

AAD SHOW DAILY 2

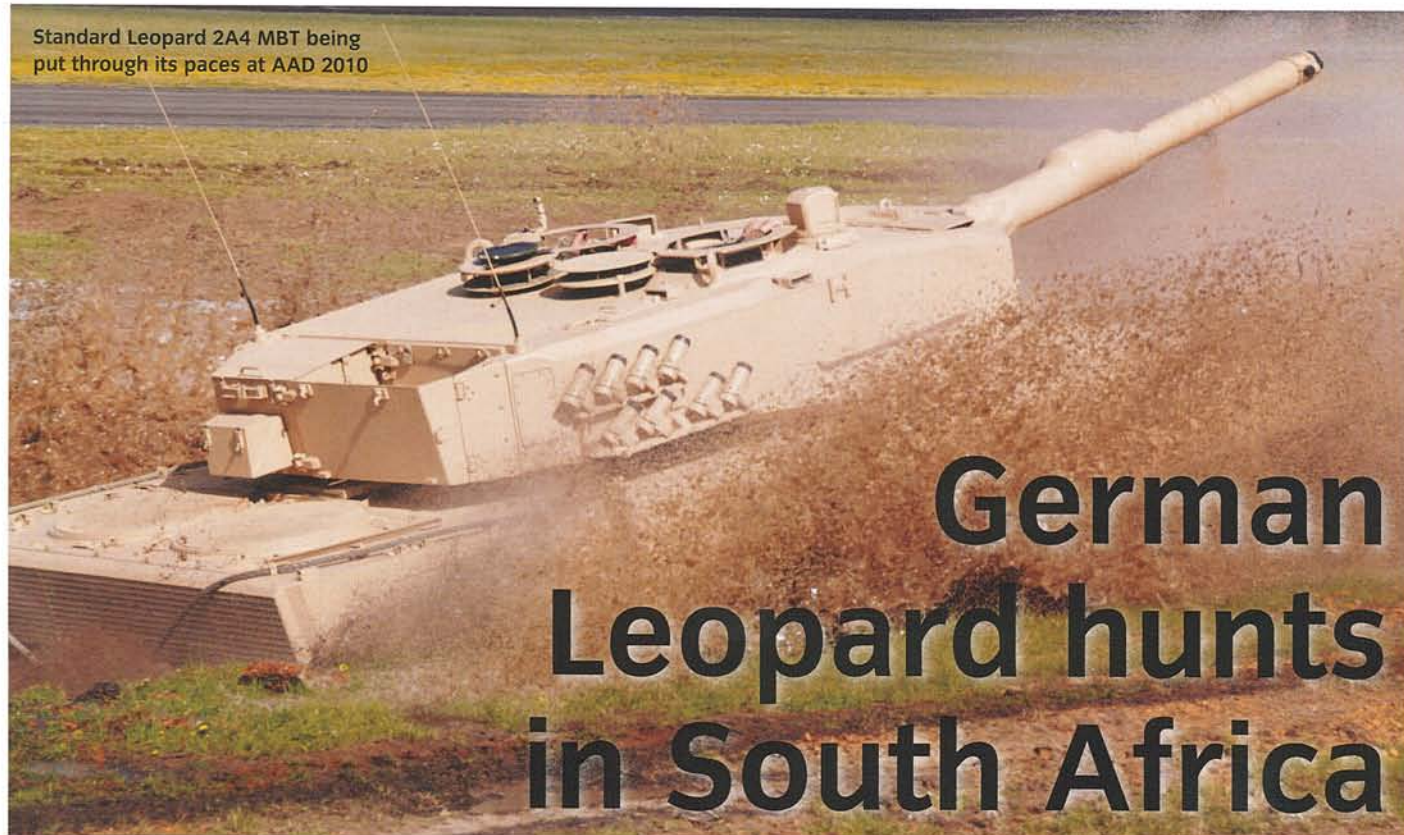
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Standard Leopard 2A4 MBT being put through its paces at AAD 2010



German Leopard hunts in South Africa

Making its first appearance in Africa is the German Leopard 2A4 Main Battle Tank (MBT), which is a potential replacement for the currently deployed Olifant MBT used by the South African Armoured Corps.

Leopard 2A4 has been brought to AAD by Rheinmetall, which has built large numbers for the German Army, together with many of the key support vehicles.

Olifant is an upgraded version of the British Centurion tank, which was first shown in 1945. This has been upgraded on numerous occasions by the now BAE Systems Land Systems South Africa, with the latest version being the Mk 2 deployed by two

squadrons and the earlier Mk 1A being used by other units.

It was expected that the Olifant would have been replaced by a new MBT some years ago, with customised versions of the now Nexter Systems Leclerc and BAE Systems Global Combat Systems Challenger 2E MBT being shortlisted. However, priority funding went to the South African Air Force and Navy and in the end no MBT orders were placed.

Both of these MBTs are now out of production, although some vehicles could be refurbished or upgraded for the export market.

There is still a requirement for an MBT to replace the ageing Olifants, with sufficient vehicles required for about three battalions.

However, funding will be a problem in the short term at least. The original requirement was for 96 new MBT, six armoured recovery vehicles and four armoured vehicle-launched bridges, but it is understood that this has now been increased to about 132 units.

The latest deployed model of the Leopard 2 is the Leopard 2A6, which has a host of improvements; unveiled in mid-2010 was the latest Leopard 2A7 Plus, which has been developed by Krauss-Maffei Wegmann in association with the German Army.

Rheinmetall Defence has also developed a modular upgrade package for the Leopard called 'MBT Revolution', which offers numerous improvements, especially in the areas of survivability and firepower. ■