

Astra(nomically) tough

Astra may be new to the playing field, but it is already dominating the specialised heavy-duty game. Rugged and reliable vehicles with low operating costs are the foundation on which the success formula is built

Astra's tough trucks have been carving a road, or rather scaling the terrain as it were, in the South African market during the past five years, and are establishing themselves as market leaders for a wide spectrum of specialised heavy-duty applications.

Astra is gaining a well deserved niche on the specialised and heavy-duty applications front.

Astra started in Cagliari, Italy, in 1946 to convert heavy military trucks for commercial use. This purpose laid the foundation for Astra to become a manufacturer of heavy-duty commercial vehicles, aimed at tough-

terrain industries such as mining, quarry and construction.

"We have become involved in a different industry as well, with Eskom, focusing on the expansion of the power lines grid," Ceccarelli points out. Astra has additionally entered into a relationship with Edison Jehamo Power (EJP), which is also handling extensions of the South African power lines. EJP has bought 10 trucks from Astra, comprising 6x6, 8x6 and 8x8 models, which are all fitted with a 100-tonne crane. This is a good example of how Astra can customise its trucks to suit customers'

specific needs. The Italian trucks are also providing Eskom with a new means of transporting coal. This procedure streamlines the coal transportation process by loading coal-filled containers directly onto Astra's 8x6 rigid trucks, which is then offloaded by the mere tipping of the container, enabling the offload of six to

eight trains a day. The company has at the moment a fleet of six Astra trucks and another 10 on order, which will be delivered in the first quarter of 2012.

Astra has also won tenders in Mozambique, where there is a big explosion of coal mining. "We have managed to become the preferred truck manufacturer for crane-trucks, water dowsers, and service-trucks," Ceccarelli points out. This led to the opening of a new workshop in Mozambique, adding to the workshops opened in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's province of Katanga, and Zambia. Ceccarelli states that Astra will also open two new workshops in Zimbabwe and Botswana during 2012 to support the eruption of diamond and uranium mines in those countries.

It is now mandatory for mines to ensure that workers are moved in a proper and safe way, which lead to the use of buses for moving miners within the mines. "We find that a lot of mines struggle to find a proper and durable bus to transport workers," says Ceccarelli, "so we built a 4x4 Astra heavy-duty bus, with all the safety requirements like safety-belts, roll-bars and air-conditioning." The bus will be available as 30- and 60-seater options.

"The health and safety regulations of mining are always improving and to support this we are launching a new cab next year, which will offer greater comfort and, more importantly, increased safety," Ceccarelli concludes.

Astra is striving to further secure its position as a market leader for application-specific vehicles and is constantly exploring new possibilities to carve its road though Africa. ■



"Even a competitor importer didn't choose their own trucks, but bought our Astra 6x6 and 8x8 models for their tough applications," states Andrea Ceccarelli, managing director of Autumn Star Trading, Astra's sole importer and distributor in South Africa, with a mischievous grin. This proves, even though it is still a small company, that