

Tube factory



# SICAM

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF STRUCTURAL TUBES

The Bianco group, a group of companies belonging to the family of the same name, operates in the distribution of high-grade carbon steel tube. The business, started at the end of the 50s with Francesco Bianco and grew rapidly with his three sons opening new companies and the acquisition of additional business up to the current size that sees the Bianco group present in ten countries with 31 offices, 23,000 customers and 160,000 tons of goods in stock for prompt delivery.

In the early 1970s Giovanni Bianco, one of Francesco's three sons, opened SICAM. There was a strong evolutionary impulse when the group became interested in hydraulic pipes for mechanics; that was the period in which SICAM was born, the company in which we meet Engineer Fabio Zambruno, Sales Director, and Dr. Andrea Ragazzi, Area Manager for the Triveneto area. Zambruno has participated in every stage of SICAM's evolution: "We are a service company, extremely focused and careful to offer solutions to the customer who buys our tubes. The product is functional to this. All our structures are organized and our activities are planned according to the service we offer to the customer."



At the Sicam headquarters, in Parona Lomellina, province of Pavia but with an eye to Milan (19 miles south) we meet the Sales Director, Fabio Zambruno and Andrea Ragazzi, Area Manager and “engine” of the laser processing development project.

Zambruno has participated in every stage of SICAM’s evolution, from the early 1980s to today. His description of the company captures the image of a company in the continuous search of customer satisfaction. *“We are a service company, extremely focused and careful to offer solutions to the customer who buys our tubes. The product is functional to this. All our structures are organized and our activities are planned according to the service we offer to the customer.”*

#### **Service**

For SICAM, service takes the form of offering its customers an expansive variety of tube. *“The assortment is a fundamental point of our offer to customers. The world of steel is huge and actually SICAM does not follow many products. The choice is to offer a complete range in the sectors where we are present. We want to be the warehouse of our customers, who can find everything from half-inch tubes, to 31.5 inches in diameter, up to 4.75 inches thick.”*

Now, the arrival of the laser systems for tube processing allows Sicam to expand the perspective of customer service. *“Providing a service also means offering the customer a single supplier who has a warehouse and processing inside and is responsible for the entire process. It was the most complex and difficult choice to make, but the awareness that comes from having made it, especially in the interest of our customers, will allow us to tackle all organizational problems with serenity, trust and competence”* explains Zambruno.

#### **The market**

SICAM, follows three main macro-sectors, mechanics, construction and hydraulics. *“The so-called structural tubes, squares, rectangles and rounds, today represent*

*50% of the sales volume, the other half are made by mechanical ones and cylinder products. For us, constructions are not only the foundation piles, columns and roofs of large building works such as stadiums or airports, but we are talking about the structural tube, generally welded but we also manage the seamless ones, used in machine tools or in agriculture, in earth moving rather than in the construction of cranes or vertical warehouses. In the last period we have moved away from the oil sector, which has always been the most important for hose distributors, but which is going through a severe crisis, due not only to the cyclical nature of that market, but also to the environmental choices of national governments and Europeans and therefore is destined to last over time,”* Zambruno explains to us.

The distribution market is in turmoil, squeezed on the one hand by the drop in demand in its main sector, oil, and on the other by the spread among laser operators with the tendency to buy tubes directly, bypassing the distributor. *“The market has evolved so much that we had to consider the risk of losing a large share of it. Those who offer this service today will tend to buy directly without going through the distributor. We have a very important market share on the square tube which makes us attackable. We must protect ourselves for the future by safeguarding our quotas by increasing the offer and quality of customer service more and more.”*

### The strategy

SICAM's response to the evolution of the market was carefully considered and ultimately decided with the purchase of three BLM GROUP Lasertube systems in less than a year. *"With the purchase of laser systems, we too become transformers. We had been thinking about it for a long time, but we were hesitant because many of our customers are converters, so we feared on the one hand of losing customers and on the other of touching important and transversal interests. The evolution of the dimensional range and of the products allows us to respond to all the market requests that arise in the construction world. The inclusion of laser systems was the natural next step and this was the right time to do it,"* explains Zambruno. *"The alternative to buying the machines would have been the acquisition of a new company that did the machining, but any acquired company would not have had the great advantage of having the tubes next to the machines. Furthermore, the service offered to customers, at least for the first few years, would not change. SICAM would in any case have sent the tubes to an external company to do the processing before delivering to the customer, exactly as we did before."*

In fact, by having in-house laser systems SICAM has at least two advantages to the service it offers to the customer. Being the only supplier to place the order and therefore becoming responsible for the process it ensures shorter delivery times and eliminate transport times. Not to mention the elimination of annoying unforeseen events due to the incorrect calculation of the starting material necessary for a job. A trivial problem, but far from infrequent. In the traditional chain, the laser operator is forced to run in search of the tube not on hand. In Sicam, on the contrary, the tubes are two steps away from the machines. *"The goal is to turn to high-level structural work, referring in particular to the quality of the steel, including particular ones such as high yield strength, and to the service required."* In fact, there are many



right machine. *"The choice of machines depended on the need to cover the entire range. As distributors, our processing experience is necessarily limited and was limited to having employed many laser technicians, but entering a new sector for us we had to do it with a strength that would allow us results up to our standard of service. We have customers who need the large but also the small and we have to cover the entire range,"* explains Zambruno. The choice was therefore to rely on BLM GROUP, as has already been successfully done by NTS, another company of SICAM's sister group based in the UK. Today SICAM owns an LT24, LT14 and an LT8.20 which covers the dimensional range of tube from half inch to 24 inches in diameter. The projection, however, is aimed at new horizons. Ragazzi concludes, *"We would like to expand the business also to fields of consumption other than construction. We can offer customers not only the laser processed tube on order, but also the stock service for the already lasered tube. If you make a thousand identical pieces all year round, we would make them, put them on the ground and then provide them when you need them. You don't have to stock those parts anymore; savings in lead-time, transport and warehouse costs."* The Sicam of the future is already at work.

confirmations in the construction world, where tube of a certain size and weight are used, that there is an increasing attraction to laser processing which allows savings in different stages of tubular product manufacturing.

### The machines

When selecting the correct laser tube system, SICAM did not have years of experience in mechanical processing to draw from, but what they did have was a very precise and absolutely correct idea: to cover the entire range by machining on each tube with the

