

Orion Equipment on the rise as a Bell Trucks America dealer

When you're in an area that gets an average of one hundred and eighty days of rain a year, equipment productivity and efficiency are crucial for maintaining your project schedule. Your equipment must work hard, be easy to operate and maintain, and able to handle nearly constant muddy conditions.

Orion Equipment in Seattle, Washington, took these factors, and more, into consideration when they chose to become a Bell Trucks America dealer in 2013.

Orion Equipment President, Van Ruiters, and Managing Director, Jim Irish, both have a background in the technical world of engine and transmission repair and rebuild as owners of Pacific Torque, a power

train solutions provider. "We survived the 2008 recession, came out the other side and started to look at the growth opportunities for Pacific Torque," Van said.

In business for 35 years, Pacific Torque has serviced many types of construction equipment, everything from Genie tele-handlers to rigid haul trucks, but

mainly working on powertrains. With all their service, parts and rebuild capability, Van and Jim saw an opportunity to become an equipment dealership and began searching for product lines that suited their vision and goals.

Knowing the history of Bell Equipment, and having done their share of work on several brands of articulated trucks, they felt that they knew the Bell product line very well and, in 2013, Jim contacted Bell Trucks America. Orion Equipment was formed and signed as a dealer with Bell Trucks America, taking delivery of their first four Bell Trucks.

"Strategically what we were doing with Pacific Torque was a good fit for what is needed as a heavy equipment dealer," Van said. "We were an ideal fit because we had

service and parts capability, logistics and rebuild, and a good core of technicians."

Signing with Liebherr brought dozers, wheel loaders, material handlers and scrap handling to their offering. They then signed with Wacker Neuson to become a compact equipment dealer. "One advantage we have is not having too many products," he said. "We don't have thirty products, and we have three salesmen. We have product knowledge and the ability to convey it to the customer. Our sales guys, they just know everything about everything. That's a differentiator."

Van and Jim like that Bell Equipment's dedication and expertise is focused on one product line - Articulated Dump Trucks. It's a good decision for them, Van says,

because there's not much bureaucracy and you get decisions made quickly. "The Bell line is very competitive from a quality and price matrix point of view with a great, great product. We just need to continue to do what we do, and get the Bell and Orion names out there."

One of Orion's big turning points was hiring Tom Williams in Strategic Accounts. Tom's background with Totem Equipment gives him knowledge of heavy equipment, including mining, and he has a prior history with Bell Equipment. He was one of Bell Equipment's first sales managers when they first came to North America in the 1980s selling forestry equipment, and was the number one salesman for Bell in North America five years in a row. When Bell returned to the US market in 2012, Tom was part of the team



that sold the first five Bell ADTs in the Pacific Northwest. Tom is committed to the Bell products, is knowledgeable, and a staunch advocate.

"If you believe in something, it's easy to sell it," Tom said. "If I could spend 30 minutes with everyone in the US who buys articulated trucks, they'd all buy Bell Trucks, and I believe that. Not because I'm good, but because they aren't aware of everything the Bell Truck can do."

Jim adds that the niche Bell has against all competitors is with the 50 ton and a 60 ton trucks, and each model has its own attributes that make them sought after in the marketplace. The 50 ton is a 6x6 truck that will compete with other 45 ton trucks being offered, but will go anywhere because of its wide tyre

base, its sure footedness and ability to go through mud where others give up and get stuck.

The B60E hauls the weight, turns on a dime, gets great traction control and is definitely an all-weather truck. "It's been raining up here forever and these trucks just outshine everyone else in this weather," said Jim.

Orion looks to the future

Van is optimistic about Orion's place in the Pacific Northwest heavy equipment market, specifically with articulated trucks.

"We're not only going head-to-head with artic trucks, we're also going head-to-head with rigids," he said. "I think there's a lot of opportunity with the B50Es and B60Es to replace that rigid market. When customers see the fuel economy, productivity,

comfort of the truck, the 'drive it on, drive it off' ease of moving it and the benefits of Fleetm@tic®, I think there's going to be a surprising amount of momentum out there. We just need to be able to respond to the demand."

He says there are other players in the market but once you get into the Bell 50 to 60 ton world, there isn't anything comparable out there in trucks.

"Van and I are actively engaged in visiting customers and showing our participation with customers," Jim Irish said. "That's what it takes to succeed - a service and a relationship with the customers and having a fine, quality product like our Bell Trucks."

The Orion Equipment team of (from left): Jim Irish (Managing Director), Tom Williams (Strategic Accounts) and Van Ruiters (President and CEO).



Customer feedback from Kerr Construction

The first Bell trucks sold by Orion were B50Ds purchased by Kerr Construction in Portland, Oregon. For owner Brent Kerr, the Allison transmission and Fleetm@tic® were features that sold the trucks.

"I ground on it pretty hard and then I got into the computer system with reporting, telematics and Allison transmission," Brent said. "When you have a (competitor's) transmission and drop box out, you're looking at an \$80 000 bill, but with Bell, it's a \$17 000 bill for a repair and rebuild. Between the telematics and Allison transmission, I just said I'll give anything for these trucks and when I'm done, I'll run them forever."

After he bought the B50Ds Brent started looking at his rigid truck fleet, comparing the new B60E to their 70 ton rigid frame trucks, and said he made an easy choice. "The B60E adapted to our environment of rain, mud and rock mix. Our western oriented rock pits have seams of clay in them so we are always dealing with mud."

Another saving for Brent is the ease of transporting the B60E. Preparing a rigid frame truck for transport requires the removal of parts like the fenders, cat walks and tyres, and removing tyres obviously makes the whole loading process logistically difficult. In contrast, when loading a B60E, you simply drive it on a lowboy (lowbed), chain it down and go. It's just like moving a smaller machine. "That alone sold me on the 60 tonner," he said. "But then, once we tried it on a demo, the turning radius, fuel efficiency and telematics (Fleetm@tic®) also sold me. It was an easy decision."

Merino Construction sold on Bell Trucks

When someone like Brent Kerr starts purchasing Bell Trucks, other equipment managers and owners sit up and take notice. According to Ralph LoPiere, Director of Fleet Assets and Processes at Merino Construction, "Brent knows equipment more than any other owner. There are owners and wannabes, and Brent is the guy who has all bases covered," said Ralph.

"Nobody wants to do the homework," he said. "But every year, every model, you had better be looking at what's going on to make your business more money."

And Ralph does his homework. He says he isn't an expert, but he's practical. "If I buy something new, I baseline everything," he said. "I can say here are the baseline levels when it's brand new. Now I try to achieve those levels throughout the life of the machine, I try to better those levels now instead of five years down the road, when you see problems and it's already too late. Nobody does that."

Ralph's number one priority is to choose something that's robust, reliable and proven, and then from there he starts dissecting it - price, economy, how it's put it together. That's how he says you make the right decision.

"When I started doing analysis on Bell Trucks, I realised I'm already saving on the production side," he said. "Then I looked at the telematics and I'm getting what I want as far as the day-by-day, play-by-play, knowing whether we have the right trained people in the truck. You can check your production, and Fleetm@tic® can show how many events per day you need to address. If you didn't have this tool, you can't tell if a problem has been handled."

After his first demo with Bell, Ralph was convinced that transitioning to Bell was the way to go. He says the price is better and the trucks are more robust compared to some competitor models, and adding in fuel economy made the picture even clearer.

"Going with Bell starts to be the right decision," he said. "So, we bought one truck and we liked that, and now we have three and they are performing quite well."