

Octo Plant Hire continues to breathe new life into D-series ADTs

When Burger Schoeman first started his plant hire company in 2002, he thought owning only eight pieces of equipment would be manageable and affordable, hence the name Octo Plant Hire.

Although the name has remained, his original eight-machine fleet has not remained at that number and making up most of his haulage machines is a brand with a familiar ring to it.

Burger had grown up on a sugar farm near Pongola where his late father, Hennie Schoeman, had used Bell Equipment's legendary Haulage Tractors and three-wheeled Cane Loaders. By the time Burger had returned from a two-year working stint in the United Kingdom with enough precious pounds saved to buy a piece of earthmoving equipment, his first stop was at Bell Equipment's Used Division in Johannesburg.

"I bought a used 25-ton excavator that had done 8 000 hours for cash from Bell Equipment and got the impression that this company took its customers seriously, no matter their youthful age," he says. "This excavator was hired to clients in the Transkei and I owned it for four years."

With positive cash-flow generated by a machine on which he owed no money, Burger could soon buy a used Bell B20B Articulated Dump Truck (ADT), which

was hired to a well-known construction company from Cape Town and used in Oranjemund for two years before the same company moved onto a large new road construction project on the Outeniqua Pass linking George and Oudtshoorn.

"Here my clients needed more haulage machines, and I bought two used Bell B25C ADTs, each with 8 000 hours, from a large plant hire company in the North West Province. These legendary Bell C-series ADTs gave our clients sustained service on this major project for the full three years of the contract."

Again, positive cash flow generated by equipment that he owned without debt presented Burger with the opportunity to buy a new Bell HD1430 Excavator. This was followed by another Bell HD1430 Excavator and a Bell 770D Grader, both bought new.

"My steadily growing fleet of machines seemed to be in demand in all the far-flung places and we worked from near the Kgalagadi National Park in the Kalahari to a new golf estate at the Storms River Mouth where I ended up having no less than five Bell ADTs, including

two Bell B18D 6x6 machines with really low hours that I bought from a local farmer," Burger says. "During this time, I added a new Bell 315SG Backhoe Loader that proved to be very popular with clients due to its versatility, and a used Bell 2406 Articulated Haul Tractor that pulled a grid roller."

Burger makes a strong point of the fact that so many of his Bell ADTs boast high hours, which indicates how good the original design and build was, and still is. "We have so much faith in the older D-series Bell ADTs and have learned to rebuild them ourselves," he explains. "Our technical team headed up by our 'red-seal' mechanic, Louis Badenhorst, who is assisted by two other mechanics, a boilermaker and a spray painter, has a ready pool of available parts at hand as we stockpile those rare items that Bell Equipment may not readily have in stock."

"We are really geared to fully repair or rebuild Bell D-series ADTs and have spare engines, transmissions, differentials, lift cylinders and even chassis in stock and can guarantee a 24-hour turnaround on a Bell ADT that has suffered an essential breakdown."

Octo Plant Hire's Bell ADT fleet alone has surpassed the company's original eight-machine mantra and now numbers 27. The D-series models range from B18D to B30D, and Burger won't use larger ADTs as they wouldn't fit the lowbed trailers he uses to move the machines between sites. Some older ADTs have been converted to water tankers and those used to haul slurry material have been fitted with tailgates.

Burger took us to a silica mine near to his head office at Brits in the North West Province to see firsthand how a Bell B25D and two B30D ADTs performed in a pit situated against a high koppie with steep ramps providing access to the mining area.

"These three Bell D-series ADTs have all clocked between 14 000 and 24 000 hours and with our own tender loving care, you see them here hauling dense overburden and the abrasive silica ore up these steep ramps with relative ease," he adds proudly. "This is what we do the most of and have built a reputation on loading and hauling. Despite our seemingly older fleet, our clients know we deliver a sustained service due to our diligent preventative maintenance of our fleet that we have intricate knowledge of."

Having had his equipment hired by contractors around the country, Burger has high praise for the technical support his company has received from Bell Equipment with its wide footprint, trained personnel, and parts availability.

"Dealing with Bell Equipment and its warm people over many years has made it a pleasure to do business. I value the friendships I've built within the company that took me seriously and helped to get me going as a young man," Burger says. "I've known Gerald Lottering, Bell Equipment's Branch Manager in Rustenburg, for a long time and meeting Bell's new Sales Representative for our area, Suzelle van Deventer, has brought a new energy to our relationship with a world-class supplier of quality earthmoving equipment."



From left: Octo Plant Hire's Chief Mechanic, Louis Badenhorst, with the Owner of Octo Plant Hire, Burger Schoeman, Bell Sales Representative, Suzelle van Deventer, and Bell Equipment Rustenburg Branch Manager, Gerald Lottering.