

# Manufacturing heavyweights

They are the heavyweights of the manufacturing sector: the large scale automated machining centres that can turn out mechanical parts up to 1.5 metres in size. This is a specialist niche reserved for companies with expertise built up from many years of experience. Precision and quality are the prerequisites for success and there are only a few suppliers in the market who can offer truly integrated solutions. One of the leading European companies in this demanding sector is PCI, which is headquartered in Saint-Etienne, France.



PCI specialises in large scale machining centres capable of producing pieces with dimensions up to 1.5 m

PCI specialises in the design and construction of automated production lines dedicated to the machining of mechanical parts. The product range is made up of large scale machining centres and transfer machines. The company's customer base is focused primarily on the automotive and aeronautic sectors. "The trend is moving ever more towards increased functionality. We offer combined solutions that integrate various functions to provide our customers with time and cost savings. There are very few companies in the market with the ability to operate in this area," says Division Director Machining Systems Laurent Linxe. PCI machines can produce large series runs while maintaining the highest levels of precision regardless of external factors such as temperature. Other features include their ability to be installed at any location, their high level of reliability and long lifespan. One of the stars of the company's standard product range is the Tripteor range of machining centres. The key advantage of these machines is a significant reduction in

machining times that is achieved through the use of a high speed electrosindle that rotates at 15,000 rpm. The centres also offer six milling directions and high speed movements that make it possible to machine five faces without moving the workpiece. Tripteor machines are designed to accommodate large parts with dimensions of up to 1.5 m in aluminium or under licence in other metals. Another important range is the HSM Meteor ML range of machining centres which have been designed for the needs of mass production. They incorporate all of PCI's expertise and experience in the manufacture of special machining equipment to offer enhanced capacity, reliability, serviceability and ease of use. With extremely short tool change times – under four seconds – and a wide range of accessories adapted to mass production machining, the machines in the Meteor range offer extremely high throughput volumes. "The Meteor range represents the latest generation of machining equipment and can be described as the state-of-the-art in the market at this time," says Mr. Linxe.

In addition to its standard machines, PCI also supplies customised equipment. Between 20 and 30% of its turnover is generated through the supply of tailored solutions that have been adapted to meet specific needs. A particular speciality are special and transfer machines that are composed of standard and modular sub-assemblies. Amongst the additional equipment that PCI can integrate into its lines are functions such as automatic loading, palletisation and depalletisation, spray suction and the addition of a cooling unit with conditioning at high and medium pressure. Annual production capacity is around 80 machines. With equipment becoming more and more complex, service and maintenance are playing an even more important part of PCI's business. A year and a half ago the company introduced drive spindle servicing to its portfolio. This area now accounts for 11% of turnover. "We improve the performance of the spindle through servicing, overhauling and upgrading, whereby we always aim to exceed the customer's expecta-

tions," says Mr. Linxe. To support this aim, PCI operates sales and service centres in Metz and Lille so that it can be close to its customers. Although its focus has traditionally been on the automotive and aeronautics sectors the trend over the past two years in the automotive sector towards greater outsourcing has led to PCI targeting foundries as a potential customer base in France and abroad. Exports account for two million EUR of PCI's 50 million EUR annual turnover. Most of this is generated from sales to customers in Italy but since the end of 2006 the company has been targeting markets in China and India and established contacts in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. "Up until now our international activities have mainly been limited to carrying out projects abroad for customers based in France. Our goal is now to build up our own independent export markets," says Mr. Linxe. One of the company's main clients is its parent group PSA. The long term goal is to reduce its dependence so that at least

30% of orders come from other clients of which a third should be international. Its ability to innovate will be a key factor in its success in achieving this goal. The company invests 2.5% of its annual turnover in research and development each year and keeps a close eye on market developments with regard to materials, processes and production systems and line architecture. Anticipating future trends is the key to success not just for new machines but in existing models. "Production lines represent significant capital expenditure for manufacturers so it is important that we make our machines today capable of being retrofitted with the new developments of tomorrow. As can be seen from the success of our spindle overhauling service there is a ready market for repair and upgrading of existing machinery," says Mr. Linxe. PCI's readiness to adapt itself to the needs of the market can be seen from its history. In the 1980s it focused mainly on the production of individual machines. In the 1990s it progressed to become an integrator

of line architecture and today it is itself a full solution provider. This transformation is by no means complete as PCI gears itself up for the demands of the coming decade.

## COMPANY PROFILE IN BRIEF

**Activities**  
Design and construction of automated production lines dedicated to the machining of mechanical parts

- Key products**
- Tripteor range of parallel single and double spindles HS production machining centres
  - Meteor ML range of horizontal single and double spindles HSC production machining centres
  - Special and transfer machines

- Services**
- Drive spindle service
  - Service and maintenance, upgrading and overhauling of own products at those of other manufacturers

- Facts and figures**
- Turnover: 50 million EUR
  - Exports: 2 million EUR in 2006, Target: 8 million in 2010
  - Research and development: 2.5% of turnover



Line architecture by PCI

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