

“ We have yet to be self-reliant in machine tools ” : Ashok Sheth

Mr. P.K. Balasubramanian had a one-to-one with Mr. Ashok Sheth, Chairman of Solitaire to ascertain the secret of success of this trendsetter in its chosen field. Excerpts.

Solitaire Machine Tools Ltd is a leading manufacturer of precision centreless grinders. Incorporated in 1987, Solitaire has developed a niche market for itself for catering to the demand of centreless grinders. Over the years the company has produced over 650 centreless grinders coming from two production units in Vadodara.

SMT is an exclusive licensee of Cincinnati Milacron, USA for manufacturing centreless grinders in two primary sizes. It also has a licence agreement with Bocca Malandrone SpA of Italy. The value added services it offers includes rebuilding and retrofitting of any model of Cincinnati grinders as well as other European makes.



Mr. Ashok Sheth -
Chairman & Managing Director
Solitaire Machine Tools Ltd



Q. Is everything hunky-dory with the Indian Machine Tool Industry?

The situation in Machine Tool Industry is not so good as the confidence in Economic Growth is missing and no one wants to invest unless they are forced to do so.

The stability in economy is must to generate growth. The current devaluation in Rupee is also going to affect imports of various products necessary for CNC Machines.

Q. What's its current status in terms of using contemporary technologies, to be in step with the world?

The newer technology is available within country, but very few users want to invest in these contemporary technology at higher cost.

With low demand, the cost of technology remains high and this affects the possible sales. With enough demand, we can offer world class solution to domestic users at competitive cost.

Q. Are we self reliant when it comes to machine tools? Or do we still have to depend on imports, especially for special purpose machines?

We are not Self reliant in machine tools manufacturing as import still corners almost 60 % of market share. We depend on imports where volumes are very small for development within country and also where SPMs dedicated for components are already available abroad.

The other factor affecting is large scale import of used machines from overseas at very low prices from auctions and private sales.

Q. What have you to say on our quality standards and manufacturing excellence?

Our quality standards could be similar to standards in other countries. The necessary manufacturing technology is available to us in India. Most of the time, we do not get chance to use it, as Indian customer is not willing to pay for it to Indian machine tool manufacturer.

The common distrust of Indian user for Indian Machine Tool manufacturer to deliver solution is one of the major reason for high priced imports. A customer would pay Rs. 2 crores for a machine from Europe, but would bargain and haggle for same features in an Indian machines at 1 crore. This is most prominent in Government organizations and Pub-

lic sector units.

Q. How is our export performance and growth?

The Export Growth is so-so and not where we excel. We still do not Project an image where Made in India means Pride, Quality and Service. We still try to compete only on Price. We have talked at IMTMA about Selling Brand India more than selling individual company's products. However the idea has not been catching with most of the members.

Q. Coming to Solitaire Machine Tools (SMT), what precisely is your niche?

Our Niche is providing Total Grinding Solution in case of Centerless grinding. We work with our customers from start of the project where even their project reports are made jointly. We work every step of the way and offer services.

We have a sister plant in USA and which helps us keep abreast of technological developments in USA. Our collaborators in Italy also help us keep up with happenings in Europe. We Benchmark ourselves with major manufacturers in Europe and Japan.

Q. What is your current range of manufacture?

We currently manufacture Centerless grinders in small size with ability to grind 0.5 mm diameter to largest size where we can grind 300 mm in diameter. The entire range is covered with Sevendifferent models covering range of grinders built under License of Cincinnati Milacron of USA,



built under License of Bocca & Malandrone, Sunebo of Italy and grinders developed in house. All grinders are offered with 1 to 7 axis of CNC Grinder Controls and offered with wide variety of accessories, automation, gauging and anything required to meet customer's need.

We are developing Double Disk grinders at this stage withan Italian designer firm. It will be fully automated and would be suitable for mass production of components. The grinder will be launched in September 2013.

Q. Could you give some idea of your manufacturing facilities and quality obsession?

Solitaire has full machining and assembly facility at two of it's plants in Vadodara. The machining facilities include large HMCs, VMCs, Boring Machines, Slideway grinders, Surface grinders, Cylindrical grinders and host of other machines. Full inspection facility is available to inspect manufactured parts as well as cus-





tomers' components after trial grinding.

The Quality obsession was impregnated in working for first seven years by only exporting machines to USA and selling under name of Cincinnati Milacron. As of today, Solitaire has exported over 50 % of it's production of last 25 years.

Q. What are the innovations you have spearheaded so as to stay ahead?

We always have looked for challenges in grinding and accepted the same. Some of them have met with failure, but that brings out best out of our creativeness.

We have ground pins which weigh as small as 2 grams to truck axles which weigh 250 kg. In both extreme cases, we provide automation and wide variety of accessories.

To stay ahead of competition, we always look at applications, which are normally met by imports and offer our own solution at better price and service. We also work with our customers to develop new grinders

and processes by which quality and productivity goes up for better cost effectiveness for our customers. We are Partners in Productivity to our Customers.

Q. What are the value added services you offer?

We offer rebuilding and CNC retrofitment for Centerless grinders to our customers for their existing or used imported grinders. These grinders are also tooled up for components and carry same warranty as new grinders. We also offer automation for grinders or entire line of machines.

Q. What are the challenges ahead for the industry in general and SMT in particular?

The challenge ahead is to produce parts in industry at better price and quality. Machine Tool Industry has to gear up to this challenge, if we want to be part of Global market. At SMT, we work with many MNCs and other large Indian organizations to improve on quality and productivity so that our customers can compete in International market and grab major share of global market.

Q. How you look at the future?

The future for Machine Tool Industry is bright for those who want to move with continuous development to meet stringent demands. At SMT, we feel that we will continue to get challenges from Indian as well as Overseas customers and we will meet them by offering solution.

We cannot sit and watch world go by. We have to run and be ahead of Competition. ■

