

Bell and JCB form the backbone of the BHM Bricks fleet

Henk Vorster believes that because one buys equipment from people and not companies, the best machine is the one for which you get good service, again from people. And Henk should know.



Henk Vorster and his business partner, Gabriel Labuschagne, own BHM Bricks in the picturesque Eastern Free State town of Bethlehem. Henk had developed his business acumen in a family-owned business that originates from the former homeland of Qwa-Qwa, to the south of Harrismith, nestling against the Northern Drakensberg Mountain range.

"Gabriel and I have owned BHM Bricks since 2014 when we bought the business from a large aggregate producer and we're still in the business of making quality concrete products as our core business," Henk says. "We make a wide variety of concrete bricks in different colours for the domestic and industrial

markets as well as concrete building and retaining blocks."

BHM Bricks' products are transported with their own fleet of trucks as far afield as Thaba'Nchu in the Free State towards Bloemfontein, Vryheid in Northern KwaZulu-Natal and the Winterton and Bergville areas at the foot of the Central Drakensberg. Another division of their logistics arm transports agricultural lime to farming clients.

"We've invested heavily in creating one of the most automated concrete brick plants in the country," Henk continues. "We have for many years used JCB

Wheel Loaders and the latest machine, a JCB 422ZX, which was bought from Bell Equipment and delivered in March 2022, is a successor to an earlier similar machine. That machine had been used for 4 000 trouble-free hours and will now be deployed at a new subsidiary plant we've established in Qwa-Qwa."

As we receive a guided tour around this modern brick-making plant, Henk points out where the process starts. The JCB 422ZX Wheel Loader brings bucket-loads from various stockpiles according to the correct 'recipe' for each specific end-product and loads stone aggregates and processed sand from either dolerite, natural plaster, or basalt into a weigh bin, where the correct amount of cement is added. After dry-mixing, chemical additives and water are added before this wet mixture is then fed into the block plant's feed hopper. The final product is formed when the mixture is vibrated into shape according to set moulds.

"From this point on you'll see that the wet bricks or blocks are moved without human intervention into our wet stacker where they will cure for a mere 20 hours in comparison to the 21 days it took before," Henk says proudly. "When these now cured products emerge after 20 hours of curing, they are stacked using our new robot system and then one of three Bell 225A Forklifts take the pallets to the stockyard."

Henk says their previous experience with the older JCB 422ZX Wheel Loader proved that this was the correct size machine for their operation. "You'll notice that we probably don't have a vast amount of free space in our operational area but the JCB 422ZX Wheel Loader is not bulky and has more than enough power and manoeuvrability to work comfortably and safely to keep our plant running," he explains. "The 1,7-cubic metre bucket holds just the right amount of raw product for the weigh bin where the dry ingredients are weighed and with good braking that makes for a safe operation when unloading on a steep ramp up to the weigh bin, we're confident that this JCB 422ZX Wheel Loader will outlive the previous one."

"Our operator is also full of praise for the ergonomics in the ROPS-FOPS cab that is airconditioned with good all-round visibility and we're assured this will lead to less operator fatigue."

Henk smiles when he mentions how fortunate customers like BHM Bricks feel now that their stalwart Bell 225A Forklifts and new JCB Wheel Loader all come from the same distributor, Bell Equipment. "Obtaining spares and servicing from one distributor will work well for us as everything can now be done with one phone call," he says. "Our Bell 225A Forklifts have for many years been the backbone of the back end of our operation and there is simply no other tool that can so



Henk Vorster of BHM Bricks (left) with Bell Sales Representative, Chris Botha.

effortlessly move our heavy brick-laden pallets around to stockpiles and load the delivery trucks. We bought the most recent one four years ago and all three machines have each given us more than 10 000 hours of service."

According to Henk, maintaining the Bell 225A Forklifts is the simple part as their respective lives are extended

by easily replacing hydraulic pumps and wheel motors due to the machine's simple design and easily accessible parts.

But BHM Bricks' Bell-backed fleet doesn't stop with these machines. Bell Equipment's top Sales Representative, Chris Botha, has been very active in these parts as BHM Bricks took delivery of a JCB 3DX

Eco Backhoe Loader in July 2022 and it has been used extensively as a versatile tool in civil construction projects its owners have undertaken with some selected plant hire assignments as a bonus. It joins yet another, although older model JCB 406 Wheel Loader that is used in the company's lintel production yard.

"We're proud to say that with increased demand for our quality products, we've moved with the times with this modern brick plant and the same can be said of our material handling and loading tools. Without our yellow Bell and JCB fleet of machines offering sustained service, this plant could not perform as it does," Henk says.

