

Lebombo Vlake Vervoer upsizes to Matriarch's new UltECO6

When the Matriarch UltECO5 Slew Loader first hit the wide-open sugar cane lands of the Komatipoort irrigation farms, it was a revelation.

Here at last was a competitively priced slew loading tool where the operator could face the load all the time, due to the operator cab slewing with the crane, and could work on lands where the irrigation infrastructure was not harmed in any way.

Imagine then the stir in the market when the all-new four-wheel-drive Matriarch UltECO6 machine arrived in that same environment. Perhaps it would be best for Hennie Gerber, owner of the company Lebombo Vlake Vervoer to take up the story, as he is the owner of both the Matriarch UltECO5 and UltECO6 Slew Loaders.

"The UltECO5 is a great machine and I'll be forever grateful for the advantage it gave me as a contract cane transporter to load cane trailers quickly and efficiently for the haul to the nearby mill," he tells us. "We clocked some 6 800 hours in three years which goes to show

that in the cane harvesting season, which traditionally runs from April to November, the UltECO5 Loader seldom stood idle."

Hennie's company is aptly named after the plains that lie below the nearby Lebombo mountain range. He bought the company in January 2016 from the previous owners, a group of sugar farmers who hauled cane to the nearby Komati Sugar Mill, as he does now. The sugar cane on the plains near Komatipoort is mostly under drip irrigation where the subsurface irrigation pipes can deliver water and nutrients directly to the roots of the plant. It is this infrastructure that can be damaged when controlled traffic is not exercised in the lands.

"When Justin and Ashley Bell of Matriarch Equipment told me that they were introducing a larger, enhanced version of the UltECO5 Slew Loader in the UltECO6 model that would have 4x4 traction, I was immediately interested," Hennie says. "It's not that we ever really got stuck but in the wet season our underfoot conditions can get slippery and I felt that the all-wheel drive traction





would be beneficial to us, offering more versatility when loading and the higher travel speed is appealing especially when driving from one production unit to the next.”

Hennie had been the manager for sugar cultivation and harvesting on a large commercial farm in the area and certainly knows the conditions that equipment and operators endure. He views the fact that the Matriarch UltECO6 Slew Loader being a wheeled machine can be driven to another production unit without the need of a low-bed trailer and rig as a definite cost- and time-saving advantage.

His older Matriarch UltECO5 Slew Loader is now kept as a standby machine.

“We took delivery of the Matriarch UltECO6 Slew Loader in early June 2018 and I must say that with its all-wheel drive traction, compared to a tracked machine, it works much smoother and with lower ground impact. Most of our clients here practice ratooning of cane where the plant regenerates after harvesting. This makes it important that the subsurface irrigation infrastructure is not damaged,” he says.

According to Hennie, his operators who had worked with the Matriarch UltECO5 Slew Loader all took to the newer UltECO6 machine immediately and all commented on the larger air-conditioned cab that offers greater visibility of the working area. Performance has been beefed up with a higher capacity crane and a more efficient load-sensing hydraulic pump.

“We had in the past easily loaded 900 tonnes in a 24-hour cycle using the Matriarch UltECO5 Slew Loader and I believe we will surpass that with the UltECO6 model as soon as the operators get used to the greater performance and stability this machine offers. Currently we’re looking at an average fuel consumption of around 5,9 litres an hour and that is certainly not breaking the bank,” Hennie says with a smile.

Ashley Bell of Matriarch Equipment says the company is pleased with how this latest model is performing at Lebombo Vlake Vervoer as it shows that the UltECO6 is more than capable of meeting the needs of larger sugar estates and contractors for a higher production slew loader.

“The UltECO6 is larger and faster where it counts. The two speed drive motors of the UltECO6 enables a higher travel speed of 26km/h compared to the 11km/h of the UltECO5. The grab capacity is about 15% greater to promote higher production levels and the machine is also fitted standard with a wider push-piler and piler tines. This all helps the UltECO6 deliver an average load rate of 45 to 70 tonnes per hour, depending on the operation, while the UltECO5 has an average load rate of 35 to 50 tonnes per hour.”

He adds that the UltECO6 has greater track flexibility, ranging from 2,1m to 3,4m, which is achieved using spacers and different offset wheel rims.



Bell Equipment Product Manager: Forestry and Agriculture, Charles Inggs (left), discusses the benefits of the larger Matriarch UltECO6 Slew Loader with the machine’s owner, Hennie Gerber, of Lebombo Vlake Vervoer.