

# Bell Loggers are the backbone of the Mill Timber Traders operation

**The owners of a sawmill in the most southern part of the Eastern Cape battled for many years to handle and move their timber efficiently – until they bought a Bell Logger. Then they were amazed at how they had survived without it.**

Johan Schlechter had been in the South African Police Services for 21 years when his hobby making wooden pallets turned into a serious sideline business and he had to make a difficult decision. "I was a proud policeman but when the lure of being self-employed became too strong I was faced with the difficult decision of leaving the force and starting out on my own, with my late wife Martha's backing," Johan says. "This was in Joubertina in the Eastern Cape and suddenly we were faced with the difficulty of finding sustainable timber sources for our business, which wasn't easy."

Johan and Martha overcame this in 1999 by buying a shell of an old sawmill at Witelsbos, a small settlement in the Tsitsikamma area, which is renowned for its timber plantations and natural forests. Operating as Mill Timber Traders, they could

now buy timber from a well-known national timber growing group and set about acquiring equipment to saw and produce pine timber pallets for an ever-demanding market.

"At first we used forklifts to handle the raw timber but struggled as this was not the correct equipment for this task as timber is heavy and cumbersome and handling it incorrectly can be dangerous," Johan explains. "It was only when we tracked down a used Bell 220A Logger in Somerset West in 2006, which we subsequently bought, that we realised we couldn't do without it and were astounded at how we had survived without it."

A second used Bell 225A Logger was soon bought as well and later sold privately when the Schlechters decided it was time for a new Bell 225A Logger. Fiona Johnson, Bell Equipment's Sales

Representative working out of George expands on this: "I recall fondly that Aunt Martha had quietly done all the research on our products and when she and Johan felt the time was right in 2015, she called me and ordered a new Bell 225A Logger and a few months later they bought two similar machines," Fiona says. "Dealing with Aunt Martha, Johan and their son, Chris, has been a privilege and I and our technical teams have always been made to feel so welcome at Witelsbos."

At the Mill Timber Traders' sawmill, timber arrives by long-haul transport and is offloaded onto various stockpiles from 2,1 metres to 6,6 metres in length. The Bell Loggers are then used to feed the mill from these stockpiles in a 24-hour operation, and in doing so have steadily clocked up service hours to now nearing 11 000 hours on all three of the machines.

"These machines have been running smoothly since their arrival and, apart from consumables, we've only had to replace one starter motor," Johan says. "Mechanics from Bell Equipment in George handle all our servicing and we give them enough notice of impending service intervals to minimise our downtime."

Johan's son, Chris, has not sat back and, while running the company's transport fleet, has looked to add value by investing in a woodchipper machine specifically aimed at servicing both the fruit and timber growing markets in the area with wood chips and mulch. To facilitate efficient infield feeding of this machine Chris' first choice fell on a new generation Bell 225F Logger.

"We timed the import of the woodchipper machine from the USA just right with a favourable exchange rate and with the saving on the currency we could afford to buy a new Bell 225F Logger," Chris says. "This points directly to Bell Equipment's competitive pricing on the machine."

Chris uses a low-bed trailer to take both the Bell 225F Logger and the woodchipper to farms where old fruit trees are removed and loaded into the chipper, which turns the wood into chips and mulch. This is then used by fruit growers to bed down new plantings, with the layered mulch and chips helping to retain moisture in the soil. Beef and dairy farmers find the mulch and chips handy to create dry surfaces for especially calves to stand and lie on.

"We've been impressed by how quiet the new Bell 225F Logger runs compared to the older models and its frugal fuel burn of 5 litres per hour is great," Chris adds. "The machine has smooth responsive controls which makes it nimble to manoeuvre, especially in tight spaces, and it easily matches the chipper's design capacity of 50 cubic metres an hour, which equals 15 tons."

Mill Timber Traders also runs an older JCB 7531 Telehandler fitted with a 2,5 cubic metre bucket that is used to load wood chips but both Johan and Chris are adamant that the backbone of both the mill and woodchipper operations are their Bell Loggers.

"You cannot imagine what we would have done without these Bell Loggers," they echo.



**The Schlechter family (from left): Johan, Chris and Yolanda (holding JayCee and Adelaide respectively) with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson.**

