

MT6020 Atlas Copco's new 60 Tonner ready to roll



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Truck delivers major productivity boost

THE big news in underground mine haulage in 2007 was unveiled at the AIMEX show in Sydney with the global launch of Atlas Copco's 60-tonne payload MT6020 mine truck.

Developed over two years and trialed extensively in the world's major market for large-capacity underground mining trucks, Australia, the MT6020 delivers a 20% increase in haulage capacity in a powerful, economical truck set to assume the mantle of market leader from Atlas Copco's popular 50t-payload hauler, the MT5010.

Already 10 orders for the MT6020 have been

placed by Australian mines following the testwork at the Stawell gold mine, 250km west of Melbourne in Victoria, which has been running MT5010 trucks for several years.

There the new truck has demonstrated the productivity and operating cost gains that can be expected to excite operators of other deep underground hard rock mines in Australia and other key markets such as Canada, South Africa and Asia.

Atlas Copco's global product line manager for underground trucks and loaders, Robert Almqvist said the company believed the



MT6020 would become its new market powerhouse, effectively replacing the 50t truck and other competing machines.

"We have built a very solid market position with the MT5010 and can now bring a capacity increase of 20% with this truck," he said.

"That is going to help deeper mines such as Stawell lower the cost per tonne of material hauled because we have maintained the speed-on-grade capability of the 50t truck, the excellent power-to-weight ratio of the 50t truck, and the braking and safety attributes of what has been a highly successful product."

The 1900kg heavier MT6020 has a 760-horsepower Cummins QSK19 engine – up 110hp on the 50t truck version – and the proven Allison transmission used in the MT5010.

"We have put in stronger, larger, German-made Kessler axles, and we have moved to a Kessler up-box and drop-box, which are stronger to take the additional load," Almqvist said.

"The industry has been pushing for this kind of evolution in trucking"

"The trials at Stawell have been invaluable in putting these components through their paces, and making improvements where required. That prototype truck has more than 5000 hours on it now.

"With the 650hp engine we are achieving engine life of 16,000 hours, which is excellent, and we expect to get that with the QSK19 in the MT6020."

Slightly wider than the MT5010 at 3.4m compared with 3.2m, the MT6020 is the same height and length.

"We have stuck with a conventional articulated dump truck design, which we see continuing to give the best maneuverability. We understand that sometimes there are steering problems with the rigid frame when there is no load on the truck," Almqvist said.

The Cummins QSK19 water-cooled diesel engine with 19-litre displacement is a low-emission, highly fuel efficient engine.

Almqvist said: "The industry has been pushing for this kind of evolution in trucking, with capacity and productivity the key drivers. One operator bringing up as many tonnes as possible per shift, at the lowest cost per tonne, is what it's all about."



The 60 tonne, MT6020 at Stawell Gold Mine.

Shaft drilling on the rise

Renewed interest in Atlas Copco Robbins raise drills is expected to flow over into 2008, when at least two more machines will be delivered to follow on from the 73RH unit recently supplied to HWE.

Atlas Copco Construction and Mining Australia raise-drill product manager Mike Antoszkiv said in addition to HWE Mining's 73RH – which would join a Robbins 41R HWE already has working at Newmonts Granites gold operations in central Australia – the company had sold 123RH and 34RHs to ByrneCut and Australian Contract Mining, respectively.

"And there are a number of fairly strong enquires out at the moment," he said.

The orders and strong interest follow an extended dry spell for Atlas Copco raise-drill sales of more than a decade.

"We hadn't sold any machines since about 1995," Antoszkiv said. "That was a small 34H.

"Mining contractors now want to do the raise drilling work themselves instead of subcontracting it out. So they're gearing up to do the work. Of course, there is also more money floating around and a fair bit being investment in fleet expansion to keep up with the demand for development and production services."

HWE Mining will use the new 73RH, which can bore up to 3.5m-diameter raises, predominantly for ventilation shafts. The unit had been delivered to site.

Antoszkiv expects the ByrneCut machine to be delivered in March 2008, while the ACM unit was due to arrive in July/August next year.

"We've got two new people being trained up at the moment to help us handle the increased support and servicing workload that will be generated by the new machines," he said.

"They'll be handling all the service work on the raise drills in Australia.

"The market still seems pretty buoyant around the country at the moment. I'm expecting 2008 to be another strong year."



The 73RH Robbins raisebore purchased by HWE.

New cab for ROC series rigs

Operators of Atlas Copco's state-of-the-art ROC series drill rigs will be more comfortable, more productive and safer as a result of the judicious design improvements featured in new generation cabins.

"Australian mining clients have viewed the changes as significant"

"Australian mining clients have viewed the changes as significant". The cabin enhancements are expected to increase the appeal of the well proven ROC series machines, according to Atlas Copco Construction and Mining Australia surface drilling equipment product manager, Craig Marsh.

"They've been very impressed with the ease of entry and exit, operator comfort features, storage and visibility," he said.

"It is seen as a vast improvement over the old cab."

The design challenge in development of the new cabins was achieving more operator space and improving ergonomics. Both objectives were achieved, while relocation of the instrument panel expanded the operator view. An angled front window, roof window and the design of the cabin's frame allow the operator to easily observe the whole drilling process – from surface collaring to the top of the feed.

The forward-angled front window of the cabin also reduces the amount of dust that can accumulate on the surface. A number of glazing options are available, including clear or tinted laminated panes, as well as an extra 24mm pane that provides extra protection against stones. Free space around the operator has been significantly increased, while a range of smart storage solutions have been built into the cabin's interior. Easier access to the cabin has



More space, a better design with enhanced operator comfort features.

been achieved by moving the door to the front of the cabin.

The operator's seat is fully adjustable and ergonomic placement of joystick controls for drill and rod handling operations are designed to minimise fatigue and maximise comfort. By the operator's right, a side mounted rail is included for the easy adjustment of monitors for rig control systems, reverse camera or DVD viewing and an easy to reach, touch control panel for supporting functions.

The cabins have a modern ventilation system with relocated air intake, two-stage filtering and more effective heating and air conditioning capable of maintaining a pleasant working environment, even in the harshest climates. In addition to highly effective noise and vibration insulation, the new cabins offer increased protection, easily exceeding ROPS and FOPS requirements (19 tonnes for the D-series and 30 tonnes for the F and L-series).

The new cabins have also been built with ease of maintenance in mind, with an easy-to-change air filter at ground level, a service platform that allows access to the window for cleaning and changing wiper blades and also doubles as a toolbox, and an all-in-one moulded floor mat for regular cleaning among the innovations.

Marsh said the first D-series rigs featuring the new cabin design had been supplied in Australia.

"The second, the F-series, is about to be introduced into the market."

Coaltram potential 'global leader'

The Atlas Copco Coaltram co-developed by Central Queensland Regional Exporter of the Year Anderson Industries has been lauded as a potential "global leader" by former Australian federal trade minister Warren Truss during a visit to Anderson's Mackay plant.

Touring the facility after Anderson recently received the regional exporter recognition, Truss said the company had become a significant Australian exporter of manufactured goods.

"Anderson Industries participated earlier this

year with me in an Australian Government Trade Mission to India," he said.

"[The company] is currently concentrating on the promising Chinese and Russian markets. Truss congratulated Anderson Industries on its achievements, including development of the new Atlas Copco Coaltram.

"These machines are state of the art underground utility diesel machinery fitted with the only engine package with tier 3 origin exhaust emission levels," he said.

"The Coaltram will be a global leader and will be the first diesel machines to be introduced into underground coal mines that will comply with legislative requirements."

Anderson has entered into an agreement with Atlas Copco to become the exclusive manufacturer and global supplier of Coaltram underground diesel equipment. The Queensland-based company has invested more than \$A2 million of research and development funds into the equipment line. **h**



The Coaltram's release at AIMEX.

Hopes surpassed, again

Successful recruitment and training will be the key focus of Atlas Copco Construction and Mining Australia in 2008 as the company looks to build on the watershed year predicted – and delivered – in 2007.

“We have seen that with good training programs and career paths, people tend to stay with you.”

Managing director Sergio Camozzi told Headway Atlas Copco’s results in Australia this year were ahead of expectations. “We believe 2008 will be better than 2007, so we expect to generate the same kind of growth as 2007,” he said.

“The market remains quite buoyant. At the moment, when we lose orders it’s because we don’t have enough people, not because we don’t have a customer....it hasn’t always been this way though”.

Camozzi said strong sales activity across Atlas Copco’s product segments produced revenue growth of over 30% for the company in Australia this year.

Orders, sales and aftermarket business for surface and underground drills were all

up as were our exploration and construction products.

A big contributor to our success has also been our trucks (the MT5010, 50-tonne-payload underground mine truck) and to an extent the loaders. We have substantially improved our position in the market thanks to the trucks.

“In 2008 we believe Atlas Copco will lead the market when it comes to trucks, now that we have the 60t truck, the MT 6020 (see separate report this edition of Headway) we feel that we are better placed than our competitors and we expect 2008 to be a very solid year.”

Next year will also mark a strong return to the underground coal market for Atlas Copco through the loader range being produced with Australian partner Anderson Industries under the Coaltech banner. Camozzi said significant potential for the Coaltram units existed not only in Australia, but also China and Russia.

The company has also made successful inroads in the raiseboring market, securing significant new orders from HWE Mining and a high level of inquiries leading into the new year.

Camozzi said Atlas Copco Construction and Mining Australia’s total workforce has mushroomed to 450 and the group now has 850 employees in Australia. While Atlas Copco



Sergio Camozzi ... strong growth recorded in 2007.

Construction and Mining sales and technical support numbers have grown rapidly, the company continues to battle hard in a super-competitive market for skilled people to boost its aftermarket and service team ranks.

“What we expect in 2008 is to lead the market when it comes to trucks, now that we have the 60t truck, the MT 6020.”

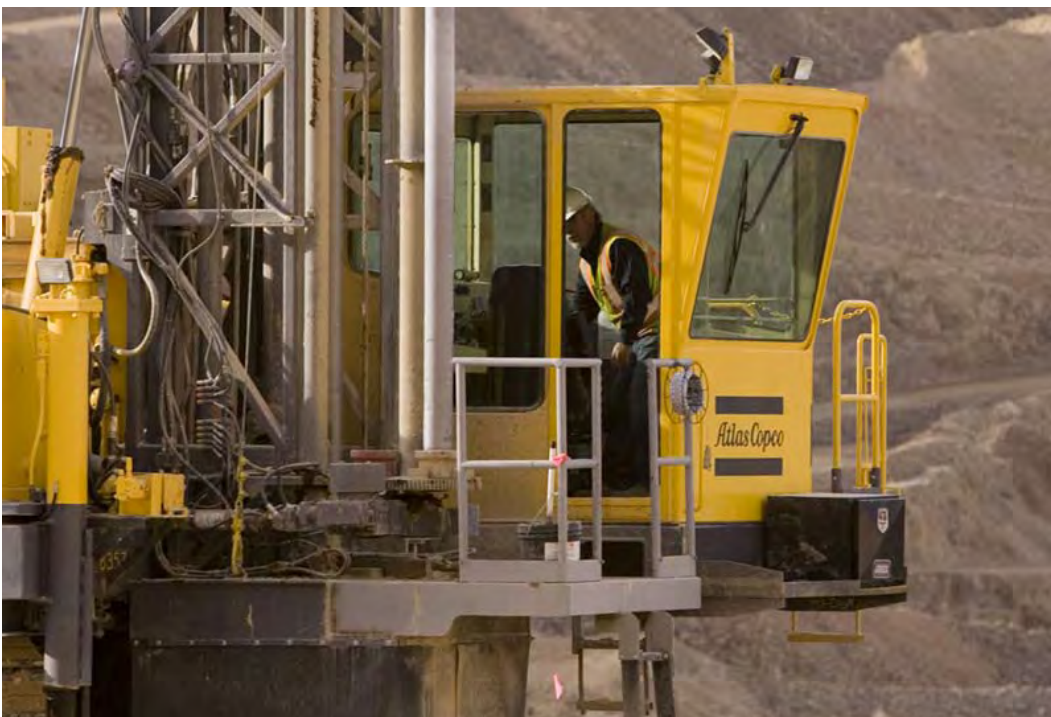
Camozzi said the company was more than doubling its 2008 apprentice intake to 80 trainees and deliver an innovative new apprentice training and career development program.

“We have employed a training manager, and his specific job is to put together long term training plans,” he said. “He has as an immediate priority to review whether what we have done so far is adequate for the future.”

Camozzi and his lead training and recruitment managers are putting a heavier emphasis on the domestic labour pool due to increasing competition for skilled personnel in most parts of the world. He said talent stocks were thinning everywhere. “We all seem to have fished in the same places,” he said.

“We have seen that with good training programs and career paths, people tend to stay with you. And if we are regarded as a reliable employer for the future, this creates stability.”

In the short term we think the apprentices are the best solution. “The company is also in the process of upgrading 12 of its 15 branches around Australia as part of a program of upgrading and expanding sales, service and support infrastructure.



Atlas Copco Drilling Solutions large blasthole rigs are making an impact in iron ore and coal.

Technology boom

By Richard Roberts*

An unprecedented mining investment boom has reinvigorated old mines, old companies and some veteran mining heads. It has also put wind in the sails of the mining technology sector.

While a far cry from the volume of junior explorer and miner listings that have taken the total number of listed resources companies on world bourses past 2000, the number of new mining service and technology floats has mushroomed since 2005, particularly in Australia, but to a lesser extent too in Canada, England and South Africa.

“The systems, increasingly with remote sensing and video surveillance, will be integrated into centralised, remote control centres that monitor and control all aspects of an operation.”

Away from the public spotlight, mining contractors, engineering, consulting and other service companies – some with significant private equity or investor backing – have recorded particularly strong growth over the same period. To that group can be added mining software, simulator, automation, mineral analysis, specialised material handling and numerous other technology suppliers.

For a taste of those technological trends set to have the biggest impact on mining costs, safety and profits, and possibly set the tone for new stock exchange listings over the next 12-24 months, we asked nearly 50 of the world’s most experienced miners where they would put their money. Which technologies might drive increased profits for them, and for the technology vendors?

Some of the more common responses included:

- Advanced “self-healing”, peer-to-peer



wireless communication systems and advanced navigation (XPS) technology. This is seen as critical “enabling technology”. Without it, “everything else is mush”, one US-based mining group’s technology boss said. The systems, increasingly with remote sensing and video surveillance, will be integrated into centralised, remote control centres that monitor and control all aspects of an operation.

- Mobile equipment sensors and other mine systems (mine dewatering, for example) will become common, and data will be extracted from them in real-time. “Total mobile equipment fleet health monitoring and management systems will dominate mining technology advances in the next three years,” a respondent said.
- Automation, using the above building blocks and others, will begin to be implemented throughout the mining industry. A US copper mine is automating three surface rotary drill rigs so all three units can be operated by one person remotely. In Chile, another copper mine is using and

piloting 11 KAC 930E-4 AT automated haul trucks. Underground autonomous LHD and haulage systems, which have previously been deployed in some advanced mines, will gain more acceptance. But it is the huge influx of surface automation in the next five years that will be noticeable.

- Data management will be a key future focus, and will manifest itself in the central control room operations outlined above.
- Automated materials handling systems (truck, shovel, loader, conveyor) with

associated collision avoidance for mobile equipment.

- Three-dimensional face mapping using digital cameras.
- Full-immersion 3D visualisation of orebodies, dig plans etc for planning and operations.
- Down-hole techniques for exploration and production hole logging.
- Instant grade control assay techniques with lower thresholds (face scanners).

A leading Australian mining consultant said the industry would definitely feel the heat from government and regulatory, but also investor, responses to global warming. “Growth will be driven by the need to move less dirt to extract metal, hence burn less fuel and release less carbon. So more precise orebody delineation and mining techniques will be needed, along with more efficient materials handling. And I believe we will see more underground mining, less openpit,” he said.

*Richard Roberts is editor of www.highgrade.net, the world’s weekly online mining magazine.

Service boss proposes seven-year 'apprenticeship'

When Nick Phillips talks about growth he is not just referring to Atlas Copco's new product lines and expansion opportunities in Australia. He feels his new role as national service manager for Atlas Copco Construction and Mining Equipment is all about the growth of people inside and outside the pivotal service division.

"We're embarking on our most extensive ever in-house recruitment and training program, and we're doubling our apprentice intake in 2008 [to 80 new personnel]," Phillips said.

"We're also in the process of formulating a new career progression structure and training program for all our people, and we've launched an aggressive recruitment drive around the country.

"We have a mix of long term and shorter term strategies to maintain the growth of

our service division, but more importantly to upskill and develop the people in this part of the business. As with all companies supplying mining equipment in this market, there is an acute awareness that aftermarket will be the key business driver when the investment cycle turns."

A former national underground maintenance manager for Henry Walker Eltin, then HWE Mining (he spent 12 years in total with HWE), Phillips also worked for more than 14 years prior to that in the mining equipment supply sector, initially with a Caterpillar dealer in Tasmania and then with Tamcorp. He's seen the equipment supply business from both sides of the fence and believes the industry is in the midst of even more serious recruitment and training challenges than those widely reported to date. Skilled technical and maintenance staff, in particular, are harder to come by than ever.

Phillips is cognisant of measures adopted so far in the mining industry to quickly expand the skills base, including a steep rise in people imports and rampant staff poaching – two approaches which clearly come with sustainability question marks. He believes it's time now to be more innovative and to take a longer term view.

"With apprentices we're looking at up to a seven year arrangement that will not only give them an apprenticeship but also a career path beyond that. We're putting forward a



Nick Phillips on board as the National Service Manager.

four-year apprenticeship, then up to three years of either working for the product company, or continuing career development and product training elsewhere around the world. They will then have the option of, as one example, coming back as product specialist type people," Phillips said.

"It is a path that gives people – and I'll generalise and say Generation Y and other young people – variety, different opportunities and experiences, and a longer term career road.

"We can offer it because we operate in 30 countries around the world. So let's utilise what assets we've got.

"It gives us, potentially, a seven-year tenure. We believe it will improve our retention rate [for apprentices], but even if we are supplying more skilled Atlas personnel into the industry, we're exporting the culture and a degree of product loyalty out into the marketplace.

"Everyone is looking elsewhere, to bring tradesmen in from overseas, but there aren't too many success stories around the country. So we've got to do something different.

"It might not be for everyone, but some will jump at it and say this is fantastic. Our ads just recently went out for apprenticeship training around the country and we immediately received 68 replies."

Phillips said the program concept drew from his previous industry experiences and discussions he'd had with Atlas Copco product specialists and other personnel. "People who've gone to work with the product company have absolutely loved it, they've come back with lots of knowledge and experience, full of beans, and ready to go forward," he said.

"My focus is all about our people and the growth of our people, and making sure we've got people who want to and are happy to come



Upskilling and developing people in service is a priority.

to work. Obviously that is also going to produce a good result for us and our customers."

While 2008 is expected to see new initiatives such as the apprentice program become building blocks for the future, Phillips said there was also an immediate need to invest in more aftermarket support infrastructure and resources.

"We've got to grow because we're selling equipment," he said.

"The company's MARC (maintenance and repair contracts) strategy has been a success. We've signed the biggest MARCs that Atlas Copco globally has ever had.

"We're putting in the infrastructure to support that very important part of our business, including very precise measures to manage those contracts. We're investing again in capital, as BHP would say.

"We see significant growth occurring in surface drilling, which is our ADS product line, and where there is also huge potential aftermarket business.

"The underground equipment market is also still quite buoyant. We've got a lot of potential with our new truck [MT 6020] next year, and we're going to very actively promote and support that product to make sure it gets off the ground and sells well."

Phillips said as a contractor maintenance manager, he had been keen to see equipment suppliers "walk the talk, and not just talk the talk".

"We have a mix of long term and shorter term strategies to maintain the growth of our service division, but more importantly to upskill and develop the people in this part of the business."

Increasingly, mine owners and operators were outsourcing equipment maintenance and repair so "they don't have the problems that come with it".

"Quality people are the key to us making that side of our business perform well into the future," Phillips said.

"I am confident that we have them, and that we can develop more to keep ahead of industry demand. That's the challenge for us now." **h**

Pilot leads training initiative

A pilot program with a Perth TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college is expected to lay down a new framework for competence based training of Atlas Copco Cert IV qualified trainers and product specialists.

"When the course is adjusted to the TAFE competency-based structure, it will give someone the opportunity to complete an Atlas Copco course, or modules, and receive full certification according to the RTO guidelines."

Atlas Copco Construction and Mining technical and training co-ordinator Rex Supierz said he was excited about the potential benefits of melding external Registered Training Organisation (RTO) certified course material and structure with elements of Atlas Copco's technical training platform.

The resultant TAFE mapped courses for Atlas Copco and also customer personnel would give trainers the opportunity to attain universally recognised certification for course material completed under the auspices of Atlas Copco or

their local TAFE, Supierz said.

"It's Australia-wide," he said. "That's the beauty of going with the TAFE system. Competency levels that we offer from this training are recognised Australia-wide."

Atlas Copco engaged Swan TAFE senior lecturer Clyde Hicks to identify components of the supplier's ROC L8 surface drill training course that could be matched to standard TAFE curriculum content. Ultimately, similar matrices would be drawn up to determine common links between all Atlas Copco technical training material, and TAFE course content.

"We're using the ROC L8 machine for a pilot at the moment," Supierz said.

"When the course is adjusted to the TAFE competency-based structure, it will give someone the opportunity to complete an Atlas Copco course, or modules, and receive full certification according to the RTO guidelines.

"We will still offer machine specific training, but under the RTO stamp of the national TAFE system.

"It improves the transparency and standard of our training. Our guys who are delivering the training are actually passed out as competent by the TAFE system. And it enables us to achieve recognition within the mining industry that we are training at a specific, recognised level of competency.

"It's our key initiative in terms of offering competency based training throughout Australia, and it is linked to current efforts to create better career paths and structures within the company." **h**



Rex Supierz mastering the Boomer simulator.

Automated jumbo takes flight

Thirty years ago the seeds of a new drilling era had not only been sown, they were sprouting promising technologies. Environmental, health and safety, and cost factors were not, however, exerting enough pressure on drill operators to make them grasp at the benefits of automation. The picture has now changed, according to Sverker Hartwig.

The vice president technology of Atlas Copco's construction and mining equipment business, who was in Australia to address an Institute of Quarrying conference in Tasmania, has seen the forces of change reshape demand for drilling technology in quarrying and mining over more than three decades with Atlas Copco.

His presentation focusing on the future of surface drilling initially took conference delegates back to the 1970s. "Atlas Copco had already then a project going since the late 1960s for automatic positioning of drill jumbos. This was before the micro processor [when the] mathematical functions for calculating positions were done using ECL logics," Hartwig said. "The project team consisted of ex-Bofors anti-aircraft gun control system designers.

"Maybe we will never see a faster system, but the flexibility ... left everything to wish for and the size and power consumption was of course a concern."

Hartwig said early recognition of the potential of programmable micro-processors did not mean new-generation automated drill rigs appeared overnight. "It was not until 1986 that could we introduce a commercial rig in Las Vegas," he said. The two-boom automatic jumbo called the Robot Boomer offered labour cost and safety benefits, but quarries and mines weren't yet ready. "In the period from 1986 to 1996 only a few rigs of this type were sold."

In the meantime technologies evolved and improved.

Hartwig couldn't recall seeing too many robotic rigs that weren't attended by operators, but "slowly, a few other features of these rigs started to develop, both pure technically but also in the user's mind".

"An increased availability was observed, less over-break, better fragmentation and better repeatability," he said. "Suddenly the list is

long with features more linked to quality than labour cost."

Atlas Copco began introducing current drill rig control system architecture, based on CANbus technology, and hence a distributed and modular design, in the 1990s. The technology offered versatility in that various rigs could use it and degrees of automation, and remote or autonomous control, were possible. But Hartwig said available technology meant the drill rigs of the period were like "a good PC, with Windows in it, but no software like Word, Excel and the like".

"In surface mining and quarrying, we will soon see one operator and several rigs. It is a part of the future that is already here."

"Now we have a very powerful PC, a modern OS system and a whole bunch of standard and optional user programs. The future is now finally here," he said.

"In some mines, one operator can remotely operate a number of rigs; in tunnelling, one man can operate four booms equipped with extremely fast rock drills – COP 3038 on AC L4 rigs – and for extended periods the rigs can complete a task such as a fan in production drilling without human interference.

"In surface mining and quarrying, we will soon see one operator and several rigs. It is a part of the future that is already here."

Auto-piloting, precision navigation and the "need for speed" were not the only concepts shared between drill rig and airplane designers and developers, Hartwig said.

"One of my earliest bosses was an aeronautical engineer," he said.

"A lot of air passengers set value to the fact that they start from a given place and arrive at another also predetermined place – though some of us have experienced exceptions.



Sverker Hartwig unveils the future of drilling at the IQA Conference in Hobart.

"This is equally important in bench drilling, and we have not until now started to equip ourselves with relevant gear for this, as already used in aircraft, such as compasses, GPS systems, laser/radar ranging systems and more.

"[Technology] introduced on Atlas Copco Smartrigs is now rapidly spreading all over the world."

Hartwig said Atlas Copco's unique "silenced" rigs allowed them to work closer to built up centres – "we are bringing the airport/quarry closer to town" – while emissions and fuel consumption had been significantly reduced.

"The new advanced control systems on these Smartrigs in many cases reduces fuel consumption by 20-30% due to better management of engine speed, flushing, and better hydraulic systems," he said.

Hartwig said improved technology and smarter design were enabling drilling to push through its "sound barrier".

"Increased control and availability will give customers more drill metres, maybe more so than from brute force," he said. "We will see some increased drill rates in the future, mostly due to higher operating frequency of the rock drills. Problems associated with reflected waves and interference will make this easier in short-hole drilling (drifting) than long-hole (bench). Due to increased speed, utilisation and availability we do see a trend towards lower cost per hole."

The "autopilot" in drilling was the means to drill dead straight, he said.

"Top hammer drilling will take you fast and cheap from A to B. In rough weather – or bad rock – DTH used to be the alternative, but at cost. Atlas Copco's COPROD system is in many ways the best of the best, combining the hole quality of the DTH but with the speed and cost of top hammer." h

RC50 trials head west

New trials underway at mines in Western Australia are set to pave the way for the explosive entry into the Australian market of Atlas Copco's RC50 drill hammer in 2008.

Launched in Sydney at the recent AIMEX 2007 mining expo and subsequently introduced at mines in New South Wales, the unique reverse circulation drill hammer is set to deliver significantly improved drill penetration rates and service life

Claes Hillblom, Atlas Copco Construction & Mining Australia "business line manager RDT (Rock Drilling Tools), which incorporates the Secoroc range" said while the company continued to experiment to determine the optimum bit design to suit the operation of the hammer, the RC50 itself was "performing really well" and demonstrating that it could drill "faster than any other hammer on the market".



"We are gradually increasing our presence and stocking up with hammers and parts so we can make a serious assault on the market in 2008," he said.

"The customers out there are screaming for an alternative product"

"Testing has predominantly been in NSW. We are now looking at a couple of sites in WA but don't have the results yet."

Hillblom said Australian market demand for an alternative RC hammer was evident.

"It's a huge market and one where pretty much one competitor has the dominant market share. So the customers out there are screaming for an alternative product and it's not a problem for us to sell it right now. We just need to be happy with the performance and then.

Hillblom said a long-term development program had aimed to deliver an RC hammer which set new standards in performance, reliability and simplicity. The company's engineers came up with the patented

Quantum Leap cycle design to maximise drilling efficiency and develop more power for any available compressor capacity. The result is 10-15% faster penetration rates in suitable ground, with frequency [blows per minute] of the Secoroc RC50 as much as 34% higher than other products.

"This translates into faster drilling and outstanding performance in all [rock] formations, though it has been performing best in hard rock formations," he said.

The Quantum Leap air cycle maximises efficiency and develops greater power for large or small compressor capacities. The air cycle uses a special poppet valve to drive air pressure to accelerate the piston to higher energy levels, with the valve allowing pressure to transfer through to the piston for as much as 80% of the stroke. Longevity and reliability are improved by a larger piston struck-end, a heat-treated collection tube and the use of the Quantum Leap valve cycle.

"Comparison tests have shown the [RC50] sample tube having up to 70% longer service life compared to present market leaders in the segment," Hillblom said.

The RC50's unique collector tube assembly was easier to service thanks in part to the patent-pending tube retention system. Replacing wearable parts doesn't require complete disassembly.

For a long time there has only been one choice in the recirculating hammer market. We like to think that will still be the case, but the choice will be the RC50.

Headway is produced bi-monthly. All enquiries to Sue Goć, Communications Manager, AtlasCopco Australia. Ph: 02 9621 9707. Email: sue.goc@au.atlascopco.com

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