

Spending; growing

Kepston upgrades grinding capability with Hauser; Electro-Discharge installs eight Agie Charmilles machines; Bernard Holmes Precision invests in technology, quality systems and people; plus subcontracting news in brief

Aldridge, West Midlands-based specialist subcontractor Kepston (01922 743133) is set to substantially increase its top end grinding capability, having spent £2.5 million in the past two years on machine tools, infrastructure and additional personnel, with the latest purchase a £600,000 Hauser H35-400 jig grinder, supplied by Hardinge.

Says general manager Andy Oakley: "We believe there are now few, if any, high precision grinding subcontractors in the UK who can match us for sustained quality and precision.

"It has been a conscious decision by our managing director, Brent Millage, to maintain investment and, more vitally, purchase the very best machines."

The Hauser H35 will be delivered this month and sit alongside Kepston's other Hauser jig grinder – an S35 – which has been a cornerstone of Kepston's success.

Says Mr Oakley: "That machine has hardly missed a beat in 13 years. It maintains 1 micron surface finishes, day in, day out, and has been a phenomenal contributor to our business. Now we need more jig grinding capacity and capability, and the new H35 will give us just that."

For the new machine, positional accuracy across the X, Y and W axes is maintained at 0.0020 mm, with the core of the machine being a robust, distortion-free module. Guideways are either sliding or linear, with the X and Y axis guideways hand scraped. The control system is Fanuc 300i, with integrated PC driving unique Hauser software cycles to ensure total compatibility with all jig grinding requirements.

However, while much is similar, an area that Kepston highlights will positively impact on their operations is productivity. Unlike its

predecessor, the latest Hauser has a fully programmable ATC with 12 magazine positions, permitting automatic machining, with grinding wheels from 3 to 50 mm diameter.

This will enable lengthy unmanned machining cycles, overnight if necessary, which will boost capacity and productivity in the precision grinding of some components.

CLASSIC SUBCONTRACT DILEMMA

Explains Mr Oakley: "We experience the classic subcontractor dilemma of never knowing what's coming through the door and, with the work we do for F1 teams in particular, the tasks can often be complex, time consuming and require exceptionally tight tolerances.

"The additional capacity created by the new Hauser will address many of these issues, as well as open new horizons for



Kepston general manager Andy Oakley (left) with managing director Brent Millage

work we currently cannot accommodate," he concludes.

EDM precision subcontract specialist Electro-Discharge (01384 245970) has boosted its capacity, placing an eight-machine order with Agie Charmilles for equipment that was completed early in 2013. In November 2012, the Netherton, West Midlands-based company won a significant new contract requiring the manufacture of thousands of high precision, complex EDM parts throughout 2013, which meant the company's existing machining

KMF Young Engineer of the Year Awards shift up a gear

Launched in 2012, the KMF Young Engineer of the Year Awards (YEOTY) initiative was hailed as a resounding success by students, teachers, parents and even local MPs. Since then, the event has grown in scale.

The challenge set by subcontractor KMF (Precision Sheet Metal) for the inaugural event was for students in years 8, 9, 10 and 11 to design and manufacture a clock, using a standard mechanism provided by KMF. In that first year, over 1,700 students, from 16 local schools, participated, with the winners being recognised at a spectacular awards evening at Stoke City's Britannia Stadium, hosted by enthusiastic TV personality Jason Bradbury.

Encouraged by the success of this event, Newcastle under Lyme KMF's managing director Gareth Higgins has expanded the competition for 2013/2014, partnering with The Greenpower Education Trust to challenge students in year 10 to build and race their own electric-powered car. Full feature online: www.machinery.co.uk/58598

