

Powerstar: working class hero

BY HOWARD MELLET

Powerstar is known for its rugged off-road tippers, but intends cementing its reputation with a diverse range of specialised vehicles and a stronger presence throughout Africa

THE Powerstar 2642 is targeted at demanding off-road applications: "It's the ideal mining truck," says Powerstar marketing and dealer development manager, Erwin Stolze. "Its acceptance by this sector is mainly due to its rugged simplicity. There are no complex electronics associated with the package. It's a tough, reliable and durable truck, great for the transport of coal – among other loads."

Truck & Bus's striking cover photograph is of the Powerstar 2642 in action at the Woestalleen Colliery in Mpumalanga near Middelburg, where it does duty for Trans Africa Logistics, which owns and operates a fleet of 27 similar Powerstar trucks. There is little doubt that operating conditions at the colliery are some of the harshest in South Africa. Dust is all-pervasive and the road conditions are among the worst possible.

"The trucks operate continuously, without problems, in this environment," confirms Stolze. "They are proven to be reliable and, as tier-two 'value' products, offer added benefits including a lower purchase price and favourable parts prices - compared to the more costly and electronically complex alternatives on the market."



Erwin Stolze, Powerstar marketing and dealer development manager, with the Powerstar 2628, a popular model in the local line-up

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The Powerstar 2642 is part of a range of trucks available, most of which are targeted at off-road applications in mining, construction and similar sectors.

"They are built for harsh environments or short to medium haul tasks," stresses Stolze. "The current range of Powerstar trucks was not designed for short hauls, but this is about to change with the introduction of a long haul model early next year. Visitors to JIMS will get a preview, together with a look at the new VX facelifted cab."

Currently Powerstar trucks are Euro 2 compliant – the inference being that they are not the most complex from an electronics standpoint. "Obviously, if we had to import Euro 5 compliant vehicles, we have the infrastructure to handle this," he emphasises.

"However, we don't want to stray too far from this basic, proven concept as we have many customers who rightly believe simplistic trucks are needed in the African market because they can entrust routine maintenance and servicing, particularly in remote areas, to lesser skilled technicians as no computerised systems are involved."

To illustrate this, Stolze highlights a deal Powerstar has concluded with Agri Congo for the purchase of four Powerstar 2635A 6x6 units and two 2642S 6x4 truck tractors.

"Agri Congo is an organisation run by Wynand du Toit, a South African who has relocated a group of local farmers to the Republic of Congo - Congo-Brazzaville - where they have been allocated land by the government in a bid to form the core of a viable farming community in that country.

"The trucks will be going up from SA to the Congo, fully loaded with all the farming equipment, tools and supplies needed to establish this community. There they will continue to service the farmers in a region characterised by rough terrain, non-existent roads, limited infrastructure and diesel fuel quality that could be as poor as 7000 ppm," says Stolze.

He confirms that all Powerstar vehicles arriving in South Africa from their Chinese manufacturer Beiben are 'Africanised' through the addition of local components including larger radiators and radiator hoses to cater for the hotter, harsher climate.

Specialised vehicles

Powerstar is also a prolific supplier of specialised vehicles, using its 6x6, 8x4 and 6x4 configured platforms as bases. One of the company's customers is an East London towing, recovery and rigging company. Other specialised vehicles produced by Powerstar include water tankers, waste compactors, skip loaders, bitumen transporters and a mobile magnetised crane.

"We are well known for our off-road tippers, but we are finding an increasing number of specialised applications for our trucks. This is a growing market for us as they are ideally suited to challenging tasks and conditions."



Powerstar is a prolific supplier of specialised vehicles. This mobile magnetised crane is an excellent example of the company's ability to target niche markets

Stolze adds that Powerstar is a market leader in its weight segment of the tipper category, as confirmed by Naamsa figures. "While our tipper is a great package, it's time we introduced the market to some of our best kept secrets in the form of our other specialised vehicles."

In a bid to increase its marketing exposure, Powerstar has moved to impressive new landmark premises alongside the N1 in Centurion near Pretoria where its signage is clearly visible from the motorway. The new premises are close to the company's customers in the mining belt north of Pretoria.

The premises are being considered for purchase by Powerstar, who owns its Pietermaritzburg assembly plant, clearly indicating a ramp up in the investments Powerstar and its principals are making in the South African economy. According to Stolze, they are in the process of using the local facilities as a platform from which to launch marketing initiatives into Africa.

"The whole of the SADC [South African Development Community] region is our territory. We need to develop it by appointing dealers and service centres. It's a big challenge and our goals may take time to achieve. However, we already have dealers in Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe and we're poised to open one in Mozambique. There is also considerable interest from Zambia and Malawi."

The local market will not be neglected. "We have a dealer network of 25 outlets, which include full and service dealers. Our newest dealership is in Paarl, while our Upington service dealer will soon be joined by a full dealership, which will come on stream in the near future geared to servicing the mining community there."

Other areas of focus for Powerstar include the farming/agriculture community and a specialised dealership is envisaged for the Free State to target these customers.

Stolze also spotlights Powerstar's Parts and After Sales division which is tasked with keeping the company's durable workhorses up and running. "The fact that we engineer our trucks to be free of electronic design and gadgets means they spend less time in the workshop. With optimised uptime, low per-kilometre costs and attractive pricing, they continue to be desirable to a broadening spectrum of customers who report excellent returns on their investments," he concludes.