

Got My First Construction Plant Ticket with a Skid Steer Loader

Shôn Ellerton, March 17, 2025

The penny dropped! I obtained my first ticket in construction plant by being a skid steer loader operator.



All right!

Got myself a skid steer loader ticket, my first piece of construction plant that I've trained up for and now qualified. For those who don't know, skid steer loaders are commonly known as Bobcats, much like vacuum cleaners are sometimes called Hoovers or copy machines being known as Xerox machines. I'm showing my age here!

I've done quite a bit of landscaping throughout the years. Not in a professional capacity, but generally, to tame and beautify otherwise barren, ugly, or unlevel yards belonging to me and others who I had helped on their gardens.

I have had no problems designing landscaping needs by choosing and procuring the necessary stone, gravel, and turf. Creativity knows no bounds after all. I've designed and built stepped retaining walls on the cheap. Fixed up and made horrid-looking concrete crib retaining walls look nice by meshing in a selection of coloured gravels from the nearby quarry. And many other features to make a wasteland look nice.

However, I always had to get the earthworks specialist to come in at some point or another, whether to dig up tree roots, scrape the ground, move large stones, and so on. With today's inflated tradie market, getting this done is a right pain in

the backside *and* the wallet. So, instead of relying on others to do this work for me, I decided to give myself a formal 2-day training course on a skid steer loader.

Skid steer loaders, as many may know, are those compact one-seater bits of construction plant which are ideal in getting into small spaces. They are often hired quite cheaply from the local DIY shop to do small pieces of work both domestically and commercially. They are extremely versatile as well with options on fitting a variety of other tools including augers for drilling holes and various other bucket designs for more detailed work.

Interestingly, many hire places, at least here in South Australia, will allow anyone to hire a skid steer loader without a skid steer loader ticket, which is a nationally-recognised certificate which shows that you are competent with the machine. However, most places won't allow you to drive one on the public road without a ticket which means for many, the skid steer loader is delivered by the place of hire for an additional cost.

Prior to training, I hired one for a day but a friend of mine, who knew how to operate skid steer loaders, did the operating while I was doing the probing with a shovel. I had a quick go, but had really no idea how to use it and thinking being safe than sorry, ended up giving it back to my friend to operate. By the way, skid steer loaders are deemed to be the second most dangerous pieces of construction plant, with forklifts being the most dangerous in terms of accidents and death. This is, primarily, because of its high centre of gravity and relative lightness which makes both these types of vehicles notoriously easy to topple over. Skid steer loaders are grossly underestimated in terms of its risks and hazards associated with them.

Skid steer loader training is absolutely crucial in my opinion. If not familiar with any construction plant, you will become familiar after two days of intensive training how to successfully stockpile earth neatly, how to create a level base, how to compact, and how to use the fiddly so-called 4-N-1 bucket, which is a bucket that opens in the centre to grapple up earth.

At first, all these techniques seemed alien in practice, but after a couple of days, it all made relative sense. Still easier than learning to ride a large motorcycle from scratch in my opinion.

There is the cost of taking a two-day course. However, bearing in mind that hiring somebody else to do a day's job costs as much as the course, it simply makes

sense to do the course. Hiring someone to do earthworks with a skid steer loader for a day pays is about the same as doing the whole course! So why pay someone else to do it for serious coin?

This opens up so many interesting opportunities.

Being a white-collar civil engineer moving onto telecommunications and then to IT, I feel that I missed out on the hands-on work that construction workers face on a daily basis. Somehow or another, I never thought of gaining practical qualifications in the construction trade during my entire engineering career. Being thoroughly sick of corporate politics and backstabbing in white-collar consultancies whether they be engineering or IT based, why had I not considered working in the construction industry? Why do I have to be chained to a goddamned desk?

Now, I'm beginning to think outside of the box.

Being not particularly fearful of heights, why not undertake a dogging and rigging course? Perhaps an excavator ticket and obtaining my heavy rigid driving licence?

What's to stop me?