

Kobelco Mini Excavator impresses at Reddot Farms

Sibling rivalry amongst boys is common especially when there is a sought-after toy in the mix but to experience a gentle rivalry between a father and his son over a piece of earthmoving equipment is rather amusing.

Johann Reinecke is the fourth generation of his family to farm Reddot Farms in the Bo-Langkloof between George and Uniondale in the Cape. He follows in the footsteps of his father, Otto, who is the grandson of well-known academic Professor Otto Samuel Herbert Reinecke, the former dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the Stellenbosch University. The latter had in his lifetime discovered the Kakamas peach.

"It wasn't a given that I could merely walk in and farm here, despite being the only son in our family," Johann tells us. "I had to obtain a university degree first and did so, completing a BSc. Agric. Administration degree at Stellenbosch University."

Reddot Farms grows nine cultivars of apples and four of pears. The reasoning behind the growing of

so many cultivars is to extend the harvesting season which runs from January to May each year. Harvesting apples especially is still a labour-intensive exercise as no mechanical harvesting is used.

"We have to harvest by hand as the twisting and lifting technique of harvesting an apple to retain a bit of the stem on the fruit, cannot yet be done by a machine," Johann explains. "It's important to retain the stem on the fruit or else it affects the grading of the fruit."

Reddot Farms exports about 70% of their apples and pears. The 250 000 cases of fruit that are packed on the farm, are taken away in between 160 and 200 refrigerated containers each season. While harvesting the fruit may seem like the pinnacle of the productive cycle, it's in the off-



Forklift operator, Andrew America, Johann Reinecke and Bell Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson, with the Bell Forklift. Note the use of round tubing and the wheel motor visible on the outside of the wheel.

season that the real work on the farm gets done; when land preparation, planting and irrigation infrastructure, amongst other areas, demand attention.

"The general rule of thumb is that you should replace four percent of the total growing area each year and that gives our trees a 25-year life cycle," Johann says. "Our apple trees are planted in a north-south direction and although we have enough land, our biggest challenge is getting all our trees irrigated."

To aid the preparation and maintenance of the soil infrastructure which carries the multitude of irrigation lines, Reddot Farms took delivery of a Kobelco SK55SRX 5,5 ton Excavator in September 2019.

"We chose this machine as we'd previously owned a Kobelco 7,5 ton Excavator that my dad, Otto, had bought on the pre-owned market in Somerset West," Johann says. "Although we felt at 7,5 tons that the machine was slightly too big for our needs, it worked really well and we used it for 10 years before it was sold."

Johann's planning was that the new Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator would be used extensively within the apple and pear orchards where this compact machine, that has no tail-swing that could possibly damage the trees, could be used to dig shallow furrows for irrigation lines. But it was not to be as his father indicated that the Kobelco Excavator had a more urgent application.

"My parents, Otto and Lynette, are enjoying semi-retirement on their small farm near the mouth of the Gourits River, south of Mossel Bay," Johann

says with a smile. "The road leading up to their hillside home needed repair and maintenance and that's where our new Kobelco Excavator has gone, commandeered by my father who was at pains to explain to me that this was a far more pressing role for the brand new machine."

We caught up with Otto and Lynette Reinecke and Otto was very pleased with the performance of the Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator. "This machine has a surprisingly big bucket – equivalent to a backhoe bucket – and enough break-out force to get through the shale that we have on the road up to our home," he says. "Using it here has made a huge difference in a short space of time although I'm reluctant to let it return to the farm as I've had so much fun operating it."

"I firmly believe that this is the correct machine for working in the orchards as with the modern trend to better utilize the land, fruit farmers are planting narrower rows and this compact little Kobelco will do well in those more confined spaces."

Johann feels reassured about the fact that Kobelco products are sold and backed by Bell Equipment and that in nearby George there is a Customer Service Centre with knowledgeable personnel and spare parts. "We've been impressed by Bell Equipment's attention starting with Sales Representative Fiona Johnson taking the trouble to visit us on the farm, through to the obvious support for the company's products," he says. "We can vouch for the quality of the company's products as we have an early model Bell Forklift that was built with round tubing and despite its 1980s vintage, it is still in almost daily use, especially during the harvest."



Lynette and Otto Reinecke with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson.



"This machine has a surprisingly big bucket – equivalent to a backhoe bucket – and enough break-out force to get through the shale that we have on the road up to our home."

Otto Reinecke