

KRC Farming – one of the first customers to buy Bell Series 5 Tractors

In January 2019, a tornado hit a farm near Panbult in Mpumalanga and blew flat standing timber that ranged in age from eight to twenty-five years, breaking the trees off as if they were matchsticks.

The farm owners' challenge was to move this timber out of the compartments to the mill as quickly as possible before a blue stain set in, caused by a fungus, that would reduce the quality and price of the timber they were trying to salvage, and which could still give them some value.

Ruan and Christian Paul are the fourth-generation farmers on this land which they farm with their father Kurt, hence the name of the business being KRC Farming. "Our forefather arrived from Germany with a group of missionaries in 1856. His grandson, Reginald, our grandfather, bought the first land in 1928 as the farm Driehoek where we are still today," Christian Paul says. "He started off farming poultry and beef cattle and turned to growing black wattle for the tanning and charcoal industries in the 1950s."

The boys' father, Kurt, came to the farm after finishing school and his military service in 1987 and started planting pine trees as saw wood. Today 60% of the farm is utilised for pine trees, 30% for normal agricultural crops like maize and 10% for beef cattle.

"We're proud to say that we look after the entire cycle of the timber growth, from silviculture to overseeing the thinnings processes and eventually the harvesting as well," Christian says. "We give the thinnings and harvesting out to local communities and so create jobs, do skills transfer and general upliftment as well while overseeing the expenditure on consumables such as fuel and lubrication that the community needs during these times. In this way, they also learn about money management and fiscal controls."

KRC Farming first used agricultural tractors to haul their timber to the local sawmill, about 20km away. Then in the year 2000, Kurt Paul decided to switch to the Bell 1766 Haulage Tractor for haulage and Bell 125A Loggers for loading infield and at roadside depots. The farm owned five Bell 1766 Tractors pulling 20-ton double-axle trailers and all five machines had been rebuilt at some stage. Currently there are two Bell 125A Loggers, four Bell 220A Loggers and a new Bell 225F High Power Logger in constant use.



Daniel van Huyssteen, Bell Sales Representative (left) with Christian Paul standing at one of the older Bell 1206 Tractors.

According to Christian, after assessing the damage caused by the tornado, they were desperate for haulage machines as they fortunately had spare trailers. They were able to acquire two Bell 1206 4x4 Tractors on the used market.

"I remember my dad, Kurt, chatting to our Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen, who would lend a big hand by arranging for a new prototype Bell 1736AF Tractor to be made available to us as a loan machine, and what we experienced firsthand with this new tractor really impressed us."

The new all-wheel drive Bell 1736AF Tractor spent a month at KRC Farming. During that time it so piqued the Paul brothers' interest that older brother Ruan kept reminding Daniel van Huyssteen to let them be the first to know when this model was released to the broader market.

"This happened a mere eight months later when Daniel called and told us the good news and so in July 2021, we took delivery of two Bell 1736A 4x2 Tractors and one Bell 1736AF 4x4 and we believe we were one of the first customers to own the new Series 5 Bell Tractors," Christian says smiling. "Their performance has been superb, and each has clocked around 1 500 hours, with the Bell 1736AF used for extraction from infield to roadside and the two Bell 1736A machines used for the haul to the mill."

Returning fuel burn of between 6 and 8,5 litres an hour depending on the application has left the KRC team well satisfied considering the current cost of fuel. "We feel we did a wise thing by buying these Bell 1736 Tractors with extended warranties to three years or 6 000 hours on the wet drivetrains as Bell Equipment's locally based mechanic in Piet Retief, Stefan Coetzer, really keeps his hand on the machines and sees to it that the correct service kits, consumables and replacement parts are always in stock," Christian says. "We may consider replacing the Bell Tractors once the warranty has run out but until then, we believe they will give us an excellent return on our investment."

"To our collective minds and having used many other tractor models, the Bell 1736A and AF models are the best tractors Bell Equipment has ever built."

Christian is of the guarded opinion that with the price difference on the all-wheel drive Bell 1736AF not being that much more than the two-wheel drive model, they should have considered a total all-wheel drive fleet as the all-wheel drive can be switched on and off.

The farm also owns a used Bell B20B Articulated Dump Truck (ADT) of which they removed the bin and replaced it with a 20 000-litre water tank with which to fight forest and veld fires. Two older Bell ADTs, a Bell B17C and B25C respectively, are used to haul fill material to maintain the many roads that criss-cross the farm.

