



FURNITURE

A PROFITABLE INVESTMENT

GRATNELLS LTD.

With a history that can be traced back over 125 years, through four generations of the Hudson family, the modern day Gratnells has consolidated its position as a leading supplier of storage, furniture and staging to schools, industry and the medical sectors. The Harlow, England-based company is now embarking on its next technological leap, using technology from BLM that would have even been beyond the imagination of H G Wells, who published his classic work of science fiction The Time Machine, in 1895, the year that Gratnells was founded as W A Hudson.

The decision to install a BLM LT5 Tube Laser machine, the first in the UK, is further revolutionizing Gratnell's business to meet the increased demand for its tray storage products for schools, industry and the medical sector, which were currently being produced using manual machine technology. **"Within a very short space of time of installing the BLM Tube Laser we were seeing productivity doubling.** Batches of racking that would previously have taken two people, two days to complete are now being produced, mainly unmanned, in less than a day" says Murray Hudson, Gratnells' Managing Director. "Not only that, but we are now able to process shapes on tubes that would have been impossible to achieve previously and this has led to innovative new product designs that will have significant impact on the market, The speed at which the BLM LT5 operates has also created extra capacity, which we are able to offer to those in need of quick response for low volume laser cutting". The arrival of the BLM Laser Tube machine has not only improved productivity, but has also taken the business in directions it hadn't originally envisioned.

However, there is one area that is of particular interest, that of motorsport. Murray Hudson's son Rory is among the top 10 Kart racers in the UK and has been selected to be part of the McLaren Performance Academy, in fact he is the only UK driver on the programme at the moment. "It was the connection between BLM and Tony Kart in Italy, whose karts Rory drives that sealed our interest in getting the BLM LT5 machine. All of the Tony Kart chassis is cut and bent on BLM machines and having this information has enabled us to work with two universities, manufacturing the chassis for their Formula Student cars. The LT5 is allowing us to achieve multiple angle cuts that in turn create complex joints on these chassis that we couldn't achieve without the laser. Working in a racing environment breeds quality and while motorsport is just one area that **we can see potential for our laser cutting service the potential is huge thanks to the capability of the BLM LT5**", says Murray Hudson.

The move from manual slotting and cutting of tubes to the use of the BLM LT5 Tube Laser has been a massive leap forward in technology for Gratnells, but one that is paying dividends, as it now has the capability



to quickly, and efficiently, process batches of any size tube, within the machine's range of round tubes up to 120 mm diameter, squares up to 100 mm, and rectangular, oval and elliptical semi-flat stock up to 120 x 70 mm. It also has a capability to cut wall thicknesses up to 6 mm mild steel, as well as processing stainless steel, aluminum alloys, copper and brass.

As a result, Gratnells has created a business within a business, namely Gratnells Laser Cutting, to provide laser cutting for small to medium batch quantities with rapid response. Typically, the type of work that wouldn't be commercially viable for traditional sub-contractors to accept. "We justified the purchase of the BLM LT5 on the work that it would be undertaking on our products, so any spare capacity that we have available after that is already costed in. This allows us to be very competitive in the sub-contract market particularly for short batch runs where the customer needs the work done in short lead times. We are not looking for large batch work as we do not want to commit the BLM LT5 to extended periods on sub-contract work as the main focus remains our own products, but this

spare capacity does allow us to provide a niche, bespoke, service for customers" says Richard Picking, Gratnells' International Marketing Director.

The installation of the BLM LT5 Tube Laser machine is just another step in the 125 years of development at Gratnells. The company has constantly evolved, moving from manufacturing metal cornice poles and curtain fittings, cornering the market for television stands in the post war boom years and being one of the first businesses to develop flat pack wardrobes. It was the latter that paved the way for the current business success, as each wardrobe included slotted frames to allow shelving to be positioned. When schools changed their curriculum to include more science experiments by pupils, Gratnells (as it was now known) saw the opportunity and grabbed it. They took the design of the wardrobe shelving system, added standardized plastic trays and the result was that the company became one of the largest suppliers of storage systems to schools. Current production stands at 10,000 plastic trays per day that are shipped worldwide along with their associated shelving.