



Above left: a Watertec 40 rig in Maiduguri, Nigeria



Above centre: a special shipment of Watertec 9000 rigs for the Indonesian military



Above right: Dando Terrier drive-sampling rig on site in Uganda

"At the Dando factory, GDI got an exclusive look at the new sonic rig, which was, at the time, half-built"



Martin Fitch Roy

In expansive mode

Nia Kajastie visited Dando Drilling International on the south coast of England at the end of last year and caught sight of new rigs being built and a fleet ready to be shipped to the Indonesian military. Martin Fitch Roy, Dando's managing director, also gave *GeoDrilling International* an update on the company's plans and projects for 2014

While the economic downturn has seen the market for drilling rigs flatten out in many regions, including the UK, Dando has adapted and maintained its global ambitions.

The British manufacturer became part of Canadian Energold Group back in 2011 as a result of the financial crisis. The group's three divisions – mineral exploration, energy, and manufacturing and water (which Dando forms) – are active in 22 countries, contracting altogether 280 rigs.

"We proceed as we did before, selling into our markets around the world, while also supplying the group with the equipment it needs," explains Fitch Roy. "We have designed and built quite a few specialist rigs for the group, including particularly safe rigs for seismic operation, which are currently working in Canada."

"The market for mineral rigs is pretty flat at the moment, so we have put most of our efforts into geotechnical and water-well rigs, with some success. This year [2013] our revenue will be around £15 million (US\$25 million), and projects of note have included an order for six big 40t water-well

drilling rigs to Borno state in Nigeria. We are working on an order, which we will complete this year, for 18 water-well rigs for the military in Indonesia; and there have been quite a few other bits and pieces throughout the year.

"We also just started contracting again a year ago. I run from here a water-well drilling contracting operation in Burkina Faso, Togo and Ivory Coast called Hydrofor, which is a 60:40 joint venture. We are contracting in Africa for water wells mainly."

"We supply plenty of rigs in the UK as well, but the market here has been very flat, for us anyway, over the last few years. We're seeing it slowly come back. Most of our rigs in the UK are geotechnical, and that market seems to be returning. Our little Terrier drive-sampling rigs are selling well now – about two a week. And the shell-and-auger tripod rigs are beginning to sell again, which is quite encouraging."

RIG LAUNCHES

At the Dando factory, GDI got an exclusive look at the new sonic rig, which was, at the time, half-built. The head was on its way from Canada, where it is built by

sonic drill-rig manufacturer Sonic Drill Corp. The first rig has been sold to a contractor in Delaware, US, for a project in New York.

"We needed a sonic head, and we have been looking for one for some years now. There are several people making them, and we have been offered others before. The technology, we believe, has to be reliable – as it has a tendency not to be. The Canadian sonic head is the most tried and tested one on the market," says Fitch Roy.

For the UK market, Dando is about to launch a two-headed version of the small Terrier drive-sampler rig. It includes a fully fledged rotary component and a drive-sampling component that can move from side to side, enabling the driller to carry out multiple techniques in the same site-investigation hole.

"You will be able to take a drive sample in the soft material and then take a core in hard rock, or you could use a hollow-stem auger, making it the most flexible geotechnical machine I have ever seen. The first one is going into build about now. That will be available end of February. It's something that should definitely have a market in the UK."

"As we are part of a company that's in the mineral market, we have developed the Coretec 9000, a mineral rig that has a chuck and is designed specifically for deep wireline coring. For the group, we have also invented a new system for hands-free operation on a very high-speed seismic rig. We're just commis-



A Dando Terrier high-speed seismic rig at work in Canada



A Dando 3000 shell-and-auger rig used for soil boring in Nigeria

sioning the first three in Canada at the moment. That's an English invention, and there is nothing else quite like it on the market."

Dando's biggest water-well drill has a mast capacity of 50t, but the company is now working on a heavy-duty rig with an increased capacity for the shale-gas exploration, coal-bed methane and deep geothermal markets. "That's something that is in design at the moment that won't appear probably until later in the year next year [2014]."

HOMEWARD BOUND

According to Fitch Roy, 2014 looks promising, with enquiry levels at a high and the quality of enquiries constantly improving. Dando is on the verge of closing agreements for multiple developments around the world, including large water-well projects in Nigeria, Sudan, all along the Sahel area, southern Africa and Chad, as well as large projects in Indonesia, both in water and coal exploration.

A market Dando is now focusing more on is Latin America. "We have hired three Spanish speakers, and we have agents in Peru, Mexico and Colombia; we're looking for agents elsewhere as well. We are quite active

in that area, which is new to us because the language barrier has always kept us away," says Fitch Roy.

Presently, 95% of Dando's business goes outside Europe, and the company's profile in the UK has reduced quite significantly. "We used to be very active here, but we've left the market to others over the last 5-10 years. However, our intention is to design products for the home market."

The Energold Group's watchword of the moment is to diversify, and at a board meeting in December, Dando was tasked to look into offering the group's energy-drilling capabilities in the UK.

"I've had two meetings already about possibilities in the 1,000-1,200m plus depth area. And the offer I can make is that we can supply machinery, machinery and crew, or act as a contractor. We are getting quite a bit of interest in that because we would be competitive, and it's something we are very familiar with."

Energold Energy, formerly known as Bertram Drilling, has until now been working primarily in the US and Russia. Its main area of business is the exploration of the Alberta oil sands in Canada. However, the division has recently also won a big geothermal job in Nevada; this ground-source heat-pump project will keep 4-6 rigs busy for three years.

Overall, Fitch Roy is forecasting considerable growth for Dando in the coming years. "We have grown this year; our revenue will have grown from just under £10 million to £15 million. The margins, because of the competitive nature of the world market, aren't brilliant, but that's expected. We still think we can achieve around £30 million in the next 3-5 years. And we will do that," he concludes. ♥



GDI visited the Dando Drilling International factory in December 2013