

Artic Hauler is a game changer for Ortmann Brothers

A custom-built Bell Articulated Hauler has seen the continuation of support for the Richards Bay-based brand by a well-known KwaZulu-Natal Midlands family's farming business.

And the fact that the customisation has had such positive results in terms of production and excellent fuel burn certainly makes for interesting reading.

Back in 1954, a partnership was formed between brothers FW and WE Ortmann on land their great grandfather had obtained near New Hanover in 1868. They started farming as Ortmann Brothers, a name that proudly stands to this day. Their initial focus was on cattle, timber and maize but in 1957 they turned their attention to cultivating sugar. They ended their cattle farming in 2007 and now concentrate on growing sugarcane and black wattle with lesser pine and gum. A fourth generation of Ortmann sons now run the farms.

Andrew Smith is Ortmann Brothers' Farm and Technical Manager and is very familiar with, amongst a myriad of

other responsibilities, the mechanised side of the business. "We first bought a new Bell Cane Loader back in 1988, which is long before my time," he says. "The first machine was a Bell 120 Cane Loader, which has racked up 25 000 hours. Shortly thereafter a Bell 100 Cane Loader was bought second-hand. Still with a tube frame and after some 40 000 hours and only one engine overhaul, this machine is still in daily use."

A Bell 125 and 125A Cane Loader have followed, as has a Bell 225A Crankboom Timber Loader.

"We service two sugar mills, UCL in Dalton which is 12km away and the Illovo mill at Noodsberg some 17km away," Andrew continues. "In 1994 we bought a Bell 1766 Haulage Tractor to haul our cane using Bell-built cane trailers. This machine is now nearing 30 000 hours of service. We also use it for doing short hauls of timber, transporting timber from plantation to stock yard depots."

In 1999 Ortmann Brothers purchased a 2406C Articulated Hauler, which was added to the fleet to haul



Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Keith Milne (left) with Ortmann Brothers' Farm Manager, Andrew Smith.

sugarcane to the mills. This machine proved itself in the fields and on the road, with its impressive traction and good fuel burn. "The only niggle we had was with the durability of the 366Ti motor".

Ortmann Brothers later bought a Bell 1866 Haul Tractor as a demonstration unit that had been running in Swaziland and this is used for cane haulage only. Ortmann Bros contracts a haulier to haul their timber from the farm depots to Masonite in Estcourt, Shincell in Richards Bay, Sappi Saiccor at Umkomaas or to export facilities at Durban's Maydon Wharf.

"During the long cane cutting season our nearby sugar mills have to be fed constantly and we had for a while been considering getting a more powerful haulage machine that could sustain larger loads over our hilly roads," Andrew continues. "We felt confident to approach Bell Equipment, who in turn came up with the idea to customise a haulage machine specifically for our purposes."

The technical design team at Bell Equipment's Richards Bay factory put their heads together and in March 2014 the Bell 2406C was traded in and Ortmann Brothers took delivery of a custom built Bell 2406D Articulated Hauler that had been fitted with a Mercedes Benz 926 engine. What it meant was that the head, similar to a Bell B30D Articulated Dump Truck, had been fitted to the drive train of a Bell B25D Articulated Dump Truck.

The Bell 2406D Articulated Hauler pulls 33-ton, Bell designed tri-axle interlink cane trailers that are dedicated to the Hauler. "This machine has made a huge difference in our production, hauling big loads up our hilly roads with ease and at relatively frugal fuel consumption figures of below 15 litres an hour," Andrew explains. "Our turnaround times at the mills are quicker, which all translates into lower production cost per tonne delivered."

"Bell Equipment handles all of our technical backup and servicing and what I enjoy, as a qualified mechanic, is that Bell Equipment ensures its staff gets to know the machines first before going on to higher positions. An example of this is Keith Milne who now works as the Sales Representative in our area. Keith first got to know our machines as an apprentice mechanic in the 1990s before moving on to become a Product Support Representative in our area. The same can be said of the new Product Support Representative, Freedom Mthembu."

Ortmann Brothers use only Bell Lubricants and Andrew is at pains to mention the support and advice they receive from Bell Equipment's Richard Manning, and Darren Cousins, the Workshop Foreman in the Bell Pietermaritzburg Customer Service Centre.

"As with any working relationship involving mechanical equipment, we would sometimes pick up issues but the mere fact that I can take the liberty of picking up the phone and speaking to someone I know at Bell to sort it out promptly makes us feel like family, and that relationship to me is unique and very special."

