By Pierre Sanson

Powerstar keeps the lights on

The last few years has seen an upsurge in the number of coal transporters entering the market as a result of the increase in the demand for coal locally. The re-opening of some previously moth-balled power stations has also had a bearing on the demand for coal.

A number of these operators have soon gone out of business for one reason or another, which has left the door open for the better established companies to increase their service levels and consolidate their position with the larger consumers, such as Eskom.

Makoya Supply Chain Holdings, founded by CEO Kenny Malgas in 2005, has interpreted the situation very well and successfully established a syndicate of companies that offers a comprehensive solution to their customer base. They have over the years progressively linked a number of service providers under the Makoya flag and are thus able to offer their customers better than average solutions in coal beneficiation.

Makoya have somewhat revolutionised coal handling with their road-to-rail strategy. Most of the mines have their own sidings, which were extensively used in the days when rail transport was the optimum solution in moving large quantities of coal. These sidings have remained in disuse for a number of years and have now been taken over by Makoya Mining and are used in their transport strategy of moving coal by road and rail.

The system requires loading the coal at the mine into rail cars with specially modified open-top containers using front end loaders and which are then transported to the sidings close to the power station. The containers are then removed from the rail cars using container handling equipment and placed on specially-designed tipping trailers for transportation to the power station.

"The investment is enormous," says Malgas, "but the efficiency and speed of operation of the system justifies the investment."

Proof of this has resulted in a long-term contract with Eskom when, after the 2008 load shedding, the Camden power station was re-commissioned and was required to be in operation in the shortest time possible.

Makoya, in addition to its 10 years of road logistics and supply chain activities, has managed bulk-terminal operations and rail road logistics projects over the last two years. During the pressure of 2009, Makoya took on the Eskom-Majuba rail project challenge. Makoya researched the process and fast tracked changes to failing operations to substantially achieve a 60-wagon train loading in under 1:45 hours. Thereafter the volumes gradually increased from 26 to 42 trains without the application of additional resources.

Malgas has been wise in his choice of equipment for the project, especially when it comes to vehicles. Having had a mixed bag initially, he has selected Powerstar as the truck of choice for the operation. The initial deal was for two water tankers and two truck-tractors, followed by an order for seven 8x4 freight carriers which are used with a drawbar tipping trailer and carrying up to 44 tons in total.

"The Powerstar trucks have proven themselves adequately in this operation and have maintained an excellent balance in economical operating costs. Their simplicity of design makes them ideal vehicles for in-field servicing and repairs without the need for computers," says Malgas.

Kenny Malgas, CEO of Makoya Mining. The company's Powerstar trucks have proven themselves again and again in Makoya's coal-hauling activities.

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