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BESSA BULLETIN - VOLUME 2 - 2025



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Dear Customers

With the potential for construction in South Africa looking its strongest in several years, and above-average rainfall in our sugar cane growing regions, we are anticipating a pleasing uptick in the local demand for capital equipment. Particularly positive is the expected and much-needed investment into roads and water infrastructure.

This was evident at NAMPO in May, where a record attendance and an upbeat atmosphere tempered the chilly weather. It was a privilege to connect with so many customers, dealers and partners and to showcase some of the exciting developments in our product range. Interestingly, our JCB Backhoe Loaders accounted for half of our sales enquiries, and a large portion of those were specifically for our new JCB 3CX Pro model, which was on display for the first time.

Other highlights included the unveiling of our new 200hp Bell Haulage Tractor, purpose-built for more powerful and efficient agriculture and timber haulage, and the Bell Motor Grader, which marks a new chapter in our manufacturing journey as a Mining & Construction OEM as we evolve to become more than a 'global ADT specialist'.

We are thrilled to be officially launching the Bell Grader in KwaZulu-Natal in June and Gauteng in July, and we believe it will be a game-changer for customers seeking enhanced grading capabilities and superior local support. We look forward to our customers experiencing our machines during live demonstrations and seeing first-hand what makes the Bell Motor Grader a cut above the rest.

We're driven to deliver machines and services that add real value to our customers. I am passionate about superior customer service and building lasting relationships – it has always been one of our key differentiators. Apart from our human interaction, where we aim to operate with a sense of urgency and communicate clearly and proactively, we are growing the support services we provide throughout the lifecycle of our machines.

Our BETA Parts range has been expanded to include three- and four-cylinder engine kits for Tri-Wheelers to provide customers with cost effective and convenient solutions while our Online Parts portal gives users access to parts manuals and ordering options at the click of a button – making maintenance and repairs simpler than ever.

As we look ahead, we remain grounded in our commitment to innovation, quality, and customer service. Thank you for your continued trust in Bell Equipment – we look forward to growing together.


Ashley Bell
Group Chief Executive

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COVER PICTURE:
A relatively young timber harvesting contractor operating in Eswatini is the first to admit that his wage bill is that much easier to pay due to the substantial saving in fuel his fleet of four Kobelco Excavators allows him. Read the full story on **PAGE 08**.

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Bell B30E impresses Mission Point in sand mining operation

Imagine an articulated dump truck (ADT) hauling clean river sand for twelve hours a day and twenty-six days a month, giving its owners a twenty-seven percent increase in production while saving a massive fifty percent on fuel costs.

If that sounds far-fetched, you'd better believe it as it's a scenario that plays out daily on a sand producer's site close to the Vaal River on the border of Sasolburg in the Free State and Gauteng's Vanderbijlpark.

Mission Point Mining is the name of the sand mine established by a quirk of fate. The late Hennie Pretorius, a dynamic entrepreneur, had founded

a company that manufactured tile adhesives, grouting, and primers, aptly called Stick-a-Tile. He also ran a subsidiary company called Cleveland Silica, which provided dried sand for the manufacture of tile adhesives, construction chemicals, and foundry industries.

"In 2012, our late dad felt the need for better quality sand, not only for our own use in the drying of sand, but to also supply the local construction industry with building sand as well as sifted and unsifted plaster sand," says Esté Muller. Esté and her brother, Johann Pretorius, now manage the three businesses under the umbrella name of the SAT Group. Mission Point Mining also has a workers' trust with Simon Mohapi representing the company's employees, who all benefit directly.

"Our sand mine, named Mission Point Mining, is situated near the banks of the Taaibosch Spruit, a tributary of the nearby Vaal River,

and we mine the sand under strict environmental controls. We stockpile the topsoil, which is returned when we rehabilitate the blocks where mining is complete," Esté explains. "As we don't have our own distribution fleet, outside companies fetch the sand, which is distributed in a radius of up to 150km."

Mission Point Mining does, however, have a fleet of yellow machines and screens used to produce the various types of sand. Excavators in the 30- and 40-ton classes mine the sand once the topsoil has been removed and stockpiled and load it into ADTs for the 2km haul to the stockpiles from where it is screened.

"You'd appreciate that our profit would lie in producing sand at the lowest cost per ton and with the current price of diesel coupled with some aging haulage equipment costing us money to maintain, we were staring down the literal barrel of rising costs affecting our bottom line," Esté says. "During the second half of 2023, we realised we would need to replace an ADT, and we spoke to Bell Equipment's Chris Botha who had been diligently calling on us for the past seven years."



"Chris knew that our present haulage fleet consisted of 30- and 40-ton ADTs. With his product knowledge, he suggested we look at a Bell B30E ADT fitted with 200mm greedy boards to ensure a decent heaped load in the bin," Estè adds. "I should admit that we were hesitant at first as this was a big capital equipment commitment but the factor that won us over was what Chris told us about the Bell B30E ADT's proven fuel consumption and this has not disappointed."

Mission Point Mining took delivery of a new Bell B30E ADT in November 2023 and at the time of writing, this new haul vehicle had completed almost 700 hours of service.

"This Bell B30E ADT's all-round performance has been nothing short of amazing as its frugal fuel consumption is such that we're saving at least 10 litres an hour, which with present usage translates into a saving worth around R63 000 per month," Estè says smiling. "Then too, with the 200mm greedy boards in place, we're getting 27% more in production with the big,

heaped loads in the bin and these factors combined, lower our production costs per ton.

"Our business is driven largely by the volumes of material that we sell and fortunately Chris and Bell Equipment understand and appreciate these factors. We're already talking to Chris about fitting future similar-sized ADTs with bin heating to negate the carry-back of wet material stuck in the bin.

"On this performance and amazing fuel burn, the Bell B30E ADT certainly sells itself and we'd be pleased to swap out our entire fleet of ADTs to the Bell brand in time."

Mission Point Mining further benefits from Bell Equipment's Classic Fleetmatic® telematics package, which gives vital information on tons moved, machine performance, and operator behaviour.

The SAT Group had previously bought a three-wheeled Bell 220A Forklift to handle bulk-bags at its Cleveland Silica operation.



Estè Muller (left) with Bell Sales Representative, Chris Botha.

Bell fleet keeps New Branch growing

A relatively young timber harvesting contractor operating in Eswatini is the first to admit that his wage bill is that much easier to pay due to the substantial saving in fuel his fleet of four Kobelco Excavators allows him.

But then JJ Van Schalwyk, the second generation of his clan to have been born and bred in Eswatini, had learnt valuable lessons from his late father Koot Van Schalwyk, who himself had done land preparation for large timber growers' silviculture and traded in wattle.

"I started our company in 2013 doing general transport to and from Eswatini into Gauteng, using flatbed trucks," JJ says. "I had also spent some time working for

my dad and had traded timber, which is probably where the seed for engaging the timber industry was planted."

JJ and his wife Nicola run the business jointly and with solid academic qualifications of B Comm degrees behind them, this dynamic couple is well-equipped to ensure the business runs profitably.



New Branch's first foray into timber harvesting came in 2017 when a local Eswatini timber grower gave out work in project timber areas, which demanded small scale harvesting.

"Our first stop was at Bell Equipment in Matsapha where Charlie Boucher helped us to buy a new Bell 225A Logger with its legendary four-cylinder Deutz engine. Despite the 15 000 hours that this workhorse has gifted us, we have never touched that engine besides servicing it religiously at the recommended frequencies," he says. "We learnt a lot during the three years that we did this work, which involved bush clearing, felling by hand, extracting with a cable-yarder and cross-cutting at roadside."

"We started off conservatively and worked our way up from 500 tons to 1 000 tons a month. During this time, we bought a used Bell 125A Logger and two agricultural tractors from our clients. The latter was used for extracting the felled timber, although we soon realised we would have to get specialised equipment for this onerous task."

By now, New Branch's clients noticed that this young company was in it for the long haul and, in what JJ sees as a key moment in their business relationship, his company successfully tendered for a large volume of pine clear-fell.

"We again approached Charlie Boucher at Bell Equipment for advice on excavator carriers with harvesting heads and timber grabs. While the advice

we received was valuable for later use, our immediate goal was to source yellow forestry machines that would assist us in meeting huge production targets starting at 8 000 tons a month."

Fortunately, help was at hand as New Branch was able to rent the necessary equipment from a well-known forestry plant hire operator, Gavin Simms.

"Gavin owned the first two Skoggers that Bell Equipment had built. We initially wanted to buy a skidder, but using the two Bell Skoggers soon opened our eyes to the versatility of these machines at a much lower running cost," JJ recalls smiling. "After renting Skogger #1 and #2 for a year, we bought them from Gavin along with six used Bell Loggers. Since then, we have successfully repowered the Skoggers with new engines, pumps, bushes, wiring harnesses and drop-boxes."

The Bell Skoggers have proved invaluable for New Branch as they extract and spread the timber for easy cross-cutting into a multitude of different lengths as determined by the client. The Skoggers, which are able to work independently from traditional choker-men, who would wrap cables around cut timber for extraction by a skidder, can put in a night shift and have a substantial stock of timber ready for chainsaw-bearing cross-cutters starting the day shift.

"The Bell Skogger is ideal for the tree size that we cut, which are trees between 19 and 22 years and weighing, on average, point 3 of a ton," JJ explains.



(From left): Emile van Wyk (Bell Equipment Product Manager: Forestry & Agriculture), Jacobus Van Schalkwyk (Director, New Branch), Nicola Van Schalkwyk (Director, New Branch) and Bruce Larkan (Bell Equipment Swaziland Product Support Representative).

"Having grown our fleet of timber-handling machines so dramatically along with our dedicated staff, we were proud to achieve the required 8 000 tons of pine timber a month. Since then, we've been able to greatly increase output even peaking to 19 000 tons in some months."

In 2021, New Branch bought the first two of a current fleet of four Kobelco Excavators when they took delivery of a Kobelco SK220XD-10 and a SK135SR-7 Excavator respectively. Prior to delivery, the machines had forestry conversions done by Bell Equipment and were fitted with MT500LB Grapples built by Bell.

New Branch's first Kobelco SK135SR-7 Excavator has clocked over 10 000 hours since its acquisition in 2021 and has had its wheel motors and tracks replaced.

"Kobelco Excavators have really made the difference on the log deck where they unload, load, and stack and sort timber while working in tandem with the nimble Bell Loggers," he continues. "That is why, early in 2024, we took delivery of another Kobelco SK220XD-10 and a SK135SR-7."

JJ continues: "Fuel is traditionally a huge cost factor in any mechanised operation. Our mainstay equipment is all supplied by Bell Equipment and makes for

interesting and frugal reading. Our Bell Skoggers run at around eight litres an hour, the Bell Loggers between five and six litres and the Kobelco Excavators at eight to 10 litres for the SK135SR-7 and 10 to 11 litres for SK220XD-10 machines.

"As mentioned before, the saving on diesel we've found with our Kobelco Excavators assists us in keeping our business sustainable.

"It would be amiss not to mention the technical and moral support we receive from Charlie Boucher and his entire team at Bell Swaziland as they really keep our fleet well-maintained and moving."

The confidence that New Branch has in its fleet of equipment supplied by Bell Equipment is evident as their Bell Logger fleet now stands at nine after acquiring two new Bell 225F Loggers in September 2024, and they received a new Bell Skogger in early March 2025.

New Branch is setting the bar high on timber harvesting and extraction in Eswatini and there seems to be no stopping this dynamic company from progressing. "I must give credit to our New Branch team for their dedication and hard work. Teamwork makes the dream work!" JJ said in closing.



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Finlay Crushers deliver for Power Construction on wind farm projects

The Power Group believes in staying true to its purpose of improving the quality of life in Africa through infrastructure development and one of these topical avenues is getting involved in the construction of renewable energy projects.



Fleet Manager at Afrimat Lyttelton Dolomite, Jon Gunter (right) with Bell Equipment Sales Representative André Jordaan.

Founded in 1983, the Power Group is active in the Western, Northern and Eastern Cape, as well as in Gauteng. The company, driven by its primary entities, Power Construction and Power Developments, boasts a rich history of sustained growth. With a commitment to excellence, the Power Group offers an extensive array of services encompassing civil engineering, roads, and earthworks, engineering management, building and housing, mining and turnkey property development.

An exciting direction is that of renewable energy projects where the establishment of wind farms in remote areas has proved to be challenging yet satisfying when bringing projects to successful conclusions.

This was the case when Power Construction successfully tendered for the construction of three wind farms in an area between Laingsburg in the Western Cape and Sutherland in the Northern Cape.

We learn more about the company's involvement from Derek Esterhuysen, the Head of Power Construction's Plant Department.

"You will appreciate that wind turbines need to stand on very firm concrete bases that are cast in the shale-like ridges that typify the Karoo where all three of these projects are being built," he says. "To produce the required concrete, we needed to find a source of aggregate rock and this we did at a substantial resource about 10km south of Laingsburg, where we established a small quarry."

The rock that Power Construction was to turn into aggregate turned out to be tillite, which is a glacial sedimentary rock which would have been deposited in this area millions of years ago. Blasting it correctly would be crucial to obtain the correct size and shape when crushing it and this was left to a company specialising in drilling and blasting.

"We planned to use a two-stage crushing train for this project, opting for a primary jaw crusher that would feed a cone crusher as a secondary stage. For this equipment we turned to Bell

Equipment, distributors of Irish-built Finlay mobile machines in their distinct red livery," Derek says. "We already had two Finlay C-1540 Cone Crushers along with a Finlay J-1160 Jaw Crusher, but we needed another Jaw Crusher for this project."

"While many competitor machines have become increasingly electronic, the Finlays have maintained their user-friendly design. This aspect is particularly valuable to us, making operation and maintenance significantly easier, especially considering our frequent work in remote areas," Derek adds. "Looking ahead, we also consider the resale value, and Finlay machines consistently provide us with a robust return on investment when it's time to sell."

The contracts on the wind farm projects demanded that the required concrete for three turbine bases be cast each week. When one considers that each base for a turbine contains about 400 cubic metres of concrete along with reinforcing steel, Power Construction had to create a whole value chain to be up and running and be sustainable as any break in the chain could have disastrous results for the continuity of the project.

"The Finlay J-1160 Jaw Crusher and 1540 Cone Crusher running in tandem on this quarry site have shown what they're capable of despite them being slightly smaller than competitor machines. We produce about 800 to 1 100 tons of product per day," Derek explains.

Derek and his team responsible for the company's plant are happy with the attention received from Bell Equipment as the suppliers of the Finlay equipment.

"The Finlay 1160 Jaw Crusher is the first leg of the crushing cycle and its operational status at the given time is crucial. If it is not operational, the whole train comes to a halt," Derek says. "For us preventative maintenance is key, and Bell Equipment understands this, with the company's Workshop Manager in Cape Town, Kobus van Zyl, often checking in after working hours to ensure everything is in order – a fact we really appreciate."

"Bell Equipment's wide footprint across the country also plays a part as one is assured of support wherever you should work in South Africa."



Isipani Construction loads up on JCB equipment

Brand loyalty can typically be shown in many ways, but none is so glaringly obvious as buying the same brand of earthmoving and material handling equipment some six decades after first deciding that this is the brand of machine that your company is going to rely on.

Isipani Construction is a respected construction company, born and bred in the Cape Winelands with a portfolio of successfully completed projects that rivals any similarly sized company in the world.

"We are building and civil contractors specialising in commercial, industrial, retail, large residential and government work and we operate mostly in the Western Cape," says Riana Liebenberg, Isipani Construction's Marketing Manager. "Since the company was established and registered as such by its original owner, Mr Jan van der Sluys, in 1960 we've shown phenomenal growth by completing projects on

time and on budget and, in doing so, have built a reputation that clients can rely on us to do exactly that."

Being a construction company with its roots in civil projects implies that the company will make ample use of selected mechanical means like material-handling and earthmoving machines. Isipani Construction is in the habit of assessing what the company's broader and long-term needs are instead of buying specific machines or vehicles for a project.

"This has always been our thinking, and it works for us," says Isipani Construction's Financial Director, Gerrit van Niekerk. "It also means that as we take good care of our mechanical equipment and vehicles with scheduled and preventative maintenance, we get many years of service from such equipment."



Isipani Construction Marketing Manager, Riana Liebenberg (left) with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson.



Isipani Construction's history with JCB equipment goes back over 60 years as in 1963 the company first bought a Fordson Super Major JCB 3C Digger, which today is commonly known as a Backhoe Loader.

This machine, with its hydraulic loading bucket at the front and hydraulic boom at the back that was meant for digging, was thought to be quite revolutionary at the time and really changed the use of smaller plant in the construction industry. It was a versatile tool then as it still is now. Gerrit recalls that their company has owned and operated many JCB-built machines since then and, as an example, a JCB 535-140 Loadall bought in 2004, has given sustained service spanning 20 years, which goes to show what a good return on investment JCB equipment delivers.

In 2023, Isipani Construction felt the need to replace some equipment and approached Bell Equipment through the company's Sales Representative, Fiona Johnson. "Fiona's product knowledge and eagerness to share that has always sat well with us and we were pleased that Bell Equipment was now the South African distributor of JCB equipment," Gerrit says. "We were in the market for two JCB 540-170 Loadalls and a JCB 406ZX Wheeled Loader as there seems to be an inexhaustible supply of varied tasks on most of our large construction projects for these types of machines.

"We apply certain strict criteria to our choices of machines despite our long relationship with JCB equipment," Gerrit adds. "The equipment's price is

naturally important, but to commit to the longevity that we strive for, the assurance of available parts and solid technical backup is equally important in both the life of the machine but also in it delivering maximum uptime so as to not negatively affect its important roles on our projects."

Isipani Construction chose the JCB 540-170 Loadall for the stable 17-metre reach the machine has, which has proved invaluable on sites where tower or mobile cranes don't have access. Much the same can be said of the JCB 406ZX Wheeled Loader which, with its tight turning circle, can enter tight spaces and is highly manoeuvrable. The fact that both machines have interchangeable tools like buckets and forks is another point in their favour as multi-taskers on construction sites.

Building materials like sand, stone and concrete are conveyed in the buckets and any manner of cumbersome loads on secured pallets can be moved using the forks on the JCB machines. The company took delivery of one JCB 540-170 Loadall and the JCB 406ZX Wheeled Loader in September 2023. The second Loadall followed in March 2024.

"Deploying these machines on our sites is a way of working more efficiently and ultimately, safely," Gerrit says. "This goes well with the backstory of our company name which means team and team quality, and our company motto, 'Teamwork builds quality', which is a registered trademark."

Misapak has the 'Golden' touch on the N2 Wild Coast Road project

It's a well-known fact that the eastern half of the Eastern Cape Province, while rich in resources, cries out for economic stimulus that could lead to more permanent jobs being created.





This is why the construction of the South African National Roads Agency Limited's (SANRAL) new N2 Wild Coast Toll Road (N2WC) is seen as important. The construction of 96km of a completely new road, coupled with a 17km stretch of road to be extensively rehabilitated near Port Edward, ties in with other major roads infrastructure upgrades in the province. Eventually, the road trip between Durban and East London will be much quicker and safer.

Standout features of the N2WC are the construction of two major civil engineering feats – two massive bridges. The first is the Msikaba Bridge, a cable-stayed steel deck bridge that will be the third highest bridge in Africa. The second bridge is the 1 133 metre-long Mtentu Bridge, which will be one of the highest bridges in the world and one of the longest in Africa.

A noteworthy feature of the SANRAL N2WC project is that it has thus far created in the region of 3 000 jobs for locals and there has been a significant focus on the establishment of small sustainable enterprises that can be used as subcontractors while offering skills training and coaching in business practices.

One such subcontractor is Misapak Plant Hire, whose owner has an interesting backstory. Nogolide 'Golden' Zokufa grew up in Flagstaff, although she attended school in Mthatha. After matriculating she studied at Durban's Varsity College where she obtained a Diploma in Business Management. A career with a leading South African bank followed, which lasted 10 years.

"My mother owned a trading store, and my father was a conductor on the railways, so you would imagine that I had learnt something about commerce at my mother's knee," Golden says when we meet at the Indwendwe Lodge, a guesthouse she owns in Flagstaff. "After 10 years in banking, I resigned in 2008 and built this guesthouse."

When the SANRAL N2WC's major bridge contracts were announced in 2018, Golden saw an opportunity to reap some benefit and built a guesthouse close to the site of the Mtentu Bridge with the intention of having senior project personnel stay there due to its convenient proximity to the site.

"We called this guesthouse Malunga Park and, with the delays in the project, senior project personnel only got to occupy our guesthouse in 2023, but all 27 rooms are full," she says smiling. "There was, however, another event in 2023 that had a far greater impact on me and my family."

During that year Golden, as a member of the local business chamber, attended a workshop for small entrepreneurs hosted by SANRAL in nearby Lusikisiki to tell them how they could leverage opportunities by working as subcontractors. The workshop also saw a presentation by Bruce Ndelela, Bell Equipment's former Director: Business and Public Sector Development on what equipment could be accessible to SMMEs wanting to establish themselves in the project.

"I was struck by Mrs Zokufa's business acumen and the types of questions she asked after my presentation," Bruce recalls. "It was clear to me that here was a true businesswoman with a plan and I felt confident in referring her to one of our sales representatives, Fortune Matsobane, as she seemed to know where

she wanted to head with her business even though it may have been a new environment for her."

Golden continues the story: "After Bruce Ndelela's presentation on earthmoving equipment supplied by Bell Equipment, which we got to know is a truly South African company, there was no doubt in my mind that I wanted to be part of this great road project, and I wanted to own earthmoving equipment for my company's involvement. I found Fortune Matsobane to be a patient and knowledgeable man, and he always answered all our questions."

Fortune Matsobane was impressed by his new customer's tenacity in asking for quotations to be repeatedly updated until she was ready to put pen to paper and sign the order to purchase a JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader. "Mrs Zokufa really wanted to know a lot about this new venture, and I'd say by the time she signed for the first machine, she knew a lot about the industry, the equipment, and the way it all fitted together with warranties and maintenance thrown in. She was not going into this venture blindly and we, as





Golden Zokufa (left) with her son Ntsiki in front of the JCB JS205 Excavator.

suppliers, admire that in customers who are well prepared," Fortune says. "Thanks to the guidance she and other subcontractors receive from the main contractors, she could make informed decisions as was the case with the order for the JCB JS205 Excavator she gave us a while later."

"We, as new subcontractors, are fortunate that the main contractors on the project are large established construction companies with the resources to guide and mentor us," Golden says. "With their sound advice, in conjunction with Fortune and Bell Equipment's assistance, we signed an order for a JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader on 15 January 2024 and the machine was delivered on 21 February 2024. Bell Equipment arranged the finance through Wesbank at preferential rates over 60 months after we had paid a deposit."

Misapak Plant Hire's JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader is seeing service loading excavated soil onto trucks, levelling platforms where structures such as the many culverts will be built, trenching, backfilling and doing housekeeping duties to keep sites tidy. With the main contractors supplying the fuel for the vast number of machines and vehicles on site, Golden and her team are not yet monitoring the fuel consumption.

"The project management schedules a feedback session with us every three months to give us advance notice of what equipment may be needed next. It was after one of these meetings that we decided to acquire an excavator as we'd been told that such a machine would be required for excavations of cut and fill material and deeper trenching that would soon follow," Golden says. "My eldest son, Ntsiki, who has an Honours degree in Computer Science, assists me in the business and we were very excited to place an order for a JCB JS205 Excavator in early April 2024 that was delivered the same month."

"Our short-term plan, dependent on the guidance we receive from the main contractors, is to follow up on this JCB JS205 Excavator with a similar machine and after that, possibly a roller," Golden adds. "This entire road project, with all the bridges and culverts, is planned to take approximately six years to complete and we're committed to be in it for the long haul."

"Whatever the demand is for more equipment, we'll be speaking to Bell Equipment and Fortune Matsobane first, seeing how they guided us and gave us sound advice on our initial purchases. We're enjoying the new challenges and learning a lot and I'm dreaming of still owning graders and articulated dump trucks too."

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Major maize operation chooses Bell Tractors

In layman's terms, two additional cylinders added to a four-cylinder diesel engine should provide more horsepower, but would you believe that those same two additional cylinders can also reduce fuel consumption?



This is the unlikely-sounding experience that a hugely successful family-run farming business in the Free State is enjoying after cutting their teeth on specialised haulage machines provided by Bell Equipment.

LFC Milling, located in Wesselsbron in the heart of the Free State maize growing area, was established by Lourens van der Linde (Snr). By 1993, he was a successful maize farmer in his own right but wanted to create a legacy for his three sons who were growing up.

The three Van der Linde sons, Lourens Jnr, Francois, and Cobus, from whose initials the company derives its name, make up the fifth generation of the family whose forebears first farmed the land called Klein Constantia in 1888. The farm lies to the northwest of Wesselsbron with the youngest brother, Lourens Jnr, overseeing maize cultivation. The farm sells its products to the South African Futures Exchange (SAFEX) at the best possible prices.

"Our dad, Lourens Snr was keen to own more of the maize value-chain, hence seeing the need for a maize mill that has now grown exponentially through several phases. We're proud to say that our maize products are distributed right across South Africa," says Cobus

van der Linde, the Operations Manager at the mill. His brother, Francois, manages the financial side of the business, and all three brothers have tertiary qualifications in finance and agriculture respectively.

LFC Milling made the agricultural headlines in 2023 when the company unveiled the largest single maize silo in the world, a colossal concrete and steel structure that can contain almost 100 000 tons of maize feedstock for the mill.

However, no mill can operate without harvested maize being delivered to it and, to this end, in late 2017, LFC Milling started exploring the possibility of creating a dedicated logistics arm to supply the mill with its raw product and have a wider use to add further value that would justify the capital expenditure needed.

"After extensive research into the wider tractor market, we came across a solution that Bell Equipment, through its knowledgeable Sales Representative in our area, Rickus Erasmus, could offer us," says Cobus. "While we have a substantial fleet of agricultural tractors, we prefer dedicating them to land preparation and other purely agricultural tasks, and we discovered that Bell Equipment could provide us with the solution in a haulage tractor."



(From left): Francois, Cobus, Lourens Snr, and Lourens Jnr van der Linde from LFC Milling.

By 2018, the newly created LFC Logistiek took possession of six Bell 1734AF Haulage Tractors that haul custom-built 55-cubic metre side-tipping tandem trailers that can carry 36 tons of maize. The Bell 1734AF Haulage Tractors ran with a four-cylinder Mercedes Benz engine and Allison transmission and were delivered in a staggered way over six months.

"I'll admit that I had been concerned that the four-cylinder engine was a bit light for the mass that these initial Bell 1734AF Haulage Tractors had to move but they got the job done," says Lourens (Snr). "Their heavy work would be during the two to three winter months when they would haul fully laden trailers to the mill over some 16km for 16 hours a day. In summer, they'd be used to haul water tanks on trailers that would be used infield for fertilisers and pesticides."

Lourens goes on to explain that the Bell 1734AF Haulage Tractors have different hydraulic configurations enabling them to tip the side-tipping trailers and drive augers that deposit fertiliser into spreaders.

"We had intended to operate the first set of Bell 1734AF Haulage Tractors for 10 years, as we believed that this would ensure a decent return on our investment. However, when Rickus Erasmus told us about the newer-generation Bell 1736AF Haulage Tractor fitted with a 6,8 litre, six-cylinder John Deere engine, we were intrigued," Cobus says. "We then decided to trade in the two oldest machines for two new Bell 1736AF Haulage Tractors, which we received in August 2024, and the difference in performance has been remarkable from the start."

Now fitted with a John Deere 6068HF285 six-cylinder inline engine that complies with Tier 3/Stage 111A emission certification and delivers 173 horsepower or

129kW, the new generation Bell Haulage Tractor surprised the Van der Linde's in a way they weren't anticipating.

Cobus explains: "In the past, we'd seen the four-cylinder Bell Haulage Tractors running at 0,35km to a litre of diesel or 0,16 of an hour on a litre. Now, this has improved drastically to 0,5km to a litre or 0,23 of an hour, on the same litre of diesel.

"By comparison, the newer Bell 1736AF Haulage Tractor is saving us 43% in fuel alone, which with today's high fuel prices, is a huge saving.

"The newer six-cylinder Bell 1736AF Haulage Tractor also delivers more torque and the Allison gearbox is proving to be a winner with the operators not missing gears, thus reducing wear and tear on load-bearing parts by maintaining a smoother passage," he says. "We're also pleased with the odometer that measures both hours and kilometres travelled."

In time, LFC Milling plans to renew its entire fleet of Bell Haulage Tractors with the latest generation of Bell 1736AFs. As this dynamic, family-run company looks to reduce their production costs, it remains committed to providing essential food to a hungry nation, while navigating pressure on profit margins.



Kobelco SK220XDLC delivers speed and efficiency for JNg Earthmoving

By the time Johan Nolte bought himself out of the South African Air Force as a Permanent Force member for a mere fifty rand, he had amassed a wealth of experience and gained vital qualifications that set him up for how he earns his living to this day.

Looking back on his family's history, it comes as no real surprise that Johan is continuing a family tradition, fortunately with much more modern tools at his disposal.

"My late grandfather had done land preparation for the wine farmers in the Cape Winelands using a small plough pulled by donkeys before being the first person in the then Cape Province, and as far back as 1930, to import a tracked tractor from the USA that he used to plough with," Johan says. "And when my grandfather died, my own father, Jan-Hendrik Nolte or 'Lang-Jan' as was his nickname, had to leave school in Grade 11 to carry on with the family business of doing land preparation and building infrastructure for the wine farmers."

Johan had enjoyed the good fortune of attending an agricultural high school where he had learnt much about plants and the soils that suit them. After doing his National Service in the South African Air Force, Johan joined the Permanent Force where he qualified as a diesel mechanic and because he had experience of working with earthmoving equipment, he built airstrips in some interesting places in Sub-Saharan Africa.

"When I left the South African Air Force, I worked for contractors in the Villiersdorp area in the Cape but the seed of wanting to be self-employed had been growing in my mind. After six years of learning the ropes of the business, I registered my own company JNg Earthmoving at the end of 1989."

Johan respected what his own father had done but took that experience and expanded on it. "My father had mostly concentrated on land preparation for the wine farmers, but I had had contact with a lot of the fruit farmers in the Grabouw area where they cultivate apples and pears and focused my attention there as well."

He describes what would happen when older fruit trees must be replaced by newer plantings or a change in cultivar. Once the old trees were felled and their stumps removed, Johan and his team would be tasked with ripping the soil with bulldozers and doing a soil analysis to check the pH-value and determine what fertilisers may be needed.

"As the topsoil in this area tends to be shallow, the modern trend in fruit cultivation is to create ridges with the topsoil to allow for deeper root penetration of the tree into good soils," Johan explains.

"To do that effectively and keeping in mind the contours of the land that also determine water flow, we sculpt ridges using an excavator. The direction of the ridges also means that the sun passes over the new orchard in a certain way which ensures all the trees obtain the same amount of sunlight which is vital for photosynthesis and the continued healthy growth of the trees."

Johan tells that with the Grabouw area known for its export-quality apple and pear cultivation, it was imperative to maintain these high standards and creating the ridges in this area using an excavator, had started in 2016. The ridges are only created in this area as clay of around 50cm deep is found in the soil and the creation of the ridges puts fertile soil, which aids the growth of the trees, on top of this clay layer.







(From left): Johan Nolte (Director of JNg Earthmoving), Fiona Johnson (Bell Equipment Sales Representative), Jan-Hendrik Nolte (CEO, JNg Earthmoving) and Rias Mathys (Kobelco Excavator Operator).

On Kanoneiland, which lies in the Orange River in the arid Northern Cape, Johan and his teams use a different technique of land preparation by using a finger plough. This special plough cuts through the layers of silt which remain when the Orange River bursts its bank, and this method has proved to be very successful as more even layers of good soil are created for decent root penetration.

Yields that had started at 12 ton/ha doubled to 24 ton/ha within two years instead of the normal three years it would take the vines to produce fruit at such a rate. "Our core yellow machine fleet consists of five excavators, six bulldozers, and two articulated dump trucks (ADTs) and we won't keep a machine for more than 6 000 to 10 000 hours," he says. "From time to time we also hire in ADTs, and we've come to rely on Bell B20D and B25D ADTs from a plant hire company that we support as they are real workhorses and get the job done for us.

"We had previously owned a Bell HD1023 Excavator that had given us very good service for around five years, so when we were looking to replace a similarly weighted machine in 2023, we took a serious look at what the Kobelco SK220XDLC-10 Excavator would offer, and we were impressed by its specifications."

Bell Equipment's Sales Representative Fiona Johnson had been calling on JNg Earthmoving for many years and it was to Fiona that Johan made the call to find

out more about this turquoise-coloured machine. "Fiona and Bell Equipment responded very quickly with a competitive price and favourable financing options," Johan says. "We were pleased at getting a quick approval of our financing application and by September 2023, our new Kobelco SK220XDLC-10 Excavator was delivered and put straight to work."

Johan has devised a working system whereby he has prior knowledge of what machine services would cost and keeps sufficient funds for services and incidentals aside and earning interest. In this way when essential machine servicing takes place, those monies are available, and a machine's sustainable performance is assured.

"This system takes fiscal discipline, but it works, and its success is reflected not only in the maximum uptime we can deliver to our clients but also in the excellent fuel consumption we're seeing from the Kobelco Excavator. It uses between 10 and 16 litres of diesel an hour when working at its highest power setting."

Johan has been joined in the business by his son Jan-Hendrik and together they're adamant that the new Kobelco SK220XDLC-10 Excavator is making a marked difference in the speed and efficiency where they are tasked to do land preparation, build dams for farmers and create general farming infrastructure where bulk earthworks is at play.

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BELL

Skoggers are the extraction tool of choice for J&B Timbers

Bell Equipment is one of the few original equipment manufacturers that listen to the all-important feedback it gets from the field where its equipment works and then, most importantly, uses that information to make improvements to its machines.

These are the words of Barend Steenkamp, part of the fifth generation of farmers adding value to the Eswatini economy, South Africa's closest eastern neighbour. The Steenkamps farm beef and mutton in the Sicunusa area in the west of the country and have embarked on contract timber harvesting under the banner of J&B Timbers since 2010.

"We had started off conservatively and, as our experience and fleet of timber handling equipment grew, we soon realised that to achieve the challenging production targets our clients had set us, we'd need more sophisticated equipment for extracting timber efficiently and above all, safely," Barend says. "This solution we found when we bought our first Bell Skogger back in 2017, which was the third such machine to roll off the then Matriarch production line."

J&B Timbers has subsequently bought Bell Skoggers at regular intervals with their

second machine arriving in 2019 (Serial #10), a third in 2020 (Serial #13) and a fourth in 2024 (Serial #58).

"Since we started in 2010, the job hasn't changed, although we no longer undertake thinnings or the harvesting of whole tree lengths. Now it's all clear-felling and mostly in pine, but it's still a motor-manual operation as our chainsaw operators in felling and cross-cutting are efficient and experienced."

The pine trees that J&B Timbers harvest are mostly between 18 and 20 years old with volumes of approximately 0,3 cubic metre of utilisable timber. Two tree-fellers with chainsaws work in a team with a Skogger and the machine is also used for final extraction when timber is initially hauled in using a shovel-yarder.



"Our target for each Skogger is to extract and place 600 trees in a shift and this also accounts for working at night as, with two operators to each machine, we deploy our Skoggers in a night shift from Monday to Thursday," Barend explains. "The Skoggers have good lighting and can place logs neatly to be ready when the manual chainsaw teams arrive for the day shift."

"The MT500LB Grapple is an ideal size for us as our operators aim to grab full loads of timber and, with the Skogger's excellent hydraulic flows, there is a good balance between the power the engine delivers and the grapple."

To ensure safety, J&B Timbers' Bell Skoggers operate in only two of the available three working modes namely 'Tortoise' and 'Snail', opting to disable the 'Hare' setting.

"We've been very pleased that Bell Equipment has taken to heart the feedback that we, as experienced Skogger operators, give them," Barend continues. "The newly designed propshaft with its carrier bearing installed is a big improvement as it is now split into three sections and will make for easier maintenance."

"Other standout features on the Skogger are the differentials that are big and strong - the same type that is fitted to Bell Equipment's tough B20E Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs). We also enjoy the grapple and its rotator. Although they bear the brunt of the heavy loads when the machine is working, their longevity is something to behold."

According to Barend, the Skogger's hydrostatic drivetrain with its built-in limiter prevents the machine's wheels from spinning and, given the often treacherous underfoot conditions in Eswatini's forest compartments due to high summer rainfall, this feature presents a real winner. The standard tyres that the machines are bought with generally give service up to 5 000 hours and, considering the terrain they work in negotiating tree stumps and rocks, that is seen as remarkable.

"Our first Skogger from 2017, now stands at 23 000 hours and had its engine replaced at 12 000, although the original engine was then used in another machine," Barend says. "We will, however, take the older machine to our farm where it will be completely refurbished replacing pins, bushes, the valve bank and the articulation infrastructure. There will also be some minor panel beating and respraying as working in the forestry compartments doesn't come without scrapes."

"We consider that our faith in the Bell Skogger as a primary extraction tool is evident in the four machines that we have," Barend says. "These four machines would, however, not be as productive were they not maintained properly and for that we have to thank Charlie Boucher and his dedicated team at Bell Swaziland for their attentive service, great parts holding, and general all-round caring attitude."

"We only use original parts from Bell Equipment and don't skimp on service intervals. The same goes for all the other equipment we own that is supplied by Bell, which includes two Kobelco SK260LC-10 and three SK210LC Excavators, the four Bell Skoggers and eight Bell Loggers."



(From left): Emile van Wyk (Product Manager, Bell Equipment), Bertus Potgieter (Operations Manager, J&B Timbers), Barend Steenkamp (owner, J&B Timbers), Sandile Sam Mabuza (Harvesting Manager, J&B Timbers) and Bruce Larkan (Customer Support Representative, Bell Equipment).

Rumdel beefs up excavator fleet for Eastern Cape road contracts

The positive experience enjoyed by a leading Eastern Cape-based civil engineering construction company with a large excavator, has prompted it to invest in three more of the same brand of equipment, although in a slightly lighter class.

Rumdel (Pty) Ltd was formerly known as Rumdel Cape and is a privately owned, multidisciplinary civil engineering construction company operating throughout Southern Africa. With a category 9CE grading issued by the Construction Industry Development Board, Rumdel is not limited to the size of projects it can undertake, which is evident from the many successful projects it has completed in infrastructure, incrementally launched bridges, and many kilometres of paved roads. It's with the latter discipline that it recently enjoyed major success using a Kobelco SK380XDL-8 Excavator on a major access road in neighbouring Lesotho.

"In 2019, we started constructing the Polihali Western Access Road as part of the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme," says Derick Smit, Rumdel's Plant Manager. "That road would be crucial as it ties in with the Northern Access Road that will eventually allow access for really heavy equipment, like tunnel boring machines, to reach the project site of the Polihali Dam."

"We had a lot of problems with blasted rock on the cuttings and needed an excavator with enough grunt and superior breakout force to load awkwardly blasted rock segments into our Bell B25 and B20 Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs), which were the backbone of our operation high in the Maluti mountains."





Rumdel Plant Manager, Derick Smit (left), with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Anthony Enslin.

Derick is of the opinion that the arrival of the Kobelco SK380XDLC-8 Excavator contributed significantly to Rumdel's successful completion of the access road due to its ability to load the blasted rock they were tasked to move. He says that despite the thin air and working in the Lesotho snowbelt at an altitude of 3 200 metres, the Kobelco kept working and, although additives were blended into its diesel fuel, normal oils and lubricants kept it running just as well.

The machine has now completed over 11 000 hours of heavy work and will be utilised loading aggregate in a quarry near to where Rumdel is contracted to work on the N2 road between Mount Frere and Mount Ayliff in the Transkei.

"We buy new earthmoving equipment in two main ways," Derick adds. "Should an excavator reach 15 000 hours of service we'd sell it and replace it, although we keep our ADTs for longer and have one Bell B25D ADT that has given us 30 000 hours of sustained service. The other way of acquiring new equipment is when we land new contracts, which has been the case of late, and we knew we'd need to beef up our fleet of excavators."

Rumdel's choice of excavators fell on three new Kobelco SK220XDLC-10 Excavators of which one was delivered in August 2023 and two more in October the same year.

"The reason for staying with the Kobelco brand is simple and is the result of the great production we have enjoyed from our Kobelco SK380XDLC-8 machine along with the long relationship we have with Bell Equipment, the distributors of Kobelco equipment in South Africa, and the subsequent excellent technical backup."

Two of Rumdel's new Kobelco SK220XDLC-10 Excavators are being deployed on the N2 road project between Mount Frere and Mount Ayliff with the third used on emergency slope repairs on the R61 road between Mthatha and Port St. Johns. All three of the new excavators load excavated material into Bell ADTs as well as other tasks that come with reducing slopes and digging and backfilling trenches.

"Apart from the machines' robust design and build, a few other criteria also came into play in our decision," Derick explains. "Bell Equipment's pricing was very competitive, and we saw this as adding to the Kobelco being good value for money. Then there was a 36-month/5 000 hour warranty as standard plus another big value-add in a 12-months or 1 500-hour maintenance plan that would normally have been an additional cost. Bell Equipment, through its Sales Representative, Anthony Enslin, made it an irresistibly good offer."

Derick relays that the Rumdel excavator operators on the new machines report that the controls on the new Kobelco machines with the -10 designation seem far more responsive than those on the older -8 designated model, which reduces operator fatigue and enhances productivity.

"We, as a company, have come a long way with Bell Equipment and we believe they, as a supplier of

choice, understand our business and the challenges we face," Derick says. "What gives us confidence is Bell Equipment's willingness to share important data like comparative fuel figures about other equipment and the company's parts holding and response times, which are always improving, and that in turn reduces our downtime when essential servicing or repairs take place."



Bell footprint and service keeps Quicksilva Burcon coming back for more

A leading plant hire company in the Western Cape believes its competitive edge lies in the fact that it allows its clients to scale up or down in their choice of yellow metal equipment without shelling out capital themselves. And, running equipment that is younger than six years means that those clients have access to modern and well-maintained equipment that promises maximum uptime.

The plant hire company that is now called Quicksilva Burcon Plant Hire was originally established in Cape Town in 1992. Joao da Silva, a 30-year plus veteran of the steel construction and plant hire industry mostly in Gauteng, bought the business in 2017 and changed the name to reflect his family's involvement.

"At the time that we bought the business, the plant fleet sat at 20 machines and over the last seven years we've grown both the business and the fleet, which now numbers 70 machines," Joao says when we meet in the company's contemporary styled offices in Blackheath, Cape Town's light industrial area. "We're much more than a normal run-of-the-mill plant hire company as our different divisions renting equipment for earthmoving, steel construction, mobile crane hire, and heavy haulage transport show, and we offer solutions to challenges our clients may face.

"During the last two years, we've moved from renting to clients working in normal construction to those involved in renewable energy on wind and solar farm projects, battery plants, road infrastructure, water reticulation and wastewater treatment projects," he adds.

"We've found that post-pandemic, clients are focusing on their core strengths. Road construction companies, for example, will commit capital expenditure on acquiring their specialised equipment while hiring everyday equipment and experienced operators on demand from us."

Quicksilva Burcon's plant, with its distinctive blue painted wheel rims, can be found on construction projects across the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape provinces. "Our plant is known in the vernacular of 'blou wiele' (blue wheels) and we're happy with that as it distinguishes us as a brand," Joao says with a smile.





Known for its versatility, with its front and rear loading and digging buckets, the backhoe loader generally forms the backbone of any plant hire company worth its salt and here Quicksilva Burcon makes a definite statement with 55 such machines. What further distinguishes Quicksilva Burcon's backhoe loader fleet is that almost the entire fleet stems from one manufacturer, namely JCB.

"There is a very good reason that we run only JCB 3CX and 3DX Backhoe Loaders and that is because it's a durable, well-designed and well-built machine that is ideal for our conditions," Joao says. "We offer machines with standard buckets and forks as well as hooks on the buckets, which are handy when doing pipe-laying."

Quicksilva Burcon's clients have also come to realise how versatile a JCB 540-170 Telehandler can be, as seen in the number of these machines having doubled from five to 10 in a short while. "These JCB Telehandlers are very stable, even on rough terrain, and their versatility is proven every day with a varied range of attachments, such as forks for lifting pallets, a standard bucket or a special concrete bucket, an auger for

drilling holes in the ground or a man-cage, making them very popular with a growing number of clients," Joao says. "The 17-metre boom can reach to most places with a load and do it safely."

This is not the end of Quicksilva Burcon's JCB fleet as the company also uses a range of JCB Excavators from the medium-sized JS205 20-ton and JS140 14-ton

to the compact Kobelco SK55SRX-6 5,5 ton machines, with the latter proving very popular in the agricultural and residential markets.

Joao has instilled in his staff that preventative maintenance is the key to the longevity of equipment. "Despite our equipment working hard and offering sound returns on investment, we still believe that having a machine deliver at least 12 000 hours of service is a workable principle. For this to happen good maintenance regimes are key," he says. "We have three full-time mechanics, of which two have achieved the highest standard as 'red seal' Earthmoving Technicians, and we're keen to engage with the likes of Bell Equipment about training apprentices.

"Having Bell Equipment as the South African distributor for the JCB brand has only been positive for us. The

brand and Bell Equipment's wide footprint of branches across the areas where our machines are deployed gives us the confidence to see our equipment, especially the many JCB machines, work in distant places."

Being able to speak to someone within a supplier's business is also important to Joao and his staff. "André Jordaan is our one point of contact into Bell Equipment, and should he not have the answers to the questions we ask, we know that he always makes the effort to find out and gets back to us promptly – a very reassuring thing," Joao says. "In the long run, this helps us in offering the best value to our clients and not necessarily at the cheapest price only. We are after all a solutions-driven business and with the support of suppliers like Bell Equipment, we firmly believe that nothing is impossible."



(From left): Bell Equipment Sales Representative, André Jordaan, and Quicksilva Burcon owner, Joao da Silva.

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Bell1962

Master Drilling customises ADT as a drill rig carrier

In much the same vein as Bell Equipment establishing itself globally as an innovative company that custom designs mechanical products to meet customer needs, a fellow South African company, Master Drilling, has established itself as one of the largest rock boring and drilling services providers in the world.

With its head office in Fochville, in the North West Province, Master Drilling operates all over Africa and South America and has a presence in the US, Canada, Australia, India, Turkey, China, Russia and France. The company, founded in South Africa in 1986, is focused on delivering a fully mechanised range of services to the mining, infrastructure, and energy sectors.

“Master Drilling is known for its innovative approach in tailor-made designs coupled with cutting-edge technology to provide solutions to the challenging environment it often finds itself working in,” says Gerhard Pretorius, Manager: Master Drilling Project Office.

“It was with one such challenge that we, in 2019, started work on a concept of a mobile drill rig capable of carrying interchangeable tools to work underground.”

The basic concept was that Master Drilling would mount a drill rig capable of drilling holes of between 660mm to 760mm in diameter, vertically upwards and at various variations up to 15 degrees forwards, backwards, and laterally with a technique called slot boring. With a different interchangeable tool, holes of the same size could be drilled downwards using down-reaming.

“As this was to be a custom-built rig for our own use, we were governed by strict cost structures and had to find a carrier vehicle of good quality, which was reasonably priced, to provide a robust and sustained service in an underground working environment,” he adds. “The risk of its design and build was entirely on our shoulders and that’s why the choice of the correct carrier vehicle was so important.”

Gerhard says that they approached Bell Equipment because it was a local company known for the robust design and build of its Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs). They approached Bell Equipment’s Sales Representative, Chris Botha, who directed them to David Ras, Bell Equipment’s Manager: Mining & Construction Specials.



"Our initial thought was to mount the drill rig on a Bell ADT chassis called a 'dock-spotter', a specially adapted 'binless' version of an ADT that was designed to work on harbour quays in Europe," Gerhard explains. "While this ADT's availability worked in our favour, we had to watch our costs and sadly had to make alternative arrangements to source a used machine. We are, however, grateful for the insight and advice we received from Dawid Ras and his team at the Bell factory in Richards Bay."

Master Drilling used a pre-owned Bell B30E ADT from Europe that had done 8 300 hours and was imported and brought to the Master Drilling project yard in

Fochville. The machine's higher-tiered engine made it suitable for use in the Northern Hemisphere, but the lower emissions of a higher tiered engine also makes it ideal for underground conditions.

Andre da Silva, a junior mechanical engineer with Master Drilling, takes up the story: "We removed the Bell B30E ADT's bin and lengthened the chassis to enable us to fit on all our equipment. We then adapted the cab to have the seat rotate through 180 degrees to enable the operator to face backwards. This we did without affecting the ROPS-FOPS integrity of the cab."

Touch screens were installed at the back of the cab for the operator to use when facing backwards for total control over the drilling process.

"Some of the other visible modifications we made involved changing the prop-shaft but retaining the Bell B30E ADT's 6x6 capability. We then replaced the hydraulic fluid tank with a cyclone reservoir as it was originally intended to serve the bin tipping but, with the bin removed, it was no longer necessary. We also modified the exhaust system to exit in the right front wheel arch and repositioned the catalytic converter."

Other add-ons see the Bell B30E now carrying universal hydraulic and electrical packs for different applications, which will make it even more versatile.

"We're also looking to lower the Bell B30E carrier to enable it to fit into general mining haulages and we're considering a lower profile tyre to do this," Gerhard adds. "An important factor to consider, though, is that as we deliver a service and not equipment as such, the development of this rig was successful in that we could do it within tight budget constraints. We're confident that our choice of a Bell B30E ADT chassis as a carrier was the correct one."

Both Gerhard and Andre report that simulation tests, where holes were drilled in granite blocks suspended in a steel rig using slot boring, proved successful but as with any prototype machine, especially those destined for the harsh world of underground mining, testing to the utmost continues.



Exeo loads up on JCB Backhoes and a Kobelco Excavator

The chief operating officer (COO) of a leading civil engineering and construction company in Cape Town believes his company achieves an ideal ratio between yellow machine ownership and rental by keeping plant and construction teams reading off the same page.

Exeo Khokela Civil Engineering Construction (Pty) Ltd, known in the trade as Exeo, was established in Cape Town in 1995 as Exeo Construction, but after a number of successful joint venture projects the company merged with Khokela Construction in 2004 to become one under the abovementioned name. The company's core business is bulk earthworks, pipelines, roads construction, concrete construction and the installation of services for township and industrial development.

In 2025, Exeo celebrates being in business for 30 years, which is seen as a significant milestone and a tribute to its founders, staff, and loyal clients.

"Being essentially a civil engineering company, you'd appreciate that we are fully mechanised, meaning that we have a substantial fleet of yellow machines that we use in fulfilling our core business of completing projects successfully," says Charles Cooks, Exeo's COO.

"We're currently involved in no less than 18 projects, and this places huge pressure on our own machine fleet but also that of the plant hire market, which is severely challenged at the moment, especially when looking for newer and more reliable rental equipment."

There is a consensus amongst many major civil construction companies in the Cape Peninsula currently that reliable hired plant is hard to find due to so much infrastructure repair that is ongoing after the devastating floods in 2023. This difficulty has not escaped Exeo either, resulting in the company turning to a supplier of choice to replace older equipment and add even more new equipment.

"While we still need our older equipment to do the grunt work, we have found that newer equipment returns better hours and, therefore, better productivity which justifies the newer equipment's purchase," Charles continues. "We don't have a strict hour-based replacement policy but we have found on average the sweet spot in terms of hours where we replace our diggers and excavators."

Exeo has bought its own lowbed transporter, which is proving a good investment with high utilisation and good availability. It is also more cost-effective than hiring such a service.

"We recently needed to add a new 20-ton excavator to our fleet as this size machine best fits the profile of the type of work we do whether it be bulk earthworks, the installation of services, digging box-cuts, or preparing excavations for platforms," Charles says. "I mention this specifically as the way in which our interest in this particular make and model of excavator was piqued, is a radical departure from the norm for us in that a similar model machine was sold to a local quarry and we saw a video of this machine on social media, which got us thinking."

The excavator Charles refers to is the Kobelco SK220XD-10 and this would be the first Kobelco model in Exeo's excavator fleet.

"Our initial apprehension of a radical change in the brand of excavator that we've been used to was quickly overcome by the fact that Kobelco Excavators are distributed and backed by Bell Equipment, and we have such a solid business relationship with Bell Equipment's Sales Representative, André Jordaan, that goes back many years," Charles says.



"We feel strongly that solid relationships in business are of the most important elements that maintain mutual trust, and this applies to that between suppliers like Bell Equipment and ourselves, and again between us and our clients," **Charles Cooks, Exeo COO.**



"We, therefore, had the assurance that if anything should go wrong, André and his product support and technical teams were a mere phone call away as that is the type of relationship we've enjoyed with Bell though André."

The Kobelco SK220XD-10 Excavator has been deployed on the site of a new low-cost housing project being developed at Morreesburg in the Western Cape's Swartland region. Here the machine, fitted with a narrower trenching bucket, is digging trenches in hard soil for the installation of services. Despite the challenging conditions, it's returning average fuel consumption figures of 13,8 litres per hour, which is expected to improve as the machine builds hours.

There was, however, no change in Exeo's brand of backhoe loader when they needed to replace aging equipment and enlarge their fleet, as in August and September 2024 they took delivery of two new JCB 3CX Plus machines in each month respectively. Three replaced older machines and one has expanded the fleet, which now numbers 14.

"Here again André forewarned us of a possible price increase on the new model JCB 3CX Backhoe Loaders and saw to it that we received the best possible pricing," Charles adds. "He needn't have done that,

but he too clearly values our business relationship above that of purely money and knows that we're particularly loyal to the JCB brand as it goes to show why.

"Our relationship with, and loyalty to, Bell Equipment goes beyond mere pricing and great quality machines as Bell is a company whose mechanics don't shirk away from servicing or repairing our equipment on weekends when the need arises, or the pressure is on, and this we appreciate."

Charles mentions that their JCB Backhoe Loader operators speak highly of the responsive controls on the newer machines, which leads to less operator fatigue. This is where the importance of the plant and construction teams' mutual understanding of the cost and hire ratios come to the fore, helping to balance the books and ensure profitability.

"We feel strongly that solid relationships in business are of the most important elements that maintain mutual trust, and this applies to that between suppliers like Bell Equipment and ourselves, and again between us and our clients," Charles concludes. "Proof of this could be seen when, during the COVID pandemic and nationwide shutdown, we did not have one machine left standing in our yard as they were all still deployed with our loyal clients."



André Jordaan (Bell Equipment Sales Representative), Stephan Marais (Bell Cape Town Branch Manager), Dirkie Frylinck (Exeo Plant Manager), and Charles Cooks (Exeo COO).



JCB 3DX Plus kickstarts Skhothahla Construction’s yellow metal fleet

The daunting challenge of having to build one’s own house would seem insurmountable to most, but for a former English teacher it turned out to be the motivation that set her on an exciting new career path.

Zandi Tyibilika hails from Peddie in the Eastern Cape Province and, after completing matric, her tertiary education allowed her to become a teacher. “I taught Geography and English in Gqeberha for 12 years and during that time I bought my first house,” she says. “It had an awkward location though, as it sat on a slope, and in due course I sold it.”

An opportunity arose to buy some land in the Gqeberha suburb of Kwadwesi, which, as luck would

have it, turned out to be a double plot. Zandi bought it with the intention of living on one plot and developing the other for sale later.

“This was during the early 2000s and there was a real shortage of houses for sale, which prompted me to decide to build a house myself,” she recalls. “This was, however, much easier said than done, as I couldn’t obtain a loan from any bank to fund the construction, as they foresaw too much of a risk.”



Zandi Tyibilika (left) owner of Skhothahla Construction and Investments with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Tom Swartz.

However, help was at hand should Zandi register as a construction company, which she did. She also obtained a National Home Builders Regulatory Council (NHBR) certificate through a family friend, which allowed her to register with construction industry bodies and obtain a bank loan.

"Building a house wasn't a totally foreign concept to me as I had made alterations to our family home soon after I had started earning a salary, as was our custom. There, I had learned enough to get me feeling relatively confident about building my own home," she explains. "But it wasn't easy, and I spoke to a lot of people in the construction industry, picking up tips on the best way to build foundations, walls, roofs, ceilings, as well as how to do plumbing and electrical installations."

In 2008, Zandi registered her company, Skhothahla Construction and Investments, which is derived from her clan name, and soon embarked on building projects in both the public and private sector. The

company started with a Construction Industries Development Board (CIDB) rating of 2 and currently proudly holds 6GB, 4SQ, 3CE and 2SO.

"We get involved in all aspects of construction from site clearing, digging of foundations, bricklaying, plastering, plumbing, roofing, painting, and fence erection," adds Zandi. "You would appreciate that many building projects require mechanisation of some sort and, to this end, we always had to hire in equipment from plant hire companies, which was and still is expensive. It certainly cuts down on profits and, at times, production when older equipment that may seem cheap to hire breaks down or is not available when you need it most."

At the beginning of 2024, Zandi took the decision to start building her own fleet of yellow machines to ensure availability and cut down on expensive plant hire costs. She researched the market thoroughly and, when speaking to colleagues in the industry, one brand of backhoe loader stood out, that of JCB.

"I had heard the JCB name so often and people were telling me how this was the market-leading brand of backhoe loader due to its durability and ease of obtaining parts. I then found out that JCB machines are distributed in South Africa by Bell Equipment, which certainly sounded familiar as a true South African brand. This led me to meet Tom Swartz, Bell Equipment's charismatic sales representative here in Gqeberha, who gave me the welcome news that a leading banking group was making it easy to obtain financing on JCB equipment with preferential rates as a bonus," Zandi says smiling. "With Tom holding my hand, so to speak, and advising me on the correct and most versatile machine for our applications, it was an easy task to decide on the JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader, which we took delivery of in February 2024."

Zandi was assertive in her financing arrangements, putting down a 50% deposit, she realised a reduced interest rate from ABSA and JCB Finance, and was able to finance the balance over a mere 24 months as, by her own admission, she hates owing people money.

"Having our own JCB Backhoe Loader has made an immediate difference to many of our projects," Zandi adds. "We have two operators for the machine and

make use of a truck owner with a roll-back truck to move the Backhoe Loader to outlying sites that are too far to drive to."

The adage 'nothing succeeds like success' rings true for this dynamic entrepreneur when one looks at Zandi and her company's impressive track record with seven figure contracts being the norm. "Apart from doing work for local, provincial and national government institutions, we get excited when we're asked to work in the private sector as well, such as a project involving a nationwide makeover for an international fast-food chain."

Skhothahla Construction and Investments has been pre-approved to add more yellow machines to its first JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader, which will no doubt have the downstream effect of speeding up the completion of more building projects in the Eastern and Western Cape where they ply their ever-improving trade.

So, the next time you sit in a queue at a vibrant fast-food outlet waiting for a Quarter Pounder and a McFlurry, consider that the revamped building looks so good because an erstwhile English teacher got to build her own house!



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