

The professionals

THERE ARE MANY ARGUMENTS FOR BEING A JACK OF ALL TRADES, BUT MARZOCCHI POMPE BELIEVES IT PAYS TO BE A MASTER OF ONE – ESPECIALLY IN TODAY’S COMPETITIVE MARKET



Aldo Toscano, sales and marketing manager, Marzocchi Pompe

▶ If you’ve read the Sir Anthony Bamford interview on page 22, you’ll have noticed his admiration for component suppliers that specialise in, and are passionate about, one particular field. Italian company Marzocchi Pompe certainly falls under that description. Initially set up 61 years ago to provide shock absorbers to the nearby Ducati factory, it moved into the manufacture of external gear pumps and motors in 1961. This ‘two-wheeled’ side of the business was sold late in 2008, leaving the Bologna-based supplier – along with sister companies Lavin, its gear manufacturer, and automation engineering specialist Atma – freer than ever to concentrate on its own niche in the mobile hydraulics arena.

Nevertheless, I had to ask sales and marketing manager Aldo Toscano if the firm had ever been tempted to develop other kinds of pumps to expand market share.

“We came up with a design for an internal gear pump, but it would have required extensive capital investment for what isn’t a big share of the market,” he says. “We had several meetings about piston pumps, but it’s taken other suppliers about 10 years to develop their own product and then maybe another two or three to fine-tune them.

“So we have recently reconfirmed that we will be even more focused on gear pump products – and having a full line-up [displacements range from 0.12cc up to 200cc, with pressures to 300 bar] will certainly give us an advantage. There are not many suppliers producing pumps in the smaller displacements – almost everybody is in the 2-200cc range – and I think it’s one of our specialities that the market is recognising.

“Plus, because we are so focused,” he continues, “it’s easier

for us to invest in those products – in their design, assembly and testing – helping us to leap ahead of our competitors.”

Does this mean that when he’s scouring for new business he targets only those applications using gear pumps from a more diversified manufacturer?

“Well, there are millions of them used each year, but it is certainly viable for our products to replace vane pumps, because they can offer higher pressure with lower noise,” he claims.

The company is such a specialist, in fact, that it has supplied components for high-performance niche applications, such as Formula 1 since the late 1970s. With an emphasis on small sizes and light (read: titanium) weight, and the resultant cost implications, a trickle-down of technology is unlikely to reach the off-highway sector, but it has pushed the company to think more about the noise issues.

“We have developed a ‘silent’ pump – due to be launched in 12-18 months – that will also be much better in terms of performance and price. We’ve used new alloys, and developed a new gear profile and compensation area to reduce the noise, and this should be particularly popular for use in electric forklifts.”

Increased efficiency

Gear pumps may be relatively simple products, but there nevertheless remains a notable discrepancy in their mechanical or automatic efficiencies from one supplier to another. But apart from the obvious areas of tolerances and materials, Toscano asserts that increased cleanliness at the assembly and testing stage is perhaps the area in which the greatest improvements in their efficiency could be made in coming years.

“Our work environment, the assembly process and the way we move parts within the company must be clean, so we have invested a lot in that,” he elaborates. “We wash every single component of the pump

before assembly. A clean product, without any burring or other contamination inside, will prevent contamination of the rest of the hydraulic system, resulting in longer life, and less servicing on valves, etc. It’s very difficult for some suppliers to do this, but we can certify the level of contamination and therefore guarantee the product is not contaminated.

“We’ve also invested a great deal in the hydraulic motors, especially in their design and testing, so that at the end of the process we are 100% sure that the product is performing optimally. Investing even more in specific testing in the pursuit of greater efficiency and reliability could be a barrier for a number of diversified suppliers.”

What about in 20 years’ time then? Will the gear pump still be at the heart of such a wide range of machinery?

“I don’t expect major changes in its design, but I do think we will see more integration with the rest of the hydraulic system because components will need to be smaller, lighter and virtually silent. So there will probably be changes in materials, and machines in the future will rely much more on electrohydraulics. And despite the big volumes of gear pumps, I don’t expect other players to enter the market – in fact, the smallest and the weakest will disappear.”

You can go one of two ways in the face of such conditions – branch out, or continue doing what you do best. Suppliers that offer a one-stop shop may save their clients time and money in the putting together of a hydraulic system, but Toscano believes Marzocchi’s decision to continue specialising is already paying off: “Buying everything from a single source can save a lot of hassle, but it can be at the expense of flexibility. We’re already seeing big players that preferred to buy the complete package making the switch. It’s a bit like choosing your own hi-fi system rather than buying a midi unit.”

It’s music to the ears of the end user demanding ever-greater performance! **IVT**

“WE WASH EVERY COMPONENT OF THE PUMP BEFORE ASSEMBLY TO PREVENT CONTAMINATION OF THE REST OF THE SYSTEM, RESULTING IN LONGER LIFE”



CONTACT

www.marzochigroup.com
pompe@marzocchi.it