



Heavy machine: Stuart Rodgers oiling links on the electro magnet

Customers put first by company's plant

STEELPHALT'S plant employs 50 people and generally operates a two shift system, although it can run 24 hours a day in the summer, when demand is highest.

Last year, the computer-controlled plant dispatched around 300,000 tonnes of material, mostly to customers within a 70 mile radius of its site.

The cost of transport and the fact that, depending on the type of asphalt, it has to be used within anything from two to 12 hours, limits the area any asphalt business can supply, but, despite that, SteelPhalt is still one of the top 10 asphalt suppliers in the UK and has about 20 per cent of the market in Yorkshire.

Unlike most of the competition, SteelPhalt doesn't have its own laying contractors, which can be attractive for local authorities that have their own direct labour operations.

The company prides itself on its ability to respond to customers' technical, as well as delivery, requirements.

"We are very customer orientated," says Bob Clarke.

"A lot goes into customer service and, in the rare event that someone has a question about a product once it has been laid, we can retest the material on the spot."

SteelPhalt also prides itself on low staff turnover and the fact that its senior people have tended to come up through the ranks.

"We tend to home grow people," says Bob Clarke.

"A number of people have joined the business straight from school and learnt their technical skills with the business. It is a very technical subject and we have tended to promote people from within and give people a good technical grounding through the laboratory and research department."



Hi-tech method: Dan Rogers at the control centre

Why our roads will no longer be going to pot

WITH Sheffield's £2 billion road repair project due to get under way following last week's appointment of Amey as the 25-year programme's main contractor, **Business Editor Bob Rae** takes a look at one local company whose expertise has proved vital in ensuring resurfaced roads will last.

TO most of us, it's just the "black stuff" – Tarmac, asphalt, call it what you like, it's all the same, isn't it?

No, it most certainly is not, according to Rotherham-based SteelPhalt, which has been developing road surfacing materials from steelworks slag since the 1930s and recovering metals from slag for even longer.

In SteelPhalt's case, it's not just one product, it is a range of materials, developed to provide specific technical properties for different applications covering everything from the approaches to junctions and pedestrian crossings to dockyards and steelworks themselves.

Steel slag has a number of advantages over quarried



Product range: Business manager Bob Clark, left and general manager Dean Raynor with samples

our materials that others cannot," says commercial manager Dean Raynor, who has been with the company for almost 40 years.

"We do our own research and development, including investigating the use of special binders, developed by bitumen suppliers, which allow you to use a smaller amount of aggregate to lay a road that lasts just as long.

"It's far cheaper because you are covering a greater area in less time and is also more cost effective because, with a thinner layer, you haven't got the road planing costs and you minimise road closure times."

Given that SteelPhalt's main customers are local au-

thorities, which are currently under severe financial pressure, those sort of developments have been more than welcome.

The portfolio of materials SteelPhalt has developed in house, include SteelStop, SteelFlow, SteelPave and SteelSurf.

SteelStop is a high friction asphalt, developed by the firm for use at intersections, crossings, close to traffic lights, on winding roads and on hazardous bends as a lower cost, longer lasting alternative to asphalt containing bauxite, the ore from which aluminium is extracted.

SteelFlow offers similar properties to standard materials, but only needs to be laid



Industry with historical traditions

STEELPHALT can trace its origins back over a century to the days when Stanley Faber-Prest struck a deal to provide a range of steel works services to Steel Peech & Tozer's plant at The Ickles in Rotherham.

One of the services Faber-Prest provided was to remove the slag left behind after the steel making process and dump it in huge tips near the plants.

Faber-Prest started providing services for other plants and the story goes that one day, while walking across a slag tip at Penistone, Stanley slit open one of his brand new boots on a piece of metal in the slag.

The incident must have stuck in his mind because, when the first magnetic separator was developed a few years later, he launched the Slag Reduction Company, with the aim of breaking up the slag, separating out any metal and selling it back to the steelworks.

That still left him with the steel free slag to deal with.

By the middle of the 1930s, the first tar plant had been installed at Faber-Prest's site at The Ickles, but it wasn't until the mid 1960s that SteelPhalt was formed to promote and sell products making use of steel slag.

Major investment was made in a new asphalt plant and modernising the crushing and screening facilities.

The business grew and, in 1998, was acquired by US group Harsco – whose German founders had been on a fact finding visit to Slag Reduction's Ickles plant on the eve of the Second World War, but then opted to set up business in America.

Harsco has invested significantly in the plant in recent years, replacing two old, 100 tonne asphalt plants with a new, 240 tonne plant – more for the energy and efficiency savings it offered than in order to increase production.

The company has also invested in transport and is considering investing about £1 million in a new crushing plant.

"It's partly renewal and



Production overview: Business manager Bob Clark, left and general manager Dean Raynor



On site: Asphalt plant

partly to improve throughput," says SteelPhalt business manager Bob Clarke.

"The crushing plant structure goes back to the early days and there have been

major changes over the last 40 years. We are putting in more metal detection equipment to help efficiency and throughput."

SteelPhalt collects slag

from major local steel makers, including Tata's Stocksbridge and Aldwarke plants and Outokumpu's and Forgemasters' plants in Sheffield.

Thanks to being part of Harsco, the company can also get slag from steel works elsewhere in the country if production at local plants falls below the volume of material it needs.

Material has to be processed and separated into different sizes, ranging from dust to lumps around 30mm across and then weathered, to ensure lime in the slag won't cause it to expand in size.

The challenges don't end there. Most days, SteelPhalt will not know what grades of asphalt it needs to make for the following day until 3pm.

"It depends how well the customer is organised," says Dean Raynor. "Some people think you can just pull a couple of tonnes of liquid asphalt off the shelf."



At work: SteelPhalt, Sheffield Road, Rotherham's crushing plant