

Taking Much Asphalt into the 21st Century : People and Technology

TECHNOLOGY and better trained and equipped people will differentiate Much Asphalt from other companies, says the company's chief executive, Phillip Hechter. The company has, he says, significantly changed direction investing heavily in state-of-the-art technology by building two world-class plants – one in Natal and another in Gauteng – and embarking on a concerted drive to upgrade its staff's skills levels.

"We are committed to our staff and believe we are demonstrating this by actively upgrading the skills of our people by introducing a learnership programme for all those involved in the manufacturing process," says Hechter.



Much Asphalt chief executive, Phillip Hechter.

A company training facility is also currently being established in Port Elizabeth where the company's operations director, Chris Lange – considered to be a leading expert in asphalt plant technology – will train key personnel on the new plants and the technology used in them.

According to Hechter, the decision to

upgrade the two plants was twofold. Firstly, both were outdated and had to be upgraded to match world standards and incorporate environmentally friendly standards. Secondly, the problem of "human error" needed to be eliminated.

"Not only do the new plants offer this but they also offer clients a superior product. To do this cost effectively we needed to ensure that the technology we use is the best available. Coupled with our trained and motivated staff, who know they are valued, we are assured of maintaining our high standards," says Hechter, adding that offering clients a world-class product is what the company does best.

Eikenhof gets world class plant



The new state-of-the-art Eikenhof plant. All the plant's functions are controlled from a computerised control cabin.

MUCH Asphalt has opened a state-of-the-art, world-class computerised batching plant at its Eikenhof premises, just south of Johannesburg.

The plant, which is similar to one recently built in Coedmore KwaZulu-Natal, is one of the first in this country capable of producing premix products which exceed current specification requirements.

This flagship plant can produce a variety of high specification mixes, all from its modern, computerised control cabin. Its product capacity is rated at more than 150 tons per hour and it is capable of producing mixes such as SMA, Novachip, BRASO and other modified asphalt mixes including hydrocarbon modified asphalt.

According to Vivian Seiderer, the plant's manager, hydrocarbon modified medium asphalt has already been manufactured and supplied for the construction of the Gosforth racetrack and drag strip.

The new asphalt-batching mixer is an integral part of the plant's upgrade scheme,

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The Eikenhof team - always at your service!



Vivian Seiderer, Much Asphalt's Eikenhof plant manager.

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New asphalt batching plant

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which includes the installation of a second weighbridge to facilitate better flow of both incoming and outgoing materials. It also features a new bag-house filter to facilitate emissions control and automated cold feed bins.

All the plant's functions are controlled from its futuristic control cabin where the computerised processes ensure that both management and operational staff have access to on-line information at the push of a button. Process variables such as temperatures, pressures and flows are continuously logged and monitored allowing the operators to optimise conditions – ensuring consistent quality at all times.

Keep abreast

Another advantage offered by this facility is its new twin shaft, double drive, high intensity mixer that was locally designed and manufactured to suit local conditions and match similar mixers already used overseas. It ensures fast, complete mixing and discharge while all the raw material feeders are equipped with dribble feeds to the plant's scales ensuring precise weighing and complete accuracy.

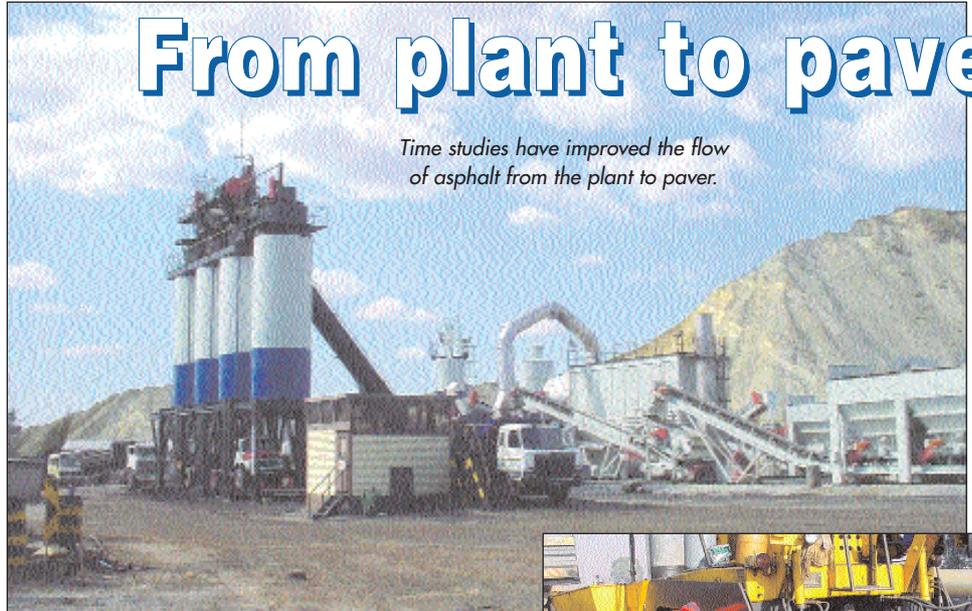
"The main advantage offered by this plant is that it is easy to operate, especially when it comes to changing between different mix designs. This increased flexibility and control over products will benefit all our customers," says Seiderer.

It is a comment which Bennie Greyling, Much Asphalt's regional manager, supports.

"Keeping abreast of technological advances ensures that we can provide our customers with the latest products of the highest quality. This new plant will ensure that we can do this while staying ahead of the pack."

From plant to paver

Time studies have improved the flow of asphalt from the plant to paver.



IN an effort to further improve service levels, Much Asphalt's Benoni team recently conducted an in-depth study to ascertain what factors affect the flow of materials to site.

This was carried out when the company supplied the asphalt necessary to rehabilitate the N3 between Heidelberg and Alberton. The project entailed the mill and repair of existing deteriorated wearing course asphalt sections of the road.

The study began with the analysis of the weighbridge tickets for a specific day, which were sorted and represented graphically. This quickly gave an indication of the time it took the vehicles to travel to site, as well as the time spent on site. The data was verified via the vehicle's log sheets and a time study was undertaken over a few days to further verify the results.



Some of the trends identified included;

- ❑ On a normal production day the standing time on site would decrease as the day progressed due to the paving process taking some time to start-up and,
- ❑ When a paver is moved there would be a second start-up phase and an increase in time the vehicles spent on site.

It was also found that the following factors influenced the timely delivery of asphalt and the paving team's production rate. These comprised;

- ❑ The delivery distance travelled to the specific point on the contract, access to the site and the route taken by the trucks,
- ❑ The number of vehicles used to make the delivery,
- ❑ The type of work carried out,



- ❑ Any breakdown experienced by the asphalt plant, the transporters or paving equipment and,
- ❑ The sequencing and organisation of the paving crew and asphalt plant.

Significantly, it was found that the assumption that a fleet of vehicles would speed up the flow is not necessarily correct. Bottlenecks at the paving site resulted in the asphalt going cold and an additional standing time charge from the cartage contractors.

As in all production processes it was found that proper planning cannot be underestimated and that correct information is a priority.

Another critical factor is the correct use of the hot storage facilities which enables the asphalt plant to start producing the typical asphalt mixes in advance and store them, thereby ensuring that it is ready for dispatching as and when required.

It was also found that the common practice by contractors of inflating orders and then cancelling a portion thereof the following day, has had a direct affect on productivity and costs.

The asphalt manufacturer wastes time and money producing the unwanted asphalt and then has to recoup the cost by increasing the price of his product – something which neither the customer or producer really wants to see happen.

"We should all make a conscious effort to improve the lines of communication between the asphalt plant and the construction team so that we can all benefit in the long term.

"It is our intention to constantly strive to improve our client service levels and the lines of communication will always be open. We are ready and willing to listen to suggestions," says Greyling.

Much Asphalt works towards ISO 9001-2000 quality standards

ALL Much Asphalt's manufacturing facilities are working towards obtaining ISO 9001 and 2000 quality standards certification.

According to Raj Rajcoomer, the group's quality assurance manager, high quality standards are playing an increasingly important role in business.

"Quality management systems improve production efficiencies," he says, adding that a third party certification will give Much Asphalt's clients the reassurance they need that the company's products are of the highest quality.

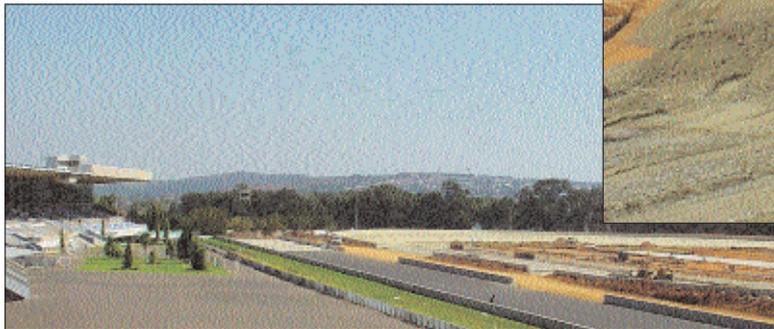
As a leading supplier of bituminous road surfacing materials, Much Asphalt already has an ISO 9002 - 1994 accreditation from the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS). The listing, known as the "Network Listing" includes Much Asphalt's head office in Cape Town and 10 other branches situated countrywide.

Later this month the company will again be audited by the SABS for a 9001-2000 listing. This will include 13 branches, the company's laboratory in Eersterivier in Cape Town and all mobile operations. According to Rajcoomer,

quality standards within the group have progressed rapidly. "This accreditation will simply reinforce the guarantee we give as a company that our asphalt is manufactured under stringent controls and that it is regularly tested to a set of job specifications in order to ensure consistent quality and standards.

"Our manuals, instrument logs, calibrations, plant and laboratory equipment, company policies and instruction manuals are also regularly audited internally to ensure the company complies with the quality standards set by the SABS and ISO," he says.

Gosforth Park becomes a high powered raceway



(Above) Construction of the banked ovals get underway.

(Left) The newly completed drag strip at Gosforth Park raceway.

IN its hayday Gosforth Park teamed with people, lured by the excitement and thrill of placing a bet on their favourite horse. Today things have changed and soon Gosforth Park will reverberate to the throb and roar of engines found in high-powered racing cars.

The transformation, which started a few months ago, should be completed by the end of June this year.

The revamped facility features a drag strip; two different sized banked oval circuits and a racing circuit made up of various sections of the facility's other tracks linked together.

A skidpan for advanced driver training courses and vehicle testing has also been included in the new raceway's design.

The main contractor on the project is Dip Civils and the asphalt surfacing was subcontracted to Hammon Road Surfaces.

Much Asphalt's new Eikenhof plant supplied the specified hydrocarbon modified asphalt.

Says technical manager, Tom van Rijckevorsel; "This continuously graded modified medium asphalt was specified as it has a high resistance to deformation. This is typically required on racing circuits where racers exert extreme forces on the surface.

"The banked ovals, the very fine tolerances required on the raceway's surface and the need for a continuous, smooth flow of material and an extremely smooth surface called for a close working relationship between Much Asphalt and Hammon Road Surfaces."

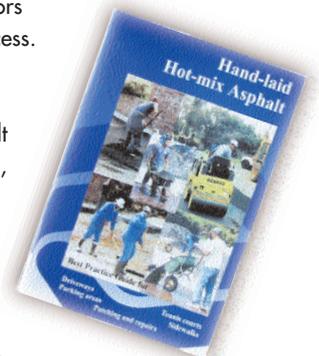
"Help" handbook a huge success

THE "Best Practice Guide" handbook specially written and published by Much Asphalt to assist supervisors and workmen working for emerging contractors and smaller companies has been a huge success.

According to John Onraet, the company's marketing director, the booklet which details specifications for all hand laid hot mix asphalt such as that normally used to pave driveways, tennis courts and sidewalks as well as patch and repair roads, has ensured that a uniformly high standard of asphalt is laid.

"We have had extremely positive feedback on the book and, in an effort to further assist the smaller companies we are now putting in place demonstrations, which will be given by some of our own customers who are proficient in hand laying asphalt," he says.

Pointing out that hand laid asphalt is often a much cheaper option than bricks, Onraet, went on to say that it is a growing market which should be fully utilised to reach its full potential. "The market can only grow and if we assist smaller companies and emerging contractors we are sure asphalt will become the first choice for smaller contracts," he adds.



Increased focus on emerging contractors

SMALL, emerging contractors are playing an increasingly important role in Much Asphalt's Gauteng operation.

While the company's customer base includes the "giants" of the road industry, smaller contractors are becoming a significant factor with record growth recorded over the past few years.

Yearly contracts awarded by local councils for remedial work is an ongoing factor and the majority of this work is carried out by the company's Benoni plant in conjunction with MBS Consulting Engineers on behalf of the Ekurhuleni Local Council.

"We believe today's emerging contractors will be tomorrow's giants," says Rupert Pöhl, Much Asphalt's contracts co-ordinator, adding that the company is always willing to offer advice on technical matters relating to the placing and finishing of asphalt.

"We also offer a facility whereby contractors who cannot get credit approval, can continue their contract in terms of a cession agreement between Much Asphalt and the client. Emerging contractors are an important part of our business and we would like to be the preferred supplier – no matter what size the contract is," he says.

In an effort to encourage two-way communication the company holds an annual social function to encourage interaction between Much Asphalt staff and its customers. At last year's function, the "Hand Laid Hot-mix Asphalt Guide" – which offers practical advice for asphalt contractors carrying out hand laid asphalt jobs - was launched to great acclaim.



Comar Plant Design & Manufacturing CC is proud to have been associated with this exciting and innovative project. We warmly wish Much Asphalt continued prosperity in their accomplishments.



Greg van Wyk shows how it should be done. Grand Prix 2004 here we come!

Attacking AIDS



AIDS is a serious issue and Much Asphalt has launched a four-pronged attack on this dread disease by encouraging employees to become involved in a positive, healthy way.

The "attack" on AIDS involves encouraging employees to adopt a positive attitude, to become aware of the disease and its ramifications, to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to help one another by becoming involved in a peer educator programme.

"We endeavour to make our people and the communities from which they are drawn, aware of the disease and sexually transmitted infections (STI's) in every sense. This includes an extensive distribution programme of condoms, posters, booklets, pamphlets and videos," says Raj Racoomer. Formalised education, training programmes forums and a volunteer peer educator programme have also been initiated. Working under the auspices of a network of doctors, health-care organisations and the Department of Health, the volunteers support and counsel infected people and their families.

LeMans comes to Benoni

MUCH Asphalt, its suppliers and customers often interact at various social events – a factor which makes day to day business relationships just that much easier.

At a recent "Le Mans" evening Babcor Engineering and Rheinsun Engineering challenged Much Asphalt staff members and their families to a Go Kart endurance race with one proviso – everyone had to take part!

The challenge was on and teams, comprising both male and female members, were put together. Five teams of five people joined in the fun.

A practice lap kicked off the

evening's fun, with much laughter and joking. The supper of hamburgers and "Boerie" rolls were quickly wolfed down – racing's hard work!

At the end of the official "Grand Prix" certificates were handed out to the winning teams. Tankfab came first, Much Asphalt clinched a very credible second place and Much More came third.

"It was a wonderful evening and a perfect way to meet new people and interact with colleagues, friends and families. We are looking forward to the rematch," says Rupert Pöhl, Much Asphalt's teamster.

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