

Pre-owned Bells find a second life at Vogelstruiskuil

Listening to what your client wants and supplying exactly that may seem like common sense to many people but it has been proven to cement business relationships and build brand loyalty to boot.

This has been the case that a family business in the far-flung North West Province has enjoyed with sales and support staff from Bell Equipment. Willie Carstens along with his son, James, are the third and fourth generations respectively of the Carstens family on this land called Vogelstruiskuil, north of Wolmaranstad, which first came into their family in 1924. Willie's son-in-law, Ben Meintjes, works with them.

This is prime farming land where beef, mutton and maize are cultivated. Although situated some 60km as the crow flies from the Vaal River, this precious land also contains diamond-bearing gravels that are being mined in an environmentally conscious and responsible manner by the Carstens family. Under Ben Meintjes' caring hand, complete rehabilitation of the land takes place as they mine.

"We were once told by a geologist that many millions of years ago the Vaal River flowed very wide, hence we now sit with these alluvial gravels, so far from the present source," Willie

tells us. "We decided back in 1998 to take the risk and mine these gravels and over time we bought a new excavator and two wheeled loaders for the purpose of mining and feeding the rotating diamond pans."

In time though the family's first generation of earthmoving equipment needed to be replaced as maintaining the ageing fleet was becoming very expensive. "Through my own research, I found that there was a link between Liebherr and Bell Equipment, and as we owned a Liebherr excavator at that point we decided to approach Bell Equipment's Sales Representative, Rickus Erasmus," James Carstens says. "We have known Rickus for a long time since his days in the motor trade and we felt confident that he would give us sound advice."

By their own admission, given the current world price of diamonds and the effect of a crippling drought on their farming activities, the Carstens family felt they could not afford new earthmoving equipment but this did not seem to faze their Bell Sales Representative.





(From left): Mining Supervisor, Ocher Wasserman with Willie Carstens (holding his grandson, Ben Meintjes), James Carstens and Ben Meintjes.

“Rickus came and listened to what we felt we needed and then he went and sourced used equipment, in excellent condition, to demonstrate to us,” Willie Carstens says. “And what he demonstrated to us fitted our needs perfectly and we had no hesitation in buying the equipment.”

The family bought two Bell L1806E Wheeled Loaders with 6 800 and 7 000 hours respectively and a Bell HX390E Excavator, which had clocked only 1 200 hours. The machines were delivered in December 2015 and January 2016.

Diamond mining at Vogestruiskuil takes place in a single shift at a controlled and measured pace in daylight hours only, for five days a week. The Bell Excavator strips the topsoil and overburden, which is stockpiled for continuous rehabilitation. The gravels appear at a depth of about two metres and stockpiles are created from where the Bell Wheeled Loaders move the material to the rotating pans. The pans are mobile and get moved to wherever mining takes place. Discard from the pans is stockpiled again for rehabilitation.

“We were impressed by the care and attention we got from Bell Equipment even though we bought used equipment,” Ben Meintjes says. “Bell Equipment had given us a preliminary three-month warranty on the equipment during which time they spared nothing in fixing anything that was faulty, down to the smallest light bulb and in addition they brought an expert technician who set the hydraulic pressures on the Bell Excavator to work at optimum power.”

The equipment was supplied with extended warranties on the wet drive-train to 8 000 hours on the Bell L1806E Wheeled Loaders and 5 000 hours on the Bell HX390E Excavator.

“We mine about 4 000 tonnes of soil a day and while we admit the specific gravities (SG) are quite low, the fuel consumption of these Bell machines is very impressive,” James says. “The Bell Wheeled Loaders return 8 to 10 litres an hour and the Bell Excavator, between 35 and 40 litres and this is while being utilised for 9 hours a day.”

“As with any mining or earthmoving, cost-per-tonne is what determines bottom-line profits and we can honestly say that the savings we achieve with what this equipment moves in a day coupled with the saving in fuel, covers almost 60% of our monthly installments.”

Willie Carstens is adamant though that it is not only the equipment they have come to rely on. “It would be amiss if we did not mention the names of Shaun Malan, CSC Supervisor for Kimberley and Wolmaranstad, Bell mechanics, Corné Olivier and Dewald Cloete, and Martin Swanepoel in the spares department at the Wolmaranstad branch, to add to that of Rickus Erasmus,” he says. “Bell Equipment has staff who live out the excellence of the brand and make the company proud.”

James Carstens has the last word when he says: “We feel we’re on a positive track now and as soon as our industry has stabilised we plan on buying brand new equipment from only one supplier, Bell Equipment.”