

UK industry news

In brief . . .

► Prior to the demonstration of its range of sheet-metal cutting and processing solutions at the forthcoming **MACH 2010** exhibition, Prima Finn-Power will be showcasing them at a series of Open House events taking place at the company's technical centre in Italy on 26-27 March. Products on display will include the company's FB (Fastbend) manually loaded high-speed bender, the E5x servo electric turret punch press and the Zaphiro 2-D laser cutter. For further information, phone Joe Attuoni — managing director of the firm's Coventry-based subsidiary — on 0844 499 6241.

► Last month's *Southern Manufacturing & Electronics Show* has been hailed as a tremendous success by both its organiser European Trade & Exhibition Services and participants in the exhibition. Record numbers of visitors attended over the two days. Steve Morris, sales manager with Trinity Touch Europe Ltd, said of his visit: "There really isn't another show like it. The diversity of suppliers is useful, and it's a great way to meet different people and see what's going on." Exhibitors were equally upbeat. Paul Brooker, managing director of Creative Instrumentation, said: "The show's been absolutely superb. We are getting excellent results — even better than last year."



HDO acquires Davy Markham

Davy Markham, the Sheffield-based heavy-engineering concern (Tel: 0114 244 9971), has been acquired by the Indian engineering procurement and construction company Hindustan Dorr Oliver Ltd, which is a subsidiary of IVRCL Infrastructures & Projects Ltd. Managing director Kevin Parkin and financial director Duncan Hay will continue in their current roles.

HDO sees this acquisition as a platform for expanding into new sectors, using Davy Markham's corporate credentials and engineering expertise. It intends to invest strategically in new plant and equipment at the Darnall works and to continue Davy Markham's successful apprentice training

scheme. It will also extend Davy Markham's sales and marketing infrastructure, in order to tap into opportunities in India.

Mr Parkin (pictured with IVRCL vice-chairman and managing director E Sudhir Reddy) said: "This is great news for Davy Markham's customers, employees and suppliers, since HDO — along with its parent — is financially very strong, and very growth-orientated; it dedicates itself to continuous improvement in all fields of its business.

"There are considerable synergies between ourselves and HDO, while IVRCL's commercial aspirations in markets like nuclear energy match ours perfectly."

Manufacturers growing in confidence

UK manufacturers are looking to the future with greater confidence about the prospects for recovery, as more companies report signs of demand improving, according to a survey released today by the Engineering Employers' Federation. The latest quarterly *Manufacturing outlook* report reveals a larger-than-expected improvement in output and orders over the past three months and a broad-based return of confidence across manufacturing. Companies are consequently the most upbeat since the financial crisis began.

However, the EEF stressed that there are still a number of risks to manufacturers' prospects. These include uncertainty about how to 'repair' the public finances, plus on-going questions about access to finance and the sustainability of the recovery in key export markets. Conse-

quently, investment intentions are likely to remain muted for some time.

EEF chief economist Lee Hopley said: "Having emerged from the recession at the end of last year, the start to 2010 was better than expected. Clearly, more companies are becoming more confident about their prospects, and we're beginning to see the real benefits of an export-led recovery.

"However, we have to be cautious about predicting a strong rebound, as a number of factors could knock growth off track. The recovery depends on world markets continuing to grow, while the financial system's ability to provide finance is yet to be fully tested. Investment plans are also likely to remain on hold until manufacturers get a better sense of how a new government plans to repair the public finances."

Polish agreement for Leader

Leader Chuck Systems Ltd (Tel: 0121 771 4843) has signed a contract with Bison, a Polish manufacturer of work-holding equipment. Under this agreement, the Birmingham-based company will assume responsibility for the sale in the UK of Bison's extensive product range, some of which was previously sold under the Toolmex TMX brand name. Founded in 1948, Bison is Poland's largest manufacturer of machine tool ancillary products. Today, the ISO 9001-accredited company employs around 600 people and produces a wide range of standard manual chucks, many of which are available with cast iron or steel bodies.

Time running out for backdated business rates appeals

Small firms are being warned that they have only a few weeks left if they want to contest their level of business rates over the past five years. Any business owners who believe that they have been charged too much for their rates since the last revaluation in 2005 have until 31 March to appeal. If their appeals are successful, they could receive rebates worth thousands of pounds.

The FBP believes that around 160,000 small businesses have already won backdated reductions in their rates since 1 April 2005. However, many more may be eligible for a reduction without realising it. There are two main grounds on which businesses can appeal against their rateable value. They can either show that they are paying more than neighbouring properties — a Web site (www.voa.gov.uk) allows business owners to find out what neighbouring premises pay and whether or not they have appealed against the amount — or they can prove that there has been a 'material change' in their circumstances since 2005. For more information, call the FBP on 0845 612 6266.