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Earth-friendly dirt-moving

Oxford company Crossfire gets fuel-efficient Caterpillar bulldozer

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Photo by YODIT GIDEY/Herald

Curtis Valencia, superintendent with Crossfire LLC, watches Gene Bacus operate a hybrid bulldozer along County Road 334, east of Ignacio, on Monday. Crossfire owner Ezra Lee hopes the diesel-electric bulldozer helps the natural-gas industry project a friendlier image while saving gas and lowering emissions.

Is it a hybrid?

Technically, the new D7E bulldozer by Caterpillar is a hybrid because it combines two energy sources to move the vehicle: diesel and electricity.

Unlike a typical hybrid automobile, the bulldozer does not have batteries to store the electricity. Instead, the engine powers a generator that in turn produces electricity that helps move the

OXFORD - A San Juan Basin gas contractor is among the first companies in the nation to operate a fuel-saving Caterpillar bulldozer.

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The Caterpillar D7E bulldozer uses about 20 percent less fuel than a comparable nonelectric bulldozer, the manufacturer says. It's also quieter and delivers more consistent power to

"electric drive train." This drive train takes the place of a traditional mechanical transmission. And unlike a Prius, the D7E has about 100,000 pounds of pulling power (but it does burn through 6.2 gallons of fuel per hour, according to Caterpillar).

move dirt.

Lee purchased the bulldozer for \$650,000, about 25 percent more than a regular bulldozer would cost. But it comes with some advantages.

The Caterpillar runs at a constant rpm of 1,500 to 1,800, delivering more consistent power to the ground, Lee said.

It also saves gas, less of a concern now than last summer, when diesel neared \$5 a gallon, but Lee doesn't expect gas

prices to remain low forever.

"It is a very comfortable, very clean to run, very quiet dozer," Lee said.

Compared to the bulldozer's predecessor, Caterpillar projects a fuel savings of \$9,000 per year, based on 2,000 hours of use and \$3 per gallon.

The 56,700-pound bulldozer generates 235 horsepower. It is one of 45 pieces of heavy equipment operated by Crossfire, 223 Chickenhawk Lane.

Lee founded Crossfire in 2002 to reclaim and seed old natural-gas well pads. It is now what Lee calls a full-service contractor, building well pads and roads, maintaining wells, installing pipelines and conducting reclamation and seeding for companies such as BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips and Williams in the gas-rich San Juan Basin.

Crossfire employs 200, Lee said.

Curtis Valencia, a Crossfire manager, said operators enjoy running the bulldozer. On Monday, the D7E was helping create wetlands and wildlife habitat on a ranch east of Ignacio.

Lee said the natural-gas industry "gets a black eye every time we turn around." The industry has run into criticism recently for its hydraulic fracturing practices and effects on rural homeowners.

But Lee said he hopes the fuel-efficient bulldozer will help put "a little bit better face on the industry."

Caterpillar, based in Peoria, Ill., reported revenues of nearly \$8 billion in quarterly results released Tuesday. The company said its second-quarter profit fell 66 percent on weaker sales, but its stock soared about 6 percent on an improved 2009 profit forecast.

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The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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