

Forestry & Agriculture Global Edition - VOLUME 2 - 2023



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Cover The MTO Group in South Africa has added five new Bell Loggers to its fleet. Read more on page 10.

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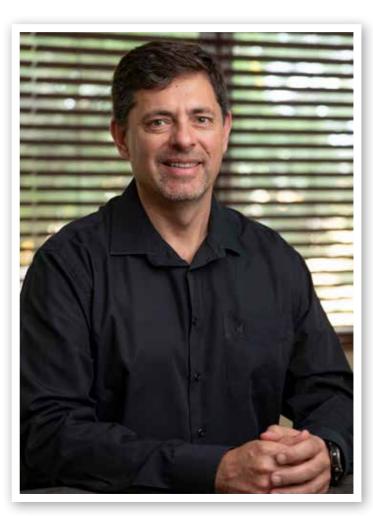
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insight



2023 is drawing to a close, as is my time with Bell Equipment, and I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey we've undertaken together over the past 16 years. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as CEO for the last five years, and I am filled with gratitude for the trust and support you, our customers, have shown throughout my tenure.

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As I prepare to pass the baton to a new leader, I can't help but feel a sense of nostalaia and a touch of sadness. Leaving a company and a community I have been a part of for so long is never easy. However, I do so with the utmost confidence in the future of Bell Equipment.

Our organisation stands on a solid foundation, and I am proud to say that we are in great shape. The strategies we have embarked upon to explore new global products, expand into new markets, and drive various new business units and initiatives forward have set us on an exciting path. This positive momentum will undoubtedly continue into the future.

I want to express my sincere thanks for your partnership, loyalty, and unwavering support over the years. It's your trust and collaboration that have fuelled our success, and I have every belief that the same will hold true in the years to come.

As I bid farewell to my role as CEO, I look forward to watching Bell Equipment reach new heights, achieve greater milestones, and continue to serve you with excellence. Our dedicated team remains committed to your success, and I have no doubt that the best is yet to come.

Thank you, once again, for being an integral part of the Bell Equipment family. It has been an incredible journey, and I am excited to witness the remarkable future that lies ahead.

Yours sincerely

Leon Goosen Group Chief Executive Officer

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Bell Loggers provide a unique solution for truck stop construction

Two brothers, both engineers, have hit on a novel idea to create a solid underfoot surface at the two new truck stops they're developing and are using non-traditional loading tools to handle concrete products.

The Brelage family have been farming near Perdekop, just north of Volksrust in South Africa's Mpumalanga Province for three generations since their forefather emigrated from an area close to the French border with Germany. The family has traditionally grown crops and tended beef cattle and while that is still the case, the current generation has, after obtaining professional tertiary education, branched out into wholesale fuel sales that soon will evolve into the retail sector.

Herman Brelage is a mechanical engineer and had worked for the state-owned electricity supplier while his younger brother Marius, an industrial engineer, worked for a leading banking group.

"We saw a gap in the local diesel wholesale and distribution market and founded our company FPS Bulk Diesel in 2000," Herman Brelage says. "As the name implies, we sell and distribute diesel fuel and lubricants of a leading Dutch petroleum company all over South Africa and have a fleet of 40 interlinked truck-tanker rigs on the road, fetching and delivering diesel fuel and lubricants."

"Our younger brother, Antonie, works with us and he is in charge of lubricant sales," says Marius Brelage. "With the bulk diesel business well-established, we've set our sights on an ambitious project for which the proper approvals have taken far longer than we originally anticipated."

The Brelage brothers are in the throes of developing two truck stops on either side of the N11 highway which links Volksrust in Mpumalanga to the area around Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal. This is a major transport route for truck transport heading to Mpumalanga, Limpopo and even Gautena from the Port of Durban. As the provincial border is virtually on the outskirts of Volksrust, the truck-stops are in fact in KwaZulu-Natal between Volksrust and the hamlet of Charlestown.

"Ever since establishing our bulk diesel business we've had the idea of developing the truck stops but approvals from the correct authorities, environmental impact assessments, and issues around water and sanitation have taken all of 15 years to comply with," Herman says. "We're confident of making a success as there is no such facility around these parts and for some distance on either side of Volksrust where a lot of trucks seem to park for the night after leaving Durban."

"Our plans include refuelling bays, restrooms and ablution facilities, and a cafeteria that will serve nourishing meals to the longdistance drivers," Marius says. "We'll also cater for overnight accommodation and a secure vehicle parking area." Mention the vehicle parking area and the brothers' faces light up as they have hit upon a unique idea of creating a solid and, what they believe, durable underfoot surface for driving and parking the trucks at the truck stop.

Herman and Marius have managed to procure 30 000 scrapped concrete railway sleepers that were discarded by Transnet Freight Rail (TFR) after they were deemed to have reached the end of their life in terms of keeping railway lines safely anchored. These concrete railway sleepers are flipped upside down so that their flat bottoms are at the top and two sleepers are bolted together to form a one squaremetre reinforced concrete paving block that has had its strength proven by especially coal trains running over it for many years.

"We must admit that the idea is not totally our own as we had seen this used by a friend, Albert Willemse, who runs a timber transport business in Vryheid," Marius said. "He had used a similar method in his yard and we're expanding on the idea by 'paving' two much larger areas that will have many truck wheels crossing it and parking on it."

A big portion of the 30 000 scrapped railway sleepers were stored near a siding at Perdekop, some 30km from the truck stop site. The brothers soon found that loading and unloading the concrete sleepers was slow when using a hydraulic truck-mounted crane and they needed to urgently find a viable alternative.

"We again turned to our friend, Albert Willemse, who suggested we use the same unique tool that he uses for loading and unloading timber, a three-wheeled Bell Logger, and that turned out to be the perfect solution as we did not even have to alter the timber grab on the machine," Herman says. "The timber grab on the Bell Logger opens wide enough to easily pick up three or four concrete sleepers at a time and deposit them safely onto a truck; something you could never achieve as safely and as quickly by hand as these sleepers are heavy."

But now the next challenge was to find a dealer situated close enough to provide them with a Bell Logger. Again, good fortune smiled on these brave engineers.

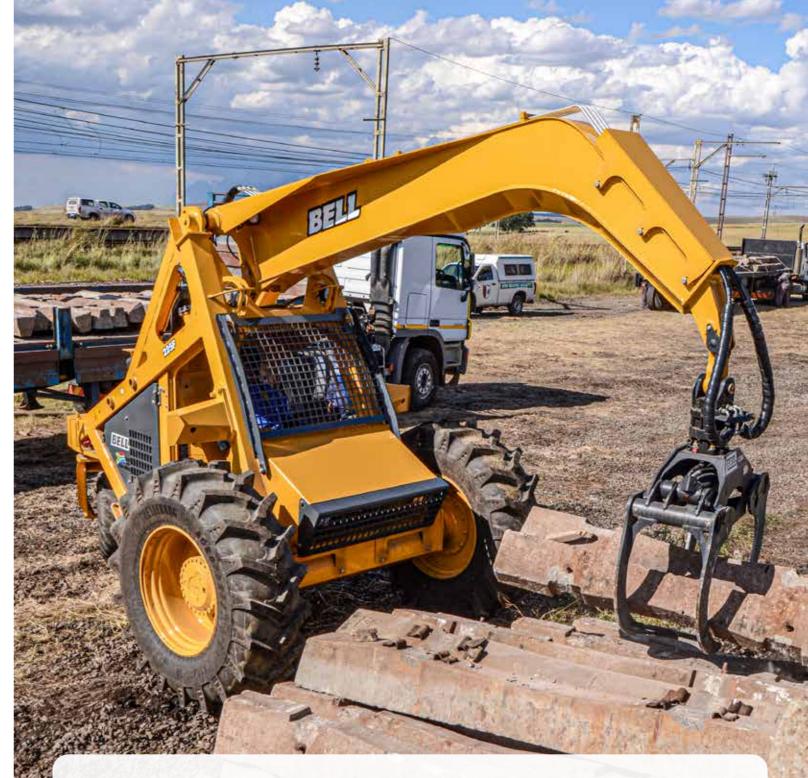
"We have for the past eight years or so had a great business relationship with Werner Nel and his company JWL Landbou Voorsieners, which has its main branch in Ermelo and another in Standerton," Marius explains. "We have bought agricultural tractors, implements and spares from Werner and his team, so it was a very pleasant surprise for us to learn that Werner and his company had recently been appointed as dealers to Bell Equipment's Forestry & Agriculture division."

Marius adds that they've enjoyed solid service from JWL Landbou Voorsieners with good response times and a well-stocked parts holding for their consumable and replacement parts.

And so, the Brelage brothers took delivery of a new Bell 225F Logger in early February 2023 and they could embark on getting the



Herman (left) and Marius Brelage stand on some of the laid concrete sleepers at their developing truck stop site on the N11 outside Volksrust.



railway sleepers to their site much quicker. "We use two flat deck trucks that can each carry 150 sleepers and, with the Bell 225F Logger loading at the Perdekop site, we easily transport 450 sleepers a day to the truck stop site," Herman adds. "We soon noticed though that offloading the trucks wasn't as quick and we were fortunate enough to locate a used Bell 225A Logger on the open market that we promptly bought to speed up the offloading."

The used Bell 225A Logger is a 2015 model that had done 8 000 hours when bought for this project. It is used to offload the sleepers and place them so that teams on the ground can bolt two sleepers together before they are placed in situ. Once all the sleepers are in place, they will be covered with gravel to keep them in place and ensure a smooth surface for the expected truck traffic.

"Using the Bell Loggers on either end of our concrete sleeper supply chain has certainly made a huge difference to our project schedule and we would not have progressed this far were it not for having these two yellow Bell machines, which we've now learnt was one of the stalwart equipment models that Bell Equipment built its name on," Marius says. "We're also confident that having the concrete sleepers as the base of our forecourts and parking areas is the way to go as concrete is much hardier than asphalt and we're banking on finishing construction of the truck stops in about five months."

The Bell 225F Logger has been bought with a standard 12-month warranty and during that time all servicing will be done by field service mechanics from JWL Landbou Voorsieners in Ermelo.

MTO upgrades aging fleet with new F-series Loggers

An upward growth spurt for a leading South African timber growing company has seen it turn to a preferred supplier of timber handling equipment to replace its fleet of older machines.

The MTO Group came into being out of a State-Owned Entity (SOE) that was a forestry group in the early 1990s. It has evolved from different investment groups and shown real growth since creating its own identity in 2005. MTO stands for 'Mountain to Ocean' and it's a very applicable name since its forests, especially those in the picturesque Tsitsikamma area of the Eastern Cape are often found in a thin belt between mountain tops and the nearby ocean.

As a timber grower, MTO operates in the Western and Eastern Cape and, since 2015, in the Mpumalanga Lowveld as well. It is here near White River that we find Dirk van Heerden, MTO Group's Maintenance Manager in the Lowveld and the person tasked with acquiring and maintaining mechanised forestry equipment that is used for a wide variety of tasks.

Dirk hails from Sabie where both his father and grandfather had worked in forestry, which means Dirk really is a chip off the proverbial old block.

"Here in the Mpumalanga area we grow mostly Eucalyptus species and we produce a variety of round log products into external value-adding facilities," he says. "Some of the value-added products include pulp, board timber, sawn lumber, biomass, poles, mining timber, veneer, shutter-plywood, and shelving."

A visit to MTO's gum plantations near White River shows bustling clear-fell operations in progress with yellow Bell Loggers very much in evidence, extracting the felled timber and stacking it at the roadside where it is processed using chainsaws and cut into predetermined lengths.

"We've been using Bell 225 A-series Loggers for as long as I can

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remember and in September 2021, we started the process to replace some older models with the newer machines," Dirk says. "We researched the market thoroughly as there are a few players out there but we're happy to say that our choice once again fell on Bell Equipment's new F-series Logger. We're also grateful to Bell Equipment's Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen, who as a forester, understands our business and the challenges we face." According to Dirk, their plan is to retain a Logger for 10 000 to 12 000 hours before replacing it but some older models in their fleet had clocked in excess of 18 000 hours. "These Bell Loggers run to those high hours because they are easy to maintain and to rebuild if necessary. Bell also still stocks essential parts for the A-series such as hour meters and fuel pumps, and the company should be commended for showing such faith in an older design that they acknowledge its longevity."

MTO took delivery of three new Bell 225F Loggers in March 2022 and two more similar machines were delivered in June the same year in the Lowveld area. "We're using three of these new Bell 225F Loggers infield with two others in our treatment and stockyard where they handle, stack, and load untreated and treated timber poles and other timber products."

Dirk and his colleagues are pleased to have the five new Bell Loggers working as with mounting production pressures they had to hire similar equipment that came at a cost, with much of that being fuel.

"These new Bell 225F Loggers with the Yanmar engines are so much lighter on fuel than the older A-series models," he says. "We're saving on average about 25% on our fuel burn with the new F-series Loggers, which amounts to a lot of money at the end of a financial year. What surprises us is that we're seeing this frugal fuel burn despite the Bell Loggers handling full tree lengths of up to 28 metres at times."

According to Dirk, their operators took to the new Bell 225F Loggers immediately and commented on how more responsive the controls were. The company has implemented strict daily pre-start checks and all operators know that preventative maintenance is key in successfully maintaining equipment to ensure longevity. Each Thursday is washday for the Bell Loggers and lubrication is done regularly.

Asked about maintenance and the level of service that MTO enjoys from Bell Equipment in nearby Nelspruit, Dirk says the following: "We had a few teething problems with the new machines as one can have but Bell Equipment is a mere phone call away and these niggles were fixed quickly and quietly with no questions asked."

"Looking to the future, upwardmoving production targets see our company increasing harvesting capacity, which will increase our need to utilise three-wheel loggers going forward. We're busy evaluating the amount of new equipment we would need for our expansion and will be engaging with Bell Equipment to see if they can supply to our needs."



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Group Lowveld.

Daniel van Huyssteen (left) Bell Sales Representative with Dirk van Heerden, Maintenance Manager MTO



Bell Cane Loader makes a good first impression in Grenada

José Carlos Rocha Filho, Marketing and Commercial Manager at Latin Equipment Norte, describes his experiences as he explores new frontiers in the Caribbean region to support customer success and sustainability-related goals with Bell Cane Loaders.



Considered the Caribbean Gateway, Grenada is situated in the delightful Caribbean region and is part of the West Indies. It is one of the smallest countries in the Americas, with the territory comprising the primary island, also named Grenada, and several smaller neighboring islands.

In recent years, along with the agriculture industry, Grenada has been developing its economic potential through international tourism, which stands out as the foremost sector contributing to foreign currency earnings. Often referred to as the "Spice Island," the country is a major global producer of nutmeg and mace, ranking second only to Indonesia among producers of these spices. Grenada is characterised by uneven terrain punctuated with nutmeg and sugarcane plantations and is blessed with favourable growing conditions.

Like many other Caribbean islands, Grenada features an exotic tradition of rum production that has become an integral part of its cultural heritage. The "Grenadine Rum", as it is called, truly sets Grenada apart in the world of spirits due to its unique, distinctive flavour profile, featuring hints of tropical fruits, spices, caramel, vanilla, and oak.

Operations

CaneCo is dedicated to cultivating, harvesting, and milling superior sugarcane. Premium varieties are selected for their suitability to the island's climate and soils, as well as resistance to disease and drought. With an annual mill input of over 10 000 tons, it currently produces over 500 000 litres of absolute alcohol (LAA), which might yield over one million litres of rum. The group also manages the Renegade Rum Distillery, producing and exporting premium selections to European markets.

Driven by the rising demand for exporting their rum, Latin Equipment was called upon to provide a better solution for the



sugarcane loading process. This presented an opportunity to introduce the new Bell 125F Cane Loader as an alternative to the small, tracked excavators typically used for the task.

In the absence of a purpose-built machine to load whole cane sticks, regular eight to 10-ton excavators are commonly seen in operations throughout the island. These machines are not designed to work in harvesting operations.

According to CaneCo's maintenance manager, the prolonged use of excavators in sugarcane loading applications can significantly increase operating costs and negatively impact production targets due to excessive mechanical repair and downtime. In addition, their limited ground clearance and width make some of these machines susceptible to bogging down in soft soil conditions, and prone to overturning in steep slope areas commonly found in plantation land.

Their plantations are mostly set on uneven, gently sloping terrain that occasionally gives way to rough, cut-up spots. We observed considerable elevation changes ranging from 60 to 140 feet, with some sections featuring steep slopes reaching up to 25°, offering an extra challenge and risks for the small track excavator to operate.

First impressions

The Bell Tri-Wheelers have established a remarkable reputation for their exceptional reliability, cost-effectiveness, and productivity around Latin America. The first Bell 125F rolled into CaneCo's facility in August 2023, and at first impression, it exceeded all expectations.

Several aspects come into play when you operate in steep slope areas, and such conditions pose a range of challenges regarding the cane loader performance. The Bell 125F outfitted with the dual-wheel set performs outstandingly when it becomes too steep for the track carrier excavator. Due to its weight spread over the double wheels, the machine offers less ground pressure, minimising both soil compaction and ensuring optimal traction and stability. This empowers the 125F to perform optimally and safely in rough and variable terrain such as that found across the island. Additionally, mitigating soil compaction is highly desired to ensure healthy sugarcane regrowth, claims CaneCo's planting crew manager.

In the operation with the tractor and trailer following the loader, the machine consistently achieves 40 tons per hour. From the stockpile into large trucks in the loading zone, the machine does over 50 tons hourly. In addition to the spacious cab, the machine brings the advantage of nimble, precise movements and easy manoeuvrability, resulting in a notable boost in productivity compared to the small excavators. Also, the controls are simple, without electronic complexities, intuitive, and user-friendly, which was especially noted by the operators.

Furthermore, the Bell Cane Loader's daily maintenance offers more than just convenience. The new F-series sets a new standard in daily service points, providing easier access to general machine components from the ground. So, the convenience of quicker servicing, inspecting, and maintenance notably contributes to reduced downtime.

Productivity and cost studies up to this point have demonstrated promising results not only with increased productivity but also a 20% reduction in diesel consumption per ton loaded as well. The Bell 125F has effectively streamlined operations and improved efficiency and safety, demonstrating being the right fit for the operation.

Latin Equipment Norte takes pride in representing Bell Equipment, which continues developing products to address the everevolving demands of the agriculture and forestry industry. We are confident that all our efforts, coupled with this project's remarkable achievements, will set a precedent for expanding the presence of Bell Equipment into existing and new countries throughout Latin America.

Article supplied by Jose Carlos Rocha F. - Latin Equipment Norte.

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KRC Farming – one of the first customers to buy Bell Series 5 Tractors

In January 2019, a tornado hit a farm near Panbult in South Afria's Mpumalanga Province and blew flat standing timber that ranged in age from eight to twenty-five years, breaking the trees off as if they were matchsticks.

The farm owners' challenge was to move this timber out of the compartments to the mill as quickly as possible before a blue stain set in, caused by a fungus, that would reduce the quality and price of the timber they were trying to salvage, and which could still give them some value.

Ruan and Christian Paul are the fourth-generation farmers on this land which they farm with their father Kurt, hence the name of the business being KRC Farming. "Our forefather arrived from Germany with a group of missionaries in 1856. His grandson, Reginald, our grandfather, bought the first land in 1928 as the farm Driehoek where we are still today," Christian Paul says. "He started off farming poultry and beef cattle and turned to growing black wattle for the tanning and charcoal industries in the 1950s."

The boys' father, Kurt, came to the farm after finishing school and his military service in 1987 and started planting pine trees as saw wood. Today 60% of the farm is utilised for pine trees, 30% for normal agricultural crops like maize, and 10% for beef cattle.

"We're proud to say that we look after the entire cycle of the timber growth, from silviculture to overseeing the thinnings processes and eventually the harvesting as well," Christian says. "We give the thinnings and harvesting out to local communities and so create jobs, do skills transfer and general upliftment as well while overseeing the expenditure on consumables such as fuel and lubrication that the community needs during these times. In this way, they also learn about money management and fiscal controls."

KRC Farming first used agricultural tractors to haul their timber to the local sawmill, about 20km away. Then in the year 2000, Kurt Paul decided to switch to the Bell 1766 Haulage Tractor for haulage and Bell 125A Loggers for loading infield and at roadside depots. The farm owned five Bell 1766 Tractors pulling 20-ton double-axle trailers and all five machines had been rebuilt at some stage. Currently there are two Bell 125A Loggers, four Bell 220A Loggers and a new Bell 225F High Power Logger in constant use.

According to Christian, after assessing the damage caused by the tornado, they were desperate for haulage machines as they fortunately had spare trailers. They were able to acquire two Bell 1206 4x4 Tractors on the used market.

"I remember my dad, Kurt, chatting to our Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen, who would lend a big hand by arranging for a new prototype Bell 1736AF Tractor to be made available to us as a loan machine, and what we experienced firsthand with this new tractor really impressed us."

The new all-wheel drive Bell 1736AF Tractor spent a month at KRC Farming. During that time it so piqued the Paul brothers' interest that older brother Ruan kept reminding Daniel van Huyssteen to let them be the first to know when this model was released to the broader market.

"This happened a mere eight months later when Daniel called and told us the good news, and so in July 2021 we took delivery of two Bell 1736A 4x2 Tractors and one Bell 1736AF 4x4 and we believe we were one of the first customers to own the new Series 5 Bell Tractors," Christian says smiling. "Their performance has been superb, and each has clocked around 1 500 hours, with the Bell 1736AF used for extraction from infield to roadside and the two Bell 1736A machines used for the haul to the mill."

Returning fuel burn of between six and 8,5 litres an hour depending on the application has left the KRC team well satisfied considering the current cost of fuel. "We feel we did a wise thing by buying these Bell 1736 Tractors with extended warranties to three years or 6 000 hours on the wet drivetrains as Bell Equipment's locally based mechanic in Piet Retief, Stefan Coetzer, really keeps his hand on the machines and sees to it that the correct service kits,



Daniel van Huyssteen, Bell Sales Representative (left) with Christian Paul standing at one of the older Bell 1206 Tractors.



consumables and replacement parts are always in stock," Christian says. "We may consider replacing the Bell Tractors once the warranty has run out but until then, we believe they will give us an excellent return on our investment.

"To our collective minds and having used many other tractor models, the Bell 1736A and AF models are the best tractors Bell Equipment has ever built."

Christian is of the guarded opinion that with the price difference on the all-wheel drive Bell 1736AF not being that much more than the two-wheel drive model, they should have considered a total all-wheel drive fleet as the allwheel drive can be switched on and off.

The farm also owns a used Bell B20B Articulated Dump Truck (ADT) of which they removed the bin and replaced it with a 20 000-litre water tank with which to fight forest and veld fires. Two older Bell ADTs, a Bell B17C and B25C respectively, are used to haul fill material to maintain the many roads that criss-cross the farm.

Indonesian sugar operation sees huge benefits in UltECO6

The first Bell UltECO6 4-WD Slew Loader arrived in Indonesia in late 2022 and has made a strong impact by bringing valuable advantages compared to competitor machines.



The machine belongs to PT Sinergi Gula Nusantara (formerly PTPN14), a government-owned agriculture company operating in the South Sulawesi Province of Indonesia. It was sold by Bell Equipment's Singaporean-based dealer, Maximum Equipment.

PT Sinergi Gula Nusantara farms 15 000 hectares of sugar cane plantations. The harvested cane feeds their three sugar mills that have a combined annual production target of 60 000 tons of sugar.

According to Bell Equipment's Dealer Manager, Johari Ahmad, the company is one of Bell Equipment's pioneer customers in the sugar industry in Indonesia. "In the early days, they operated 24 units of the old Bell 120A and 220A Cane Loaders infield on the plantations. All these units have served them well. In late 2022 they took delivery of the first UltECO6 and are very proud to be the first owner of an UltECO6 in Indonesia.

In its first year, the UItECO6 clocked 1 800 hours in the harvesting season and seldom stood idle. The machine operated 12 hours a day and would collect and load the cut cane into trucks by running infield between the cane rows to avoid compaction.

Johari says that people in the region familiar with sugarcane loading equipment have noted that the UItECO6 has a lot of advantages over its competitors. Mr Syafrudin, the Operations Manager at PT Sinergi Gula Nusantara, said that the UltECO6 is a great machine. He was impressed that it was able to perform in the rainy season without getting stuck, even when underfoot conditions were wet and slippery, thanks to its fourwheel drive and superior traction.

He was also pleased with the much higher production rate the UltECO6 delivered with its larger grab capacity and slew boom when compared to other loaders. "Currently, the average fuel consumption is between 5 to 6 litres an hour, which represents a considerable saving. We don't see any reason why we should not purchase another UltECO6 to increase the efficiency and productivity of the operation."

The Operator, Mulyadi, added that the UltECO6 is a fast machine (travel speed of 26km/h), with a larger cab and good visibility, all of which he believes makes it superior to competitor machines with similar features.

The UltECO6 has an operating weight of 7 150kg and is powered by the acclaimed JCB Diesel Max 444 T2 NA engine. The 4,4 litre, four-cylinder engine with direct injection produces 63kW at 2 200rpm while peak torque is 320Nm at 1 200rpm to provide ample muscle under load. The Slew Loader also features an onboard electronic engine protection system.



In addition, the machine features a 185° slew angle and a highcapacity crane with upsized cylinders and a longer reach. The 15% increase in the grab capacity and the 'find centre' feature on the slew increases productivity through operator ergonomics and the grab always being in the ready position. 'Find centre' automatically pauses the slew function at the centre for a moment so that the cab always faces perfectly forward on the return.

The innovative design incorporates safe and convenient ground-level servicing and daily checks. The condenser conveniently slides out of the way for easier cleaning of the cooling pack, and centrally positioned grease points on the boom enable access while keeping both feet on the ground. The steering, push piler and grab also share a common cylinder thereby increasing parts commonality.

Last, but certainly not least, the machine's safety features include a slip-proof step and handrails, nine strategically positioned LED lights for 24-hour operations, large rear-view mirrors, lights to assist with visibility, and a sturdy steel windscreen guard. The machine mass has also been optimised to increase stability and reduce ground pressure for better performance in soft ground conditions.

Bell Loggers support renewable energy creation at Coega Biomass Centre

There is a lot of good news emanating from the Coega Special Economic Zone (SEZ) north of Gqeberha on South Africa's vast Eastern Cape Coast.

First, there's an international company that has invested in an innovative idea to turn invasive tree species into a source of sustainable renewable energy while creating jobs and earning valuable foreign exchange for its host country, South Africa. Then this same company is empowering local timber harvesting contractors by utilising their services, so sustaining more jobs and with an unprecedented benefit, assisting them in buying the mechanised equipment they need while enjoying the use of it.

The company creating this positive energy is a subsidiary of an international company based in the Netherlands and is aptly called the Coega Biomass Centre. Here we meet Emiel Hanekamp, Manager Biomass Supply and Sustainability, who tells us more about what this innovative company is doing: "We are producing wood pellets as a source of energy and heat for export to Europe as the South African market for these pellets is still under development. In addition, we produce wood chips for both the European and local energy markets.

"We use invasive tree species such as eucalyptus, pine, and wattle as our feedstock. While we pay the contractors who extract the timber for us, we don't charge the landowners or farmers where the timber is sourced and they in turn are happy to be rid of these and other invasive species that are generally heavy on the water table. We're proud to say that we use 95% of the timber that we extract, compared to a pulp or saw-log operation where as much as 30% of the biomass is left behind, which can be considered a potential fuel load for forest fires.

"All land where harvesting takes place is 100% under internationally recognised Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification and while all current harvesting operations are motor-manual, there is the potential to develop this partly into mechanised harvesting," says Willem Jacobs, General Manager of Bio-Logistics Africa, a company contracted by Coega Biomass Centre that has been overseeing the timber harvesting since 2019. "We're currently harvesting timber in a radius of 175km from Coega, which extends from the Bloukrantz River to East London and inland to Jansenville."

"The larger part of our feedstock timber, in fact about 75%, is transported to our plant here at the Coega SEZ in round log form. The balance is chipped on site leaving only stumps and thin branches behind," Emiel continues. "At our plant, the inbound truck carrying the timber crosses a weighbridge to determine the mass and therefore costs and unloads the timber onto a stockpile."

From this point on the timber enters a chipper, which drastically reduces its size. The smaller fibres are dried to contain only 15% moisture and then compressed into pellets which are cooled.

"The pellets we end up with are 100% wood with nothing added as the lignin in the wood acts as a natural binder. When these pellets are burnt, they produce very little ash making them an ideal source of heat and energy," Emiel says. "We're excited to have exported our first 10 000 tons of wood chips to European markets as breakbulk at the end of August 2023 and we plan to export the first pellets at the end of 2023. In a few years, we will export at least 120 000 tons of pellets per year."

"On the harvesting side, we make use of contractors and former out-of-work forestry workers who have the basic knowledge and some experience of this type of work," Willem explains. "We currently use four harvesting teams and 45 people infield. The harvesting side is also under the auspices of the FSC in terms of skills transfer and adhering to strict safety protocols, working in daylight hours only."

Willem expands on the fact that because the contractors were using older timber handling equipment that delivered availabilities of less than 20%, Coega Biomass Centre took a decision to assist them by buying two new Bell 225F Loggers from EdgeQuip, the Bell Equipment Forestry & Agriculture dealer based in the Tsitsikamma area.

"We were comfortable in approaching Mike Cowie, the Manager of EdgeQuip about what timber handling equipment to buy as we had bought spares and consumables from his company in the past," Willem says. "What sets



Emiel Hanekamp (left), Manager Biomass Supply and Sustainability, with Willem Jacobs, General Manager Bio-Logistics Africa with an older Bell 225A Logger at the Coega Biomass Centre.

harvesting contractors by allowing with those rental charges taken as

EdgeQuip apart as a dealer is that

its owner, Danie Scheepers, is a

possible advice on what

EdgeQuip suggested Coega

Biomass Centre buys two new Bell

225F Loggers. Once ordered, the

machines were delivered a mere

two weeks later, on 5 May 2023,

with one machine going straight

region and the other delivered to

the Coega Biomass Centre in the

into service in the Tsitsikamma

"We're assisting the timber

equipment to buy."

Coega SEZ.

timber harvesting contractor and

with that link we obtained the best

instalments to pay off the machines so that they end up owning them," Emiel adds. "This creates a win-win situation for all concerned as the contractor gains equipment while creating sustainable employment and we in turn are assured of an ongoing supply of timber feedstock for our plant."

"Being familiar with Bell Loggers from past experience, we've been impressed with how much quieter the new F-series Loggers run with the Yanmar engines, and with an average fuel consumption of around five litres an hour they are quite economical," Willem says.

"They also seem more powerful and with average utilisation of

seven hours a day, this greater power translates into less operator fatigue resulting in safer operations infield and on loading areas."

Coega Biomass Centre bought the Bell 225F Loggers with extended warranties to 2 000 hours or two years and during this time all servicing will be done by EdgeQuip's mechanics.

"We as Coega Biomass Centre are proud that we can be part of the global transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy forms while assisting others in creating and sustaining jobs and becoming owners of reliable timber harvesting equipment such as that which Bell Equipment has proved it designs and builds," Emiel says.



Skogger provides a versatile solution for Umvuni Solutions

When a well-established timber harvesting contractor in the Mpumalanga Lowveld of South Africa wanted to speed up infield bunching and presentation of felled timber, his solution created the imaginary comparison to when a featherweight boxer takes on a heavyweight rival in the same ring.

John Roux founded his company Umvuni Solutions from his family's farm in the Low's Creek area in 2012. 'Umvuni' is the Zulu word for 'harvester' and this is what this company does, harvesting timber in a radius of 140km from its base.

"My dad has got us all involved, me on the operational side and my sisters Ronél, Esmé, and Lindi on finance, data capturing, and safety respectively," says Ian Roux, John's son. "Our farm called Three Sisters has been in the Roux family since 1931."

Ian is proud of his father's achievements which span many years in the timber growing areas of Mpumalanga and Eswatini and tells of him building roads in forests for large timber growers and paper producers and doing conversions of timber hauling and handling equipment. "My father has come a long way with Bell Equipment and owned his first Bell Cane Loader, with serial number 18, in 1976 in the Mpumalanga Lowveld area," Ian says. "He worked in Swaziland on many Bell Articulated T25 Timber Trucks loaded with a Bell Logger which he owned from 1992. When it came to the most recent innovations that Bell and Matriarch were bringing to the market he, as a respected veteran of the timber contracting industry, had the inside track on new

BELL

equipment."

Umvuni Solutions, as a harvesting company, runs a fair fleet of machines which comprises skidders, excavators with timber processing heads, shovel yarders, and timber handling loggers. With pressure mounting for increased production, the company really needed a machine that could bunch and present the handfelled timber quicker than a grapple skidder did.

easier."

"For reasons of safety in the compartment, our chainsaw gangs fell trees a day in advance of the

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"My dad really loves mechanical equipment, especially that which has the potential to make our jobs extraction and processing teams, but we found that the skidders, although powerful, were in certain cases too slow in bunching and presenting the felled whole tree lengths for processing," lan explains. "What we needed was a nimbler machine that could extract, bunch, and present the tree lengths quicker and this we found with the Bell Skogger."

Umvuni Solutions took delivery of their first Bell Skogger in November 2021 and, according to lan, it made an immediate difference to their production. "The Skogger is a far nimbler machine than a skidder although the latter is more powerful," he says. "The Skogger is so manoeuvrable as with its tight turning circle and grab on the boom, the operator can quickly pick felled tree lengths, bunch them and drag them to where the skidder can take them on to the roadside for processing."

lan adds that another advantage is that the Bell Skogger does not need to be transported on a low bed but can be driven to different compartments.

"We were pleasantly surprised to be told of yet another feature of the Skogger that we weren't even aware of when planning to buy the machine. This has had an additional positive impact on our production and safety within the compartment."

John and Ian discovered that they could fit a custom-made felling head to the Bell Skogger, in this case, the MT50FH, which is like that found on the Bell Fastfell.

"We bought the felling head in January 2022 and found that while it needed two additional hydraulic pipes, it was essentially a 'plug & play' system that took less than three hours to swap out with the machine's grab," Ian explains.

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"Safety in the compartment is a huge factor for us and our clients and we have safety officers at every step of the harvesting and production cycles. Having the felling head on the Skogger now enhances this safety as it can easily replace five chainsaws in certain compartments depending on the gradient and terrain."

According to lan, the Skogger can place a tree better and in a safer way after it has been felled, which makes for more order in a compartment. He goes on to explain that where there are rocks on the surface of a compartment, hand felling would still be preferred as the chainsaw operator can manoeuvre himself in amongst the rocks to get to the tree, but this was the case in less than 25% of the areas where they harvested.

"At first glance, it's plain to see that the Bell Skogger is a purposebuilt quality forestry machine that can also work in the rain and runs much quieter. We and our clients are impressed with its safety features like the fully enclosed and air-conditioned cab that protects the operator and reduces fatigue," lan says. "We debated where to draw operators from and settled on two who had been logger operators as they were used to operating grabs in front of them as opposed to skidders which load at the rear. We also trained a third operator who had been a chainsaw operator as it's good to have a backup."

The Roux's are equally impressed with the Skogger's fuel consumption. At between nine and 10 litres an hour it is only fractionally more than what their three-wheeled Loggers use at eight litres an hour with the Skogger's payload and capabilities so much more.

These capabilities brought the solution for what they had originally tried to achieve, to improve the performance of their skidders by having bunches of felled trees presented in such a way that the skidders had easy access to haul the timber to the roadside. This generated enough workflow with the need for a second Bell Skogger soon realised and this second machine with its grab and MT50FH felling head was delivered in August 2022.

"Thanks to excellent advice from Bell Equipment's knowledgeable



Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen (left), with Umvuni Solutions Senior Supervisor, Zenzo Mabhena, and Umvuni Solutions General Manager, Ian Roux.

Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen, himself a qualified forester, we have achieved what we set out to do and that was to speed up the workflow of our skidders, hence the comparison of two boxers with the Skogger being the featherweight showing up the heavyweight skidder," Ian says.

"Acquiring the Bell Skoggers has come with a huge boost in that we now have two dual-purpose machines with their grabs and felling heads. We can comfortably have one operating as a feller and the other doing extraction and in doing so, reduce our people numbers in the compartment, which will lead to quicker and safer production. These machines can also work comfortably on moderately steep slopes."

Bell 225F Logger sustains sawmill production for Rance Timber

Traditionally Bell Loggers have been known as quite simple yet robust machines, which is probably why they have become the industry standard as a loading and timber handling tool. But, as robust as they are, they can also display the odd quirk as the workshop and transport manager of a leading South African timber group will attest to.

CJ Rance (Pty) Ltd, trading as Rance Timber, is a sawmilling company manufacturing premium quality South African pine-sawn board products that has been in operation since 1910.

Rance Timber has grown from humble beginnings as a one-man business in the earliest pioneering days of the timber industry in South Africa, to a successful, modern enterprise employing 1 400 people over both the forestry and sawmilling divisions. It has been the backbone of the timber industry in the Amathole region of the Eastern Cape and continues to play a vital role in the socio-economic development of the rural economy and its people. Its log resource is supplied mainly from the 15 000 hectares of plantations owned and managed by its sister company, Amathole Forestry Company. These plantations are managed on a sustained yield basis according to best international and environmental practices. The company operates two sawmills, namely Kubusi Sawmill and Sandile Sawmill, and is committed to providing industryleading service and quality for its valued customers.

It's at the Sandile Sawmill that we chat to Devan Sternberg, Rance Timber's Workshop and Transport Manager and a man with the responsibility of looking after a vast fleet of timber and forestry-related vehicles and machines comprising utility vehicles, Bell Loggers, transport trucks, wheel loaders, and skidders.

"Rance Timber (Pty) Ltd is a timber company in the true sense of the word with its own forests and two sawmills and it therefore owns the whole value chain in producing saw timber that has a wide variety of uses and markets," Devan says. "Here at the Sandile sawmill, we process pine logs from 13cm to 23cm in diameter and create timber products that are sold throughout the South African market. These products include structural, industrial, and packaging timber."

Getting the timber from the forestry compartments to roadside depots, onto trucks, and then onto stockpiles at the sawmills presents its own challenges and for a very long time Rance Timber has made use of Bell Loggers in the 220A Teleboom and 225A Crankboom ranges. The company's fleet of Bell A-series Loggers runs to 30 machines.

"We run eight Bell Loggers on infield operations, another five loading transport trucks, and the balance at the two sawmills," Devan says. "Our oldest Bell Logger dates to the 1980s and was completely refurbished five years ago. A further four machines were subsequently refurbished by Bell Equipment in East London fairly recently. "In that way, we extract further lives from these rugged machines and can do that if the machines' frames are intact. When refurbishing them, we generally fit a new engine, new wheel motors and replace the hydraulic pump under the seat as well as rebushing the grab. Refurbishing or rebuilding will typically happen at around 10 000 hours with second and even third lives extending a Bell Logger's life to 30 000 hours and in some cases 40 000 hours, which constitutes a wonderful return on the initial investment."

In 2021, Rance Timber took a decision to buy a new Bell Logger specifically for use at the Sandile Sawmill where unloading of timber off trucks, sorting on the log deck, and feeding into the mill only occurs during daylight. "We had consulted with Anthony Enslin, Bell Equipment's Sales Representative in East London, and took delivery of a new Bell 225F Logger in July 2021, the first such machine in the Bell F-series," Devan adds. "It made an immediate difference to our production at the Sandile Sawmill as there is now a sustained feed to the mill off the log deck."

"Having had only A-series Loggers before, we were impressed with how much quieter the new F-series Logger runs with its Yanmar engine and the fuel consumption is much better."

Rance Timber's new Bell 225F Logger has been bought with a standard warranty and has by now exited the warranty period with around 2 000 hours on its hour meter. Despite this and the fact that Devan manages a fully stocked workshop and substantial parts holding, Rance Timber still insists that mechanics from Bell Equipment in East London do the major milestone servicing at the 1 000-hour marks.

"What makes our relationship with Bell Equipment special is that Denton Webber and his team in East London may be almost 100km away, but should we make that phone call, they drop everything to attend to our needs and always have," Devan says. "That level of service sells subsequent machines and breeds brand loyalty."



Rance Timber Workshop and Transport Manager, Devan Sternberg.

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60 Years of continuous Tri-Wheeler innovation ensures you have the best in class.

Others have tried to follow but nothing beats a genuine Bell Cane Loader or Logger. Featuring Yanmar's water-cooled engine, our latest F-series machines continue to lead by providing a quieter operation, increased safety and more power with exceptional fuel efficiency.

Contact your nearest Bell Dealer today to see what we can offer.



Bell Forwarder streamlines operations for Buhle Betfu

Timber forwarding is often thought of as the unglamorous link in the timber supply chain. Felling trees, extracting and cross-cutting them gets the adrenaline going as it's mostly noisy and busy. However before the timber reaches the long-haul transport, done by either road or rail, it must be moved from the roadside to a loading depot. This must happen continuously, efficiently, and above all, safely.

Buhle Betfu is essentially a transport company but one with a difference as it's a South African empowerment success story. Buhle Betfu evolved out of the wellestablished Cargo Carriers. The name Buhle Betfu means "our pride" in Siswati, the language of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) and it's this pride which has carried it forward since its founding in 1986. The company's vision statement is "We are on the move" and, judging by its past successes that have been acknowledged with several awards, the pace of its movement is steadily increasing.

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"Buhle Betfu operates in two industries namely sugar and timber," says Vinesh Gayaram, the company's Operations Manager. "Sugarcane transport, with the loading outsourced, is done with a 12-vehicle fleet in the Malelane and Komatipoort areas. In timber, we operate a 24-vehicle express fleet that supplies 80% of the timber that feeds a major pulp and paper mill west of Mbombela."

It is near this giant pulp and paper mill at Ndogwana in Mpumalanga that Buhle Betfu has its base for the timber haulage operation. "We





employ around 140 full-time staff and from here we cover the areas of Camelot North and South as well as Sudwala," Vinesh adds. "We're fortunate to have a low staff turnover and most of our employees have been here for a long time, which adds to our collective skills base."

Having timber handling and transport as its core business, the timber division of Buhle Betfu has since its inception made use of Bell Loggers to sort, stack, load, and unload the timber in its various forms. "Buhle Betfu has owned 15 Bell Loggers in various model sizes over the years with all of them being A-series machines apart from one newer Bell 225F series Logger," says Maurizzio Spasimante, owner of Forest Trading, a company closely

associated with Buhle Betfu, and which looks after the fleet's maintenance. "The company has been innovative with new technology and using a performance-based operations system has been self-regulatory in finding ways to carry larger payloads and speed up production."

The need to speed up production to provide a constant stream of timber to the pulp and paper mill was recently highlighted by Buhle Betfu's clients. They suggested that the company look at replacing previous all-wheel drive road trucks that were loaded using Bell Loggers with two specialised timber forwarders fitted with their own cranes. This would enable them to load and unload the timber independently during the

forwarding process with the added advantage that it could include infield loading when that was required.

"What our clients wanted to see was a timber forwarder fitted with its own crane that could work independently of mechanised teams using Bell Loggers to load or unload timber, and this all in the name of keeping the timber supply to the mill flowing," says Johan van Zyl, Buhle Betfu's Shift Manager and someone who is constantly at the forefront of the production process. "The thought was too that should there be timber left in a compartment, a forwarder, being versatile and high enough off the ground to get over stumps, could also load infield and so speed up the supply process."

"While we researched the market thoroughly, our decision was made all the easier by what Bell Equipment's Sales Representative in Mbombela, Daniel van Huyssteen, a qualified forester with excellent product knowledge could tell us," Vinesh adds. "Knowing Bell Equipment and the quality of their design and build, especially in their forestry-focused products, along with their excellent technical support, gave us the confidence to order the first of two Bell TF302E Forwarders in January 2023."

The Bell TF302E Forwarder was delivered to Buhle Betfu in May 2023 and put straight to work. The operators, former truck drivers, took a while to get used to the seat swiveling through 180 degrees while using the onboard crane to load and unload the truck with timber.

The timber that Buhle Betfu transports is all cut to 2.4 metre

lengths which the Bell TF302E Forwarder's crane handles easily with its maximum capacity of 1,65 tons. The teleboom extension has proved to be incredibly handy when certain types of timber more suitable for pulp may be stacked at the back of piles and the longer reach of the crane enables it to comfortably load selected logs.

The Bell TF302E Forwarder has twin bunks that are ideally suited to the 2,4-metre log lengths.

"The Bell TF302E Forwarder runs an average haul distance of 5km and while most of the roads we traverse are hard and solid, some can get very slippery in our long rainy season in Mpumalanga," Johan explains. "We believe that with the Bell Forwarder's even distribution of torque across all three axles, we will enjoy true 6x6 traction in all weather and underfoot conditions, and extended tyre life. The current fuel consumption of slightly over 13 litres an hour is fair, and we believe



(From left): Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen; Buhle Betfu Workshop Manager, Pieter Woest; Buhle Betfu Shift Manager, Johan van Zyl; Buhle Betfu Operations Manager, Vinesh Gayaram; Forest Trading Owner, Maurizzio Spasimante, and Buhle Bettu Bell TF302E Operator, Louis Malomane.

this will improve as our operators become more accustomed to the machine."

Buhle Betfu's Bell TF302E Forwarder has been bought with a standard warranty of 12 months or 2 500 hours. Both Maurizzio and Workshop Manager, Pieter Woest, are of the opinion that it's easy to deal with Bell Equipment as you can talk to someone you know in the Nelspruit branch. "Bell, as a family business, is known for reaching out and ensuring each customer's machine delivers maximum uptime as they were designed to do," Maurizzio says. "Buhle Betfu is a firm believer in the advantages of preventative maintenance and will fully familiarise its maintenance crews with the Bell TF302E Forwarders even while they are still under warranty."

Buhle Betfu's second Bell TF302E Forwarder is due for delivery towards the end of 2023.

SAFCOL's investment in three Bell 225F Loggers pays dividends

The delicate balance of investing today to save in the long term certainly holds true for the forward-thinking management of the Timbadola Sawmill. What gives this balancing act a real homegrown flavour is that the spend was directed at a proudly South African company that produces a uniquely local yellow machine product.

The South African Forestry Company SOC Limited (SAFCOL) is a state-owned company that falls under the Department of Public Enterprises. It has operations in the KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo provinces as well as in the Sofala and Manica provinces of neighbouring Mozambique.

At the largest sawmill in the Limpopo Province, Timbodola, situated at Levubu, which lies to the east of the town Louis Trichardt, we find Senior Sawmill Manager, Aubrey Kwamba, who holds a qualification in Wood Technology from the Saasveld Forestry College. Aubrey tells us: "This particular sawmill was built around the 1930s and its boilers, commissioned in 1937, are amongst the oldest in the world."

The Timbodola Sawmill produces mainly structural timber with 85% of its production for the construction industry. The balance is split between an ever-decreasing furniture market and pallet manufacturing.

"Our mill processes 120 000 cubic metres of pine timber annually and employs 430 people," Aubrey explains. "We sell 50% of our production into Gauteng, 40% into the local Vembe district, and 10% across the border into Mozambique."

SAFCOL sources its timber from its own forests surrounding the Timbodola Sawmill and the company uses its own harvesting and extraction equipment to bring the timber to the roadside. From there it is transported to the mill by haulage contractors. At the mill, contractors were, until recently, used to unload the timber trucks, and sort and stack the logs in preparation for them being fed into the mill.



(From left): Log-yard Supervisor, Boyisie Shai (left), Production Manager, Thokozeni Khumalo, and Wet-mill Foreman, Peter Sithole.

"As any progressive business does, we analyse our overhead costs on an ongoing basis and we came to the realisation that if we could unload the timber ourselves, we'd be saving money in the longterm," Aubrey says. "To do this, we realised we'd have to buy costeffective loading tools.

Aubrey tells a charming story of the company's oldest Bell Logger, a vintage 125A model dating back to 1970. It had clocked an estimated 50 000 hours and was later named after a retired employee with the surname Savhasa who had operated it for many years. "This answers the question as to why we've always relied on Bell Equipment for our timber-handling equipment as longevity coupled with reliability is key in our industry," Aubrey says. "We own two Bell Wheel Loaders fitted with timber grabs that have served us admirably as well, having clocked 56 000 and 28 000 hours respectively."

The Timbodola Sawmill owns two 220A Bell Loggers bought in 2010



that are currently undergoing some tender loving care before being put into service again.

"We looked critically at rising costs in fuel, labour, utilities, and general inflation and decided in 2020 to review our inbound costs which have the potential to affect us negatively as some timber is sourced from as far as 80km away. Going forward, handling will be insourced by deploying our own timber handling equipment, which will now save us a massive amount of money."

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According to Aubrey, they researched the wider market before deciding on buying three Bell 225F Loggers. Their decision was ultimately influenced by Bell Equipment's competitive price, their positive experience with previous machines, and above all, the support they knew they could rely on from Bell Equipment's technical teams in nearby Tzaneen.

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> "Soon after we took delivery of the three new Bell 225F Loggers in mid-2022, Louis Fivaz, the new

Branch Manager at Bell Equipment Tzaneen, paid us a visit to personally assure us of his teams' commitment to looking after our Bell-branded equipment and they have done exactly that," Aubrey says. "We're happy to say that Bell Equipment's response times are prompt, and the availability of parts and service kits assure us that we'll continue to extract long lives from these new Bell Loggers, which certainly have made a positive impact on our production and bottom line."



The Bell 225F Loggers have been bought with standard warranties of 12 months and unlimited hours. Aubrey mentions that the machines operate in two nine-hour shifts during which they run for a total of 13 to 14 hours, which points to busy production schedules and high utilisation figures. They have been pleased with how much quieter the new Yanmar engines run and the favourable average fuel figures per hour.



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	Construction of the second
AT - LEATHER	HAT - SAFARI STONE / NAVY
^R 355 ⁰⁰	^R 130 ⁰⁰
ACKET - MENS AY SOFTSHELL	JACKET - MENS K-WAY PUFFER
BLACK SIZE: L - 2XL	BLACK SIZE: S - 5XL
09000	R1 09000
GHLANDER B3 ONE STEEL CAP)	BOOT - AFRICAN RANGER FUDGE
TAN SIZE: 5 - 12	SIZE: 3 - 13
^R 960 ⁰⁰	
700	^R 1 200 ⁰⁰
- VELDSKOEN	SHOE - S5 TURBO VELLIE
the House and	
- VELDSKOEN YELLOW	SHOE - S5 TURBO VELLIE (NONE STEEL CAP) TAN
- VELDSKOEN YELLOW	SHOE - S5 TURBO VELLIE (NONE STEEL CAP) TAN
- VELDSKOEN YELLOW	SHOE - S5 TURBO VELLIE (NONE STEEL CAP) TAN

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Bell Bulletin readers

Our gift to you this festive season is this special edition Forestry and Agriculture Bulletin full of some of our favourite customer features.

We thank you for your support during this year and look forward to bringing you more inspirational stories in 2024.

From our Bell family to yours, we wish you a safe and peaceful festive season and best wishes for the New Year.

The Bell Bulletin Team



