



MIVAMI MAKES A STRONG INVESTMENT IN BELL EQUIPMENT

If milk is good for you, then the experience gained from its distribution should also have a positive influence on one's business sense. This has certainly been the case for the owner of a construction company based in Gauteng.

Way back in 1986, Ruby Mphahlele secured a contract to distribute milk and other related dairy products for one of South Africa's leading dairy producers, in what was then called Garankuwa, an area in the north of Limpopo Province. From humble beginnings, he built up his business to involve 20 8-tonne refrigerated trucks running seven days a week. "It was good business and run on a cash basis but after several years I was tired of the stress and thought, as I had all my eggs in one basket, I should start looking around for an alternative," he tells us.

An engineering friend based in South Africa's Northwest Province suggested that as he already had the experience of operating a fleet of trucks successfully, he should consider buying a fleet of tipper trucks that he could in turn hire to the provincial government of the Northwest Province for their infrastructure development. "I knew nothing about tipper trucks but set out to learn, and quickly," he says. "In 1993, I bought four 6-cubic metre tipper trucks which were hired to the Department of Transport of the Northwest Province and soon after that, two 10-cubic metre tipper trucks for the same purpose."

Mphahlele's tipper trucks were used to haul gravel for road maintenance and his experience of successfully managing a fleet of trucks stood him in good stead. "There were many other operators vying for space in this market but they were hampered by having old equipment that frequently broke down," he explains.

"My friend then suggested that I tender for the actual job of undertaking the re-gravelling of rural roads as opposed to supplying only transport, and helped me to complete the necessary tender documents."

"I was fortunate to land two contracts of R6 million and R4 million respectively but what I really needed at that time were graders, tractor-loader-backhoes (TLBs) and rollers," he adds. "The plant hire industry was pretty hostile towards an emerging contractor and hire companies wanted their money upfront."

Mphahlele had named his company Mivami Construction with its road-building arm called BBMM Roads Construction. Fortunes changed rapidly for Mphahlele and his company when at the end of its 1997 financial year, the Northwest Province's Department of Transport paid him R1,5 million in advance for a contract he was to undertake. "Suddenly I was the good guy in the business when I could pay my suppliers in advance as well," he smiles. "There was even enough left over for me to buy a TLB and a used grader."

Successful completion of projects, on time and on budget, brought more work and during 1999, Mphahlele saw the need for Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs) in his projects and bought four new Bell B20C ADTs and two used B20C ADTs, which were subsequently converted into 18 000 litre water tankers. "Those Bell ADTs were, and are still, simply the best," says.

"We used them extensively on our road-building projects and they hauled material sometimes as far as 15 to 20km at a stretch, over some really tough rural terrain. We still have five of the original six."

"But sadly, Bell Equipment and my company lost touch until November 2008 when I had a call from Bell sales representative, Thabo Semono," he says. "The first thing I did was blast the poor fellow for losing contact with us although it was not of his doing."

It would seem though that the renewed contact between the two parties has had a positive spin-off for both as in January 2009, Mphahlele's companies took delivery of two Bell 770D Graders and a Bell 315SJ TLB. Towards the middle of 2009, the companies took delivery of five Bomag BW65S Walk Behind Rollers. Explaining his companies' decision to buy Bell 770D Graders, Mphahlele is quick to point out that general consensus among those in the know is that value for money coupled to performance puts the Bell 770D Grader at the top of its class. Added to these facts is an average fuel consumption of around 17 litres an hour in medium application, which does not do much damage to bottom line profits.

Mphahlele by his own admission loves to operate in the provinces with a more rural flavour although he has obtained a lot of work in Gauteng as well. "We learnt our trade in the Northwest Province and I still have a strong affinity for it as well as the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces," he says. He also plans to work in the Free State soon.

With his expanded geographical target market in mind, we asked Ruby Mphahlele whether he would consider investing in more earthmoving equipment manufactured and serviced by Bell and he answered: "Absolutely. Bell Equipment takes us seriously and we are blessed that they have knowledgeable sales representatives who know our business. On the service side, their response times are good and their technicians are thorough, giving us maximum uptime on our Bell Equipment."



Tel: +27 11 928 9700

E-mail: bellparts@bell.co.za / usedparts@bell.co.za

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