

MT765B Tractors spring into action on ice shelf

The two Challenger MT765B tractors purchased by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) for transport duties went into hibernation for the winter months (March-October 2007) but have been back working on the ice since November.

BAS is building a new research station - Halley VI - on the Brunt Ice Shelf further inland to the existing Halley V which is located in an area now at risk from breaking ice. The MT765Bs have been brought in to increase productivity in the delivery of cargo from ship to building site, while they will also be used to haul the new station to its final resting point at the end of the 2008/9 season.

In an email to us from the Antarctic, Martin Bell, BAS Deputy Project Manager reports: "With the arrival of our spring, we dug out the Challengers from their snow rounds and de-iced them. Winter storage can see temperatures as low as -50 degrees C. The Challengers run on low temperature oils and have heaters in both the water jacket and transmission to aid starting after the winter. As fuel we employ JET A1 (Avtur - the same as that used by Jumbo Jets) which is good down to -70 degrees C."

The tractors restarted smoothly after their winter sleepover and immediately set to work on a major logistics operation.

Continues Martin: "The machines worked virtually non-stop around the clock, delivering cargo from the relief ship to the build site, shifting around 14,000 m³ of cargo in eight days. We are very happy with the Challengers' performance. They have done exactly what we needed without fault. We've also had great support from our dealer, TNS and their staff."



"Another point in our favour this season is the vehicle route which we have been able to groom to enable the Challengers to work at high speeds, pulling loads of up to 40 tonnes."

"All the team have worked really hard to keep the cargo flowing. Drivers spent 11 hours behind the wheel and only changed when the vehicle was due a fuel stop. The length of time to fill the tank had been calculated into the fleet planning and was quickly achieved."

With the building materials now on site, the construction of the Halley VI station can begin in earnest. It will take until February 2009 to complete the build and then the next important role of the Challengers will start. This will involve moving the new station to the new site 15km inland from Halley V. "The MT765B tractors are key to the whole project - some of the larger buildings could weigh up to 200 tonnes so we have a pretty big job on our hands," says Martin.

