

Harris sets itself apart



David Nangle, the president and CEO of The Harris Products Group, presents at the Gold Reef City hotel during Electra Mining, 2012.

The Harris Products Group, formed from the merger of gas equipment specialist, Harris Calorific, and the brazing and soldering consumables manufacturer, JW Harris, is a world leader in the design, development and manufacture of cutting, welding, brazing and soldering equipment, as well as consumables and gas distribution systems. Its products are sold and used in more than 90 countries.

"One of my jobs is to draw up a path for the company for the long term. Key to that is distribution and who we will trust to handle that for us. I have been watching southern Africa very closely for some time now and I can tell you that we have been underperforming here for several years. In spite of the downturn, we have continued to experience strong growth in other parts of the world, growth that was not evident here," Nangle notes.

"So we started to evolve a new strategy, based initially on the local Lincoln operation, to restore the Harris footprint in the region. And it's starting to take effect."

Earlier this year, Harris also began to implement a new strategy to provide South African customers, in the mining, railway, petrochemical and automotive industries, easier access to its products. It decided to move away from its exclusive distribution agreement with Afrox and to add additional distributors such as Renttech, Air Liquide, Brandweld and Cosmo Welding. "And I can already tell you today that our strategy to dramatically expand our distribution channel in

During an Electra Mining visit to South Africa, David Nangle, the president and CEO of The Harris Products Group, presented the success of the company's new multiple channel distribution strategy. *African Fusion* reports.

South Africa has been an overwhelming success," says Nangle. "I checked the figures just before coming out this evening, and as of July 2012, orders for Harris-branded gas equipment products are three times higher than for all the 2010 to 2011 period combined," he reveals, "and this is a terrific opportunity for me to show up to thank our customers in person and show them how we intend to build on this success moving forward.

"We have long known that we had to change our long-standing exclusive relationship here in South Africa. Afrox did a great job of supporting our product lines in the past, but times change, distribution changes and customer demand changes."

Setting Harris apart

A key driver of this success is increased demand for two new Harris products—the Harris H28 Heavy Duty Hand Cutting Torch, designed for foundry and special heavy cutting applications, and the Harris 351 flowmeter regulator.

Harris constructed the H28 torch to accept the traditional Monarch-style tips from the 2890 series. The H28 features a solid brass forged head that resists flashback damage, and triangular stainless steel tubes with brazed connections for added strength.

The Harris 351 flowmeter regulator is a zero compensated flowmeter that allows for more efficient gas use. What sets it apart from the competition is its unique design, making it more resistant to CO₂ freeze-up and gauge damage than comparable models.

"From a quality view point, we have decided that we will be the best in all areas. We will not compro-

mise on quality. We believe that every country in the world can benefit from state-of-the-art products manufactured using first-world environmental, ISO and quality standards. We apply the same standards to the products sold here as we do in the most stringent western market environments," Nangle announces.

"Our equipment is 100% tested 100% of the time. Few others can say that. Every single torch, tip, and regulator is tested. Every single product that comes out of any of our factories is tested to make sure that it works, that it is 100% safe and that its quality is the best available.

"In the USA, I came across a competitor who was quoting quite a bit less and I couldn't understand it. Brass is brass and it costs the same for them as it does for us. I know what the import duties are, I know the transport costs and I know about efficient manufacturing. So I couldn't understand what they were doing differently to make their product less expensive than ours.

"What emerged as the key difference was 'random testing'. We asked what that meant. One in 10? One in 100? Do you know what the response was? They said yes. So we don't know: somewhere in between perhaps. This is an issue we face when competing against companies that do not operate under the same restraint as we do. But we are not even tempted to go down that route. Our new torch undergoes 26 different tests before being released onto the market, and that is every one. Nothing we do is random!" Nangle exclaims.

South African Harris products are all now being manufactured in Harris' new Dzierzoniów plant in Poland. "This is an outstanding example of how we have built on our reputation as a product innovator. Now, Harris has become in-



The genuine Harris H28 torch features a solid brass forged head that resists flashback damage, and triangular stainless steel tubes with brazed connections for added strength.

novative in how its products are manufactured, as well."

The Dzierzoniów facility uses an array of automated machining processes, including high speed and high volume CAM equipment, high precision CNC machining centres, vertical machining centres, 'Swissturn' variable-feed machining centres, and robotic cells.

"We have also implemented an innovative brazing process for our torches that eliminates the use of cadmium from the process and product, delivering consumer safety, improving quality, reducing cost, and increasing capacity," adds Nangle. "Dzierzoniów is a world class facility that is strong on automation. It has won several environmental health and safety awards as the best Lincoln Electric Facility in the world, and when it didn't win, it was second."

While part of the Afrox stable of products and to compete with imported Chinese parts and products that were challenging Harris' market share, Harris products were manufactured in South Africa for the local market. This has also been stopped as part of the new strategy going forward. "All Harris goods are now being produced at our Dzierzoniów, Poland plant, so as to keep much better control over product quality."

Counterfeiting copying and competition

"We have recently purchased some Harris product here in Johannesburg at a local gas and welding gear outlet, and what I see troubles me," continues Nangle, moving over to a gas equipment kit. "Here we have a container with Harris branding and it says: 'certified, patented, copyright reserved'. The box is Harris Calorific Blue. When I open it up, I immediately see a Harris regulator, and I can see straight away that this is genuinely one of ours."

But then Nangle shows us the torch, which is bent "This is definitely not our product. It's an unbranded look-alike that is being sold in a Harris box with some genuine Harris items. The torch is not ours, the box is not ours, and on examination, neither are the consumables," he points out.

"Should something happen because of this equipment, then the user will see Harris certified, patented, and copyright reserved, and get back to us. But we can't back this equipment. As a supplier, we will not indemnify you for any repercussions," he warns.

"At the end of the day, if product is either being counterfeited or copied and branded under copycat names to

confuse or mislead the market, we need to know about it. And we are willing to fight it and put an end to it. We have successfully stopped this in many countries around the world and we will do the same to protect our southern African markets," he warns.

We have chosen a different distribution path for the future, primarily to expand our markets in line with expansions elsewhere and secondly to protect the quality and safety of our brand.

We will not be walking away because of cheap opposition and we are determined to support all of our authorised distributors across this country.

We have a strong commitment to the customer and his safety and we believe that the customer cares. They want to know that we are environmentally concerned, that we follow high quality standards; and that we are designing and making the best products that we can," he concludes.



The Harris 351 flowmeter regulator is a zero compensated flowmeter that is more resistant to freeze-up and gauge damage.

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