

Renttech's zero downtime welding model

At an open day at its new Spartan facilities, Renttech showcased its new face for Gauteng: a 2 500 m² customer-friendly centralised sales, marketing and service facility with a walk-in sales outlet and showroom. *African Fusion* talks to Gerrit van Zyl, managing director, and Johann Bester, welding product manager.



Renttech's Johan Bester, welding product manager and Gerrit van Zyl, the company's managing director.

With a long history of success in the South African rental market, Renttech's equipment offering now includes 22 recognised brands of welding, lifting and rigging equipment, as well as a comprehensive range of industrial generators, electrical power tools, welding consumables and construction-related equipment. "We are the leading distributors of Harris soldering and brazing gas cutting and welding products, the largest distributor of Lincoln Electric products and, through SA Welding (SAW), can offer an impressive range of specialised welding solutions," says van Zyl. "We are also proud to be associated with names such as: Kelmeg Lifting Services (KLS) for top class rigging and lifting equipment, UniPower, for welding machines and industrial generators; and UniArc for welding accessories," he adds.

The rental business, along with the company's national distribution centre, will continue to be managed from the company's 9 000 m² under roof facility with 17 000 m² of yard space in Wadeville, Germiston. "Until 2007/2008, we were a rental driven business and, with over 1 000 generator sets and 4 000 welding inverters, we have one of largest rental fleets for welding in South Africa. We have now dedicated the

Wadeville facility as a rental repair workshop for all welding related equipment – gas equipment, engine-driven welders, welding inverters and diesel generators, for example – and it also serves as our national warehouse and distribution centre for rentals and sales," he explains.

The new facility, opened during December and effectively operational from 1 January 2014, expresses the recent shift in the core business of the company. "75% of current business is now sales," reports van Zyl. "This new facility has been chosen to reflect that. It centralises all our Gauteng sales and marketing functions and serves as a new face of Renttech. We have incorporated a showroom, along with a walk-in retail sales outlet and a suite of customer friendly offices, meeting rooms, training and demonstration facilities so that we can service the broad and day-to-day needs of customers across the region," he explains. The new premises, which finalise the integration of SA Welding's Benoni office into Renttech, will also serve as the tender base for all South African contracts. "Spartan is easily accessible for clients, our sales teams, and for shipping to our other offices in the country," says van Zyl.

Building on its rental expertise, it was a natural extension for Renttech to start selling capital equipment: welding machines, engine drives and diesel generators. "We began with offering our own UniPower product range," continues Bester. "These welding machines all use inverter technology, but because of our rental experience, we persuaded the original manufacturers to improve their designs. The duty cycles are now much higher and the quality, reliability and lifecycles more suited to long term rental use," he suggests.

"In the petrochemical industry, for example, our traditional strength, it is not uncommon for a welding machine to see power spikes of up to 575 V. Also, the mining and on site work environment is very dusty.

"UniPower now customises machines for our South African rental customers. We have enlarged the heatsinks, increased the airflow, moved the PC boards away from the bottom of the machine and isolated them from the airflow, so that no dust can pass over or settle on the electronics. On the supply voltage side, the machines switch automatically to accommodate voltage fluctuations of up to 25% up or down from the 525 V mean supply," adds van Zyl.



The new facility, which incorporates a showroom and a walk-in retail sales outlet, serves as a new face for Renttech.

"The machines sell well, because no welding contracting company wants to have to drive onto site to repair machines, and these are robust and offer good reliability," Bester adds. As well as reliability, UniPower, because of its ability to deal with erratic supply voltages, has emerged as an ideal inverter brand for use with generator sets.

In 2010, Renttech added Lincoln to its range, and its engine drives already predominate in the piping service industries. Then in 2012, with the acquisition of SA Welding Supplies, Renttech became the largest Lincoln agency in the country.

A Harris Equipment agency was also secured during this time: "Since securing Harris, we have brought in a specific range called the Metal Worker for power generation, petrochemical, pulp and paper, shop maintenance and general industrial sectors. So instead of focussing only on the mining sector with the 9/16-inch fitting, we now offer, on an exclusive basis, the Harris Metal Worker gas equipment range, with 3/8-inch fittings. This line is a more mainstream in the US and circumvents the need to use converters to accommodate 9/16 mining fittings," van Zyl tells *African Fusion*. Renttech's Wadeville facility has also become one of the few accredited Harris service centres in South Africa.

"Unlike some welding distributors, we are in a position to look at complete welding and technical solutions," notes Bester. "Welding is not just about machines and consumables. We look at everything that surrounds fabrication processes, from the lifting equipment needed to unload pipe and plate off a truck, to the loading and shipping of a finished fabrication. As well as the welding equipment and consumables needed, we look at Harris gas equipment or the Hyper-therm plasma range for preparing plate; the grinding, abrasives and power tools for finishing; and then at welding PPE: helmets, gloves and safety accessories that support process needs. We are there to supply all the equipment that surrounds a fabrication need," Bester relates.

Van Zyl cites the acquisition of KLS in support of this position. "KLS makes Renttech SA a leader in the sales and rental of welding, power generation, lifting and rigging, and construction equipment," he says. Under the brand name Unilift, KLS manufactures a range of lifting accessories, including polyester slings, web slings, endless round polyester slings, steel wire slings, chain blocks and cargo securing straps.

For high-end infrastructure projects like Medupi and Kusile, Renttech "has technicians to support any of our machines in service", be they rental or sales machines. "At Medupi, for example, we have an onsite service office at Lepalale with 20 full time members of staff to service the rental fleet and for warranty and backup work for bought equipment. We hold a full inventory of spares and welding consumables for the convenience of site contractors. Between Kusile and Medupi, we are servicing some 1 000 welding machines, so technical and commercial teams have been established to give these projects full-time support," he says.

"Through our combined rental and sales offerings, we are striving towards a zero downtime solution for our clients. For long term contracts of several years, or for outages and planned shutdown work we operate a simple but complete welding focused model.

"In recent years, we have added considerable weld-



Lincoln engine drives already predominate in the piping service industries and, with the acquisition of SA Welding Supplies, Renttech is the largest Lincoln agency in the country.



Under the brand name Unilift, Kelmeg Lifting Services manufactures polyester slings, web slings, endless round polyester slings, steel wire slings, chain blocks and cargo securing straps



UniPower customises machines for South African rental customers by enlarging the heatsinks, increasing the airflow and isolating the PC boards from the dust-bearing airflow.

ing knowledge and expertise in sales and technical support. We now have two fully-fledged Lincoln-accredited repair facilities for all repair and warranty work. We invest in new technology, through Lincoln, Harris, and UniPower, and we are determined that our internal people will be at the forefront of technical developments in welding," van Zyl concludes.