

Dunlop Ladysmith operators gain global expertise in tyre making

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Eight operators together with their foreman from Sumitomo Rubber South Africa's (SRSA) Dunlop Ladysmith plant have wasted no time in applying their new expertise after a six-week training programme at Sumitomo Rubber Thailand (SRT). Equipped with advanced skills to operate the Ladysmith plant's critical new 3-stage making machines, they're already leading the charge on the shop floor.



Sumitomo Rubber South Africa's (SRSA) Dunlop Ladysmith plant members at the six-week training programme at Sumitomo Rubber Thailand (SRT)

This strategic initiative, part of SRSA's commitment to developing its workforce and fostering independence within the African tyre market, saw eight tyre builders and their foreman travel to Thailand. They included: Sabelo Zwane, Sizwe Nkabinde, Sfiso Zwane, Vimbayi Mavimbela, Lindokuhle Dhladhla, Musawenkosi Khumalo, Mthokozisi Zikalala, Ngobile Dlamini and Sfundo Mthethwa.

The team immersed themselves in SRT's world-class manufacturing practices as they underwent specialised training in tyre making. The impact was fast and tangible. Within three weeks, they achieved a 36% improvement in performance, ensuring consistent quality at the highest standards.

"We are very proud to be flying the flag of SRSA and South Africa high. Our team has already begun sharing their key learnings, highlighting the disciplined approach to safety, continuous improvement, and quality that we witnessed as defining Sumitomo Rubber Thailand's operations," said Sabelo Zwane.

Lubin Ozoux, CEO of Sumitomo Rubber SA, said: "By nurturing talent and fostering collaboration within the global Sumitomo Rubber Industries network, we are not only strengthening our operations but also developing skills for South Africa to continue to stand tall in the global tyre industry," he added.

The international training programme forms part of Sumitomo Rubber SA's new training model, established in 2017. This model identifies high performing individuals and equips them with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive performance and transfer learnings across SRSA's operation.

Previous iterations of the programme saw 19 local operators trained at Miyazaki Factory in Japan in 2017, ahead of the

establishment of SRSA's Truck and Bus Radial (TBR) tyre manufacturing facility, as well as in 2019 to develop passenger tyre manufacturing capabilities.

"Investing in our people is fundamental to our success," said Neil Rademan, general manager for organisational development at Sumitomo Rubber SA. "This international exposure enables us to have a deeper understanding of global factory shop floor operations and how we can develop and maintain globally competitive manufacturing standards locally."

Sumitomo Rubber South Africa is the manufacturer of Dunlop, Falken, and Sumitomo tyres for the African continent, operating under the umbrella of Sumitomo Rubber Industries Ltd (SRI), a leading premium manufacturer of automotive tyres and industrial rubber products headquartered in Japan.

The company has earmarked a R1.7m investment drive for the Ladysmith plant, which includes new equipment and machinery to increase passenger car tyre production capabilities in support of the original equipment (OE) market. Local skills development will be a critical enabler of this rollout.

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