

Interview

1 year operating the DECO «e», 10 years of DECO «a», 37 years of Bechler tailstock drilling unit. So many years spent pursuing the objective of precision (Iberian) and quality.

IN THOSE DAY, PRECISION IN SPAIN WAS SOMETHING OF A PIPE DREAM!

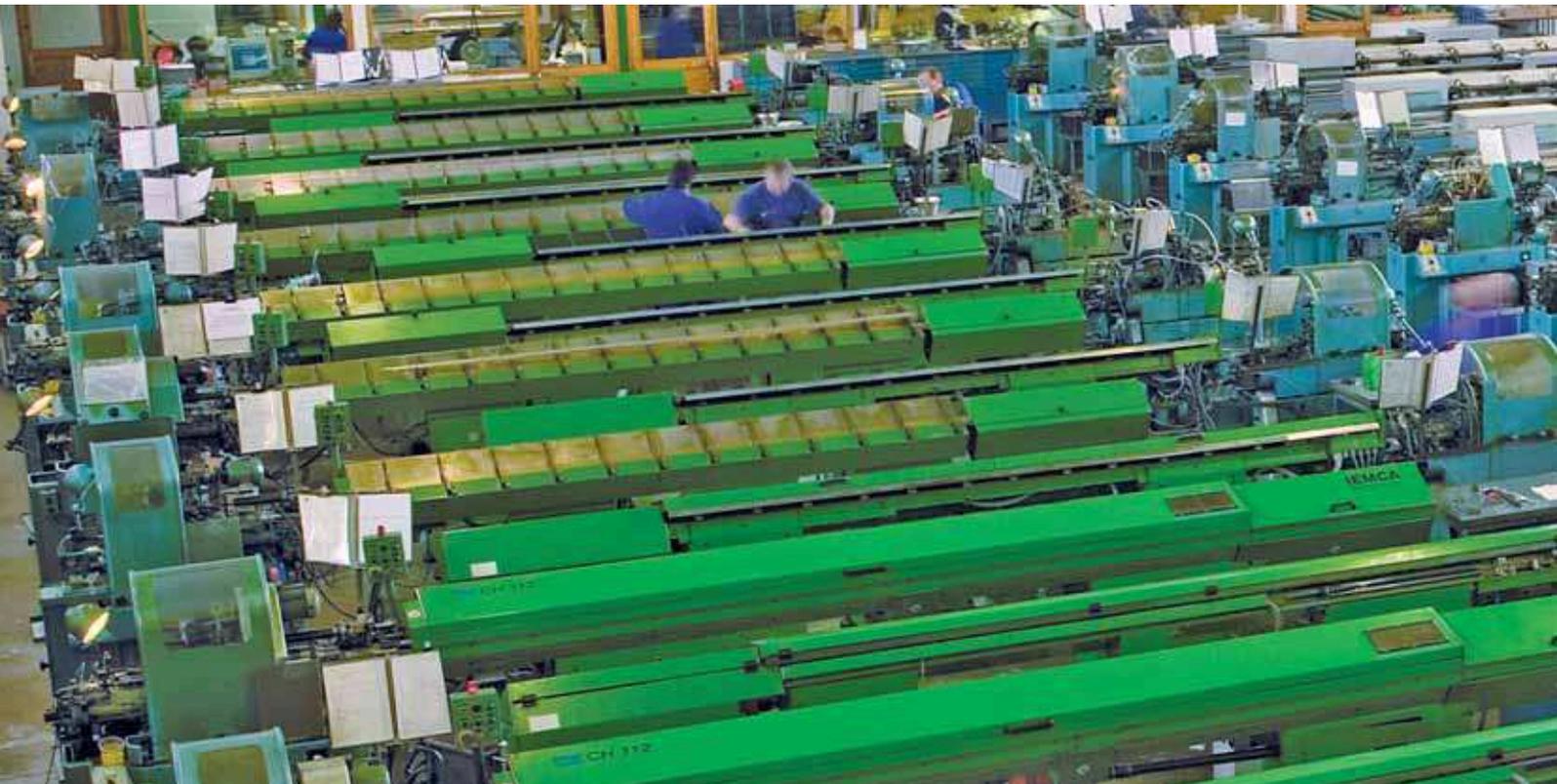
Meeting in Reus (Catalonia) with the Preciber S.A. management team.

It is common to state that bar-turning in Spain back in the Seventies is best illustrated by the square screw, an item so badly produced that its essential geometry was altered. However, during this period, there was a market for this type of workpiece, so imagine what it took to set up a company specializing in the manufacture of small, high-precision workpieces, so good that they brought a smile to your face. Mr. Correig and Mr. Casas took the decision to launch their business on 2 January 1971 with a single defining and guiding aim: that aim was to produce very high quality all the time!

These two men set themselves some clear rules – they would need the best possible machines, which

they would have to learn to operate to perfection. Following a thorough analysis of what was on offer, they decided to invest in 4 machines from Bechler AR. «These machines were the very best for back operations at that time» Mr. Casas tells us. He goes on to add: «The Bechler tailstock drill performed wonders and, even to this day, our cam-type machines produce high quality in normal operating mode and in back operations».

After manufacturing for the optical sector (high-end screws for hinges) and components for gas lighters, the market opened up for Preciber, by then with a reputation for its production quality. Today, the company has 21 DECO units and almost 50 cam-type



machines. Its guiding principle has remained the same, and centres around a single word: quality!

Preciber, probably the most dynamic exporter among the bar turning companies in Spain, achieving 75% of its annual sales internationally, is perfectly entitled to look its international competitors in the eye on an equal footing.

A short history lesson...

dm: You certainly needed a fair amount of courage and vision to launch yourselves into precision bar-turning work. What prompted you to take this decision?

Mr. Correig: We were both involved in the production of small workpieces, and we knew there was a market out there. We therefore chose our machine carefully, and our gamble has paid off. We still work in the same way today. Before launching the production of a new machine, we carefully examine all the solutions, carry out a production test with the machine and, if everything goes well, we add more machines. This is what has been happening with DECO «a» over the last 10 years, and with the «e» models over the last year or so. We source all our machines from a single manufacturer which enables

us to economize on training, and we benefit from the inherent synergy in numerous ways.

dm: Before we talk about your current set of machines, you mentioned that «there was a market out there» for your workpieces, but we have seen these types of component, particularly those used in the production of spectacle frames, migrate to other countries. How have you compensated for this disappearance?

Mr. Correig: Over the years, our cam-type machines, then our NC machines, have been tooled up for every conceivable kind of machining operation. We now have highly developed implementation capabilities for headstock as well as tailstock, i.e. normal and back, operations. Instead of trying to play "follow the workpiece", we decided to build even more strongly on our capabilities for manufacturing complex workpieces. Our DECO machines have equipment for polygon cutting, thread whirling, milling... the limits to which we can operate are very low. Since we are effectively able to turn our hands to almost anything, and always to do so at the very high standard of quality which is our hallmark, our markets naturally enough remain open to us.





MM. Correig and Casas, a perfect team to ensure the company's success.

dm: You have a perfect mastery of Bechler machines. What do you do to assure their maintenance and usage?

Mr. Casas: We navigated some tough times, and when Tornos bought back Bechler, we kind of lost our bearings, lost our points of contact and, for several years, we did not purchase any new machines. We acquired all the skills we need to safeguard maintenance for our old machines ourselves, and purchased second-hand Bechler machines to round off our machine shop.

More complex workpieces

dm: Given your great mastery of cam-type machines, why move to NC machines?

Mr. Casas: Our notion was to extend the range of workpieces we were able to produce, firstly into larger diameters and secondly into workpieces requiring even more complex machining operations. This is why we purchased one of the very first ever DECO 20 machines from Tornos. Our policy has always been to choose very well appointed machines which are capable of doing everything. We started by producing workpieces with a 10.5 mm diameter on our DECO 20 machines. We verified the machine, then we went on to purchase a further 20 DECO units!

dm: DECO 20? Isn't this machine a bit big for machining diameters of 10.5 mm?

Mr. Casas: At that time, Tornos did not have the DECO 13, and the DECO 10 was too small. We are very satisfied with our 20 mm machine and, of course, we now also have the 10 and 13 mm units, and we are still occasionally called upon to manufacture small 5 or 6 mm workpieces on our DECO 20. Quality and precision are perfectly in phase. That guarantees us flexibility!

Normally, we manufacture all the more complex workpieces on our NC machines, in preference to our cam-type machines. These are therefore complementary products.

dm: Are you still able to find operators for your cam-type machines?

Mr. Casas: There is no difference between operators of cam-type and of NC machines: we are simply unable to find personnel in Spain who are trained in bar-turning work. We therefore recruit mechanics and then train them up for our work entirely in-house. Our workforce is a multitasking one: all can operate cam-type and DECO machines. To equip someone with this level of mechanical expertise, we need somewhere between 3 and 4 years! There are great synergies between these two technologies. Given that cam-type technology is necessarily limiting in nature, we need to be very creative to find ways of machining our workpieces. This understanding and this creativity can then be used to maximum benefit by TB-DECO to program DECO machines.

Complementary machines

dm: You said that you were one of our first customers in the world to work with a DECO 20a, then with a 13a, then one of the first to work with DECO 10e and DECO 13e. How do you divide up your work across these different machines, and your cam-type machines?

Mr. Correig: Well the division of work between cam-type machines and DECO machines is a fairly simple one. First of all, all the "big workpieces"¹, the very complex workpieces, components made of very tough materials and short production runs are all machined on our DECO units. Only a very small number of our "cam-type" workpieces have migrated to DECO. I would have to say that the market for Preciber has developed along two distinctive lines. We have added to our range of CN machines, but at the same time, we have also added new units to our range of cam-type machines. If it is possible to manufacture a workpiece on a cam-type machine, then that's what we do with it! This is driven by commercial logic.

dm: Let's stay on the subject of commercial logic for a little longer: you now have DECO «a» and «e» units. What are the advantages of having both types of machine? Are the stated synergies really there?

Mr. Casas: Absolutely. We work with both types of machine, and the fact that they both get programmed in the same way, that is to say that they run the same programs, is a major advantage. The tool holders are interchangeable, but the philosophy is identical – it really is an ideal situation for having

these two types of machine. For us, this enables us to make better use of the «a» machines with small, highly complex workpieces, and to employ the «e» machines to focus on workpieces requiring only a few back operations. The compatibility of these two types of machine is a crucial factor, and certainly delivers real benefits to us!

dm: How do you go about choosing workpieces for your «a» and «e» machines?

Mr. Casas: We have a track record and a reputation for producing good components, and this helps us decide which machine to work on. We know these types of workpiece, and their needs in terms of machines. The choice is certainly a technical one, but cost-effectiveness also has role to play in our decision making process.

Mr. Correig: Workpieces can be manufactured at a certain price, and this price influences our ability to be competitive. If we are able to manufacture parts less expensively, we will find it easier to sell them. At the same time, we have never deviated from our guiding principle, which is never to compromise in terms of quality or precision. At the present time, our range of cam-type, DECO «a» and DECO «e» machines are all being well utilized, and we are manufacturing types of component which benefit from the advantages of each solution.

Global competition

dm: You are therefore highly competitive?

Mr. Correig: Our competitors also have DECO machines. We are highly competitive because we use our machines to the full extent of their capabilities and our workforce operates them in a creative manner. The fact that we have machines well suited to

¹ More than 10 mm!



Interview



The DECO 10e is the ideal complement to the DECO 10a in Preciber's plant.



the types of workpiece we manufacture is a key competitive factor.

dm: Do you have any workpieces which you used to machine on DECO «a» and which you now produce on the «e» machine?

Mr. Casas: One example would be dental implants! We started out on the DECO «a» machines because these are what we had at the time, and they enabled us to manufacture highly complex workpieces. However, these machines were never used to full capacity, and we could have been manufacturing even more complex workpieces on them. From that point, to free up capacity, and to produce in a more cost-effective manner, we started manufacturing those workpieces on a DECO «e». The transition is a fairly simple one, both in terms of programs and of equipment and tooling. Once these machines had gone into production, we were able to extend our range of services to include other workpieces and sectors.

dm: What is your return on investment?

Mr. Correig: The return on investment is good in both cases. With the «e» machine, since it cost less to purchase, we are able to sell its production output at lower prices. There is a kind of natural selection at work today: you can't sell components that are too expensive. Instead, you need to manufacture at the best possible price in order to sell at the best possible price. This company is run in a collaborative manner with close liaison between its technical and commercial directors - we communicate a great deal and always know where we are, in both commercial and technical terms.

dm: As we have seen today during this interview, the two aspects of "commercial" and "technical" are valued equally in this business – is it still as important to you today to stay involved personally?

Mr. Correig and Mr. Casas: Absolutely – whenever "the boss" is directly involved with production or with customers, there are by definition no middlemen, and this level of direct contact ensures that we understand one another perfectly and can respond rapidly to anything that is asked of us.

dm: Let's now talk about the future. I see that you have just enlarged your premises...

Mr. Correig: Indeed we are. We were starting to feel a bit confined, and this process takes its time. Enlarging a factory is not as "politically interesting"



Preciber's new premises at the end of the 2009 extension.

as opening a holiday club, and there has been some delay in getting official permission granted.

Mr. Casas: We have substantially increased the size of our machine shop and are working now with larger diameter workpieces. That means that we need more floorspace to accommodate our new machines. In addition, we wanted to offer our workforce better working conditions, larger changing rooms, a training room and a canteen. These changes were all completed in early 2009. We are expanding our business on an entirely self-financing basis, meaning that we are keeping our capital here in the company.

dm: In conclusion, what is the key to success for Preciber today?

Mr. Correig: The answer is one of a balance between numerous factors. We are doing things that need to be done to remain true to our guiding principle of "high quality and precision". Our workforce is highly skilled, and our system of ongoing in-house training runs very smoothly. We are directly and personally involved in the ongoing running of our business, and in the investments required to sustain it. We have a very high-calibre range of machines in our workshops. Our customers are loyal because they know that we are working for them.



INDUSTRIAS PRECIBER, S.A.

Founded: 1971
 Number of employees: 80
 Export: 75 % of annual sales
 Diameter ranges: 1 to 20 mm
 Production site: Reus/Tarragona (Sp)
 Certifications: ISO 9001:2000 certified by TÜV
 Expansion in 2008: The production floor area increases from 2300 to 3100 m²

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