

Exceptional customer support keeps Johnson Plant Hire & Civils loyal to Bell

Bell Equipment has always been known as an enthusiastic and innovative company but one of its sales representatives has set a new benchmark for customer service.



Recently Fiona Johnson from Bell Equipment in Cape Town sold, amongst other compaction equipment, a Bomag BT65 Tamper to Johnson Plant Hire & Civils in Stellenbosch. While this Tamper was still new it developed a problem and, as Fiona was in the area, she simply drove to the site where the machine was being used, put it in the backseat of her sedan and drove it to the Bell branch near the Cape Town International Airport. Here the problem was attended to immediately and she delivered it back to the site in working order, the same day – again from the back seat of her car!

“Now that's the kind of service we don't get from any other original equipment supplier,” says a smiling Ben Johnson, Johnson Plant Hire & Civils' Managing Director. “Fiona is always willing to help and really does go the extra mile for us.”

Ben grew up amongst earthmoving and haulage equipment as his late father, Mark Johnson, owned both Johnson Bricks and the Volmoed Quarry in Oudtshoorn. When these businesses were sold in 2000, the Johnson family moved to Melbourne, Australia but returned three years later. After finishing school, Ben went on to work for a construction company for some five years before the urge to be self-employed became too strong. In 2013 he saw an opportunity for a plant hire

service in the Stellenbosch area with a focus on the agricultural sector.

“My love for yellow machines started when my late father had the businesses in Oudtshoorn and with my own business I started small, first buying a tractor loader backhoe before growing the business to then own a 5,5 ton excavator and subsequently 13- and 20-ton excavators loading a variety of tipper trucks,” he says. “My target market when starting out was to supply plant hire services to the wine and fruit farming community here in the Western Cape, which is a captive market.”

Ben says that his equipment was mostly used for uprooting old vines, doing soil preparation, digging trenches for irrigation infrastructure, drainage canals, farm dams and related agricultural infrastructure.

“In 2017 I approached my friend MW Beyers, who had extensive experience of civil engineering and construction, to join the business and so we became Johnson Plant Hire & Civils,” he adds. “Now we could offer a more comprehensive range of services to include the construction of tarred and paved roads, storm water infrastructure, sewers and sewerage pipelines, stores and warehouses.”



(From left): MW Beyers (Civil & Construction Director), Fiona Johnson (Bell Equipment Sales Representative), Jacques Davids (Plant Manager) and Ben Johnson (Managing Director).

What started as a small plant hire company grew exponentially in a few short years and now has 110 full-time staff including four site foremen, a plant manager and a host of artisans, machine operators and truck drivers. The company's fleet of yellow machines and trucks has grown to number 22. During the slower winter months when there is not much demand for plant hire in agriculture, the equipment is cross-hired to the civil construction side of the business.

"Despite all this equipment, we were always having to hire in compaction equipment and, while the machines we use are not big, their hiring costs do affect our bottom line, so early in 2020 I decided it was time to acquire our own compaction equipment," Ben explains. "I recalled that we had enjoyed great service from machines made and sold by Bell Equipment with my father's businesses in Oudtshoorn and approached Bell in Cape Town through their Sales Representative Fiona Johnson, who we knew well by now as she called on us regularly. We believe it's the right thing to do supporting South African companies such as Bell Equipment."

In February 2020, Johnson Plant Hire & Civils took delivery of a Bomag BW120AD-5 Double-drum Ride-on Roller, two Bomag BT65 Tampers and a Bomag BPR35/60 Plate Compactor.

"We use the Bomag BW120AD-5 Roller mostly for compaction during roadbed preparation and it has run really well and added value during its first almost 300 hours of use," Ben continues. "Its fuel consumption has also been a pleasant surprise at between 3,5 and 4,5 litres an hour."

He goes on to explain that the Bomag BT65 Tampers are especially useful when compacting fill material on top of pipelines and behind retaining walls and the Bomag BPR35/60 Plate Compactor gives a solid and firm finish to any brick paving.

"I'm aware that Bell Equipment has a reputation for solid technical support, and we have not been disappointed as the example of Fiona Johnson as a sales representative doubling up in a product support role shows," he says. "We believe Bell Equipment understands our business and appreciates that we can't afford downtime on our equipment, which makes us confident that this South African equipment distributor will see more of us in the future."

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