Major presence in heavy load scene

Yew Choon is among the few that are able to transport MRT train cars, report JONATHAN CHEE, ONG WEE SERN and TAI LEE YU

YEW Choon, recipient of the Singapore 1000 Awards for the past three years, has come a long way since its founding in 1975. It has expanded from a fleet of just four lorries operating locally to become one of the major players in heavy lifting transportation within Asia and beyond to Oman. Its businesses are spread across four core industries – oil and gas, petrochemical, power generation and marine.

As a main contractor, Yew Choon is required to engineer, execute and manage the total transport chain, from receiving the cargo from ocean vessels, to providing marine and land transport, to ro-ro (roll-on roll-off) operations, to lifting and positioning to get the heavy load on its foundation.

Yew Choon today is a one-stop service provider for oversized and heavy loads, encompassing marine and land transportation, ro-ro operations, jacking and skidding, craneage, warehousing & storage, and engineering.

In 2009, it came in at 43rd in the Enterprise 50 ranking, but a year later made a giant leap to No 6 in the list.

“This has been a morale booster for the whole company and a recognition of all our efforts,” says Neo May Ling, general manager of Yew Choon and daughter of one of the two founders of the company.

Looking ahead, “expanding globally is one of our major goals,” says Ms Neo. And to achieve that goal, safety is a major factor, which in turn is determined by the quality of the workers.

According to Reiner Blijleven, senior project manager, a company’s safety record is the most important factor in the industry, and Yew Choon has a track record of zero accidents for the past 10-15 years. As a result, Yew Choon has been highly regarded by MNCs operating within Asia. Ms Neo does not see the stringent safety requirements of the business as a disadvantage. “Yes, we often lose out to those firms that can offer lower price with safety as a trade-off, but we are still doing well as MNCs always place a premium on safety over price.”

Another reason for the good safety record is that Yew Choon learns from the mistakes of competitors. “Safety is not a trivial matter, especially when it comes to heavy machinery, because accidents are often fatal,” points out Ms Neo.

Interestingly, Yew Choon is one of the few transport companies in Singapore capable of transporting MRT train carriages. It is the result of Yew Choon’s heavy investment on equipment and systems. “We built and owned the only modified trailer in Singapore that can carry MRT train carriages arriving from Japan and Germany,” it says.

In fact, Yew Choon fabricates its structures in-house and is able to support different cargoes and various modes of transportation. To do this, it invests a lot in human capital. The company also leases its specialised equipment to overseas companies. “This has become one of our winning points as we are well diversified in specialised equipment, enabling us to accept most projects available,” says Ms Neo.

On the matter of a public listing, Yew Choon says that it would keep that in view though it does not need fresh funds. “Even though there’s not much recognition locally for the company, it doesn’t matter as we are diversified across countries and sectors. Of course, we plan to expand into emerging countries, where there is more demand for our services.”

The writers are students from NUS Business School.