LET YOUR HALO SHINE

WORDS AND IMAGES BY CAMERON OFFICER

The clever Digga Halo drilling alignment system puts the polish on every project, as Bay of Plenty contractor Glenn Ford and builder Grant Ford have recently discovered

> “It’s an awesome bit of kit and worth every cent”

The Halo unit sits atop the drill attachment on the Hitachi Zaxis 38U mini excavator

The Digga Halo erases the need for the two-man embedding process

Glenn Ford, of Ford Contractors, reckons he’s cut his pole placement time in half—more than in half even—and it’s all down to a compact metal cylinder that sits atop the drill attachment on his Hitachi Zaxis 38U mini excavator.

“This Halo unit from Digga is an absolute gamechanger for me,” he enthuses when I catch up with him at a Waihi subdivision, where he’s currently installing retaining walls for house building company J2 Homes.

“It’s very accurate technology and the light system makes it so easy to use. The real big difference for us though is purely in terms of time. Setting poles used to be such a manual process, but, depending upon the job, I can essentially work solo with this.”

Glenn explains that the Digga Halo lets him know before and during every step of the drilling process that he’s working at the desired angle. A simple light system guides him at all times, changing colour sequences depending upon whether the auger needs to be corrected by shifting left or right, forwards, or backwards.

The Halo system utilises a microprocessor and six sensors to provide accurate readings to +/- 0.25 degrees even under heavy vibration. A ring of powerful LED lights, which can be easily seen by the excavator operator even in bright sunlight, signal whether the drive is plumb or not.

When plumb, the LEDs are illuminated green. If the drive happens to move from its plumb position, a sequence of red, white, blue, and green lights are lit allowing the operator to guide the drill back to the correct upright position.

The Halo system virtually eliminates the need for a spotter with a spirit level.

Powered by a magnetised rechargeable battery, which will last all day, the Halo

The Halo battery pack is attached to the machine boom

Glenn Ford and Grant Ford

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battery pack is attached to the machine boom. That's all there is to it, increasing Glenn's efficiency without added complexity.

"You imagine what you'd have to pay for one of those fancy drill rig excavator set-ups—maybe $30,000 or $40,000? The Halo system pretty much gives me the same ability at a fraction of the price."

Glenn, who works with builder Grant Ford ("We're no relation though!" laughs Glenn), was so convinced there had to be a better way of setting poles than the accepted norm, that he only came across the Halo system because he approached Digga New Zealand about fabricating something similar.

"Grant and I like to come up with solutions that allow us to work smarter, and we had actually approached Digga New Zealand about possibly working on an alignment system of our own design. They went one better and said 'Well, before you start down the road of engineering something from scratch, how about this?'

"I was blown away that something already existed on the market. I can only guess the Halo system will become a lot more popular."

Previously, Glenn and Grant would have to make several alignment checks for every pole using line of sight and a spirit level. It was time-consuming work and frustrating too with the stop-start nature of consistent checking every step of the way.

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The Digga Halo, which was developed by Digga in Australia, erases the need for the two-man embedding process, leaving Glenn to rely on the accuracy of the LED indicator lights in order to drill holes and set poles precisely. It also helps eliminate oversizing holes, as well as sideload on the auger drive, meaning better protection for the attachment itself.

"We recently completed a job at the Bay Oval in Tauranga that required the installation of 60 large poles, set three metres deep. In the past, every single one of those poles would have needed maybe 10 to 14 checks as they're embedded; you do the math on how long that process would take.

"But we got through that project in half the time, meaning I could get the digger on to the next job. It's an awesome bit of kit and worth every cent," says Glenn, who has been in the contracting game for more than 25 years.

Away from larger projects, the bread-and-butter jobs for Ford Contractors are what Glenn describes as "mum and dad's backyard" work: replacing old fences, installing small retaining walls, and creating footings for decks and house extensions. He completes a variety of other tasks, too, including tree stump and concrete removal, site clearing, and trenching and drainage work.

"This is where my four-tonner comes in handy; it has the rubber tracks and the small footprint, so its really easy to get down the sides of houses. But it's bloody grunty too; it's an impressive wee machine," he says.

With the Hitachi filling the sweet spot size-wise, and paired with the accuracy of the Digga Halo, it would seem that Glenn has got his 'working smarter' wish after all. ■

For more information contact Glenn Ford on 022 608 4133 or visit digga.co.nz.