

Working with leading manufacturers helps Bridgestone stay ahead of the pack

For more than 20 years, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres has been the Australian distributor of Exactra Inc products, a leading Canadian manufacturer of valves and related components for off the road (OTR) tyres.

According to John Counihan, Bridgestone's Diversified Products Specialist, this relationship has enabled it to create industry leading solutions for many customers.

"As a solutions driven organisation, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres is constantly looking to solve problems for our customers and in some cases this means working very closely with the manufacturer," he said.

"Over the years we have developed a great relationship with Exactra and its people; we provide them with plenty of field knowledge and data and they re-engineer products to meet our specific requirements," said John.

Exactra can develop valve systems for specialised applications and its products are used in mining applications around the world. Valves are required on all OTR tyres from ultra size mining tyres to the smallest construction range.

Exactra's in-house technical expertise comes from Maurice Robitaille, who has over 36 years' hands on experience in the OTR industry.

Maurice was an employee of Bridgestone-Firestone Canada for 36 years before leaving to found Exactra in 1988.

His concept behind founding Exactra was that the valving industry was a niche market with little competition at the time.

In 2010 Bridgestone sold many thousands of Exactra products ranging from valves to hoses, pumps and gauges.

"An OTR tyre valve maybe small, but it is a critical element of the tyre wheel assembly because it maintains the vital inflation pressure," said John.

"If you have a poor quality valve which leaks, the tyre will start to deflate and excessively deform, which will increase tyre operating temperature – resulting in costly damage or even failure."

More recently, Exactra has also designed and supplied a new hydraulic valve and assembly machine which is now on trial at one of Bridgestone's larger branches supplying valving and valve extensions to major mines in central Queensland.

"This machine automates the assembly process, so it now takes a fraction of the time it used to take to manually carry out the valve assembly process," said John.

"Again recently, we worked with Exactra on a problem that arose with larger sized dump trucks, where heat being generated in the hubs caused a problem with standard hoses melting.

"Exactra proposed the use of steel-braided reinforced hydraulic hose; after experimenting with various brands of hose, Bridgestone PF0708 and PA1710-R hoses proved to be the most reliable under such extreme operating conditions. These hoses are an important element of the valve system for both inner and outer wheels.

EXACTRA
VALVE SYSTEMS

Display features
some of Exactra
product lines



He felt that there was a need to be able to supply the industry with an alternative source for valving, as well as being able to supply real field-experienced technical assistance.

Maurice's son, Marc Robitaille, joined the company about 16 years ago in the capacity of senior vice-president, and since then has been instrumental in bringing Exactra to its current level of world recognition in the OTR industry.

"A large percentage of the OTR tyres supplied by Bridgestone feature Exactra valves, and we refer any issues to the Exactra team; any problems and they are straight onto them," said John Counihan.

"This relationship has developed to the extent that many of the valves now being manufactured by Exactra incorporate market intelligence supplied by Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in Australia," said John.

"There have been a number of improvements over the years. For example, just recently, we had an issue with valves for grader tyres; the angle of the valve wasn't quite correct so we went back to Exactra requesting that the angle needed to be changed.

"Exactra responded to our request and quickly developed a valve specification to suit."

Exactra's product line isn't just restricted to OTR tyre valves, with other products including hoses, pumps and gauges.

"Working closely with Exactra, we solved this heat issue by using Super Large Bore (SLB) and Super Extra Large Bore (SXL) hydraulic steel-braided hose in the Bridgestone produced hose," said John. "This is just another example of how valuable collaboration can be between two major manufacturers who know their products and the business they are in.

"I'm sure there will be other opportunities to further improve our product offerings in the future," he said.

For complete solutions

BRIDGESTONE

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres Pty Ltd
223 Rookwood Road, Yagoona, NSW 2199.
Ph 1800 114 040. Fax (02) 9722 6199.

WEBSITE www.bridgestone-earthmover.com.au

EMAIL sales@bsem.com.au

For further information on any of the products or services covered in IMPRINT, please contact us at Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, or your nearest Bridgestone outlet.

IMPRINT

WINTER 2011

Focusing on the customer

Derek Steer Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' Bunbury (Western Australia) Branch Manager, typifies the company's approach to doing business: for more than 30 years he's been focused on customers, understanding their businesses and requirements as market demands change.

Derek joined Bridgestone in 1981 as a tyre fitter, before moving into internal sales and then into a role as a sales representative. He has been in his current role for the past nine years.

"I've seen radical changes in the business in that time," said Derek.

"From an internal perspective, I can remember how, when shipments were delivered, we'd manually write down the contents of the shipment, the stock and serial number and when you invoiced the customer – which were all hand written – you'd cross-reference the serial numbers and the like.

"Slowly the company has introduced computers and, although they are hard for us old timers to get used to, they have certainly made life a lot easier," he said.

Because he started as a tyre fitter, Derek pays particular attention to the 'coal face' of the business – where a lot has changed in the service environment.

"Take service trucks for example: it's like flying a plane these days. Many aspects of mobile tyre changing equipment can be controlled remotely, making it safer and more efficient.

"As an organisation, we are very focused on the safety and well-being of our staff and those of our customers, so we have made ongoing investments in our safety and technology, which are additional to our own processes and procedures."

Derek observed how dramatically the mining sector has grown in his time with the company.

"The way resources are mined today sometimes beggars belief," he said.

"When I started, the largest trucks were 35 tonnes and now there are 340



Derek Steer: for more than 30 years he's been focused on customers

tonnes-plus trucks operating; you almost have to ask yourself 'where's it going to stop?'

"For example, with increases in the size of trucks and increased payloads, tyre weight has gone from 500 kilos to a tyre that weighs 5.7 tonnes.

continued on page 2

Focusing on the customer *continued*

"You've got loader tyres now weighing 7.1 tonnes, and the cost of them is through the roof," he said.

"That's why Bridgestone has invested in the latest tyre handling technology to ensure our tyres are fitted safely and in perfect condition."

Derek said the supply of super large tyres is today one of the biggest issues facing his customers and the Bunbury operation.

"The supply issue has grown in importance over the last few years; it's a major issue for all of our customers.

"Because of that, we have worked hard to develop a strong base of loyal customers, and we support them in a number of ways to help manage this," he said.

"In recent years we have invested in on-site management, tyre programming, educating mine personnel on how to extend tyre life, and of course our tyre repair facilities, as this is such a strong area for us.

"We've also focused on greater efficiencies relating to wheel and tyre servicing and we recently developed and introduced the new Topy Smart Change Wheel system," said Derek.

"This enables you to basically change out a whole truck and not have to undo a single wheel nut.

"You can pull a front tyre off and fit it to a rear position so productivity is dramatically improved; it means a truck can be down for only a couple of hours rather than a full day."

Derek has developed long-term relationships with many of his customers

in the Bunbury region, which for him and his team is simply how business is done.

"Our branch manages the relationships with a large number of long-term customers, so it's about personal relationships and being sure we are on the ground for them.

"In our region, there is a strong concentration of coal mines, gold mines, Alumina mines, mineral sands, titanium and lithium, as well as forestry activities – all of which have their own different needs."

In his nine years as Bunbury Branch Manager, Derek has seen a large increase in tyre sales and services turnover – which has been managed with only a slight increase in staff, and while maintaining a strong commitment to safety.

"Safety has been a real focus across the mining industry in recent years and the safe handling of wheels and tyres is paramount at Bridgestone," he said.

"All our vehicles have industry-leading safety equipment and our team actually designed a tyre handling attachment that's unique to the industry," said Derek.

"Specifically designed to handle log skidder tyres, the attachment is fitted to a mobile crane, and it pretty much allows a service technician to change a tyre from the comfort of the cab.

"It's just another example of the 'Solutions Driven' approach that we at Bridgestone have to all areas of our business," he said.

Bridgestone seminars help make mining industry safer



Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres ran a series of six Underground Tyre & Wheel Safety Seminars throughout 2010 in the mining centres of Mt Isa, Parkes, Ballarat, Kalgoorlie, Perth and Orange.

The seminars were designed to help the mining industry understand its responsibilities as set out by the Tyre Maintenance and Tyre Repair Standards.

The focus of the day-long seminars was "how do the safety standards apply to you?" and covered topics such as:

- How to safely apply underground tyres
- How to safely apply underground wheels
- How to maximise tyre and wheel performance
- Safe management strategies to guide tyres and wheels through their life cycle

The seminars were positively received by the 100 plus delegates who attended. Delegates were pleased that non-biased information was presented, and that Bridgestone was an authoritative source of information in the industry. Similar seminars are planned for 2011.

New Managing Director: continued customer focus



Managing Director Takashi "Tony" Yokoyama

With a career spanning 30 years with Bridgestone, Takashi (Tony) Yokoyama has seen a lot of changes to the company and to the markets it serves. In this interview we get an insight into how he currently sees the business and what he expects to be the challenges ahead.

"I first joined Bridgestone in 1981 and have been working for the organization in a number of roles since then. My roles have always focused on the overseas operations of Bridgestone and my first overseas posting was to Saudi Arabia between 1984 and 1986, I then returned to Tokyo," said Tony. "Back then there wasn't a specific Off the Road Tyre department so the overseas operations were handling every type of tyre. The OTR division was created in 1989 and I have been in charge of OTR tyres since then."

With stints in South Africa and Indonesia and returns to the Tokyo head office as General Manager, Tony has kept a close eye on the Australian market so he had a good idea of what to expect when he was made the Managing Director in April 2010.

"In my role as General Manager of OTR tyres I was able to keep a close eye on the various markets. Of course Australia is a very important and valuable operation to our company and I was very pleased to be offered the opportunity to work with this organization," he said.

The Australian operation is a good 'business model' for other OTR businesses in our organization. Over the years it has developed a 'complete solution' for our customer base which obviously includes the supply of tyres, industry leading support and service and more recently a national tyre repair network. Importantly, we are now the national distributor for Topy wheels."

"We think of ourselves as a "Solutions Driven" business, we are always looking to deliver the right solution for our customers. Understanding the customer is one of the great strengths of the organisation and much of this is due to the experience we have in our staff, particularly in the senior management team with many members having been with the company for

a long time, some for over 30 years, there is no substitute for this kind of experience," said Tony. As Tony looks forward he can see a number of challenges for the business.

"There are external pressures, such as the high levels of demand for the raw materials and resulting cost increases that affect the pricing of our tyres. The supply of the giant tyres will continue to be an issue for our organization as worldwide demand for these tyres remains at record levels. Phase 3 of our expansion of the Kitakyusyu plant in Japan will come on line in 2013 which will add significant capacity, but the reality is there will be a supply issue even after this expansion is completed."

As for the domestic market Tony sees the national role as distributor for Topy Wheels, continued development and refurbishment of

facilities and ongoing safe work practices as the key focuses for the future direction of the business.

"Taking over the national distribution for Topy wheels was a very wise strategic move for the business. As a "Solutions Driven" organisation we are now able to offer the Topy Wheels as a key element of our product line up and in the last year sales of this product have increased dramatically," he said.

"Continued investment in our state branches will enable us to better respond to customer demands. We are committed to an ongoing investment program of upgrading our facilities on a national basis, which include investment in the latest technologies for our tyre and wheel repair and refurbishment facilities."

"The continued safety of all Bridgestone and our customers personnel remains a paramount issue and we will continue to invest in the latest technology, processes and techniques to continue our role as an industry leader in this area," he said.

"Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres will continue to focus on its Corporate Social Responsibility to ensure the company and its employees are committed to operating in a way that takes into account not only the financial implications of business decisions, but also the social and environmental impact it has on the community," said Tony.

"Head Office has been working on what we call 'The Bridgestone Essence', a series of statements that confirm the company's mission statement. Moving forward, it will be important for all of us to base every decision on the following fundamentals."

Mission

- Serving Society with Superior Quality

Foundation

- Seijitsu-Kyocho (Integrity and Teamwork)
- Shinshu-Dokuso (Creative Pioneering)
- Genbutsu-Genba (Decision-Making Based on Verified, On-Site Observations)
- Jukuryo-Danko (Decisive Action after Thorough Planning)