Dia Azzawi

"CORNER OF A VILLAGE ROAD"

A work that opens generously onto man, onto his world, a work both transversal and transgressive, a work loaded with multiple meaning, both existential and political, a work full of the contradiction of joy and tragedy, a work in which life triumphs over death and obsession with death...

Dia Azzawi was born in Baghdad in 1939 and now lives in London. His work has been exhibited at the following venues:

1995-2003: Galerie Claude Lemand, Paris
2001: Arab World Institute, Paris
2003: Cité du Livre, Aix-en-Provence
In the first half of 2003, the Group's business and results for once showed a downturn by comparison with the constant growth that has been achieved over the past twenty years.

It is true that the rate of economic growth in the countries where we work has been extremely low. It is also true that North America has experienced prolonged bouts of terrible weather conditions which have seriously hindered the progress of sites. And it is true that business in Africa has been particularly irregular.

But we shouldn't take refuge in this unfavorable environment to justify a drop in our performance. Exterior circumstances, including the increasingly fierce competition that we face both in France and throughout the world, do not constitute an excuse.

Both success and failure always originate in internal factors. We must look nowhere other than at ourselves.

In what promise to be tougher times to come, we need more than ever to summon up all our energies. Thought, imagination and action. We must develop good products, anticipate our customers' demands, be competitive, adapt relentlessly, strengthen our synergies, and attract the best managers and the best workers to the Group.

If we do all these things, Colas will stay on the road of progress.
LATITUDE/LONGITUDE
From the UK to Alaska, from Reunion Island to Benin, snapshots of Colas expertise around the world.

DIRECTIONS
- Safety, the environment, acquisitions, products, communications... What's changing at Colas
- In depth: the International Innovation Competition - sharing good ideas within the Group.

EN ROUTE
Smac Acieroid at the volcano's edge

A massive project at the volcano's edge

France

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

INTERSECTIONS
- Hubert Hoffstetter: keeping the "Group spirit" alive through associations of past and present employees.
- The Sorgen Sailing Challenge attracts more and more students.

A day in the life of Valantin... an everyday story of road building folk

Romania
Bucharest - Constanta... a motorway to Europe

An exceptional project in the heart of central France.

Modernization of Romania's roads network.

The Lunéville region in eastern France, home to Group subsidiary Valantin.
From the UK to Alaska, from Reunion Island to Benin... visits to job-sites, snapshots of work in progress, reports on finished projects. Colas expertise around the world.

Inside the European corridor

The Delta 3 multimodal interchange and logistics facility being built in Dourges is one of the largest projects in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. Located at the intersection of the European corridors which link the UK to the east and the south of the continent and the ports of northern Europe to those of the south, this platform will eventually have a combined road, river and rail transport terminal, two logistics hubs and a service center. To perform this huge contract, the major projects department of Colas Nord-Picardie successfully proposed an “all-in” application which presented a number of advantages over the initial solution - lower quantities of materials, reduced costs and lead times, winter season work capability and an immediate return to traffic making it possible for the work to take place simultaneously with other contracts. These included the laying of 27 km of railway by Seco-Rail, which link the platform to the highway and riverside terminal. Completion is scheduled for this autumn.

Smac Acieroid is simultaneously carrying out two major projects for two giants of the aviation industry, one in Toulouse for Airbus and the other in Mérignac for Dassault.

Thanks to their concerted collaboration, Smac Acieroid and Acieroid Spain won a contract worth over €8 million with Airbus. The works include roofing the S7X halls of the A380 assembly shop, representing a surface of 42,000 m², and 45,600 m² of cladding. A total of 760 metric tons of sheet steel and 8,400 m³ of insulation material were required for the construction, which is 46 m high and 500 m long. The site will be completed at the end of the year.

Some 200 km away as the plane flies, not far from Bordeaux, the Smac Acieroid Aquitaine agency was awarded a contract by Dassault for roofing and waterproofing the new building that will house the Falcon assembly plant. The company carried out previous contracts for the planemaker between 1996 and 2002. In the building currently under construction, fourteen arched and vaulted factory roof sections have been installed. The huge 25,000 m² workshop enjoys natural daylight and can accommodate sixteen of the legendary aircraft at once.

It’s all “plane” sailing for Smac Acieroid!

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Coletanche serves in the Falklands.

In 2002, Colas Ltd persuaded the British Ministry of Defense that a landfill being built in a disused quarry on the Falkland Islands, a remote British dependency in the South Atlantic, should be lined with Coletanche ES3 geomembrane. Particular advantages of the product presented were the robustness and heavy density of the geomembrane, a key consideration in the very windy Falklands. A shipment of 117 rolls was dispatched from Galway, Ireland, to Southampton for the five-week voyage to the Falklands on a military supply ship. A six-man team from Colas Ltd flew out. Working seven days a week, they lost only four days to poor weather and completed the project ahead of schedule.

"Linking the Channel to Europe", a slogan symbolizing both the European and local aims of the vast Saint-Lô bypass project — providing a road link between England and Spain and diverting traffic from the town center.

With highway RN 174, Cherbourg is joined to the Estuary road network which forms a continuous motorway link from the English Channel to the south of Spain. The Devaux agency in Saint-Lô, a Colas Ile-de-France/Normandie subsidiary, carried out the work for a total of €6.5 million.

"We were awarded three contracts arising from the construction of the 4-lane road — replacement of the structural works, refurbishment of the local RD 999 road, involving ramps and access to the RN 174, and the road surfacing work, involving seven kilometers of complete road building and 18 kilometers with porous asphalt surface. Work took over two and a half years and there were sometimes up to 50 people working on the job site," explains Dominique Leconte, head of Deaux Saint-Lô. 300,000 metric tons of asphalt mix came from the mobile mixing plant installed in the Fût quarry, some 15 km from Saint-Lô. The quarry is 50% Colas-owned and has an annual production of 300,000 metric tons. It also supplied 50,000 metric tons of 0/31.5 river gravel for use on all sites. "We were extremely lucky to have good weather, which made it possible to keep up a steady pace and get the site finished on time," says a satisfied Dominique Leconte.

The shortest way to get from England to Spain

United Kingdom

A new roads management contract Britain’s Highways Agency recently awarded the contract for the management and maintenance of all motorways and most trunk roads in the northeast of England to A-One, a company jointly owned by Colas Ltd and Halcrow, a leading engineering consultancy. The initial four-year contract incorporates an option for an extension until 2010, and is worth in excess of £130 million over seven years. A-One will provide numerous services, ranging from maintenance (e.g., snow clearing, litter collection, etc.) to road building, and will also reduce delays due to accidents on the network thanks to a 24/7 control center. The new form of management contract will permit more effective maintenance planning to avoid unnecessary delays to the travelling public.

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Colaska Inc. invests in a polymer modified asphalt plant

Back in June 2002, Colaska Inc., a leading general contractor in Alaska, entered the polymer modified asphalt (PMA) business. Although currently only 10% of asphalt produced in the state is polymer modified, it is estimated that this percentage will increase to approximately 70% over the long term. Indeed, it has been forecast that within a few years, the majority of road building contracts will include a PMA requirement.

With assistance from Colas SA, the amount of polymers needed to modify asphalt to meet government specifications was determined. In January 2002, orders were placed to acquire the appropriate PMA equipment and construction of the plant began once ground conditions had thawed.

The plant’s production capability enables it not only to provide PMA for all Colaska’s projects, but also to cover approximately 80% of all PMA required in the state. It has been forecast that within a few years, the majority of road building contracts will include a PMA requirement.

Green grow the slag heaps

The mining company Mines de Potasse d’Alsace established near Mulhouse in the east of France in 1904 has been gradually winding down its activity as the deposit was exhausted. In 1996 the site was earmarked for economic regeneration, and its environment for rehabilitation.

The Haut-Rhin profit center and the Colmar office of Colas Est were awarded the contracts for landscaping the Rodolphe slag heap at Ungersheim, waterproofing it with extra width Colanche ES1 and planting it. Seven hectares of land were excavated, 20,000 m³ of topsoil was brought in and 51,000 m² of turf was planted. The site was difficult to perform because the various salts that composed the slag heap were extremely sensitive to water. Poor weather conditions also caused numerous interruptions of site work, but once the work was complete, the remodeled slag heap was covered at last with grass.

30 kilometers of the A 72 renovated

In June 2002, Screg Sud-Est, the main contractor; Sacer Sud-Est, Colas Rhône-Alpes and Colas Sud-Ouest, performed surface renovation of the A 72 motorway between Thiers in the Puy-de-Dôme department and Noirlac in the Loire department. A further stretch was carried out this year between Noirlac and Saint-Germain-Laval. This 30-kilometer long project lasted almost two months, from the application of asphalt to finishing, with almost 70 people working on site. Somaro installed safety rails and road markings were applied by its subsidiary Vialis.
Colas Ltd and SES are well up to standard in Britain

To cope with the considerable increase in the volume of traffic on Britain's motorways, the Highways Agency, which runs the network, is developing and introducing innovative traffic management solutions to regulate vehicle flow. Among these is the installation of a system of variable message panels that display symbols and speed limits and provide drivers with advance warning of traffic conditions. Colas Ltd has won a £3 million contract to supply and install twelve such panels on motorway gantries. SES, a subsidiary of Somaro specialized in signs and signals, has been subcontracted the work for a sum of £1.8 million.

“British standards are extremely stringent,” explains SES project manager Philippe Perut. “We have had to come up with a new technical concept.” An inconvenience not without its advantages... “The new European standards are very similar to the existing British ones, so we now have a competitive edge.”

The quality of the collaboration between Colas Ltd, SSL (the British company supplying the electronics) and SES has established the companies as key players on the British market. This should prove to be a profitable strategy: the Highways Agency recently launched an ambitious new program called ATM (Advanced Traffic Management) to expand smart traffic management systems, and Colas Ltd has already won a £2.5 million contract in partnership with SES.
RAP is no. 1 at Branscome

RAP (Recycled Asphalt Pavement) is a critical ingredient in the success of Virginia-based US subsidiary Branscome Inc. In 2002 it produced over 780,000 metric tons of hot mix asphalt for its five asphalt plant market areas and used more than 210,000 metric tons of RAP (27%).

Relying on costly rail or barge aggregate deliveries, Branscome realized early on the advantage of using RAP in hot mix asphalt. The use of RAP has generated around 25% savings ($5.00 per ton) in asphalt cement and aggregates raw materials. It was first used in small quantities in the late 1980s. “Because mix quality was very important, we started with small percentages and worked up to where we are today, learning many lessons along the way,” says Branscome Inc. president Roy Turman.

The use of RAP and the nature of today’s mix specifications mean that Quality Control at Branscome has now evolved into Quality Assurance. Rather than simply manufacturing output, all raw materials processes, including RAP, are now monitored with changes made to maintain a high quality product. RAP is now processed by screening, crushing or both at two RAP processing centers before it is introduced into the mix. Branscome believes further processing will be required for RAP to meet more demanding mix specifications, and it may even be graded, like virgin aggregates.

On the fast track

To meet the needs of the young and energetic population, the local government authority of Reunion Island voted to finance an athletics stadium on Petite-Ile, in the southwest of the Island. The facility includes a 400-meter running track and areas for high jump, long jump, pole vaulting, and weight, hammer and javelin throwing field events, along with a soccer field.

The contract is worth more than €1 million, and work began in January 2002 with completion to take place within 15 months. Following excavation, the installation of drainage and lighting and a number of small-scale structural works, the roads and main services teams found themselves up against a set of extremely severe requirements in terms of altimetric and planimetric measurement not normally encountered in road construction. Working with an outside laboratory, the final untreated aggregates were applied with a grader and two layers of bituminous concrete with a finisher, to tolerances of ± 1 cm. To lay the track correctly, the teams used a laser leveling instrument. A total of 4,600 m² of synthetic surface was applied over 3,000 m³ of aggregates and 1,300 metric tons of asphalt mix, to within a tolerance of ± 2 mm.
A new road in Benin links Bohicon, Dassa and Savalou

On the road that links the port of Cotonou in Benin, to the South Saharan countries, the 108-km long Bohicon-Dassa-Savalou stretch is constantly under heavy traffic. To deal with the poor state of the infrastructure and its insufficient size, the Benin government decided to widen the roadway from six to ten meters and to strengthen it with a foundation layer and a subbase in cement-stabilized laterite, which would then be surfaced with bituminous concrete. The project was awarded to Colas Benin and was commenced in November 2001. By the time it is completed, 400 workers and equipment operators, along with ten supervisors (six of them expatriates) will have carried out 360,000 m$^3$ of excavations and applied 24,000 metric tons of cement and 57,000 metric tons of asphalt mix. The crushing station will have processed 140,000 metric tons of aggregates. Major buffer stocks of materials were constituted in order to secure supplies for the job sites, which consumes 200 metric tons of cement and the contents of two bitumen tankers daily. Financed by the European Development Fund, the contract, worth a total of almost €20 million, should be finished at the start of 2004.

Group subsidiaries take the tram together

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France

Nantes and Bordeaux: two cities, two tram systems and the Colas Group working on both sites.

Out of the 23 km of tram track laid in Bordeaux, 7 km were carried out by Group regional subsidiaries – four by Colas Sud-Ouest, which was adjudicated three sections, including the Pont de Pierre bridge, 1.75 kilometers by Socré Sud-Ouest co-contracting with a grouping, and the same quantity by Cregut Atlantique, a subsidiary of Sacer Atlantique. Last May, following 17 months of work, Cregut Atlantique completed five stretches of Line B, in the center of Talmont on the outskirts of Bordeaux. The teams were faced with the usual difficulties met in this type of project, such as scheduling work phases, relations with neighborhood residents and traffic. The same difficulties were encountered by Sacer Atlantique three years ago during the extension of the Nantes Tramway Line 1 over a distance of 3.5 kilometers. The new construction was awarded the Loire-Atlantique development first prize for 2002.

Today, the tram is continuing its journey. The Socré Sud-Ouest Mérignac agency will be working up until the autumn on the Bordeaux site laying a 40,000 m$^2$ Métalflex-Scintiflex wearing course. Colas Sud-Ouest and Socré Sud-Ouest are co-contracting within a grouping which began work on another stretch of the Bordeaux tram system at the end of September. Line A will be brought into service next December, to be followed in March 2004 by lines B and C. In the city of Nantes, yet further contracts are in the offing – trolley-car lanes are currently being considered.
Projects and accurate coordination made it possible for six weeks to be gained on the schedule. Given the impossibility of stopping traffic in the main street of L’Isle-Adam, the work began under traffic, prior to one lane being shut down. The site was completed at the end of September, confirming to both the town and the local council that they had made the right choice once again in awarding the contract to Sacer Paris-Nord-Est.

Last August, in the Ariège department in southwest France, the Soreg Sud-Ouest teams renovated 5 km of the D25 in four days. Part of the itinerary of last summer’s Tour de France, the road, which passes close to Ax-les-Thermes, gains height at the Pailhères pass (altitude 2,000 meters). Soreg Sud-Ouest applied a wearing course in Compomac R, a dense cold-mix asphalt, chosen to comply with the requirements of the project. The first of these was logistical. The site was remote and it would have been difficult to get hot-mix asphalt up to it in time. Another drawback was the terrain. The roadway foundations were of poor quality, which means that hot-mix asphalt would have had a tendency to break. Cold mix is more acceptable of deformations. Compomac R is being relaunched by Soreg this year and has been optimized. Now rougher in texture, it is similar to semi-course surfacing materials.
A t the request of the Orange region of motorway operator ASF (Autoroutes du Sud de la France), eight noise walls have been installed on the A7 motorway between Bollène and Avignon by the Southeast agency of BRS, a subsidiary of Somaro. In total, these barriers protect a linear stretch of more than 2,830 meters in eight zones. The process consisted of clearing the shoulders, performing earthworks, pouring an extruded concrete strip footing and a widened reinforced concrete guardrail, installing blocks to hold the metal structure in place, assembling the structure and, lastly, mounting the panels and the concrete and wood coping. The project lasted from October 2002 to June 2003, under difficult conditions because of the heavy traffic. Somaro’s Midi-Méditerranée agency employed major means to protect the workers, including more than 800 linear meters of metal separators. Since the noise walls were erected, the song of the cicadas is no longer drowned out by the roar of the traffic.

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**Hear the cicadas near the A7!**

**L'Aigle has two bypasses**

T wo roads that bypass the small Normandy town of L’Aigle, which had been subjected to major nuisance caused by heavy through-traffic, have been constructed by Sacer Atlantique in two phases. Work on the northern bypass began in 2001, linking up the highway to Paris (RN26) with the road leading to the town of Vimoutiers. The southern section was then launched, and it was completed this summer. The installation of guardrails and concrete gutters was performed by Somaro.

“Tt was a typical road building project in terms of the tonnages involved and also the configuration of a 6.3-kilometer two-lane road,” says Hervé Cavil, site engineer at Sacer Atlantique’s Alençon agency. A classic site, with its fair share of difficulties and challenges to be met: “The installation of the mobile mixing plant provided by Colsé Centre-Ouest and good price negotiations with suppliers, particularly the Chailieu quarry, had a big impact on the success of the operation. We were working at a rate of 1,800 metric tons per day,” recounts Hervé Cavil. A very fast pace to maintain, especially given parameters that could sometimes be unfavorable (weather, plant capacity, etc.). “Yes, it was a demanding rate of work. But to manage to react swiftly to the unpredictable, it’s absolutely essential to create a climate of trust and to prepare the project very thoroughly.”

A golden rule under all circumstances…
Originally designed 17 years ago, the Bucharest-Constanta motorway project in the southeast of Romania got under way again in 2001. It forms part of the vast process of modernization of the Romanian road network, in the bid to ready the country to join the European Union. Section 3, which links Lehliu to Drajna, is now under construction. Group subsidiaries Colas Romania and SCCF Iasi are carrying out the work.
Summer, 2003. The Baragan Steppe described in the novels of Romanian author Panaït Istrati stretches as far as the eye can see. Fields of sunflowers and corn dominate the landscape. Work on section 3 of the Bucharest-Constanta motorway, a distance of 41.6 km, which began at the end of 2001, is now well under way. Over half of the excavation has been carried out and construction of the roadbed has begun.

Site work started in the east from the Drajna end, but time pressure has required work to be carried out from both ends at once. As a result, since the start of 2003, the road is also beginning to take form at the Lehliu end. This small town is 55 km from Bucharest. In a popular 1980s Romanian TV show, Lehliu features as a typical small provincial town where “nothing ever happens”. The start of this road-building project has certainly helped to dispel the myth and revitalize local life both in Lehliu and Drajna, where Colas has set up its base camp to house and feed 300 members of the 700-strong workforce.

An enormous contract

The bidding procedure began in February 2001. Colas Romania had just finished a number of road renovation projects. “This contract represented a major opportunity for the Group, with the possibility of opening up further opportunities for projects of a similar scale in the region,” explains Bruno Laffaire, who has managed Romania and the southern European region for Colas since 2000.

In 1992, when the Group set up a partnership with the national Romanian Highways Authority to create Sorocam (which stands for Société Romaine de Constructions et Matériaux), Colas Romania came into being. In 1994, Sorocam received the Quality award from Araco, the Romanian construction company federation. In 1998, following the acquisition of the local Screg subsidiary, Colas Romania became the Colas Group. The acquisition of a majority stake in SCCF Iasi (66% interest in Iasi) was the fruit of a partnership begun back in 1994. Among the other major projects currently being performed by the Group in the country are maintenance work contracts on the RN 3 Highway between Bucharest and Cricova, one of eight former Romanian regional highways and bridges authorities. At the end of 2001, SCCF Iasi, Romania’s number three road construction company, specialized in civil engineering, structural work and railway maintenance, joined the Colas Group. The acquisition of a majority stake in SCCF Iasi capital represented the fruit of a partnership begun back in 1994.
the amount of the bid, a number of factors worked in favor of Colas, which was in competition with Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Turkish contractors. Among the advantages is the close availability of Colas quarries and the Group’s knowledge of the country. The contract was adjudicated in November 2001 for an amount of €50 million. An extension to the contract for a further €20 million was negotiated at the end of April 2003.

A minimum level of subcontracting

Very little work on this project is subcontracted. Colas Romania is itself carrying out almost all of the excavation and roadbed construction. The other Group subsidiary involved in the project, SCOF Iasi, is responsible for the civil engineering work – nine overhead roads, and twelve motorway bridges, one of which crosses the Draja-Nărcea railway.

“We are working with teams that we have been able to train up gradually, in the field,” explains project manager Emmanuel Quesson, who is assisted in management of the site by a Romanian, Vasile Ghiță. “We have strongly motivated, high-quality labor,” comments Jacques Pitras, who is in charge of the excavation teams.

The beautiful Danube

Progress can get held up by the presence of the water table, which is only 4 meters underground. The reason for this is the closeness of the river Danube, which flows just 40 kilometers to the south of the site, and the presence of many irrigation canals. “We’re not short of water here,” jokes Jacques Pitras, who has previously worked on sites in Morocco and French Guyana. A lime spreader is employed to stabilize and dry the ground used for foundations.

The ever-present Danube and other waterways in the area, plus the close proximity of the Black Sea, make waterborne transport a natural solution for bringing the materials on site. Aggregates travel by barge down the Danube and are unloaded at Calarasi. Bitumen comes from Sidly by sea and is stored in the Black Sea port of Mangalia. The use of bitumen from the Poledi refinery is being considered as an option, to keep a degree of flexibility in the supply chain. In addition, bitumen used for the asphalt mixes must be neither too hard nor too soft, given the wide temperature variations.

Some 700 highly motivated people are working on a project more than 40 kilometers long.
that affect the area (-30°C in the winter to +30°C in the summer).

A colossal project

A total of 1,400,000 metric tons of natural gravel, 600,000 metric tons of treated gravel and 536,000 metric tons of asphalt mix are required to perform the site, which should be completed during the first semester of 2005. Loess used as infill for the embankments is extracted on site. For the roadway, untreated gravel is extracted from the river Danube and other rivers in the Buzau and Prahova regions. The aggregates used to manufacture the asphalt mix are supplied by a quarry operated by Soroscam, another Romanian Colas subsidiary located downstream on the Danube.

Major resources are being deployed, including 21 compactors, 12 bulldozers, ten loaders, ten back-hoes, 17 sprayers, nine graders, four finishers, two soil treatment units, 350 metric ton/hour TSM 21 mixing plant, three cement plants and a concrete mixing plant. Some major investments have been made which are expected to prove beneficial when the Group tenders for the sixth and final section of the motorway - a 50-km section linking Cernavoda to the Black Sea port of Constanta, the final link in Paneuropean Corridor IV. The feasibility study will be completed in 2004.

Context

Modernization of the Romanian road infrastructure is a challenge for the years ahead.

Currently, Romania has a motorway network consisting of only 114 kilometers of roads. This is a particularly low figure, not only in relation to other European countries as a whole, but also by comparison with Romania’s nearest neighbors: Bulgaria, for example, which has half the land area of Romania, has 287 kilometers of motorways, and Hungary, a country that is even smaller, has a network of 353 kilometers. By 2012, spectacular changes will have taken place in Romania’s infrastructure, with progressive deployment of a national motorway program that calls for the construction of 1,300 kilometers of roadways. Investment required will be in the order of €7.5 billion. The Nadlac-Constanta Paneuropean Corridor IV of which the Bucharest-Constanta motorway forms part, crossing Romania from west to east, will be the backbone of the future road network. When the program is complete, Romania will be joined to the main European road transport corridors by at least three major road links. The start of this huge project required the prior rehabilitation and modernization of a number of highways. Finance for the Bucharest-Constanta highway was provided through the European Union (ISPA program structural pre-accession instrument, a program intended to facilitate the process of joining the European Union) for an amount of €72 million, a loan of €154 million from the EIB (European Investment Bank) and €154 million provided by the Romanian government. Work is expected to be completed in 2008.

Key figures

EARTHWORKS
2,800,000 m³
BASE LAYER
270,000 m²
NATURAL GRAVEL
1,400,000 metric tons
CEMENT-BOUND AGGREGATES
600,000 metric tons
ASPHALT MIX
260,000 metric tons
STRUCTURES
12 bridges
25,000 m³ of concrete
9 overpasses

George is laid on an access ramp leading to a structure using reinforced ballast.

Eugen Florescu – target quality

Eugen Florescu, age 38, is head of the Lehliu-Drajna motorway site laboratory. With a Master’s degree from the Paris ENPC engineering school and a PhD in civil engineering from the University of lași, he is in charge of quality control of materials at all levels, from soil to asphalt mix. He heads a team of forty people who help him with this task. His involvement with Colas dates back to 1995, the year in which he decided to stick with his “day job” and give up sports journalism. He does not regret the choice he made. “Working in a company of this size is something that everyone of my generation aspires to,” he admits. It is also a choice that is something of a family tradition. His father was a civil engineer specialized in road construction - “I was practically raised on job-sites,” smiles Eugen. The satisfaction he gets from his work comes at least in part from the demanding nature of the criteria he must apply when judging the quality of the materials sent to him for inspection. His favorite part of the job is the day of the handover, for it is then he feels his work is fully accomplished.

PORTRAIT
Smac Acieroid was chosen by the Auvergne regional authority to carry out the roofing and facade treatment of the Grande Halle d’Auvergne complex. The site is highly original. The architect has given the building a “volcano” shape to harmonize with its environment. Teams from the Southeastern France Cladding agency used the project as an occasion to demonstrate their technical mastery and demanding approach to quality, ensuring that the building’s architectural appearance was perfectly showcased.

Near the historic site of Gergovie, a new volcano is rising out of the earth... or at least, a new building designed to resemble the extinct volcanoes found in the Auvergne region in central France. Each day, the Grande Halle d’Auvergne complex grows taller out on the Sarliève plateau, near the city of Clermont-Ferrand. The major project, carried out for the Auvergne regional authority, comprises a Zénith performance space and five exhibition and congress buildings, designed by the architect to resemble the surrounding landscape as closely as possible. The local authorities decided to develop the complex in response to the lack of cultural and commercial amenities in the area, making it the only facility of its kind in central France. Smac Acieroid is responsible for the roofing and facade of this flagship project.

Building a volcano
The Southeastern France Cladding agency, based in Vaulx-en-Velin, was awarded both contracts. The first of them, adjudicated directly by the regional authority, is for the roofing and cladding of the Zénith concert venue and was completed in July. The second contract, subcontracted by Sohea Auvergne, involves roofing, double-roofing, sun panels and facade of five other elements that make up the Grande Halle exhibition space (the GrandPlace, the exhibition hall, the conference center, the Auvergne Rooms and the ancillary buildings). Site work on this contract started in April and is scheduled for completion at the end of November. The turnaround time is a challenge for the Vaulx-en-Velin team, but an even bigger one is ensuring that they deliver exactly what the architect stipulated.
"The Zénith is in the shape of a truncated cone like a volcano, and is clad with thousands of panels in a color reminiscent of the Gergovie landscape, covering nearly 5,300 m² of sloping facade rising to a height of 28 meters," explains agency head Gabriel Seradieu. "We worked out in advance what the structure would be like and defined a geometric pattern for the panels to fit the structure as closely as possible. We had to be extremely rigorous and painstaking — tolerances were in the order of one millimeter."

At the cutting edge
In the preparatory phases of the project, some 3,000 hours of design work were required, using highly sophisticated IT tools. A process was specially designed to produce identify and package 1,800 panels. "We have gone from the Stone Age to the high-tech age," laughs Gabriel Seradieu. "Before this we had a number of problems at the level of technical design. Based on dimensions given to us by the site foreman or the site supervisor, we would make the panels on site. Now we send the dimensions of the panels to the plant engineering office over the Internet. We save a lot of finishing time — there is no panel adjustment required. In addition to the facade cladding, the Zénith contract included all roofing work, requiring application of an Axter-type bituminous membrane complex over an area of 6,800 m². "It all went very well, although it was complex to execute," says Gabriel Seradieu. "The preparation period was long. Everything had to be organized so that there would be no improvisation in the design or the application and safety regulations would be complied with."

A dedicated team
To make sure that the organization ran smoothly, a specific structure was set up. Explains Gabriel Seradieu: "This has been our biggest ever project. A normal contract for us is around €300,000. Here we were talking about over €11 million. So we set up a dedicated unit of eleven people, consisting almost entirely of site and design engineers." 75 people worked in the field on these two contracts.

PROJECTS

Sebastien Perrot, project manager

Sébastien Perrot began his career at Smac Acieroid in November 1998 after his French military service. "I had finished my studies at the Ensam engineering school and had gone to Guadeloupe as a technical assistant. While I was there, Gabriel Seradieu contacted me, asking me to join Smac Acieroid on my return to France. I had been an intern at Vaulx-en-Velin when I was a student, and we had stayed in touch."

Sébastien had kept an impression of a company in which he had felt empowered and where he had greatly appreciated relationships with both customers and suppliers and the chance to travel. "I trained to go into production and mechanical engineering, but finally this seemed less interesting to me than the waterproofing business, which I discovered during my internships," he recalls. He started on his career as a site engineer, first on small sites, but working up to much larger projects… until he was offered the job of managing the Grande Halle d’Auvergne project. "In this job I have worked much further upstream than previously," he explains. "I’m like an orchestra conductor whose job is to see that everything is ready at the right time and in the right place and that there are as few mistakes as possible. I find being in charge of a team of engineers is in constant contact with customers and suppliers highly motivating, as well as working under pressure the entire time. This project is a massive experience for me, and is a great asset for my future."
The second contract, involving the other buildings in the complex, is larger in size, but presents fewer technical problems. “To roof over the exhibition space, we had to manufacture 20,000 m² of Kalzip® using a special machine, because the 98 meter maximum length aluminum sheets were outside the standard dimensions,” recounts Gabriel Seradieu. “We also had to install special holding equipment. Similarly, we profiled the 6 kilometers of louvered sun-protection slats placed on the roof of the Grand Place. We have respected the architect’s requirements for all this, of course, and taken care to ensure that the appearance of the structure and the technical requirements of its construction came together to the greatest extent possible.”

Thanks to this project and the major technological resources needed, the Vaulx-en-Velin team now has total mastery of all the techniques involved in this type of building work and hope that they will soon deploy them once again on another major project.

**CHARACTERISTICS**

When the Grande Halle d’Auvergne is completed, it will be the only cultural and business complex of its type in central France. Designed to blend in with a heritage region, the site is located in proximity to major motorway junctions, the railway and an airport. It will also be served by a shuttle bus service.

A parking lot with capacity for 6,0!0 vehicles is scheduled to be built later. The Zénith will be able to hold up to 8,500 people for shows, congresses and concerts and will be operational by December 2003. The conference center, meanwhile, has seating for 600 people, and in addition has a number of smaller modular meeting rooms available for use as congress and convention workshops. The exhibition hall, designed for trade shows and fairs, will be capable of accommodating large-scale events whether on a regional, European or worldwide scale.
You were the instigator of the Grande Halle d’Auvergne, which is currently under construction in Clermont-Ferrand. What inspired you to take on this huge project?

The Grande Halle d’Auvergne project forms part of a regional vision of economic and cultural development. Furthermore, it is a response to a very strong demand from the economic, agricultural, commercial and cultural areas. It is a response to constant and well justified demands from organizers of trade fairs and exhibitions such as the Clermont-Cournon trade fair, the Breeders’ Summit, new and used car fairs and the local small businesses association, spokespeople for self-employed business people and entertainment organizers and individual performers. This project for a major exhibition center will allow the vital economic players of our region to benefit from a high-performance tool for economic and cultural development. By the existence of this project, the region is...
It should be a major promotional and economic and cultural development tool, meeting major demand from the economic, agricultural, commercial and cultural sectors in Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, indeed the entire region. The venue is already considered as a key link in a future Auvergne network of performance spaces.

Will the new complex only house regional events? Do you see it as having a nation-wide, not to say European, identity?

The main purpose of the facility is to be able to accommodate major trade shows and exhibitions under a roofed structure, in order to respond to the unanimous demand of players in the economic, agricultural and commercial communities in Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, indeed the entire region. The venue is already considered as a key link in a future Auvergne network of performance spaces.

What purpose have you assigned the Grande Halle d’Auvergne for the sake of the future, the Auvergne needs major innovative facilities of a type that will give it a modern, dynamic image and make it attractive. The Grande Halle d’Auvergne is entirely in line with this aim.

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Responding to the unanimous demand of players in the economic, agricultural and commercial communities in Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, indeed the entire region.

In a city of over 200,000 inhabitants, there was a lack of a major exhibition zone which was not only technically and acoustically appropriate but also had the correct level of public safety and parking space. This, combined with the lack of an installation capable of accommodating several thousand people in modern, comfortable conditions whether for working or congregating, meant that our region was unable to provide a venue for the type of events that would attract large numbers of businesses and visitors. This, in turn, prevented job creation and redistribution of wealth through the type of ancillary businesses associated with such a project, such as catering and visitor accommodation.

It was also not possible to receive major cultural, musical and sports events which require a specific structure of the Zénith type which delivers excellent acoustic quality, comfort and safety.

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- an exhibition zone to "showcase" the region and generate numerous subsidiary impacts,
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A day in the life of Valantin...

an everyday story of road building folk

Like many of the Group’s agencies, Valantin, a subsidiary of Screg Est, performs contracts both large and small. The number and diversity of these projects require rigorous planning and specialized teams. Routes spends a day with the men in the region of Nancy.
At ten o’clock in the morning, and on the residential estate at Houdemont, outside the city of Nancy, a Valantin team is resurfacing the driveway of a private house with asphalt mix. The seven men were on site early this morning. Specialized in hand-applied asphalt mix, they will go on to carry out two other small private jobs this morning, just a few dozen square meters in size, in the same neighborhood. “When we can package small sites together, customers get a better price, and we save time and reduce traveling costs,” explains foreman Denis Guinaire. “Here we are going to do all three houses in a day and a half, whereas if we’d had to do each one in turn, we would have needed three days.”

Specialized teams
Private individuals represent a significant share of Valantin business. “They are demanding customers, and discussing the job with them is essential,” continues Denis Guinaire. “It is necessary to take the time to explain to them what we intend to do, and above all what result they can expect, so that they don’t respond negatively once the site is completed.”

The hand-applied asphalt team moves to a new location every two days, and was created specifically for this type of customer. “We have organized Valantin and set up our teams according to our specific needs,” explains manager Michel Santamaria. “This means that there are hand-application teams, but also asphalt-paver teams, excavation/main services/roadbed teams, and teams that perform urban landscaping and rural sites. There is also an on-call team for emergencies. Responsiveness is a major asset. We always need to be able to meet customer demands.”

Not all jobs are small
After the residential estate, our next port of call is at the extreme of Valantin’s territory, at the frontier between the two French departments of Meurthe-et-Moselle and Vosges. An excavation/main services/roadbed team is at work on a large job site – the roadways of the industrial zone in the Grand Rupt Business Park. The main contract was carried out in 2002 over a six-month period, and the team is now working on a supplementary contract. “The most important thing in the beginning was to have access to the site to Chianacé,” a Sorec Est subsidiary specializing in pipework, so they could install drainage,” explains foreman Thierry Casset. “Apart from a few minor glitches caused by the terrain, we are on schedule.” A few figures make the contrast with the preceding job clear: 11,500 m² of surface area, 7,260 m³ of excavation, and €1.2 million of turnover!

A further example of the great diversity of Valantin projects is close to hand. At Pierre-Percée, in the mountains of the Vosges, the construction of roads for the industrial zone in the Grand Rupt Business Park is typical of Valantin’s larger jobs, with 11,500 m² of surface area, 7,260 m³ of excavation, and €1.2 million of turnover.

After gaining qualifications in surveying and in public works and completing a number of internships with Valantin, Thierry Casset joined the ranks of the company’s employees. He followed an internal training program in site management with Sorec, and gradually made his way up the ladder, starting out as a technical assistant and now with seven years’ experience as a site foreman. “The things I love about my job is contact with people and, most of all, working in the open air. It’s great to create something out of nothing. And the sites we work on are very varied. The problems are different every time and you need to be able to adapt,” he smiles. Variety is certainly not lacking in Thierry’s work! He already has to his credit projects as varied as a search for pits for les Salins du Midi and, more recently, the construction of roadways for a local bus company.

Profile
A human-scale profit center
Attached to a Sorec Est agency and based in Lunéville, in eastern France, Valantin operates in a territory stretching 40 kilometers south of Nancy. The company has forty employees, who include 32 skilled workers, six foremen, two site supervisors and a surveyor. Although it is an average-sized center, it has more than 200 customers on its books, and reports annual turnover of €65 million. Local municipalities account for one-third of its business, while both the Department road authorities and private individuals each represent more than €1 million of turnover.
another team is busy resurfacing the road for the local authority. This two-month contract covers a stretch of around 1 kilometer, and involves drainage work, bordering the road, and constructing a pedestrian footpath. “We managed to finish the zone that the tourists use the most, as well as the residential zone, before the summer vacation,” explains foreman Grégory Nies. “We had no problems with local residents. It was just a matter of giving them advance warning. Chiaravalli took care of all the hook-ups.”

Moving on, further down the road is another jobsite that is typical of Valantin’s business—a rural project. The rustic atmosphere is emphasized by the fact that at Pierre-Pérard there is little traffic, making the work easier to do. The project, financed by the local roads authority, consists of surfacing roads through villages and improving public areas and property frontages. “We usually spend four to five days on this type of contract and so we try to group the work to be done in several different villages,” explains foreman Philippe François.

Planning ahead

Whether managing large or small contracts, Valantin’s work organization is faultless and goes well beyond scheduling for the specialized teams. “Every Thursday morning we plan the schedule for the week ahead,” explains Michel Santeramo. “We take stock not only of requirements in machinery and site teams, but also of scheduling of surveyors and laboratory inspection and testing sessions. We work three months ahead for site organization and make three-week projections for plant availability. Scheduling is a vital tool to help ensure proper functioning. Communication and consistency are real assets when it comes to seeing that sites are carried out in the right conditions.” For the past two years Scrog Est and Colas Est agencies have been using a specific sheet for plant management which tells them what equipment they have available as well as what their needs are. “It is a very useful system,” says Michel Santeramo, “because it makes it possible for us to help each other out within the Group and particularly to optimize the way plant is used.”

Once a day, without fail, the teams get together for the daily planning session. No later than 4 pm, all the site supervisors forward their plant requirements for the following day to Antoinette Mailliot in the administrative office and confirm what they have already asked for or warned of changes. The process works like a smoothly oiled machine and the benefit is in the day-to-day running. A little later, as the day draws to an end, it is time for the foremen to report back on their progress. The teams return to base and the machines are parked under the hangars, ready for service again the next day.

Weekly and daily planning meetings are essential tools for ensuring that the teams are managed efficiently.

Two men have followed different career paths but have arrived at the same job. Alain Maxant and Stéphane Thomassy are both site supervisors. Each of them brings specific strengths to the job, and it is the way they complement each other that makes them such a formidable team. Alain Maxant has been with Scrog for 22 years, starting out as a trainee foreman. He has been a site supervisor for twelve years, and joined Valantin two and a half years ago. Stéphane Thomassy, on the other hand, joined Scrog Nord-Picardie in 1992 in the parks and gardens department, after training as a landscape gardener. After getting to know his colleagues from the roads building sector, he made a change seven years ago, and arrived at Valantin in 2000. “Alain has more experience of roads than me,” says Stéphane. “He knows more about the technical aspects of projects. I’m more interested in the sales side and customer relations. We share the same aim of satisfying our customers, ensuring zero defect, and always finding answers – as they say, there are no problems, only solutions! And the crucial thing is staying ahead of our competitors.”
In 1997, the Colas Group signed a Road Safety charter with the French Interministerial Delegation on Road Safety. At that time, Colas pledged to reduce the number of road accidents engaging the responsibility of employees in France by 25% over three years. At the end of that initial period, the target had been comfortably met. In 2001, the charter was extended, with a new target of a further improvement of 5% over the following three years. By 2002, Colas had already achieved an 8% drop in the number of accidents. "We are now seeing the results being maintained and consolidated," contends Dominique Biraux, head of the Insurance department. "Although we have 48% more vehicles on the road than five years ago, the frequency of road accidents has fallen 43% over the same period."

When it comes to making employees more aware of road safety issues, all methods are worthwhile. Realizing that a drawing can say more than thousands of words, Colas Sud-Ouest President Patrick Guénolé sees winning the French Challenge for the best safety index score as an encouraging result because the company seeks to develop its training infrastructure. The initiative has been taken up by all of the Group’s major brands, as well as by foreign subsidiaries (Colas Ltd, Smit Belgium, etc.). To date, thirteen road safety topics have been presented in comic-strip form, with scenarios showing various specific high-risk situations both on site and on the road. These documents can be consulted on the Sésame intranet under Risks and Insurance / Road Safety.

The thirteen comic strips have so far been translated from French into Polish, Arabic, Flanders and English.

Colas Sud-Ouest has distinguished itself this year, with 22 centers reporting zero accidents. A safety newsletter mailed to every employee encourages the improvement in results, particularly the Safety Challenge, which introduced the "Super Safe" category for employees who work up 1,000 days without an accident, and a regular safety newsletter mailed to every employee. "After consulting with a doctor, we offer anyone involved in an accident a suitable alternative position," notes Philippe Chastain, head of HR at Colas Sud-Ouest. The responsible attitude that the company seeks to develop is based on the strong involvement of senior management, safety officers and the employees of each center. "This is closely linked to the numerous initiatives taken by many parties," concludes Patrick Guénolé. "We are pleased it is now bearing fruit, but we must not be any less vigilant or stringent."
The NAPA’s diamonds are forever

In March 2003, 26 of the Group’s U.S. asphalt mixing plants were congratulated by the President of Colas Inc. for the “Diamonds” they have been awarded by the NAPA (National Asphalt Pavement Association). Each year, these trophies reward asphalt mixing plants which prove their commitment to the protection of the environment. Barrett Paving Materials was recognized first, in 2000, for its facility in Ann Arbor, Michigan. IA Construction has also shown itself highly motivated, with five trophies to its credit. Nello L. Taylor, Sloan, Delta, HRI and Sulby-Miller do not want to be outsiders. The Group’s goal is fifty Diamonds by the end of 2003. Roads in America will soon be paved in Diamonds!

Cofor and Coreis join the Group

On March 5, 2003, Spac acquired Cofor and Coreis from the Desquenne & Giral group. This purchase significantly boosts the Group’s upstream expertise in its energy and water network installation businesses. Cofor, based in Maisse, south of Paris, specializes in vertical deep drilling (to depths of 3,000 to 4,000 m) for oil, gas and water, and in well maintenance. It carries out work in France, Africa and the French Caribbean on behalf of energy companies such as Exeon, Total, Gaz de France, Vermilion, etc., and in the water sector for BRGM, Gaudriot Geotherma, Saxop, Andra, etc. It has a workforce of 94 people in France and 47 outside France, the majority of them based in Chad. Its subsidiary, Coreis, located close to the city of Limoges, has a workforce of 36. It performs exploratory deep drilling and core sampling for the operation and development of mineral deposits, finding of underground water sources, etc. It also carries out the specialist vertical Raise-Drill drilling technique used to construct ventilation shafts for mines and tunnels. Coreis has performed contracts for Cogema, BRGM, Lafarge, Geocostock and Sobiouroute, as well as in many quarry operations in France and elsewhere.
In 2002, Colas was the world's leading producer of bitumen emulsion, with 1.5 million metric tons.

**HISTORY**

Bitumen and water celebrate eighty years of happy marriage

There are no affinities, either chemical or organic, between bitumen and water. But after 80 years, the marriage between the two materials is as harmonious as ever, and has given birth to numerous applications.

Emulsion – the dispersal of one liquid in another normally immiscible liquid – was not a recent discovery. Cream, whether for consumption or cosmetic, is an emulsion which was discovered in ancient times. The use of bitumen also dates back a very long way. In Neolithic times it was used to prevent boats from leaking and even to embalm the dead. The idea of spreading hydrocarbons on road surfaces began in the 19th century. In Paris, the Place de la Concorde and the Champs-Elysées were surfaced in 1824. But bitumen was very difficult to apply without the controlled fluidity that is achieved through the addition of water.

In 1903, they tried mixing bitumen with ammoniacal water. Research had begun! In 1922, Mackay and Hay, two British chemists, patented the invention of bitumen emulsion, which was further improved the following year, when a new patent was filed in France and a company called Asphalt Cold Mix Ltd was set up. It became Cold Asphalt, and later... Colas.

So is the union between bitumen and water a love story or a marriage of convenience? A marriage of convenience, since it was a forced marriage, dictated by chemists. But also a love story – it has stood the test of time, and has seen the successful present and future applications based on the product it has generated – a product with remarkable properties! “The French patent was copied, improvements were made and new concepts developed,” says René Chamard, head of research on emulsions for 30 years at Colas, now retired. “The Société Générale d’Entreprise formed a specialized department to operate it, which led to the creation of the Société Routière Colas in 1929. The Colas Group later bought up all the foreign companies owning the British patent, so ensuring for itself leadership in the manufacture of bitumen emulsion.”

Low-temperature asphalt means a revolution in the streets

The small group of bystanders gathering around the finisher can barely hide their surprise. The surface has been stripped away and the road bed prepared to receive a thick black coat of asphalt. But the residents of the Rue de Talleyrand, in central Paris, do not have to contend with acrid smoke and unpleasant odors. “Traditional mastic asphalt is heated to roughly 250°C, a very high temperature which is essential in order to maintain viscosity during application,” explains Jean-Pierre Déan, technical manager of SmacAcieroid. “After a lot of research, our laboratory has managed to develop the use of additives which, when mixed with the binder, make it possible to apply the mastic asphalt at much lower temperatures of around 150°C.” These additives derive from organic chemistry. The patent for NTB (“Néophalte® Température Basse”) was filed this year. This innovation means an end to the nuisance of a smelly product, and to the need to work in extreme heat. An NTB site is a smoke-free zone! “The site workers are as astonished as anyone!” adds Jean-Pierre Déan. “They couldn’t believe it was possible to apply such a product with the same viscosity and workability as traditional mastic asphalt.” Because NTB cools faster, the new surface is ready to be reopened to traffic after only three or four hours.

“The market was losing momentum,” states Jean-Pierre Déan. “Asphalt wasn’t perceived as a modern or environmentally friendly product. We have high expectations for this new formulation.”
The Boscher Signalétique & Image site brings a business to life

Boscher’s website – www.boscher.fr – combines the refined style and down-to-earth practicality that are both inherent to the sign engraving business. From the original tiny engraving studio to the signs and signals revolution, the story of the company can be read with interest. The site also presents Boscher’s material and human resources, incorporating a detailed inventory of all the skills required by the company – ironsmiths, screen printers, engravers, sanders, etc. Some highly prestigious recent projects, such as the Beaumoing courthouse and the Museum of the Image in Epinal, attract the visitor to discover the range of products. The company makes no secret of the dynamic growth in its turnover. The website also invites visitors to sign up to receive a regular newsletter by e-mail to keep fully abreast of the company’s latest developments.

Colas Nord-Picardie goes on the Web

Online since November 2002, the Colas Nord-Picardie website has proved a great success. With a very straightforward structure (“Who are we?”, “Our commitments”, “Your projects”), clearly written texts and eloquent examples, the site puts the focus on the environment and safety. The general public, customers and potential customers can find all the information they might need about the subsidiary. The purpose of the site is to establish the Group as a player in this regional environment.

One attractive feature is a clever presentation of all the skills to be found in the company. Of course, anyone interested in any of the job vacancies advertised on the site can apply online, while candidates are also invited to make unsolicited applications or request an internship with any one of the fifteen profit centers that divide up the territory constituted by the five French departments covered by Colas Nord-Picardie.

Launch of European Roads Review

A standard roadbuilding industry periodical, RGRA launched an English-language edition in 2002, under the title European Roads Review. Since 1925, the Revue Générale des Routes et des Aérodromes, developed by and for French road building professionals, has taken pride of place among trade publications. Co-written by engineers, RGRA is representative of the entire sector, and its Board of Directors includes delegates from leading professional associations (cement producers, road builders, aggregate producers, etc.) as well as major companies, including Colas. It is also a publisher: among recent titles are the Millennium Book, a two-volume work on bitumen mix and a practical guide to urban roads. RGRA has succeeded in spreading French technical know-how in all parts of the world, but it will now get its message over even more effectively thanks to the new English-language European edition. European Roads Review will appear two or three times per year, with a print run of 15,000 copies. “There is nothing quite like RGRA anywhere in the world,” says editor Marie-Françoise Ossola, “so we decided to launch a European ‘hub’ to serve as a platform for the exchange of know-how.”

Colas wins the Silver Siemens

On May 15, Claudie Haigneré, French Minister for Research and New Technologies, presented Colas with the Silver Siemens for Innovation 2003 for Colgrip, the high-grip surfacing which helps improve road safety. This annual award, created in 2000 by the Siemens group, awards the 1st Prize for Applied Research for an innovative research project on vibrations and noise deadening of irregular shaped objects, carried out in collaboration with Colas Group subsidiary Somaro, with the aim of developing and patenting a new type of noise barrier for roads.
Chugging down the Champs-Élysées

Exhibiting locomotives and wagons on the Champs-Élysées, or actually running a train up and down what they call “the most beautiful avenue in the world”? Two crazy ideas… but two challenges met by Régie Ferré de France, the architect of the operation, as part of the Train Capital exhibition in May and June 2003, along with his technical partner, Seco-Rail. “We were selected straight away, without tendering,” recounts Benoît de Bodman, CEO of Seco-Rail, “proving how well our technical, innovative and professional approach is appreciated in the profession.” Seco-Rail’s expertise helped resolve questions of the gauge of the tracks and the organization and phasing of the operation. The two rail-laying operations consisted of constructing a track for the train exhibition in the southern side-alleys of the Champs-Élysées and on the traffic islands surrounding the Place de la Concorde, on the one hand, and, on the other, the famous temporary 1,500-meter railtrack running from the Place de la Concorde as far as the Avenue George V.

A year of preparation
The man who dreamed up this original project is Gad Weil, who memorably turned the Champs-Élysées into fields of wheat a few years ago. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of rail travel, why not do something similar, and liberate trains from their tracks? A year of preparation was required in the face of numerous difficulties – restricted setting-up time to avoid disruption to traffic, complex problems involving freighting materials and rolling stock, with night transport whenever possible, restrictions dictated by the Batiments de France architectural authority, obligations imposed for the sake of safety, cramped access conditions and the fragility of the ground structure (a subway line runs beneath the side-alleys).

From one incident to another… “For a year, we had to deal with one idea after another,” relates Yves Baillon, head of the Major Projects division of Seco-Rail, “such as having the trains circling the Arc de Triomphe. We entered into the spirit of things, and suggested to the organizers, for instance, that we could use red, white and blue ballast, which would have had a certain resonance between May 8 (VE Day) and July 14 ( Bastille Day)! We also had many problems to resolve on a day-to-day basis. There was one time when we thought that the only way we could lay the tracks without touching the trees, which are protected, or moving the street lights and garbage cans was by crane, or maybe by helicopter!”

More than 2,000 meters of track were laid, requiring 4,000 metric tons of ballast. Laying the tracks was a performance in itself. For Champs-Élysées nightclubbers, one of the finest spectacles of the whole Train Capital event must have been the laying of the rails. With assistance from the 5th Regiment of Military Engineering stationed in Versailles, teams from the SNCF and Seco-Rail laid more than 2,000 meters of rails, requiring 4,000 metric tons of ballast applied with a finisher by teams from Colas IDF/N. The greatest challenge of all was laying the temporary track. One hundred people installed 87 eighteen-meter panels. After five nights’ work, the line was operated for twelve hours, and it took one further night to strike it all away. “It was a commande operation,” says Benoît de Bodman. “The number of men per kilometer was identical to the TGV Est high-speed rail site. The teams proved their professionalism and everything took place in a pleasant atmosphere. We will all remember the Train Capital project for a long time to come.”
Putting a tax on the road

In most countries, the transportation policy includes some form of taxation on use of the road infrastructure. There are three main reasons why this form of taxation is widespread:

• the prevalence of policies to “internalize external costs”, in other words making users themselves bear costs, both direct (materials, fuel, etc.) and indirect (accidents, pollution, etc.) arising out of use; and the problem of financing the cost of infrastructure maintenance and building (financing of motorways by tolls in France);

• attempts to bring about a modification in behavior, particularly in the reduction of pollution (taxing commercial vehicles with the aim of lowering truck traffic).

To be efficient, taxing road transport presupposes that alternative methods of transport either exist or will be created, in the form of either public transport and cycle paths for use by the general public, and intermodal rail transport for road transport companies. As a general rule, these taxes are unpopular. For example, in Norway 70% of the population of Oslo was against the introduction of urban tolls in 1989. This did not deter the authorities from implementing them the following year. Nine years later, 54% of the inhabitants are still dissatisfied with the measure.

Taxing trucks, kilometers and highways

Tax on fuel, sales tax on vehicles on purchase, road fund for the use of vehicles (tax disc), parking, per-kilometer tax for trucks and various highway and motorway tolls – there is no limit to the type of taxes on vehicle use. In Austria and Switzerland, in an effort to bring about a reduction in NOx emissions, a per-kilometer tax has been instituted. Other forms of commonly used levies are tollgates on motorways, stretches of highways tunnels and bridges. These are much used in France where modular tariffs, such as those deployed on the A1 and A14 motorways at different times of day, may ultimately combine to modify drivers’ behavior. Urban congestion charges are also becoming increasingly frequent, filtering the quantity of traffic that enters certain urban areas. In the wake of Singapore and Oslo, London is the latest city to adopt the system. Any vehicle entering the congestion charge area, located in the city center, between seven o’clock in the morning and 6.30 in the evening has to pay a tax of £8. Before the tax came into force, 250,000 vehicles used to enter the zone. Three months after the scheme was inaugurated, a drop of 17.5% in traffic was recorded. It is not always easy to make a precise assessment of the impact of taxes over a period of time, particularly when it comes to the environment; however, it seems that authorities have no qualms about subjecting users to several types of tax at once.

Taxing trucks, kilometers and highways

In 2001, Switzerland brought in a per-kilometer tax on trucks driving within its territory. We talk to Jean Beauer, President of Colas Suisse, Marc Maranzana, head of plant management, and Marcel Clerc, Managing Director of a Scania dealership in Switzerland, about the services-related tax on commercial vehicle traffic – the reduction sur le trafic des poids lourds liée aux prestations (RPLP).

Why was this tax on commercial vehicles instituted? It was ratified by 57% of Swiss citizens during a referendum in 1998. The tax has two aims – financing the policy of transferring freight from the road to the railway, particularly freight that crosses the Alps, and environmental conservation. The tax is calculated in terms of the number of kilometers driven and the total weight of the payload, irrespective of the curb weight of the vehicle, and this is then multiplied by a rate which varies with the truck’s tailpipe emission classification (Euro 0, I, II and III norms).

What does it represent financially? The tax consists of €0.01 per metric ton per kilometer for clean engines and €0.015 for polluting vehicles. For Colas Suisse this is the equivalent of the driver’s salary, in other words 1.25% of turnover! The tax brings in around €442 million a year to the State. Roughly a quarter of it is paid by foreign transport companies that are working in Switzerland or driving through it. A 70% increase for 2005 is already planned and the tax will rise 120% by 2008.

What repercussions has the tax had? Bringing in the tax forced transport players to think out new solutions. These included setting up a freight transport exchange so that trucks don’t come back empty from their unloading points, construction of transit centers, installation of recycling hubs, use of the most polluting trucks only for short distances, etc. Freight transport has become more specialized, using vehicles adapted to each profession, and there has been a development of grouped loads. The result is that there are now fewer trucks on Swiss roads and the vehicle fleet has greatly changed in the last few years. Currently, 80% of Colas Suisse trucks are compliant with the latest anti-pollution norms. However, the tax has come at a price. There are those who believe that Swiss industries are suffering, because the tax impacts all national products as well. Frequent turnover of the truck fleet has led to “mountains” of old trucks which are becoming impossible to sell. In time, they will have to be destroyed and this may create a new source of pollution. But then, nothing is perfect!
Inventing, creating or transforming — no matter what the context, innovation is always synonymous with novel ideas and imagination. In the Colas Group, innovation is supported by a sustained Research and Development policy (involving 900 researchers worldwide) and results that are in line with targets set — a new product developed every year. However, the Colas style of innovation includes all the practices and innovative techniques developed on a day-to-day basis in the field by employees, as well as fostering a “team spirit” that helps spread good ideas throughout all the subsidiaries and agencies. This is never clearer than during the International Innovation Competition organized every two years, launched for the third time in March 2001.

Encouraging quality, safety and productivity
“We noticed that many innovations were being developed at profit center level in a number of different areas (sites, equipment, etc.), but awareness of them was failing to spread throughout the Group,” explains Jean-Pierre Reymonet, deputy manager, Plant and Machinery. “We worked out that this was because our professions have primarily oral traditions, whereas ways of doing things, modifications made to equipment and various other practices are transmitted by word-of-mouth. By setting up the Innovation Competition in its original form in 1995, and then repackaging it in 2000 as a bi-annual event, we hoped that we would encourage employees to set down their innovations on paper so they could be published and a greater number of people benefit from them.”

Encouraging innovation within the Group means improving productivity, quality and safety so that in the long run, the Group is more competitive. The competition, which is open to all employees, involves 17 different fields as diverse as road construction, civil engineering, transportation equipment and industries.

In depth

Promoting innovation entails encouraging employees to define “the” good idea that will be of interest to all the Group’s subsidiaries. Colas supports their efforts with its International Innovation Competition.

Left to right: Jean-Marie Jolivet, Philippe Royer, Frank Long, Pascal Reygner, Xavier Lepercq.

Left to right: Frédéric Drouillot, Michel Rivier, Alain Decourchelle.
RESULTS

Winners of the 3rd International Innovation Competition

➤ Prize for the widest application in the Group
1st prize: Gérard Rosset and François Charignon (Spac, Rhône-Alpes agency): system for supporting pneumatic drills.
2nd prize: Frank Long and Pascal Regnier (Soroma/El-Si): creation of a safety barrier for drainage pits in the workshop.
3rd prize: Frédéric Drouillot (Colas Est): system for fastening the rear doors of dumper trucks.

➤ Joint 2nd prize: Benoît Drouet and Gilles Paicheur (Colas Est): system for supporting the towbar with springs and elastic straps.

➤ Prize for minimum investment
1st prize: Bachir Karrouchi and Said Elbakali (Spac, Suburbanie Ile-de-France Sud): creation of trays placed under the ramps of spreaders.
2nd prize: Narcisse Azor (GTOI – Réunion Island): creation of trays placed under the ramps of spreaders.

➤ Jury’s Special Prize
Quinzi Azolini, René Roland and Jean-Claude Turpin (Colas Madagascar): adaptation of a system for pile driving on the Kinga barge.

➤ Chairman’s Prize
Pascal Regnier (Soroma/El-Si): automatic hitching system with radio-controlled rear lights.

300 innovations compiled on CD-ROM
Between launching the competition and handing out the awards, 154 dossiers, 67 of them from France and 52 from North America. The committee selected 66 dossiers, which will be published and then shortlisted 28 to be presented to the judges as candidates for the awards," explains Jean-Pierre Reymont. "The reason for the shortlist," he says, "is that a number of the innovations are already published while yet others are not suitable for Group-wide application."

300 innovations have been published within the Group. Gathered in printed form until now, as of this year they are compiled on CD-ROM. Most of them come from France and North America. The reason for this particular predominance is to be found in the respective workforces of these countries (65% of Group workforce is located in France, 12% in North America) and by the fact that these areas have a strong innovation culture.

There is little doubt that the next biennial competition will encourage an even greater number of employees to try to develop that really "great" idea, worthy of the title "innovation", being published and maybe even awarded a prize.
Focus on three innovations

Initiated by Group employees and put into the spotlight by the Innovation Competition, the three innovations presented here won prestigious prizes. These ideas continue to arouse interest throughout the Group.

➤ 1ST PRIZE FOR SAFETY
Protection for drainage pits

There is nothing like seeing things from a different angle. François Cossu, a highly experienced mechanic and manager of one of Colas Midi-Méditerranée’s workshops, was fed up with having to mark out his drainage pit using stakes that always got lost and deliver an inadequate degree of safety for his work zone. He decided to produce an automatic protection fence that can be lowered around the pit and automatically raised again in two seconds once the work is finished. One day, the managing director saw the fence and realized straight away it would be an excellent idea to present in the Group Innovation Competition. “I was really motivated! My boss, Vincent De Moro, put the dossier together, and we were rewarded with the first prize in our category!” says François.

Emmanuel Gauroy
Head of the Lozère Enrobés mixing plant

➤ 1ST PRIZE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
Efficient, gasoline-free bitumen filter scrubbing

The law is the law... and it is illegal to burn the waste from an asphalt mixing plant. So there can be no question of scrubbing bitumen filters by burning them off with gasoline to get them completely clean. This means leaving them submerged in enormous vats of cleansing product, which is risk-free, but extremely lengthy, because the process takes several days. It is also expensive, because it requires having to keep a large stock of clean filters. “Then I got the idea of emerging filters in a bath of fuel oil and stirring them around by using compressed air injected at low pressure, like a washing machine,” says Emmanuel Gauroy, head of the Lozère Enrobés mixing plant (Sacre-Sud-Est/Sacre-Sud-Est) and winner of the Environment Prize. “The filters are clean within an hour, and the 120 liters of fuel oil needed can be reused for up to a year.” This innovation will interest all those in charge of filter cleaning in asphalt mixing plants and binder plants, as well as sprayer truck operators.

Emmanuel Gauroy
Head of the Lozère Enrobés mixing plant

➤ CHAIRMAN’S PRIZE
A patent automatic hitching system

When an idea is really good, like an automatic hitching system with radio-controlled rear lights, it becomes not just an innovation, but even a patent (now being filed). Although there are many automatic trailer hitching systems on the market which save the driver from having to get out of his vehicle, they use connectors that are both flimsy and expensive. Pascal Reygner, technical manager of El-Si (Somaro), got the idea of replacing the automatic connector by a radio-controlled system. There is nothing to hook up, and the transmitter makes it possible to switch indicator and position lights on or off. “Because El-Si manufactures trailers for road marking use, we know from experience the cables always get damaged and you end up with loose connections,” explains Pascal Reygner. “We thought about the problem and this is the result. The product is not expensive - €150 to €200 per unit cost - and the trailer only needs a small stand-alone battery unit.”

Pascal Reygner
Technical manager at El-Si
-training the teams of tomorrow

Carlos Justiniano, site foreman, and Marceau Dijoux, roads and mains mason, respectively foreman and roads and mains mason, have recently taken on a new professional role: they have invested in training newly arrived young people in the company. "We have a crucial need for skilled labor to satisfy the needs of the company, particularly in masonry and laying asphalt mix," says Carlos. After eight years in the building trade, he joined Sosar Atlantic as a mason. Now a site foreman in the Brest profit center, Carlos transmits his know-how to young people who want to progress in their careers.

Marceau, a member of his team, backs him up in this task. "Traditional" training programs are too general and often put young people off, while they are motivated by practical training," says Marceau. "Everyone who participates has asked to be there. We offer them the chance to acquire the skills of the trade in a safe environment," continues Carlos. "Training people is a new experience for us, and is very enriching. It gives us a different view of our profession. From their point of view, the youngsters appreciate being able to establish a close relationship with their trainer. We adapt our training to the realities of working in the field. The two men work with a maximum of six trainees, who are placed in a real jobsite situation. This approach enables young people to make rapid progress. "You see the results quickly," adds Marceau, "which is very motivating, as much for the trainers as for the new recruits!" Everyone gains in confidence, and emerges stronger from the experience. And at the end of the day, the company has acted not only to optimize its human resources, but also to make them more sustainable.

One is a concrete technician, another is a grader operator, a third is a site foreman, yet another is a roads and mains mason, the others are a site supervisor, a technical manager, a head of site administration... Every day, all of these people give it all they've got to make Colas succeed.
Successful conversion

“Colas gives me more responsibility – people trust me”

Pascal Picaud, site supervisor, Benin

His 18 years of experience in the French Military Engineering Corps and numerous foreign assignments taught Pascal Picaud to be adaptable. “The army gave me a lot, but it didn’t leave much room for initiative,” he explains. So at the age of 35 he decided to switch jobs. “I used the Internet to get in touch with companies offering jobs outside France. When Colas called, I didn’t hesitate for a second.” In 2003, he joined the Group as site supervisor. A major project was waiting for him in Benin and for the first time ever, he could take his wife and three children along. His verdict on the career move? “Colas gives me more responsibility – people trust me.” He hopes in a few years’ time to be given sole responsibility for a contract.

The state of the artwork

Thomas Cousin, head of site administration, France

After graduating with an MA in history, Thomas Cousin studied journalism at Sirpa, the Communications Center of the French Army. He joined Seco-Rail in 1999, working on the TGV Méditerranée high-speed rail link as a personnel manager. “I then spent six months on the Belgian TGV site before moving to the high-speed rail renovation train,” he explains. “I then requested a transfer to headquarters in Chatou, in the outskirts of Paris, because I wanted a more sedentary lifestyle.”

In his capacity as a site administration manager, Thomas started taking a closer look at the technical drawings. “The drawings were pretty dull, with trains symbolized by lines and dashes, so I started to work on computerized illustrations for them,” he says. To date, Thomas has illustrated some 50 sets of drawings. “It’s given me a chance to develop my artistic side,” he smiles.

Top of the class

Olivier Casseleux, technical manager and safety adviser, France

After Olivier Casseleux graduated from high school and college with specialist civil engineering qualifications, military service followed. Then in 1988, he joined Sonaf starting as a lab technician. Olivier is now a technical manager and spends 40% of his time on projects, 20% on site and 40% in industries. Head of controls and inspections at the Gauchy emulsion plant in Picardy, he selects samples for analysis of bitumens and emulsions. Olivier is fascinated by both computers and metrology, so he designs all the data and analysis results forms. This ability last year earned him the rank of safety adviser class 7. Olivier is the first person in the company to have held this rank. “There are nine classes that define the hazard levels of materials and designate specific transportation standards,” he explains.

“Class 7 involves radioactive materials. As part of our equipment, we have a gamma-densimeter, an apparatus that measures the density and water content of materials, which gives off radioactive emissions.” It is transported in a vehicle which may only be parked under surveillance in designated zones. Olivier designed a special case for transporting it. “The case is lined with lead and polyethylene, reducing the radiation to such an extent that it is not over authorized levels,” he explains.

“I designed a special case for transporting the gamma-densimeter.”

Benin

France
From tractor to grader!

Claude Pinel, grader operator, France

Claude Pinel learned to drive a tractor in childhood. "I began helping out on the family farm at the age of 12," he recounts. With a basic qualification as a mechanic, he started out at a garage but was unhappy working indoors the whole day long. "I got a job with a small public works contractor, where I learned to drive a grader. The company rented out equipment to the Sacer agency in Alençon and a colleague persuaded me to join him there." Thirty years later, Claude is a grader expert. His vast experience allows him to evaluate a jobsite at a glance. "I carry my level with me in my head! The thing I enjoy best is to drive back over my sites once they're finished. I like average-size sites the best, they are varied and there is more responsibility." A youthful grandfather at age 55, Claude is still delighted with his job. "It gets a bit tougher in the winter," he admits, "but for me, working in the open air is the most important thing in life."

Total independence...

Xavier Stoll, machine operator, France

Xavier Stoll, 28, first began working in the hotel business, "but the hours and the atmosphere were not for me. I then decided to get a heavy-goods vehicle license." His first job was in a company that rented out civil engineering plant and machinery and it gave him a first experience of driving heavy vehicles. "This is how I got to know site foremen and became acquainted with SNEL (Société Nationale pour l'Exploitation du Logement). Four years ago I applied for a job there as a plant operator." Xavier currently drives a sprayer-sprader. "I like this job, because I'm independent," he confesses. "I team up with a worker in whom I have complete confidence. The job isn't always easy, especially in bad weather, but Xavier strongly believes that his future lies with the company. "I intend doing some training courses to learn new skills and enable me to earn promotion," he says. "In the evenings he parks his machine, climbs on his motorbike, and rides off into the sunset. Some people never get enough of machines!"

Taking part in a company-wide project

Anne Bonjean, concrete technician and quality and environment supervisor, France

Anne Bonjean has always had a fascination for construction sites, and so she unhesitatingly chose civil engineering studies. As she is also interested in quality, she went on to gain an additional qualification in Quality management, specializing in environmental issues. She joined SRMV (Société de Réglementation des Matériaux et du Végétal) as a concrete technician in 2000. "I'm responsible for inspecting and testing the concrete produced by our plant. I like this job particularly because of its contact with people in the field."

For the past two years, Anne has also been in charge of the Quality and Environment initiative. "I have to draw up documentation, raise awareness among employees, check the progress of the initiative using indicators, and keep a watch for improvements that need to be made," she explains. Her work seems to have paid off, as in 2003 the SRMV concrete plant was certified ISO 14001 and also received ISO 9000 2000 certification. "It's great to take part in a company-wide project, and I am happy to contribute to improving the day-to-day working conditions of my colleagues," she says proudly. However, she finds enough time off from work for a project of her own – restoring an old house with her husband, in the south of France.

"I contribute to improving the day-to-day working conditions of my colleagues."
Alain Tameze, site supervisor, France

As soon as he left school, Alain Tameze entered the EATP public-works apprentice program in Egletons. He gained a qualification in reinforced concrete shuttering and began working as a third-rank skilled worker, then a highly skilled worker, before becoming a concrete site foreman. He worked in Nigeria, Iraq, Morocco and then Cameroon. “But I wanted managing everything from A to Z to get back to France and settle down,” he remembers. “I had been around before joining RCFC (Colas Nord-Picardie).” For nearly the last ten years, he has been visiting job sites, working on bids, carrying out studies and following up orders and jobs. “Currently, we are working on refurbishment of the Montparnasse railway station pits where the machinery has to be renewed. What I like best about job sites is that you get to see everything. You have to manage it all from A to Z, from the bid right through to handover. There’s no routine in my job!” Alain Tameze is quite disappointed that none of his three children are interested in public works. “I’m very much self-taught – I had to begin as a laborer. But today young people can go to engineering school and have a variety of jobs open to them.”

Jean-Louis Borde, site foreman, Mali

At 53, Jean-Louis Borde is nothing if not a seasoned traveler! With a qualification in reinforced concrete to his name, he joined the Société Générale d’Entreprise (SGE), where he stayed 14 years until an offer from Colas fulfilled his dream of working abroad. He claims to have something of the nomad in his blood – “I was born in Algeria” he says by way of explanation. His first destination was Djibouti, followed by Rwanda, Burundi and Mauritius. “Colas helped me achieve one of my dreams, and work abroad. I worked in Djibouti, followed by Rwanda, Burundi and Mauritius. “After that,” he continues, “I did Gabon, Benin, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast.” Every contract different, each one fascinating, if sometimes a hardship post. His family always came too. Now, Jean-Louis is starting to think of settling down. “My children are grown up now and live in France, and we feel rather foreign when we return home,” he remarks. In a few years he will retire to his house on France’s Atlantic coast. He smiles. “Or maybe not. After all, my wife and I do like to get around!”

The Tour de Région is a rewarding experience

Julien Souchet, site foreman, and Nicolas Hubert, site technician, France

Julien Souchet and Nicolas Hubert both agree – the Tour de Région training circuit is a rewarding experience. For a year, after graduating with construction industry qualifications, the two young men went to four different Screg Ouest profit centers. Julien Souchet completed his circuit a year ago. Today, he is the site foreman at Arnaud, in Vendée. “My circuit included Rennes, Brière, Gaillac and Quimper,” he recollects. “It was gradual, but nonetheless, each time I had to learn to fit in and get into the swing real-ly quickly. Each agency has its own way of working. You learn a lot from that. You start to understand the core of the job, working with suppliers and coworkers.” Nicolas Hubert first went to Arnaud, then to a laboratory in Nantes and finally to Saint-Nazaire and Poitiers. “I am now replacing the asphalt mix application foreman,” he says. “I was reticent, because I had done more excavation and roads and mains. But I found the team was really solid, with a great atmosphere. The Tour de Région is really all about people. By moving from one profit center to another you learn about different ways of working.”
INTERVIEW

Hubert Hoffstetter:
keeping the “Group spirit” alive

Now retired, Hubert Hoffstetter, a former Group managing director responsible for Colas subsidiaries, is president of Amico, an association of past and present employees of Colas. Whether or not they are still working in the Group, the members take part in a variety of activities, united by the “Colas spirit”.

How did this association of employees and former employees of Colas originally come to be founded?

Our association was founded in 1985 by several prominent people in the Group who had retired, but felt a need to form an association to maintain the state of mind, solidarity and friendship between people who, after spending their career in the Colas Group, were about to give up working. So the main purpose of the association was to become a sort of crucible in which the “Colas spirit after Colas” could be kept alive.

Is Amico only an association for retired people? Isn’t it also open to current employees of the Group?

That’s right, we welcome former employees, but also current Colas employees with at least ten years’ seniority in the Group. Of the 477 members of the association, there are probably a hundred who are still working. I would very much like to see more and more people who are still active joining us. Amico should be a meeting place where the generations can come together, creating a link between past and present employees.

What development prospects do you anticipate for your association?

Our membership has risen slightly – by 8% in two years. But we need to intensify our membership campaigns, particularly targeting current employees. They are the ones who will bring a breath of fresh air, which is vital for the development of the association, and they will ensure the future life of Amico. We are increasing our contacts with the subsidiaries so that they will relay information to their employees about the existence of Amico, and how we operate. Of course, the best way of promoting our association is to constantly propose innovative and attractive new projects that will interest potential new members... such as using a Colas event as an opportunity to organize a display of paintings done by artists who are members of the association, whether they are still working or are retired, and it should extend beyond Amico to include members of the associations of retired members of Screg and Sacer... Believe me, there are a lot of artists around!

Does Amico intend to adapt to the way the Group has developed, and consider merging with the two similar associations, the Anciens de la Gironde (Screg) and the Anciens de Sacer?

Amico will continue along its own road, while adapting its own development to that of the Group. A meeting between the executives of the three associations was organized in April 2002 by Alain Dupont, with the aim of forging links between them and, ultimately, uniting all the Group’s retired employees around the “Colas Group spirit.” At the level of the regional branches, particularly in Île-de-France and Aquitaine, relations between the associations are beginning to be established. Joint projects are currently under study. My greatest wish is that the “Group spirit” is perpetuated through our associations by way of closer links, meetings and voyages, always based on solidarity and friendship and respecting the specific nature of each party.

What activities does Amico offer its members?

The association proposes a varied range of activities. On the national level, we organize two trips a year outside France – this year, we have traveled to Crete and the American West. But our activities are mainly regional. The association has nine regional branches, which are strongly influenced by the territories of the Colas subsidiaries. These really are the life force of Amico. The branches function well, and it is their teams who are responsible for the association at a grass roots level, keeping it active with meetings, encounters, cultural visits, tourism, voyages – all in all, there’s quite a strong program of activities.

Doesn’t Amico also offer a certain number of services?

Apart from the role it plays in defending and protecting the rights and interests of people who have retired from Colas, the association also has the goal of informing, advising and assisting its members on practical issues. With this purpose in view, it publishes a newsletter three times a year. It was recently redesigned, and it now includes sections on the life of the Group, our projects, and news items. Amico also publishes a certain number of leaflets on topics which are of interest to everyone, although with a greater or lesser degree of urgency, such as “All you need to know about retiring”, “Passing on property” and “The survivor’s pension rights.”

We are also working in conjunction with Colas on a number of issues, one of which is a Greve, a hot topic of interest to everyone. We are in contact with Colas in order to help the retired members of Amico, and other associations for that matter, including those concerning Group mutual funds.

What is your opinion of the current state of the Group?

I believe that Colas is a Group which is facing a difficult period, both internally and externally. It is a period of uncertainty for the employees, who are naturally concerned about the future of their company. The Group needs to adapt to the changes taking place in the transport and logistics sector. In this context, the role of Amico is to maintain the “Group spirit” and to be a point of reference for the retired employees, who are still attached to the Group and want to remain informed about its activities.

In conclusion, how do you see the future of Amico?

We hope that Amico will continue to grow and to be an active and dynamic association, taking into account the wishes and expectations of its members. We are already planning new activities and initiatives for the coming years, in order to keep the “Group spirit” alive and well. We are also looking into the possibility of establishing an international branch of Amico, in order to welcome members from other countries and regions, and to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and friendship between them. In summary, we are committed to making Amico a true meeting place for the retired employees of Colas, who are proud to have been part of the Group’s history and who want to continue to be part of its future.
The 20th Screg Sailing Challenge took place in May at Crouesty, Brittany. For the past few years, the competition has been attracting students from French engineering schools.

Back in 1981, in Port Grimaud, a mere nineteen boats inaugurated an amateur sailing contest that was to develop rapidly into a flourishing success. This year's event was the twentieth Screg Challenge. No fewer than 71 boats and more than six hundred participants, who came from all over France and Europe, fought it out in a friendly sailing contest at Crouesty, in the Morbihan Gulf in Brittany. Originally only employees of the Bouygues Group and partner companies were eligible, but this year the competition saw an increase in the number of boats entered by engineering schools. Three schools, the Ensam, Paris (École Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Métiers), Estic (École Supérieure d'Ingénieurs des Travaux de la Construction) and ESTP (École Spéciale des Travaux Publics), entered four boats in the race.

Promoting the Group
"Engineering school boats started taking part in the Challenge around five years ago," explains Christophe Leblanc, who is in charge of relations with engineering schools in the Human Resources department. "We are very active in encouraging engineering schools to participate. It is a dynamic way of promoting the Group and creating links with students. Instead of just sponsoring the schools we actually invite them to take part in an event that projects a 'human' image of the Group, which students are able to convey back in their schools."

The students are delighted
Like the organizers, the students are delighted by the initiative. "It's a race that combines fun and a high level of competition," comments Benoît Souseme, a 2nd year student at ESTP and president of the school sailing club. "It has an atmosphere that you don't normally find in student races. Our club, D7F Valéry ETP, has been taking part in the Challenge for about five years now." The 14 crew members from ESTP put up a good show, as they finished fifth in the general standings. "Apart from the competition and the pleasure of the regatta, the Screg Sailing Challenge gives us an opportunity to get to know the Colas Group better," adds Benoît. The Challenge is a fine initiative that should grow further in the years ahead. "We want to open up the Challenge to even more schools and we're thinking of creating a Schools Cup," says Christophe Leblanc.
Dia Azzawi: “The Colas Foundation has given birth to a community of artists”

The Colas Foundation invited you to paint a canvas on the theme of the road. What did such a subject inspire in you?

For many years, one of my main topics has been the Diary of the Arab Traveler, which is, obviously, directly related to the topic of “the road.” When I received the invitation from the Colas Foundation, I tried to relate this topic to Marrakesh, which is one of the richest Arab cities in terms of diversity of character. I tried to combine old Arabic maps with features of folk design and the vast space of the desert.

What is the symbolic dimension of your picture?

The symbolic dimension is to create a modern space of color which can enrich the fantasy of the human race, and its ability to discover the power of traveling through history.

You have lived in London for many years, but you were born in Iraq. Have your origins had a major influence on your art?

Art is the accumulation of knowledge and experiences. From that point of view, I have always tried to question the dimensions of my knowledge on the history of art in Iraq and other parts of Arab countries and their relation to world contemporary art movements.

By “combining Sumerian architecture with the dynamic of modernity,” as Alain Jouffroy of the Arab World Institute has said, does your art reflect the emergence of a new Arab civilization, or does it have a universal dimension?

My paintings are part of a new Arab art movement, in which I create works which can be universal in their dimension and, at the same time, are related to aspects of our history and values of our contemporary culture.

You have exhibited your work throughout the world. What reactions do your paintings arouse?

I have received a positive reaction in most of the nations I have exhibited in. I find that the comments made by Benjamin Forgey, the art critic of the Washington Post, summarize such reactions: “Like Corneille, most western viewers, myself included, cannot literally comprehend the calligraphic strokes that are an important part of Azzawi’s work. To us, their persuasive power lies in their abstract beauty, in the structural role they play in Azzawi’s post-cubist patterns, and in their ability to evoke Arab culture in a non-specific way. Azzawi’s images are at once traditional and of our time. With their wonderful, glowing colors and taut, iconic forms, his works are hauntingly poised between two worlds.”

Corporate foundations are involved in a number of forms of cultural patronage. What is your view of Colas’ approach, which consists of dedicating its Foundation to the promotion of contemporary painting?

The approach of the Colas Foundation in promoting contemporary art movements, and the relation between its work as an international company in road businesses and the topics which are always used is a fascinating concept which can enrich the vision of the company. It also has the positive effect of creating a small community of world artists who can relate to each other through this topic.
Acknowledgements

BÉRÉNICE GENOUX, MELISA RUHLMANN,
ALEXANDRA GUISET-TRENSON, PHILIPPE ZULIANI,
SABINE TANG, ALAIN MASBRONI, MICHEL DUCROCO,
JEAN-LOUIS GUILLAUME, SIMON FAKE,
MARION BENTZ, DOMINIQUE LECOTTE,
MICHEL ROURE, GORDON CRAWLEY,
JEAN-CLAUDE DOUTEYSSIER, BRUNO JEANNINGROS,
PHILIPPE BOYER, JEAN-MICHEL MILLE,
SEGOLENE CALAIS, DANIEL LALLEMAND,
DIDIER MANSEAU, PHILIPPE PERUT,
FLORENCE LANNES, BOB STONE,
CHRISTOPHE DA POIAN, JEAN-FRANÇOIS COTTET,
ROMAIN CAXTON, PIERRE MAJORAL,
VERONIQUE BLIN, CHRISTOPHE COLOCES,
JEAN SÉCHET, BERTHARD JAMOT, BRUNO LAFFAIRE,
GABRIEL SERADIEU, SEBASTIEN PERROT,
JEAN-MARIE DIAZ, MICHEL SANERAMO,
ERIC BLEZZARDE, JEAN-PIERRE DEAN, YVES BALLON,
JEAN BEAUVEND, MARCEL CLERF, MARC MARANZANA,
JEAN-PIERRE REYMONET, VINCENT DE MORO,
PASCAL REGNY, CHRISTOPHE LEBLANC,
BENOIT SOUESME, AURELIE GERMANY, TRACEY HOFFHEINZ.
Dia Azzawi

“CORNER OF A VILLAGE ROAD”

A work that opens generously onto man, onto his world, a work both transversal and transgressive, a work loaded with multiple meaning, both existential and political, a work full of the contradiction of joy and tragedy, a work in which life triumphs over death and obsession with death...

Dia Azzawi was born in Baghdad in 1939 and now lives in London. His work has been exhibited at the following venues:

1995-2003: Galerie Claude Lemand, Paris
2001: Arab World Institute, Paris
2003: Cité du Livre, Aix-en-Provence

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EN ROUTE

A massive project at the volcano’s edge