

# What can we learn from a woman in the oil and lubricant industry?

Mercia Jansen, area manager for Southern and Eastern Africa at Motul, was almost persuaded to become an actuary after her school aptitude tests showed she'd be ideal in that sort of role. However, she had other ideas - she was looking for a career where she could spend more time with people and still do practical work. Once she discovered all the possibilities that chemistry offered, there was no looking back for her.



Mercia Jansen, Motul Area Manager for Southern and Eastern Africa

As a woman working in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and indeed Motoring, Jansen didn't set out to change the oil and lubricant industry. However, by creating a successful career in this male-dominated space while being considered a trailblazer, she has encouraged other young women to look at careers in these areas.

Prior to joining Motul in 2017, Mercia worked as chemical distribution manager for Manuchar South Africa and regional manager for CJP Chemicals. Both of these roles helped her to deepen her knowledge of the chemicals and logistics industries in the region – knowledge which she has continued to build on and use to great effect at Motul.

Mercia Jansen talks challenges, achievements and of course, coping with the current pandemic.

## ■ ***What challenges have you faced in your current role?***

The region I look after includes southern and eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. It's a part of the world that has seen more than its fair share of turmoil down the years, with currency issues, regulatory changes, counterfeit issues, and changes in management at distributors resulting in complete changes in strategy. Being adaptable has helped me overcome these challenges.

Then there's the fact that South Africa is a mature market with many competitors, so it's not easy to penetrate and it takes constant innovation, out-the-box thinking, commitment and resilience.

## ■ ***What have been your greatest achievements in your current role?***

With Motul having identified Africa, including South Africa, as a key focus area in its long-term growth strategy, there was a need to support Motul's distributors in sub-Saharan Africa better, both now and into the future.

Motul's first step was setting up a branch office in 2016. Helping to incorporate a subsidiary and the opening of a new

distribution centre in Johannesburg are some of my greatest achievements, as these steps addressed past supply issues and accelerated regional expansion rolled out.

■ ***Can you tell us about a moment that sums up the spirit of Motul for you?***

The company's response to the 2020 coronavirus crisis has really summed up the spirit of Motul for me. Motul has lived its value of togetherness through internal initiatives and campaigns to support the staff and their wellbeing, as well as external initiatives to support our customers worldwide. We're proving that we can be 'Stronger Together' and #bettertogether

■ ***What has been your most exciting moment watching a Motul-sponsored event or athlete?***

I've always enjoyed watching Motul-sponsored events - Motul athletes are like family and I take immense pride in their achievements. As a lifelong MotoGP fan, I was thrilled to attend MotoGP Le Mans when I'd just joined the company and then MotoGP Valencia in 2019. The experience was even more rewarding as a proud partner as well as a fan.

Closer to home, seeing Motul branding all over the Maluti Mountains during the Motul Roof of Africa is always a special moment for me. Painting the mountains of Lesotho red in support of our dedicated Motul athletes gives me a real sense of pride. Last but not least, the vibe and excitement at Simola Hillclimb is unbeatable.

■ ***Technology, now more than ever, is being incorporated into the new future of business, how is Motul including or updating their technology and their digital approach to business?***

Motul was an early adopter when it comes to going digital. We've been expanding our e-learning platform to include customers as well as Motul staff. It's a great way to use technology to help people gain knowledge and skills whilst keeping safe. We see e-learning as a game-changing technology, and we'll be looking to increase the amount of Motul professional learning content that's available online.

■ ***How has the coronavirus changed the way you work?***

We're all getting used to working from home, and luckily it's been relatively easy for us. Being part of a global company, we've always been fully set up to work remotely – we travel a great deal (or at least we did before the lockdown!) so we're used to working from anywhere. Video conferencing was part of our normal working routine even before the coronavirus.

I miss the excitement and energy that happens when we get the whole team together, and it's been frustrating not to be able to work in person with our customers and roll out many of the exciting plans we have worked so hard on.

I think that the automotive industry will be under pressure for a long time even after this pandemic, so working together with our distributors, retailers and customers will be more important than ever.

■ ***How have you been coping with the lockdown?***

Fortunately, my work has kept me really busy, which has helped me maintain a routine. I try to stay fit and keep a balance between work, training and having fun – fun is also important! We have to look after our physical and mental health, and I'm taking it day by day. I've also been setting myself goals, like running an ultra-marathon around our house in 35 days.

■ ***What gives you hope/cause for optimism in the current circumstances?***

How resilient people are – especially in South Africa. We are survivors.

■ ***What has the current crisis taught you?***

The biggest lesson for me has been the reminder again of how quickly things can change. Never take anything for granted. Make the most of what you have, the opportunities presented and the time you have as it can be taken away from you in a second. I have also learned that we can adapt to anything and that the mind is powerful. Your thinking and mindset can change the way you see things. I have also learned that there are lots of good people in this world. And I have learned that planning for those “what if’s” should not be underestimated.

■ ***If you could rewind the clock to the beginning of 2020, would you do anything differently, knowing what you know now?***

From a business point of view, I actually wouldn't change anything. We were pushing hard; we did everything we could. We came out of a challenging 2019 and we started 2020 with great optimism and great plans. We were focused and driven and then it all came to a halt. But we would still have pushed as hard and done the same things as they are the right next steps for our business, and we couldn't have done them any sooner.

From a personal point of view, I have always tried to live my life to the fullest. I managed to fit in an amazing motorcycle trip through Namibia just before this all happened, and I am so grateful I did - it was a reminder again to take those opportunities when they come up as the next time is never guaranteed.

■ ***Any advice for businesses trying to find a new normal in a world gone mad?***

I attended a webinar during this time by Erik Kruger on mind shifts. One point he made really struck a chord with me: change from decoding to encoding. Don't try and understand the now and the future. Don't try and decode the situation. But work on the best possible inputs you can make today in the current situation. Encode the now. Change the way you do things to fit the situation.

■ ***What would you like to do when the restrictions are lifted, and we move into Level 1?***

Ideally travel - go to places with great big views. Ride my motorcycles. But I suspect we are all going to be very busy at work making up for lost time and sales!