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REACHING ACROSS THE GLOBE

MAATS EXPANDS TO SUPPLY PIPELINE MACHINERY WORLDWIDE



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REACHING ACROSS



By Bradley Kramer

Arising from the mind of a man born in a small town in the Netherlands, Maats Pipeline Equipment has grown to become a major supplier to the global oil and gas pipeline industry.

When Wilhelm Maats founded the company in 1981, he focused on trading a wide variety of heavy equipment. The company quickly began expanding its focus on foreign markets, and added equipment rental as a key component of its business. A partnership that began in the early 1990s with the equipment giant Liebherr Group catapulted Maats to greater heights on the world market.

Today, Maats specializes in manufacturing, selling and renting pipeline equipment to pipeline contractors all over the globe. While the company has achieved strong success in Europe and elsewhere abroad, Maats has more recently begun to crack the North American market, according to CEO Gerben Wansink.

"The North American market is difficult for a foreign company to get a foothold," he says. "The biggest issue is service capability. That is why we have put a lot of care and thought in broadening our network and carefully choosing partners that hold the same values as

we have."

Compared to the European market, Wansink says that the rental market for North America is "significantly larger" and geared toward long-term contracts that include service.

"While getting to know the North American market, these are all issues that we needed to address," he adds. "We do so by making sure that we establish the right partnerships and distribution channels that meet the demands of the North American market and comply with the level of quality products and services we want to provide to our customers."

As Maats has "laid down a solid net-

CROSS THE GLOBE

MAATS EXPANDS TO MEET PIPELINE INDUSTRY DEMANDS WORLDWIDE



work” and is “strengthening our position in the North American market,” the company has focused on quality and service, according to Mark Roerink, sales manager for the company’s North American business segment.

“Our approach is to deliver quality equipment and services, as well as meet specific customers’ requirements in customizing and engineering and building purpose-built equipment,” Roerink says. “We are a flexible company that listens to the market and hence is able to allow specific customers’ specials in the design of the equipment.”

Despite current delays in some of

the mainline work and the recent decline in oil prices, Roerink says there are “some big projects on the horizon” in the North American market.

“For sure lower oil prices will have their impact, but this cycle is nothing new and it has happened to all of us before,” Wansink adds. “It might slow down some decisions, but most decisions are more impacted by governments than by oil prices.”

A Focus on Pipelines

Maats specializes in worldwide sales and rental of new and used high quality pipeline construction equipment. Aside from manufacturing its own

branded equipment, Maats has an agreement in place to act as a dealership for Liebherr pipeline equipment.

“We aim to provide our customers with the best and, whether its sales or rental, go to extreme lengths to deliver tailored solutions and add an extra value to our customers’ projects with high quality equipment and service,” says Wansink, who began his career in the pipeline industry as a petroleum engineer before joining Maats eight years ago.

While in the early years Maats focused on trading various brands of heavy equipment for export markets,



Maats is the exclusive dealer for the Liebherr RL54 pipe layer, manufactured in Telfs, Austria.

Wansink says the company found itself in the 1980s conducting a lot of business with German contractor Mannesmann AG and its pipeline division.

Wansink adds that “the somewhat more exclusiveness of that market caught Mr. Maats’ attention” and led him to focus on the pipeline sector.

“Later on, the idea of equipment rental arose, and Maats added renting equipment to the existing company profile,” Wansink says. “Maats then soon successfully entered the pipeline industry with their equipment rental concept. Maats started renting out specialized pipeline equipment to several pipeline contractors and soon became a well-established company in the pipeline business.”

Maats eventually stopped trading earthmoving equipment to fully concentrate on the pipeline industry, Wansink adds. By carefully listening to its customers and operators in the field, Maats began to improve upon existing, ordinary machines that were used in the pipeline construction.

Since its introduction to the pipeline industry, Maats has continued to develop its global network, products and scope of activities.

“Over the years we’ve built up an extensive technical knowledge and understanding of specialized pipeline equipment,” Wansink says. “Besides renting and trading machinery, Maats

[established] its own brand and also continued its powerful cooperation with Liebherr. By listening to and working closely together with our customers, our team keeps evolving, fine-tuning and optimizing both our equipment and our services.”

While Maats’ scope has expanded to serve pipeline contractors worldwide, Wansink says, “The objective of the whole Maats team remains: Stay reliable in supplying our customers with high-quality equipment and services.”

Partnership with Liebherr

In 1994, Maats started working with Liebherr, a German equipment manufacturer headquartered in Switzerland, Wansink says. When Liebherr launched “the first mutually designed, fully hydraulic” 45,000-lb Liebherr RL22 sideboom, Maats was awarded nine European Union countries as its sales area, and after 2005, the company became the worldwide sales representative for the RL pipe layer series, manufactured at the Liebherr factory in Telfs, Austria. This partnership has had a profound impact on Maats.

“With Liebherr carefully watching the upkeep of their standards for quality, delivery promises and operator/owner satisfaction, Maats went from a focus on trading equipment mainly in Western Europe to becoming a global player with the Liebherr products, in a market that is somewhat reluctant to try out inno-

vative ideas,” Wansink says. “This transition came with a new field and scope that required a great deal of flexibility, adaptability and teamwork.”

Laying, Bending and Welding

Pipe layers, bending machines and welding tractors form the core of Maats’ offerings to the global pipeline sector. Because other common heavy equipment such as excavators and dozers are readily available, Wansink says this specialization sets Maats apart from other equipment providers.

“The specialty equipment that we supply is not so abundant and therefore a ‘specialism’ on its own,” he adds.

The wide variety of project locations and specifications, such as diameter and wall thickness and the relatively limited — though necessary — use of specialty pipeline construction equipment (compared to, say, an excavator) leaves contractors with a demand for global suppliers that know the specifics of the equipment, Wansink argues. By focusing on this specific equipment, Maats is able to fill that demand.

“Project specifications vary a great deal and the needed variety of equipment and its availability is of high value to our customers, whether it is for common size pipeline construction jobs or less common diameters and specifics,” adds Roerink, who has worked in the pipeline industry since 1999, working for a con-

tractor and welding and coating service providers before joining Maats 10 years ago. "That makes the equipment needs in the pipeline industry unique on its own and is the reason why we need to have a wide variety of equipment sizes, capacity and accessories available to supply to our customers' needs."

Aside from having a wide range of equipment available, Roerink says Maats also caters to the need for flexibility in equipment to perform several tasks simultaneously or in sequence with one machine.

"For instance our pipe layers can be delivered as a multipurpose machine, making the machine suitable for several possible purposes besides pipe laying," says Roerink, listing pipe welding, air compressing, preheating and pipe facing as other uses. "Our welding tractors, which are equipped with several attachments, [such as a] generator, compressor and crane, can be delivered in different capacities."

The hydraulic PTO drive on the base machine makes it possible to attach a wide variety of equipment, allowing Maats to customize the machine to the wishes of the customer, Roerink says.

Apart from its laying, bending and welding pipeline equipment, Maats has over the years custom-engineered and built numerous machines that were either derived from pipeline equipment or were needed by a customer to complete the package of equipment required for a pipeline construction jobsite.

Unique Needs

Maats strives to keep up with the unique needs of pipeline contractors while staying up to date with industry knowledge and working to improve its equipment.

"With long-term experience of manufacturing, selling and renting specialty equipment to the pipeline industry, Maats has built up a comprehensive understanding and technical expertise of the different aspects of pipeline construction equipment, as well as possible difficulties that contractors may face," Wansink says. "Our involvement in the industry keeps our knowledge up to date and allows us to keep up with developments in all areas."

One of the latest examples of that knowledge is in the way Maats engineered its latest pipe bending equipment,

Wansink adds. Improved steel quality in mainlines has led to stronger pipe with the same wall thicknesses as in the past, meaning that these pipes are tougher to bend. This has led to such problems in the field as equipment breakdown and general difficulties bending pipe.

Maats engineers went back to the drawing board and came up with the BM series of pipe bending machines, which have the capacity to bend modern pipe specifications and beyond.

"These machines are truly 'future ready' as they have the capacity to bend X100 pipe up to 1 in. wall thickness of the maximum loadable diameter," Wansink says.

A Future Together

The drastic decrease in global oil prices has sparked a significant number of mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures and other partnerships in the pipeline industry. Wansink isn't surprised by this trend, but says Maats must be ready to respond to the changes in the market.

"In my opinion, we see that the contractors that are working within the pipeline industry are joining or merging with each other because of the scope of proj-



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Popularity Contest

Maats Pipeline Equipment focuses on three main classes of machine: pipe layers, bending machines and welding tractors. Here are the most popular models to the company's North American customers, according to Mark Roerink, sales manager for the Maats' North American business segment.

What Pipe Layer model is most popular for North American customers and why?

This depends of course on the required lifting capacity for lowering in pipelines. All Maats and Liebherr machines can be equipped with an arctic or desert kit to fit any working conditions and are designed for maximum performance (high lifting forces, stability, great torque, maneuverability, etc.) under even the most difficult circumstances, which makes the machines suitable to work under any circumstances at jobsites around the world.

What Pipe Bender model is most popular for North American customers and why?

The specifications that define which machine is needed besides the diameter, is nowadays also the type of pipe material to be bent. As pipeline steel quality is rapidly improving, performance of the pipe bender has to be stronger in order to bend the pipes. The extreme forces that are put on the machine often result in problems onsite. To prevent these problems, Maats has developed a bending machine program (ranging from 16 to 60 in.) with the capacity to bend x100 pipe up to 1-in. wall thickness of the max diameter.

What Pipe Welding model is most popular for North American customers and why?

That would be the SR714LGP. Welding specifications can vary a great deal and what the customer needs depends heavily on the job to be done and additional attachments and/or equipment of choice.

We have a base machine, a crawler tractor, on which we can supply all the needed options for the Welding Tractor conversion. The tractor provides optimal traction, also in heavy circumstances such as working in mountainous areas. For the Welding Tractor, we have several standard attachments (generator, compressor, crane, welding equipment) that are available in a variety of capacities to match it up to whatever the customer needs, but the same goes for numerous options or adding attachments/equipment leaving all options open to optimally customize the Welding Tractor. Adding to its popularity is the fully hydraulic-driven concept of the machine in which all attachments are fully integrated and efficiently powered by the base machine's diesel engine. For the hydraulically driven welding generator this means that a most stable welding power is guaranteed, providing a constant high-level weld quality.



The Maats BM series of bending machines was designed with the future in mind, as pipe steel becomes stronger and tougher to bend.

ects and the responsibilities involved for these companies," Wansink says. "You need to be big to take on these risks responsibly."

As an equipment supplier, Maats must be able to address detailed technical questions and confirm that it can meet the project demands if the company wants to continue renting or selling its equipment, Wansink says.

"I think our industry is still healthy, but margins are under pressure, and responsibilities are being pushed down the line from the pipeline owner towards the contractors and finally towards the suppliers pushing them in sometimes unwanted situations," he says.

While some pipeline projects have been put on hold, Roerink adds, the push to become less dependent on other countries for oil and gas continues to drive the industry forward.

Although some companies are merging or working together to be more competitive, Roerink says the importance of environment and safety is leading to increased costs of pipeline construction. However, when asked what he expected the industry to look like in the next five years, he cites the increase in natural gas and oil production from shale as bright indicators for the future, saying, "It looks positive in the coming years."

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