

Kobelco Mini Excavator handles the grunt work for Mopana Farm

Right near the foot of Cathkin Peak in KwaZulu-Natal's Drakensberg lies Mopona Farm, home of William and Nell Gibbings and their son, Bruce. While it may seem like many other crop cultivating farms in the area, there is one feature that stands out on this farmyard - a new Kobelco SK75SR as its unusually bright turquoise colour distinguishes it from the rest of the many farm tractors and implements.



"My son, Bruce, and I are the second and third generation on this land that was first farmed by my father, Larry Gibbings," William says. "We grow crops like maize, soya, dried beans, wheat and oats of which some is exported, and the balance goes to local co-operatives and seed companies."

Being a modern-day farm where precision farming is applied, Mopona Farm is fully mechanised and two machines that first catch the eye are a JCB 540-70 Loadall Telehandler and a JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader. "I had seen the JCB 540-70 Loadall advertised in the United Kingdom and, as the machine had such a good reputation, we bought it and imported it as used equipment," William says. "It is so versatile and with its interchangeable tools it's hard to believe we lived so long without it."

William bought the JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader new from Bell Equipment in Pietermaritzburg. "We'd had a similar older machine that had given us many years of great service but as we did not want to be without such a handy tool, which we'd come to rely on for a

different set of uses to the JCB Telehandler, we decided in 2021 to buy a new Backhoe Loader," he adds. "I looked around the market and discovered that Bell Equipment was now the South African distributor for JCB equipment and what's more, the Pietermaritzburg branch had stock with a very competitive deal."

William mentions that with the financing in place, Bell Equipment delivered their new JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader promptly and it could be put to work on road rehabilitation and maintenance, digging irrigation trenches and doing general housekeeping, of which there is always plenty on any farm. With average fuel consumption of only six litres an hour, it wasn't blowing the fuel budget either.

The six-in-one front bucket has proved to be extremely handy, but they felt that when excavating for road-fill material in a borrow pit and with a lot drainage and trenching to be attend to, a bit more grunt was needed from the backhoe and he started looking for a small excavator.

"The research for earthmoving equipment is always interesting as there is such a large variety on the market with so many similar machines at competitive pricing," William says. "I had driven to Johannesburg to have a proper look around and found myself at Bell Equipment, the South African distributor for Kobelco Excavators. Although I had taken a keen interest in another brand, Bell had stock of the machine size I wanted, which was the 7,5 ton Kobelco SK75SR Excavator. It was competitively priced and had a better warranty than most, in this case 36 months or 3 000 hours, which was unmatched."

Mopona Farm's Kobelco SK75SR Excavator was delivered in August 2022 and could not have arrived at a more convenient time. According to William, this is the time of year when there are no crops on the land and the ideal period for planned maintenance of especially roads, drainage and irrigation infrastructure.

"Although we haven't yet used the Kobelco SK75SR in the borrow pit, we're confident that it will have enough breakout force to fill its 0,28-cubic metre bucket with the fill material we require. We've also obtained a 1,2-metre wide 'grading bucket' made by a third-party supplier that we use to clean ditches of weeds and unwanted growth. It's working extremely well in this role especially when digging in softer material, and even without using the fuel-saving 'ECO-mode' the fuel consumption has come in at between 5,5 and 6,5 litres an hour which pleases us."

"Knowing enough about farming and earthmoving equipment, I can see this is a well-designed and constructed machine and I'm not sorry we bought it as I believe it will be an asset to our farming operation for many years to come," William continues. "We've found that our Backhoe Loader operator took to the Kobelco SK75SR Excavator quickly as the controls are very similar with some minor adjustments."



William Gibbings at the controls of his Kobelco SK75SR Excavator.

