

Skogger with felling head provides an ideal solution for Umvuni Solutions

When a well-established timber harvesting contractor in the Mpumalanga Lowveld wanted to speed up infield bunching and presentation of felled timber, his solution created the imaginary comparison to when a featherweight boxer takes on a heavyweight rival in the same ring.

John Roux founded his company Umvuni Solutions from his family's farm in the Low's Creek area in 2012. 'Umvuni' is the Zulu word for 'harvester' and this is what this company does, harvesting timber in a radius of 140km from its base.

"My dad has got us all involved, me on the operational side and my sisters Ronél, Esmé, and Lindi on finance, data capturing, and safety respectively," says Ian Roux, John's son. "Our farm called Three Sisters has been in the Roux family since 1931."

Ian is proud of his father's achievements which span many years in the timber growing areas of Mpumalanga and Eswatini and tells of him building roads in forests for large timber growers and paper producers and doing conversions of timber hauling and handling equipment.

"My father has come a long way with Bell Equipment and owned his first Bell Cane Loader, with serial number 18, in 1976 in the Mpumalanga Lowveld area," Ian says. "He worked in Swaziland on many Bell Articulated T25 Timber Trucks loaded with a Bell Logger which he owned from 1992. When it came to the most recent innovations that Bell and Matriarch were bringing to the market he, as a respected veteran of the timber contracting industry, had the inside track on new equipment."

"My dad really loves mechanical equipment, especially that which has the potential to make our jobs easier."

Umvuni Solutions as a harvesting company runs a fair fleet of machines which comprises skidders, excavators with timber processing heads, shovel yarders, and timber handling loggers. With pressure mounting for increased production, the company really needed a machine that could bunch and present the hand-felled timber quicker than a grapple skidder did.

"For reasons of safety in the compartment, our chainsaw gangs fell trees a day in advance of the extraction and processing teams, but we found that the skidders, although powerful, were in certain cases too slow in bunching and presenting the felled whole tree lengths for processing," Ian explains. "What we needed was a nimbler machine that could extract, bunch, and present the tree lengths quicker and this we found with the Bell Skogger."



Umvuni Solutions took delivery of their first Bell Skogger in November 2021 and, according to Ian, it made an immediate difference to their production. "The Skogger is a far nimbler machine than a skidder although the latter is more powerful," he says. "The Skogger is so manoeuvrable as with its tight turning circle and grab on the boom, the operator can quickly pick felled tree lengths, bunch them and drag them to where the skidder can take them on to the roadside for processing."

Ian adds that another advantage is that the Bell Skogger does not need to be transported on a low bed but can be driven to different compartments.

"We were pleasantly surprised to be told of yet another feature of the Skogger that we weren't even aware of when planning to buy the machine, and this

has had an additional positive impact on our production and safety within the compartment." John and Ian discovered that they could fit a custom-made felling head to the Bell Skogger, in this case, the MT50FH, which is like that found on the Bell Fastfell.

"We bought the felling head in January 2022 and found that while it needed two additional hydraulic pipes, it was essentially a 'plug & play' system that took less than three hours to swap out with the machine's grab," Ian explains. "Safety in the compartment is a huge factor for us and our clients and we have safety officers at every step of the harvesting and production cycles. Having the felling head on the Skogger now enhances this safety as it can easily replace five chainsaws in certain compartments depending on the gradient and terrain."

According to Ian, the Skogger can place a tree better and in a safer way after it has been felled, which makes for more order in a compartment. He goes on to explain that where there are rocks on the surface of a compartment, hand felling would still be preferred as the chainsaw operator can manoeuvre himself in amongst the rocks to get to the tree, but this was the case in less than 25% of the areas where they harvested.

"At first glance, it's plain to see that the Bell Skogger is a purpose-built quality forestry machine that can also work in the rain and runs much quieter. We and our clients are impressed with its safety features like the fully enclosed and air-conditioned cab that protects the operator and reduces fatigue," Ian says. "We debated where to draw operators from and settled on two who had been logger operators as they were used to operating grabs in front of them as opposed to skidders which load at the rear. We also trained a third operator who had been a chainsaw operator as it's good to have a backup."

The Roux's are equally impressed with the Skogger's fuel consumption, which at between nine and 10 litres an hour is only fractionally more than what their three-wheeled Loggers use at 8 litres an hour with the

Skogger's payload and capabilities so much more. These capabilities brought the solution for what they had originally tried to achieve, to improve the performance of their skidders by having bunches of felled trees presented in such a way that the skidders had easy access to haul the timber to the roadside. This generated enough workflow with the need for a second Bell Skogger soon realised and this second machine with its grab and MT50FH felling head was delivered in August 2022.

"Thanks to excellent advice from Bell Equipment's knowledgeable Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen, himself a qualified forester, we have achieved what we set out to do and that was to speed up the workflow of our skidders, hence the comparison of two boxers with the Skogger being the featherweight showing up the heavyweight skidder," Ian says. "Acquiring the Bell Skoggers has come with a huge boost in that we now have two dual-purpose machines with their grabs and felling heads. We can comfortably have one operating as a feller and the other doing extraction and in doing so, reduce our people numbers in the compartment, which will lead to quicker and safer production. These machines can also work comfortably on moderately steep slopes."



Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Daniel van Huyssteen (left), with Umvuni Solutions Senior Supervisor, Zenzo Mabhena, and Umvuni Solutions General Manager, Ian Roux.