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VINEYARD MACHINERY

Xabregas pushes on with new low carbon-emitting harvester



Xabregas Wines vineyard manager Ross Pike with the Nairn 3080 self-propelled harvester.

By Lauren Jones

Xabregas Wines, comprising three vineyards totalling 123ha of vines in the Mount Barker sub-region of Western Australia, has recently purchased the first Nairn 3080 self-propelled harvester to roll off the production line, putting it to work for the 2008 vintage. Fitted with a Tier 3 John Deere diesel engine, the harvester produces lower carbon emissions when compared with a standard harvester. Xabregas has Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc under vine. Only 6t of the Riesling is hand-picked, with the rest all machine harvested.

Vineyard manager Ross Pike said the Nairn 3080 had met the team's expectations during the 2008 vintage.

"Our previous machine that we still use is a Nairn 630 LS tow behind. We have found the best features of the Nairn 3080 self-propelled are the high production picking rods that allow us to run the picking head at a lower speed than the old harvester," Pike said. "We

can adjust the gap between the bow rows and the tension of the bow rods by remote switches as we are harvesting."

Pike has been particularly impressed with the harvester's gentle handling of young vines.

"As the Nairn 3080 harvester was hand-made to our specification, some alterations were required during harvest to suit Western Australian conditions. Nairn flew one of their technicians over during harvest to help us fine-tune the machine to suit our site," he said.

The Nairn 3080 is designed to operate from 5-6.5km/h when harvesting in the vineyard, depending on the harvesting conditions. Travelling on the road, the machine can travel at speeds up to 40km/h depending on the transmission system selected.

A range of picking heads can be fitted and Nairn manufactures four different styles to cover a range of trellising systems, however, most machines are fitted with a fixed-head system.

The machine itself is designed to function for more than 10,000 hours (equivalent to 30 years' operation at

300 hours per year) prior to requiring a major overhaul of equipment. Owners can expect to have trouble-free operation of the Nairn harvester for the first 10 years.

"There is a greater push from the European market for the Australian wine industry to produce wine with lower [carbon footprints] and Xabregas is committed to being an environmentally-responsible wine producer," said Terry Hogan, chairman of Xabregas.

"The new harvester delivered results as close to hand-picking as possible which provided our winemaking team (lead by Dr Diane Miller of The Vintage Wineworks) with the advantage of receiving clean, whole berries with significantly lower juicing compared with a standard machine harvester," Hogan said.

Xabregas has collected many awards over the years, including gold medals at the 2007 International Wine and Spirit Competition in London, the Qantas Wine Show of Western Australia and the 2007 New Zealand International Wine Show. ■