



HOME APPLIANCE

COFFEE ART

FRACINO

Fracino, the Birmingham-based manufacturer of espresso and cappuccino coffee machines is achieving the coffee equivalent of taking coals to Newcastle by exporting its machines to Italy, along with 70 plus other countries.

Fracino's success in broadening its European and worldwide horizons reinforces that manufacturing in the UK can be, and is, globally competitive. albeit with a little help of an Italian-built BLM 4-RUNNER All-Electric CNC tube bending and end forming machine.

The multi award-winning, third generation family business is marking 52 years in business after being founded in a garden shed in 1963 by Frank Maxwell, a former machine tool designer with the Alfred Herbert company. His passion for coffee came from holidays to Italy and led to a successful business importing and selling coffee machines to catering establishments around the UK. In the late 1980s Frank was joined in the business by his son, and current managing director Adrian Maxwell, a former Rolls-Royce engineer – bringing a powerful combination that took the business to new heights. Turnover doubled and the business gained the accolade of being the second best distributor, worldwide, for the Spanish coffee machines that it was importing. However, demand began to outstrip delivery, a situation that led Frank and Adrian to look at manufacturing their own range of machines.





4.000
coffee
machines
produced per year

“Manufacturing in house turned out to be the best decision we made. In the first year we produced 30 machines - all of which were sold within the UK. Orders were growing and we took advantage of the weak pound - which resulted from the financial collapse of 2008 - as an opportunity to launch an export arm. We focused our marketing messages on the British values of quality build, durability and reliability – based on the fact that the first machines we ever built were still in good working order and we were confident to promote that Fracino coffee machines, made in Birmingham, are the finest in the world. This strategy, combined with our investment in manufacturing, ensured we would remain competitive with our global competitors, with our machines selling for between 15 to 20 per cent of comparable equipment, in spite of the current strength of the Pound” says Adrian Maxwell.

The success of this export initiative has seen Fracino double its turnover to over £4 million since 2008 - currently producing in excess of 4,000 commercial and domestic espresso machines a year. However this strong sales growth also brought production issues and challenges with a large volume of manufacturing - including much of the tube bending for the water delivery systems in the coffee machines - having to be subcontracted. “We recognised that we needed to bring this work back in-house in order to control lead times and quality, so we purchased a new building next to our existing site, which doubled the size of our premises, and created a sheet

20%
reduction in waste
material

metal and tube working facility over a 12-14 month period. Our tube bending initially consisted of a manually loaded machine, but after a visit to Italy, where we saw the benefits of the BLM automated system, we placed an order for the 4-RUNNER machine”.

The BLM 4-RUNNER is a complete tube bending, end forming and swarfless cutting cell in one machine, taking tube directly from coil and straightening it prior to processing it - with up to six ram-forming passes, bending, cutting and controlled unloading of the finished part. It can form bends with fixed or variable radii and the end-forming can be a combination of ram and rotary forming passes. The key to the machine’s success are the significant gains in productivity that result from combining these processes into an automated cycle. “The introduction of the BLM 4-RUNNER has revolutionized our tube production. Tubes that used to take 3.5 minutes to process on our old machine are completed in 15 seconds now. The speed is incredible, so much so that we have moved from a bottleneck situation to being in a position where we don’t have to run the machine every day as it keeps us ahead of the build schedule” adds Adrian.

As well as dramatically lowering cycle times, problems of lead times on material have been eliminated by switching from straight tube to coil. The machine’s efficiency has likewise been boosted with a 20 per cent reduction in waste material - and time saved in changing over from one job to another has also fallen considerably. These reduced set-up times are aided by the BLM 4-RUNNER’S ability to store the position and settings of each electric axis along with the part program, eliminating any adjustments when changing batches. The manufacturing environment also benefits from the BLM 4-RUNNER’S technology, with all-electric axes eliminating the need for hydraulic oil and generating electricity savings of up to 80 per cent when compared to older tube bending systems.

15 second
instead of 3 minutes to produce a tube

