

JCB JS305 Excavator impresses Lapua in zinc ore application

Willem Wium believes that he is loyal to a brand that looks after his business and this he has found with a certain yellow brand of excavator that seems particularly hardy while working in challenging conditions.



A son of the Free State, Willem hails from the historic town of Philippolis in the west of the province and worked in banking for 15 years before venturing into buying and selling livestock, a job he by his own admission really enjoyed. "Life however moves one in different directions and in about 2007, I found myself dabbling in hydraulics in the mining industry in Rustenburg," Willem tells us. "I registered my company, Lapua (Pty) Ltd, in Rustenburg in 2011, which specialises in all aspects of hydraulic repair and maintenance in the mining industry, on surface and underground."

An opportunity to take his services further afield to the Aggeneys area of the Northern Cape arose in 2016 when he tendered successfully to do hydraulic maintenance on the zinc mines there. His company's tasks would include repairing and maintaining the hydraulics on drill rigs, trucks and loaders used on both underground and surface mining and all aspects of high-pressure hydraulic hoses and fittings. This was challenging as the service was required around the clock for 365 days of the year.

"Challenging though it may have been, we stuck to the task and our dedication seemed to pay off as in 2019 our clients asked us whether we'd be interested in doing material handling and related tasks as well," Willem says. "We would be tasked with building safety berms bordering haul roads and loading platforms and manage the ore on the run-of-mine stockpile that was fed into the plant for beneficiation."

To do this Willem needed yellow equipment and he contacted his friend Anton Schonken, owner of Lusthof Civil and Plant Hire based in Cradock, for advice. "Anton is a big fan of JCB equipment and he suggested we look at the brand as well especially as we needed hardy excavators for work in the sphalerite rock where zinc ore is found."

With a specific gravity ranging from 3,5 to 4,1 sphalerite is known to be tough on metal as Willem has found.

"We first bought a JCB JS360 Excavator and it gave us excellent service to 5 000 hours when we decided to trade it in on a newer machine," Willem says. "Working in the sphalerite rock, ground engaging tools on the JCB JS360 Excavator's bucket would only last a week."

At the time that Willem looked to trade in their JCB JS360 Excavator on a newer model, he was pleased to learn that Bell Equipment, with its wide service and support footprint, was now the distributor of JCB equipment in South Africa. He duly met with Brendon Gird, the Bell Equipment Sales Representative from the Cape Town branch.

"We took delivery of our new JCB JS305 Excavator in October 2022 and the buying experience with Bell Equipment and Brendon Gird was a pleasant one," Willem adds. "This new machine will add value to our existing fleet of two other JCB Excavators, a JS305 and JS205 respectively, and it will be used for at least 300

hours a month, which is why we bought it with an extended warranty to 6 000 hours on its wet drivetrain.

"I believe in putting down a healthy deposit when financing such equipment so that the machine can generate enough income to pay for itself," he explains. "With the extended warranty we have the assurance of the sustained technical support that Bell Equipment is known for and the maximum benefit of good production that our clients at the mine are entitled to.

"Let it be known that we and our clients are really happy with the performance of our JCB Excavators."

Lapua's JCB Excavators are hired out on dry rates as the client supplies the diesel and although fuel consumption is monitored they have, according to Willem, always stayed well below any fuel cap.

"Working where we do in this part of the hot and dry Northern Cape, preventative maintenance is a key feature of our daily pre-start checks as dust and heat combined can play havoc with lubrication and cooling systems," Willem continues. "We hose down dust, especially near radiators, and see to it that air filters are clean as the summer temperatures often exceed 40 degrees Celsius."

Due to the abrasive and dense nature of the rock where Lapua's JCB Excavators are used, Willem has had special reinforced rock buckets built by a third-party supplier using VRN400 steel. "These reinforced rock buckets are slightly smaller than the standard buckets the JCB Excavators are supplied with and what amazes us is that despite the abrasive underfoot conditions, the JCB Excavators' tracks seem to not show any excessive wear."

When asked about his company's plans looking ahead, Willem is adamant that the near future will see him needing more excavators as he expands his service offering and we share his confidence that new JCB Excavators will soon be dotting the picturesque Northern Cape skyline.



Willem Wium owner of Lapua (Pty) Ltd.