

Thies family extends their Bell fleet with new Series V Haulage Tractor

The modern sugar farm is a busy place where precision farming techniques demand that every man and machine be efficiently used for what he or it was trained or designed for. The same goes for mechanical haulers such as tractors where agricultural tractors should not be sacrificed to haul cut cane to the mill to the detriment of daily tasks.

This has long been the view of the Thies brothers, Eugen and Uwe, on their farms near New Hanover in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. They have the distinction of being the fifth generation of their family to work these lands. "Our forefathers arrived in the area back in 1881 to farm wattle and cattle," says Eugen. "Our own father, Helmut, switched to growing sugar cane in about 1966 and we have built on his legacy."

Helmut Thies bought his first Bell Cane Loader, a Funkey Bell model with its distinguishing round tube frame, high lift boom and double jockey wheel, in 1983 in Empangeni. This machine is still being used by his sons to load seed cane and after having its engine refurbished at 10 000 hours, it has since passed 16 000 hours of service.

"We mention this to show how long our family has always believed in using the correct machine for the job it was designed for and, in this regard, how we've come to rely on Bell Equipment to supply us with such equipment," younger brother, Uwe says. "Back in 1993, our dad bought a Bell 1756 Haulage Tractor which we still use to haul cane trailers, although we replaced its engine some years ago with that of a Bell ADE 366 unit."

The Thies brothers have been impressed by equipment from Bell proving longevity and excellent resale value, despite machine age. "We subsequently bought a Bell 120 Cane Loader in 1996 and then again a Bell 125A machine in 2013,



which illustrates a wide gap in time," Uwe continues. "In between those two, we had owned another used round-tube framed machine which we sold out of hand to a local farmer for an excellent price, and that machine is still being used on a daily basis."

Their Bell Tri-Wheeler fleet is made up of three cane loading machines and one Bell 225 Logger, a refurbished machine bought back in 2008 which is used to load limited amounts of wattle and pine that they grow and supply to NCT and the UCL sawmill.

Cut cane though is no good unless it can be hauled to a nearby mill by a hauler that is purposely built for that role as Eugen explains: "We first owned a Bell 1716 Series 3 Haulage Tractor which we ran until 6 000 hours and replaced that with a 1734A two-wheel drive machine which we still have and now shows 5 000 hours on its clock. As we load our cane trailers infield, we've always found it necessary to have a spare tractor on standby to pull the laden tractor-trailer combination out of wet fields in the rainy season."

"Since we started using our new Bell 1736AF Series V in August 2021, we haven't had that problem due to the machine's all-wheel drive traction that can pull a fully laden tandem trailer out of a wet field and over muddy roads. We should have bought this type of tractor years ago."

Both Eugen and Uwe agree that they chose the Bell 1736AF Series V Haulage Tractor for its competitive price and knowing that one day it won't be hard to sell. "We had a good look at the market and the Bell Haulage Tractor was priced much better than its immediate competitors, not that there are many," they say. "Experience has also taught us that equipment from Bell is easy to maintain and has excellent resale value no matter its age."

The Thies family farms are situated relatively close to the nearest sugar mill at Noodsberg and the return haul to the mill is only 12km. "Our older Bell 1734A Haulage Tractor gave us fuel figures of between 9,4 and 10,5 litres per hour which is excellent but keeping in mind that it is a two-wheel drive machine that at times needed assistance out of wet fields," Uwe says. "The new Bell 1736AF Haulage Tractor compares very favourably with these figures at between 10,6 and 11,2 litres per hour for an all-wheel drive machine, which we are very impressed with."

Thies Trading Trust's new Bell 1736AF Series V Rigid Hauler has been bought with a standard 12-month unlimited hours warranty. The farm makes extensive use of Bell Equipment's mechanics from the Bell branch in Pietermaritzburg but also sources some essential spares from a local outlet in Fawn Leas that keeps genuine Bell parts.



Brothers, Eugen and Uwe Thies with their Bell Sales Representative, Keith Milne.

According to Eugen and Uwe, there has been a lot of interest both at the mill and from neighbours about the new Bell Haulage Tractor, the first of its kind in the area. "We think this new Bell 1736 Series V range of Haulage Tractors is going to be a winning model range for Bell Equipment considering the ease with which it pulls fully-laden cane trailers as if there is nothing on the tow-hitch," they echo. "More importantly, not having to take an agricultural tractor out of its daily routine is a cost saving factor, which ultimately lowers our production costs."

