

Wheel Loader delivers versatility and productivity for GI Projects

Imagine a machine, albeit a small one, that could do the work of fifteen men and at the same time steadily speed up the process of constructing luxury homes in one of South Africa's most sought-after towns.

This is exactly what two brothers in a small, specialised construction company found when they bought a multi-purpose wheel loader.

Ian White and his brother, Arno, own GI Projects in Stellenbosch, in the heart of the Cape Winelands. "We originally hail from Cape Town's Northern suburbs where our father Gys was a building and health inspector and under his expert tutelage, we learnt a lot about quality building methods and getting it right the first time," Ian says over coffee in the picturesque Jonkershoek Valley near Stellenbosch. "I used to be in the South African Police Services and, as a sideline, my brother Arno and I bought small patches of land and built houses that we sold."

The world financial recession started affecting their sideline business as early as 2006 and the brothers had to take the decision to enter the bigger housing construction market and build for profit to survive. "After 12 years in the SAPS, I resigned and an architect friend suggested we look at building houses in the 200 to 300 square metre range, and

that we should concentrate on a more affluent area like Stellenbosch," Ian explains. "We fortunately took this sound advice and although it hasn't always been easy, it certainly has paid dividends in the long run."

GI Projects has over time built a name for itself as a construction company that brings in building projects on time and on budget, is meticulous in its attention to detail, and takes pride in the projects it has completed for a blue-chip market.

Construction of especially larger homes implies that a fair amount of site levelling, digging of foundations and services trenches along with material handling will take place for which earthmoving and material handling equipment is necessary. "Our father Gys had taught us about cashflow controls and for a long time, even though it was expensive, we hired in earthmoving plant only when it was needed," Ian adds. "We recently decided though that with a full order book potentially putting us under pressure, buying a new versatile machine that could multitask was warranted and we started researching the market."



Arno White (left) with Bell Sales Representative, Clifton Roberts.

He concedes that they had at first considered buying a used machine but decided with the pressure they were under to deliver, valuable time could be wasted with more maintenance such an older machine may demand.

Ian was surprised when a sales representative at a supplier of yellow machines suggested he look at a rival JCB machine, which according to that representative, was the market-leading brand in the machine model he was seeking. "I was further pleasantly surprised to learn that Bell Equipment is now the agent for JCB equipment and when visiting their well-appointed branch near the airport in Cape Town, I met Sales Representative Clifton Roberts who I found to be very knowledgeable," Ian says. "Most pleasing though was the fact that Bell Equipment had a sparkling new JCB 406 Wheel Loader in stock, the very machine we were interested in due to its ability to quickly switch between a loading bucket and forks."

Bell Equipment assisted GI Projects to obtain financing at favourable rates over 48 months and the company took delivery of the JCB 406 Wheel Loader in August 2021.

"We put the JCB 406 Wheel Loader to work on a large building project in the Jonkershoek Valley and its impact was immediately felt," Ian continues. "The quick change between loading bucket and forks is amazing to experience and you can be loading excavated soil onto a stockpile and five minutes later be handing a pallet of bricks to a bricklayer standing 3 metres high on the first floor."

"We're currently using a bucket with a straight edge but have asked Bell Equipment to supply us with a second bucket fitted with ground-engaging tools to loosen soil and ease site-levelling operations in harder soils."

Both Ian and Arno are impressed by the JCB 406 Wheel Loader's compact design and articulated steering that make it easy to manoeuvre in tight spaces. The machine's rear lights are recessed into the solid counterweight for good impact protection and hydraulic hoses are well protected and securely clamped while positioned well away from potential pinch-points. The cab offers good visibility while the ergonomically designed joystick makes for comfortable and intuitive operation.

"This JCB 406 Wheel Loader easily does the work of 15 men," Ian says smiling. "While we haven't accurately calculated its fuel burn yet, as it seems to run for more than a week on a full tank, we're expecting it to return figures of around 4,5 litres an hour, which would be great."

While Ian and Arno are aware of their social responsibilities as employers, uplifting and training their employees through skills transfer, they also take cognisance of the importance the benefits that modest mechanisation will bring to their growing business. "We have a relative in the construction industry in the Netherlands and learn a lot from him and the building methods used in the First World through mechanised means where you have fewer people building homes of a high standard at a much quicker pace," Ian tells us. "We believe that should we be able to give the 'grunt work' over to machines, we can concentrate more on improving the quality of the finished article we're steadily building our reputation on."

"We're excited at the prospect of becoming more mechanised and our thinking is that a backhoe loader is the next machine that will slot in well with our building operations," Ian concludes. "With this in mind, Bell Equipment and its market leading JCB machines, along with the surety of reliable technical backup and parts, is firmly on our radar."

