

# The 3-metre radius welding offering



From left: Michael Ashley, Mwali Kawawa, Rolf Schluep.

“In today’s manufacturing environment, customers are expecting their supply partners to become more integrated into their eco-systems, be more agile as well as being able to provide unique and globally competitive solutions for their operations. Within this context, “Air Liquide has further evolved a number of its offers which aim to provide its customers with world class solutions” begins Schluep. “The first of these solutions is the Air Liquide hardgoods offering which encompasses a 3 metre radius around the welder and aims to support our customers with a fully inclusive solution”.

Michael Ashley, Mwali Kawawa and Rolf Schluep, members of the Air Liquide Marketing Team, talk about the development of their new Welding and Cutting offering aimed at being the top of mind partner to the Automotive and Fabrication industries.

Air Liquide now has the ability to offer a complete welding and cutting solution. A holistic offering providing welding filler materials, welding and cutting equipment – alongside the traditional Air Liquide gas offering. “Our offering relates directly to the welders’ needs within a 3 metre radius as most welding cells will require more than one process to be used to complete a fabrication task,” Ashley tells *African Fusion*. “We have long seen the potential of hard goods being supplied in conjunction with our gas,” he says, adding that this strategy was perceived well before Weld-Cut equipment was fully integrated into Air Liquide.

“With the 3 metre radius in mind, we began to look for extended opportunities to support our customers’ needs, with a firm goal in mind of providing a one-stop-shop for everything a welder needs to productively, efficiently and successfully produce quality welded

products. We have now introduced the offering to all our main-hub offices across the country, which all stock gas, filler materials and our full range of welding and cutting equipment. This enables customers to get everything they need to set up a welding operation from any Air Liquide branch,” Ashley assures.

“As well as offering a wide range of filler materials for all welding applications, the equipment range, torches, regulators, nozzles and brazing rods which have enjoyed notable growth, we still experience significant demand for various types of electrodes and the introduction of Hypertherm plasma machines has been well received” Ashley continues.

“To meet the needs of the premium customer, the company has chosen to partner with several premium suppliers. “For filler materials and equipment, we have chosen as a partner ESAB, which is a global provider of innovative welding

and cutting solutions” he adds.

“For cutting and brazing, we offer Harris Gas Equipment. Harris is currently one of the most consistently requested product lines from customers, while for automated plasma cutting, we have formed a strong relationship with Hypertherm” Ashley elaborates.

“In addition, we offer more affordable house brands for welding applications where product certification is relaxed. These include Gemini electrodes for which we are the sole supplier, and Ultra-Arc ER70S-6 wire as well as various grades of stainless steel and aluminium wires,” Ashley informs *African Fusion*. “As for the torches, we continue our relationship with TBI” he adds.

New partners to further support Air Liquide’s 3 metre radius offer are constantly being sought. “We recently identified Tyrolit as our supply partner for grinding and cutting discs, this after having identified the ongoing requirement for these products by our customers,” Ashley notes

Demonstration and testing facilities are now available at Air Liquide’s Alrode plant. “We have a ‘welding demonstrations and development room’, which is also being used as both an internal and external training facility for all applications.

The offering is not only about the products, however. “Our in-house technical support forms a cornerstone of the approach. By taking control of the whole welding process, any problem that arises on site can be dealt with by Air Liquide. We often get called out to resolve problems supposedly linked with gas, for example, only to find that the gas is not the actual problem. Now we are able to resolve any issue, without the need for the client to call in another Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM). Internally, we have the local expertise and



The Connected Store is compliant to the ISO 3834 requirements with respect to the storage and handling of consumables.

should we encounter an unusual, difficult issue, we have the support of our global technical experts too.”

“In order to support the use and distribution of gases and hardgoods, Air Liquide has developed a deployable store coupled to a digitised procurement process. More and more customers want to control spend, have information available in realtime and be able to remotely manage their operations. The Connected Store is an ‘as and when’ needed solution which is on offer to all Automotive and Fabrication customers” explains Schluep.

“The Connected Store is compliant to ISO 3834 requirements with respect to the storage and handling of consumables. To facilitate traceability, all the delivery, stocking, purchasing, material certificate records and environmental data is stored in the Cloud. This enables supervisors and managers to monitor acquisition activity via their computers, smartphones or tablet devices – added to that, a fully stocked Connected Store is now ready and available for deployment” explains Schluep further. “To optimise site welding works and complement the hardgoods offer, the Exeltop coupled to Arcal New Generation shielding gases are available at the Connected Store,” adds Kawawa.

“The newest part of our offering is

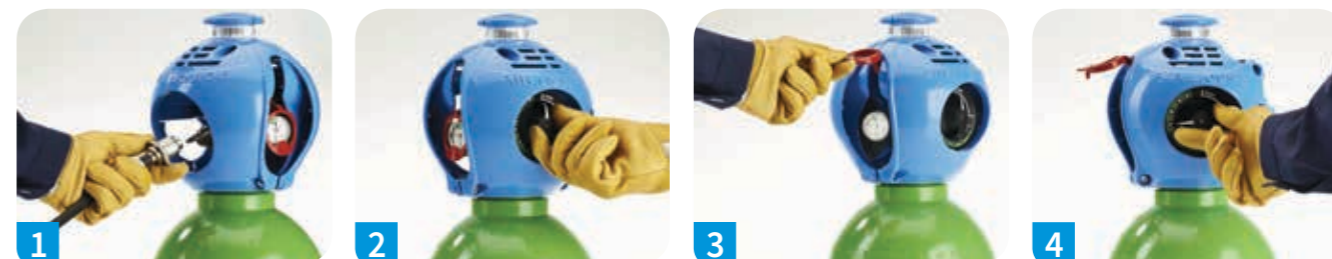
the recently launched Welding Efficiency Analysis. Over many years, Air Liquide Worldwide has developed a substantial database that is able to benchmark local customers against global players. The analysis enables optimal use of hardgoods, gases, labour and energy for Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) and cutting related processes. This helps local operations to become more globally competitive while keeping their costs to a minimum,” he adds. “We can now offer this service to clients in South Africa to enable them to benchmark their welding costs to operations across the globe” Kawawa tells *African Fusion*.

“Subsequent to gathering a holistic view of the current welding and cutting consumable consumption data, we can develop and implement a customised improvement plan to achieve improved results. By best utilising the information, Air Liquide products and expertise, the customer can realise productivity improvements that are benchmarked globally. The process minimises rework and wastage thereby enabling the customer to focus on growing their business through enhanced efficiencies.

“In summary, these ever-evolving offerings aim to provide our customers with unique solutions making their operations ever more competitive in a global context,” Schluep concludes. ■



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The key innovations built into Air Liquide’s EXELTOP solution include: 1: A quick connector to couple the gas hose to the EXELTOP gas cylinder; 2: Easy dial setting to set the initial flow to zero. 3: A pull up lever to open the cylinder. 4: Easy flow adjustment on the graduated hand wheel.