

Drill Rig Innovations

Part 2

by Greg Etting, editor

As we learned from the participants in the first installment of this article series, “working smarter” is the watchword these days for companies trying to advance the current state-of-the-art in drilling rigs. Jim Hopkins, president and CEO of Laibe Corp., headquartered in Indianapolis, echoes those sentiments, and tells us about Laibe’s latest technological accomplishments.

“People are struggling with handling tooling,” Hopkins says. “One of the big problems for drilling contractors is getting the people who can handle that kind of pipe. The labor-intensity aspect of it has been a struggle. I think we’ve come up with something that will work very well to alleviate that situation. We’ve come up with a completely automated rod-handling system. It’s sold as a sepa-



A good look at the new automated rod-handling system from Laibe Corp.



User-friendly electro/hydraulic controls with functionally grouped gauges and twin fold-up aluminum platforms.

rate item. It will be self-contained on either a trailer or flatbed truck, and will go with just about any drill built – whether it’s a Versa-Drill, an Atlas Copco, a Schramm or whatever you might have. It will be very similar to what we have on our drill rig now, but it will be better able to handle both 20-foot and 30-foot pipe.”

Just Push a Button

Explaining this new rod-handling system, Hopkins tells us, “It’s all automated; just push a button. It will be very similar to our V-2000 – you just hit ‘add a rod,’ and it will pick it up and stand it right by the drill head, so you can screw into it just like it was mounted on the rig. It’s the same thing putting it away – hit ‘store a rod’, and it will re-rack the system, so you can keep going until you’re full. You’ll be able to reload and off-load. As you’re coming out of the hole, you’ll be taking rod off of it with an on-board crane, and if you need more than it will carry, you can add to it with the on-board crane, as well. Going forward, he adds, “What we’ve been working on is how to grab larger-diameters. Right now, it’s 4 ½-inch, and we’re looking at 8-inch, 10-inch and 12-inch in that same system. So you can handle not only rod, but casing as well.”

How do these new innovations come about? “Customers will call in, or we’ll be out in the field with them, and we listen to them, and when the same things are being told to you over and over, you’ve got something to work with,” Hopkins relates. “Mark Laibe and I get together and talk about these things, and try to see what we can do. We want to stay ahead of the market. It’s nice being a flat company – Mark and I make most of the decisions. We have great people in our company, and we all listen to each other’s ideas, and if it works, it works. We don’t have to through 30 people to make a decision, so we can react quickly.”

More New Ideas

Hopkins notes Laibe’s other recent advancements: “We have a new addition to our rig that will give a V-100NG some bigger air – 600/250. You’ll be able to do lots of different types of work and still save money, time and energy because the rig is more efficient. And speaking of efficiencies, he points to larger carousels. “We can put 15-rod carousels on two of our models, 12-rod carousels on one of the models, and a 500-foot to 620-foot rod-handling system on our V-2000. Coupled with mud and some large air on that rig, it offers some nice ad-



This unit features 1,070/350 air.

vantages, depending on what types of drilling you're doing. We also are working on a large-diameter, large-pullback rig that will provide 150,000 pounds of pullback. That should be available before the end of the year."

When asked what drilling contractors are looking for, Hopkins quickly points to lower costs. "If you're an air driller, you're going to burn fuel," he notes. "And what's facing the whole industry is weight. DOTs are cracking down, and contractors are looking for less weight on the rigs. When we design our rigs, we look at metallurgy and use 3-D modeling and stressing so we know exactly what it does when the rig is drilling. One of Mark's first sayings when we started was 'Lightweight, compact and powerful.'"

Market Factors

Hopkins expresses some concerns for the drilling market, saying, "We're hearing about the oil and gas drill-

ing market dropping off slightly, so you'd hate to put all this money in a rig that's just going to sit. The companies that hire the oil and gas drillers are slowing down in order to keep the demand high. But with the costs staying so high, you have to come up with alternatives, and we're seeing geothermal as that alternative. The geothermal market has been phenomenal for Laibe. We feel as though we've really captured the audience there with all of our rig models and our efficiencies and ability to deliver. We still can deliver within three months to four months of an order. The water well side of the business is dying; it's very, very slow. But geothermal, with the energy prices the way they are, has been going strong – and will continue to do so for some time."

These things tend to go in cycles, and when market strength and technological advances come together in the drilling industry, it's a powerful combination. **ND**



"The geothermal market has been phenomenal," observes Jim Hopkins.