

## **Analyzing the Top Attachments for Backhoe Loaders**

*Backhoe loaders provide utility contractors an added level of flexibility with a wide selection of attachments – but which ones are the best for you?*

By Katie Pullen, brand marketing manager, CASE Construction Equipment

It's often said that quality beats quantity. Over the years, utility contractors have started to realize the truth behind that statement due to the benefits of having one machine with increased versatility on the jobsite instead of multiple machines.

In order to achieve that versatility, more and more attachments are being made available to the construction market every year. The backhoe loader, an invaluable jack-of-all-trades, has the capability to run a variety of attachments such as brooms, grapples and 4-in-1 buckets.

What are the must-have attachments for utility contractors? Here's what we suggest to get you started.

### **Getting Started With Hydraulics**

For starters, it's important to note that hydraulics harness the power behind a backhoe's operation, and advances in auxiliary hydraulics have expanded the attachment capabilities of these machines.

There are three kinds of auxiliary hydraulics in backhoes: unidirectional hydraulics, bidirectional hydraulics and auxiliary hydraulics for attachments mounted to the loader end of the machine. Bidirectional hydraulics provide the most flexibility to run attachments because hydraulic power flows two ways. Unidirectional auxiliary hydraulics are for running attachments with one-way hydraulic flow, such as breakers and compactors. A combination hydraulics set-up is ideal as owners can then switch back and forth between unidirectional and bidirectional as needed.

By adding hydraulics to one or both ends of the machine, contractors can save money and give themselves more flexibility with their backhoes than they've ever had.

### **Breaking Down the Selection**

The top attachments for utility contractors are hammers/breakers. As utility lines are being installed or replaced, there's usually asphalt or concrete in the way. And many areas of the country feature hard and rocky soils. Contractors need an attachment that will get the job started.

Hammers require unidirectional hydraulics. However, it's important for contractors to know that, if you have a bidirectional hydraulic selection on a hammer, it's crucial to attach to a return-to-tank drain line (if equipped) or else you can ruin the seals within the hammer.

Another backhoe attachment that is important for utility contractors is a tiger tooth or frost tooth. Tiger teeth are more applicable for areas with harder soil, while frost teeth help break through difficult frost in more northern climates.

The attachment is a hardened steel tooth that resembles a hook at the end of the backhoe. It can help contractors scrape the edges of a trench to make sure there are no protruding rocks; can help clean up the trench; and can break through difficult ground conditions.

Tampers/compactors are another very important attachment in utilities because of the amount of new pipe laying taking place. Generally, tampers are used for more shallow trenches to solidly compact the foundation to prevent movement/ground upheaval.

Tamper attachments run on unidirectional hydraulics and are available in a variety of sizes. Depending on the work being done, the tamper is typically lined up with the bucket being used. For example, if you use an 18-inch bucket, you'll use a 12- or 18-inch tamper. Where applicable, they also provide logistical advantages over independent trench rollers.

Hydraulic thumbs are universal attachments that are important to have due to their flexibility. If a contractor is breaking up concrete with a breaker, a thumb makes it easier to clean up the area.

Rigid thumbs are stationary attachments, with the bucket coming up to the thumb, which eliminates the flexibility of the hydraulic thumb. For example, you might not be able to fully curl the bucket to pick up a piece of concrete, or it could fall before it actually catches the thumb. Being able to bring the thumb down is a huge benefit.

However, buckets are still the most common attachment, with bucket sizes ranging from 12- to 36-inches. These are also the most common attachment on the loader side of a backhoe loader. Fortunately, there are a large variety of buckets such as grapples and 4-in-1 buckets to increase versatility. Another important attachment on the front is a broom for cleaning up the jobsite upon completion.

Attachments expand the versatility of your equipment and add a level of flexibility to your fleet. By utilizing several attachments on backhoe loaders, and making sure to match the right tool the job, contractors are able to complete utility installation and repair jobs from start to finish with the power of a single machine.

###