

G & K Mouldings adds a second Bell Logger to its operation

The scarcity of timber and an unfavourable Rand/Dollar exchange rate has prompted a timber products manufacturer in the Western Cape to invest in timber handling equipment from Bell Equipment.

Gerhard Botha is part of the third generation of Bothas to be involved in the well-known timber products company of Botha & Barnard, situated on the N2 between Wilderness and Sedgefield in the Western Cape. Gerhard's paternal grandfather, Gert Botha, started the furniture-making business with a partner in 1950. After Gert's passing in 1986 his son, Koos, took over the business along with his wife, Marlene, and Gert's widow, Danes, who at a sprightly 88 is still involved in daily affairs.

The third generation in the business comprises of Gerhard and his wife, Karin, along with Gerhard's sister, Inge, and her husband, Raymond. "My father, Koos, spent some time in the building industry before taking

over the business from our late grandfather," Gerhard tells us. "He subsequently saw a gap in the building materials market and encouraged us to broaden our range of products to include timber based items specifically for the building industry in addition to the wide range of wooden furniture the company had built its name and reputation on."

Gerhard and his wife, Karin, started G & K Mouldings in 2004 and they produce and sell products like skirting, architraves (moulded frames around doors or windows), flooring and decking. In 2006 the manufacturing of these products was moved to a second, smaller sawmill adjacent to the larger mill used for the furniture business. Their products are supplied to most parts of the Eastern and Western Cape.

"About 80% of the timber we use is locally grown pine but in certain cases we also use hardwoods such as meranti and saligna," Gerhard explains. "We import American oak and ash as well as Belau, an Indonesian timber which is great for decking."

"We try and source pine in a radius of less than 120km from our sawmill but this has become increasingly difficult of late due to increased competition, especially for pine. Importing timber has also become prohibitively expensive due to the Rand/Dollar exchange rates. During the second half of 2015, we hit on the idea to approach private growers and harvest pine ourselves by felling, extracting and hauling it to our mill to ensure an uninterrupted supply. This has, despite some obvious challenges, given our business a new sense of sustainability, and in the process created additional jobs as well."

G & K Mouldings has been able to source mature pine timber from compartments above the well-known Knysna forests, which does not make the haul to their mill too far. The terrain is however very steep in places and Gerhard soon realised that an effective timber handling tool would be imperative to the success of sorting and stacking timber at roadside depots.

"Having researched the subject quite extensively, I had no hesitation in speaking to Bell Equipment about their Bell 225A Crank Boom Logger as their machine really does sell itself in this application," Gerhard says. "I have heard other contractors and our own staff refer to the



Gerhard Botha of G & K Mouldings.



machine not as a Logger but simply 'the Bell'. This to me was proof that this machine had created a reputation within the timber harvesting and handling industry and was worth buying."

G & K Mouldings' harvesting team consists of twelve people and felling, de-branching and crosscutting is done using chainsaws. A sub-contracting harvesting team with equal numbers assists production. Daily production targets of 40 to 60 cubic metres of timber translate into felling roughly 300 trees.

"Once we've extracted the felled timber to the roadside, we use our Bell Logger to sort and stack it for further processing," Gerhard says. "When it has been crosscut to the required lengths, the Bell Logger is used to load it onto the trucks for haulage to our mill by a contractor. The mill has a daily intake of between 60 and 70 cubic metres. Were it not for this machine we would have absolutely no hope of attaining these targets."

"Since buying our first Bell 225A Logger, we soon realised that a second similar machine would be a real

asset to our wet-mill operation and we brought this plan to fruition in May 2016, when we took delivery of a second Bell Logger. It has really smoothed out the unloading of timber trucks and the feeding of the three lines at our mill. The speed with which it works means that we can get everything necessary done within a single shift during daylight hours, which is ideal from a cost and safety point of view."

As with any production process, overhead costs are watched and with diesel consumption being a major part of that cost, Gerhard has been pleased with the consumption of the Bell 225A Logger at between 6 and 8 litres an hour infield and only 5 litres an hour at the mill.

"I've learnt a great deal about timber harvesting in a relatively short time. Some of the important things are that we cannot do without our Bell Loggers and that to really speed things up with our infield extraction we need to seriously consider buying a John Deere 640L Cable Skidder. But that is still a long term goal," he says.