

WHITMORE'S

TRUE GRIT



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Whitmore focuses on cutting down wear in industrial applications – the tougher the job, the better Whitmore likes it

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Whitmore products exceed expectations no matter how adverse the conditions

When we spoke to Jack Ellis he was a long way geographically from Rockwall, Texas, where the specialized

lubrication company is based—though not so far semantically. The firm’s much traveled VP of sales found himself in Rockhampton, a small town on the coast of Queensland. Traveling with distributors in Australia is his favorite way of connecting with key coal mining customers in the Hunter and Bowen Valleys.

Whitmore, founded 120 years ago, deals in oils and greases; but not for the general automotive or light industrial lubricants markets. It has focused on and built an unequalled reputation in solving improbably difficult, high-wear harsh environment solutions. None is more challenging than mining, whose core business is pulverizing rock with large machines, though rail comes close. These are two of the industries whose engineers definitely know about Whitmore’s, though steel making, cement plants and any extreme pressure applications are further strings to its bow.

The bigger the brute, the more likely you are to find Whitmore. “Any place there is a large mining activity we are there. We love mining shovels, but we seem to have an affinity for large draglines!” Whether the client is after

coal, iron ore, copper or gold, there is always overburden to remove. Drilling, blasting and shoveling hard rock creates abrasive dust. “They need products that will help them sleep at night.”

Ellis’s last stop on this trip was China, where he has more than 50 distributors specializing in different industries, including power generation, a major consumer of Whitmore products. Despite the size of China’s coal industry there is only one dragline operating in the country, a massive Bucyrus 8750 machine deployed five years ago at the Hei Dai Gou open pit mine in Inner Mongolia.

The dragline operates practically non-stop in some of the harshest conditions on earth, moving millions of cubic yards of earth a year.

The Chinese wanted a gearless drive system to reduce maintenance and minimize break-downs, which can cost millions of

dollars in lost production time. Bucyrus Caterpillar is just one of the major OEMs for which Whitmore has developed special products and from day one the machine has been run on these. There are a number of potential dragline mining operations in Inner Mongolia and other provinces as the expansion in surface mined coal develops. The entire Chinese mining industry is watching developments at Hei Dai Gou Mine closely.

Whitmore is also looking at India,

5,000 HOURS

Testing undertaken for Drummond to gain OEM approval

South America and South Africa, all big beneficiaries of the current boom in mining. However the success of the company's approach may be best illustrated by what it has done in Colombia recently. The Drummond Coal Company of Birmingham, Alabama had been using Whitmore products for many years, but scaled down its US operations in the early 2000s and set up two large scale mines in Colombia operating over 1,500 pieces of equipment from haul trucks and shovels to bulldozers and draglines. Many of the excavators were made by Komatsu in Germany. For Drummond to gain OEM approval to use Whitmore lubricants required 5,000 hours of testing – more than a year of operation in practice. At the end of this test Komatsu field engineers were surprised to find the swing gear had worn by less than a thousandth of an inch. "They just couldn't believe the wear was not happening like it did in the past," says Ellis.

Needless to say, Whitmore lubricants are now specified on all these machines. And just 150 miles down the road at the Cerrejón mining complex, the largest coal mining operation in Latin America, Whitmore is supplying the mine's



Whitmore's mining lubricants are specifically designed for shovels and draglines

lubrication requirements through its distributor, Petrobras Columbia.

The close relationship that completes the triangle between the equipment OEMs and the mining companies rests on Whitmore's superior R&D, currently led by technical director Alex Medrano. His 30 years of experience in the lubricants industry has been instrumental in the development of new products for

the most demanding applications, according to Ellis. "We are good listeners. If customers have a specific problem with wear and we don't have a product to meet or correct that we will make it for them. We are very responsive." This has led

to a great suite of products customized for the big P&H, Bucyrus and Caterpillar badged machines as well as the Japanese and Korean manufacturers, but the response is customer driven too, he adds. "Not all mines and machines are the same. Sometimes it could be an acquisition where maintenance was an

1,500

Pieces of equipment used by Drummond in Colombia

issue – the company may not be able to replace all the equipment at once but needs products that help them get through."

Whitmore is growing, having recently added QHi Rail, a manufacturer and marketer of railroad lubrication equipment

based in Harpenden in the UK, to its portfolio. Whitmore also consists of the Kats Coatings division which provides protective coatings and sealants for equipment that needs protection from the elements while in use or in storage.

The Air Sentry division is also in the business of preventive maintenance. It's

“IF CUSTOMERS HAVE A SPECIFIC PROBLEM WITH WEAR AND WE DON'T HAVE A PRODUCT TO MEET OR CORRECT THAT WE WILL MAKE IT FOR THEM”



Replacement cartridge with isolator check valve



Hydraulic reservoir adapter kit



Guardian breathers come in three sizes

“THE FACILITY EXPANSION WILL MEAN WE CAN MEET OUR EXPECTED GROWTH IN DEMAND REALLY QUICKLY”

a leading developer of contamination control products that keep particulate matter and excess moisture from the headspace inside gearboxes and other enclosed vessels that hold lubricants, greases, hydraulic fluids, and fuels.

All of these divisions provide products or services of direct value to the mining

industry, and Ellis is expecting QHi Rail’s lubricant applicator system to be well received by his customers in the sector that operates rail spurs. After all, they have been proved in mainline situations where ‘strategic’ lubrication of rail-to-flange contact is a huge cost saver in maintenance and fuel economy

to the rail operator. Trains run with little friction on the straight but on a curve the pressures, and the potential wear, become extreme. Whitmore already supplies lubricants to Network Rail and London Underground in the UK. Now it has the ability to supply the applicator equipment too – and market it globally.

Rockwall, Texas has been home to the Whitmore manufacturing facility for 30 years. In 2006 the facility expanded by 50 percent but double digit sales growth in recent years has meant potential capacity issues. To address this, the company is doubling the size of the facility to more than 200,000 square feet – the expansion

will be completed in the summer of 2013. “We are always investing in new equipment and the latest technology and the facility expansion will mean we can meet our expected growth in demand really quickly.” Some of that growth will undoubtedly come as mining activity around the world expands, but it’s an important part of Whitmore’s business model not to rely too much on a single industry, he says. **BE**

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