



SEW-Eurodrive's build strategy: the pride of Africa

MechChem Africa talks to SEW-Eurodrive's MD, Raymond Obermeyer (right) and Jonathan McKey – National and Africa Manager for Business Development, Sales and Marketing (left) – about the strategy that has enabled growth in difficult times and their modern and efficient new 26 000 m² assembly and manufacturing facility in Johannesburg.

“We have experienced very challenging times over the past few years. From the recession of 2019, we went into the COVID lockdown in March 2020, and here we are today with 2021 already gone. In spite of these very hard times, however, we have done exceptionally well, I believe,” begins SEW-Eurodrive's MD, Raymond Obermeyer.

“Back in 2019, we began to put strategies in place to survive, restructuring our divisions and departments and bringing Jonathan from Nelspruit to head up a national business development team in Johannesburg,” continues Obermeyer. “It is this consolidation strategy that is now paying off for us.”

Describing Jonathan McKey's role in the structure, he says a new division has been created by merging the development, sales and projects roles. “This enables us to offer national and export support under a single portfolio with high levels of transparency. It

makes it much easier for us to customise our drive solutions to better suit the needs of customers, while also identifying potential sales of peripheral equipment. It is exciting and we have reaped the benefits,” he tells *MechChem Africa*.

McKey continues, “This strategy change enables us to close the loop on big projects. There was a follow up link missing when we used to rely on individual SEW plants and branches to manage a project remotely. With big projects managed from Joburg, we can develop close links that enable us to follow through on contracts being delivered to project houses, identifying a host of additional best-fit products that we can also supply to meet broader requirements,” he explains.

“At the engineering level, we now interact with the whole chain of project stakeholders, from end-users to owners, investors, project teams and developers. We have closed this whole loop with our SEW-Eurodrive national team, which is able to track and coordinate



The 26 000 m² facility will enable the local assembly of up to 7 000 geared motor units, along with roughly 60 to 100 IG units, every month.



SEW-Eurodrive's new “pride of Africa” assembly and manufacturing facility in Johannesburg.

the engineering requirements to meet the needs of all these stake-holders,” says McKey. Describing some key successes as a result of this strategy, he says they have been able to target areas that were previously not areas of strength, such as coal. “We have long been dominant in chrome and platinum, but coal wasn't a strength. Following a comprehensive assessment of the needs, we have adopted a headstrong attack of the industry, engaging with mining project teams and upselling every drive solution we have available to us.

“Successes include the supply of power transmission drive trains with industrial gearboxes for conveyor systems; and smaller gear motor drives for agitators, mixers and separators on the processing side of mining operations.

“We have also made significant inroads with our girth gears and mill drive solutions. Last year we sold six of these sets, the most we have sold in any one year to date,” notes McKey. These include four upgrades for existing mills and two mill drive sets for new installations.

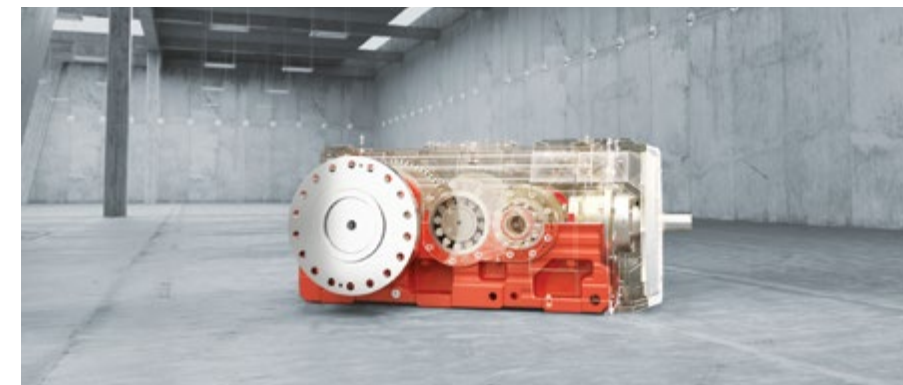
The power generation shortfall has also presented opportunities. “Most notably, we are now supplying our air-cooled condenser (ACC) drives as replacements for currently installed units. So far, we have supplied several drop-in replacements for the original ACC units supplied to our local power stations. This is typical of our current offering. We can replace any existing drive with a direct equivalent and we will design and manufacture the base-plate adapters to make the installations of our units as easy as installing a replacement OEM unit,” McKey informs *MechChem Africa*.

“For any industry that is struggling to source an OEM product, we are happy to explore adapting one of our drive solutions as a replacement, while striving to better meet the demands of the application, and maintenance and reliability issues,” he assures.

“The national Maxolution division is also becoming stronger in the automotive industry,” continues Obermeyer, adding that he intends to create another new national division next year to take care of SEW-Eurodrive's automation and electronics product ranges. “Using the same engineering-driven strategy, we are looking to supply the automotive market with all the modern and connected drive solutions they need to maximise productivity,” he says.

“We have excellent access to our global R&D teams, who can advise us on modern smart factory applications such as the use of AVGs and connectivity solutions for the modern IIoT factory,” he adds.

Also being introduced is a conditional monitoring solution called Drive Radar,



The Generation X.e industrial gearbox is just one of many innovations to be locally assembled in South Africa. Along with several new hardware enhancements, SEW-Eurodrive's Generation X.e IGs are custom-assembled to suit each application ideally.

which is purpose-designed for SEW drive and transmission products. “Drive Radar is able to use SCADA, WiFi or cellular networks to collect vibration, oil condition and temperature data from drive systems in the field. The SEW Drive Radar platform then analyses the data to determine the real condition of the equipment in use. Bearing and gear mesh condition; rotation speeds; performance and running times; oil bath temperatures; and scheduled oil change intervals are all tracked, analysed and made visible via dashboards,” says McKey.

“Drive Radar can be downloaded onto any computer, tablet or smartphone to deliver summary reports onto connected devices anywhere in the world,” he advises, adding that analysis services are also available where SEW-Eurodrive specialists keep tabs on critical equipment so as to give clients better peace of mind. As evidence of and in support of this successful approach, SEW-Eurodrive has spent the past few years building an expanded facility in Johannesburg. “Our new factory has been in the planning for several years, but building was accelerated significantly during the COVID crisis. It is an enormous project and the pride of Africa. No power transmission company can match the scale of this local SEW assembly and manufacturing facility,” notes Obermeyer.

The investment strives to further consolidate SEW-Eurodrive's national efforts into one modern and efficient assembly and manufacturing facility. “Our big Industrial Gearbox (IG) plant is coming to Johannesburg from Nelspruit, our electronics facility is coming up from Cape Town and we are also consolidating our stock and distribution for key products such as the IEC electric motor range,” he says.

New products to be locally assembled in the new 26 000 m² facility include the ACC gearboxes; the new and improved Generation X.e industrial gearbox; a new single-stage M1 IG designed for large water and slurry pumps; and the full range of SEW

variable speed drives (VSDs), for which an isolated and clean electronic assembly area has been created.

“Local branches will take care of the assembly and breakdown requirements for their clients, but in Johannesburg we will run a consolidated modern warehouse to supply into projects and the wider region, including Southern and Eastern Africa. We also intend to open up branches in many more countries in Africa, in Zambia, the DRC and Kenya, for example, and these will be directly managed and supplied from the new Johannesburg facility,” Obermeyer says.

“We are now much better able to service our whole product range more efficiently. We have a host of new and improved products, which will be assembled here. Our range offers more modular gear ratios and it is much easier to accessorise and customise.

“The new facility is far more capable of handling the capacity we will need going forward. We expect to be assembling up to 7 000 geared motor units per month from this building, along with roughly 60 to 100 IG units per month. The capacity will at least double our current capacity,” he says.

With respect to staff, he says SEW-Eurodrive is now employing a lot more electronic and mechatronic engineers. “We have upskilled our staff to ensure they are stronger and more competent at all levels. Staff numbers have increased by 20%, having gone from seven to 20 engineering personnel in the past year.

“On the social development side, we are expanding the Drive Academy and extending the training offering to include our large IG solutions – and we have the capability to have German specialists doing training via an interactive remote link, which allows candidates to log on and participate from anywhere with a network connection.

“Armed with a new strategy and a state-of-the-art new facility in Johannesburg, we are ready to take full advantage of Africa's long-term growth,” concludes Obermeyer. □