

Goedehoop Bricks build on Bell

Sixteen years is a long time in anyone's language. To have mechanical equipment running for that length of time without an engine overhaul seems nearly impossible to contemplate. This is however the pleasant reality for a highveld brick-maker in the Carolina area of Mpumalanga.

Kobus Liebenberg learnt the craft of brick-making from his father-in-law Johan van Tubbergh. Van Tubbergh had bought an ailing brickyard from a local farmer on the farm Goedehoop, north of Carolina. Armed with mining experience from decades on the local coal mines, Van Tubbergh

and he taught me everything he knew. We built a wonderful relationship which has lasted to this day, employer and employee by day and father and son after hours," he says.

The early days of Goedehoop Bricks saw a labour-intensive operation with green bricks moved out to drying areas by means of a hack-

back-breaking and risky as many green bricks were lost due to damage sustained through handling.

Not much has changed as far as the basic production process of brick-making is concerned. Clay is mined from a pit across the road from the plant using an original Kato excavator. Mining takes place to a maximum depth of 4 metres which makes for less steep and shorter ramps. The clay is transported to the plant using a Bell 1206 tractor with a 9 cubic metre dump trailer. This trusted tractor-trailer combination does 25 loads a day over the two kilometre haul distance.



set about carving a new life for his family in the early 1980's and was soon joined by his new son-in-law, Kobus Liebenberg who had married his daughter Irma. Van Tubbergh retired in 1997 and since then Goedehoop Bricks has been run by Kobus and Irma.

Kobus relates the early days of Goedehoop Bricks: "My father-in-law was a hands-on kind of guy

line system consisting of an agricultural tractor towing four small trailers with small wheels. Hand labour would be used to pack the trailers in the brick-making plant, unpack the trailers outside and repack the trailers with dry bricks that were to be burnt in the clamp. A clamp differs from a traditional kiln in that green bricks and burnt bricks are stacked to create a structure for a coal fire. This process was both

At the processing plant, the clay is crushed, coal dust is added and ultimately water as well before the clay is extruded in a vacuum chamber and cut into brick-sized green blocks. The green bricks are dried in the Highveld air under sheets of black plastic sheeting for around 14 days before being burnt in coal-fired clamps for a further 14 days. A green brick will lose about half a litre of water during its drying time.

Goedehoop makes two types of bricks: stock or commons and semi-face bricks. Most of their bricks have a reddish brown colour which distinguishes them from the yellow bricks that are endemic to the area and made by other manufacturers. At times their

bricks also boast a bluish tinge that is caused by the iron-oxide in their clay. They distribute most of their bricks themselves using a fleet of eight rigid trucks and delivering as far as 250 kilometres away.

The major difference in the operations at Goedehoop has been in their material handling. Kobus tells us why: "Way back in 1983, we were surprised to hear that Bell Equipment from Richards Bay wanted to test their new forklift at our factory. This was the prototype of the three-wheeler we know today and we were so impressed that we bought two machines the following year," he says.

Two years on from that decision saw the Goedehoop Bell 220 Forklift fleet being doubled in size. Faith in the marque saw Goedehoop buying a Bell L1706C Front End Loader in 1998 to load the clay into the factory from a stockpile, at the start of the brick-making process.

Then a mammoth sixteen years on from their first purchase saw the two original Bell 220 Forklifts undergoing engine overhauls. Kobus lauds their performance and reliability: "The three-wheeler is the only machine that can handle the uneven terrain that we work on and these machines just never gave up."

The year 2003 brought another two new Bell Forklifts into the Goedehoop fleet, this time 120 models. Admitting to not keeping fuel figures as up to date as he should and rather just getting on with the task at hand, Kobus does concede that the Bell 120 Forklifts are more economical to run than their Model 220 cousins.

While the Bell Forklifts are used to move green bricks, Goedehoop has dedicated a new machine to serve only the clamp. This time they have opted for a Bell Versalift because of its bigger carrying capacity and longer reach to stack the green bricks higher up on the top reaches of the clamp.

Constant daily service and lubrication attention keeps Goedehoop's Bell-branded material handling fleet healthy. Mechanical availabilities average out at around 80%. They're also happy with the service they receive from the Bell Equipment Customer Service Centre in Middelburg and are complimentary about the staff and service technicians.

Employing 140 people, Goedehoop works a nine-and-a-half hour day, five days a week. They believe in looking after the environment in which they earn their keep and once their clay mine has been exhausted in about 15 years' time, they will have turned the mining site into a dam.

Kobus Liebenberg is adamant that they will keep supporting Bell Equipment as the relationship has been reciprocal: "We're as proudly South African as Bell are and look forward to a long and happy working relationship in the future."

Left: Bruce Brown (Bell Equipment Sales Representative - Middelburg) with Irma and Kobus Liebenberg (Goedehoop Stene), standing alongside a Bell Forklift.

