

# Johnson Bricks builds on a solid foundation with its Bell fleet

**The unofficial capital of the Little Karoo is undoubtedly Oudtshoorn. While famous for its Karoo hospitality, ostrich farming and the many cultural festivals it hosts, none of this would have been possible without the good quality bricks that the buildings in and around this thriving town are built of.**

As dry and dusty as this part of the Karoo may seem, it's hard to imagine that good quality clay is at hand to manufacture bricks in many guises. More than 100 years ago, the Johnson family did some digging and came up with a plan to make bricks. So Johnson Bricks was born and although the business stayed in the family for nigh on three generations, the Truter family now owns it with father, Martin, ably assisted by his sons, Lawton and Ian.

"We bought the business in 2007 and produce around 1,7 million bricks a month," says Lawton Truter. "We produce mainly non-face plaster, non-face engineering and clinker semi-face bricks and distribute them as far away as De Aar, Barrydale and Joubertina."

The manufacture of clay bricks would always entail some mining and Johnson Bricks' operation is no different. With their plant situated on the north-eastern side of the town, their clay mine is right on their doorstep resulting in a short haul for the two

Bell Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs) they use to bring the clay to the stockpiles at the plant.

"We inherited two Bell ADTs when buying the business," Lawton explains. "The Bell B30D ADT is a 2006 model and the Bell B18D Mark I goes back to 2005, and despite its high hours nearing 16 000 it still hauls our clay every day at high mechanical availabilities."

"In our clay pit, we load the Bell ADTs using a Bell HD820E Excavator that has done over 17 000 hours without a rebuild, which we find amazing," he adds. "On the strength of that, coupled with a very good financial deal brokered by Fiona Johnson, our Bell Sales Representative, we bought a new Bell HX270E Excavator which we feel is going to enhance our production even more."



(From left): Ronnie Nortjé with Ian, Martin and Lawton Truter.

Brick-making demands a constant supply of fresh clay, fed first into a crusher and then into an extruder where it is mixed to attain a moisture content of some 18% before running out on a production line where the bricks are cut to size. Feeding the plant is a demanding job and Johnson Bricks use two Bell L1204E Wheeled Loaders for this task.

"We had found that an older Bell L1204D gave us excellent service, and after 12 000 hours all we needed to replace was a pin and bush," Lawton says. "It was quite natural then that when we saw the need to replace it in 2014, we bought the later model Bell L1204E machine."

When the green unbaked bricks exit the extrusion plant they are stacked onto pallets and moved to outside areas to dry in the sun. Moving these heavy pallets is a job for

more Bell machines, this time Bell 220A Versalifts with interchangeable forks and buckets and Bell 120A Rough Terrain Forklifts.

"We have five of each of these machines, and without them this brickyard simply would not run," says Ian Truter. "With our area being so dry and dusty, we service these machines every 300 hours, which we do as a preventative method due to the extreme conditions we work in."

Their own diesel mechanic, Ronnie Nortjé, does all Johnson Bricks' mechanical maintenance that is not covered by Bell Equipment warranties.

When the bricks have attained a moisture content of around 3%, they are ready to be fired in clamps and here again, the Bell Versalifts and Rough Terrain Forklifts are used to build the brick clamps and break them down, once the bricks have been fired long enough.

"We are well aware that our 125 loyal employees play an important part in our sustained production but we don't lose sight of the fact that our mechanical equipment from Bell Equipment, really pulls us through and that in part is due to their legendary technical back-up that we rely on," the Truter brothers echo.

