



It's complicated to make something this simple

Simplicity might have begun life in a backyard shed but today it is a major player on the world stage and keeping its Australian clients operating at the cutting edge of airseeding.

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, the original Simplicity airseeder was being manufactured in the proverbial backyard shed. It was a small unit in the range of 700 litres, using a simple auger and slide-metering system.

Then in 1983 David Law purchased the business outright after 12 months in a partnership.

It might have been a humble beginning – only the support of a local businessman providing special terms to rent a shed and the ability to purchase the basic manufacturing equipment let Simplicity get going.

General Manager for 14 years, Troy Law has childhood memories of wandering into what was to become the workshop – a small, timber-walled shed stacked to the ceiling with used school chairs and tables.

Interestingly, he confided, that original building is still used within the Simplicity factory and is about to undergo a significant refurbishment (again) which will include a new 6m laser-cutting centre.

PURSUIT OF QUALITY

From the start David pushed for quality in design and manufacture. The legacy is a business continually looking for manufacturing technology to advance flexibility and capacity – and the ability to make in-house alterations on-the-go for product development.

“One example of our typical product development process would be our front-mounted air seeders,” Troy says. “In the late

'80s Francy Smith, a local irrigation cotton grower, wanted a front-mounted airseeder to apply fertiliser using linkage equipment,” he says.

“A machine was designed, fitted and supplied using a hydraulic-drive system which was not ground-speed related. It was nominally successful and with time and new customers (tractor hydraulics were much less capable than today) this progressed to the development of an electric drive system. This picked up external ground-speed inputs and so we now had a rate-controllable drive system.

“That process involved working with local and an international business to produce an independent drive system for this task – which became the precursor to utilise variable rate systems with GPS in the early days.

“To my knowledge, I think today we offer the widest range of air seeders in the world. Offering small-mounted machines, trail behind, trail between, two wheels, four wheels all available in a large range of sizes and formats. We also offer the integration of applying single or multiple liquid products with up to four granular products simultaneously. Our range is very comprehensive.”

ECONOMICAL SOLUTIONS

Troy says developing a somewhat modular system is more difficult than it looks.

He considers Australian manufacturers operate in an environment requiring smaller production numbers than our international competitors – and so Simplicity has to make

all of this work economically and take best advantage of the flexibility its business type provides.

Simplicity now has five people in its design team and a dedicated research and development area focused to prototype manufacture and product testing.

“My role as GM includes working with our sales, service and engineering team to evaluate and ascertain our future product directions,” Troy adds.

“I find the difficult task is selecting sustainable key directions to be market-accepted in the medium to long term.”

Simplicity's Dalby HQ is a stellar location and has a solid manufacturing business sector, including a large foundry, and a range of medium-size manufacturing businesses covering industrial and agricultural sectors.

Troy says the other great thing is the diversity in local farming.

He says the town has a large variety of farming types within a 200km radius, which includes irrigation, dry land, forage/grazing and out to very large broad hectare farming.

A significant outcome from being in a summer/winter cropping area is Simplicity equipment is being used several times a year for different jobs – so product development for a range of usages is rapid and continual.

“Simplicity has a network of 67 dealerships across Australia and distributors including New Zealand and South Africa,” Troy says.

“We also supply with an OEM partnership directly into parts of North Africa and Russia.

“The majority of our dealer network has been established for over 25 years – and has remained consistent. That means our direct focus for product sales and service activity is engaged with having our dealers knowledgeable and confident in our products.

“Our initial goal is to have the machine set up correctly and operating to its capacity.

“If that is done well in the short term, then we find the product works well in the long term. Our key business goal is to retain our existing customers and if we do that right, we earn the ability to gain future business with that customer and their neighbours.”

MINIMISING DOWNTIME

Troy says Simplicity machines are designed with ‘simplicity’ in mind and in the event of breakdown he would consider you should be operational again quickly. He says parts are rapidly air-freighted today and their dealer network stocks key components across Australia's farming regions.

At the sharp end of the business he says continuous product development is constant – from a new or altered product, manufacturing process or technological change.

“As a business I consider in recent years we have been cautious at making major product changes but we have made many product updates and additions,” Troy says.

“But right now our focus is new products and/or major product updates to freshen our product feel within the marketplace,” he says.

“For example, we displayed a pre-release 18m 306 Hybrid Allrounder planter at the Wimmera Machinery Field days in March.

“This unit has a 308 Allrounder floating hitch, heavier frame and uses the SeedMaster opener assembly which provides a robust precision depth control unit with great ground-following ability.

KEEPING UP WITH PROGRESS

Technology and the changing face of broadacre farming techniques play a massive role in product design and development – and farm purchasing decisions.

Troy says some years ago Simplicity had a very strong position in seeder-controller offerings.

“In recent years, I consider we stalled and we are now strongly pursuing new systems that provide solid in field service and are technically advanced.

“The big change is we are now kicking some serious goals in the ISO platform.

“We can today use a virtual terminal on a mainstream ISO tractor or guidance screen, and operate in a ‘task control’ function to complete multilayered variable rate maps

correctly recording this data in your chosen package.

“Lots of additional functions farmers are currently seeking are all rapidly progressing now to ISO, so it's an area I am excited about and keen for Simplicity to become very good at.

“We have been confirming these functions in ISO operation by doing in-house operations testing – this verification has highlighted which of the main product brands do have this area sorted, and it allows us to confidently supply to those we have verified.”

Food production has a strong future position in arable Australia, with some good farming businesses out there.

Troy says he considers Simplicity's role is to work beside our progressive farmers to advance its products and their capacity to be economically strong.

He says maximising planting opportunities and the ability to cater for the wide range of planting conditions faced each year with different and developing farming techniques is where Simplicity sits in the picture.

“We have been working on a large seeder package for a couple years with specific functions different from our existing core range,” Troy says.

“Not that long ago a 20,000lt seeder was huge – but the numbers keep getting pushed up. I'm not sure where the limit is, but it has gone past my expectations,” he says.

“Sectional control is also something we have had prototypes running for testing purposes for several years, however we are not yet content with the whole package, as we want it simple and easier to live with.

“Watch this space – it's not far off.

GLOBAL INFLUENCES

“North American products generally have strong order programs which make it a very

competitive environment – so we need to work hard to compete.

Troy says Simplicity quality levels are right up there.

He says the marketplace always answers the quality question by the price strength of secondhand Simplicity machines.

The company is also out beating the drum at the grassroots level, which typically means four major field days with a factory site and up to three others in cooperation with dealerships.

“Normally we can have a reasonable level of product at different shows – last year at AgQuip we had two complete 12m planters (308 Allrounder and 12M SeedMaster), and four airseeders plus static planter unit displays on our site,” Troy says.

“They are a big investment each year between freight, site costs and the travel ancillaries but at this point I consider they still have a place within our marketing,” he says. “We meet with existing customers, hear about farming directions and also importantly get to talk with people planning or reviewing their next planter purchase.

“I have been involved in field days for many years and I always come back motivated to get cracking with our product development and follow up on any issues we had in field that year.

“Accurate, reliable and of course simple to use are all words I would hope resound with owners of Simplicity machines over the last 34 years. Moving forward, Simplicity's key focus is to offer complete planting packages which are world class in terms of technology and features, and also importantly designed and built here in Australia to suit our country.” **FA**

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