

PROFILE: Robbie Morrison, Executive Manager Western Region

In a career that spans around 27 years with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, there isn't much that Robbie Morrison, Executive Manager Western Region, doesn't know about the complexities of supplying tyres to the mining, resources and associated industry sectors. In this interview he gives candid comment on the issues that challenge Bridgestone and how it is managing the challenges in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC).



Robbie Morrison, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' Executive Manager, Western Region.

Perhaps surprisingly to some, the tyre supply issue didn't end with the significant downturn in economic activity associated with the GFC, says Robbie.

"Since the GFC, we have still been experiencing an issue with the supply of large and giant tyres but we have notified our customers about allocations

and generally we've been able to supply these allocations, which is a very positive outcome for the company.

"We have certainly seen an increase in the supply of small to medium tyres, which has enabled us to approach the market at a different level.

"We are now also promoting our full range of diversified products which includes tyre repairs and Sealzit, along with Topy wheel and rim products."

Robbie started with Bridgestone as a sales representative covering South Australia and the Northern Territory, progressed to branch manager South Australia, then regional manager South Australia and the Northern Territory.

In his current role as the Executive Manager Western Region, he is responsible for South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

In terms of size and importance to Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' Australian operations, the Western Region is similar in size and scope to Queensland, servicing a mix of customers ranging from global and national major mines accounts, to major, mid-size and small contractors, along with tyre dealers, ports and wharves.

For Robbie, a professional approach to selling tyre and wheel products remains a key issue, particularly as the tyre shortage eases, and competition becomes more intense.

"In my experience, one of the major issues that's changed over the years – mainly due to the tyre supply situation – is that we have become an organisation focused on managing the supply of tyres, rather than one with salespeople trying to sell product," he says.

"But I believe professional salesmanship will again become a factor over the next few years; it's happening now with the small-to-medium tyre range.

"Because of this, one of the things I am insisting on with our Western Region team is that our salespeople maintain their selling skills. This is particularly relevant to the promotion of our diversified products range," says Robbie.

"The Topy wheel and rim business, once it's fully up and running with our blast, test and paint facilities, will provide us with a real bonus: an extra service offering wheel and rim parts.

"These developments and opportunities are a great result for our region and the company overall, particularly given our very professional approach to the marketing and managing of this particular line of products," he says.

"Based on our current information and conversations we are having with customers, during the next 12 to 24 months we expect the demand for large to giant earthmover tyres to increase significantly.

"We also see our small to medium range of tyres certainly sustaining current numbers – but potentially increasing as well.

"However, it's difficult to accurately forecast quantities for this sector because it can be affected by transient business and spot sales of smaller tyres, causing demand to fluctuate."

When the mining boom was in full swing and tyre supply was a major issue, a number of alternative and previously unknown products from Europe and

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PROFILE: Robbie Morrison, Executive Manager Western Region *continued*

China flooded the market – but post-GFC there has been a swing back towards premium tyre products, says Robbie.

“From the start, these alternative products certainly did not perform to expectations.

“Customers were expecting these tyres to perform as well as established premium-brand radial tyres.

“When that didn’t occur, customers had to reduce loadings, speeds and cycle times of equipment to compensate for the poorer-quality tyre product.”

“Pricing was also an issue, with the alternative products priced quite high –

although these have since been reduced.

“Over that same period Bridgestone maintained very competitive pricing, with any price increases only reflecting increases in raw materials costs and changing exchange rates,” says Robbie.

“Throughout all this, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres has continued to offer a ‘solutions driven’ package which I believe places us over and above our competitors.

“Of course, we still need to show customers the value associated with our offering, but we are receiving very positive feedback from them,” he says.

New Smart Change wheel/rim system increases safety and productivity

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, the national distributor for Topy Wheels and Rims, has launched a new Topy “Smart Change” wheel/rim system, designed to enable the fitting and replacement of tyres without the need to remove any wheels on dual-rear wheel on large dump trucks.

The new lightweight system is safer, substantially reduces the need to remove wheels, and cuts tyre change times on dual-wheel systems by around 50%.

According to Adrian Angus, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres’ National Wheel Manager for Topy OTR Wheel Products, it is the first significant development in

heavy earthmoving equipment rim technology in 50 years.

The new Topy Smart Change rim, which fits on the outer positions of dual wheel positions, is based around a new design “Super Strength” rim base technology, says Adrian.

“Conventional rim bases for dump trucks are what we call five-piece rims, but for this new system, we have developed a seven-piece arrangement.

“We have incorporated a removable section – an additional bead seat band – on the back of the rim, resulting in the outside rim base being completely flat. Once the outer tyre is removed, the inside tyre and components can come



Topy engineers inspecting the condition of Smart Change and Super Strength Wheel components after prolonged service life.

out over that outer 'flat' rim," he says.

Topy's new Smart Change rims are made from new high-strength, high-tech steel alloy material, also used in its just-released Topy Super Strength Wheel range (see story below).

Adrian says this new development significantly increases safety and improves productivity when changing or inspecting rims and tyres.

"The removal process has traditionally involved the removing of all the wheel nuts, where there's a lot of repetition, strained elbows and shoulders for the service personnel, and so on.

"Using the Topy Smart Change system means the wheels remain in position throughout the tyre changing process," he says.

"The only time the wheel is required to be removed is for hub or wheel maintenance. This considerably lessens the time needed for tyre changes.

"We estimate that it is six-to-eight times less likely that a wheel will have to be removed for a tyre change, giving massive time-saving benefits for this operation.

"We also estimate that the productivity for the rear axle tyre changes should

improve by around 50-57%, which is a considerable time saving."

The new Smart Change wheel rim system was a joint development between Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres – which provided the marketing feasibility studies – and Topy Industries.

The new system is now in operation at a number of major mines around Australia; there are also a number of new mines which have committed to Topy's latest premium products as their new fleets arrive – with many others being quoted.

"The safety and time-saving benefits are so compelling that the mining industry has been very quick to embrace this new technology," says Adrian.

"One of the issues with rims is that we've pretty much had the same design for the past 50 years – and the question has often been asked, 'Why haven't the rim companies stepped up and developed something more appropriate for modern machinery and equipment?'

"This new material and wheel design technology from Topy has taken that step, and plenty of people in the mining industry are willing to give it a go," Adrian says.

Topy Super Strength Wheel range gives longer life, more safety

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, the Australian distributor for Topy Wheels and Rims, has launched a new range of Super Strength wheels, based around a purpose-designed high-tech steel alloy developed specifically for mining dump truck applications.

The new Topy Super Strength Wheel range is said to be significantly safer than conventional dump truck wheels, because it is stronger and much longer-lasting, greatly reducing the chances of catastrophic wheel failure.

Developed over the past three years by Topy, working closely together with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in Australia, its new Super Strength Wheel range is designed for rear dump trucks wheels of 51, 57 and 63 inches in diameter, capable of 150 to 400 tonnes load carrying capacity.

According to Adrian Angus, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' National Wheel Manager, the Topy Super Strength Wheel is the result of three years of detailed research and development, combined with field trials.

The development process was initiated through a better understanding of the fatigue issues occurring due to mechanical reactions in the areas of interface between components and wheel/rim bases.

"Our initial research concluded that fretting and galling – the friction that occurs when there is a metal to metal interface – is a major reason for rim failure," says Adrian.

"The challenge for Topy – one of the only wheel manufacturers that also manufactures its own steel – was to develop a material that would lessen the occurrence of fretting and galling and thereby create a rim capable of exceptional life."

Although there is no obvious cosmetic difference between a Topy Super Strength Wheel and a conventional wheel, there is considerable difference in the wheel material and its whole-of-life properties.

"Initial testing of these new-generation rims indicates we

will get up to 10 times the life of conventional rims, because we have all-but eliminated the mechanical causes of wheel and rim failure," says Adrian.

"I know that's quite a statement, but that's what the bench test models have produced so far."

Field tests are now being conducted in the Hunter Valley, with the rims having notched up around 14,000 to 15,000 operational hours.

"So far, we have carried out three inspections – the last at 12,900 hours – and the rim bases were in perfect condition, as if they were brand new," Adrian says.

"As an indication, normally we would expect fretting and galling – particularly fretting – to start occurring at around the 2000-3000 hour period. So that gives us some credible predictability already.

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Topy's new Super Strength wheel provides up to 10 times the life of conventional rims.

Topy Super Strength Wheel range gives longer life, more safety *continued*

"We're constantly supplying feedback to Topy, which had representatives present at the last inspection, and they were very pleased with the result. It very much replicates the bench testing that they had conducted," he says.

"We expect that, within another 5000 hours of testing we'll be able to stand up and predict exactly what we expect out of these rims."

Adrian says the key benefit of the Super Strength Wheel is safety: "That's the biggest issue today, it's all about safety."

The second major benefit comes from the fact that the industry itself is required to carry out regular testing of wheels and rims, under the Australian Standard (AS4457.1). And this new material will push testing cycles out to

new boundaries, which will be a major benefit to end users.

"On current indications, we're predicting 15,000 hour test cycles with the Super Strength Wheel – or about three years of operational service before any testing has to be carried out.

"As a comparison, a standard rim needs to be tested at 10,000 hours – or approximately two years – from new, and then every 5000 hours – or about annually – after that.

"With this new technology, we're extending performance by a significant factor – plus offering the customer a very big cushion as far as safety is concerned," says Adrian.

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres photo comp: Winners are grinners

This year's Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres photographic competition was an outstanding success with some 300 entries sent in by our staff from all over the country.

The standard of images was excellent, with obvious thought given to the composition, lighting and content. However, the winners were three stand out entries:

First: Alvise Raccanello, Western Australia-based Field Engineer, who wins the LCD TV. This is the second year running that Alvise has won the competition, so congratulations to him!

Second: Richard Farnham, South Australian-based Account Manager, winner of the Kodak digital camera.

Third: Tim Caddy, Mackay, Queensland Sales Representative, who won the Sony MP3 player.

Tips on taking prize-winning photos:

- Make sure you are only photographing Bridgestone Tyres.
- Ensure the camera is set on the highest resolution.
- Switch off the date function.
- When photographing personnel ensure their apparel complies with safety requirements.

Don't wait for next year's competition. If you see something interesting, take the shot NOW and send it to kathystefanac@bsem.com.au



First prize photo by Alvise Raccanello, Field Engineer.



Second prize photo by Richard Farnham, Account Manager.



Third prize photo by Tim Caddy, Sales Representative

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