

ALS MINING MAKES ITS MARK AT MARIKANA

Although the ALS Group was established in 1989, its entry into the surface mining contracting field through subsidiary company ALS Mining is more recent, dating back just three years. ALS Mining's major current contract is at Marikana mine near Rustenburg. Says André Pretorius, who handles marketing for the Group: "Our contract at Marikana is very demanding and has given us a great deal of credibility in the marketplace."

ALS, with smaller machines, is responsible for the reef itself and for areas of waste immediately adjacent to the reef. Several pits are active across the orebody, which is a basin-like structure extending over an area of 1.5 km by 3 km.

The company started at Marikana a few months after the mine started production in 2002 with just 20 machines but this has grown to 70 units, with the haulage fleet consisting entirely of Bell articulated dump trucks, ranging from the B25 through to the B40. The 50 Bell units deployed by ALS reputedly make this the biggest Bell site in the world. Working with the Bell ADTs are Cat and Hitachi excavators, the biggest being a Hitachi 80-tonner.

Managing ALS Mining is Pieter Tenner, who says that volumes moved at Marikana range from 20 000 to 25 000 BCMs a day. "We're currently working at a depth of between 50 m and 80 m in the various pits, although the ultimate mining depth could be over 100 m. Underfoot conditions tend to be poor and we're having to pump out groundwater continuous-

ly. We work two 10-hour shifts a day and, all told, the ALS Group has 160 people working on the contract.

Outlining ALS Mining's strategy, he says the company specialises in the smaller mining equipment "so we complement our bigger customers in that area." He adds that ALS's expertise is not confined to mining PGM orebodies. "We have worked in coal, gold and diamonds and, in fact, one of our biggest previous contracts was for a diamond mine in North West Province."

ALS Mining, unusually for an open-pit contractor, does not own the plant it uses. "We have ALS Plant Hire within the ALS group of companies, and the other companies within the group, including ALS Mining, hire in their requirements from the plant hire business," explains Chris Brink, a Director of ALS Plant Hire. "ALS Mining in fact ranks as one of our single biggest clients."

Brink says the division between plant hire and mining is a logical one. "ALS Plant Hire's core business is operating and maintaining plant whereas the



A Cat 330 loads a Bell B25 at Marikana. ALS has around 50 Bell machines at the mine.



An Hitachi 650 excavator working in the Marikana pit.

expertise of ALS Mining lies in using the plant effectively to move ore and waste profitably. ALS Plant Hire has two well-equipped major workshops, and we also put a great deal of effort into the training of mechanics and operators. In all, we probably employ around 250 operators and 30 mechanics."

At the moment ALS Mining is not working across border, although it does consider the entire southern African region as a potential market. Brink makes the point that ALS will only take on contracts in the wider region if it can service them properly. "Our philosophy is that whether you're a kilometre from our headquarters or 1 000 kilometres, the level of backup must be the same. This means that before undertaking contracts outside of South Africa, we need to put in place the necessary company infrastructure."

The ALS Group was founded by Cas and Thys Joubert in Newcastle, with its main activity at start-up being civil works, particularly dam building, but it has diversified over the years. Today it has its corporate headquarters in Potchefstroom (although it still maintains a presence in Newcastle) and consists of 13 companies. Most of them deal in areas related either to the construction/mining or agricultural sectors. ■



Pictured on site at Marikana are (left to right) ALS's Pieter Tenner, Chris Brink and Andre Pretorius.



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