

New Kobelco SK520XDL keeps Afrimat's six B45Es busy at iron ore mine



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Adriaan Lategan

When an experienced and knowledgeable physical asset manager for a leading supplier of construction materials, commodities and mining contracting services tells you he is excited about the upgrades to an excavator model range that has already built an impressive performance record, it is a good idea to sit up and take notice.

The fact that this excavator, despite its 52-ton operating weight, is still considered to be compact enough to be nimble in tight loading zones and unstable underfoot conditions, such as working on blasted rock, makes it a sought-after machine to work with by its operators.

But before we put the proverbial cart before the horse, let us introduce you to the excavator's owners. The group now known as Afrimat (Pty) Ltd came into existence out of a merger of Lancaster and Prima Klipbrekers. Afrimat listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in November 2006 and has seen consistent and diversified growth ever since.

As a young company with a proven pedigree, Afrimat first and foremost built its name supplying construction products such as aggregates, ready-mixed concrete, bricks and blocks, building and road lime, clinker and silica. It owns and operates quarries in every province except the North West. Industrial minerals have been a welcome addition to its offerings with popular products being limestone and lime, animal hygiene lime and metallurgical calcite and dolomite.

As it is well-versed in quarrying, which really is a form of mining, Afrimat has a contract mining division that offers a full bouquet of services from drilling and blasting, mobile crushing, screening, bid preparation and contractual services.

With this mining experience in its portfolio, Afrimat confidently entered the field of supplying bulk commodities when it acquired the Demaneng iron ore mine which is situated close to Kathu in the Northern Cape.

Adriaan Lategan is the group's Physical Asset Manager Lead and a man who knows most of what there is to know about the yellow (and now turquoise) earthmoving and haulage machines that Afrimat owns. “We have a long-standing relationship with Bell Equipment and, as a valued supplier, the company's products adhere to the levels of quality we demand in terms of our ISO 55000 standard,” he tells us. “This relationship goes back a long way as our founding quarries all successfully ran Bell Wheel Loaders and Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs) across many of the ranges and sizes and still do to the present day.”



Adriaan Lategan, Afrimat's Physical Asset Manager Lead.

According to Adriaan, Afrimat's policy regarding excavators sees them buying machines of 35-tons and the next step up from that, meaning machines in the 48 to 55-ton range. "We already own two Kobelco SK500 50-ton machines and they have really proved their worth to us," Adriaan says. "At our Demaneng iron ore operation we needed an additional loading tool that could also be used for maintaining infrastructure, something that the bigger 80-ton machines we deploy, can't economically do."

"After an in-depth consultation with Bell Equipment's Sales Representative, Sascha Caixeiro, we ordered a Kobelco SK520XDL 52-ton Excavator that was delivered to us in January 2021 and added to the fleet of six Bell B45E ADTs we run on the Demaneng iron ore site."

Afrimat has long since valued the peace of mind that an extended warranty to 6 000 hours on the wet drive train of any machine gives, and this Kobelco SK520XDL is no exception. All servicing

under this warranty is done by mechanics from Bell Equipment's branch in nearby Kuruman. "Bernard Niemand and his team are prompt in their responses to us and parts availability is never a problem," Adriaan says.

The Kobelco SK520XDL Excavator is traditionally fitted with a 3,4 cubic-metre bucket but as the iron ore is so dense (showing a specific gravity of around 2,6) the standard bucket has been swapped for one slightly smaller at 2,6 cubic metres.

"We've been quite excited to see the Kobelco SK520XDL perform as its hydraulic flows have been markedly improved over its 50-ton predecessors, which weren't bad, and it shows in its production rate," Adriaan explains. "Despite its mass at 52 tons the machine is still quite compact, and our operators enjoy this as it's easier to manoeuvre especially when working on blasted ore and close to high walls in our narrower mining areas."

When we visited the Demaneng mine the Kobelco SK520XDL was being used in-pit to load 40-ton ADTs with blasted ore and there were no queueing trucks. Even at this rate, the Kobelco returns fuel consumption figures of between 37 and 39 litres an hour, which points to profitable production costs.

"This Kobelco's performance is impressive and as a versatile tool that can be used for ancillary tasks

such as feeding material into the processing plant and maintaining infrastructure, we'll certainly look to buy more such excavators," Adriaan smiles.

"Our onsite teams also report that they don't know the machine is there meaning it simply purrs along with no demands for attention or repair, which means good production news all round."

