

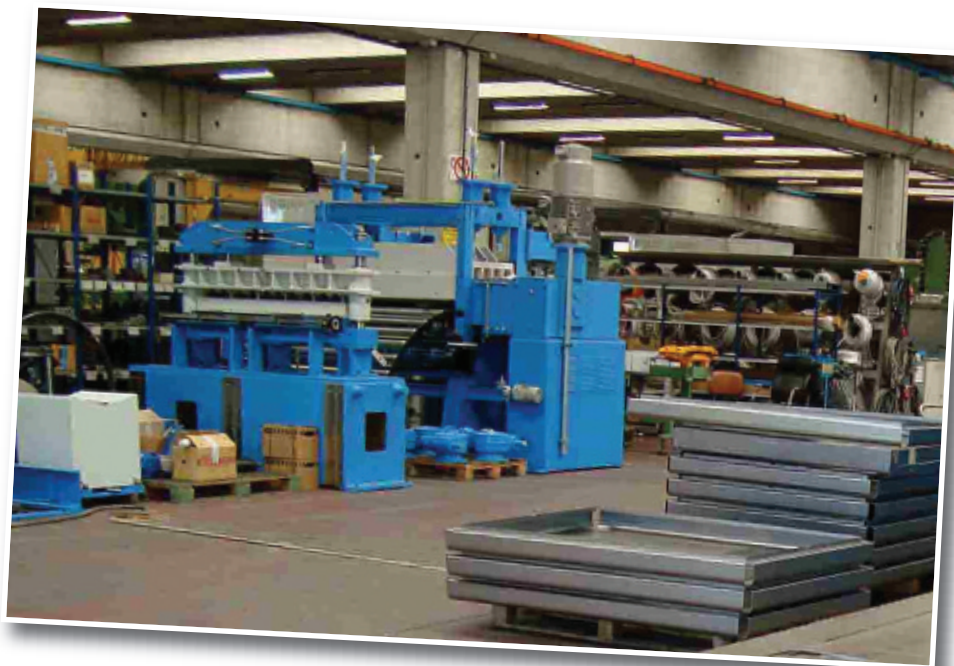
"IRON SpA, an Italian manufacturer of specialist coil processing lines, celebrates 40 years in the industry this year."

# A TOUCH OF IRON

**IRON SpA director, Massimo Dalla Pace, tells ISMR how he has streamlined operations and efficiency to position the company more competitively for the eventual upturn in the market**

IRON SpA was established in 1969 and manufactures a range of cut to length lines, slitting lines, coil metal sheet technologies, forming, punching, stamping, bending flexible and integrated sheet metal working solutions with a punch and bending solution or laser cutting from coil.

It mainly sells to large Tier One suppliers (such as Stadco), subcontractors and OEMs (such as Magna). The majority of its customer base is in western Europe. IRON has supplied numerous strip cutting lines throughout the world and specialises in the development of



specialised, complex rapid operation lines that are able to process pre-painted material

Last year, ISMR flew to its HQ in Mareno Di Piave (Italy) to view one of the largest and most complex punching and bending blanking lines

**Above and below: Customised and complex lines built at IRON's plant in Mareno di Piave (Italy).**

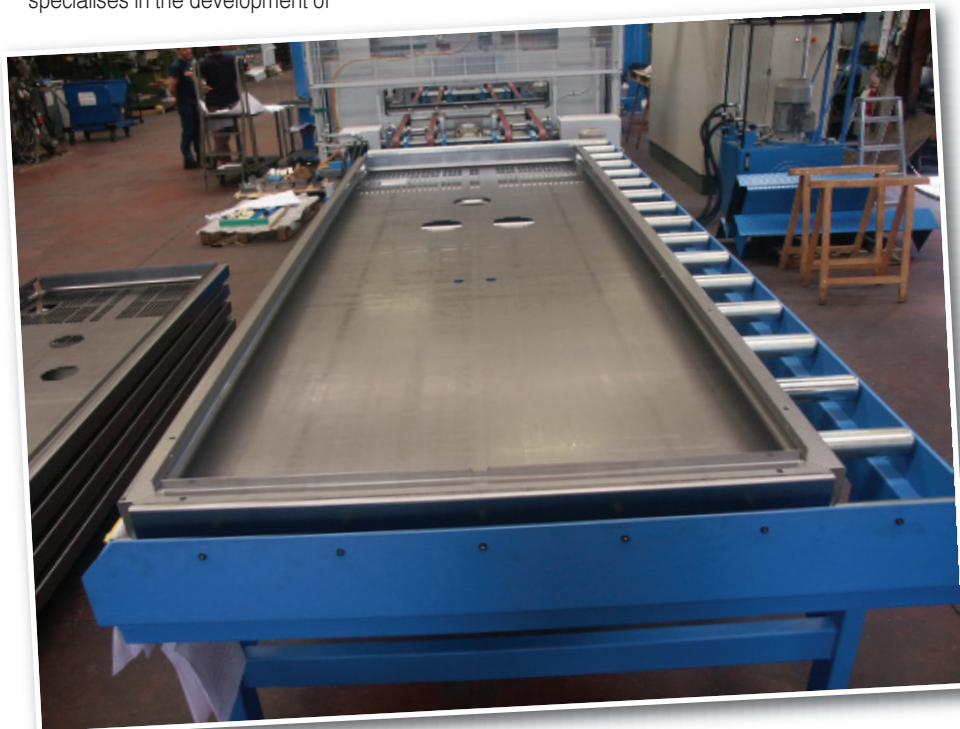
ever built at IRON's plant in Italy - the line could process cold rolled or pre-painted material of 2mm thick with a maximum width of 1500mm and a maximum bending length of 3600mm (positive and negative bends).

### 40 years in the business

This year, the family-run company is celebrating 40 years in the sheet metal business with its customers and staff including an Open House for a week in October as well as a new DVD to celebrate the anniversary (available on request) and a staff party.

"At our Open House, we displayed a new punching and bending line for a Russian customer and a heavy coil stamping line (700 N/mm<sup>2</sup> yield point), with welding features, that we built for Lentlab, a Swedish customer," explained director, Massimo Dalla Pace, to ISMR. "In today's tough economic climate, we are using the opportunity to increase the speed, performance, quality and reliability of our equipment and our internal processes so that we can be more efficient."

This is the first time that the company has seen



# FOCUS ON COIL PROCESSING



Bottom: IRON's recent Open House in October - new lines are on display.



**“You hardly ever see second-hand IRON equipment on the market and that is because our machines are designed, built and supported to run for years”**

prices more competitive,” Dalla Pace continued.

In this way, IRON hopes to position itself more competitively for the eventual upturn in the market and streamline its operations and efficiency for the future.

#### **New market focus**

Massimo Dalla Pace has noted the trend to outsource projects and high volume manufacturing to lower cost economies in Asia and eastern Europe, but has kept IRON's strategy firmly on high value manufacturing, and special projects, to keep its European customer base and HQ.

“Europe needs to develop strategies to compete against lower cost economies,” he told ISMR. “We are not looking, however, at taking advantage of lower labour rates to manufacture our products further east. We want to keep our knowledge in the market, so we need to keep our focus on what we do best, developing a range of high quality specialised lines, offering good technical assistance and keeping our customers happy, rather than diversifying our product range.”

“We do not intend to add lower cost products from Asian or eastern European producers either to our product portfolio, as others have done. We are centred on development in Europe and our target markets are Europe, Russia and the Middle East. The next market targets, for us, are India, South America and North Africa.”

Accordingly, IRON has spent time developing networks and promoting itself in these markets –

such a sustained downturn in the economy, in 40 years of working, but Dalla Pace and his father predict that the market (specifically, the European economy) will improve in a few months.

“In the meantime, this has given us breathing space to improve the organisation of our technical department and to improve/set up higher quality processes such as improving our 3D design software and static/dynamic FEM. We are also improving CAD/CAM systems in the workshop to link our technical design department more strongly with the workshop. This has always traditionally been a human resource issue, rather than a cost issue, and we now have the opportunity to do this and streamline our operations, reduce waste and improve operational efficiencies to make our



# FOCUS ON COIL PROCESSING



One of the largest and most complex punching and bending blanking lines ever built by IRON.

its new product DVD is distributed in four languages – and expects to reap the benefit in next year's figures.

"We think the turnover this year will be 10-15% less than last year (around 9 million euros), because of the global economic downturn, and we aim to keep the same turnover next year," he

told ISMR. "We improved our presence in new market areas this year and we hope to get the benefit of that next year. Now that we have streamlined our operations and made a number of new efficiencies, we should be well placed for the eventual market upturn."

However, Dalla Pace is keen to highlight that IRON's focus on quality and reliability will never change.

"Since the start of the company, 40 years ago, quality and reliability have always been key cornerstones of IRON's ethos," he concluded. "You hardly ever see second-hand IRON equipment on the market and that is because our

machines are designed, built and supported to run for years. We have delivered over 30,000 line components since we started. Many of our lines are still running after 35 years! We are proud of that – and we have never lost a customer. But we are constantly striving to be better."

## CONTACT

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See IRON in Hall 8, on Stand 8501 at BLECH EXPO in Stuttgart.

## COIL COATING ACADEMY

Want to learn more about the coil coating process? Why not try ECCA's free courses from its new coil coating academy?

The European Coil Coating Association (ECCA) has just launched a new coil coating academy for those who wish to learn more about pre-painted material. The aim is to improve understanding of pre-painted material and the coil coating process and markets.

"Pre-painted metal production has developed over the last forty years into a very clean process. Most installations are of a size which requires permitting under various European regulations and so the coil coating process is carried out under very tightly controlled conditions. Unlike many smaller post-coating operations, this provides an assured level of environmental standards to at least those regulated for at a European level," the association told ISMR.

The courses at the academy are free of charge. When a user has registered, he/she can enroll on one of ECCA's courses, complete the modules and earn an ECCA degree.

There are eight modules in all.

"We realise that not everyone needs to know the same things, so we have organised the eight modules into courses," the association told ISMR. "This allows a student to work towards a

### COIL COATING MODULES

- Module 1: An Introduction to Coil Coating.
- Module 2: The Coil Coating Process
- Module 3: Substrates for Coil Coating – Steel
- Module 4: Substrates for Coil Coating – Aluminium
- Module 5: Pre-treatment
- Module 6: Organic Coatings
- Module 7: Environmental Aspects of Coil Coating
- Module 8: Markets for Pre-Painted Metal

completed qualification without doing the less relevant sections. If they want to know a bit about everything, enrolling on "the full programme" will enable them to see everything.

"If, for example, a student only wants a brief introduction, then he/she can register on The Basics which just contains Module 1, giving a brief introduction to all aspects of coil coating. The student will still be able to complete an exam and obtain a certificate of completion."

### New congress in Brussels

Innovation in coil coating has not just improved the durability of coatings, but has also led to a more modern colour palette and the widespread use of metallic colours in buildings.

ECCA will be holding its Autumn Congress in Brussels (Belgium) on 23-24 November 2009. The Keynote address will be given by Peter van den Houde, Chief Economist (ING Belgium/Economic Research) on "Economic trends and the outlook for the European economy".

On Day One of the event, Oxford Brookes University will give a presentation on "Metal roofing on residential buildings in Europe: A dynamic thermal simulation study."

On Day Two of the event, Ulrich Strohlbeck (Fraunhofer Institut für Produktionstechnik und Automatisierung, Germany) will present a paper on "Powder coating of coil: Innovative processes for new products and surfaces".

Two speakers from Henkel, German will also unveil how the steel industry can generate add-on business in the post-finishing market. Measurement techniques, chemicals and cure monitoring of coil coated products are also on the agenda for Day Two.

## CONTACT

To register for ECCA's free coil coating academy courses, please access <http://www.prepaintedmetalacademy.eu>

To join ECCA or register to attend the Autumn Congress, please e-mail [info@prepaintedmetal.eu](mailto:info@prepaintedmetal.eu)