

## WORK MACHINE



Reliable: the Shibaura SX24 tractor at the Proteaflora nursery at Montbulk.



**Eye for quality:** Ian Woolven (left) says the easy-to-drive Shibaura SX24 tractor, which has hydrostatic power steering, optional cruise control and a flat step-through platform, is ideal around nursery.

Pictures:  
MARK GRIFFIN

# Nursery tickled

Three Shibaura tractors are improving operations for an award-winning wholesale Protea nursery, **Andrea Mayes** reports

**P**ROTEAFLORA in Montbulk is owned by the Matthews family. The nursery was established in 1974 and provides proteas to Australian nurseries, garden centres and cut flower growers.

It also supplies developing markets in Japan, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the US.

Production supervisor Ian Woolven has worked at Proteaflora for 15 years, with previous experience in seedling nurseries.

Ian says Proteaflora's high standards of care and quality management across the whole spectrum of staff, equipment, conditions and environment have resulted in a successful product and growing demand.

The nursery grows protea, telopea, banksia, leucadendron, leucospermum and serruia on 3ha, and is continually trialling, breeding and assessing new products for garden use. Ian said their best-known release was the "pink ice" protea.

Until 2006, the nursery used a small tractor Ian said had "been around since Adam left the garden", and three Taylor Dunn electric cars.

The small tractor has been put out to pasture for paddock slashing, and a Toro ride-on mower keeps the grass trim around the cut-flower beds.

The electric cars are still used occasionally but the main force of the nursery now is a fleet of three 18kW Shibaura SX24 tractors.

Ian said the electric cars were easy to manoeuvre but had some issues.

"Each car towed a single trailer of plants and the battery would often run down halfway through a day's work," Ian said. "Also, the whole nursery is laid with concrete and gravel paths and the cars really struggle on the gravel. They're really designed more for warehouse use."