

## Mick Ryan: A 35-year passion for Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres

It wouldn't be contradictory to say that Mick Ryan has been steadfast in the continuous passion he has shown throughout his 35 years with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres (BSEM).

Back in July 1976, when Mick joined the Bridgestone organisation in Sydney as a field engineer, the now globally recognised brand was then not well known.

"It seems crazy to even think that in those early days we had to explain what Bridgestone was and where it came from," recalls Mick, who today holds the position of Executive Manager, Diversified Products.

"We had to explain that (Japanese-headquartered) Bridgestone was a quality tyre maker, manufacturing a range of high-performance tyres, including off-the-road tyres."

Today, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres is the leading off-the-road tyre supplier to the Australian mining and construction industries, it employs some 230 people and has sales described as "extraordinary" by Mick.

BSEM'S transformation is the result, Mick says, of more than 35 years of continuous work to deliver not only the type of product the company offers today, but also the culture, services and expertise that exist throughout the organisation.

"Now, both the global Bridgestone organisation and even our competitors recognise that BSEM is an excellent example of what an off-the-road tyre business should look like."

### **Where it began**

When Mick joined Bridgestone, American Off The Road tyre manufacturers such as Goodyear, General, Uniroyal and Firestone, along with the Japanese manufacturers Yokohama and Toyo and the Australian produced Dunlop tyres dominated.

In those early days, Bridgestone was being distributed to the major mining houses and construction companies through Japanese trading houses such as Mitsui and Marubeni.

Both companies were buying raw Australian products such as coal, iron ore and copper, and were able to establish trading arrangements from both supplier and customer perspectives.

Mick was invited to join Bridgestone as a trainee field engineer after working for eight years with Dunlop Motorsport and he had the good fortune to work with a Sydney-based engineer from Bridgestone Japan.

"Mike Hamaya, a world-renowned tyre engineer with great insights and understanding, was a very charismatic fellow and I was lucky to work for and be mentored by him for two years."

From the outset it was also clear to Mick that Bridgestone was founded on a "can-do" attitude.

"It's always been a part of the company's culture but it's more than that.



*Mick Ryan, 35 years with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres.*

"We ask the question of ourselves, 'it might be excellent, but is this the best we can do?'" he says.

"If we are able to provide a product and a service that's continually evolving and improving, then we are going to be several steps ahead of the competition, and that's how we've always looked at our business."

Back then, Australia's mining activities were mainly concentrated on iron ore and gold in Western Australia and coal and copper in the east.

"The type of machinery being used was very small by today's standards but none-the-less it was the best technology available at that time," Mick says.

Bridgestone too was an innovator, developing a tread compounding system

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## Mick Ryan's 35-year passion *continued*



*Mick is a strong believer that, when it comes to mining tyres, the secret of success can be found in failure.*

that allowed customers to order tyres according to their heat-resistant or cut-resistant requirements.

“Up until that point, our competitors were only selling the tread compound that was available from the factory on their season of production, so a North American winter meant they were producing a cut-resistant tyre for cold conditions and a North American summer meant they were producing heat-resistant tyres for their summer conditions,” Mick says.

“Because of our seasons and conditions, our usage requirement was the complete opposite, so it was very easy to see that Bridgestone had significant advantages by supplying products that suited the customer.”

Based on that product specification and the subsequent development of other tyres and sizes, Bridgestone quickly grew a very strong reputation, with its complete customer focus seeing its sales and expertise grow exponentially.

### **Developing the radial off the road products**

With the tyre at the core of Bridgestone's business, the company's major challenge – and advance – arose with the development and introduction of radial tyre technology.

“While Bridgestone's bias tyre technology was well-developed, the radial technology was in its infancy and many, many lessons had to be learnt in the design, construction, manufacture and application of that tyre,” says Mick.

From the beginning of radial technology, BSEM undertook to inform its customers as comprehensively as possible about using the product successfully and safely.

“We introduced seminars for customers and in those seminars we received a great deal of feedback and encouragement.

“In giving this core information to the customer, we gave them value and this confirmed that we were on the right track with the work we were doing in terms of providing a quality product.”

The seminars also gave BSEM insight into what customers required in terms of additional services.

### **Lessons to learn**

“The lessons we learned and continue to learn, are that whenever we make contact with the customer, we (BSEM) should be providing value to the customer, not only in terms of product and services, but also in terms of the quality of information we provide,” he says.

“It is important that the customer can rely on our information to address the issues at hand.

“BSEM staff should know as much about our product as they practically can, and certainly more than anyone else in the industry, including the customer.”

BSEM had always endeavoured to make comprehensive information available to its staff and it was up to the individual to take on this information and understand it clearly, in order to relate it to the customer when required, Mick says.

“The development of our training system, for everyone from our tyre fitters to our management team, enhances



*Over the years, Mick has presented many seminars for customers.*



our position and is certainly part of the way we continue to offer a service over and above anything the competition can offer."

### **Reaping the benefit**

Today BSEM has a reputation as an outstanding supplier to the mining industry, achievement which is the result of collective effort.

"In the future, the company will continue to develop better products, but it will be the collective knowledge of the organisation that will continue to make a difference for our customers," Mick says.

"This continual quest for more knowledge about our products is a key element of the service we are able to provide our customers."

He sees continuing to meet the needs of customers as their business demands change will be an ongoing challenge for the company.

"I was told from the outset that we haven't succeeded if we sell a customer one set of tyres; it's the third or fourth set that we should strive for.

"Only then do we know we are providing a valued service which is appreciated by our customers."

### **Into the future**

In Mick's opinion, the future prospects for the off-the-road tyre business are limitless.

"As a manufacturer, we are focused on our production capabilities which will enhance our ability to address the supply issue.

"Continued investment in research and development will ensure that our products will keep us one or more steps ahead of our competition," he says.

### **Watershed moments**

Naturally, Mick's time in the off-the-road earthmoving tyre has seen plenty of what he calls "watershed moments".

"There are too many to mention, but one example of Bridgestone's quest to understand the business and provide 'added value' to our customers involved tyre failure.

"Obviously, as products are being developed and used in an array of punishing condition, tyre failure is going to occur.

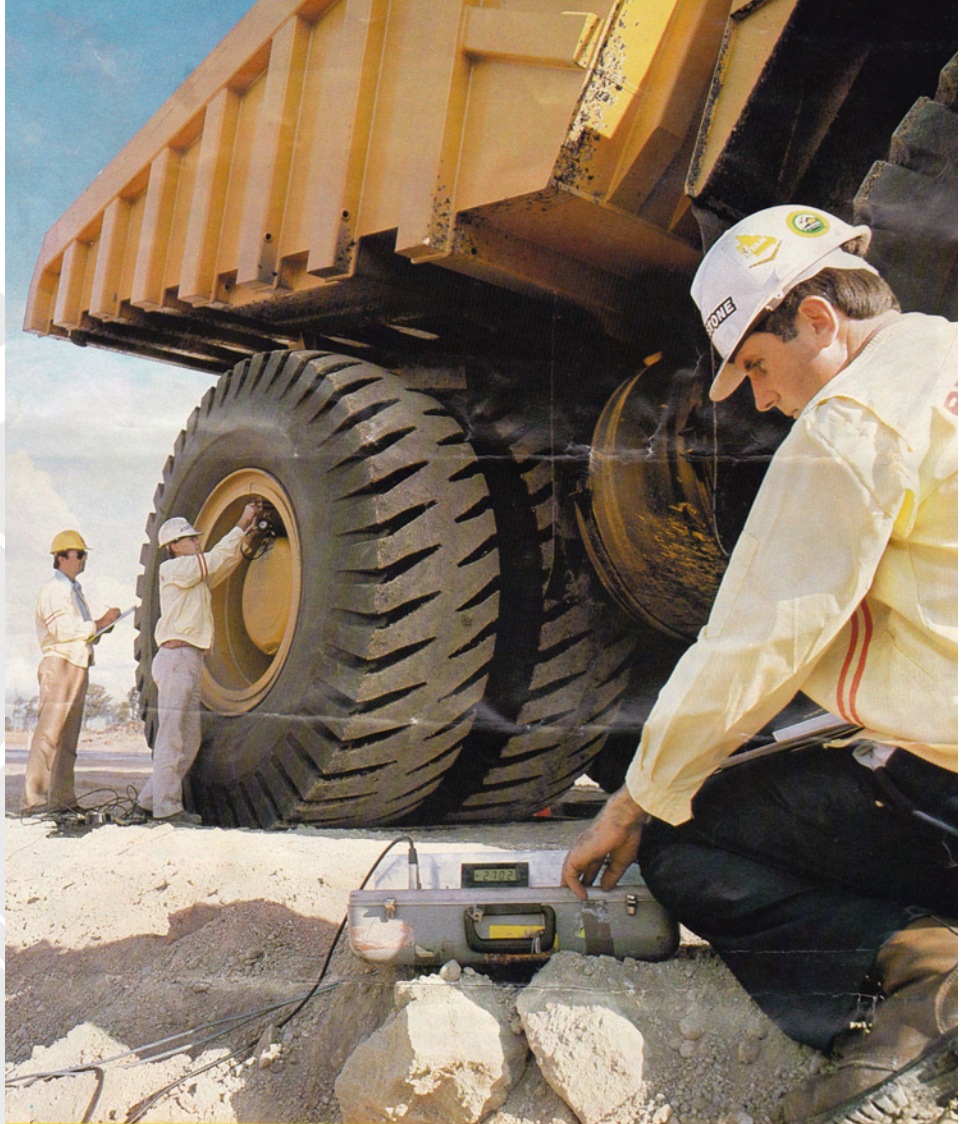
"From the early days, our customers reported that the approach from the competition was simply 'it's not our fault'."

Mick says that for Bridgestone such an approach wasn't good enough. The company would take the time and find out why the tyre had failed.

Of course this couldn't be done with a simple external observation.

"We would take the tyre and, with a knife and hammer, we would cut a section of structure at the point of failure to validate the damage and cause.

"After I had sectioned around 500 tyres, I had picked up a core insight as



*A tyre weight study, 1980s style.*

to why tyres fail and could go back to the customer and offer an informed position with a well-reasoned explanation."

In the early days, BSEM also pioneered heat and weight studies on in service tyres.

On-site testing day and night over a few days saw tyre temperature in various areas of operation measured while weight scales provided information on tyre loads. The outcome was a better understanding of tyre stress.

"This information was invaluable to our customers in terms of improved productivity and operational safety.

"And we gained an understanding of the customer's real application and knowledge-based requirements," Mick says.

"Such distinction of understanding takes the dialogue with the customer from the standard point-of-sale discussion, bringing it into the language of safety, application and management for the customer to use."

It is an observation typical of Mick's passion for the earthmoving tyre business and one he encourages those around him to adopt – and it's a passion he appears unlikely to lose.



## Continuing focus on safety

Safety is the number one issue facing the mining and resources sector and at Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, we are committed to eliminating areas of risk within our business.

The Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres Safety Steering Committee is examining all activities within the business that pose an element of risk to both our personnel as well as our customers.

Many of you will have been exposed to the "Remember Mate, Always Deflate" campaign, which is designed to remind everyone of the importance of totally deflating tyre rim assemblies before removal. The campaign consists of posters, stickers and hard-hat stickers that reinforce the message wherever tyres are being serviced.

This is the first in a campaign that is intended to highlight areas of risk within BSEM.

**Be Safe Everyone Matters.**



**"REMEMBER MATE  
ALWAYS DEFLATE"** **Be  
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**BRIDGESTONE**  
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**BRIDGESTONE**  
BRIDGESTONE EARTHMOVER TYRES

## Vale Don Green 1931-2011

It is with great sorrow that we advise of the death of Don Green on September 6 this year.

Don was one of the foundation members of the team that set up Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in 1982. In fact, Don insisted the company be named Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres as he did not believe the name Bridgestone Off The Road Tyres was distinctive enough.

In the mid-1970s Don joined Bridgestone Tyres' Queensland distributor, HM Russell, becoming Queensland manager for Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in 1982. He left the organisation in 1990.

Don brought to the company high business standards and ethics, encouraged a passion to serve customers' needs and proved an excellent staff mentor. He leaves a loving wife, six children and eleven grandchildren.

For complete solutions

**BRIDGESTONE**

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*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.*



*Don Green (centre) with Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, then Queensland Premier, at the opening of the new Brisbane facility in 1984.*