

Delapena transformed

By Wendy Harbutt, DoubleDAYLIGHT

Experienced engineers will recognise the name Delapena as synonymous with honing. Having spent some years quietly in development, this history-rich company has now emerged transformed. This caused quite a stir at MACH 2014 and many are now curious about the new face of Delapena.

The Hero's Journey, is a compelling story pattern that we all recognise and it can be seen in tales from every age and from all parts of the world: The hero ventures forth for adventure, is challenged, often with peril and dilemma, experiences revelations, is reborn or transformed and returns triumphant to bestow gifts or advantage on others. The arc of this classic structure can be seen in Delapena's chart to success and the dramatic chapters capture attention, with the darker moments contrasted brightly with its reborn strength.

Delapena has had an epic journey and today the company stands ready for a whole new chapter. From the highs and lows of its long history, it has been reborn by a parent that cares for it and ambitious leaders that have brought talent and innovation to the firm. With the strength of the new E Series of electronically-controlled honing machines, Delapena plans not only to bridge the skills gap in honing, but to transform beliefs about the potential and scope for honing. It appears to be game for challenging the engineering world!

Delapena's proposition is disarmingly simple; to take any part and to provide the fixtures, tooling, abrasives, machine and process to deliver a push-button honing operation. With the aim of being blissfully straightforward, the company hopes to encourage more to use honing, avoiding any reticence about needing speciality skill to make honing a valuable production process. Delapena technology has deskilled operation entirely and, once programmed via intuitive touchpad or uploaded via USB, the E Series machines can be safely and reliably operated by unskilled operatives, claiming rapid and repeatable results to accuracy within a single micron.

With improved stock removal capability, Delapena says we should no longer think of honing as purely a finishing process. It claims that grinding workload can be efficiently included in the honing operation, with potential to remove a stage from the production process. Furthermore, it asserts that lapping time can be significantly reduced with its honing process as the latest machines can get much closer to the required size, leaving only the minimum amount of material necessary for final lapping. Indeed, in some cases, Delapena says that its customers have dispensed with lapping altogether, given the tolerance, accuracy and finish provided by technically-advanced honing.

Today Delapena emerges from five years of internal development. It has new machines, new divisions specialising in abrasives and oil and a webshop for global sales. Its British factory is immaculate and hums with an optimistic air of expectancy as managing director, Martin Elliott, explains: "We've spent years preparing for this moment and now we're ready to relaunch Delapena. Those that know us need to take a fresh look and we're excited to offer honing to many more industries and sectors."



Future focus

Ready to 'boldly go' with honing, Delapena now prepares itself to move into the fine finishing of shafts and holes, particularly supported by its new grinding and industrial abrasives division and specialist oils business. According to Martin Elliott, its next venture will be into the tube honing market for oil and gas, a rapidly growing opportunity that the company has identified as being ripe for honing development and a sector that has made increasing demands on the business in recent months.

Interest is reported to be coming from all around the world to represent Delapena and the company is now in talks with interested parties from Russia, Asia and South America. This would expand its current distribution network in over 18 countries.

The final word on the future for Delapena goes to the hero in the journey, chairman David Arthur: "Our intention is to double the size of Delapena in the next two years and, whilst that may sound ambitious, we believe it's entirely possible. We have everything in place and hunger for that success; it's as if we were sitting on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral with the countdown sequence in our ears... we're ready for take-off and our trajectory will be impressive."

A history lesson

Created in 1927 by namesake Leslie Delapena, the honing specialist began life distributing products from America. It introduced the honing process to the UK and in the war years, when ships weren't making it to home soil from production in the USA, permission was granted to Delapena to manufacture similar machines and accessories in support of British engineering, to aid the war effort.

Initially based in Wakefield, but moving to its long-term home in Cheltenham in Gloucestershire in 1947, Delapena grew rapidly and

by the 1960's the firm employed over 400 people. It was involved in introducing honing to lots of new processes and enjoyed plenty of opportunity in the boom years of British manufacture. As a sideline during this time, Delapena invented induction heating, a non-core technology that the company sold, which subsequently went on to be developed into what we now know as the microwave.

The demise of the British car industry in the 1980's served as a body blow for Delapena and the company contracted significantly. Yet it continued to innovate and by the late 1980's it launched the first electronic honing machine, the 'E3000'. This was hoped to be its golden goose and early sales proved both healthy and noticeable. This caught the attention of a major German manufacturer and as machines began to be exported to Europe, it launched a successful purchase bid. Delapena was sold and, whilst the electronic control was perhaps ahead of its time, its machines were manufactured in Germany, badged and sold by its new parent. Delapena's British heart and headquarters diminished to a desperate condition.

By 2006 Delapena's owners were ready to divest themselves of the UK company and offered an ultimatum to industry consultant, David Arthur to 'buy it or we will close it'. Gladly at this pivotal moment David chose to invest, to rescue the business and restore it to former glory. He recognised the huge potential that the company had and knew that, having been starved of investment for 20 years, with the right input and nurturing it could be breathed back to life.

His first challenge was to stabilise Delapena financially and by 2008 he had pulled the ailing ship back into profitability. All began to



look good and the morale of the team was lifted to optimistic excitement. Then, in late 2009 the recession hit, with the potential to scupper Delapena for good. At this lowest moment, David decided to retrench and, apparently perversely, to invest heavily, to build the business from within. Following his instinct and belief, he brought automotive expert Martin Elliott in to share his experience of cutting-edge manufacture, including lean process, and tasked him with developing a suite of new electronic machines that would propel Delapena to a competitive position.

Martin, now managing director of Delapena, started the company transformation by bringing all manufacturing in-house.

Partnering with Siemens, the company developed an electronic control system for its machines to not only offer numerically precise, reliable and repeatable honing, but to extend a global reach for remote diagnosis and maintenance.

The vision for Delapena was to offer a complete honing solution; not only the innovative, technically-advanced machines, but also the tooling, fixtures, abrasives, oil, service and support that would form a complete package. The aim was to bring together the wealth of experience and specific skill in the business (one engineer has been with the business for 38 years), with all the latest developments in world-class engineering, to be sold not only by traditional routes to market, but also through e-commerce with transparent global pricing. And so began five years of quiet development from which the company is now ready to relaunch.

Delapena Honing is based in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and employs 38 staff. It has 18 distributors and agents around the world and a strategic partnership with Wendt India, a member of the Murugappan Group

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