

BELAZ trucks prove their worth in the Northern Cape

Although sales of rigid dump trucks into the mining sector have all but dried up over the past three years, Mynbou Rigs Africa (trading as BELAZ Africa), the local distributor of the BELAZ truck range, has managed to keep its fleet in the country busy. "The BELAZ brand is relatively new to South Africa so it has been critical to put machines into the field – and keep them there – so that they can prove themselves," says Dmitry Venchyk, a Director of BELAZ Africa. "We've achieved this by negotiating long-term rental contracts with mining contractors operating in the arduous conditions of the Northern Cape."

Currently, the two main customers operating BELAZ trucks are Tau Mining, which has deployed them at Kumba's Sishen iron ore mine, and 4 Arrows Mining & Engineering, which is currently using them at Kudu-mane manganese mine. Some of the units at Sishen have been working for seven years and

A BELAZ-7513 operated by Tau Mining is seen working at the Lyleveld sector of the Sishen iron ore mine. The machine can take a 136-tonne payload.



have reportedly turned in an excellent performance, both in terms of productivity and mechanical availability.

BELAZ machines have also recently seen service at the site of Vedanta's Gamsberg zinc project near Aggeneys in the Northern Cape working for Roux Mining, whose contract for the 'pre-start' mining has now been completed. This was not Roux's first experience with the brand, as it had previously deployed BELAZ machines at Kumba's Kolomela mine near Postmasburg.

The BELAZ rigid dump truck line-up runs from the small BELAZ-7540 model, which has a payload of 30 tonnes, through to the gigantic 450-tonne capacity, 2 x 1 750 kW BELAZ-7571, which currently ranks as the biggest mining truck in the world. In practice, the popular machines in South Africa are the BELAZ-7513, a 130-tonne class machine, and the BELAZ-7530, which offers a payload of 220 tonnes. New machines which have recently entered the country – but are yet to be assembled – include the 240-tonne BELAZ-7531.

The best-selling BELAZ-7513 has gained a strong reputation globally as a versatile workhorse for almost any mining application. In fact, earlier this year the 3 000th unit came off the assembly line at the BELAZ factory in Belarus, a country which is now independent but once formed part of the Soviet Union. The factory is located in the town of Zhodina and is one of the biggest truck plants in the world, reflecting the fact that globally BELAZ is one of the biggest producers of dump trucks in the world – and reportedly second only to Komatsu in terms of unit sales.

"Our principals, BELAZ, are currently enjoying a very good year with sales in the first six months of 2017 equalling those for the whole of 2016," says Venchyk. "This reflects the fact that mining in Russia, which is the biggest global market for BELAZ, has recovered considerably. The factory is fully booked for 2017 and is now taking orders for 2018."

The BELAZ mining trucks, starting with the 90-tonne capacity BELAZ-7557, all feature electric drives, with both AC and DC drives available for some models, although



A BELAZ-7513 working for Roux Mining is loaded at the Gamsberg zinc project in the Northern Cape.

increasingly BELAZ is moving towards what it regards as the more efficient AC system. Venchyk points out that the use of an electric drive in the BELAZ-7557 was a 'first' when the model was introduced several years ago. Up to that point, the accepted wisdom in the industry was that trucks in the 90-tonne class should have a mechanical drive.

The BELAZ range has been marketed vigorously in South Africa since 2008 when Mynbou Rigs Africa was established. Progress was initially slow but a major step forward was taken in 2011 when Tau Mining put units into service in the Northern Cape. The machine population in South Africa is still small but Venchyk says that there are excellent prospects for new machines to be placed in the market in the near future.

Apart from South Africa, several BELAZ mining trucks are operating at the Catoca kimberlite mine in Angola while, in Zimbabwe, both Hwange Colliery and the new Zimbabwe Diamond Consolidated Company (ZDCC), are users of BELAZ. Hwange has 130-tonne trucks in operation while ZDCC has a large BELAZ fleet which is expected to total over 50 machines by the end of this year, including 55-tonne dump trucks, wheel dozers, water bowsers and front-end loaders.

Outlining the advantages of the BELAZ mining truck range, Venchyk says the trucks – which can be customised extensively to meet specific customer requirements – are very well priced compared to most competitor machines, as are the spares. "The BELAZ trucks are also extremely economic to maintain," he adds.

Notwithstanding their competitive pricing (which, in part, derives from the highly efficient in-line assembly system used in the factory in Belarus), the trucks are of high quality and meet all relevant international standards.

"BELAZ has been manufacturing dump trucks since the early 1960s and this huge experience has translated into reliable and innovative products," states Venchyk. "Moreover, engines are from leading global players such as MTU and Cummins. Similarly, the electric drive systems are sourced from suppliers such as Siemens or GE."

The machines currently in use in South Africa are all operating on a 'per hour' rental basis with full service being provided by BELAZ Africa. Says Venchyk: "Although we are a relatively small company, we maintain a comprehensive inventory of parts in the country and our service is of a very high standard. Although we are based in Jet Park, Boksburg, we have a full branch at Kathu in the Northern Cape, which also acts as a service depot and a spares centre, to support our many machines in the area."

On the future for BELAZ Africa, Venchyk is positive. "The past several years have been difficult for all plant and equipment suppliers in South Africa but there are signs that mining could revive in 2018," he says. "When this upturn does occur, we would expect to secure at least some of the new business which will be generated as mining companies renew their fleets – enabling us to move beyond the rental contracts that are sustaining us at present."

Photos courtesy of BELAZ Africa

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