of the KMH Hinos, this time a 500 series rigid fitted with a larger water working a large redevelopment of the seaside park and reserve area, hard at work keeping the area damp to ensure minimum dust during the construction phase.

“These are fairly typical examples of the sort of work our trucks handle each day and you have to be flexible and you have to have the trucks there when the client wants them,” said Griffiths.

“Unlike truck rental in the city we can’t

be too precious about the roads and the conditions they will be working in, it’s all pretty rough and rugged up here,” he added.

While the Pilbara has weathered the severe down turn that came on the back of the drop in iron ore prices and the completion of the major part of the mine construction boom, things are looking up again in recent months.

“Things have picked up, thanks to the rise in iron ore prices, partly as a result or the reduction in supply from places like Brazil, so that has seen a bit more confidence in local producers and some new projects have been approved, so things are looking up,” said Steve.

With such a solid foundation and a long term commitment to the Pilbara, Karratha Machinery Hire will be around servicing the mineral rich region for many years to come. 📺

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