United Kingdom

Ferro (Midlands) Ltd

Start-up builds its future on refurbished AMADA Machines

Ferro (Midlands) Ltd, which began operations in 2019, has used the success already enjoyed by the business to invest in new machine tools from AMADA. Even the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic did not deter Ferro from its ambition to grow the company and, in June 2020, an AMADA LCG-3015 3.5 kW laser cutter and AMADA HFE-1003 press brake arrived at its facility in Market Drayton, Shropshire. **Both of these preowned machines, which were installed and running within five weeks of first contact, have been fully refurbished by the AMADA team of expert engineers at its UK headquarters in Kidderminster.**

The formation of Ferro was driven by Malcolm Evans and Lee Brookes after they decided to amalgamate the skill sets of companies they owned previously (one business focused on design and the other on fabrication). The pair had worked together on various projects over many years and decided to base their new business on a natural integration of capabilities, knowledge and vision. Over 65 years of combined experience now leads a team of young, skilled and enthusiastic people.

With around 9,000 sq ft of space in total, Ferro today offers everything from product design and development, through laser cutting and bending, to welding, powder coating and assembly. As a result, one-stop services can be provided to a much larger customer segment.

While this ambitious company's new investments will help fulfil its subcontract potential, Ferro has developed a number of products in-house that will also benefit from the machines, including laser-cut and folded gas cylinder storage lockers for the campervan, motorhome and commercial vehicle market. These safety-approved lockers, which are designed to contain gas in the event of cylinder leakage and vent it through the floor of the vehicle, feature an innovative removable front door that was designed in-house. Over 5000 have already been manufactured and supplied in the UK alone.

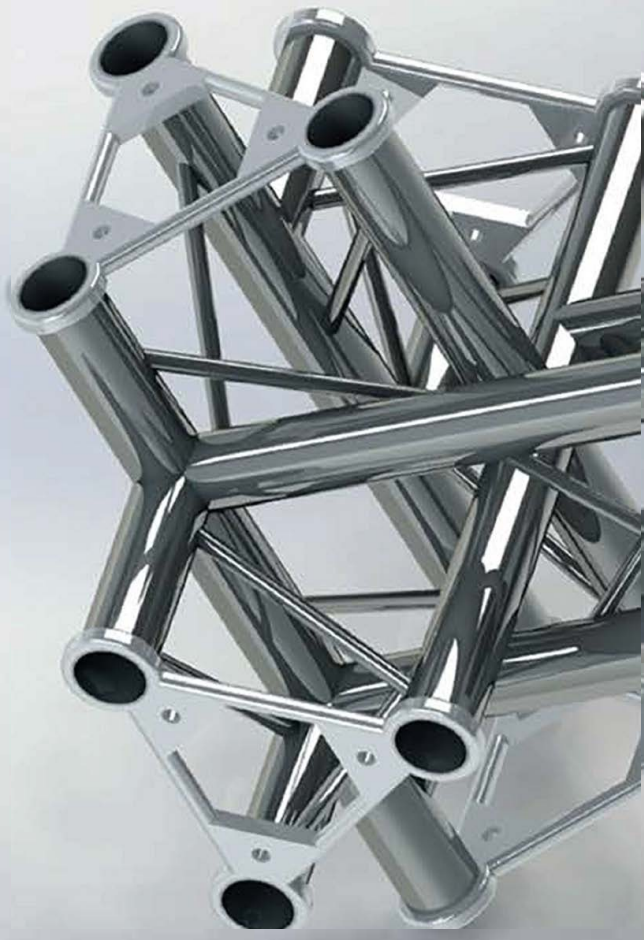
Plenty of bespoke work is also undertaken for clients in the construction and architecture industries, where products include balustrades, stainless steel hand rails, balconies, stairs and stadium seating.

Co-founder and company director Malcolm Evans, who has 18 years of industrial experience in engineering and supply services, sets out the reasons for investing in AMADA machines: "We had reached the point – just before the COVID-19 pandemic – when our outsourced laser-cutting spend was on parity with the running costs of having our own laser and housing it in a newly constructed unit."

With the arrival of the coronavirus crisis, the co-owners had a decision to make but, after a short period of reflection, decided that their investment plans should continue.

"In situations like these you can either batten down the hatches and wait to weather the storm, or carry on," says Mr Evans. "We knew that when peak of the pandemic began to pass we would likely pick up work due to the decision of competitors to close."

Indeed, the company soon secured a new customer that manufactures structural steel modules which allow for the rapid expansion or creation of hospital units. Ferro was asked to produce cleats for connecting the steel framework, all of which are now laser-cut and folded on the AMADA laser cutter and press brake.



Although Ferro initially considered low-cost options for its capital investments, including machines on eBay, the company was wary of the fact that it had not operated this type of kit previously.

"The idea of installing machines like these by ourselves, then working out how to program and use them soon became pretty daunting," says Mr Evans. "I know a few others who have gone down this road and most end up calling in the OEM's engineers to sort things out. We decided we could get into a world of pain by not going through an authorised machine-tool subsidiary or dealership. We'd seen AMADA machines at other companies and heard good reports, so they were our first choice."

With its AMADA LCG-3015 3.5 kW laser cutter Ferro provides a complete sheet-metal laser-cutting service for a range of materials including steel, stainless steel and aluminium, from 1.2 to 12mm thick. Working with the same materials, the AMADA HFE-1003 press brake is available to complement the laser cutter, or can be offered as a stand-alone service.

Further recent investments at Ferro include a tube-bending machine, which was acquired to help meet demand for 800-1000 coach seats per month. The company has also installed a powder-coating oven, which at 8 by 6 metres is said to be the largest in Shropshire, and probably in the West Midlands, Staffordshire and Wales.

Ferro's range of recent capital investments is already paying dividends, with the company reporting a surge in uptake.

"We now have other fabricators getting in touch, either because they want parts laser-cut, or laser-cut and powder-coated," says Mr Evans. "Although we initially bought these machines for our own needs, they have helped us create a subcontract service that we can offer to others. The fact we can go from raw metal to finished product under one roof is a huge selling point."

Work of course continues on Ferro's own products, with the company currently in the process of developing an e-cargo trailer. Due to the closure of many city centres to traffic for reasons of pollution and congestion, a number of logistics companies are looking at using bikes rather vans for urban deliveries. E-cargo bikes feature an electric motor and do not incur congestion or emission charges.

Ferro today employs eight personnel and recently added another 2,000 sq ft unit to its property portfolio for housing its fabrication capabilities. In the company's short existence to date it has already completed around 400 projects, processed 6000 tonnes of metal and met the requirements of 270 satisfied customers. Now, with the AMADA machines in place, Ferro is set to grow even faster.

"Our e-cargo trailer is currently at second prototype stage following initial trials, with the first production runs planned shortly," outlines Mr Evans. "The trailer is made from aluminium sheet and will be processed on our AMADA laser cutter and press brake. It's great to have this level of control in-house and not rely on external suppliers. Previously we might wait five days for another laser shop to cut parts and then drive 30 miles to pick them up."

Such as been the uptake in business since the AMADA machines arrived that Mr Evans currently describes Ferro's workload as "ridiculously busy", with monthly sales records regularly broken.