

Bell fleet forms backbone of Bidfreight's Saldanha stevedoring

Bidfreight is a leading private sector stevedoring and freight management company with a presence in every major port in southern Africa; and the natural, deep water Port of Saldanha Bay on the picturesque Cape West Coast is no exception.

While Bidfreight's operation at Saldanha Bay may be considerably smaller than its operations at larger and busier ports such as Durban and Richards Bay, the operation handles a large percentage of the bulk cargoes, both imports and exports, ex the Multipurpose Terminal of Saldanha Bay and is unique in that it is the only one in the country with a transport section.

Maintenance Transport Manager, Rasleigh Roberts explains that the operation previously employed sub-contractors to meet the transport requirements of their contracts at Saldanha Bay. However, about four years ago Bidfreight took on the transport aspect directly in order to become more involved with their clients, develop relationships and grow the business. The decision has paid dividends with the initial fleet of six road trucks having grown exponentially to 25 trucks.

The growth in the transport of commodities has seen an increase in the tonnages being loaded and offloaded at the Port. To cope with these larger volumes and drive efficiencies within the operation Bidfreight turned to South African manufacturer, Bell Equipment, to supply their heavy equipment needs.

"The relationship with Bell goes a long way back to when we used tractor trailer units to transport cargo. Today we use trucks but our Saldanha operation inherited two Bell Series II Haulage Tractors from the Durban operation, which are still in reasonable condition," he says. Both are 1226 models bought in 2007, one of which is used to haul an 8000l diesel bowser that is used to refill the Bidfreight fleet, while the second pulls an industrial vacuum that is used to clean lead concentrate, dust and mineral sands from the quayside. An old Bell 1756 Series I Haulage Tractor that was bought in 1999 is kept as a standby unit.

Rasleigh continues: "We have a good relationship with Bell. They are only a phone call away and have never let us down. If you are happy with a supplier, you tend to stick with them and standardise the fleet so over the past four years we have bought five Bell L1806E Wheeled Loaders. The last two Wheeled Loaders were purchased in June 2014 along with a Bell HX230E Excavator, which has worked just over 250 hours.

"We also like that we can throw a project at Bell Equipment and they'll sort it out for you. Our vacuum cleaner is a case in point. We needed

something that could clean the quayside and discussed our need with our Bell Sales Representative, Clifton Roberts, and he came up with a workable solution, which Bell maintains along with the rest of our Bell fleet."

Bidfreight has a contract with Arcelormittal SA to load and transport imported coking coal to their plant in Saldanha, where it is used to melt iron ore in the steelmaking process. "Due to the limited storage space at the Port, and because the product is so light, we stack the coking coal eight to 10m high and for this we realised we needed the excavator. Our Bell Wheeled Loaders push the coking coal into heaps and then the excavator stacks it from the top. It's a process and a half."

Rasleigh says: "Currently we receive a vessel every six to eight weeks with a shipment of between 20 000 and 30 000 tonnes of coking coal, so more machines will be needed to handle the product."

Occasionally small parcels of iron ore are shipped from Saldanha Bay and Bidfreight's services are employed to transport these 50 000 to 55 000t shipments to the Port and to also load the ship. This is achieved by using the Bell Loader to load into open skips, which are then hoisted onto the vessel with a ship's crane.

Bidfreight also has contracts with Tronox to handle mineral sands processed at the company's Namakwa Sands operation at Brand-se-Baai including zircon, rutile, ilmenite and pig iron as well as with Black Mountain Mining Company for zinc, copper and lead concentrates. These products are all for export and arrive at the Bidfreight operation by rail wagons where they are offloaded and stockpiled in a shed by the Bell Loaders. The Bell Loaders also feed a hopper from where the product is loaded with a conveyor belt into skips on road trucks and transported to the quayside.

"Anything that gets loaded and offloaded in the port is done by Bidfreight and is achieved with our Bell fleet. We are very happy with our Bell machines. They are reliable and have proven themselves. With every product you get your hiccups but the main thing is back up service, and with Bell that is 100%.

Rasleigh has newfound appreciation of the keyless start function of the Bell Loaders after the excavator keys were accidentally locked inside the machine and says: "We also like that the Wheeled Loaders are quiet, which is an advantage with the Port being so close to the residential area. Even though the excavator is branded Bell, it's basically a Liebherr machine, which I believe is one of the best excavators on the market."

He adds: "The size of our machines is ideal for our operation and we are happy with the fuel economy in the various applications. When we aren't using our machines we hire them out and our plant hire customers are also impressed with our Bell machines."

Looking forward, the General Manager of Bidfreight Port Operations, Sarel Schoeman says: "In the past we used to only handle mineral sands and concentrates with HRC and CRC coils. Not only have these commodities grown tremendously over the last couple of years but we are now looking at manganese, iron ore and magnetite and there is a strong likelihood that bulk phosphate sand will be exported as from early 2016.

"With all these additional bulk exports we can confirm that we will enlarge our current fleet of Bell equipment and grow our relationship with Bell to a much larger extent."

Rasleigh Roberts of Bidfreight with Bell Equipment's Sales Representative, Clifton Roberts.

