

BLM CONTRIBUTES TO HYDRAM'S WORLD CLASS STRATEGY

In the past two years Hydrum Sheet Metalwork has invested more than £2 million in capital equipment and plans to expand its factory by a further 30,000 sq. ft. next year. A crucial part of this investment by the ISO 9001:2000-accredited subcontractor has been the installation of a BLM Dynamo CNC tube bender and, more recently, a BLM ADIGE LT 712D CNC tube laser. This is in response to the current three-year business plan that identifies possible additions to the company's range of services.

With over 30 years' experience in subcontract manufacturing and more than 150 customers spread across virtually every industry sector, Hydrum has built a reputation for high quality sheet metal components, assemblies and light fabrications produced at its 70,000 sq. ft. factory. However, a decade ago this 130-employee company's customer base did not extend much beyond a 40 minute drive from its location on the Chilton Industrial Estate, near Ferryhill, County Durham. Today, it is a very different picture.

"The marketplace is becoming increasingly competitive, with UK companies looking to offshore manufacture or dual source as a way

of combating increases in energy, material and labour costs," says John Young, Managing Director. "To counter this trend we are investing in more efficient and productive equipment while, at the same time, looking further afield for customers within the UK and continental Europe. Tube bending is one of our core competencies and we needed to upgrade our capability in terms of automated operation. The tube laser, on the other hand, is in addition to our flat sheet laser machining capability and has opened up new market opportunities while differentiating Hydrum from its competitors."

The decision to purchase the LT 712D tube laser was based in part on the performance and reliability of the BLM Dynamo CNC tube bender, BLM GROUP's acknowledged expertise in tube processing, and the new machine's 8.5 metre tube length processing capacity. "We were also impressed by the build quality of the machine, its off-line programming capability, the service and support provided by BLM GROUP UK Ltd, and the experiences of other end-users," says David Greatorex, Operations Director. "Where we would previously have used several



machines to process tubular components, we now use the tube laser and have eliminated inaccuracies and work-in-progress. It has also impacted on operations downstream, for example, by eliminating the need for welding jigs as parts can now be tagged. All of this has enabled us to take cost out of the job because it is not just about cutting faster, it is about revisiting the entire production process from design to delivery of the completed component."

This BLM ADIGE LT 712D is equipped with a Siemens Sinumerik 840D CNC and can process round, square, rectangular and flat-sided oval section tube up to 152 mm diameter, courtesy of a 2500 W laser source. Off-line programming software specifically developed for the machining of tubes creates new programs quickly and easily, typically less than 10 minutes from drawing to finished part, while the Siemens control allows the operator to manage all the main functions, including program downloads. Fast set-up and change-over times – around three minutes – means short batches can be managed as cost-effectively as longer production runs.

In addition to sheet metal processes such as CNC punching, presswork, folding and rolling, and its expertise in laser tube cutting and profiling, Hydrum also offers MIG/TIG welding of mild, stainless steel and aluminium. Precision CNC machining is also available, with parts requiring painting being powder coated prior to final assembly and delivery.

"We consider Hydrum to be one of the top sheet metalworking companies in the UK, with more than 150 customers spread across virtually every industry sector," says David Greatorex. "However, the objective is to be confirmed as world class when assessed against the criteria typically used by 'blue chip' manufacturing companies such as Nissan. It is, of course, difficult to compare our performance with businesses operating outside of the sheet metal sector and especially those serving high-volume production markets. However, we have concentrated on key aspects such as cost, quality and delivery, and have arrived at target figures that we believe represent a truly world class standard."

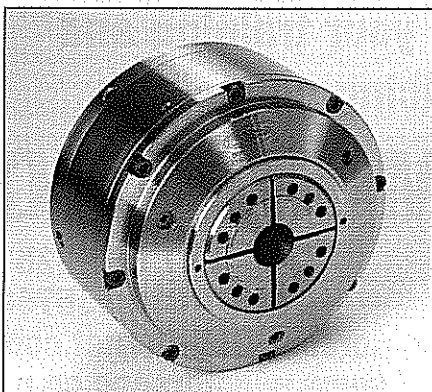
The upshot, he adds, is that Hydrum's customers "are benefiting from a single-source supplier pursuing a policy of continuous improvement and committed to high quality products, competitive pricing and prompt delivery".

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THE COLLECTIVE BENEFITS OF COLLET CHUCKS

Birmingham-based Leader Chuck Systems is the new exclusive UK agent for Lexair Inc collet workholding systems. Designed to reduce machine downtime and increase productivity, the Lexair collet range includes the Full Bore collet chucks and its advanced Prodyne Servo fixed length collet chucks.

As the name suggests the Lexair Full Bore chuck range allows the full inner diameter of the lathe or turning centre's spindle to be used because it does not require a draw tube. The range features a self-contained construction, with mechanical grip and an air release front actuated collet chuck. As such the chuck does not require an external actuator. This makes the chuck fail-safe as air is only used to open it, spring force holds the workpiece while it is being machined. Higher spindle speeds are achievable since a collet chuck does not have heavy jaws that lose grip force as the spindle speed of the lathe increases.



Clamping force is adjustable by tightening or loosening the collet using the spanner holes in the front of the collet. For fragile materials or thin walled parts the clamping force can also be reduced by removing pairs of springs inside the chuck.

Leader Chuck's managing director, Mark Jones, says: "Compared to normal collet chucks the Lexair Full Bore range provides an increased capacity of 25 to 30 per cent. This will provide significant cost savings for engineering companies carrying out bar fed turning operations because it means that they no longer have to over specify their machine tools just to be able to pass the necessary bar stock diameter through the collet chuck."

Also designed to maximise productivity for bar fed applications is the Prodyne Servo collet chuck range. These chucks have been designed for use in programmable bar feeder applications where accurate positioning of the stock is required. Featuring a patented 'pull-to-close' design that maintains the position of the bar stock against the bar feed pusher as the chuck closes, it eliminates the need to have a turret stop for positioning.

Other features of the Prodyne range include concentricity adjustment to further increase accuracy, fixed length collet design, a wedge design that provides high grip force regardless of the spindle speed and a tapered nose for maximum tool clearance.

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