



Sunam Sarkar

# Apollo eyes intelligent tyres

*Tyres are becoming intelligent. They now contain more and more enabling technologies within its structure. Advancement in sensors and electronics are making this possible. Apollo Tyres' Advanced Engineering Centre is working towards development of intelligent tyres in the foreseeable future, says Sunam Sarkar, President & Chief Business Officer, Apollo Tyres, in this exclusive interview*

**▲ By Saj Mathews**

***As the Gold Sponsor of the World Rubber Summit (WRS) organised by the IRSG in Colombo in May 2018 what are your expectations about the event and how it is going to be rewarding for Apollo in terms of business promotion for the short/medium/long terms?***

Apollo has consistently supported the work of the IRSG in multiple ways. As a responsible stakeholder in the rubber industry's value chain we believe it is our duty to help facilitate platforms like the WRS where producers and consumers come together for meaningful interaction

***What are the main strategies of the company, especially as Apollo is on an expansion spree globally? What are the main challenges?***

Our strategy is to consolidate our leadership in India in the coming years across product categories. This will be strengthened by our full range of product offerings and addressing all segments of the Indian Market. The full range play allows for penetrating deeper into the already strong distribution that we have in India.

With the Hungary plant coming on stream, we have now started supplying to some of the leading OEMs in Europe, which is likely to give us further growth in that

market. We have also recently put a team in place for the North American market, who, along with the R&D Team, is working on the products to suit the US market requirements.

The volatile raw material prices continue to be an economic challenge for our business. On the social front, meeting the growing needs of the community where we operate, and all stakeholders at large, will always remain a challenge for us. Having said that, we frequently measure our strategic preparedness against these challenges and strive to overcome them.

***What are Apollo's future plans for the growing Southeast Asian market?***

***Any specific plans to have a manufacturing presence in Sri Lanka, which is a flourishing rubber and tyre hub?***

Our strategic investments into Southeast Asian markets few years back have been paying-off well. Our products have been well accepted by the consumers in these geographies. We are looking at scaling up our efforts towards brand building and sales, local sourcing is a logical consequence once the market gives us enough economies of scale.

***Please explain briefly about the innovative range of tyres Apollo is planning to bring out on the lines of the new brand of new summer tyres like Apollo Aspire XP?***

Apollo's R&D team, with relevant inputs from the Product and Customer Services, always strives to come up with technologically advanced products for all product categories. Towards this, the R&D team is working with various research institutes and universities towards development of technology. Noise reduction on tyres, new generation materials that can support low rolling resistance and development of advanced simulations, are on active list of priorities for our R&D Team. Apollo is collaborating with Virginia tech in the US, University of Twente in the Netherlands, University of Dresden and IPF (Leibniz Institute of Polymer Research) in Germany on various material, tyre and vehicle related research.

***Please explain about Apollo's European success story and the roadmap***

Our formal entry into Europe, with the acquisition of Vredestein, in 2009, followed by the launch of Apollo brand of tyres two years later, has proved to be very successful for us. Our both brands, Apollo and Vredestein, are doing well in the challenging European market. The increased demands for our products led to expansion of capacity of the Netherlands facility by more than 20-25% first, and then, setting up a Greenfield facility in Hungary to complement that.



*Apollo global-rd-centre-asia*

With the Hungary capacity coming on stream, from being a replacement market focussed company, we have started supplying our tyres to leading OEs in Europe. We have also made an entry into the segment of truck tyres in Europe which would also be produced in Hungary at a later stage.

***What are the company's green tyre initiatives?***

Our research and development team is always on its toes working towards creating better and technologically advanced products for our customers worldwide. Developing

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tyres with low rolling resistance, better fuel efficiency and using environment friendly raw materials are all being worked upon by the R&D teams.

***Any technological innovations in the pipeline?***

Tyres are becoming intelligent as they now contain more and more enabling technologies within its structure. Advancement in sensors and electronics are making this possible and Apollo's Advanced Engineering Centre is working towards development of intelligent tyres in the foreseeable future.

Advancements in automobiles, either for performance improvement or enhancement of safety, depends a lot on inputs captured from tyres, as tyres are the only link of automobiles with the road. Serious research is already on towards development of autonomous vehicles and all these point towards an inevitable fitment of intelligent tyres in not so distant a future.

***Being a leading player in the global tyre industry, could you tell us of Apollo's vision?***

Our vision is to be a premium manufacturer in Europe and to be the leader in all segments in India. Towards that, we are looking at supplying to the leading premium OEs in Europe from our facilities.

From originally being a replacement market focused company, we have traversed a long journey and are in the final stages of beginning our supplies to premium OEs in Europe. We have already been approved by few of these leading OEs. This association will help in establishing us a premium player.

In India, while we already are the leaders in the truck-bus radial segment, with the expansion of our truck bus radial capacity in Chennai -- from 6000 tyres per day, we are going up to 12000 tyres per day -- we would look at consolidating our position further. Similarly, we have the largest production capacity for passenger vehicle tyres, and are also the leading suppliers in India, to OEMs. ▲