

Can Do Timbers expands its fleet



From left: Charles Inggs (Bell Equipment Sales Representative), Francine Greyling, Cassie Greyling (Owner, Can Do Timbers) and David Strydom (Operations Manager at Graskop).

A Mpumalanga based timber harvesting contractor, with a healthy appreciation for the numbers involved, has gone the full circle from manual labour to ever-increasing mechanisation.

Cassie Greyling studied towards a B.Comm degree in accountancy and although he is lost to that profession, it is due to his tertiary education that he is able to clearly see the bigger picture in terms of the long-term benefits of mechanising his chosen field of business.

"I was first exposed to forestry and timber harvesting on the farm of a friend of mine," he says from his head office base near Graskop. "I then started a timber harvesting operation as a contractor under my own name in 1990 and ran that until 2004, when we established Can Do Timbers."

In those early days, Cassie worked with 20 labourers and a small pick-up truck, harvesting 500 tons of timber a month. In 2004, his client Sappi, suggested he expand his business and so Can Do Timbers was born with a first task to harvest 60 000 tons a year. This soon grew to a contract for 140 000 tons of Eucalyptus annually.

"Our manual harvesting teams would traditionally consist of one chainsaw operator who would fell and crosscut a tree before a team of six others would debark it and stack the timber in 2-ton stacks in-field," he says. "This timber would stay in-field for up to six weeks to dry and then be bundle-loaded out with a John Deere 540G

cable-skidder to the roadside for short-haul to a nearby depot."

Cassie bought his first Bell 125 Logger in 1994 and has since graduated to running a fleet of nine Bell 225 Crankboom Loggers. "Since those early days, our Bell Loggers have been the mechanical backbone of our operation," he smiles. "They are such never-say-die machines and really reward the care we lavish on them, while working them hard as well. We've made the adjustment of after 500 hours of use on a new machine, we switch to an R-4 type oil, which is somewhere between conventional and synthetic oil, which we believe adds to their longevity."

"They are also not expensive machines and simple to maintain and repair with component replacement like hydraulic pumps easily done," he adds.

With their extraction method of stacking timber into 2-ton bundles infield which then have to be hauled to roadside with a "piggy-back" system, Can Do Timbers bought their first John Deere 540G Cable Skidder in 2004. "Our John Deere Cable Skidders have proved themselves over and over again to be real workhorses and our oldest machine has given us 24 000 hours of service," Cassie says. "And yes, on that particular machine we have rebuilt its engine and transmission but, given the high mechanical availability we've consistently enjoyed from it and the other similar Skidders in our fleet of four, we are well pleased with such a great return on our initial investment."

In 2013 Can Do Timbers took another major leap forward in its quest for mechanisation of its harvesting and extraction operations. Having seen a demonstration in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, Cassie and his team took delivery of a John Deere 759JH Harvester fitted with a Waratah HTH616 Debarking Harvesting Head.

"We realised that this is a very specialised machine but what convinced us that this was the way to go to more comprehensive mechanisation was the fact that the machine is sold, serviced and backed by Bell Equipment with its large national footprint, which gave us the confidence that there would always be spare parts and advice available," he says. "Another factor was that the John Deere 759JH Harvester is tracked and with its levelling cab, would be ideally suited for the steep terrain where so many of our Eucalyptus compartments are situated."

The John Deere 759JH Harvester has rapidly become an integral part of the harvesting sequence at the 6 000 hectare plantations that fall in the Can Do Timbers' mandate, in the Graskop area. Being used by three eight-hour shifts, the machine quickly worked its way out of a 2 000 hour warranty within a mere three months and has within its first year of full operation, clocked up more than 6 500 hours of service.

"We do daily checks at each shift handover and really take care of this machine and it shows in the 11 tons per hour production it gives us at a fuel-burn rate of 20 litres an hour," Cassie says. "Servicing is strictly done every 500 hours and this in turn translates into mechanical availabilities in the high 90%."

Although the infield 2-ton stack of timber that is extracted by their John Deere Skidders has always delivered sustainable production, Cassie believed that the extraction could be further speeded up and proof of this thinking would be found in his purchase of a John Deere 1710D 8-wheeled Forwarder that joined the John Deere 759JH Harvester in March 2014.



"Our harvesting has now changed with this equipment as the Harvester fells, debarks and cross-cuts the timber into 4,8 metre lengths and lays it down in the compartment," Cassie explains. "The Forwarder, which is fitted with metal bogey tracks for superior traction and reduced impact on the soil, then follows the same line and loads the timber using its Waratah 885 Crane for the extraction to roadside where Bell Loggers are used to again load the timber onto short-haul trucks."

The John Deere Forwarder has in this case replaced the use of the Skidder and improved production rates with its heavier payload and quick cycles. Average fuel burn of around 16 litres to the hour is also not breaking the bank.

"With less manual labour available, mechanisation is the way forward for us," he says. "But with any such exercise, having the correct purpose-made tools is imperative and this we have definitely found with our John Deere and Bell forestry equipment."

