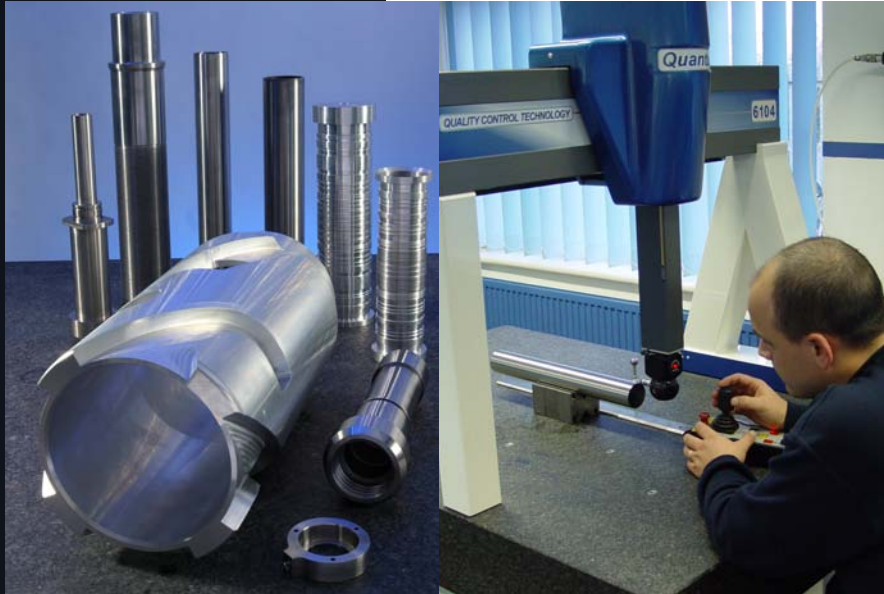




Editorial for Production Engineering Solutions

Hone-All Precision's Machining capability is ideally suited to mid-range Oil and Gas components



Typical examples of components machined in Hone-All Precision's 'one stop shop'.

Hone-All Precision's quality and inspection department plays a key role in delivering high quality machined components.

The North Sea, according to Trade & Industry Secretary Alistair Darling, is absolutely critical to meeting the UK's energy needs. In November 2006 he spoke of 15 to 20 billion barrels of oil remaining in North Sea reserves and of the pioneering spirit that is now driving a second wave of North Sea exploration and development. This, he said, is indicative of an industry that is self-confident, innovative, and looking to the future, not the past.

The Trade & Industry Secretary referred to recent £100 million-plus investments made by the oil, gas and petroleum industry multi-nationals. But in welcoming news of a new oil find by REACH – a small Banchory, Aberdeenshire-based company linked with Petro-Canada, an oil and gas company with international interests – he also pointed out that smaller companies are also innovating, linking up and developing new finds.

All of which will have a significant impact on the oil and gas industry's infrastructure, with the prospect of continuing North Sea orders for specialist OEMs and sub-contractors throughout the UK. And it is certainly good news for Hone-All Precision

Limited, a small 25-employee sub-contractor based in Dunstable that has seen its involvement with the oil and gas industry increase steadily on the back of its expertise in machining exotic and difficult-to-machine materials.

Although honing remains a core capability, the ISO 9001-accredited company prefers the description 'one stop shop' and, according to Colin Rodney, Managing Director, its machining capability is ideally suited to mid-range oil and gas components. "We machine components up to 250 mm diameter by 3 metres long within our 10,000 sq. ft. facility, and we provide a fast response and a tightly controlled quality environment, both absolute essentials when dealing with the oil and gas industry. This side of our business is increasing rapidly and is a major factor driving our investment in new machines, most recently in a £100,000 Boehringer VDF B3 deep hole borer that can bore up to 140 mm diameter in billets up to 200 mm diameter and 2 metres long.

"Investment is, of course, a continuing process – installing a third deep hole borer has resulted in more orders, with many of these components requiring additional machining. Inevitably, this has increased the pressure, for example, on our turning section, so we are now about to order another CNC lathe...and so it goes on."

Although investing in new equipment is not viewed as the primary route to attracting new customers, increasing capacity is undoubtedly helping to retain existing business and to enable Hone-All Precision to compete in the demanding world of oil and gas. "It's an indication of how difficult it can be for a small sub-contractor to strike a sensible balance that in 2006 a sudden surge in demand, mainly from the oil and gas industry, did have an adverse effect on lead times," says Andrea Rodney, Director. "We had become a victim of our own success and, despite the ongoing investment programme, we did suffer a short-term lack of capacity. It took time to bring in the new machine and for additional recruitment and training.



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HoneAll

Hone-All Precision Limited

Our emphasis is on continuous improvement because that benefits both the customer and the people who work here. One of the many changes that has taken place as a response to the competitive pressures of our oil and gas customers is the creation of cells to minimise the movement of heavy material and components through the machine shop, while allowing individual operators to look after more than one machine and encouraged, with on-the-job training, to broaden their skills set."

Typical oil and gas components machined by Hone-All Precision include tubing hangers, turbine housings, rotors, flow tubes, sample bottles, manifolds and high-pressure assemblies. Materials tend to be high specification alloys such as Inconel, 4140 and 17/4PH stainless steel as well as more unusual materials such as Ferrulium, Staballoy and Datalloy. And reflecting the nature of the oil and gas industry, most of the orders are small to medium batch, although they do repeat on a regular basis.

Because obtaining orders has to be first priority for any sub-contractor that intends to stay in business, it is often the case that 'paperwork' tends to be pushed to one side. Hone-All Precision's role as a single source supplier of fully machined components means it is more aware than most of project managing the entire production process, taking account of the complete traceability that a safety critical industry like oil and gas demands. This, says Andrea Rodney, is what lies behind the company's involvement with the development and use of a computerised production control system now marketed by Stone Technology under the name RedAnt.

"With RedAnt, everything you need to know in order to control every aspect of a business is here – because it has been developed and backed financially by a small group of SMEs who really understand the manufacturing process."

Although Hone-All Precision, which also services other high value-added, short time industry sectors such as motor sport, gets much of its oil and gas work via recommendations, it recognises the value of participating in national exhibitions such as Autosport Engineering. "Taking part is always worthwhile, if only because it helps to promote Hone-All Precision's 'unique selling point'," says Andrea Rodney. "Our combination of in-house services – honing, deep hole boring, gun drilling, turning, grinding, milling and EDM drilling – is an unusual one that we believe allows customers to benefit from a more direct involvement with component quality, cost and lead times."

Price and component quality are always factors in a customer's decision to place an order but, according to Andrea Rodney, lead times are increasingly at the top of the agenda. "With such large sums being invested by the oil and gas industry, delays to any aspect of exploration and eventual production can be incredibly expensive and failure by a supplier to deliver on time is understandably regarded as unacceptable. Committing to a continuous improvement programme that focuses on delivery performance is, we believe, key to staying one step ahead of the competition. It is, therefore, an integral part of a 'best practice' initiative that began back in 2000 with invaluable advice and assistance from Cranfield University and the creation of a long-term 'business excellence' strategy."



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