

P&J Botha Transport garners benefits of standardisation

P&J Botha Transport, in its quarter century of operation, has grown from a one-man one-truck operation to a respected member of the IMPERIAL Logistics group. It runs SA's largest fleet of International 7600s

P&J Botha Transport started life in 1986 as a small family operation running trucks cobbled together from whatever components could be sourced. This year, as the organisation celebrates 25 years in business, P&J Botha is part of the IMPERIAL Logistics group and runs an impressive, self-contained operation with what may be SA's largest fleet of 7600i Internationals.

Its blue chip client base includes Mittal Steel, Exxaro, Scaw Metals, Aveng, Highveld Steel & Vanadium and Cargo Africa. Initially the company specialised in steel transport, but has subsequently diversified to include mining and FMCG-related products.

As well as operating throughout SA, P&J also covers neighbouring territories Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland. At one time P&J Botha vehicles travelled to Luanda in Angola

(raising a few eyebrows in the process), although the improved functioning of the port reduced the need for the epic journey as that business has shifted to shipping.

On starting up, MD Alwyn Botha says: "We'd get a cab here, chassis there, engine somewhere else, diff – and build the vehicle until it ran." When a vehicle reached the end of its lifespan, it was simply rebuilt, using the same principles.

That philosophy obviously spawned a great deal of diversity in the P&J fleet. Alwyn says the yard has housed an array of vehicles over the years, including ERF, Ford Louisville, Oshkosh, a Kenworth, old MANs and even SA's sole Ford LTL. Maintenance on such a diverse fleet proved a nightmare, though – as did spares holdings.

Now, however, the 55-strong fleet comprises 10 International 9800s,

purchased in November, 27 International 7600 bonneted truck tractors, a handful of MANs along with one Peterbilt, plus a variety of smaller rigids, including Renault and MAN. The 9800s rack up between 18 000 and 20 000 km a month, travelling mainly to the eastern Cape. The rigids are deployed mainly for local operation on client sites.

There are compelling reasons for Botha's decision to standardise on International: "The trucks are well built to suit African operating conditions. Spares are readily available throughout South Africa and in neighbouring countries. The 7600 offers very good tri-axle operation – it's reliable and fuel consumption is good. They're powered by Cummins, which has been around for ages."

Botha also lists various benefits of standardising on one marque. It's easier on workshop staff, who have the



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expertise to service the vehicles they're dealing with. If a driver is absent, another driver can easily slot into place as he's familiar with the vehicle. Without the diversity of disparate brands, fewer parts need to be held in stock. There's one type of filter, one type of oil, for instance. Other advantages include the strong resale value the vehicles retain, plus the fact that the International company has such a well-established track record.

"There are definitely more benefits to having one brand than having different brands," says Alwyn.

P&J Botha has been accredited to conduct its own vehicle servicing, with vehicles sent to International just for 100 000 km services. All other maintenance and repair work is conducted in-house, which saves a great deal of time and money. A range of spares is held in stock, including engines, gearboxes and diffs. The 2 000m² workshop is fitted with two overhead cranes to assist in shifting gearboxes and engines. P&J's 40 000m² premises house an auto-electrical, brake lining and boiler shop for welding for trailer repairs. Tyres are managed using a Max-T Solutions programme, with a Max-T staffer on site full time.

There is also a 46 000 litre capacity fuel depot on site, as well as facilities for drivers to stay overnight if they're not on the road (P&J's Internationals are sleeper-cab variants).

P&J's build and rebuild strategy of the early days has made way for a fleet

replacement programme, which sees vehicles being replaced at the 800 000 to 1m km range (after about 44 months in some cases), with a trade back agreement in place for new vehicles.

In 2007, IMPERIAL bought a 70% stake in P&J Botha, and the Bothas welcome the security the move has fostered: "There's security in being part of big group," he says. "With so many companies in the group, someone is bound to have encountered any problem you're experiencing and is able to offer advice. In addition, IMPERIAL's integrity and corporate governance is excellent.

"IMPERIAL won the National Business Award for the best managed company in 2010, and in 2011 was the winner of the Mail & Guardian 'Greening the Future' Awards."

P&J's fleet operates at Euro 3 level and Botha comments that there is a strong drive throughout IMPERIAL to reduce carbon emissions.

Alwyn runs the business, founded by his parents, with brothers Pieter and Johan – the source of the initials in the company name. Alwyn joined the company ranks as a driver in 1992, on completing his schooling and military training – too late to be incorporated into the company name. Pieter, the Technical Director, is the technical expert responsible for assembling the trucks in the company's start-up days and has also been responsible for getting P&J's workshops accredited. He keeps an eagle

eye on costs per kilometre and also oversees P&J's strict maintenance schedule.

Johan is the company's Commercial Director and is also responsible for marketing.

Having worked his way through the ranks from driver to operations to MD, Alwyn knows exactly what his drivers are talking about when they approach him. It also means he won't fall prey to any tall stories.

He says that the company strives to be an ambassador for clients contracting P&J's services. The company also makes a point of keeping its customers informed at all times.

Located just off the R59, in Randvaal, P&J is within easy distance of Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark and Pretoria. It's on the main route to Cape Town from the south side of Gauteng. Botha estimates that P&J's location is well positioned for 80% of its business. P&J also maintains staff managing logistics on site at client facilities in Welkom, Pretoria, Wadeville, Alrode and Springs.

With P&J Botha planning to celebrate its 25th anniversary in November with a party, Alwyn highlights the role that the company's workforce – numbering nearly 100 now – has played in the organisation's continued growth: "Without the dedication and commitment of my staff, drivers and workshop personnel, business success would be impossible."



Pieter, Johan and Alwyn Botha: technical, commercial and managing directors of P&J Botha Transport



IMPERIAL Logistics acquired a stake in P&J Botha in 2007 and MD Alwyn Botha welcomes the security the move has fostered