



From left, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' new breed of branch managers: John Corben, Hunter Valley; Clinton Harding, Gold Fields region; James Hogg, Perth; and Drew Woodard, Tasmania.

## Bridgestone's new team around Australia

*Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres has over the past year or so made some key appointments at various branches around Australia. These new appointments include Hunter Valley branch manager John Corben, Goldfields branch manager Clinton Harding, Perth branch manager James Hogg and Tasmanian branch manager Drew Woodard.*

*Imprint spoke to all four on the opportunities and challenges facing Bridgestone and the tyre industry.*

### **John Corben, branch manager, Hunter Valley, NSW**

I began my career with Bridgestone in 1996 as a sales clerk, which in hindsight has established the foundation of a long and rewarding journey.

Over the past 10 years, I've been a "boomerang" between the NSW branch and the HV branch; however I have enjoyed the travel and learning from the exposure to mining, from open cut to underground, gold, coal, zinc, copper and so on.

Bridgestone has been like an institution to me, meaning that along the way I been given opportunities to achieve my Advanced Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, a Marketing & Business Certificate and various other courses.

We are at the centre of the coal industry in the Hunter Valley (Singleton, Muswellbrook and eventually Gunnedah), and 90% of the mining activity is open cut.

In my present role, my main objectives are to make everyone's jobs easier through implementing new systems and databases to support tyre sales.



Equally, I'm working hard to improve how we service our customers in terms of sales support, engineering and service. I believe we at Bridgestone are the best at what we do and happily we have the resources for bigger and better things.

We need to collectively target the same objectives and focus on these, particularly safety and asset management.

A significant challenge we are currently facing is the scarcity of skilled tyre fitters – or people who want to learn these skills. If we can overcome this challenge, we can grow this branch to be the biggest in the Valley.

Obviously, our biggest challenge at present is managing the tyre supply shortage, and educating our customers of the need to improve their own tyre management practices.

We maintain a database that records statistics and factors in the variables, allowing us to make pretty accurate analysis and forecasts of anticipated tyre wear and life.

I would have to say that it's taken the industry 12 month to realise the extent and seriousness of the issue, and start to work with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres to achieve the best results.

Rob Fuller, our Hunter Valley account manager does a superb job of managing customers from the perspective of improving tyre life.

We send reports, including updated TKPH calculations, through to customers on a regular basis: monthly, quarterly, half yearly, etc.

We held a highly successful Tyre Awareness course in October, and then followed this up with site-specific training.

Our next move will be to establish a tyre-repair facility in the Hunter Valley, which will be one of our primary focuses during 2006. This

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# Bridgestone's new team continued

will be an important tool in helping us extend tyre life and repair cut separation damage in the Valley – one of the main causes of tyre failure up here.

## **Clinton Harding, branch manager, Goldfields Region, WA**

I started with Bridgestone in 1992 as a store person in Mackay, Queensland. I left the company in 2000 and returned in 2002 as an account manager in Brisbane, before taking up my current position based in Kalgoorlie.



Out of the Goldfields branch, our core business is the supply and servicing of tyres to the mining sector for both underground and above-ground operations.

We have put in place a number of programs to assist our customers in managing their way through the tyre-supply shortage.

For example, we have set up a "Tyre Rescue Program", which involves support and education for the customer on extending tyre life.

In the main, our customers are listening to what we are telling them, and are effectively managing their tyre requirements.

We believe we now have a good handle on tyre supply management, allowing us to ensure most customers have reliability and security of supplier.

To achieve this, we have implemented a fair and precise allocation formula for the supply of product, while at the same time have effectively communicated the message so that our customers no longer consider tyres as an unlimited resource.

The supply issue has also resulted in a big shift towards tyre repair, to the extent that our repair facilities are now inundated.

The lack of new product in the market has seen tyres coming in for repair that, in the past, were considered uneconomical.

We are currently experiencing a rapid growth in our tyre repair market share due to the exceptional performance of our repair products and our highly skilled tyre repair teams.

We are also in the unique position of having access to cutting-edge rubber technologies from Bridgestone Japan.

For us in the Goldfields branch, Bridgestone Diversified Products Division's move into tyre repair and rim servicing represent exciting opportunities for us.

Without having diversified into these other markets, we would have had little opportunity for growth while the tyre supply situation remains as it is.

However, there have been some positives from the tyre supply situation

Our relationships with our clients are stronger than ever. We have our customer's attention.

For as long as I have worked for Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, our goal has always been to value-add to the client's investment with us.

Today, our efforts to improve our products' performance are met with genuine appreciation from the client. Customers are now looking more towards us instead of third-party tyre management companies to provide a solid partnership for the future.

## **James Hogg, branch manager, Perth, WA**

I began my career with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in January 1999, as a sales representative based out of Perth, and am now Perth branch manager.



Heading up the Perth operation allows me to be engaged with a wide range of industries.

Certainly Western Australia has a large and diversified mining sector, allowing us to be involved with all types of mining operations.

However, we are also heavily involved with forestry, quarrying and civil construction, through our Diversified Products range, which includes tyre repairs and rubber tracks.

As with the other Bridgestone branch managers, in this current market we are not able to satisfy everyone's tyre demands; however, we are able to offer expert advice and product knowledge to help our customers extend tyre life.

The overall focus on tyres is now at the forefront of critical issues for most mine operators. The message to improve tyre life is being listened to, but we still have work to do, to make it common practice.

Companies are now hiring "tyre specialists" to work with tyre manufacturers to ensure mining practices conform to best practice for extending tyre life.

Tyre rotations, repairing damaged tyres, pressure maintenance and correct tyre selection are all areas that have improved substantially in the market over the past 12 months.

Again as both John and Clinton have observed, the supply issue has forced the market to move towards tyre repair, with the majority of operations trying to extend their tyre lives.

Our tyre repair facility in Perth has seen a large influx of damaged tyres coming in for repair.

And where a tyre may have previously been deemed unrepairable, it is now capable of being repaired using today's improved technology.

We are very lucky to have positive, enthusiastic employees in our repair section who are continually improving our product.

In addition, Bridgestone has never been tempted to sacrifice quality for quicker turnaround times. The focus has always been satisfying the needs of the market and providing a product quality that will withstand the rigours of harsh mining operations.

As a result of this philosophy, the marketplace is recognising Bridgestone's facility as producing very high quality repairs.

Diversified Products remains an untapped market for Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in WA. I can foresee major increases in this area of our business, without sacrificing our core business of supplying and servicing earthmover tyres.

This move into diversified products complements our core business, allowing us to promote Bridgestone as a "one-stop shop" for the earthmoving tyre market.

Finally, we are seeing increased attention being paid to our advice and recommendations in relation to tyre management. With tyre demand high and supply unable to meet that demand for the foreseeable future,

the market is focusing more on extending tyre life.

Recommendations from Bridgestone to improve tyre performance are being recognised with action on the part of customers.

The market is today relying on us to provide the necessary advice, commitment and assistance to ensure that operations continue with as little disruption as possible.

#### **Drew Woodard, branch manager, Tasmania**

I began employment with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in December 1996, as a sales clerk in the Tasmania branch. In January 2002, I moved into an account manager position, and in August 2005 was promoted to branch manager, Tasmania.

We provide the complete package. Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres is the only OTR tyre company that supplies, services and supports its own product here in Tasmania.

A major part of our business is supply and support of tyres to the mining, construction, forestry and industrial sectors.

With the introduction of rubber tracks into our range in the past two years, we have moved into supplying and supporting this market.

We also have a very close association with major OE manufacturer Caterpillar Underground Mining (formerly Cat Elphinstone).

This business not only includes the supply of tyres, but also the



manufacture and supply of Topy wheels..

In addition, we supply fitting services, technical services and full product support to Cat Underground Mining.

The biggest challenge to our operation is obviously supply; however, with an increased focus on tyre awareness training and education of our customers, and by working more closely with our customers, we are seeing improvements in tyre life and along with decreases in new tyre consumption.

Due to the supply issue, a lot of time is now spent in managing stock, not only for the branch, but also for our customers.

We work closely with our customers, planning tyre rotations, removing damaged tyres and repairing them before failure occurs.

We have also developed relationships with customers' on-site maintenance and planning teams to improve areas of concern – all with a view to utilise as much tread rubber as possible before a tyre has to be discarded.

More recently, we have been exploring the viability of sending tyres to Victoria for repair.

We currently do not have a repair shop at the branch, and have been sending the tyres to another company for repair. This is not an ideal situation, as we do not have full control over the quality of the repair.

Bridgestone's tyre repair facilities utilise the most modern technology available and the resulting hours being achieved from repaired tyres are proof that we do a proper job.

## **Bridgestone technology ensures many safe landings**

The next time your Qantas flight touches down, spare a thought for the tyres that help ensure a safe landing – there's a good chance they were supplied by Bridgestone.

Bridgestone supplies the specialised aircraft tyres to leading airlines such as Qantas, Singapore Airlines and others around the world for all its aircraft up to 747 size, and will be providing tyres for the forthcoming Airbus A380 "super jumbo" planes.

Each Bridgestone tyre fitted to a commercial passenger aircraft is expected to deliver around 1000 landings. In the course of those 1000 landings, the tyre will be retreaded three times, achieving about 250 landings per "tread".

Typical takeoff and landing speeds on a 747 or A380 passenger aircraft are 200-250 km/h – although the tyres are rated to handle landings at up to 380 km/h.

An A380 has twenty 14:00x530 R23 tyres under the wings (which bear most of the stresses of take-off and landing), with different sized tyres for the nose. Loads on each tyre are approximately 35 tonnes, and they are inflated to a pressure of 250 psi.

Naturally given the safety issues and numbers of people flying every day, management of aircraft tyres is critical, and this is carried out by



*The new Airbus A380 during testing; tyre management is of course critical to passenger safety. Inset shows an A330 in Qantas livery.*

Photos by AirTeamImages.com

tyre suppliers such as Bridgestone.

Because operating requirements for aircraft tyres are so stringent, these tyres operate within a relatively narrow range of variables.

This allows tyre suppliers to be paid a set amount per landing for each tyre.

Bridgestone aircraft tyres are manufactured in Japan, and retreaded in specialised factories in Hong Kong, Belgium, Japan, China and the United States.

# Real-life inspiration for “re-tyred” dolphin

Inspired by the story of Fuji, a dolphin in Japan who had her diseased tail replaced by a prosthetic fluke manufactured by the Bridgestone Corporation, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres's WA repair division has fabricated a life-sized model of a dolphin using discarded earthmover tyres.

Fuji, a 34-year-old bottle nosed dolphin living in Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, Japan's largest, developed a mystery disease which led to 75% of her fluke suffering from necrosis.

With the help of the aquarium staff, a veterinarian, an artist and the Bridgestone Corporation, these people were over a period of time and several prototypes able to fit the dolphin with a prosthetic tail enabling her to swim, jump and perform.

Andrew Chapman, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres (BSEM) repair supervisor in Kalgoorlie read about Fuji on the Bridgestone website at the same time he heard about the “Chaffers Sculpture Competition”.

This gave him the idea for a “replica” Fuji using the knowledge, ingenuity and skill of Bridgestone's WA repair division – along with waste products, mainly Bridgestone tyres, sourced from the mining industry in Kalgoorlie.

Sections of a worn out Bridgestone 55.5/80-57 (68) DL giant loader tyre were used to create the body and fins, while the fluke (tail) was made from sections of Bridgestone 14.00R25 VMTS (small truck tyre). Fuji's eyes were made from two halves of a gate valve ball.

The stand was constructed using a 1200x20 tyre assembly that was no longer serviceable.

Attached to this is 25 mm galvanized water pipe (brushed and buffed), 75 x 35mm box tube and 2 mm sheet metal to stabilize the sculpture.

Water is represented through a combination of shredded rubber, glue, coloring and synthetic rubber, while Fuji's eyes are two halves of a gate valve ball.

Completed in July 2005, Fuji was proudly presented by Bridgestone Earthmover Tyre Repairs WA for auction at the Chaffers Sculpture competition in August 2005.

She was then auctioned at the Diggers and Dealers conference held in Kalgoorlie and raised \$3100. The successful bidder was Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, with proceeds from the auction assisting in the restoration of a local heritage mine and mining equipment.

Currently, Fuji is on display in a Kalgoorlie art gallery, but will soon be on display in the reception area of the newly renovated Bridgestone Sydney head office.

According to Andrew Chapman, the Fuji project couldn't have been completed without co-ordinated teamwork and the full support of Bridgestone management.

“Everyone played a part in the construction of Fuji,” said Andrew. “Although we came up with the design, Dave Oliver and his team cut various sections of the tyre to suit each specific element of the sculpture. As you can imagine there was plenty of communication between the branches,” he said.

“We were also delighted with the support the Bridgestone management provided, without which this the project would not have got off the ground,” he said.



The completed Fuji sculpture, currently on display in Kalgoorlie Insets show the original tyres (left) and the sculpture beginning to take shape in Bridgestone's tyre repair facility.

In developing, designing and crafting this unique sculpture, members of Bridgestone's WA repair team have been able to apply the same enthusiasm, dedication and skills which go into each and every repair they carry out.

## Revised standard to address safety concerns for OTR wheels and rims

Standards Australia is currently in the process of revising AS4457 – *Earthmoving machinery, Off-highway rims and wheels, Maintenance and repairs*, to address some safety concerns following a number of fatalities, injuries and incidents in recent years.

The revised AS4457 will include a renewed focus on correctly deflating tyres before they can be removed, and a requirement for regular inspection of wear of wheels and rims as well as crack-testing of those components.

In addition, a second part of the revised standard is in preparation and will set minimum standards for the repair and maintenance of large earthmoving tyres, as well as for the re-use of used tyres.

In the Autumn 2006 edition of *Imprint*, we will include a detailed report on the revisions to AS4457 and what it will mean for users of large earthmover tyres.

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