

Backhoe and Excavator fleet bears fruit for Riaan Palvie Sloomgrawers

A former fruit grower from Wellington in the Western Cape has found the Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator to be the machine of choice for his plant hire customers in the agricultural sector he himself once worked in.

Riaan Palvie and his wife, Simone, once farmed fruit close to the town of Wellington on land owned by their family. During this time Riaan had the foresight to buy a used two-wheel drive backhoe loader that he used on his own property and rented out on a plant hire basis. "By the time my siblings and I decided to sell the property in 1993, I already had a steady client base for the plant hire business I was building, so the switch from fruit grower to plant hire owner was almost seamless," he says. "I at first used a variety of machines until I bought my first two-wheel drive Bell 315SE Backhoe Loader in 2001 and had full use out of this machine for six years."

By now, his company Riaan Palvie Sloomgrawers's solid reputation had spread by word of mouth and, with increasing demand for his equipment and

trained operators from especially the local fruit and wine growers who all knew him, Riaan bought a new Bell 315SG Backhoe Loader every year for four years in a row.

"We would generally run the Bell Backhoe Loaders to 6 000 hours and then sell them out of hand with a full service history as they had good resale value," he says. "These days with improvements in design and build we run machines to around 9 000 hours."

By 2011 Riaan was running a fleet of six Bell Backhoe Loaders that were all busy machines steadily clocking up hours. Their tasks included removing old vines on wine and table grape estates and the associated infrastructure like gum poles, wire stays, concrete anchors and irrigation pipes.





Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson, with Riaan Palvie, owner of Riaan Palvie Sloopgrawers with his new JCB 3DX Eco Backhoe Loader.

“In early 2022, we decided to replace an older Bell Backhoe Loader with a new JCB 3DX Eco Backhoe Loader which was delivered in March the same year,” Riaan says. “Our operators and clients have been very pleased with this new machine and, being naturally aspirated, its fuel consumption is really reasonable considering the steep increases we’ve seen in the price of fuel recently.”

Demand from the market saw Riaan acquiring some smaller excavators since 2011. He currently has six units. After Bell Equipment took on the Kobelco brand in 2017, he started looking seriously at the Kobelco SK55SRX 5,5-ton Excavator that had arrived with good reviews. His first such machine was delivered in 2019 and has since done some 4 500 hours.

“The smaller excavators have given us another tool in our offering and have proved to be winners,” Riaan says. “These small but robust machines do much the same tasks as Backhoe Loaders but can get into steep areas where Backhoe Loaders struggle, and the steel tracks on the Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator last longer and offer really good traction which translates into a stable machine being a safe one.”

According to Riaan, an equally important reason for acquiring the Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator is that

its compact design eliminates tail-swing, which allows it far more free movement in between vines in vineyards and rows of trees in fruit orchards. This has gone down particularly well with his farming clients. This first Kobelco SK55SRX Excavator was so popular with clients that Riaan bought a second one in 2021, which has already clocked 1 400 hours. Average fuel burn runs to around 4,5 to 5 litres an hour.

All Riaan’s machines and the operators he supplies are utilised for between seven to nine hours a day including Saturdays. Attachments like ripper teeth and augers, and pole planters are also available.

“We’ve always relied on Bell Equipment’s branch in Cape Town for our in-warranty servicing and major repairs of which there have been few,” he says. “We do a lot of preventative maintenance ourselves and are guided by our in-house mechanic, but when we do need parts and service kits from Bell, we’ve always found their stockholding to be sound.”

“In closing I’d like to mention the attention we get from Bell Equipment’s Sales Representative Fiona Johnson, who often calls on us even when she knows we’re not in the market for new machines. Her kind and caring attitude makes her more of a friend to Simone and me than a supplier.”