

NCT is chipper about new Kobelco SK260LC

The NCT Forestry Co-operative Limited (NCT) operation in Richards Bay is an international supplier of hardwood pulp chips. With an annual output of 1,2 million tonnes, it relies heavily on its fleet of Bell haulage tractors and excavator loaders to manage stock in its log yard to ensure a continuous supply of timber to its chipping plants.

A Kobelco SK260LC excavator-based loader, customised for the log yard application by Matriarch Equipment, is the latest addition to the fleet and has made a good first impression thanks to its ease of operation and low cost of ownership.

The NCT operation in Richards Bay comprises of two chipping lines, which together chip 4 000t of timber per day. The operation runs 24 hours for about 360 days a year and accepts timber lengths of up to 5,5m.

Mainly black wattle and gum are supplied to the chipping mills by NCT growers, who are private timber growers. Timber comes from as far afield as Vryheid and Piet Retief and while most is

transported by road on 34t rigs, the KwaZulu-Natal interior near Vryheid and Piet Retief also makes use of rail transport.

Timber is delivered directly to the mills for chipping with the overflow of vehicles directed to the log yard where their payload is offloaded by the excavator loaders and stockpiled for later use.

The chipping mills supply three primary species of wood chips. These are transported to the Port of Richards Bay on a 3km conveyor belt and loaded onto ships bound for the main markets of Japan and China where they are used to manufacture pulp and paper. Biomass, destined for Japan, is also chipped separately from lower grade logs.



Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Haig Thompson, with Charles Atkins (left) and Ryno Martyn (right) at NCT Forestry's log yard in Richards Bay.

NCT's Richards Bay operation has been using Bell equipment for 20 years. One of its first machines was a Bell 225A Logger which has "stood the test of time", according to NCT Plant Engineer, Charles Atkins. A second Bell 225A Logger was purchased five years ago and together these machines are used for housekeeping in the log yard and to neaten loads on the tractor-trailers.

The six Bell Haulage Tractors in the fleet include an old Bell 1206, which was bought second-hand in 1999 and has worked over 15 000 hours. A Bell 1766 was added two years later and still provides loyal service. "We installed new cabs on these tractors but engine-wise we've done no repairs," enthuses Ryno Martyn, NCT's Operations Manager.

Four Bell Tractors move up to 800t of timber from the log yard in a 12-hour shift, which involves a short 400m haul to the chipper, passing through a weighbridge along the way.

Rounding off the fleet is a Bell L1506 Wheeled Loader with a 4m³ wood chip bucket, that is used for housekeeping duties at the wood chip mills. In all this time, the mill has only replaced the wheel hub of the newest 225A Logger a few weeks after it was delivered. "Other than that, we've never had a breakdown on our Bell machines in 20 years. It makes sense to remain loyal to a supplier with a good product and who offers reliable 24-hour service," remarks Charles.

The Kobelco SK260LC excavator loader was delivered in May this year. The customisation work included raising the cab by 1,5m to provide improved visibility of the wood piles, which are stacked up to 5m. From this elevated position, the operator has a better view when offloading trucks and loading trailers.

The cab sits atop a metal box structure on rubber mountings that absorb any bumps and provide a more comfortable ride experience. The conversion also includes operator cab guarding, nose cone and Matriarch's MT1000 grapple, which has a 1m² capacity.

"The Kobelco doesn't bounce around like some of the other excavator loaders, it has good stability," comments Charles.

"I thought the tracks would do more damage in the log yard but it isn't bad at all and the staff have become accustomed to operating the machine which is simple to operate. Usually staff are reluctant with new machines but we've had buy-in with the Kobelco. It is a relatively simple, quiet machine with not too many electronics," concludes Ryno.

NCT Forestry is a marketing co-operative catering to the needs of private and independent timber growers.