



With a rapidly expanding order book, Wrekin Sheet Metal decided the time was right to invest in new automated machinery.

## Automated AMADA machines will help double turnover at Wrekin Sheet Metal

Telford-based Wrekin Sheet Metal has invested £1.1 million in AMADA automated punch press and laser-cutting technology all during the UK's pandemic lockdown. An AMADA EMZ-3612MII electric punch press with AS-III MP300/40 tower and PR-III UL part remover, alongside an AMADA VENTIS-3015AJ fibre laser cutter with AS LUL3015 tower, were installed in August-September 2020. By leveraging the speed and capacity of these new machines, this progressive company is aiming to double its turnover to £5.5 million within the coming 12 months.

Specialising in subcontract sheet-metal fabrication, Wrekin can design and manufacture anything from simple mounting brackets through to complex multi-part products for prototyping or batch production. Founded in 2002, the company was subject to a management buyout in 2009, with Claire Robinson and Simon Orpe taking the reins as Managing Director and Sales Director respectively.

In 2013, Wrekin Sheet Metal relocated to a 40,000 sq ft factory in Telford, providing the foundation for growth under its new leadership. One of the first machines to arrive at the facility was a new AMADA laser cutting machine, and this philosophy of investing in the latest AMADA technology has continued ever since.

*"We see ourselves as an extension of our customers' manufacturing facilities, with AMADA machines central to this offer," states Mr Orpe.*

"At present we're extremely busy serving the refrigeration sector, predominantly with parts for chillers used by bars, restaurants and hotels. We also provide a range of components to the retail sector, including major supermarkets, while the supply of gym equipment solutions and investment casting dipping tanks are further examples of our current workload. Providing steel doors and screens for the vacant property security industry also keeps us busy."

With an expanding list of customers based across the UK and mainland Europe, Wrekin Sheet Metal could see the need for investment, particularly with the recent arrival of a major new account.

"We see Britain as a manufacturing powerhouse and we want to help drive it rather than sit back and worry about things like COVID-19 - there is plenty of work out there," states Mr Orpe. "With this thought in mind – along with our new contract wins – we revisited our entire manufacturing capacity, both machines and people. Throughout the lockdown period we were hiring new staff, from qualified setters to front-office management."



***“We’ve been using AMADA machines since day one, as we see them as the Rolls-Royce of manufacturing equipment,” says Mr Orpe. “And although we assessed a range of machines from different suppliers, we favoured returning to AMADA as they had solutions that were compatible with our shift to Industry 4.0. The new machines ticked a lot of boxes regarding data communication using the AMADA V-factory software.”***

Wrekin Sheet Metal first decided it would move towards Industry 4.0 as part of its strategy to help combat the effects of Brexit.

“One of our major selling points is customer communication, and Industry 4.0 is very much that,” explains Mr Orpe. “We recently set about investing in the necessary network and IT infrastructure that would be able to gather information for our customers. We typically have up to 400 different live parts in progress on our shop floor at any one time, and we want to reach a position where our customers can log in and see the status of their components. This capability, which is currently being developed in partnership with our MRP software supplier, will really set us apart from our competitors. Industry 4.0 compatibility was therefore highly important when it came to investing in the new machines.”



With the arrival of the automated AMADA EMZ-3612MII electric punch press and AMADA VENTIS-3015AJ fibre laser cutting machine – as well as the company’s investment in a powder-coating plant and new personnel – Wrekin Sheet Metal has spent circa £1.5 million since the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed in March 2020.

“When the pandemic first arrived, we very quickly got involved with the UK’s Ventilator Challenge, which recently drew to a close with nearly 5000 ventilators being produced in total,” says Mr Orpe. “This not only kept the cogs turning so that we could remain open during lockdown, but was one of our proudest moments.”

Proposed investment in the new automated AMADA machines also prompted Wrekin Sheet Metal to redesign its shop floor to further improve production flow. Such has been the benefits of both the new technology and layout that the company is expecting to double its turnover within the coming 12 months, to £5.5 million. Wrekin says that its investment in AMADA manufacturing technology has led to a 150% increase in both

punching and laser-cutting capacity, largely thanks to the automation.

“For instance, with the EMZ-3612MII electric punch press being fully automated from loading to unloading, we could get 72 hours of consecutive manufacturing if we had the right product to go on it, which is incredible,” says Mr Orpe.

The AMADA VENTIS-3015AJ fibre laser cutting machine is also providing Wrekin Sheet Metal with 40% more efficiency thanks to its single diode module 4 kW oscillator and proprietary LBC (Locus Beam Control) technology. Mr Orpe says that the fibre technology not only provides extra speed over the company’s previous CO2 laser, but reduces power consumption by 50%.



On a daily basis, material from 0.5 to 20 mm in thickness is processed at Wrekin, mainly in mild steel, but also in stainless steel and aluminium. Thanks to the company’s investment in its first fibre laser cutter, reflective materials such as brass and copper can also be processed. As a point of note, Wrekin Sheet Metal offers a bespoke design service supported by an ISO9001-accredited engineering department that provides complete quality-assured solutions. In addition, the company holds approved supplier status in the aerospace, construction, security, retail and heating markets.



***“We’re staying focused and positive about the situation out there,” concludes Mr Orpe. “You might think that sectors such as refrigeration for refreshments are quite vulnerable, but lately we have seen a sudden spike in orders from this industry. The confidence levels of these customers and many others has completely transformed from where it was back in March and April, and with our new AMADA machines we’re ready to take advantage.”***