



FATS

ACHIEVING
AUDACIOUS GOALS





ACHIEVING AUDACIOUS GOALS

In the 20 years from 1992, the Harris sisters built their company from nothing to a R200 million organisation. CEO Caron Harris spoke to Ruari McCallion



Entrance to the offices

The year 1992 was one of major change in South Africa. Amid all the excitement about the release of Nelson Mandela and the progress towards majority rule, it might have been easy to overlook the activities of two sisters who were in the process of setting up a freight forwarding and transport services company. Twenty years on, it is hard to overlook what they have achieved: a R200 million services company that has established itself in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

The logo is eye-catching enough: it features a large lady carrying a container on her back, single-handedly, which reflects the name of the company, FATS (the initials stand for Forwarding African Transport Services). It could easily have been named CATS, as at the time of its establishment, businesses were required to submit alternative names; but FATS was the one that was selected. That is just fine by CEO Caron Harris, for personal, family reasons and because FATS is certainly an eye-catching name. It was a name that attracted attention to itself quite quickly for other reasons, too, because FATS was one of the first companies to actively market itself into Central Africa.

“Twenty years ago, everyone was afraid of Central Africa,” she says. Corruption was just one of the factors that gave other people pause for thought but to the Harris sisters, it was a region that simply could not be ignored—and nor should it be. They decided not just to venture where others were frightened to tread: they determined to

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Standard Electrical has recently completed its Performance Contract whereby it will deliver to Eskom 55GWH in savings over a 3 year period. Standard has performed retrofits across the parking lot basements of over 100 buildings replacing over 20,000 fittings and delivered to clients 50%-68% energy savings. Standard Electrical is proud to have partnered with Eskom on the First Performance Contracting roll out.

Standard Electrical is a well-established business which has been in existence for over 60 years, the company is involved in all facets of the electrical engineering and contracting field, specialising primarily in the commercial and industrial building industry.

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do so in a way that would set an example to the industry.

“Most freight forwarders do different parts of the business separately. We decided to do them all,” she explains. “What this enables us to do is to discuss problems before they happen, because problems do arise. We chose this approach because it was not easy: everyone else was doing what was easy; we came at it from the other end. Our objective is to look after the end user, from start to finish, as a one-stop operation.”

What the Harris sisters were trying to do was pretty ambitious, but they did have at least one advantage: the main port of entry to the landlocked countries of Central Africa is Durban. While there are other ports, nowhere else is as well-equipped or has the same level of port and transport infrastructure. “You can go through Dar-Es-Salaam, which is closer, but the port is very congested and there are major delays. And Beira is tiny in comparison with Durban,” Harris says.

FATS was launched with a capital of R24,000—R12,000 each—some experience, business discipline, vision and ambition. Caron's background is in

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Shippy Marketing is able to carry consignments of different weight to various destinations, both local and regional. Our wide range of vehicles varies from bakkies to 30-tonne trucks. Dedicated trucks for speedy delivery are available at competitive rates. We are highly experienced in movement of the following commodities: cotton lint; machinery and spares; maize (bulk and packed); and containerized cargo. We are proud of our relationship with FATS and wish them continued success in the future.

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Reception area at FATS

“WE HAVE BASED OUR ENTIRE EXISTENCE OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS ON DELIVERING HIGH SERVICE LEVELS”



PUTTING SMILES TO MILES

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Chita One Logistics is a South African registered company which was formed in 2010.

We provide cross border transport services on northbound and southbound into countries like Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We intend to expand our services into other African borders in the near future.

The company proudly owns 36 freightliner trucks (century class, Columbia, Argosy) and 36 trailers (sided and flat decks) enabling us to carry and move all kinds of loads with ease either as break bulk cargo such as fertilizers, steel coils, polythene, paper, agricultural products or containerised cargo e.g. liquor, groceries and electronic goods.

Our trucks are fitted with satellite tracking devices which allows us to add security to our clients' cargo at the same time also giving our clients up to date tracking reports of their cargo and the right turnaround of the trucks.

All staff come with a wealth of experience and their dedication to serve our clients effectively concurs with the long term vision of the company.

CHITA ONE LOGISTICS

Chita One Logistics became engaged with FATS in 2010 after the demand for vehicles to Malawi rose. After a few trips to Malawi FATS increased its confidence in our services and since then we have become an integral part of FATS, with an honest relationship built through trust. We have extensively moved large volumes of steel coils and paper loads from South Africa to Malawi and in the process have attained the experience in handling these commodities to FATS's satisfaction. In brief we are proud to be associated with FATS and Chita One Logistics wishes FATS well as it celebrates its 20th anniversary.
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accountancy; her sister, Elaine, had shipping experience gained at Rholog and other companies. Their focus is the customer, their strategy is service.

“The only thing we have to sell is communications,” she explains. “We have based our entire existence over the last 20 years on delivering high service levels. We are not the cheapest, but our

company is founded on the principles of communication and integrity: whether it is good news or bad news, we will give our customer the news.” They make sure the customer gets it as well: they do not place the onus on the customer to find out what is happening by tracking their delivery on a website: they actually email them personally. “This is a personal service. Customers should not have to find out for themselves; it is our responsibility to tell them.”

FATS, scoring Level 5 in Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment, now employs around 50 people and owns a warehouse and shipping depot. It tends to train its recruits to the necessary skills level, rather than importing expertise externally.



FATS building in Durban, South Africa

“WE ARE NOT THE CHEAPEST, BUT OUR COMPANY IS FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION AND INTEGRITY”



BIG on Projects into: Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia

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Transporting a bulldozer

“OUR BUSINESS IS ABOUT LOOKING FOR NICHES, FOR AREAS AND OPPORTUNITIES WHERE WE CAN OFFER SOMETHING SPECIAL”

“The reality is, this business is about people, and I am only one person,” Harris declares. “Our success comes from the people who work in the company.”

FATS’s largest markets are steel and paper but the company is also involved in project work, which it defines as the handling of abnormal loads, ‘out of gauge’ cargo, large structures and similarly unusual challenges. Paper is imported from Europe to Central Africa; steel is two-way traffic. Structural steel is exported to China, for example, with

specialist metals coming the other way. FATS makes a virtue out of dealing with the unusual. “Over the past two years we have been moving more towards project work, in areas like construction, energy and strategic investment to Central Africa,” Harris says. “Businesses in China are becoming our biggest partners. That sometimes means that margins are becoming smaller, so our business is about looking for niches, for areas and opportunities where we can offer something special.”

FATS’s knowledge of the continent’s infrastructure, as well as the end-to-end service it offers, represents a premium product. For example, if you have 1,000 containers to move and the apparently nearest and most convenient port actually has the capacity to unload only 10 per day, then you are going to have problems. “People don’t think of these things and that’s where we come in: we are about finding solutions,” Harris explains. “Customers don’t want to hear about what can go wrong but part of our job is to educate our clients—it is important to be aware of the challenges.” FATS’s task is to ensure that things go as smoothly as possible, that documents are where they should be in plenty of time, so cargoes

are despatched and therefore have the opportunity to arrive on-schedule. That’s what the company is doing now and it has ambitious plans for the future.

“We have set ourselves the target of being a half-billion rand company,” Harris says. “Our BHAG [‘Big Hairy Audacious Goal’] is to get there in two years. Our BAG [‘Big Achievable Goal’] is to get there in three years.” And if it achieves the achievable, all its employees will share in FATS’s success, with a large bonus. They will have earned it. **BE**

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