

## **Electra Mining Africa 2018 was a vital platform for the future of mining**

**By Norman Maleka, National Sales and Marketing Manager**

31 October 2018: Our focus was to showcase the new products we are developing for the future. SEW is present in all major industries, from mining to food-and-beverage and automotive, to name a few. Hence it is always a challenge for us when it comes to Electra Mining Africa: What do we focus on, and which products do we push aggressively? It is an interesting challenge, because it does imply we have a range of solutions for different industries.

The biggest industry for us is mining. How do we approach the issue of providing solutions? We deal mainly with project houses, as these are actively involved in any Greenfield mining projects. We also deal with OEMs who tender to produce solutions. Those are the main people we work with across the board.

As in previous years, we had our full mining product portfolio on our stand, including our large geared units and Industrial Gear (IG) units. These are vital for applications such as conveying and hoisting, which require large heavy-duty units. However, mining operations consume a lot of energy, so we also aim to demonstrate our energy-saving initiatives.

These include the application of Variable Speed Drives (VSDs) for motor control, for example. We even had specialised products such as our LTP-B Eco HVAC drive. This drive can extract dust or circulate clean air in a shaft. It can pump out slurry water, or even pump in water for cooling applications. It is a new product for us, which is why it was forefront at Electra Mining Africa 2018.

We even featured specific products for materials handling in mining, such as our Automated Guided Vehicle (AGV) system. This system is used to automate in-house material flows, or can serve as the basis for flexible assembly operations. The track-guided inductive heavy-load AGVS allows for a barrier-free factory, for example.

SEW's total AGV system solution covers the individual vehicles, energy supply, and the WLAN communication, as well as the navigation and vehicle coordination itself.

Yes, mining tends to shy away from sophisticated technology, and has always relied on manual labour. The uptake of automation has been slow because it is such a difficult operating environment. Any equipment installed has to be sufficiently rugged and durable to withstand these conditions. This is why we also focus on solutions specifically for mineral-processing plants, which has a greater demand for new technology.

We also had an LTP-B Eco HVAC demonstration drive on our stand, running a fan, so delegates could see for themselves how effectively it controls the flow, and what features and benefits it offers. Whatever functionality we can offer, we attempted to showcase its benefits in the best way possible, given the constraints of our stand itself.

We featured a complete Powerpack on our stand, which we traditionally supply to mines. This consists of a motor, a coupling, and a gearbox. However, we went one step further by including a VSD to highlight how this can vary the motor speed, and thus be used to speed up or slow down a conveyor belt, resulting in a significant energy-saving.

Electra Mining Africa 2018 was an important opportunity for us to showcase our competencies. We have always perceived the exhibition as a major platform to realise this goal, and to reach a far bigger audience to communicate our product portfolio to. We were also able to inform this audience how we have evolved, not only from a product point of view, but also in terms of the ancillary services we have added to the business.

For us, it is one platform we never miss. We always look forward to it. It gives us an opportunity to engage with our customers, and to learn about the market – not only to benefit our customers, but also for us to learn about the competition, and what is happening at the coalface, so to speak. It is a perfect platform for networking, for promoting technology, and showcasing the evolution of our company, as an innovator, a solutions provider, and as an essential partner to the mining industry.

More importantly, our continued presence at the exhibition shows our customers that, despite the tough business environment, we are still standing, and we are close at hand to listen to them and assist them with their requirements. Not only do we use this as an opportunity to talk about our current product portfolio, but we also talk about the future.

For instance, an upcoming trend is our Mechatronic Industrial Gear (MIG) units. These represent the convergence of gears, motors, and decentralised inverters in a single handy package. This is an exciting future technology for the mining industry, especially with the increasing trend towards automation to cut costs and boost productivity.

This is the 'future of mining' as SEW sees it developing. This is where we showcase our ongoing innovation. The message we put out there is that we listen to our customers, and develop products in response to their present needs, and the host of issues facing the mining industry at present, from energy-saving to automation.

Clearly the mining environment needs to play catch-up, and we are able to inform the industry of the quickest and most practical means of doing so. However, it is always a two-way street. For me, one of the most exciting aspects of the exhibition was to be able to interact with delegates, who got to ask questions and presented us with their specific problems or issues. Some of these questions we might not even have thought of, or they highlight different application requirements.

Can we do it this way, for example? This is the kind of information that is invaluable to us as a supplier, a designer, and as an OEM. It allows our research-and-development department to go back to the drawing board. You develop products to solve a problem or to meet a need. You have to listen to your end users. What are their challenges? Even though you might have come up with a solution, how effective is it in the field? Such feedback will inform you.

So, for us Electra Mining Africa 2018 was not only a product showcase, but a platform for interaction and discussion. Not only does it serve South Africans, but it sees delegates attend from all over the world, and from different mining environments or application areas. This is an invaluable source of feedback

from a broad spectrum of end users. Our aim was to spark a discussion, debate, or a conversation around our products. In so doing, we better understand their requirements, how to service them better and, ultimately, how best to improve our products.

It is difficult to sell technology from a brochure. If customers cannot see it, then they cannot comprehend the practical benefits and advantages. Seeing our broader product portfolio on the stand made customers aware of what else we can offer, and the possibilities of integrating new technology and solutions into existing operations. If somebody asks me if there is continued value in participating in Electra Mining Africa, my answer is of course. Some of the opportunities might not be realised immediately, but it does mean we can sow the seeds that will lead to future orders.

And every time we exhibit, we keep on getting better and better. We always find a way to make our participation more customer-friendly. Our product portfolio has grown. Now we have mechatronics with automation, electronics, geared units, motors. For us, it is a problem to include everything, and convey a distinct message. This is what we always want customers to take away from our participation: What can SEW do for them? Customers need to know our value proposition.

We also displayed our service capability, which is critical at a time when the mining industry is faced with an ongoing downturn. This is not a new concept for SEW, but we showcased it to delegates in particular so they could comprehend the scope, which includes our Drive Academy.

SEW Germany goes so far as to include HR on its stand at major exhibitions, and even to talk about internal systems and processes, highlighting what happens to your order once it is inputted. What happens behind the scenes? That is vital to know. How can our customers use online tracking to keep tabs on their orders? Now you can place an order online, configure your gearbox, email the specifications to internal sales, and the order is processed. You are able to track your order from assembly to when it is placed on the truck for transportation.

That is the power of Industry 4.0 and the Internet of Things. For example, SEW Germany had an entire factory cell mock-up at Hannover recently specifically

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to showcase these trends. This is the power of exhibiting at shows like Electra Mining Africa – it means the future is now.

***Ends***

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**Media Contact**

Nomvelo Buthelezi

NGAGE Public Relations

Phone: (011) 867-7763

Fax: 086 512 3352

Cell: 083 408 8911

Email: [nomvelo@ngage.co.za](mailto:nomvelo@ngage.co.za)

Web: [www.ngage.co.za](http://www.ngage.co.za)

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