

Plant hire customer enjoys 'milestone' longevity from Bell Loggers

It wasn't only a sailing ship that was famous for being named the Queen Mary. Would you believe that a bulk woodchip trailer was also called that as related by the inventor's grandson, who is now continuing the family's tradition of working in the timber industry as one of its tenacious third generation.

While engaged in material-handling duties at the giant Ngodwana paper mill near Mbombela (Nelspruit) in the 1970s Pierre Duvenhage had invented a bulk woodchip trailer aptly named the Queen Mary. His successful business acumen was passed onto his son Theo, who ran a profitable transport business hauling mainly timber mine packs to the gold mines in Gauteng. Both of Theo's sons, Bruce and Eugene, have carried on the family tradition of being self-employed and now each run their own plant hire concerns in the timber industry.

"I came into this business in 2012 and have the same qualification as my forebears, QBE which stands for 'qualified by experience'," a smiling Eugene says when we meet him in his company's new offices in George. "My business is called Milestone Plant Hire and I started out doing material handling for the largest of the particle board manufacturing mills in South Africa, located in Ugie in the Eastern Cape."

Since the Duvenhage family had first started working for these clients, their relationship has



grown, and the family now provides material handling services at all three of the particle board plants spread across the country.

"Our tasks fall into three main categories," Eugene continues. "We firstly feed the plant with logs and for this we use our Bell Loggers and wheel loaders with grapples. The Bell Loggers are also used to offload timber trucks, stockpile logs and feed the log decks."

"Then we blend pine and gum chips that are fed into the plant using wheel loaders that we've modified and have self-designed buckets that tip to 90 degrees and can stack higher. Finally, we handle waste and feed energy plants with timber waste and biomass."

Eugene is clearly in awe of the Bell Logger as timber handling equipment with specific reference to its longevity as he explains: "I grew up with Bell Loggers as my late grandfather, Pierre, had them and they always seemed to be around. We recently sold a 1989 model Bell 220A Logger to a canning company in Port Elizabeth where it is in daily use despite having done between 60 000 and 80 000 hours."

According to Eugene, their Bell Loggers are completely stripped down every five years and rebuilt and resprayed with major components being replaced where necessary. Another of their 1989 model Bell 220A Loggers has clocked 135 000 hours in this way and is still used daily.

"We have 20 Bell Loggers at the last count and these machines are all used around the clock, working on average 500 hours a month," Eugene says. "Despite the heavy work that they do, we've never found cracks or signs of metal fatigue in their frames, which points to the quality of their design and build by Bell Equipment."

Milestone Plant Hire recently took delivery of a new Bell 225F Logger which is being deployed at a particle board plant near Piet Retief in Mpumalanga. Eugene and his clients have been very impressed with this new generation Bell Logger and his clients are badgering him to acquire a second such machine for the same operation.

"This new Bell 225F Logger with its Yanmar engine runs so much quieter than the older models and with a fuel burn of only 5,8 litres an hour it certainly

is ticking all the boxes and saves our clients around 15 to 20% on fuel," he says. "Our operators report that the machine's controls are very smooth and operator fatigue is reduced."

In addition to the Bell Loggers, Milestone Plant Hire uses three JCB 940-4 Rough Terrain Forklifts at various plants and they are used to move planks and boards around in storage areas. "With our already strong relationship with Bell Equipment and its proven Loggers, we were doubly happy to hear that the company is now the South African distributor of JCB products," Eugene says. "The 4-ton JCB 940-4 Rough Terrain Forklift is a simple but robust machine. Our first one dates back to 2015 and has given us almost 15 000 hours of trouble-free operation with excellent fuel consumption of only 3 litres an hour."

Eugene points out that the JCB 940-4 Rough Terrain Forklift has minimal electronics and no complicated valve bank which makes for easier operation and maintenance. "We have firsthand

knowledge of machine maintenance as we do so much of it ourselves, although we also work closely with the Bell Equipment branches in Jet Park, George and Piet Retief."

He adds: "We endeavour to remain on the forefront of technological innovation, an example of such is utilising materials like Strenx, which allows us the scalability of utilising its high strength, low weight properties to design and fabricate new-age machine attachments that maximise machine utilisation and payload efficiency. You have to employ out-of-the-box thinking to stay ahead of the game."

Milestone Plant Hire certainly seems to be staying ahead of a competitive market and recently took delivery of a Bell 1216AF Haulage Tractor that has been fitted with a hook-lift to handle waste skips for their clients. It is a young company driven by an innovative thinker who is not afraid to plan for many milestones ahead.



Bell Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson, with Eugene Duvenhage.

