

One of a Kind

Not many companies in the bulk handling industry in South Africa offer full turnkey solutions in terms of manufacturing an entire bulk handling system under one roof. Most specialise in either pneumatic or mechanical conveying, structural fabrication or process design and automation, so clients have to shop around all over the place to get a plant built.

▲ Rula', derived from the Tswana word meaning 'ruler', stands for measurement, accuracy and fit for purpose. It's a company that literally provides all the equipment needed to move bulk materials. "Bulk Handling Today" speaks to managing director of Rula, Roelf Odendaal, at their premises in Honeydew near Johannesburg, about the challenges of offering such an extensive range of solutions.

"When we started off, we specialised in pneumatic conveying systems, but over the years



Roelf Odendaal, managing director, Rula

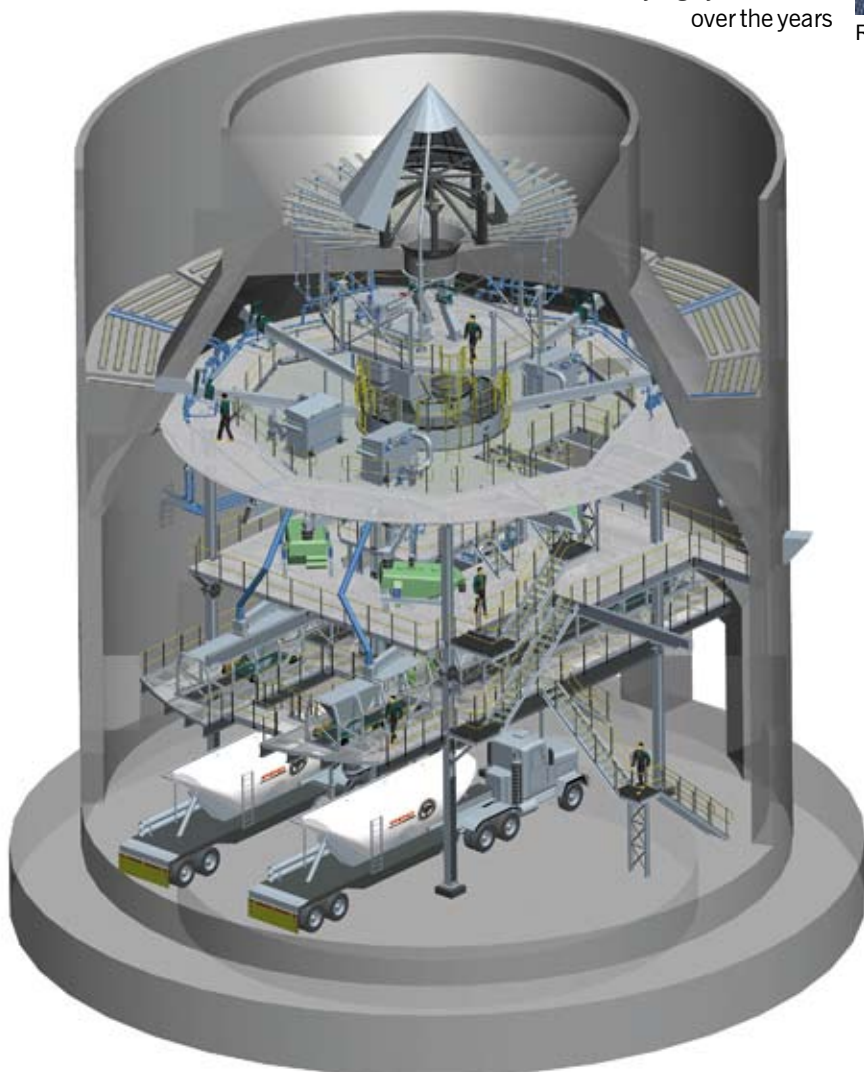
we gradually got involved on the mechanical side as well and now we manufacture most items in-house," he says. "Today, we have several unique solutions that our team of design engineers have come up with over time to solve specific bulk handling problems."

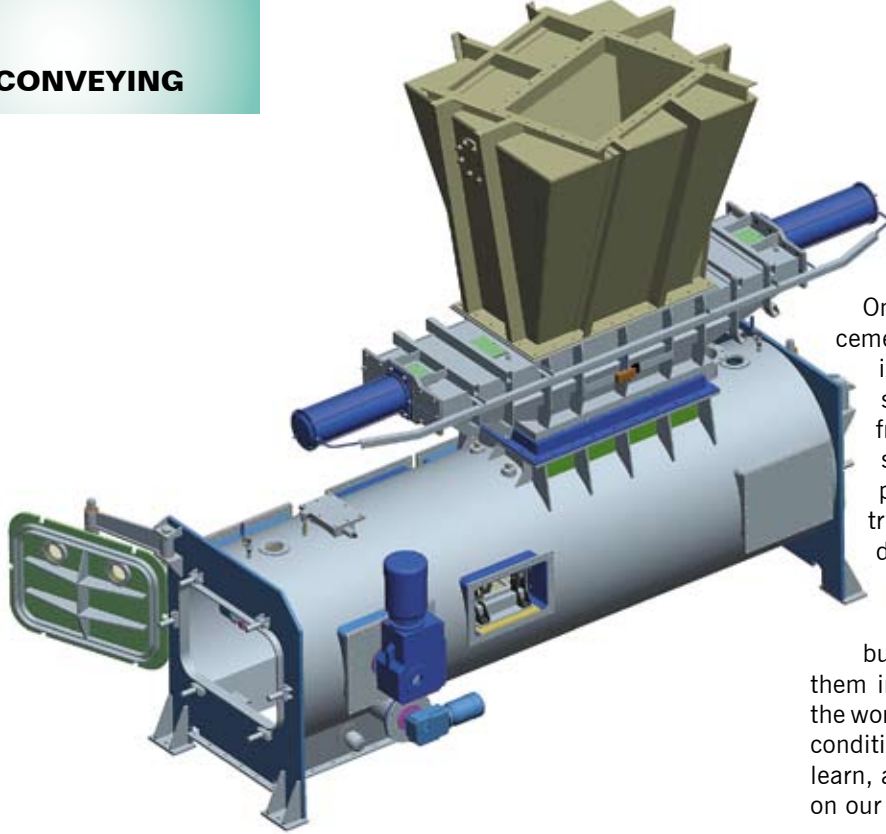
Coal feeder

Just one example is a coal feeder system Rula designed, built and installed recently. "It is a South African first and is typical of how we approach a project," says Roelf. "Mill coal feeders are usually imported from overseas but we realised there was a need in the market for feeders that are purpose built for specific local conditions, so we did some thorough research before developing our own system."

We weren't fazed all the components that go into a coal feeder system

"Already experienced in designing and manufacturing belt conveyors, chain conveying systems, bins and chutes, we weren't fazed by the scales, pressure vessel design and all the other components that go into a coal feeder system," adds Roelf. "The principle is the same as other coal feeders, but we custom-made everything in ours. Even the belt scale, which is normally bought as a unit, was designed and built by Rula. It has been installed and, after sorting out minor teething problems, we are well within the accuracy tolerances allowed for coal feeders."





Ash and cement

One of the company's specialities is ash and cement handling systems. "Our main focus lies in the energy, cement, mining and alumina sectors, where we supply turnkey plants from concept design to commissioning," says Roelf. "In addition to long distance pneumatic handling system for these industries, we also produce silo filling, storage and discharge systems."

"In ash handling, for example, we initially implemented German-based technologies, but have since adapted these, transforming them into something we believe to be unique in the world and specifically oriented to South African conditions. One of our strengths is our ability to learn, assimilate, adapt and improve significantly on our equipment, processes and technology."

Tailor made

Rula has an extensive range of in-house intellectual property and designs that extends across all engineering disciplines. "This enables us to comfortably cope with sizeable contracts from designing original concepts to the final commissioning of the project, encompassing civil works right through to electrical, control and instrumentation," says Roelf.

Cater for eventualities and contingencies not necessarily specified in documents

"Because we have such a thorough working experience of prevailing South African conditions, our designs cater for eventualities and contingencies not necessarily specified in documents. Instead of using standard data sheets to determine the layout, we tailor-make the equipment to ensure the dynamic and efficient flow of material."

Accuracy

The mark of true professionalism is revealed in the company's approach to product process design and the quest for accuracy. "An extensive knowledge of bulk materials handling is necessary. You can't just go on the internet and find information to build a bulk handling plant. It comes with many year's experience," says Roelf.

"Take wear protection for example. It's not just a case of reinforcing areas of high impact. The key is in providing for particles to flow in a more elegant manner, so that you actually remove



the areas of turbulence. The equipment and plant has to be designed to address all aspects of the specific particle flow analysis. To aid us in this, we make use of software design packages that include 2D as well as parametric packages dealing with 3D modelling. Finite element analysis is used to optimise design and forms an integral part of our design approach.

Quality

“Quality is never an accident,” stresses Roelf. “It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution and it represents the wise choice of many alternatives. With this in mind, we are proud of our newly-awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification. This achievement is based on a strong skills-set, integral to our core business.

“All employees are committed to the optimisation and improvement of efficiency because we all share the same goal that enables us to move effortlessly and freely through the consulting, manufacturing and construction disciplines. Continuous and extensive in-house training ensures a low staff turnover and our people take immense pride in our achievements. I am also extremely proud of the individually strong employees that have supported me in carrying and building the company.” Roelf says.

The future

Roelf has big plans for the future, not just for the company, but also to boost the bulk handling industry in general. “We’re awaiting the final go-ahead for a concept I call the Rula Tecno Park,” he says in conclusion. It’s a new 35 000 square metre facility within a kilometre of our existing premises. In addition to offices, construction facilities, shops, warehousing and assembly areas, we envisage a section dedicated to entrepreneurs.

Providing for particles to flow in a more elegant manner

We know from experience that there are many people who have ideas that could revolutionise business or industry, but don’t have the facilities to develop them. Our vision is to accommodate those who are

involved in the bulk materials handling or power industries in some way, we’ll give them access to our expertise, support services and corporate facilities such as accounting, marketing, manufacture and distribution, whether they’re manufacturing components for us or to market themselves, as long as it is for the bulk handling industry.”

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