

ALS GROUP

Big hearts deliver big promises



Family values, intellectual capacity, expertise, upskilling and teamwork – these traits are the foundations on which the ALS Group of companies business was built, and remain the core attributes of its ongoing success, discovers **Inside Mining.**



THE ALS GROUP comprises 16 business units, and employs about 900 people specialising in the earthmoving and civils sectors. Working as individual units or together, they offer a deep pool of resources and skills, providing a 'one-stop' solution capable of overcoming any challenge. Each individual company is focused on a specific market segment within the earthmoving and civils industries, which equates to well-developed and highly specialised skills. These include specialised rental companies, open pit mining contracting, civils as well as construction companies.

Although ALS Group has been working in the mining sector for less than 10 years, it already has numerous current and completed projects under its belt, and continues to drive its presence in the sector. "We appreciate the clients we have added to our client base over the past year, as well as the support from our suppliers. This has contributed to a great year for the mining part of our business, which today makes up a large portion of our turnover," says ALS Group's CEO, Johan Janse van Rensburg.

He outlines the company's key success attributes, qualities he upholds above all else and instils in every manager and employee. "We measure our performance on a continuous basis, providing us with the necessary information on which to base decisions, which directions to take and where to improve. We have put processes and checks in place in each part of our business, enabling us to measure and evaluate everything that can impact the bottom line.

"We also invest in technology and equipment to increase our productivity and work more dynamically. An example of this is the new improved engines, which deliver an improvement on fuel efficiency by as much as 30%. We continually work to improve control over expenses like diesel, logistics, communication and salaries. We position ourselves 'as close as possible' to our suppliers and clients, allowing us to establish long-term relationships based on trust. And finally, but most importantly, we continuously improve our workforce through

training, empowering and building the capacity of the individual in our service."

Looking to the future, ALS Group is looking to the coal sector for growth in the short to medium term, driven by the growing demand for energy, which fuels the local demand for coal. "We will, however, continue to diversify within the group to 'hedge' ourselves from fluctuations across industries and markets."

Joining forces for delivery excellence

The ALS Group's most recent contract entails developing a new mining pit for a privately owned coal mining company and is the perfect example of the group's capabilities.

"We were awarded the contract in February and are currently developing the box-cut for the company's pit situated in the Middleburg area. During the mining phase, our aim is to move about 450 000 m³ every month," explains ALS Group's mining director, Gert Maritz.

The award of the contract has seen numerous entities in the ALS Group involved in the project. "Our mining company does not own

any plant, our focus is mining and meeting production targets. Instead, we work with our sister companies, ensuring we deliver a top-quality service on every project element to our client through shared values and systems," Maritz continues.

The specialist plant hire companies supply the plant and are responsible for the operator as well as the maintenance of the machines.

Erno Janse van Rensburg, plant hire director, ALS Group, reiterates the employee development sentiments: "Our company comprises specialists, because we put a lot of effort into developing the team. On-the-job training and general training courses are non-negotiable, meaning we are constantly upskilling our workforce, providing them with growth opportunities and ensuring absolute commitment in return. This also provides continuity between ALS companies when working together. ALS employees have a mutual respect for each other, further encouraged through a flat management structure with a hands-on approach."

"We work with our sister companies, ensuring we deliver a top-quality service on every project element."

Gert Maritz, mining director, ALS Group



OPPOSITE AND TOP INSET

On site in the Middelburg area – ALS still uses spotters on site

RIGHT FLTR – Gert Maritz, mining director at ALS; Martin Joubert, client; and Giel Venter, ALS site manager

Because plant hire could be considered one of the core group businesses, looking after the fleet is essential. “Ideally, we try and renew our machines every 9 000 hours (three to five years),” Erno points out. The company spent in excess of R145 million over the past 12 months to renew the fleet.

“Maintenance is equally, if not more important. We aim to service our machines after every 250 hours worked, which is more frequent than industry average but makes us more competitive in the second-hand market. We have dedicated mechanics on-site, always take extended warranties on our machines and are cost competitive on machine rebuilds at our facility in the area.”

The ALS Group runs about 400 pieces of capital equipment.

The future of ALS Mining

“We are a competitive opencast mining contractor with an excellent safety track record with not a single lost time injury recorded in the past five years. We have created a culture

where people take responsibility for their actions and ensure that honesty is upheld,” Maritz outlines.

While the company’s aim is not to have a large number of contracts, new opportunities are always evaluated. “Our intention is to focus on the coal sector and penetrate the market, which we will do as opportunities present themselves.”

The intention is to be a mid-tier player, moving about 1 million bank cubic metres a month in total, increasing to about 1.5 million bank cubic metres across the projects. “We don’t want to be the biggest, but do want to be the most competent and the most productive without compromising on safety. Working closely with projects provides clients with a sense of ease and comfort. Personal interaction and service delivery is a massive-value-add to any client,” Maritz adds.

Although the current focus going forwards is coal, the ALS Group has considerable experience in hard rock mining and recently completed a five year contract with Littleton

Dolomite. It previously worked at Lonmin’s Marikana opencast platinum mine and Harmony Gold’s opencast Kalgold operation.

Komatsu dozers deliver

Machine rebuilds and renewals are important values shared across all ALS Group companies. The Dozer Hire entity was officially established as a standalone entity four years ago, the company rents dozers as a value-added deal to the mining industry including operators and maintenance. “Our focus is rehabilitation and production dozing for the Mpumalanga coal mines,” states ALS Dozer Hire’s MD, Giep de Klerk.

The company’s fleet comprises mainly Komatsu dozers, with a few supplementary Cats, with sizes varying from the D155 size right up to the D375s.

“Machine renewal is an ongoing process, with a typical machine working between two and three years. Rebuilds are equally as important. We strip the machine down and rebuild it from scratch, enabling it to perform productively for another 10 000 hours on average.” The company recently purchased two new Komatsu dozers, which are already operational on one of Witbank’s larger coal mines. “Buying a few

RIGHT AND OPPOSITE FLTR – Renier De Klerk, BUM, ALS Dozer Hire; Johan Janse van Rensburg, CEO, ALS Group; Giep de Klerk, MD, ALS Group; Thys Joubert, director, ALS Group; Tertius Vermeulen, sales application engineer, Komatsu

BELOW Gideon De Klerk, MD ALS Dozer Hire, testing the new Komatsu dozer



new machines each year forms part of our renewal strategy.”

De Klerk speaks highly of the Komatsu dozers and will continue to show preference for the brand, in line with ALS Group’s policy to develop relationships and work closely with a select group of preferred suppliers. “Komatsu’s prices are very competitive and we are accustomed to and comfortable with the machines’ performance.

We bought our first Komatsu dozers about 20 years ago, and the two we bought eight years ago are still working today. We have trust and faith in the brand.”

“The ALS Group, over the past 25 years, has always had a policy to look at things from a long-term perspective and to concentrate on sustainability. We evaluate equipment over a 60-month period and calculate everything from the purchase price, maintenance cost, productivity, reliability, operator comfort, durability, cost per tonne and, most importantly, the value of the machine at the end of the 60-month cycle. Evaluating Komatsu machines in this way over the years, we are comfortable with what we have in Komatsu. We believe that

business revolves around people and we are also more than comfortable with the people at Komatsu ‘standing behind’ the machines – the guys delivering the back-up service etc. In the competitive market place we do business in these days there isn’t place for a company that does not understand the importance of service delivery. We believe Komatsu understands this and they help us to meet the

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Giep de Klerk, director, ALS Dozer Hire

high standards our clients expect from us,” Johan affirms.

“We have been working for about two and a half years at one of Witbank’s more established coal mines, performing production dozing and dump rehabilitation. We have seven dozers

on-site and expect to remain there for another few years,” elaborates de Klerk.

The company is also operating two dozers at another ALS site in the area, doing all material pushover and flattening the tipping area. It will supply another two machines in the near future. The company recently completed the construction of a twin ramp system on opposite ends of a well-known coal mine’s opencast pit, which will be used for conveyors to transfer the ore from the pits. Each ramp is about 1 km in length and the project took only three months to complete.

The ALS Group is also focusing its attention on the coal sector for its dozing entity and is tendering for new work in the Carolina and Hendrina areas.

“We love the challenges of the coal industry and are looking forward to growing our market share in this sector,” de Klerk concludes. **35**

Welcome “Komatsu mining division, Isando would like to take this opportunity to welcome Giep de Klerk and ALS Dozer Hire to our Komatsu family, we are looking forward to a long mutual relationship with the possibility of future growth in the mining sector.” **Tertius Vermeulen**

