EN ROUTE

Pier 400, a colossal project
Starting points
The ambition of Colas

Roads are our business. We are the market leader. Our territory is the whole world.

Our core business has always been roads, of course. Today, however, the meaning of that term has broadened considerably to encompass the construction and maintenance of all forms of transport infrastructure for people and for merchandise. Our position as world’s leader means that we must show extreme vigilance as far as our competitors are concerned. We must never underestimate their rapidity and competitiveness. Our status also imposes certain duties upon us. It demands that we play a decisive role in the industry, particularly in terms of ethics.

Working out of our French base, which remains our foundation, Colas must conquer new territories and further increase its share of markets in Europe and North America, areas that are already functioning effectively.

The ambition of Colas is that of a global company that operates in what is also a global context. The Group must both integrate and anticipate the economic, social, political and mental context. This constitutes a challenge and an opportunity. We are talking about globalization and all the accompanying upheavals – the speed of technological progress and, especially, the expansion of the Internet, without forgetting our 3% profit target and the growing demands placed on us by society at large in terms of ethics, safety, social protection, the environment, sustainable development.
LATITUDE/LONGITUDE
From the US to Mali, from Morocco to Belgium, snapshots of Colas expertise around the world

DIRECTIONS
Drivers
• Management, methods, markets…
  What’s changing at Colas around the world
Backward glance
• Containers fill the breach in Madagascar
In depth
• Colas strategy in North America

routes
number 12
Golden Gate Bridge,
San Francisco,
United States

IN ROUTE
United States
Pier 400,
a colossal project for the Port of Los Angeles

ITINERARIES
Working behind the scenes or under the floodlights, these are the women who make the Colas Group what it is today

INTERSECTIONS
• Robert Del Picchia: restoring a relationship of trust
• Masayuki Kaï: roads on other planets

R O U T E S
number 12

Ponds at the Madagascar shrimp farm
24 France
On the Paul Ricard circuit

30 Madagascar
A new shrimp farm in Madagascar

Pier 400, Port of Los Angeles, United States

The new track at the Paul Ricard circuit, Castellet plateau, France
From the US to Mali, from Morocco to Belgium… visits to job-sites, snapshots of work in progress, reports on finished projects. Colas expertise around the world.

Houston, we have no problem!

No fewer than fifty dynamic message signs were shipped to the United States between July and November 2001. The origin of the order dates back to January 2001 when MIA, a Texan toll highway operator, placed an order for fifty dynamic message signs with FDS (the American subsidiary of SES). The initiative was prompted by the desire to bring down the number of traffic accidents in Houston, which has one of the three worst records for fatal accidents in the United States. The hitch was that SES only had two hundred days in which to design, manufacture, ship and install the products. The first containers started to arrive by boat in the United States in July. Thirteen more deliveries were to follow. As the shipments arrived, six FDS operators installed both the signs and the command software on all of the highways approaching Houston.

Working together, SES and FDS were able to meet this considerable challenge. Beyond the penalty clauses that could have been invoked in the event of the slightest delay, the stakes for SES and FDS meant, above all, not disappointing the customer. SES enjoys an excellent reputation in the United States. By flawlessly delivering an order, right on time, it was very anxious not to see it tarnished.

Following planning work on the four lanes, as well as the emergency lanes, a layer of Néoclean was applied. This was then covered with a porous bituminous asphalt concrete. Two different products, in fact, were used to ensure porosity: Drainolastic on one side of the road, and Sacerflex on the other. Porous asphalt mix is made up of 90% fine aggregates with a high gap coefficient (gap-graded 20%) that allows water to be absorbed under the asphalt surface. Water splashing onto car windshields and the fog effect are therefore both greatly reduced under rainy conditions, and this represents a major step forward in road safety for motorists.

As principal site contractor, Screg Sud-Est brought in Somaro to supply the safety rails. Carried out in the spring and autumn of 2001, work sessions took place at night and lasted for five-and-a-half hours at a time. Traffic is extremely dense in this area, which is in close proximity to major cities.

Since this collaboration between different companies within the Group proved such a success, the teams are now ready to repeat a joint operation.
The Georges Pompidou square is one of the main downtown areas of the town of Montigny-le-Bretonneux, not far from Paris. The square provides the point of access to an underground car park, a shopping center and a local residents’ car park. Flanked by a theater, hotels and offices, the oval-shaped plaza has become an area of major traffic circulation. A total rethink of the layout of Georges Pompidou square had become necessary in order to channel traffic and improve safety. The project included creation of a landscaped area, improvement of vehicle circulation and the installation of safety markers.

Screg won the contract as a result of taking the bold step of associating two original processes, Compostyrene and Scintiflex. The Screg Ile-de-France-Normandie team worked on the site for six months, from July to December 2001. After planing off the old roadway, Compostyrene fill was applied. As the surface treated was immediately above the underground car park, this extremely lightweight product was required. Scintiflex asphalt mix was then laid. Made up 25% of mirror shards, this original product reflects light and differentiates the traffic lanes, greatly improving the safety of both pedestrians and drivers.

The site itself was carried in total compliance with safety standards; particular attention was paid to the safety of pedestrians and ensuring that was traffic shut down for as short a time as possible.
Just outside the city of Hull in northern England, the Humber Bridge proudly spans the vast Humber estuary. Built more than 20 years ago, the bridge was once the world’s longest single-span steel suspension bridge. Suspension bridges are designed to be flexible in the face of high winds, strong temperature variations and the continual vibration of heavy vehicle traffic. The Humber Bridge bends more than three meters in the middle, which means that the materials used in its construction must be equally flexible. Open to traffic since 1981, the deck surface required renovation. It was decided to use epoxy asphalt, a hot mix asphalt concrete that uses an epoxy binder. The old surfacing is removed with a pneumatic drill and the steel structure thoroughly cleaned – a tricky operation. After laying new waterproofing and applying epoxy asphalt, a non-skid layer of Spraygrip surface dressing is applied. The 38,500 m² of road surface is being treated in stages, with one lane in each direction closed off to through traffic, instead of the normal two lanes in each direction. The closure has not caused traffic congestion problems but does increase structural torsion because of the weight of site vehicles, something to be taken into account by the site supervisors.

Despite hold-ups for bad weather, work has progressed and the first lane was handed over in October 2001. The site is due for completion in the autumn of 2002.
Colas builds the World Bank headquarters

Two million US dollars and less than a year of work were needed to construct the regional headquarters of the World Bank in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. On this project, Colas led a highly technical, all-trades job-site involving a glulam (glued laminate) timber frame, roofing, wood and aluminum sidings, partitions, both hard and soft coverings, exterior fixtures and mains services.

With the exception of the technical areas of the contract, such as electricity, plumbing and air-conditioning, all of the work was carried out by Colas teams and the working blueprints produced by the in-house engineering office. During the final phase of the work, no fewer that 200 construction operators were busy on-site. Total quantities involved 1,800 m³ of concrete and 2,800 m² of flooring on three levels, all laid to a top-quality level of application and finish, according to customer specifications. Most of the materials and equipment used for the finishing work were imported from Europe, the United States, Canada and South Africa. Completed two months ahead of deadline in April 2001, the new regional headquarters of the World Bank was inaugurated in September at a ceremony attended by the Madagascan Prime Minister and the head of the World Bank for Africa.

A landing strip for the space shuttle

The take-off runway of the Moroccan military air base of Ben Guérir, located 70 kilometers north of Marrakech, was refurbished last summer. NASA, the site owner, may require to use the runway as a back-up site in the event of a forced landing by the US space shuttle. A number of military airports located at various points around the globe are now available to NASA. In the event of a problem, the shuttle will jettison its fuel tanks and head for the closest landing strip. At Ben Guérir, La Route Marocaine and BRS planed off the existing surface, which was suffering from cracking. Then a new asphalt mix surfacing was applied over a length of 4,266 meters. Work lasted for a month during the summer of 2001, following more than six months of negotiations and preparation. Two other Group subsidiaries also collaborated on the project – Erco, which carried out the planning, and Vialis, which provided the signs and signals. Proof yet again that the strength of Colas resides in the variety and depth of its network.
Reduce the number of accidents by improving the grip of road surfacing material – these were the customer’s orders to improve safety on a stretch of the A6 motorway located at the entrance to the city of Lyon, before the link-up with the northern orbital highway. Traffic is particularly dense in this spot. Up to 50,000 vehicles daily, including a high volume of heavy trucks, use this motorway. An average of a hundred accidents are recorded every year.

The target for the Lyon profit center of Sacer Sud-Est, which was designated to carry out the contract, included the application of an asphalt mix with surface grip that does not diminish with wear and time. Microgrip S, developed by the Sacer laboratory, was therefore chosen for its high level of performance. It is already well proven to be successful in use, particularly on stretches of motorway that are reputed dangerous.

27,000 m² of Microgrip S were applied over three nights during the month of September 2001. Major resources were deployed to meet the draconian requirements in light of the fact that access to the stretch was only available for six hours nightly. In all, the project employed up to five finishers at a time.

The site will be inspected after one year, three years and five years to ensure the durability of Microgrip S performance. But the customer is apparently already satisfied, as four months after the laying of the new surface, not a single accident has been recorded.

Good grip under all conditions
A brand-new test track

Through its Internet site, Screg Belgium was contacted by Ford International, which like many carmakers favors electronic communications. The contract was for the extension of the Ford test center track at Lomel, Belgium. 400 people, including 40 test drivers, work on the site 364 days a year – the center closes only on Christmas day.

Test drivers insisted that the new track have perfect grip and smoothness. Following the 150,000 m³ of excavations and the laying of foundation for the new zones, the two base layers of asphalt were applied, using 40% recycled material. The surface course of 17,000 metric tons, 4 cm thick, was carried out with all new materials with a very fine grading curve, in order to obtain the degree of skid-resistance Ford required. A total of 55,000 metric tons of asphalt were needed. Screg Belgium, which worked on the site in partnership with Strabag, rose to meet a considerable challenge – carrying out all work within a sixty-day period with no interruption of the testing program. Ford test drivers can now put cars through their paces with peace of mind.
Refurbished airports for the African Nations Cup

650 km from Bamako, Mali, on the edge of the Sahara desert, Mopti airport has celebrated 25 years of service. The runway, 2,500 meters in length and 30 meters wide, was recently refurbished, along with the runway of Nioro airport in Sahel, some 600 kilometers distant. Both projects, for a total amount of €8 million, were required to relieve congestion at Bamako airport, which has heavy tourist traffic. At both airports, technical buildings and new control towers were also built, giving them both the capacity for international flights. The dual operation was a major challenge in terms of schedules as the work had to be completed in under a year. In Mopti, a seam of metamorphic sandstone meant that supplies were available locally, but for the Nioro airport site, bitumen had to be shipped in bulk from the town of Abidjan, 1,300 kilometers distant. Logistic teams were required to come up with 30 site machines and an asphalt mixing plant to process the 20,000 metric tons required to apply a surface layer 7 cm in thickness. Mopti airport was finished in mid-January, just in time to be pressed into service for a major event in the football calendar – the African Nations Cup. The Nioro contract will be handed over at the end of May.

Grenoble turns down the volume

For the second year running, Sacer Sud-Est’s Grenoble profit center has won a contract from the Greater Grenoble urban authorities for refurbishment of the road surface on the city’s by-pass. This project included the application of 200,000 m² of Miniphone S noise-reducing asphalt mix in August 2000, followed by further work on the A 480 in July 2001. These are highways with high-density traffic located in urban surroundings, with over 100,000 vehicles daily. Noise-reducing surfacing was vital to improve conditions for local residents. The logical choice was Miniphone S, which also offers excellent grip, a benefit for road safety. Carried out at night to avoid interrupting traffic, work took place in three phases. First came preparation of the surface with planing down of the existing asphalt layer, then application of a cold micro asphalt that served as a tack coat, and final application of Miniphone asphalt with several finishers moving parallel to each other, ensuring that longitudinal seams remained perfectly flush. The result is an estimated ten decibel reduction in noise level. Local residents say they were surprised by the noise-reducing properties of the asphalt, and were glad to be able to open their windows at last!
Rodrigues gets improved air line service

The island of Rodrigues, located 600 kilometers to the east of Mauritius, is a Mauritian dependency which has recently begun to benefit from an increased degree of independence. This small coral atoll of 104 square kilometers with a population of 36,000 is trying to develop its emerging tourist industry. Plaine-Corail airport could only accept short-range 42-seater aircraft and the runway, constructed of concrete slabs, was 20 years old. After renovation and extension of the runway, which is now 1,300 meters long, 66-seater ATR aircraft will be able to take off and land.

500,000 m³ of cut and the same quantity of fill, consisting 90% of coral rock, were laid to make the shoulders standards-compliant. 12,000 metric tons of asphalt mix were used to surface both the existing runway and its extension. This included space for a new taxiway and a 6,000 m² parking area for aircraft. The site was carried out by a joint-venture company owned 80% by AJMC – a local Colas subsidiary – and the remaining 20% held by Allied Builders, which is chiefly responsible for the parking area concrete.

The site required a specific logistical operation because of the low number of crossings over to the island – only two or three per month – and limited transport and handling capacity. Four separate crossings were required to bring the equipment to the site, consisting of two bulldozers, four excavators, three compactors, an asphalt mix plant, trucks and a paver, all of which had to be dismantled for shipping and then reassembled.

As of September 2002, when the project is completed, more tourists will be able to come to Rodrigues in greater comfort to enjoy the pleasures of its turquoise blue sea.
The Orlik dam, located in southern Bohemia (Czech Republic), was constructed at the start of the 1960s, and the road running along the top was opened to traffic in 1962. The structure was entirely modernized last year. Sangreen was chosen to carry out the renovation work as well as to replace the surfacing of the roadway.

Motorists and pedestrians that use the road have probably only noticed that the surface has been renovated, modern lighting installed and paths landscaped. However, inside the dam, much has been changed.

A number of technical components of the dam had to be modified or replaced and the entire dam structure strengthened by new blocks of reinforced concrete rip-rap. The spaces between the columns and the load-bearing base structure were filled in with concrete.

The structure had also been weakened on the inside, through water leaking from the road into the control room. Waterproofing of the control room was carried out by injecting polyurethane. Thirty-two expansion joints were installed over a length of 400 meters, along with a new system of rainwater runoff.

In all, a 500-meter long section of road was refurbished, with the application of 2,000 m$^3$ of concrete and 4,000 m$^2$ of asphalt. A team of thirty operators worked non-stop on the site since its commencement in May 2001. The road was reopened to traffic on October 21 last year, and the site was finally completed at the end of November. The largest structure in the Czech Republic has now been fully refurbished.
Welcome to the largest ever Colas project in North America! To meet demands for future global trade, the Port of Los Angeles is acquiring a new state-of-the-art container complex at Pier 400.

The $78,000,000 contract was awarded to the Group’s Californian subsidiary, Sully-Miller. The challenge is as imposing as the site itself: the facility had to be completed within a 15-month deadline.
On a typical winter morning, the view from the Vincent Thomas Bridge is surreal. Underneath, bathed in that idyllic California sunlight, the busiest port in America stretches out as far as the eye can see. Nestled in the San Pedro Bay, some 32 kilometers south of downtown LA, the 56-kilometer waterfront Port of Los Angeles is the Pacific gateway for Asian and South American markets. Getting ready for the rapid growth of global trade, particularly since the recent trade agreement with China, the Port is building its newest terminal at Pier 400. Soon to be home to the Southern California hub of Maersk Sealand, one of the largest shipping lines in the world, Pier 400 will be built in two phases. The first of these will create a 139-hectare facility, including an 88-hectare container yard, a 16-hectare intermodal yard capable of accommodating four train units, and full rail and highway access.

The complex will feature three berths with a total length of 1,200 meters. It will have the ability to handle post-Panamax ships (i.e. ships with dimensions wider than the Panama Canal). Pier 400 will be the southern terminus of the Alameda Corridor, a 32-kilometer road and rail expressway linking the harbor area with transcontinental rail yards in downtown LA. This gigantic undertaking is financed by the Port of Los Angeles, a department of the City of Los Angeles whose revenues are derived not from taxes...
but from fees for services acquitted by shipping companies.

**A fierce competition**

Out of five qualified contractors who were invited by the Port to submit offers, Sully-Miller was the lowest bidder, shading out the second-placed competitor by a mere 0.54%! With nineteen subcontractors to take into account and no room for errors, it took a dozen people two months to assemble the bid. “It is very difficult to find bonding insurance for an $80 million job, but Colas had the financial backup, assets and credibility required,” points out Mahmoud K. Irshaid, the Project Manager for the Port of Los Angeles, who oversees Sully-Miller’s contract. “Another reason Sully-Miller was able to get that contract, aside from their expertise and track record, is the fact that they were able to provide the materials. Many contractors were not capable of supplying such a quantity – don’t forget that we are talking about nearly 930,000 square meters of asphalt paving!”

In advance of launching the bidding process, the Port rigorously selected the candidates, qualifying contractors in terms of their capacity to execute such an enormous project. “The talent and capability of the Sully-Miller team was a deciding factor for us to go...”

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**PORTRAIT**

Frank Gray,

**general superintendent**

A no-nonsense kind of man from California, Frank Gray is the trouble-shooter who handles problems in the field. Prior to his twenty-three years at Sully-Miller, he worked for ten years in another construction company: “That was where I gained my experience,” he recounts. “I was in the field for so long, I learned to forecast everything in a project. What’s exciting about this contract is the magnitude. What scared me the most at first was the timeframe.” Always one call away from the job-site, Frank is always on the go, overseeing all the field crews and making sure everything is going to plan and on schedule. “They call me ‘the hammer’, because my job is to push people! They don’t like it, but this is a fast track project and that’s what my job is. On the other hand, I had two foremen who once came up to me saying, ‘Frank, thank you for pushing us, we can’t believe the volume of work we managed to get through in such a short time.’ In every case, the key to success is communication. If everyone is on the same frequency, there is nothing we can’t build.”
ahead and bid this project, which is in fact the biggest ever obtained by Colas in North America," observes Louis R. Gabanna, Colas Vice President of Western Operations in North America.

**Challenges at every level**

The construction of Pier 400 represents a combination of challenges that have had to be met, as much concerning schedules as technical issues and complications affecting the financial engineering.

Sully-Miller’s responsibilities on this project include all the infrastructures for the entire Pier 400 island, comprising all water main, natural gas, electrical, sanitary and...
Some of the crews worked sometimes day and night on an asphalt drum plant.

storm drainage systems. At the beginning, the Pier 400 site was just a bare island, and all infrastructure had to be provided at the same time. The project also includes the placement of the aggregate base and all the paving as well as striping, signage and the installation of the lighting. The value of the electrical subcontract alone is $17 million. Sully-Miller was required to coordinate the work of all the sub-contractors.

Another challenge consisted of execution of the asphalt paving, which involved 455,000 metric tons of asphalt, and concrete paving. Sully-Miller’s crews worked on an asphalt drum plant for seven months, sometimes on day and night shifts, at a rate of more than 9,000 metric tons of asphalt per day. 60% of the aggregates used for the asphalt were brought in by ship from Canada over a distance of more than 2,000 km. In all, the site required some 1.8 million metric tons of aggregates. Blue Diamond’s newly rebuilt asphalt plant in South Gate was used for additional supply. New permits enabled pro-

PORTRAIT
Herbert S. Lozano, project engineer

Born in El Salvador, Herbert S. Lozano grew up in Mexico and in Canada, where he worked for three years after graduating in civil engineering in 1995. He joined Sully-Miller in June 2000, after deciding to move to California. “I am honored to work on this project,” he says. “It’s a fast-pace job full of challenges. The one I’m facing now is to coordinate the delivery of materials from Canada with the actual output of the portable asphalt plant. After the events of September 11, the ship was delayed for three days. I am always having to adjust and make projections. I used to handle the quantities and inspections and the survey, but now Alex Saplala has me doing the coordination, which involves asphalt, concrete paving and striping.” Herbert admires his style of management. “Alex is a different type of manager. He really challenges you, but if you can do what he asks, he’ll give you more opportunities. He pushes you to work hard, but he himself is often the last one leaving the office. Overall, I’ve learned to be proactive, because if you’re not, by the time you react to a problem on a job like this, it’s already too late.”
duction capacity to be increased from 27,000 metric tons to 80,000 metric tons per month.

Building the drainage and sewer systems on the Pier proved to be a particularly critical part of the project, owing to strict requirements and highly complex logistics. A cutting-edge method called horizontal directional drill was deployed to connect the sewer system to the mainland. It consisted of placing a machine on the other side of the channel to drill a pipe which was pushed through the water 43 meters deep in a 1,100-meter curved line from Terminal Island to Pier 400. This was a technological first both for the Port of Los Angeles and for Sully-Miller, and the experiment was deemed successful.

Beating the clock

The Port committed to its future tenant, Maersk Sealand, to hand over the facility on May 15, 2002. In so doing, it set down a series of milestone dates for each stage of the operation to insure a timely completion of the work. According to the contract, every day of overrun on each milestone will incur a penalty for the contractor of $61,718.

The clock was set on March 5, 2001 for the

**PORTRAIT**

Alex Saplala, project manager

When it comes to a really big challenge, Alex Saplala is the ideal man for the job! A graduate in construction engineering, he started out in the Colas Group as an estimator in 1990 at Barrett Paving in his home state of Michigan. Later, he was sent to Ohio as a project manager, before being promoted to a construction management position in New York. Within three years, he had become a key person within a very special team that turned around a money-losing division into a very profitable one.

“I gained lots of management skills there,” he tells us. “When you want people to do something, you must be reasonable and ethical, and provide leadership and follow-through. What this means is ‘if I make a decision, we make it together’, and the other side of the coin, ‘if you’re in trouble, we’re both in trouble.’ I also learned the meaning of urgency: anything you don’t do now will be a problem tomorrow.”

Now based in California, Alex is one of the youngest project managers in the Group at age thirty-eight, and Pier 400 is his first project at Sully-Miller. “At first, you don’t know how you are going to do it,” Alex acknowledges, “but you know inside you’re going to figure it out and your imagination starts to grow.” For Alex, everything revolves around teamwork. “We have a great team! We have overcome most of our hurdles so far but we have to keep focused. Our challenge is not over yet.”
start of a marathon 437-day race. The goal was to reach the finish line before the major milestone of May 15, 2002, at which time 99% of the work has to be completed. The final milestone is August 26, 2002, the date stipulated for final handover. “My biggest challenge is planning, scheduling and coordinating with subcontractors and agencies to make sure that the work is executed as planned,” explains Project Manager Alex Saplala, “because if just one thing is off, it affects everything else.” A three-week long process of brainstorming culminated in a master-schedule taking some 700 items of work into consideration – including innumerable underground operations needing to be completed as soon as possible to insure a safety margin, and with many contractors installing different utilities, conflicts at points of intersection had to be prevented and connections had to be painstakingly coordinated.

**Achieving the practically impossible**

One of the principal obstacles that had to be overcome was exacting environmental legislation, which imposed a number of very severe restrictions on the job-site. Among other requirements, strict rules were imposed around a restricted nesting area of the pier to comply with laws protecting the natural habitat of terns. A further difficulty surrounded the construction of buildings and the transtainer runway along with the striping of the wharf: these parts of the project could not get under way until subcontractors employed in adjacent areas had completed their own operations.

The countdown has continued relentlessly. Now sixty days away from the deadline, the teams are doing very well. Sully-Miller prides itself on being one month ahead of schedule. “Frankly, we didn’t know if it could be done,” admits Alex Saplala. “To build an $80 million job in fifteen months seems practically impossible.”

This summer, the second phase of construction of Pier 400 will be offered for bid. “Sully-Miller has done such a great job, I hope they get awarded the next contract because we make a great team!” concludes Mahmoud Irsheid.

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**SYNERGIES**

**A winning partnership**

With the scope and complexity of this project, selecting the team was a crucial element for success. “Our goal was to assemble a team of young supervisors and allow them to stretch their capabilities,” explains Bruce Rieser, President of Sully-Miller. “At the same time, we provided a back-up network of experienced managers.” The team includes three engineers, and three survey crews review the site every day. Overall, there are ninety people, including thirty from Sully-Miller, working in the field. Owner and contractor generally find themselves in two opposite camps, but on the Pier 400 project, they oversee each other’s work in a system of checks and balances. Teams from each side meet, brainstorm and go to partnering sessions with a facilitator. “We are not there to assess liquidated damages, but to help find solutions to potential problems,” remarks Port of Los Angeles Project Manager Mahmoud K. Irsheid, who works in close collaboration with Alex Saplala. “It is in our interest to help the contractor avoid any delay.” Alex Saplala is in complete agreement with his opposite number about this collaboration “We can build anything together,” he asserts. “No blame, no ego involved – we are true partners.”

The rail and road infrastructures constructed at Pier 400 will enable merchandise to be transported rapidly.
The Paul Ricard Circuit – a high-tech test track

The ultimate in high-tech for motor sports and for safety – the Paul Ricard circuit on the Castellet plateau in southern France has been refurbished to become the only test track of its kind in the world. Fasten your seatbelts...

It’s been some ten years since the mountain of Sainte Baume saw so much commotion at its foot. The Paul Ricard circuit had slumbered for a decade amid the pine forests and scrubland of the Castellet plateau. But since March 2001, the 400-hectare site has been the theater of a vast job-site to refurbish the race track and neighboring airport, plus the construction of a hotel complex. According to Philippe Gurdjian, President of Excelis, which has acquired the circuit, the company opted to make the Paul Ricard track “a hi-tech test circuit.” Indeed, the words “High Tech Test Track” are emblazoned over the entrance, a foretaste of what lies inside. “Colas was already involved in building the track back in 1971 and has lots of experience in the field,” continues Philippe Gurdjian, “so we stuck with the winning team.”

COMPLETELY RENOVATED INFRASTRUCTURES

Colas was contracted for all the external work and the project has been undergoing modifications for a year. “The original budget has been multiplied by three,” notes Marc Péronnet, the construction executive. At the entrance to the site, a luxury hotel with two swimming pools and a golf course has arisen from the site. Across the main N8 highway, the airport has been totally renovated with four hangars and a 50,000 m² parking area. The
airport runway is big enough to handle 50-seater aircraft. Colas has also built an extra taxiway, access roads to the hotel and airport and emergency lanes that surround the test track.

The test circuit is intended for Formula One cars, prototypes, production touring cars and motorbikes. The main track, which has a maximum length of 5.8 km, can be configured in 40 different ways. Explains Philippe Gurdjian: "I rectified the flaws in the layout by modifying some of the bends." What does a racing driver consider to be the right kind of bend? "A technical bend," he explains, "with a two-fold steer-brake-accelerate sequence. You can’t design it on a computer. You just have to go ahead and build it."

As Marc Péronnet confirms, the bends were designed empirically: "We marked out longer bends and then put down cones. Philippe Gurdjian tested the bends in a car and we kept moving the cones until he was satisfied."

**STRONG ON SAFETY**

Philippe Gurdjian was strongly affected by the death of Italian driver Elio de Angelis in 1986 during a testing session, so he is tough on the issue of safety. "I am struck by the contrast between the cutting-edge technology of the cars and the antiquated safety features, mainly sand traps and walls of old tires, still in use on circuits," he says. "We decided to innovate." The solution deployed is based on the principle that the brakes of a racing car rarely, if ever, fail. If the driver has enough room – something
made possible here by the absence of spectators – he will have time to react, so there are no more of the sand-traps familiar from spectacular Formula One skids. Instead there are huge runoff areas. The biggest of these is on the Signes bend, at the end of the Mistral straight. It has an area of 55,450 m² (about ten football fields) giving drivers braking distances of up to 200 meters. The runoff areas have another advantage: they allow drivers to restart a lap immediately, whereas with sand traps the cars first require four or five hours of cleaning. As testing costs several thousand euros a day, every extra hour spent in the pits is expensive.

STATE-OF-THE-ART MATERIAL
Complementing these safety features is the quality of the asphalt mix, which had to meet two major requirements – good grip and excellent stability over time, to resist stripping. To deliver this, the 12-meter wide track has been surfaced with a Colflex-based asphalt mix and the pits surfaced with an kerosene-resistant asphalt. Five kilometers of negative curbs in the form of concrete rumble strips let the driver know where the edge of the track is. In the runoff areas, a more abrasive asphalt mix has been applied and in a number of places, Colgrip has been manufactured and laid by Colas UK. “This surface material has a...

On the circuit, everything concerned with safety has been reviewed: sand-traps have been dispensed with, runoff areas created, and high-grip surfaces employed. These innovations could find their way into the mainstream world of automobiles.

Formula One drivers sit only a few centimeters above the road surface, so the evenness of the track is essential.

TEAMS
Toyota has a home
During the site work, Colas teams would often see Toyota Formula One cars on the circuit. A newcomer in 2002 to Grand Prix racing, Toyota is resident on the circuit, where it has set up a base with offices, workshops and a direct satellite link to its plant in Cologne, Germany.

Other Formula One teams are also keenly interested in the facilities offered by the Paul Ricard Circuit. The biggest have already traveled down to Castellet for a look. In addition, two other projects are being considered – a go-kart track and perhaps a training track for racing drivers.
resin and calcined bauxite base making it abrasive and highly resistant. It cuts braking distances in the rain by half,” explains Marc Péronnet. The safety features are completed by 7 kilometers of guardrail installed by Colas subsidiary Somaro.

“A site like this requires great attention to detail,” says Jean Vidal, who is in charge of the Var Region at Colas. A good example of such detail is the road paint. At 300 kph, ordinary road markings are invisible to a driver seated close to the ground. The edge of the track is painted with a continuous 20 cm wide blue line and the rumble strips are painted red and white.

CARE IN THE DETAILS

The runoff areas are painted with two meter-wide blue strips and the Colgrip areas are painted red. A total of 100,000 m² of paint, designed to prevent loss of grip, was used. Colas also carried out all the mains and pipeworks (drinking water, electricity, lighting and waste and rainwater networks) and installed a pumping station for the fire-fighting and sprinkler networks. It also installed 7 km of pipes around the track carrying optical fiber cable that hooks up 34 cameras, the chronometric equipment and the start lights. The data gathered is sent back to each team in the twelve pit garages. “Over 100 Colas people worked on-site,” says Marc Péronnet. “And we also acted as principal contractors coordinating the various sub-contractors.” The entire contract was performed in under a year, with the added complication of constant modifications to which responses and implementation strategies had to be found… against the clock!

PORTAIT
Jean-Michel Thomas,
site supervisor

At the age of 26, the career path of Jean-Michel Thomas already has almost as many twists and turns as a sinuous Grand Prix circuit! Having started as a mechanic, he trained for two years at a school for site supervisors in Toulouse. In 2000, he joined Colas as a site foreman.

“At the time, Marc Péronnet contacted me for a rather unusual project,” explains Jean-Michel. “One of his sub-contractors had let him down on a contract involving building a retaining wall in the town center. I took it on.” So it was not surprising that Marc Péronnet called him in again in April 2001 on the contract to refurbish the Paul Ricard circuit.

“To start off, we did everything,” recounts Jean-Michel. “We cut down trees, we bulldozed earth, then little by little the site got bigger and new teams started to arrive. As I knew the site well, I ended up supervising them.” Jean-Michel is one of life’s enthusiasts.

“Building a racing circuit is like a childhood dream. As I am naturally curious, I learned a lot. I also got to like major job-sites. So I have now made the decision to move towards an international career.” All interested parties, please apply!
He is a familiar figure in Formula One paddocks. For over 25 years, Philippe Gurdjian has been haunting the world’s race circuits, where his role has been principally that of promoter. The sport is just one of his passions – he has been a banker, advertising executive, Formula One Grand Prix promoter and even a racing driver! At the age of 57, Philippe Gurdjian leads a very full life, to say the least. As he says himself, “My problem is that I’ve got too many interests.” A 24-hour day is clearly far too short for him...

His career is not one that has meekly followed a conventional path. Starting out at the Rothschild bank in 1963, where he analyzed companies listed on the Paris stock exchange, one day he started to think about the best way to move up the ladder. He suddenly realized it was through seniority. As he tells it, “the very next day I quit my job at the bank and got a job in an advertising agency.” It was this career move that brought him into contact with cars. He became an account executive at Gemap in 1967, where he worked on the launch of the Matra 530, and went on to found the Bagheera agency, of which he became general manager in 1973 then chairman in 1978. He was responsible for creating the BMW brand identity throughout Europe. From there to behind the wheel of a racing car was only a step. “When you are sitting at the wheel, you have the feeling that you drive not only better than the others, but above all, faster,” explains Philippe Gurdjian. “To see if the feeling was real, I set myself a tough challenge. If I was only going to drive in one race, it had to be the Le Mans 24 Hours!” This he achieved in 1975, when in addition to his high-level skiing, tennis and golf accomplishments, he added a 13th place in the Le Mans event.

“Prior to the race, I had never driven at 350 kph,” he acknowledges. He competed in the Le Mans 24 Hours seven times in all, with his best ranking a seventh place in 1979 driving a Porsche 935 with Bob Wolleck. The bug had truly bitten and would never quit. In 1979, he and Jean-Pierre Beltoise set up Noscar, a company that organized races in which some of the biggest names like Pescarolo, Jabouille and Prost competed. Gradually, Philippe Gurdjian started to drive less. As of 1985 he became the promoter of the French Formula One World Championship race on the Paul Ricard circuit. He organized six Grand Prix championship races there before moving to the Magny-Cours circuit, where he won the Foca prize in both 1991 and 1992 for best race organization. Then in 1999 Gurdjian left for new horizons, this time in Asia. In Malaysia, he designed the Sepang circuit and organized the Malaysian Grand Prix. In the same year, he took to the high seas as organizer and promoter of the Figaro Solitaire round-the-world yacht race. He became President of Excelis, a company founded by Bernie Ecclestone, the prime mover of the Formula One world, and embarked on the Paul Ricard circuit project. It is now over five years since Philippe Gurdjian took part in a race himself. Is he ever tempted to get back behind the wheel for a few laps around the track? “No, I’m not,” comes the reply. “I already know the it by heart, but anyway – I’m far too busy!”
Madagascar, with its warm waters that remain at a constant temperature, is the idea place to raise shrimp. Shrimp-farming is a booming business, but is suffering from serious problems with virus infections in the countries in which it is traditionally practiced. For this reason, breeders are flocking to the island of Madagascar, which is full of potential virgin sites, exempt from any pollution. The Colas shrimp farm site is in the region of Ankarana.
Located at the northern tip of Madagascar, not far from the rugged peaks of the Tsinghy mountain range, the site is impressive as much by its scale as by its surroundings. Between the ocean and the forest lie a series of large ponds, separated by a central canal. On one side stretches the green of the mangrove swamp and on the other the limitless blue of the Indian Ocean. At the mouth of the nearby river lies a small village of fishermen. In this landscape from the other end of the earth, Colas Madagascar is working on the installation of a shrimp breeding farm. The scale of the project is as monumental as that of the site. The surface of each pond is ten hectares, and ultimately the farm will stretch over 1,000 hectares, four times the size of the Soalala fish farm delivered by Colas Madagascar two years ago. Les Gambas de l’Ankarana (LGA), the operators, have chosen a semi-intensive farming system and is aiming at achieving the best possible quality standard in agri-foods: OGM-free.

**Off to a flying start**

Given its scope, the project has had to be organized in a number of phases. In its first stage, the contract involves thirty ponds – an area of 300 hectares – which will be handed over in mid 2002. "In December 2001, we already handed over 180 hectares," explains project manager Alain Cussigh. The project got under way in May 2001. "We have been working virtually in real time side by side with the customer on final tweaking of the project. I’ve even been handed new plans just the day before work on a structure was due to begin!"

This entirely constructive attitude between contractor and owner has made it possible to successfully meet challenges. Today, the early results are in evidence. There are 100 men currently working on site and it is possible to see the first 10 ponds, fed from a central canal. The site combines a major ensemble of traditional civil engineering structures with specific ones designed specially for this type of operation.

The civil engineering structures include several processing plant platforms, a landing stage, a number of service roads, including an air strip, and a pumping station installed at the river mouth. The key component of the water feed system of the ponds, the pumping station is gauged for high flow. The 30 ponds of the first phase of the site required 3 pumps with a capacity of 4 cubic meters per second. When
completed, the 100 ponds with have an equivalent water consumption to that of a city of six million inhabitants! In terms of specific work, Alain Cussigh gives the example of how the adjustment of the slope of a pond controls the rate at which the water goes down for the fishing process. “The tolerance of the slope gradient is of 1.5 cm,” he explains. “We had to set a thousand level indicators in each pond. And remember, the finishing work has to be carried out by D5 bulldozers!” However, the major difficulties stem from the nature of the site.

**Tides and clay soil**

What with tides and clay soil, site organization was something of a headache. The first problem was to manage the tide schedule. The soil is halfway between the high and low tide levels. “We had to construct protective...

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**SOCIETY**

**Tradition and progress**

Local traditions are very strong in the Ankarana region. The people are highly observant of the *fady* [taboos], which are codified in the form of ancient rites and customs. Explains Alain Cussigh: “We had to take account of them in the life and organization of the site and the support base. This included, for example the positioning of the doors of the bungalows and the route followed by a site access road so that it did not cross a forbidden zone. Things are gradually changing, however. Once the site work is finished, the shrimp farm will create a dynamic effect in this very isolated region. “In time, LGA estimates that over there is the potential for creation of over 1,000 jobs connected with the various phases of the business – from the hatchery to the packing lines,” emphasizes LGA project manager Laurent Ottogalli.
breakwaters the entire length of the site perimeter to protect us from high tides, the low tides making it possible to empty the ducts to drain the water out of the site materials,” explains Alain Cussigh. No external material was brought to make the protective ramparts. Material removed from the bottom of the ponds are being used, bulldozed, compacted and dried by evaporation. The remainder is stocked in the middle of the pond, where they are shoveled up and moved by truck to form the breakwaters.

It was at this point that the second problem arose. It was a major one. Under the smooth, shiny aspect of this surface lies unstable, water-logged soil. “We drained the clay and dried it out. We had to create a central barrier that could be used as a road by the trucks. Around the perimeter, the foot of the breakwaters protected the site,” says Alain Cussigh. “Of course, the team has the right type of equipment, such as LGP type machines with extra wide caterpillar tracks, specially designed for yielding ground. However, during the entire project, the work of the machines has to be managed and structures installed keeping to the load-bearing limitations of the soil. “Before installing the metal superstructure of the pumping station, we had to drive the equivalent of 1.5 km of piles. There was no load bearing soil until we got down to a depth of 15 or 16 meters.”

Making sure of the quality of the soil has been an ongoing challenge: it has to be solid enough to bear both structures and machines.

Alain Cussigh, construction executive on the Ankarana site, is known for having a reputation for liking far away places at Colas. Aren’t Africa and the Indian Ocean his favorite places in the world? For him, an urban job-site would be somewhere like Yaoundé or N’Djamena! “What I enjoy,” he says, “is to work at the ends of the earth, combining life in the brush with the demands of modern production methods. Here, our nearest neighbors are crocodiles, but I work in real, air conditioned offices with computers, and I will soon even have an Internet connection.”

Alain started work in the construction industry as a quality manager on large-size job-sites. But his liking for field world, the desire to build and to “make a beautiful structure,” took him over. Alain began working on road and breakwater construction jobs. Today he is completely immersed in the Madagascar project and likes life with the team, who look on him as the village chieftain. What’s next? “For the time being I am concentrating on the site. If it all goes well, I’ll be here for four or five years.”
An island on an island

Working in a isolated area requires impeccable organization. The site is carried out for the most part in closed circuit. “The entire site is self-sufficient in soil. The 18 ponds constructed in 2001 represent 750,000 m³ of excavations. For everything else, very little comes overland as a supply route. Here, we are an island within an island.” The site has tools and logistics designed for these conditions. All of the supplies of materials and large pieces of equipment come by sea, on board the *Kinga*, the Colas Madagascar landing craft. The only exception are the concrete aggregates which are brought from a quarry 150 km away, during the dry season. One of the major limitations here is the impact of the seasons. The site schedule is determined by the cycle of rainy and dry seasons. For instance, excavation work cannot begin before April and must end by early December.

A site of this scale also requires a great many men – no fewer than three hundred people work on the teams carrying out the excavation, structural and civil engineering work. They are teams who are not afraid of hard work. “They are all Malagasy with the exception of myself,” says Alain Cussigh, “even the supervisors. I am the only *wazaha*, or foreigner.”

In this far-flung corner of the world, life and work have a tendency to coincide. The support base works like a small village. Good health and safety conditions are ensured by the presence of a dispensary, a nurse and a Colas doctor who makes regular calls to ensure that hygiene precautions are being followed. ■

**TECHNIQUE**

**A delicate operation**

Shrimp farming imposes very strict requirements. The farms must be sited a long way from human activity, to avoid a serious source of pollution. Another principle, according to Laurent Ottogalli is “ensuring that there are no more than twelve creatures per square meter to reduce the risks of pathologies and ensure that the water that is recycled is not in bad condition.” Once the site has been found, the ideal conditions for breeding have to be created. A month after they hatch, the baby shrimps leave the hatchery for the ponds. The first demand is the quality of the water. 20% of the water is renewed each day. After four or five months, the shrimps have reached the ideal weight of about 20 grams. At that point, the ponds are emptied, and the shrimps are caught in nets. “The bottom of the ponds must be perfectly smooth, like sinks,” says Laurent Ottogalli. “Although Colas has to work with huge machines, we are asking them to perform a very delicate job. There can’t be any surface irregularities, because they create puddles when the ponds are drained in which shrimps can escape the catch.”
Colas Suisse makes safety a work of art

Calendars, handbills, explanatory drawings – at Colas Suisse, information designed to improve safety always makes use of illustrations. It is surprisingly effective! For this reason, Jean-Marie Hermès, head of workplace health, safety and environment, and his team at Colas Suisse corporate headquarters recently decided to publish a quarterly calendar dealing with a specific aspect of safety, illustrated with art work supplied by a professional illustrator.

The first calendar came out at the beginning of the winter. Among other safety reminders, it emphasized the importance of clearing access ways and roads to prevent skids and falls and, of course, the need to wear personal safety equipment. Even the simplest precautions can help ensure the safety of workers.

The calendar comes in several formats: the desktop model is printed on both sides and makes a flip-over triangle, there is an A4 format for hanging on the wall and a small version in a handy wallet-size format.

Better than any speech...
The calendar is another step in an initiative that has provided a major range of informational documents on safety, such as the handbills published as part of a series on the theme “Observe, think and act”, which, again through the use of illustrations, encourages people to think about problems or previous accidents, and reflect on ways preventing them from recurring. Among the subjects dealt with: thefts from job-sites, skin problems, 3 key HSE words, etc. In a similar vein, “flash bulletins” are printed and circulated in each company. These are simple A4 sheets, illustrated with sketches, that set out in detail accidents which have occurred and the means by which they could have been prevented. “All these initiatives are appreciated by the Colas Suisse employees, and we find this form of expression is particularly successful in attracting their attention,” says Jean-Marie Hermès.

The 2001 safety awards

Colas won three prizes at the French national public works federation (FNTP) safety awards, based on results from the year 2000. In Category B (profit centers with 1 to 149 employees), first prize went to the Colas Châtellerault center, second prize to the Rodez center, and the Screg center at Epernay received a special incentive prize. In Category D (profit centers or subsidiaries of over 500 employees), Colas Nord-Picardie was commended, but not awarded a prize because it had already won the Grand Prize in 2000.

In 2001, three of the 12 prizes went to the Group. Since 1994, our companies have won no fewer than 43 awards. The 2003 awards are now keenly awaited because regional prizes will be awarded for the first time, giving subsidiaries a chance to be recognized for their safety expertise within their own regions.
Whether described on handbills or pocket-format or desktop calendars, the objective is always the same: observe, think and act.

**SAFETY AWARD NEWS**

**International HSE Challenge**

Two North American subsidiaries, HRI Inc. (Pennsylvania, US) and Works Alberta (Alberta, Canada), shared the Crystal Woodpecker award in the International HSE Challenge.

**HSE France**

Colas Nord-Picardie was the winner of the 2001 HSE Challenge, rewarding the French subsidiary recording the best safety index score.

Second prize went to Sacer Sud-Est, which achieved the best improvement for the same index.
The Compagnons de la Route have the right stuff

On November 22, 2001, 88 operators were elevated to the ranks of the Compagnons de la Route. The youngest was aged 20 and the oldest, 59.

Established in 1993, the order of the Compagnons de la Route brings together under a single banner the Colas and Somaro “Losange d’Or”, the Screg “Ruban Vert”, the Sacer “Top Niveau” the Smac “Compagnons de l’Arche”, the Spac “Compagnons de l’Arc” and, as of this year, the Seco-Rail “Compagnons du Rail” honors. Currently, the Group has a total of 707 Compagnons de la Route. The aim of the order of the Compagnons de la Route is to award a distinction to the Group’s best workers.

They are selected on the basis of their professional know-how and their ability...
to show initiative and flexibility, but also for their sense of responsibility, their commitment in the area of safety, their capacity to be a team player, welcome and accept new arrivals and maintain a permanent learning curve as well as their ability to deliver high quality service to the customer.

“Profit center heads submit proposals to the senior management of their subsidiaries,” explains Marie-Noëlle Macé, who is secretary to the order of the Compagnons de la Route. “The files of those who are accepted are then passed to the Group Human Resources department, which organizes the induction ceremony for the new Compagnons in November each year.”

At the event, attended by Alain Dupont, operators are individually presented with a silver trophy by the chairman of their company to symbolize their induction into the order. The ceremony is followed by a dinner on the River Seine with members of top management and then a special visit is arranged for the next day. This year, it was to the Stade de France stadium, in 2000 to the Arts et Métiers museum of engineering and technology, and the previous year to the Palace of Versailles.

After this, the Compagnons have the opportunity to follow a specially designed training course that will help to familiarize them with the business side of the company, develop their capacities to welcome and integrate newly hired personnel and become more active in the areas of workplace safety and accident prevention. Through their love of a job well done, the Compagnons de la Route play an active role in the life of their own center and in that of the Group.
It can be a woman’s world...

Corinne Recchia, team leader

Twenty-three years ago, Corinne Recchia was hired in the enamel- ing shop at the Chaudun plant of Adem, a Somaro subsidiary. 13 years down the road, she was promoted to lead a production team in the aluminum sector. Corinne currently heads a team of seven people. Her job is to organize ordering and track production to ensure it is carried out on schedule. Slightly embarrassed at having been named Compagnon de la Route, she is happy to share the honor with her team. “It’s not easy being the only one to have been nominated when we all contribute to seeing that the work goes well,” she admits. “Most of my colleagues offered me very sincere congratulations.

The guys teased me, but nicely – after all I am the only woman to become a Compagnon this year, and only the second ever since the order was created! Everyone made a big fuss of me on the day of the award ceremony because I was a woman. It was really a big day. Now I’ve come back down to earth, I think that the training I will receive through this distinction will acquaint me with new areas of work and allow me to meet some really interesting people.”

"Being a Compagnon de la Route brings true recognition"

Julien Dufresse, Main services worker

Julien Dufresse was inducted into the order of the Compagnons de la Route in 2001. Aged 20, he is the youngest Compagnon. After joining Screg Nord-Picardie as a temporary employee, he was hired in March 2000 as a main services worker and learned to master the job, which requires a multi-skilled profile. In 2000 he took part in the National Skills Competition and came first in the Lille region.

“To begin with, I misread the plan we were given,” Julien recalls. “I had to start over, but I managed to finish ahead of the others.”

Not only ahead, but in the opinion of the judges, better. Julien has decided that life is not for idling through. He is even more motivated now that he is a Compagnon du Ruban Vert, member of the order of the Compagnons de la Route. As he says, “For me, it is true recognition of my work. My father, who worked for the Highways Department, is almost as proud as I am!” But the distinction has not turned his head. He knows that only good work earns him recognition. “I hope that being a Compagnon will help me to progress further,” he says. “And if I am able, I would like to become a foreman. After all, why not?”
The Compagnons de la Route trophies

1. The Colas and Somaro Losange d’Or
2. The Spac Arc
3. The Screg Ruban Vert
4. The Smac Arche
5. The Sacer Top Niveau
6. The Seco-Rail Rail
Specialists in adapting to economic change

The history of Alterra stretches back over more than fifty years. Our company has lived through all the different political, economical and social changes that Hungary has experienced,” explains managing director Szabolcs Sido, speaking from his office in Budapest. Like most of the construction companies in the country, Alterra was originally part of a State-owned conglomerate. Quantity was prized above all and quality was not an issue. The State was the only customer and no competition was allowed. Then the fall of the Berlin Wall followed by the opening up of the former Communist bloc, including Hungary, totally changed the rules of the game for all the companies in the country. “We suddenly found ourselves confronted with two major problems – the sudden lack of capital coupled with the challenge of a market that was open to competition,” explains Szabolcs Sido. “The solution was to bring in foreign investors.”

This took place in the eighties, at a time when there were many Austrian investors looking for opportunities around the country, but Alterra finally chose Colas. “Although Alterra is not a road construction specialist, we have found that our expertise in the construction industry is perfectly complementary with Colas’ expertise.” Alterra’s activities are mostly laying gas and water mains and pipelines, but also embrace concrete structures – building for the railways and constructing foundations for all kinds of buildings.

Alterra prepares for the euro

Did becoming part of the Colas Group in 1991 bring lots of changes for the company and its one thousand employees? “I must say that we are all happy about the relationship we have with the Group,” says Szabolcs Sido. “We are free to make our own strategic choices and control our day-to-day management, which is really very important for us. Of course, there are standards and codes that we have to follow, but we are free to decide how to apply them. When we need help or technical advice, Colas is here for us. We couldn’t have dreamed of a better understanding. Our next goal is Europe. Hungary should enter the euro zone in a few years’ time. I find this a bit daunting, but what a challenge!”
ever since the early days of Internet development, some companies have been calling for bids on the web. The bidders propose their best offer during the bidding process and the company able to make the lowest bid wins the contract. In July 2001, Barrett lost a bid for an important contract on this type of Internet auction.

Barrett Midwest Central, which is a US subsidiary of Colas, bid out for a contract with the giant American car manufacturer, General Motors. The contract involved paving the entire site of the automaker’s main plant in Dayton, Ohio. In other words, an enormous contract involving more than 80,000 metric tons of asphalt concrete. Barrett had previously completed three different similar sites for General Motors, with which it had maintained a good relationship, and it prepared this project in detail. The Barrett managers were confident, and fully expected to win the contract.

“But just before General Motors made their decision, surprise!” recounts James Weeks, the vice president operations for the company. “They suddenly announced that this offer was going to be put out to bid on the Internet. This meant that all the competitors had to fight, and let their prices be known by everyone.”

The lowest bid wins

So Barrett managers needed to react promptly, and they lowered their offer to oppose the competition. Then, at the eleventh hour, just as the deadline for bidding was about to elapse, one of the other bidding companies decided to slash its prices. Barrett realized it had to withdraw from the auction. “This kind of method is not only unfair to the competitors, it is also misleading,” adds James Weeks. The best offer is far from being the cheapest, especially for a site of this nature.”

As a general rule, choosing a supplier is not only a question of money; other criteria come into play. General Motors is a particularly demanding customer, especially in terms of quality standards, expertise and deadlines. Inviting bids in this way could be against their own interests. However, granting contracts on the Internet does not look like it’s becoming a widespread practice and James Weeks is confident about the future. “It is the very first time this has happened to us. If this method starts to develop, it will surely be limited to the private and commercial market. All public markets should be spared.”
Customizable signs from Boscher

In the universe of signs and signals, new ideas are a standard product. In a made-to-measure profession where everything has to be reinvented for each customer, Boscher is innovating with ranges of customizable products called Systems. This new signs and signals product offering means that a customer, whether a business, local authority or national government, will be able to apply any modifications they wish to their signs and signals, using special software. This will also make it very simple to customize or to update existing products. This new process opens up an infinite range of possibilities for customers and gives Boscher a major competitive edge. Soon, Systems will be applied to luminous panels and ultimately to dynamic message panels.

A CD-ROM for South Africa

You’ve read the book, now get the CD-ROM! Following the success of the technical manual, Colas South Africa has presented its bituminous products and services on a CD-ROM since June 2001. This tool has now become a local reference for players in the bituminous road surface construction and maintenance business. Designed for field use, the CD-ROM presents products complete with specifications and safety information as well as technical back-up. Strong added value is provided by the Excel simulations that make it possible to compare a number of different solutions. A user-friendly product with sound-track and video animation, it highlights Colas South Africa building and public works activities. Flexible, because it can be updated from the Colas site with the latest standards and specifications, it can also be ordered directly on-line at www.colas.co.za – a factor that helps the Group get better known and raises its profile with customers.

Colas keeps recruiting

Prestigious symbols of Colas activity, the Strasbourg airport and the Magny-Cours motor racing circuit formed the backdrop for the 2001 recruiting campaign, supplemented by two faces, recalling the very large-scale recruiting campaign launched in 2000. Published in the French press, the new campaign attracted a wide public, particularly of recent graduates, while departing from the traditional image of construction and public works professions. In 2001, the recruitment drive continued to promote this group image while focusing more on its core business. The target was achieved as traffic on the Colas Internet site has increased. Note: recruitment followed the same trends in 2001 as in 2000.
IA Construction Corporation wins an innovation prize

The New Construction Award of the Maryland Asphalt Association this year went to IA Construction Corporation. The prize was handed out on February 26, 2002. A Group subsidiary whose headquarters are in Pennsylvania, USA, the company won the award for the high quality of its execution of the Canal Parkway contract, which it carried out during 2001. Principal criteria for awarding the prize were comfort of the surface when driving, appearance of the road markings, quality of the joint finish and the integration of the surface into the surroundings.

This Maryland State highway, intended to reduce traffic carried by the main turnpike linking Maryland with Virginia, goes through a national park. The way the highway blended with its surroundings was therefore very important. The appearance of the Canal Parkway roadside has been conserved with the use of drystone walls and guard rails made of wood.
International training sessions help build strong local links

For the last ten years, the Colas Universities have trained Group employees who work in France. In 2001 these training packages were made available outside France in North America and West Africa.

Following a series of external growth acquisitions outside France, Colas now has a large number of employees who are non-French nationals, including over 7,000 in the US and Canadian subsidiaries alone. Given this state of affairs, what is the best way of developing a sense of belonging to the same group? How can the development of synergies be encouraged and the various corporate entities networked effectively? “The question became critical as soon as Colas began to conduct sustainable development outside of France,” explains Philippe Tournier, Human Resources manager of the international departments. “We realized that we needed to export our domestic French training packages to our foreign subsidiaries, taking

Site supervisors gathered in Cotonou, Benin, in January 2002 received theoretical and technical guidance to help them manage sites in the field.
account of their needs by adapting the training to the local context. The official announcement that international training packages based on Colas University programs were to be set up was made during the Rencontres Colas which took place in the spring of 2000. The first areas and populations that were targeted by the packages were North American Profit Center Project Managers and District or Regional Managers and West African Site Supervisors.

Spreading Colas culture in North America

In the United States, the first training session took place in October 2001 in Savannah, Georgia. Thirty managers took part. “The main aim was to bring the North American subsidiaries closer together to create a network that would involve all the participants. We wanted to give them greater knowledge of the Group by raising their awareness not only of its values, but also of its organization, structure and strategic vision,” explains Philippe Tournier. “Colas culture is absolutely central to this training package, particularly the principle of decentralized management, a concept that may be new to those in certain regions.”

The participants clearly appreciated the Group initiative and the next session, scheduled for March 2002, will have additional modules that deal with Group techniques and with certain legal aspects.

Transferring know-how in West Africa

In West Africa, a zone historically permeated with Group culture, priority was given to transfer of expertise. “We have noticed that there is occasionally a lack of theoretical knowledge among site supervisors, but above all, it became vital to hand down techniques and ‘tricks of the trade’ from one generation to another,” comments Philippe Tournier. “So we had to set up specific training packages for each region to help to train supervisors, who are often required to head up major projects located in the bush on their own.”

In concrete terms, the training session was an opportunity to review optimization of plant, preparation and organization of job-sites, excavation techniques and operator safety, quality and human resource issues. For increased efficiency, the entire program of the first session which took place in Cotonou, Benin, from January 21-26, was transferred to CD-ROM so that it could be directly reutilized by the participants. This way, they are able to share know-how more widely in other French-speaking West African countries such as Gabon, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Pleased with the success that these early international training sessions have met with, the Group has now decided to undertake similar initiatives in other countries and geographical zones. Morocco will be ready for the start of 2003, with other countries to follow. Colas training is going international…
The Quarry Managers Convention was all at sea on October 4 and 5, on board the cruise ship *Sapphire* sailing from Marseille to Ajaccio. Some 250 people – mainly quarry managers whose quarries are in France, but also some from the rest of Europe, North America, Africa and Asia – took part in the event, at which Colas CEO Alain Dupont, Group senior managers and chairmen from the subsidiaries were also present. The aim of the Convention was to review the status of new technologies and regulations currently in force in the sector, and to give participants a chance to get to know each other and talk business.

**The ISO 14001 standard is the target to be attained by all Group industries.**

Regulatory and technical approaches to crushing techniques, loading and transportation, automation, upkeep of tracks and roads and operating profitability were just some of the subjects presented and commented upon by Group managers as well as by speakers representing equipment manufacturers.

The problem of quarrying and the choice of explosives for blasting naturally brought up the issue of the environment. This meant that subjects such as elimination and recycling of specific industry waste together with the broader topic of environmental protection became central to the sessions. Kept in the foreground by all the participants was the ISO 14001 norm, the environmental quality certification program that all the Group industries could be covered by in the future, according to Jacques Chardon, Group plant and equipment manager. “This Convention has provided an opportunity to confirm that all our industries are strongly aware of environmental protection issues,” he emphasized. “In this area of our industry, much still remains to be done, and it is far better to be a leader than a follower.”
ICE HOCKEY

A sports first in the west of Canada

Hockey jockeys one and all, they got together in Alberta on January 10 and 11 for the first Western Canada Colas Cup, organized by Everall Construction. Four teams were constituted, each composed of employees from the fourteen Colas companies established in the Canadian west. Ice hockey is a national sport in Canada, and every Canadian supports his or her local team. No doubt the highly charged atmosphere of the matches contributes to the popularity of the sport. So it is hardly surprising that a number of Colas players were more than willing to travel over 1,500 kilometers to take on other teams just for the love of the game.

The first day of the meet ended in a dinner where everyone told tales of the exploits of the day and recounted previous battles. The next day, each team was clearly determined to flex its muscles and show its superiority. After a hotly disputed competition, it was the Wapiti-ACP-Terus team that finally emerged victorious and the Western Canada Colas Cup was awarded to them with due honors. All the teams are ready to meet next year to do battle once again. They are hoping that they have written the first page of a story that will run and run.

Western Canada Colas Cup Final rankings

- 1st: Wapiti Gravel Suppliers - ACP Testing - Terus Construction
- 3rd: Standard General - Alberta Highway Services
- 4th: DGS Astro Paving - Adventure Paving - Pittman Asphalt - L.B. Paving - Kentron Construction
Welcome to Colas Est

Before us, like on a movie screen, is an image of a country road that the camera zooms down to the accom-paniment of a soundtrack. Day dawns and we arrive at Colas Est – on www.colas-est.com. A series of photographs flashes past illustrating slogans such as “a more beautiful and safer road”, zooming in on key words. A map of France designates the Colas Est territory. Site photographs are now added to the page. To enter the site, click on the Colas logo.

A menu bar gives access to easy-to-use sections with good content. The interactive map details the subsidiary’s territory, highlighting its activities. In the News section, the expertise of Colas Est is extremely well presented on a series of dissolving screens. The range of hi-tech products is displayed in a series of photographs, commented by a presentation of the product and technical references. A number of direct e-mail links are available throughout the Human Resources section.

The site really keeps on moving. The whole gives a strong, dynamic impression and shows a clear desire to inform and communicate.

Panoramic view of the Roy quarries

At www.carrièresroy.com, a clear and detailed presentation makes all visitors better acquainted with the Carrières Roy quarry sites, people and products. With a choice of six different entry points, including quarries, process, products and services, the visitor can learn almost everything about the company and its businesses. The site makes extensive use of Flash animation, which provides 360° views of the Noubleau and Gouraudière quarries – a virtual guided tour! The panorama is used to illustrate the quarry operation process and its various phases. Even someone with no previous knowledge of quarries can understand how extraction
Sacer on the Internet

Against a pastel two-tone background, Sacer invites web-surfers to take a closer look on www.sacer.fr. Stylized airplanes, trams, trucks and site machinery cross the Home page. The menu displays its sections: “From the past to the present”, “Products”, “Sacer recruits”.

Photographs of work performed locally and from the materials testing laboratory add visual interest to the site. Each of the photos serves as a gateway to the various Sacer activities, which are in turn each illustrated by an example of the type of work performed. The links are simple to follow and it is easy to move from one section to another. A series of maps of France gives an overview of where profit-centers are located, region by region.

The full range of Sacer products, each with a description, area of utilization and site photographs, showcases the company’s expertise. An animated series of profiles clearly proclaims the priority given to safety and the important place that people occupy within the company.

operations are carried out and the end use to which the products are put. In addition, the visitor is aware of the environmental concerns that the operators are constantly addressing.

In the “About us” section, Carrières Roy displays an open record, with 5-year revenue trends, workforce and corporate organization structure. This access point enables visitors to make direct contact by e-mail with senior managers of the company, while after consulting the “References” database, which houses information on a vast range of company business activities from railway ballast to race-tracks and motorways, a click opens an e-mail to the regional sales manager.

The asphalt plant, the rock face, the microgranite installation and the ballast stock... The panoramic tour of the quarry gives visitors a full understanding of the entire range of quarrying operations.
January 2001. Part of the National 7 collapsed, 120 km from Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar, creating a hole 30 meters long and 30 meters deep. The damage was caused by the torrential rains swelling a river that flows under the road by way of a 50-year-old box-culvert. Carried away by the deluge, the culvert carried away with it the road surface, which also acted as a dyke. For the economy of Madagascar, a country struggling against serious poverty, this road damage took on the proportions of a full-scale catastrophe. The National 7 is the only highway linking the capital with the city of Tulear, 900 km away in the south of the island. In addition, the road transports everything produced in Antsirabe, the province’s major industrial city, to Antananarivo. So it was necessary to set up a detour very quickly that would be able to take truck traffic until it was possible to reopen the main highway.

**The national economy is paralyzed**

In view of the seriousness of the situation, a technical representative of the European Community offered emergency aid. He submitted a report to Brussels on the impact of the incident. The credit was released in less than a day. Colas then proposed an original emergency technical solution and made its teams immediately available in order to solve the problem in under a week.
AFTER
Restoring the North-South link

The site chosen for the detour is right beside the breach, where the river is at its narrowest. Because of the lack of temporary bridges on the island, the Colas crew needed to improvise. Their innovative solution? Two containers. Strengthened by steel profiles inside and with their doors removed, they fill the bill perfectly as prefabricated culverts.

Colas teams answer the call
In spite of the rain, a team of some thirty workers worked round the clock with bulldozers, excavators and loaders to perform the 6,000 m³ of cut required for the containers to be positioned on the bed of the river, followed by 9,000 m³ of fill. On the sixth day, double surface treatment was applied on the base course. As soon as it was completed and had been inaugurated by the President of Madagascar, the detour enabled traffic between the north and the south of the country to start up again. 2,000 vehicles blocked on either side of the breach were able to resume their journeys. Awarded the contract to carry out permanent repairs, the Colas Madagascar teams turned their attention to rebuilding the highway. Works began in November 2001, and lasted three months. The first task was to put a dyke in place. A reinforced concrete structure was installed to replace the old culvert. Here again, the Colas teams had to pull out all the stops to complete the critical phases of the site before the rainy season, which begins in December.

Future emergencies
Similar emergencies are expected to occur in the future. There is no doubt that in the years to come, the island’s roads will again be cut off in the rainy season. The deforestation of Madagascar has had the effect of destroying the vegetation which normally slows down the runoff of rainwater. In the event of heavy rainfall, water levels rise immediately. Current structures are not big enough to cope. The country recently acquired a set of temporary bridges, but it is more than likely that the “container solution” will be used again to resolve other emergency situations in certain remote regions of Madagascar.
Colas, among the leaders in North America

In the run-up to a convention in Florida to be attended by Colas North America managers, Routes takes the opportunity to turn the spotlight on the Group’s North American strategy. Here’s how Colas does things the American way…
Colas first gained a foothold in North America in the 1960s, and since then it has made a long string of acquisitions. Today, the Group’s North American operations constitute 23% of its activity, and more than one half of its international business. In all, the thirteen North American subsidiaries were responsible for generating $1.5 billion in sales for 2001. “The success of Colas in America (which, let’s face it, is a rare achievement for a French company) is without a doubt due to two factors,” observes Dominique Leveillé, senior vice president and CFO of Colas Inc. “In the first place, we have been careful, and taken the time to understand the market. On top of that, we have always respected the identity and the personality of the companies we have taken over, some of which are now more than a hundred years old.”

Consolidating and developing a strong presence
The pace of expansion has been stepped up since 1989, with the purchase of several companies each year. As a result of this strategy, Colas now operates in 22 American states and in 7 Canadian provinces and territories. “We have planned our development according to two priorities,” explains Michel Roullet, president of Colas Inc. “On the one hand, we have worked on consolidating existing operations, as we did recently in Virginia when we purchased Branscome. But on the other hand, every two or three years, we establish new operational units in regions where we haven’t worked yet, like Alaska, where we set up Colaska.” Although the Group has built up strong presence on the ground, the distinctive yellow logo is not very prominent. Companies that are acquired retain their own names and identities, and consequently never bid for contracts in the name of the Group. In a nutshell, Colas’ North America development depends on a fine balance between the decentralization of responsibilities and the sharing of Colas values. “When companies join the group, they adopt the classic Colas organization, with a president backed up by three vice presidents, in charge of finance and administration, personnel and equipment,” points out Dominique Leveillé.
A fragmented, fiercely competitive market

This structure certainly seems to be the most effective for attacking what remains a heavily fragmented market. “In spite of recent consolidation, there is very little market concentration,” observes Michel Roullet. “The three leading players in the industry, which includes us, only hold 20% of the market between them, and no company can lay claim to complete coverage of the territory.”

This is the world’s largest roads market. Competition is ferocious, and it is almost systematically the lowest bidder that wins the con-

Meeting in Orlando

The next Colas North America convention, entitled “World-class expertise, North American know-how”, is scheduled for April 4, 5 and 6 in Orlando, Florida. It will be attended by the managers of the Group’s 13 North American subsidiaries – roughly 30 people per company – and will have as its central theme the living and working conditions of Colas teams spread out across much of the continent. “Between Alaska, Wyoming and the East Coast, living and working conditions are very different,” explains Sintra CEO Daniel Ducroix, who is in charge of the organization of the convention. “We want to show that history, culture and working methods vary enormously depending on the regions in which Colas operates. It’s a way of getting to know each other better.” The convention will also be a vehicle for sharing the values of Colas and establishing a spirit of unity in North America.
A few facts and figures

Annual production (2001 figures):
21 MT of asphalt mix produced by 216 plants.
25 MT of aggregates and 1 billion metric tons of reserves.
460,000 m³ of ready-mix concrete, produced by 30 plants.

Equipment:
More than 14,000 heavy construction machines, including 300 finishers, 650 loaders and 1,200 compactors.

Safety:

Consequently, the economic outlook is favorable. But this does not prevent the Group’s companies in North America – as in other parts of the world – from having difficulties recruiting people. “It has been hard for about the last ten years, and it keeps getting worse,” observes Michel

tract. Price is therefore a crucial factor.
Customers are mostly public authorities representing the various tiers of the American administration (Federal government, states, counties, city authorities), but they also include private industry and the retail sector. “Following several years of low investment, road building now fares relatively well in public spending budgets, particularly in the United States,” says Michel Roullet. “The last few years have seen a strong federal policy designed to help states renovate and expand their highway networks.”
Branscome enters the fold

The most recent company to join the Colas Group in North America, in February 2001, was Henry S. Branscome Inc., a family business founded in 1956. Branscome operates within a radius of approximately 100 miles around Williamsburg, in southeastern Virginia. It is active in two fields: road construction and production of sand, gravel and ready-mix concrete. Branscome recorded revenues of $70 million in 2001, and employs some 400 people. “We particularly appreciated the Colas approach, because the Group gives the companies it acquires a great deal of latitude,” explains the president of the subsidiary, Roy Turman. “Of course, the integration process has required us to make certain adaptations in our accounting procedures, but it has not had any effect on our way of working or our commercial approach, and still less on our personality!”

Construction of Interstate 75, at Tifton, Georgia, by crews from Reeves.
Colas Group companies in North America

United States :

1. New Jersey
   Barrett Paving Materials
2. Ohio
   Barrett Paving Materials
3. Michigan
   Midwest Michigan
4. New York
   Midwest Michigan
5. Maine
   Midwest Michigan
6. Pennsylvania
   Pennsylvania Construction Group Inc.
   IA Construction Corporation
   HRI Inc.
7. Maryland
   IA Construction Corporation
8. Missouri
   Delta Companies Inc.
9. Arkansas
   Delta Companies Inc.
10. Illinois
    Delta Companies Inc.
11. Wyoming
    Simon Contractors
12. Nebraska
    Simon Contractors
13. South Dakota
    Simon Contractors
14. South Carolina
    Sloan Construction Company Inc.
15. North Carolina
    Nello L. Teer Company
    Reeves Construction Company
16. Géorgie
    Sloan Construction Company Inc.
17. Virginie
    Nello L. Teer Company
    Bransome Inc.
18. California
    Sully-Miller Contracting Company
19. Alaska
    Colaska
20. Washington
    Colaska

Au Canada :

21. Québec
    Sintra Inc.
22. Alberta
    DGOC Ltd.
    Terus Construction
    Works Alberta
23. British Colombia
    Terus Construction
One is a truck driver, another is a deputy head of quarry operations, a third is a serigrapher, one is a sales supervisor, another one is a salesperson, one is a personal assistant, and yet another is a site supervisor…

Every day, these women give it all they’ve got to make Colas succeed.
Woman driver!

**Nathalie Delpechlin, truck driver, France**

Nathalie Delpechlin, young, blonde and the driver of a Kerax semi-trailer truck, has been at the wheel for the last four years, working for Cosson. “It’s just a 38-tonner!” she laughs. “I have always adored trucks. This is my dream job. It’s actually in the family. As a little girl I used to ride in the truck with my dad, who worked at Cosson for 28 years.” No wonder Nathalie knows everyone so well! The only woman driver working at Cosson and proud of her status, she says, “I couldn’t bear the idea of doing the job less well than my male colleagues.” In fact she is a thorough-going professional whose male colleagues hold her in great respect. The morning starts at the Roissy depot at 5.45 with coffee all round while the engines warm up. At 6, Nathalie takes her card for the day and is off. Riding 1.5 meters above the ground, she transports the earth in her 12-meter vehicle. At the end of the working day, she surveys the amount of site work that has been accomplished with satisfaction. “The guys here have a good attitude. I think they appreciate what I do and let me get on with it,” she explains with conviction. However, she does sometimes accept a helping hand with cleaning out the dumper. Nathalie is very fond of her truck and likes to decorate it with photos of her family. At Christmastime it can be seen coming from a long way off, decked out with a Christmas tree in red and green twinkling lights. Nonetheless, Nathalie hopes that one day she will get to drive a Scania.
Rocks around the clock!

Having a job where she spends as much time in the field as in the office was extremely important to Marie-Agnès Lebeau, when she made her choice of career. With a postgraduate degree in geophysical engineering, she is now deputy head of quarry operations at Screg Sud-Est, the same company where she served her internship. Explains Marie-Agnès: “My job is to advise our profit centers on quarries, not just in technical terms, but also in terms of legal and regulatory aspects. A lot of my work consists in putting together and following-up applications for permits to extract materials and operate crushing plants.” Marie-Agnès is also responsible for studying the sites the profit centers have designated for technical sorting and landfill, which will soon come into use to sort inert building waste that is to be recycled. Permit applications require heavy paperwork, which Marie-Agnès puts together by visiting the site, after which she has to defend the application to regional planning departments and local authorities. The task requires good knowledge of both quarry operations and the law, an ability to synthesize and a strongly diplomatic approach. Another aspect of Marie-Agnès’ job involves the evaluation of quarry deposits to which Screg Sud-Est wishes to acquire rights. “I examine the administrative status of the deposits as well as their market potential,” she explains. From Nice to Perpignan, and from the Alps to the Auvergne, Marie-Agnès covers the entire south-east of France, traveling wherever she is needed. “At the age of twenty-five, I am getting to live out my childhood fascination with rocks,” she says with satisfaction. At weekends, she works on restoring an 18th century farmhouse in the region of Lyon, renovating its facade – of exposed rock!
When all the signs point the same way…

Anne-Marie Lorillou, serigrapher, France

A sure touch and a sure eye, good concentration and a careful approach – these are some of the attributes required to do the job performed by Anne-Marie Lorillou. Her work consists of silk-screening direction panels, letter by letter. After having worked as a pharmaceutical sales assistant, Anne-Marie’s career radically changed course when she went to work in the SES plant at Chambourg-sur-Indre, where, at the age of 30, she discovered another world – that of roads and road equipment – of which she previously knew nothing. Over the next ten years, she became acquainted with many of the road sign industry trades before joining the serigraphy teams in 1988, where her ability soon attracted attention. Her colleagues voted for her to represent SES skilled workers in the Sacer Top Niveau order. Today, Anne-Marie enjoys serigraphy work as much as ever. “Even with experience, you still have to take great care to put the right letter in the right place, and look a word up if you’re in even the slightest doubt about how it’s spelled,” she explains. “In time, you learn to recognize dimensions without having to measure them. You learn to recognize immediately if a sign is the wrong height.” Sign panels used to be very basic, but today they come in colors and have complex graphics. Whether signs are for use as road directions, tourist directions or job-site signs and signals, they are vital elements in the road universe – and, of course, they are vital to Anne-Marie.

“I look a word up if I’m in even the slightest doubt.”
Béatrice Delaire, sales supervisor, France

Setting up relationships between customers and the profit centers of Colas Sud-Ouest, identifying and anticipating needs, setting up links for the future by building a network of relationships – Béatrice Delaire is motivated by contact with people. It comes as second nature and has punctuated her entire career. She trained as a civil engineer specializing in public works and then joined Screg. Next, she spent five years in a small company specializing in quarries in southwestern France but returned to Colas in 1995. She started in Emulsion sales, covering four French Departments and working with the Saint-Astier plant in the Dordogne area. In January 2000 her range of activity broadened to all key accounts in the south-west. “For semi-public and key private customers, such as consulting engineers and major retailers, there is no official notice given for calls for bids,” explains Béatrice, “so it is up to us to keep on top of future contracts. It’s vital to maintain excellent contact with these customers’ technical and real estate departments. This way we are asked to bid for each new contract and we pass on the information to the profit center responsible for issuing the bid.” This in-depth work is carried out in coordination with the French sales department, so Béatrice covers the French Atlantic coast from La Rochelle down to the Pyrenees-Atlantic region, striking east as far as Puy-de-Dôme and north to Nevers. This huge territory gives her ample opportunity to practice her keen relational skills. “When you’re selling, you need to use good psychology to get through to the customer, but you must also be humble, as a contract isn’t won until it’s signed and sealed.” Based in Mérignac, Béatrice has continued to increase her area of activity, with the addition, last May, of the sales management of two quarries in Charente-Maritime. She has taken on this new adventure, rich in opportunities for the sales contacts that she makes so effectively, without ever neglecting her role as a mother and her liking for sports.

“You often need to be humble and to use good psychology to get though to the customer.”

Keeping on top of market trends

“You often need to be humble and to use good psychology to get through to the customer.”

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Farida Lakhlef, salesperson, France

Always be ready to listen, question your own actions, change your mind and find solutions – Farida Lakhlef, 32, a young woman on a quest for movement and self-improvement, likes to give fate a chance. She joined Somaro in 1991 as an executive assistant at Boulogne-Billancourt, then moved to the Ile-Saint-Denis office, where she gained an interest in operational management. She became a technical sales representative for road paints and Indasco colored road surfaces in December 2000 and has been on the road ever since, covering the east of France, Normandy, the North region and the center-west. Visiting architects, town councils, small- and medium-size public works contractors, Colas subsidiaries, transport and amenities departments, regional governments – her customers are numerous and so are their needs for consultancy and technical support. These services go far beyond the purely commercial aspect of her job. “It is vital to know the manufacturing process well. I never hesitate to give customers a demonstration when a product is being applied, wearing my safety jacket and overalls. Customers always want to know the application methodology of each of our products.”

Whether for water- or solvent-based paints, colored or special surface materials, customers have many different needs and Farida gives each of them special attention. Based on tests performed by the Rouen plant laboratory, she makes several proposals to take account of the climatic conditions, environmental concerns and the specificity of the material used. “To satisfy a customer you have to control all the parameters and offer an optimized solution,” she says. For Farida, Indasco is more than a manufacturer and supplier; it is also a technical partner supporting the customer every step of the way, from upstream project work to performing the final stages.

“I often give demonstrations – customers always want to know the application methodology of our products.”
Valérie Donnedevie, site supervisor, France

After graduating with a technical diploma in public works, Valérie Donnedevie joined Surbeco in 1990 as assistant site supervisor. “Not only were there very few women studying the subject,” she recalls, “but most of them went into engineering offices. But I decided that I wanted to do field work.” Today, as a site supervisor, she works principally on sites for France’s electricity and gas public utilities in the north of Paris. Ten teams – around forty people – work under her supervision on excavation operations in urban surroundings. “We then lay the cables and pipeworks, and even do plumbing work when we are hooking up a household to the mains,” she explains. “In town it is really fiddly work, the sites are tiny. We have to use small-size machines, specially designed to deal with trenches already overloaded with mains services.” Some of the work performed by the Surbeco pipeworks center involves what are known as “small holes.” Teams are on call 24/7, year-round to dig up mains in the event of leaks or failures. There are many objects lying buried under the ground of the Ile de France region. Sometimes the teams literally hit an obstacle – on occasion in the form of old bones! Valérie never forgets the commercial side of her work. “I follow roughly sixty customers. Our contracts may last up to two years, so we have to plan everything ahead and take account of special requirements not just from the highways department, but also imposed by the local police force.” For now, she is clearly very much at ease in such a masculine universe, but she also thinks about the future. “Life in public works can take on epic dimensions!” is the way she puts it. “I think that one day I shall probably go into public works teaching – probably in the French provinces. Passing on knowledge can be just as important as using it, sometimes.”
Communication and discretion

Martine Reymonet, personal assistant, France

Martine Reymonet joined Colas as an accountant at the Annecy regional office in 1973, before moving to the Bonneville center. An opportunity took her to the training team at Colas headquarters, but she kept her knowledge of the field active. A proud native of Fouesnant, in Brittany, she has the knack of anticipating change. She was fully involved in the modernization and computerization of Colas processes during the implementation of management auditing. Working in auditing helped her to better understand the company and cultivate a logical mind and ability to organize. Wanting to advance her career yet further, in 1982 she became personal assistant to the head of Group Human Resources, and two years later, a personal assistant at Colas Ile-de-France Normandie. She has worked for three different chief executives. “It’s like having a new job each time,” she acknowledges. “I had to adapt to each of their different personalities, their working methods and the way they ran their teams.”

Her role involves her staying in the background, requiring first-rate organizational skills coupled with the flexibility of a contortionist! For instance, absolute discretion is required at all times, but coupled with exceptional communication and listening skills. “What makes the job fascinating is that you are a hub and have a great deal of person-to-person contact,” stresses Martine. “You have to be interested in the life of the company and know how to keep going when things get tough, getting vital work done. When the boss-assistant team is working well – and it’s always been my case – I am happy to go to work, knowing that each day will bring something new.”

“Each chief executive has a different personality and working methods from his predecessor. It’s like having a new job each time.”
Robert Del Picchia: “We need to restore a relationship of trust”

A French Senator since 1998 representing French nationals living abroad, Robert Del Picchia serves on the Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs, Defense and the Armed Forces. At the initiative of Senate Speaker Christian Poncelet, senators spend time in French companies to better understand how they function.

Your Colas “internship” took place from November 29-30 last year. Was it the first you have taken part in?

No, in 2000 I also did an internship at Amazon, which had just set up in France. I was very interested in finding out how this new Internet sales company that has had such a huge impact in the United States actually worked.

Did you know the Colas Group before your time there?

Of course I knew of Colas before then, but not in any detail. It is a very familiar name on French roads. But I also knew Colas from meetings with its senior managers in the course of talks with major French economic players and when meeting French expatriates on my many trips abroad.

Was road construction a profession that was new to you?

Yes, it was a real discovery. I knew that it was a specialist area that was different from the traditional construction industry, but I hadn’t imagined everything that it involved.
You visited Magny-les-Hameaux, which is the leading center in the world for road-related research. What did you learn there?
I was highly impressed. Firstly, I had no idea that road building required such far-reaching research into materials and methods. I found a carefully designed state-of-the-art research center that surprised me greatly in terms of its innovation and diversity. I felt that there was a strong creative desire, aimed constantly at improving the quality of road surface materials, construction techniques and safety.

Did you realize that the road construction profession involved so much technology?
Not at all. I thought that building a road was simply a matter of spreading some asphalt. I discovered a new world where absolutely everything is calculated. The tests carried out at the research center involve cutting-edge technology, chemistry and physics. I was truly surprised by the company’s capacity for research and for the invention of instruments and machines designed to improve the manufacturing quality and safety of products. It is not at all surprising that the center is world-class in its specialist area.

You visited a materials recycling center in the Paris area. Were you aware of the importance of this type of installation in areas where there is a natural shortage of road building materials?
Visiting the site I learned how industrial waste gets recycled following crushing and sorting operations. I was absolutely astounded to see lumps of concrete, beams and steel reinforcements from demolition waste transformed into very high-grade material that can be reused in road construction or other types of projects. This is truly a process for the future that proves that eco-aware industries really exist in France. Not only is recycling good for the environment, it also favorably impacts supply of material to areas where there is a shortage and where it has to be transported from distant quarries and gravel pits with all of the haulage problems that this implies. If you will excuse the pun, the solution is now only a stone’s throw away.

Did you have contact with Group employees during your internship?
Yes, at all levels. Those I met impressed me by their commitment, both to the company and to their profession. They are all devoted to moving things forward, improving things. These are exemplary qualities for getting a company to function properly. The organization of Colas, both in France and around the world, also interested me. I think it is a good idea to keep the original brand identity of a company following an acquisition. And very sensible to allow senior managers to shoulder their own responsibilities. I found out that Colas has a very broad-based company structure with a relatively low hierarchical pyramid.

What was your overall impression of these two days spent in the Company?
The two days were highly profitable in terms of my understanding of the company. The internship allowed me to get to know it from within and get a different take on a company that contributes to France’s international reputation and makes it economically strong. Even though I am strongly pro-Europe, I am still proud to see a splendid road flying the Colas flag with its yellow logo. I am even prouder when I see it abroad!

What “lessons” have you learned?
These internships give us a better grasp of the concerns of businesses. This one enabled me to understand a number of specific Colas concerns, but also more broadly, those of companies in general. For example, many Group companies are handicapped by delays due to transport, particularly on the French rail network, putting projects behind schedule. We are faced with a paradox – we have a target of migrating road freight traffic to the railways. The principle is fine, but it means the railways have got to run properly! This can be applied to many companies.
To take another example, we must improve relations between companies and elected officials. A dreadful climate of suspicion hovers over bidding procedures, when a straightforward meeting between an official and a corporate representative is enough to create an atmosphere of distrust. Each party is afraid of being suspected of either exerting influence or seeking leverage. I believe this should all be done away with and a healthy relationship that does not give rise to suspicion instituted.
Finally, the managing director of Colas, who came to deliver “feedback” on the internship to the Senate, should be asked if he has gained any particularly positive elements from the meetings he had there. I, for one, certainly hope so!
Masayuki Kaï:
“Colas may one day build roads on other planets!”

The Colas Foundation invited you to produce a work on the theme of the road. How did this topic inspire you?
Colas shapes the land to build roads and to create links between people. My work was inspired by this: I have dug down deep into the earth to create a work that I regard as being universal – the Planet Colas.

You have lived in France for the past twenty-six years. How do the French public react to your work?
After coming to France to study at the Marseille College of Art, I won the Grand Prix at the Cagnes-sur-Mer International Festival, which helped to get me noticed in France. I would say that the French public are receptive to the work of a foreign artist, and of course they have been open to my experiments. My work plays on the juxtaposition of materials that are able to evoke nature, a universal theme which unites people.

The Colas Foundation would divulge some of its secrets through my art. From that point on, I have restricted myself to working only with natural materials which have given rise to several series of works – Rain, Kite, Solarization – in which my canvases undergo the action of the elements. Water, air, fire and earth, the four fundamental elements, are what gave me my inspiration.

Does your technique owe a debt to an environmental agenda, or does it reflect a desire on your part to move in the direction of Japanese culture, in which the presence of nature is ubiquitous?
I have always considered that I was part of nature and that nature is part of me. Through my art, I try to illustrate the preoccupations of the contemporary world and the relationship between man and nature. My palette is mainly made up of natural matter, such as earth, rain, the sun or the weather. Of course, Japanese culture is another influence on my work. I have also produced several works using nori, which is an edible seaweed.

What is the symbolic dimension of the work you have produced for the Colas Foundation?
For the Colas Foundation commission, I naturally decided to give my work a symbolic dimension. I buried my fabric at the site of the research laboratory, where the Colas road building products of tomorrow are created. As a matter of fact, the series I am currently working on focuses on the future and the possibility of discovering other planets. Who knows, perhaps Colas will build the first roads on some of them!

Corporate foundations are involved in various forms of cultural patronage. What is your opinion of the approach of Colas, which has opted to use its Foundation to promote contemporary painting?
I would say that it’s a remarkable commitment, because patronage supporting young painters is still extremely uncommon. What’s more, the originality of the principle of the commission enables artists to express themselves with great liberty, in spite of the fact that the theme of the road is imposed.
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Contemporary tragedy was born at Hiroshima – a blinding flash, black rain, burned earth, chaos in time and space…

But creation is not limited to human and terrestrial contingencies: why not imagine the objects which would belong to beings living on Mars?