Management buyout for precision machinist Claro

A management buyout at Claro Precision Engineering has seen a team take over which has almost 40 years’ experience with the company. The new team of Martin Doxey, Mike Lewis and Richard Wilson take over as Howard Chadwick, Tim Godolphin and Sarah Chadwick exit. In addition to the management buyout, the company is taking on new staff to strengthen the support team.

Claro has built an enviable reputation since its formation 26 years ago and the new team says it is determined that the standards of the company and quality of work produced will continue.

Mr Doxey, previously CEO of the White Rose University Consortium and Claro non-executive director, is the new managing director, with Mike Lewis as sales director. “We have plans for further investment, and will continue to give customers the focused quality service for which Claro is renowned throughout the UK,” said Mr Lewis.

“This is an exciting time for the company and I am delighted to be part of the new team taking Claro forward,” Mr Doxey said. “The outgoing team has made an outstanding contribution not only to the company, but to the local community and the industry as a whole. We are looking forward to building on this success.”

The company employs 45 staff, supplying the medical, aerospace, defence, subsea, automotive and instrumentation industries. It has won the prestigious GTMA World Class Golden Globe award for the past two years, in recognition of its ability to evolve products, processes and business strategies for maximum business success in a changing market.

Birmingham firm helps scientists’ atomic quest

A Birmingham-based precision pressings firm Brandauer is supplying vital components to scientists in Geneva looking for particles created at the start of the universe.

Brandauer fought off worldwide competition to secure the £350,000 contract supplying parts to CERN – the world’s biggest particle physics laboratory – after attending a ‘Doing Business with CERN’ seminar. The event was run by UK Trade & Investment, the government organisation that provides support services for UK firms trading overseas.

The components, ‘Pumping Slot Shields’, are used in a 27 km circular machine (aerial picture, left) – the new Large Hadron Collider, due to be switched on in 2007 and which speeds protons to velocities close to the speed of light before they are smashed into each other to release energy and reveal matter’s core.

“Together the shields will stretch 108 km, four times the length of the accelerator, to about a 20” of the width of a human hair,” Brandauer’s managing director, David Spears, said.

“We have pushed our technical capability to be the best in the world. We beat nine other international rivals both on price and technology to win the contract, promising levels of quality and accuracy that even some of our own staff said couldn’t be done,” he added.

“Working with CERN has been a great boost, the laboratory only deals with excellence.”

Sub-contract
FMS capacity

A £2.5 million flexible manufacturing system based on five Mitsubishi MH 500 horizontal machining centres and a 72-pallet Fastems automation package installed at Kenard Engineering of Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire is available for precision machining of sub-contract components.

The new service means customers can take advantage of the latest flexible machining technology to produce frequent or repeat batches as small as two or three parts on short deliveries.

The line of 4-axis MH 500 machines with 650 by 650 by 800 mm working envelopes and 12,000 rpm spindles, has high levels of flexibility and is currently machining high specification defence, telecoms and aerospace components, aluminium castings and steel valve blocks.

Accelerated growth
Johnson Precision Tooling, a specialist in steel and carbide header tools, has invested over £100,000 in moving its operations from Yardley Wood to a new site in nearby Darlaston, in the Black Country, and plans to increase turnover by some 10 per cent during the next year. Backed by support from Accelerate, the move has allowed the company to create an even stronger relationship with nearby Armstrong Fastening Technologies, with response times and quality all improving.

Plate machining niche
A specialist contract machining service, established by Hemlock Manufacturing of Sandiacre, Nottingham where base plates and face plates are machined using high-speed technology, is now processing some three tonnes of aluminium a month on five Haas VF vertical machining centres and a twin-pallet, 100-tool Kitamura H400 horizontal machining centre. The components, up to 300 mm², are produced out of Honsel HE30 and Alplan proprietary aluminium blanks and once machined are used in a wide range of products such as mould plates and printer frames, face plates and fascias. These are then assembled into printers, packaging machinery and electronic equipment. The company also supplies black anodised finish machined fascias for use in upmarket hi-fi systems.

Mill-turn installed
Kenard Engineering, Dartford has installed a £500,000, 5-axis Mori Seiki mill-turn centre and multi-axis turning centre to boost machining capacity for, in particular, complex parts in difficult materials for aerospace, oil and defence firms.
EDM trumps grinding
Graham Margetts predicts that Microprise’s move towards EDM will significantly improve its abilities to respond to customer demand with shorter lead times. “Wire cutting will eliminate time-consuming processes such as jig boring and grinding, and enables us to bring the majority of manufacture under one roof,” explains the managing director. “The majority of our work is one-off or very short run work and smaller gauges and fixtires can now be turned around in days rather than weeks.” The move into EDM with Charmilles wire-cut machines was eased by adopting Vero’s VISI-Wire for programming. Microprise was one of the first in the UK to use the software. “With the VISI-Wire software, solid model interrogation and programming is increasingly becoming a formality,” he adds.

To boldly invest...
Emerald Engineering invested almost a third of its turnover in a Citizen M32 CNC sliding-head auto from NC Engineering, Watford in April 2001. Since then, the decision to buy the 13-axis lathe has proved to have been shrewd. It has cut lead times in half, opened up new markets, increased turnover and given the nine-strong company a competitive edge. The retrofitting of NC Engineering’s Cool Blaster 2,000 psi high-pressure coolant system six months after installation had a dramatic effect, saving up to 30 hours’ production time on batches of 1,000 parts. And the company has now installed a second, smaller capacity Citizen B20. NC Engineering is holding an open house at its Watford HQ from 22-24 September. Visit www.ncengineering.co.uk.

Qualiturn’s expansion turns on early entry to world of CNC sliding-heads
Qualiturn Products celebrated its 30th anniversary earlier this year by moving to new, larger premises in Hertford, confirming the importance of its early move into CNC machining. Employing 24 people and turning over £1.5 million/annum, Qualiturn’s success is linked to its 1990 move into CNC sliding-head technology, managing director Bernard Groom buying the company’s first Star machine.
At that time the firm’s capacity comprised 16 Peterman sliding-head autos, 16 turret-type machines and a Wurth & Gruffat rotary transfer unit. “We hardly made any profit in those days,” commented Mr Groom, “When I saw the Star machine at the MACH show in Birmingham, I was very impressed with its performance and knew it was the way forward for us.”
Fourteen years on, it has 15 Star CNC machines which are continually part-exchanged at the rate of two per year. And typically, a job that might have taken 28 seconds to turn-mill a few years ago is now completed in 18 seconds, said Mr Groom.
The recent move saw each machine re-installed and operating again within four hours, followed by lights-out running the same night. “We operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year with only daytime staffing, operating unmanned for about 60 per cent of the time,” Mr Groom confirmed.

PG continues to invest to be best
Contract-manufacturing specialist PG Technology has recently completed the installation of two, top-of-the-range S31 5-axis CNC Studer grinding machines and a pair of Mikron CNC vertical machining centres: a VCP600 and a VCE600.
The installations come just a few weeks after the rapidly expanding company purchased a number of new Charmilles Clean Cut and twin-wire machines for its state-of-the-art EDM Centre, and a 5-axis Mikron UCP 1350 vertical machining centre for its CNC machine shop. Company owner Mr Vincent Bootes describes the investment as part of an “extensive and ongoing programme” to reinforce PG’s position as one of the UK’s top precision engineering partners.
PG Technology’s investment programme began two years ago when Mr Bootes took over the 70-year-old Surrey based company (see Machinery 2 July, page 25). In that time PG has evolved into a consolidated manufacturing organisation offering contract manufacturing, an extensive EDM capability, advanced toolmaking, 5-axis CNC machining, CNC grinding services, and CNC grinding wheel profile dressing systems.

Firm’s cutting edge decision
Micrometric, the Lincoln-based laser cutting, welding and wire EDM specialist, has installed a £400,000 Bystronic Bystar laser. The 4.4 kW, fast-switching CO2 laser with rotary axis, replaces an earlier 2.7 kW Bystronic Bystar laser. As well as boosting efficiency for existing work, it will open up new areas of work, including 8-10 mm thick stainless steel and 3-6 mm aluminium together with more complex components.