

A good sport.



Eric Etchart,
president of
Manitowoc Crane Group

The celebrations connected with Manitowoc's recent opening of its new facility in Baltar, Portugal brought together many of the company's top brass. An ideal opportunity then to chat with Eric Etchart, promoted to president of the Manitowoc Crane Group in May this year. Mark Darwin fires the questions.



Over the years, there can't be many top-flight sportsmen that at the same time studied for an MBA. Eric Etchart is one of the few. After growing up near Biarritz in south west France and then studying Economics at Bordeaux, the rising basket ball star was drafted by a French military team based in Paris in the late 70's.

Unlike top basketball players today, there was not a lot of money in the sport at that time and after completing his post graduate studies in 1984, Etchart had to focus on earning a living.

"I liked languages so coupled with my academic background, international business seemed a logical way forward," said Etchart.

His first job was with crane company PPM in sales and distribution in the Middle East. Here he was introduced to the reach stacker which really attracted his interest as he could see the potential worldwide for this type of product. It also gave him access to the Asian markets, an area which interested him greatly. Stackers became a substantial business and helped Etchart rise to international sales director within PPM.

When Terex acquired PPM in 1995, Etchart accepted an offer to join Potain. Although his wife had a PR business

in Paris they moved to Italy for two years. It was however Potain's joint venture in China, signed in the same year which was the main attraction, drawing him back towards Asia.

From 1997 he was based at Potain's offices in Singapore, this was the beginning of three tough years of the Asian crisis. However, during this time (1999) Potain bought out Zhangjiagang in China which became a wholly-owned subsidiary. The company then began to develop the business in mainland China adding cranes imported from France and Portugal.

A few years later in 2001, Potain became part of Manitowoc. As executive vice president for Asia and the Pacific, Etchart was the driving force behind the success in the region. The continuing growth in the market means that its Chinese plant now has 1,000 employees. His commitment to making the business a success included the considerable effort to learn to speak Chinese in addition to his other languages.

So how did he feel when the position of president of MCG presented itself after spending so many years building the business in Asia?

"The opportunity came along and I was happy to take it," said Etchart.

"The best way to drive the company forward is from the front. It has been a very busy six months since taking up the position and I am thoroughly enjoying it. My five year plan includes growing the company in new markets and this is already taking shape."

In recent months, Manitowoc has opened a sales and service facility in Dubai, bought a manufacturing facility in Saris, Slovakia and acquired Shirke Construction

Equipments of Pune, India - a leading player in the Indian tower crane market and manufacturing partner and distributor for Potain since it acquired Richier in 1982. And the latest facility to be opened in Baltar, Portugal.

"The Slovakian facility, after being refurbished and re-equipped - will serve as the final manufacturing and assembly site for Grove, Potain, and Manitowoc cranes, delivering to customers in East European markets, particularly in Russia and the CIS, he said. "Customers in the region will benefit from lower shipping costs and faster delivery schedules. By re-developing an existing facility on a brownfield site, we will be able to get this factory live faster and at a lower cost. We are a global player, but committed to local manufacturing close to the customer base."

"I will also be looking at adjacent businesses with a view to further acquisitions," he said. "We are open to opportunities providing they are a good fit and can be one of the main players in the sector."

He indicated that this might include mast climbers (but not hoists) and port equipment and also did not rule out the acquisition of another tower crane manufacturer.

"The new position is very challenging, but I knew what it would involve. I am dealing with the same people and know well what Glen Tellock, president of Manitowoc expects. We operate in a global, 24 hour business and you have to be everywhere all the time. I have a great team of people ready for the opportunities and challenges ahead. The appointment of a non-American as president of Manitowoc Crane also signifies the desire to be a global company."

The company is currently in the final selection process to find someone from outside Manitowoc to fill his previous position.

"We need more innovative products and need to continue our investment in our differentiator of customer care. We think the market will continue to grow and will therefore take decisions accordingly.

Whilst I cannot currently talk about new products, next year's Conexpo will be a show of force for MCG with several new cranes unveiled."

Eric Etchart - essential or favourite....

Gadgets: Not a fan because of the short lifespan. Would rather have items such as a watch, antique furniture or paintings which perpetuate an event or person.

Film - Being raised in France, loves the films with Michel Audiard dialogue (Les tontons flingueurs, Le cave se rebiffe) and also Spielberg.

Book - likes author Amelie Nothomb and continuing to learn languages particularly Chinese.

Music - 80s music (Goldman, Cabrel, Lama, Johny Haliday Supertramp) Serge Gainsbourg who wrote the most beautiful text also Beatles, Rolling Stones and Joe Cocker.

Car - not a big fan anymore - used to love convertibles when younger. A 4x4 might be needed for the Wisconsin snowy winters.

Hobby - Spending time with his wife Monique (unless she goes shopping), family and friends. Basketball, soccer and French rugby.

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FAX EXPORT 0039.059.81.26.01
E-MAIL: DINAMICOIL@DINAMICOIL.IT
WEB SITE: WWW.DINAMICOIL.COM