Where bigger machines can't go

For Ardleigh-based Cottage Landscapes, the smallest machine in the yard – a Yanmar SV08-1C – is changing what customers expect an excavator to look like.

"Are you going to measure the access gate?" customers ask. "No," Paul Gaffney tells them. "I don't need to." Minutes later, his 1,035 kg Yanmar SV08-1C is tracking down the side path, arm curled and bucket raised – and the reaction rarely changes. "I can't believe you've got that in here."

Many still picture a digger as something hulking behind a site fence. Yet compact excavators have come a long way since Yanmar launched the world's first mini excavator in 1968. Today, mini and midi excavators are the UK's biggest construction equipment sales group by volume. At the smallest end, the SV08-1C takes digging power through narrow access points, even through houses that would otherwise demand far more manual work.

That, Paul explains, is precisely where his ultra-compact kit is earning its keep in Ardleigh, near Colchester, Essex.

Small machine, serious work

Paul started landscaping at 14 with his grandfather, later moving into civil engineering and landscaping management. In 2020, he struck out on his own; the business later became Cottage Landscapes. Patios now form a large part of its workload, typically 30 to 150 square metres. "We've driven it in the front door, down someone's hallway and out the back," says Paul. "There's no room for a dumper, but it'll load barrows all day." At 960 kg transport weight, it is also easy to trailer between jobs – "ready to go every day," as Paul puts it.

When the SV08-1C arrived on demonstration from local Yanmar Compact Equipment EMEA dealer, Tuckwells, one of Paul's team – all 6'2" of him – was unconvinced. "His first words were, 'It's a lot smaller than we're used to,'" Paul laughs. "But you can do things with it you could never have done with our old machine."

On site, the undercarriage extends from 680 to 840 mm for greater stability, while the smooth, steady controls allow delicate work. "Plenty of narrow machines still have a great bolt sticking out the side," says Paul. "Yanmar have tucked everything in. It's tidy and easy to use, and when you're on it all day, comfort matters."

Versatility redefined

An auger handles fence posts, while a clay spade is used for drainage and water pipes. When the ground is too hard for the bucket, a ripper claw helps loosen it. Upcoming work ranges from planting beech trees and moving stumps to landscaping a pond. One particularly revealing job will see the SV08-1C loaded onto a small trailer behind a tractor, towed down a footpath and then used to dig an access into a ditch before preparing the pads for a new wooden footbridge.

In Great Bromley, a recent turfing job meant squeezing through several narrow gateways before levelling the ground and tracking in topsoil. The SV08-1C has also worked until half past two in the morning under its own lights, digging out a water leak at a caravan park. One of its first jobs was pulling up timbers at the end of Clacton Pier.

"A digger on the end of a pier – you don't see that every day," says Paul. "But that's the point. It gets into places nothing else can, and once it's there, it does proper work." The SV08-1C delivers 10 kN of bucket digging force, with 5.9 kN at the arm – useful muscle from a machine just 680 mm wide at its narrowest.

A dealer on the doorstep

Paul's relationship with Tuckwells predates the SV08-1C. Its Ardleigh branch is half a mile from the Cottage Landscapes yard, and Ryan Parsonson, Commercial Sales Professional and Plant & Construction Specialist, is now Paul's main contact. "We're a similar age and we see things the same way," says Paul. "Everything goes through Ryan. I don't go anywhere else."

When his old micro excavator wore out and Paul was sceptical about a switch to Yanmar, Ryan arranged a demonstration. "He told me, 'You won't go wrong with one of these,'" Paul recalls. "He was right." Recommendations now run both ways, while Tuckwells' parts support is just down the road.

More tools in the armoury

As Cottage Landscapes takes on larger driveways and groundworks, Paul and Ryan are discussing another Yanmar in the 1.5- to 2.7-tonne class. Transportability remains important, while a fixed grab and tilt bucket are already on Paul's wish list. "You need different machines for different jobs," he says. "Hopefully, over time, we can get a few more tools in the armoury."

Whatever joins the fleet, the SV08-1C will keep earning its place wherever bigger machines can't go. "There are jobs and places we simply couldn't approach in the same way without it."