



A classic BM Volvo tractor donated to Sandstone.

One of the tractor brands absent from the Sandstone Heritage Trust collection has been a BM Volvo although there is a T24 Volvo in the collection. Recently, however, this was corrected in 2022 with the donation of a mid-60s Volvo BM 600 from a farm in Memel in the Free State of South Africa. Built from 1967 to 1971, the 600 is fitted with a 3, 8 litre, 3 cylinder, Bolinder diesel engine developing 46, 2 kW (62hp).

Most people associate Volvo with high quality and super safe motor cars and the tractor range is also in the same high quality bracket. One would also expect that the 600 would be fitted with a Volvo engine but the Bolinder engine gives the clue to the history of BM Volvo which ultimately became Volvo BM.

AB Bolinder-Munktell (BM) was a tractor and machinery manufacturer founded in Eskilstuna, Sweden in 1932 through a merger between two companies, Bolinder and Munktell. In 1950 BM was bought by AB Volvo creating the brand, BM Volvo. In 1973 the company changed its name to Volvo BM AB and then in 1995 to Volvo Construction Equipment.

In early 2022, Sandstone received an enquiry as to whether we would accept the donation of a Volvo BM tractor, of course, the reply was yes! The unit was on a farm near Memel and collection was arranged by Chris Wilson, Curator of the Tractor Collection at Sandstone. However, fate was not on our side and the collection date coincided with the worst floods in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province of South Africa in living memory. Massive destruction took place throughout the province and the farm where the Volvo was had become a temporary island! Nevertheless the waters eventually subsided and the BM Volvo was collected by Chris Wilson and taken to his premises near Nottingham Road in Kwa-Zulu Natal for an inspection. An initial examination revealed a clogged fuel system leading to poor starting. After it has had a good check over by Chris, the BM Volvo will be moved to Sandstone.

The donation from the farm at Memel was facilitated by Mr John Illsley, the son of the Memel farmer who owned the BM Volvo. He takes up the story of the tractor and its donation to the Sandstone Heritage Trust collection.

"In the late 1960s this was part of batch of brand new BM Volvo tractors imported by the De Wet family of Standerton. This was after my uncles (John, Nicol and Lawrence De Wet) had travelled to Sweden to visit the factory. I have a clear memory of the gleaming new red tractors all lined up on my grandmother's farm Erdzak, just to the south of Standerton. This particular tractor that was donated to Sandstone was destined to be used on only two farms in its working life. The one was Erdzak and then after my father, Harry Illsley, went farming in the 1990s, it was bought, refurbished and used on his cattle farm, Klimaks, in the Memel district. These tractors were renowned for their reliability and their longevity, in part because of the quality of the steel used in their construction and the ruggedness of the design. These tractors were used to plough fields, pull bailing machines, tow trailers, run threshing machines and were even adapted for front end-loading.

The Illsley family have visited Sandstone Estate several times over the years and so when Harry Illsley retired from farming, his son John was keen to see one of the Volvos preserved as part of the Sandstone collection and so he facilitated this donation of the example which had been given to him to use as he saw fit".

Sandstone Heritage Trust extends a huge thank you, to both John and Harry Illsley, for the donation of the BM Volvo which will be carefully preserved in its new life at Sandstone Estates in the eastern Free State.

Our photo gallery shows the BM Volvo after its arrival at Chris Wilson's workshop in Kwa-Zulu Natal.