

# Rance Timber makes 'harvporting' headway with Bell and John Deere fleet

**When any business undergoes sudden growth it is often hampered by factors which constrain it, be they financial, technical, human or all three. This was evident during the expansion that a leading Eastern Cape timber company recently underwent but its owners and management turned the constraints around in a most positive manner.**

Rance Timber (Pty) Ltd has been around for the past 75 years since the late Mr Jack Rance founded a timber company, born from a company his late father had started. By 2005, the Rance Group formed Amathole Timber Holdings, a modern and empowered South African company that bought the Amathole Forestry Company from the parastatal SAFCOL. Rance Timber (Pty) Ltd runs two sawmills namely Kubusi and the smaller Sandile, both near Stutterheim.

"During the growth spurt we experienced from around 2007 timber harvesting and transport became our constraints," says John Rance Jnr, Operations Director Harvesting and Transport for Rance Timber. "As we don't profess to know all there is to know in the timber

business, we elevated these constraints and called in consultants to assist us in overcoming these constraints."

One of these consultants was Derek Howe, Bell Equipment General Manager: Forestry, Sugar and Agricultural Sales. "Derek Howe spent a lot of time with Sean Richter, the Harvesting Manager, and Devan Sternberg, the Workshop Manager, John Jnr says. "Over time, they concluded that improvements were needed in planning, felling and skidder techniques, tag-line techniques, overcoming infield log-deck constraints and that the short haul needed to be improved."

"In overcoming our harvesting and transport constraints, we had to look hard at how our business had changed," John Jnr continues. "In the past we only harvested about a third of the areas we now cover as we sourced timber from other parties."

The harvesting and transport teams at Rance Timber subsequently created their own term as a type of mantra for what they were aiming to improve and set a benchmark for – "harvporting". With "harvporting" in

*Rance Timber's harvesting and transport team (from left): Johan van Heerden, Justice Yakophu, John Blaine, Tobani Siphiwo, John Rance Jnr, Devan Sternberg, Happyboy Hletyiwe and Sean Richter.*





mind, and going through a restructuring process, they soon realised that part of the problem was an ageing fleet of harvesting equipment where downtime was a niggling constant. New equipment was sorely needed and quickly at that.

“We looked around the market and had some very competitive deals on offer from a variety of original equipment manufacturers (OEMs),” John Jnr continues. “But we also realise that because of where we are situated our own business is an island economy, meaning that we are relatively isolated in terms of the timber industry and this means one thing, we cannot commit to equipment supplied by an OEM without it having proven and sustained technical backup.”

With this criterion at hand, Rance Timber turned to Bell Equipment for their upgraded timber harvesting and handling equipment. In November 2014, they took delivery of two new Bell L1706E Wheeled Loaders with timber grabs. These machines work on the log-deck at the Kubusi sawmill where they feed the wet mill and offload trucks before loading the de-barker.

In the second half of 2015, they added two Bell 220A Teleboom and three Bell 225A Crankboom Loggers to their Bell Tri-Wheeler fleet, which now numbers around 30. Added to this fleet came a new Bell L1506E Wheeled Loader with a timber grab and a John Deere 640L Cable Skidder with Continuous Variable Transmission. The Bell

L1506E has been deployed at the Sandile sawmill where the timber it handles is slightly smaller than that at the Kubusi mill.

“As mentioned, we chose Bell Equipment for their large footprint and proven and sustained technical backup, and that faith that we have in the company has already paid off,” John Jnr says. “We run a fleet of five John Deere 540 Mk III Skidders and when we recently ran into technical issues, we could call on Brandon O’Neal, the John Deere Product Marketing Manager: Skidder and Wheeled Feller Bunchers, who spent time with us at our premises and whose advice was invaluable.”

John Jnr is also quick to point out the attention and support they enjoy from Denver Tesmer and Denton Webber, both from the Bell Equipment Customer Service Centre in East London. “Without this support and technical backup we can’t operate effectively; and if you need proof of our trust in Bell Equipment, I can tell you that we have yet another John Deere 640L Cable Skidder on order and we can hardly wait for it to arrive to boost our productivity.”



*The new Bell L1506E Wheeled Loader with a timber grab, which has been deployed at the Sandile sawmill, was also acquired during 2015.*