

MOMS adds nine new Bell B50Es to its already substantial fleet

The superlative synergy created by using a Bell B50E Articulated Dump Truck (ADT) that is loaded with a Kobelco SK850LC Excavator in a large opencast coal mining operation, translates into a situation where a stipulated fuel cap has never been exceeded due to the frugal fuel burn of both types of machines.

It's this type of harmony amongst mechanical equipment coupled with a solid business relationship that keeps this equipment's owners loyal to a brand.

The owners in this case are the partners and shareholders in a dynamic 100% black-owned holding company called Mzimkhulu Mining, which was founded in 2016 by Themba Langa, a mining engineer. Mack Maleka, the Chief Financial Officer, and Sibusiso Sibisi, the Chief Legal Counsel, are the other directors with Michael Mabogoane as the General Manager.

Being active in mining and initially focusing its energies on coal mining, Mzimkhulu Mining first created a logistics arm called Mzimkhulu Logistics which, in association with another well-known logistics company, hauls coal to a variety of customers.

The need to own more parts of the value chain, saw the partners create another subsidiary company called Mwelase Opencast Mining Services (MOMS) which in turn acquires and operates a large fleet of yellow equipment dominated by that which is sold by Bell Equipment. MOMS is headed up by another mining engineer, Bheki Khumalo, who spoke to us of the company's latest venture at the Rietvlei Coal Mine, which lies to the east of Middelburg in Mpumalanga.

"One of the entities in our holding group has a vested interest in the Rietvlei Coal Mine which made it a natural choice for us to tender on that mine's contract mining services," he says. "The Rietvlei contract rounds off our portfolio of coal mining contracts and gives us the confidence to look further afield at other commodities such as chrome, iron ore, copper and cobalt."



The Rietvlei mine is relatively new and has been mined since October 2018. When the mine went through a restructure in early 2020, MOMS took over some equipment from a subcontractor who leases out mining equipment. This consisted of six Bell B60E ADTs and two Kobelco SK850LC Excavators, which were added to MOMS's existing fleet of mining equipment.

"By April 2021 we realised that Rietvlei was growing to be a major coal mine quite quickly and we would need to invest in more yellow machines to keep up the production our clients expected," Bheki says. "We then bought nine Bell B50E ADTs and three more Kobelco SK850LC Excavators as a direct outflow of the great experience we had enjoyed with Bell Equipment during previous transactions when our company was establishing itself and yet Bell took us seriously."

Bheki explains that as they see themselves as a wholly owned South African company, supporting another local company such as Bell Equipment makes good business sense. "And as Bell manufactures and backs durable products such as its ADTs and sells other high-quality equipment like Kobelco Excavators, it just seems natural to tap into their experience," he adds.

Mining at the Rietvlei mine has developed at such a rate that the continuously evolving mining pit is now almost 3,1km in length, with rehabilitation an ongoing affair as areas are mined out. Topsoil that is stockpiled and monitored for this purpose ensures proper regrowth of rehabilitated areas, which is under the guidance of a strong environmental team. Ramps into the pit are kept long so as not to be too steep, but even in the wet summers that mines in Mpumalanga must contend with, reports indicate that MOMS's fleet of Bell ADTs easily negotiate wet and slippery underfoot conditions with their all-wheel drive traction, even under full loads.

"We're currently moving around 1,5 million cubic metres of overburden and coal per month at a stripping ratio of 1:5," Bheki explains. "The furthest haul from the coal face to the run-of-mine coal depository

is 2km and we mainly use our Bell B60E ADTs with their larger bins for hauling coal with the very versatile B50E ADTs used for hauling waste and coal when the latter is needed."

A key operational mantra for MOMS is to design their haul roads well and keep these roads and loading platforms free of debris such as rocks to ensure tyre life on their haulage vehicles. According to Bheki, this means that they've never had to buy additional tyres other than those that have been budgeted for.

"At the Rietvlei mine the client provides us with fuel, and it's been an eye-opener for us that despite our ever-increasing production targets the combination of our Bell B50E ADTs, which by far make up the largest portion of our haulage fleet, combined with our hard-working Kobelco SK850LC Excavators, have never exceeded the set fuel cap," Bheki explains. "We ascribe this to a range of factors such as the excellence of design and build but also due to the solid preventative and diligent maintenance we receive from the dedicated Bell Equipment mechanics on our site."

Current average fuel burn for the various Bell and Kobelco machines reads as follows: Bell B50E ADTs at 23 litres an hour, Bell B60E ADTs at 25 litres an hour and the Bell B45E ADTs at 20 litres an hour. The Kobelco SK850LC Excavators use on average 46 litres an hour. All these machines return mechanical availabilities never dipping under 91% with the Kobelco SK850LC Excavators regularly peaking at 96%.

"It amuses us that when we were starting out and were viewed as very junior miners by the various financial institutions, no one wanted to touch us, and now those same institutions are falling over themselves to loan us money," Bheki says. "Without wanting to sound arrogant, we've just shown our commitment to the Bell Equipment brand by buying yet another nine Bell B50E ADTs and we did that without any financial help from anyone."