



RACING FOR ROCK

Deep in the heart of the Texas Panhandle in the small rural city of Vega, LS Sand and Gravel is racing to put as much material on the ground as possible. If the company can process it fast enough, it will sell, says Plant Manager Carlos Vega.

As one of the largest aggregate producers in the Texas Panhandle, LS Sand and Gravel produces more than a million tons of road base asphalt and concrete aggregate each year. It's a product that's high in demand right now, thanks to a recent infusion of state funding allocated to maintain Texas' massive highway infrastructure. That demand is forecast to be even greater in the coming years, with the recently-passed federal highway bill, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or the FAST Act.

The company has come a long way since its inception in 2002, when they were just using "de-sanders" – an industry term in the Panhandle used to describe screens like the GT205S track-mounted screening plant – and front end loaders to scalp sand rather than mining rock. Today, the company uses a variety of crushing, screening and washing equipment to make base and landscaping material, including two log washers, five screens and six de-sanders, all from KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens.

The material LS Sand and Gravel encounters is abrasive, hard river rock and sand that the company mines off of hundreds of thousands of acres in the Texas Panhandle.

"We make anything from ¼-inch up to 1-1/2-inch rock, all to Texas Department of Transportation specifications," Vega says. "We use this material for building roads, pads for buildings, base roads for windmill farms and producing landscaping materials. Anything you can think of, we make it here."

The process starts in the pit with a GT205S "de-sander", where the sand is scalped away



from the rock. The remaining aggregate is then loaded onto belly dumps, where it is crushed, washed, sized and put back on the ground to sell.

The material from the pit is comprised of approximately 60 percent sand and 40 percent aggregate. Depending on the grade of the sand, it may be used as concrete sand, scalplings or fill-in sand. If the sand is too dry or too contaminated to use, it is not processed.

Focusing on achieving high production has been key to the company's success, Vega says, which is why the company switched to the GT205S after becoming dissatisfied with the production and service from other units.

"If we're not producing, we're losing money," Vega said. "We're a big operation, so we've got to be putting material down on the ground every day, 10 hours a day. We try to be the strongest and the best producer, but we have to have good equipment to do that. I think KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens is the best equipment on the market right now, and I like that it is American-made. We don't have to wait for anything to come overseas and we can get parts quickly."

The GT205S is a track-mounted screening plant that is designed for producers processing sand and gravel, top soil, slag, crushed stone and recycled materials. The screening plant is part of the Global Track family of products, which are specifically designed to be user-friendly, mobile and self-contained. Because the GT205S is part of the Global Track product line, it is slimmer and lighter, making it easy to transport and more affordable.

The GT205S pairs a 5' x 20', double- or triple-deck screen with industry-leading conveyor heights for maximum stockpile capacity. Minimal electronics ensure easy maintenance and troubleshooting, while its low-profile and compact design allow for easy access to all controls for set-up.

Vega said he values the capacity the GT205S provides, allowing him to screen over more material in a shorter amount of time.

"The more I can put on the ground in fewer hours, the





better," he said. "A bigger screening deck means you can put more material on the ground faster."

Even more important to Vega than the built-in production and capacity is the ability to work directly with the engineers at KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens to alter the machine to fit his needs.

"I love being able to work with the factory," he said. "If they send me a GT205 and say it can do 500 tons per hour, and I say I need 800 tons per hour, they work with me to tweak the machine to get the production I need."

Vega also worked with Texas Bearing Company, his authorized KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens dealer, and the factory to install a 20-foot breather in the air, which helped the equipment battle the region's oppressive heat and dry conditions. This design change helped the machine take in clean, fresh air all day long and kept the temperature of the engine down.

"There are all sorts of design changes we might need, which is why I appreciate working with a factory that will take my needs into consideration," he said. "We might change hydraulic motors, hydraulic pumps, hoses, we might need our hoppers to be bigger or smaller... It all just depends on what kind of material we get into."

Vega says the downtime he has experienced with the GT205S is minimal, which is critical to hitting his production goals and selling as much product as possible. Out of the whole year, he estimates downtime at under 10 percent, which he attributes to normal maintenance and wear and tear of the machine. The low downtime is also attributed to the parts availability he receives through Texas Bearing Company.

"Parts availability for me is the biggest factor for downtime," he said. "If I don't have parts to fix my plants with, and I have to sit and wait two or three days, I'm not going to meet my production numbers. You've got to have great dealer and factory support. You can have the best piece of equipment, but if you don't have someone to work on it or you don't have the parts, then that piece of equipment isn't going to do you any good. In this industry, with what we do, equipment is going to break down. You need to have a good response. This is where Texas Bearing comes

in very strong. They have almost everything on their counter, and it's just a phone call away. They are willing to do anything and everything to get parts to us in a timely manner and get the equipment fixed."

"We're their customer, but really, it's almost a family relationship," he continued. "I can say I would give the shirt off my back to those guys, and they would do the same for me. It could be Father's Day, Christmas Day, any day of the week, and they are here 100 percent. They're not going to slack off giving us any support, and they sell a good product, and that's what makes them such a good company to buy from."

