

TRANTER ROCK DRILLS

EYE TO THE FUTURE



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Jack Liebenberg, managing director of Tranter Rock Drills, talks to Jayne Alverca about leading the company through the latest phase of its evolution

Tranter Rock Drills may be a relatively new commercial entity, but it has an industrial legacy that stretches back more than half a century. The Rock Drills division of Boart Longyear, known throughout the South African mining industry by the acronym SECO, was originally founded in 1934 and has honed its expertise in rock drills and airlegs since the 1950s.

The business, consisting of Boart Longyear's percussive rock drills and hard rock tool product lines and all associated manufacturing operations, including the site at Roodepoort, was acquired by Tranter Energy and Mining Services (TEMS) in 2009. This black-owned and black-managed company, part of Tranter Holdings, is one of the most dynamic forces in the contemporary mining and energy industry in Southern Africa.

Tranter has already taken a lead role in a number of new broad-based groupings, including women, communities and employees, and can point to an outstanding track record in operational business skills and technical expertise. Founder Joshua Ngoma believes that Southern Africa's mineral assets have the potential to transform the regional economy and improve the lives of millions of people who continue to live in poverty.

In line with this vision, the managing director of Tranter Rock Drills, Jack Liebenberg, is now tasked with overseeing the next phase of evolution of the business. The SECO range of percussive rock drills and hard rock tools will be marketed far



Long hole drilling
using S36 machine

more extensively in both South Africa and other sub-Saharan African countries. Tranter Rock Drills also markets a range of its products via Boart Longyear to the rest of the world.

His immediate priority is to completely reinvigorate the aged plant legacy to create a solid foundation and springboard for future growth. “Some of our current plant dates back as far as the 1950s and for at least 15 years before Tranter acquired the business, there was no new capital investment. Now we need to increase capacity and productivity and we are making a quantum leap by investing in a total of 15 new machines simultaneously, rather than by dripping investment slowly into the company.”

Over the last year, the management team has carefully examined all the bottlenecks and Liebenberg is now convinced that a programme of investment across all operational areas, which includes milling, turning and grinding, as well as some specialised processes, can generate an increase in productivity of at least 70 per cent, as well as leading to all-round quality improvements.

Another tranche of investment will see Tranter Rock Drills move much closer to its customers. “Our major markets in



Employee testing S140 on shaft sinking jumbo



Testing of S140 on site

the South African mining belt are all at least 250 kilometres in distance from our headquarters; and some are 450 kilometres away from us,” he explains. “We intend to move much closer, with distribution warehouses located directly in the area of the mines. This will also give us the scope to become much more involved in the routine maintenance that all rock drills require for optimum performance. After 30 or 35 shifts

a rock drill must be taken out for maintenance, but this is not the mine’s core business. It has far more synergy with our own activities and is a service we are capable of undertaking to the highest OEM standards, rather than the sub-standard service which many smaller operators are currently offering.”

Liebenberg is keen to stress that the focus of the business is growing by listening carefully to what mine operators want from the equipment they purchase. “As an OEM supplier at the top of the chain, we know that this industry is extremely safety-conscious. Despite the huge improvements

that we have seen in recent decades, too many people are still killed and maimed in mining accidents and it is an absolute priority for us to collaborate with mine operators to reduce these incidents to an absolute minimum.

“Here at Tranter, we look at our products on a feature-by-feature basis to see how we can design out potential for accidents,” he continues. “Noise reduction is also a huge and important consideration for our design engineers. Most miners with a long working life have some level of hearing loss and the need to address this was identified by our predecessors. We have

35
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Maximum shifts a rock drill should undertake prior to maintenance

“OUR M2 SERIES OF ROCK DRILLS FAR EXCEED NEW LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF MINERAL RESOURCES FOR NOISE MUFFLING”

continued with research into this area and made many design improvements which are exemplified in our M2 series of rock drills which far exceed new legal requirements from the Department of Mineral Resources for noise muffling,” he says.

The new S25-M2, for example, offers significantly reduced noise levels, but is an exceptionally hard-hitting and powerful jackhammer designed for any development

end drilling operation where the operator can adopt a standing posture. Another similar product, the S215-M2, offers a special lightweight solution to environments where the operator must adopt a sloping posture. Tranter Rock drills has also developed the S36M drill for long hole drilling operations.

In another safety initiative, Tranter Rock Drills is also involved with advanced testing of an anti-finger crushing device for airleg

“OUR ENGINEERS HAVE COME UP WITH A DEVICE WHICH MAKES PINCHED FINGERS A THING OF THE PAST”



Delivering muffled machines to client

operations. Liebenberg explains that with standard airleg operations, it is far too easy for operators to have their fingers crushed by the swivelling joint that connects the pneumatic rockdrill with its associated thrust leg. “Our engineers have come up with a device which makes pinched fingers a thing of the past by designing out those parts which have the capacity to cause crushing injuries. Within the next three months it will be on the market and we believe it will dramatically reduce the current accident level which can lead to serious injury to operators and also to substantial lost time because each time a mine has an event of finger pinching injury, work is stopped at the face,” he explains.

“In general, the products we sell have been around for many years and we are working with an excellent range that has been trialled and is trusted across the mining industry,” Liebenberg continues. “Our challenge now is to move forward and gain a competitive advantage with incremental improvements to the drilling process, such as our unique noise attenuation technology and the anti-finger pinching device to create a safer and more productive workplace,” he concludes. **BE**

For more information about Tranter Rock Drills visit: www.tranterenergyandmining.co.za



Joshua Ngoma addressing Tranter Rock Drills employees



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