

Bell backup keeps Schwarzwald loyal to the brand

The gentle hills surrounding Paulpietersburg in Northern KwaZulu-Natal are often shrouded in mists, which make this an ideal area for growing timber, especially Black Wattle, Pine and Gum.

This natural moisture also often brings rain which make the gravel roads slippery and this has seen established timber growers turn to Bell Equipment's powerful new all-wheel drive Haulage Tractors to haul their timber to nearby rail sidings.

Hugo Niebuhr and his brother, Gunther, are the third generation of Niebuhr's to grow timber on the farm Schwarzwald that lies some 7km outside of Paulpietersburg and is named after the famous forest in Germany. The land was first obtained by the brothers' grandfather, Heinrich Niebuhr, in 1926, and their father, Reginald, is still involved to lend a helping hand or give advice.

"We grow mostly Black Wattle for the woodchip export market and Pine and Gum to a lesser extent," Hugo Niebuhr tells us. "Not all our land is covered by timber compartments and in the open areas we keep a herd of Drakensberg cattle."

The Niebuhrs first bought a Bell 1206 Haulage Tractor in 2000 when they needed better traction to counter slippery underfoot conditions on the 10km haul to the rail

siding from where their timber is forwarded to Port of Richards Bay. This machine has given them in excess of 15 000 hours and, with its engine overhauled once, is still in daily use.

"We have also come to rely on Bell Tri-Wheeled Loggers when loading our timber infield and offloading at the siding and have had four Bell 125A Loggers, which we've bought between 2003 and 2011," Hugo says. "Then in 2015 we started cutting longer pine poles, which are really heavy and to this end we bought a Bell 225A Logger in 2015. We're firmly entrenched with Bell Equipment's timber handling equipment and would not survive without it."

Schwarzwald's timber is sold through Natal Cooperative Timbers and recently increased demand brought the Niebuhr brothers to reconsider their haulage options. "We needed more powerful all-wheel drive tractors that could offer us a sustained supply of timber to the rail siding, which is reached along 10km of roads, often slippery due to the weather," Hugo explains. "Bell Equipment's Research and Development team ran a prototype of their new Bell 1214AF Haulage Tractor on

our farm for 500 hours which was spread over six months during 2016. This powerful machine so impressed us that we placed an order for two of these machines, which were delivered in August and September respectively."

The new Bell Haulage Tractors are powered by proven water-cooled Mercedes Benz engines coupled to trusted Allison automatic transmissions. In the case of the Bell 1214AF Tractors that now haul Schwarzwald's timber, the increase in power to 90kW works well for them, offering sustained delivery. Other features of the new tractors include exhaust valve braking as standard to reduce brake wear and a power core air-cleaner with integrated pre-cleaner and scavenging for improved engine protection. Increased hydraulic pump flow adds value, as do dual batteries with the introduction of a 24-volt electrical system.

"Our tractor drivers are enjoying the improved ergonomics of the new ROPS/FOPS cabs and especially the airconditioning that is standard along with the improved all-round visibility," Hugo says. "They find the ride a lot smoother. Fuel burn is another pleasing feature as even in this hilly environment, the Bell 1214AF Tractor, hauling full loads of timber, returns fuel consumption figures of around 10 litres an hour, which does not negatively affect our bottom line."

According to Hugo, Schwarzwald's two new Bell 1214AF Tractors are used to move around 80%

of their timber, with the older Bell 1206 Tractor used as a standby machine. Annual tonnages range from 10 000 tonnes for Black Wattle, 5 000 tonnes of Gum and around 4 000 cubic metres of Pine.

Schwarzwald has been relying on the Bell Customer Service Centre in Vryheid for all its maintenance. "We're pleased with Bell Equipment's response times and spares holding and we work well with amongst others, Heino Meyer, who is a local lad also of German descent. Bell Equipment's technical backup is one of the reasons we have stayed with the brand for so long," Hugo smiles. "We have faith in the brand and in especially these new Bell 1214AF Tractors, and believe they will take us forward."



Tractor driver, Sibusiso Ndlangamandla, speaks to Hugo Niebuhr prior to hauling another load of Black Wattle to the rail siding, some 10km away.

