

BMH loads up on B30Es for Mozambique coal contract



In pressurised opencast mining production having the correct and compatible loading and hauling tools is paramount to success. Being able to maximise the capability of such tools is an added bonus that benefits clients and machine owners alike and brings repeat business.

This is what excites James Knowles who is the owner of Gauteng-based Bulk Machine Hire. During the latter part of 2018 his company landed a topsoil-stripping contract on a large opencast coal mine in Mpumalanga where the simple sounding task at hand belies the challenges that his mining teams face.

Bulk Machine Hire has been around for the past 16 years and undertakes contract mining and

material handling assignments across a broad spectrum of mining industries from coal and silica to working in the gas fields of Mozambique. James Knowles had first honed his knowledge of earthmoving equipment during eight years as a sales representative for Bell Equipment before venturing out on his own.

"This current contract is not our first venture into the coal mining industry, but it is a challenging one in an area that has high rainfall leading to shallow water tables where good traction for haulage machines is so important," he says. "We realised that to successfully meet, and possibly exceed, the targets of cubic metres of material moved that our clients demanded we would need powerful new and reliable equipment."

"For that reason, we invested in a fleet of eight new all-wheel drive Bell B30E Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs) and two new Kobelco SK500HDLC Excavators. We believe the Kobelco 50-ton machine, with its 3,1 cubic metre bucket, is the ideal loading tool for the Bell B30E ADTs."

Just prior to delivery of the Bell B30E ADTs, the bins were fitted with 200mm greedy boards, increasing the carrying capacity of the machines. The topsoil that they primarily haul has a low specific gravity and the subsequent increase in load volume does not tax the machine. Despite the increased capacity, the Kobelco SK500HDLC Excavators fill the bin in a mere five to seven scoops, which makes for faster cycle times. The haul to the topsoil dump is about 1,5km.

Most modern opencast coal mining in South Africa is done responsibly and using the 'roll-over method' where mined-out seams are backfilled immediately, hence the need to stockpile topsoil. Effective stripping and loading are therefore important and here, according to James, the Kobelco SK500HDLC machines really come into their own right.

"In terms of our contract we work on dry fuel rates, but this does not mean that we don't monitor our fuel consumption closely," he says. "Our new Bell B30E ADTs have clocked an average 1 000 hours

each in the five months that we've had them. At expected high mechanical availabilities and fuel consumption of only 15 litres an hour, they definitely add value to the operation. Using high flotation tyres in underfoot conditions that get extremely slippery at times is a must."

"The two Kobelco Excavators are just passing the 1 200-hour mark and their fuel burn averages out at around 45 litres an hour which, considering the work they do, is more than acceptable to us and our clients."

James and his team at Bulk Machine Hire have learnt that as good as any piece of mechanical equipment can be, effective and diligent maintenance is the key to longevity of the equipment resulting in a decent return on investment. To this end, the company has entered into a maintenance contract with Bell Equipment to maintain and repair the fleet beyond the warranty period.

"Call me biased if you like but of our total fleet of some 75 machines, 65 come from Bell Equipment and that has to tell you something," he smiles. "We still appreciate the open lines of communication we have with our OEM of choice and I can call our Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Kobus van Niekerk, at any hour."



James Knowles (left) of Bulk Machine Hire with his Bell Sales Representative, Kobus van Niekerk.