

## Compromising on quality not an option for Dunlop Conveyor Belting

2019 certainly seems to be an exciting year for Drachten-based Dunlop Conveyor Belting. Its order book is at its highest level for some considerable time. In fact business is positively booming. In the present economic climate, it is hard to imagine any company in any industry that can say that sales are up by over 50% compared to the same quarter last year and that production capacity and production staffing levels have been increased by more than 50% in order to cope with demand.

Perhaps what makes this exceptional level of success even more noteworthy is that European conveyor belt manufacturers like Dunlop are facing the growing challenge of 'market saturation' tactics that are being employed by belt manufacturers in East Asia, primarily China. Imports of belting priced way below market rates are arriving in Europe on an unprecedented scale and are posing a substantial risk to the very future of European belt manufacturing, which should concern all but the most foolhardy of end-users.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Dunlop's response to this threat has been to focus even harder on their traditional market approach. This has always been to sell on quality, performance and offering their customers superior economy by supplying belts that provide a working life that exceeds cheap Chinese import belt many times over. "There is no point trying to compete on price because, quite simply, it is impossible to manufacture belts that meet even the most basic European standards, let alone be safe to handle, at the kind of prices that the Chinese are offering" says sales & marketing director Andries Smilda. "All of our customers, without exception, could buy belts from China at a much lower price than we could ever achieve. The fact that our order books are so fantastically healthy proves beyond doubt that the price reflects the quality and the value for money. That's why they buy from us".

### MAJOR NEW INNOVATION

Although this strategy is clearly serving them well, at least part of this surge in popularity and demand stems from the development and introduction during the past year of a brand-new, super-tough, high quality belt that is totally unique to Dunlop. In Europe they have branded their discovery Ultra X.



*Selling quality and much longer belt life is a winning strategy.*

Ultra X is a single-ply construction that is designed to replace EP315/2, 400/3, EP500/3, 500/4, 630/3 and 630/4 ply belts. Despite being single-ply, Dunlop claim that primarily thanks to its totally unique specially woven carcass Ultra X is considerably more durable and tougher than conventional ply belting. Most surprisingly of all, despite its physical advantages, Ultra X is also designed to compete at the economy end of the market. This market strategy seems to fly in the face of their claims to compete on quality rather than price but Smilda disagrees. "We are not trying to compete at what we call the 'crazy price' end of the market because those belts cannot remotely compare with ours in terms of performance and operational lifetime economy. What the price levels of Ultra X gives to end-users is the best of both worlds; sensible pricing and far superior

performance and longevity".

So, how are they able to offer prices that are at least comparable (and often lower than) multi-ply belting? Dr. Michiel Eijpe, Dunlop's development director in the Netherlands, explains: "We have not," he says, "and of course never would, compromise on quality for the sake of a lower price offering. That is simply not our culture. Actually there are several reasons why we can price Ultra X so competitively". "Firstly, the single-ply carcass is made from a unique design of fabric that we manufacture in-house. That's a big advantage both quality and cost-wise. Having a single-ply construction also allows for maximum efficiency of production because there are fewer calender runs. And having no rubber skim between the plies not only results in a thinner, stronger carcass, it also keeps the cost down".

*The BAUMA exhibition was a huge success for Dunlop.*



### ON THE ATTACK

Perhaps it's also no coincidence that all this success comes at a time when the company's image and profile are also

clearly in the ascendancy thanks to an extremely high level of marketing activity. New, cleverly designed and highly informative technical information documents; new technical and promotional films; an unprecedented level of media activity underpinned by a brand new and highly impressive 'user-friendly' website are just some of the components. The marketing efforts have been supported by significantly enhanced levels of customer contact based more on providing technical advice and guidance to customers rather than a 'hard sell' approach.

### EXHIBITION SUCCESS

The Bauma exhibition, held in Munich every three years is one of the biggest exhibitions of its kind and for Dunlop Conveyor Belting the 2019 event was a huge success, with a record number of visitors to their very impressive stand. "It was not simply the level of interest shown

in us but also the extremely positive comments being made by visitors," explains Smilda. "Large numbers of people were telling us that the profile and image and sheer level of our marketing activity was leaving our rivals behind. I cannot begin to tell you how good that makes us feel. A lot of people have been putting in a lot of hard work behind the scenes. Now those efforts are beginning to pay dividends".

### ON A ROLL

Dunlop Conveyor Belting is, if you will excuse the pun, on a roll but they clearly have no intention of allowing success to go to their heads. "We have a lot of exciting things going on and there is plenty more to come," says Smilda enthusiastically. "As we say in the Netherlands, the best time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining. But we do not just want to fix the roof – we want to make that roof even higher!"