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Kawasaki loaders are balanced.”

— *Shane Smith, Owner, FT Aggregates*



Bit by bit he procured equipment — skid steers, snow blowers, and a grader.

Next, he got into site work, using it as a way to break into the market. Not only did he make valuable connections all over the area, he started looking for suitable land to either buy or lease for future aggregate production.

After three or four years, he realized he was going through so much outsourced gravel that it was finally time to make his long-sought-after dream a reality. Selling his herd and much of his equipment, he invested in his first crushing spread.

“Now we don’t even do site work anymore,” says Smith. “The pits have just taken over. We have six open pits and we have a few more we’re just waiting to open.”

## IN THE PITS

Just because Smith has fulfilled a dream doesn’t mean he can take it easy. Working aggregate in this territory has its challenges. Although the company doesn’t work with shot rock, the terrain does present its

own hurdles, ranging from extreme dust to extraordinarily abrasive glacier till rock. “We go through liners in our cones about every six weeks,” relates Smith. “We don’t even use teeth on our loader buckets; we use a straight edge. We even build our own bucket extensions because the material is so hard on the wear plates. And at our sand pit, you can’t hardly drive a wheeled anything on it. The artic trucks are fine, but wheel loaders were a real issue — until we discovered Kawasaki.

“We tried a few other brands, but ended up parking them. As soon as we’d load the bucket, all the weight would be in the front, so when we’d back away from the face, the front wheels would just drop in the sand and we’d have to use the bucket to push ourselves out. And we couldn’t fill the bucket. The tires would just spin and we’d rut. They just weren’t balanced.

“But the simple fact is that the Kawasaki loaders are balanced. They can do it; it isn’t a problem. The first one we bought was an 80ZV-2 that we had demo’ed, and decided to do a lease purchase.”



*It takes multiple trips through the crusher before rainbow rock comes alive with light and reveals its beautiful colors.*

## SIMPLE IS GOOD

“They are simple,” says Smith about his Kawasakis. “I don’t buy a loader for a bunch of fancy gadgetry. You can put anybody in them, and they are comfortable and can get right to work. We need them heavy and we need them balanced. The Kawasaki loaders ideally fit what we are doing.”

Two other aspects Smith appreciates about his Kawasakis are the Fuel Efficient

Mode switch which lets the operator select whether he needs extra power or not, and the Efficient Loading System (ELS) switch. When it's activated from the cab, it increases rimpull power when digging while using less fuel, increasing productivity while holding down fuel usage.

After the 80, the company bought several larger ZV-2s to decrease cycle times and increase efficiency. The four Kawasaki units are scattered among several pits, including a 65 at a neighboring wash plant. "Right now we are working at full capacity so we have to watch our expenses and efficiencies," says Smith. "We've gone from a primary crushing spread to a tertiary so we can do custom blending. Our tonnage per hour has doubled. We have decent amounts in inventory so we can be wide open in production and plan accordingly. We'll move 300-400 hundred thousand tonnes of product a year, and there are only 11 of us. That's a tremendous testament to our guys' commitment to the company. They are awesome."

## OVER THE RAINBOW

At the moment, about ten percent of FT Aggregates's business is municipal. The company is hoping to increase that, as municipalities do graveling in the winter while construction, which provides about 85 percent of their gross revenue, peaks for just three months out of the year — August to October.

Another market they are moving into is decorative landscaping. One hot product is called "rainbow rock," and it's not easy to find. When crushed, it sparkles, revealing bright and beautiful pinks and golds due to large amounts of petrified wood. Not only is it used in landscapes, but manufacturers of countertops and tile like it too. There's



*The well-balanced aspect of the Kawasaki loader, coupled with careful pad maintenance, eliminates rutting. Despite the abrasive nature of the material, the loader backdrags without resistance.*



**Shane Smith, Owner, FT Aggregates.**

just one other supplier in Alberta, and they are confident they'll be able to move the product not only in Alberta but other provinces as well.

## STILL GROWING

Rather than wait for companies to find them, Smith and his marketing guru Brad Enarson

work proactively to choose their customers. With about 40 products in their portfolio, ranging from decorative to granular base coarse materials, FT Aggregates certainly isn't finished growing yet. They know there's always room for improvement. By studying the way different companies and countries conduct the aggregate business, and keeping the lines of communications open with their end customers, the company is fluid and keeps their quality control high.

"You have to be careful where you put your energies. I'm extremely protective of my guys and their work environment. A company is only as good as its people, and thanks to them, what we accomplish is tremendous.

"I've worked many years in site work, just lining up customers and building relationships before we actually started producing anything. This has been a multi-year plan — and we're not finished yet!"

**FT Aggregates is serviced by Hammer Equipment, a Division of Rocky Mountain Dealerships Inc., Edmonton, Alberta.**

