

Trenchless Technology in Thailand

Horizontal Directional Drilling (HDD) and HDD applications are commonplace in America, Australia, and Europe and are often thought to be limited to other western countries while developing countries are often assumed not to use HDD or other high-tech electronic equipment to complete projects.

However, even with sufficient manual labour, installing a pipeline under a river or highway still poses the same challenges that might be faced in a western country. Although labour is cheaper in developing countries, the need for modern, automated equipment is still apparent. As far as having modern equipment to tackle difficult infrastructure projects, Thailand has always had relationships in place since the 1970s with foreign equipment manufacturers from Japan, America, and Europe.

HDD was first introduced in Thailand in the mid 1990s. While there are several people who can be credited with the promotion of HDD in Thailand, Thailand can boast of its own industry people who have championed the use of HDD within the country. Although they may not be on the same level as Bentonite's Frank Cannon or HDD founder Martin Cherrington, Thailand's

HDD promoters include Vermeer representative Jon Jamison of Asia Technical consulting and John Barton of Strega who in particular should be commended.

Strega is a Thai model HDD contractor. Despite not being the biggest or oldest HDD contractor, Strega stands out out of a dozen or more HDD contractors in Thailand due to the company's professionalism and persistence in tackling difficult projects.

However the road that led Strega to such success was not smooth road by any means.

Founded in 1999, Strega was led by John Barton, a New Zealander who found himself in Thailand via Burma back in the early 1990s. Mr Barton possessed a background in heavy equipment, having worked at two different companies before venturing out on his own.



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Sanafoam Vaporooter® II

foaming sewer root inhibitor



The USA EPA publication 600/2-77/017a, a study on I/I, the EPA explains that

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The HDD team.

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Mr Barton started Strega with the idea that he would lead and model his crews after international construction companies. This meant all the staff were issued steel tip work boots, uniforms and hard hats. In Thailand the concept of a small contractor modelling themselves after major utility company was non-existent and even today it is possible to find contractors whose workers wear sandals and think a hard hat makes for a good rice bowl.

“The outward appearance of the crews is a reflection of the professionalism of our company,” said Mr Barton.

“From our professional AutoCAD bore plans to thorough documentation of works completed our company strives for professionalism beyond even the client’s expectations.”

Mr Barton added that the professional appearance and reputation of the company has led to their continuous success of winning contracts and invitations by major utility companies to participate in bids.

“In the past years, we have never been short of work. There may have been lulls but we never had to lay off anyone due to lack of work.”

Mr Barton said that Strega has raised the bar for other contractors to follow, saying that utility companies that employ Strega have seen the company’s professionalism and have adapted Strega’s best practices upon their other sub-contractors.

Another reason why Strega is such a

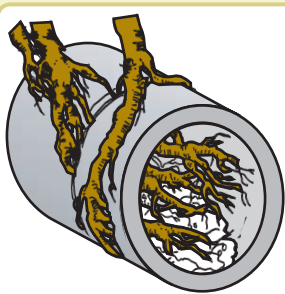
successful company is they have never been afraid to take on tough and financially risky jobs as they have realised that sometimes it is necessary to spend money in order to make money.

In a few recent difficult projects, Strega invested in a DCI Magnetic Steering system



John Barton.

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and a mud motor and other non-magnetic tooling. Over the years Strega has brought in technical expertise for particular projects and for crew training. Most recently for some difficult rock crossings, Strega employed an Australian team comprising of Brett McMeekin, Chris Wright, and Steve Booth. Grant Spaninks from Queensland Drilling also lent technical advice leading up to the projects and supplied Strega with a Wenzal mud motor for the projects.

As Strega had little experience in drilling in dense rock (over 100 MPa), Mr Barton candidly explained that his crew was neither experienced under the current conditions, nor were they with using a mud motor.

“We are not afraid to admit to ourselves if we do not have the expertise on hand. If this means spending money on foreign experts and expensive tooling, then so be it,” Mr Barton said.

For Strega, a commitment is made not to let the client down and to finish the job.

Mr Barton added that the advice and work provided by the foreign experts were invaluable as it is due to their help that “We were able to complete the projects on time and at the same time, our own people have learned a lot about drilling in dense rock.”

Some details of the project that made the crossing difficult were the density of the rock, the length of the bores (which in one



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case was over 900 m long), and the adverse job site conditions that contained a lot of interference.

Mr Barton expressed gratitude over the tracking equipment used.

“The DCI stuff definitely contributed to the project success and the Eclipse system with the dual frequency transmitter has saved us more than once. What’s also nice is we can step up to our wire line transmitter or even the Eclipse SST system if the project is really tough without buying a whole new system.”

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