

Experience
Automotive

DOOSAN
PUMA GT2100M

MECAL S.R.L.

DIVERSIFYING TO GROW

Mecal is a supplier of mechanical parts that focused on product and service quality to stand out in a market where very often only price is important. The owner, Franco Savoia, explains that it has not been an easy start as the company. Born out of the breakup of a previous business, it starts its activity in the fateful 2007, just before the serious crisis that we all remember: *“In the beginning, we were 5 people in a warehouse in Fiorenzuola and soon after we found ourselves in the middle of the crisis. Our major customer, providing 70% of our turnover, was devastated and left a hole also in our finances”*. MECAL’s reaction to this negative start was prompt and efficient in transforming the risks deriving from the crisis into opportunities. Savoia continues: *“We immediately understood that it was not a temporary period, but that it was a radical change in the economic world and in the mode of production. Therefore, we went against the trend with respect to those who were suggesting us to limit the damage leaving at home the few people we had, and instead we decided to invest in technology”*. The new market situation also suggested a change of strategy in the search of new customers: *“We mainly targeted companies that were the most demanding in terms of quality and services to the detriment of the less demanding companies that just focused on price”*.



The result of this strategy based on investments and on the choice of 'difficult' customers is that, as early as 2009, our company started to grow and hasn't stopped since. *"Year after year we kept growing in terms of people, turnover and also spaces. Profits, entirely reinvested in the company, provided the resources for new investments and, at the end of 2014, we moved to Piacenza doubling our spaces. In 2018, we further expanded with adjacent warehouses and finally we had the space to fulfill our old desire to introduce a Lasertube in our production cycle"*. Savoia explains with clear and legitimate satisfaction.

Mecal works in an area historically considered the cradle of Italian mechanics and the demanding customers he is referring to are historical brands in the world of machine tools, such as Jobs, Mandelli, MCM or others in different sectors such as Bolzoni of the Hyster-Yale group or Leitner. These are important companies for which quality is a must and they are structured to objectively check the quality of their suppliers.

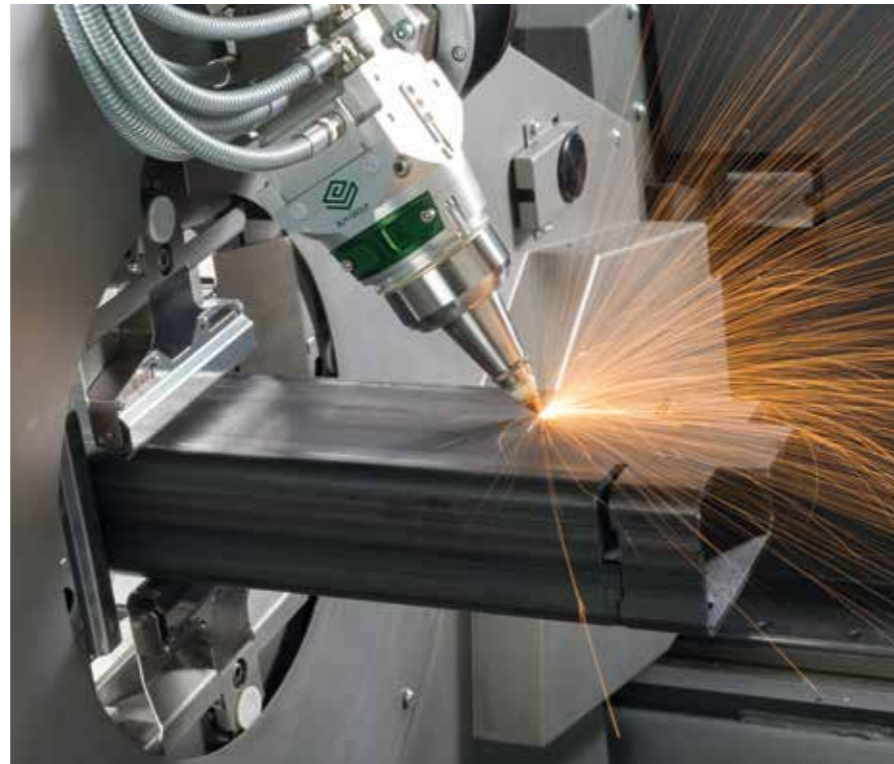
"Working with these customers, more demanding as to quality and service, forced us to improve and adapt to the required performance. Every month we receive reports about the service level that certifies if we are, or not, in line with expectations for whatever reason. It is not just a daily battle, but it concerns every instant, that makes us grow and it is also very difficult because requests are continuously increasing both in terms of product and of service. But in the end, quality pays off ensuring work continuity".

Thanks to the investments made over time, today Mecal is able to offer a complete range of machining processes, laser cutting, bending, metal works, welding and mechanical processes that make it considerably independent in the development of the products requested by its customers. Only the tube was missing.

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Tube machining remained a wish until November 2018, when the Lasertube LT8.10 arrived. Savoia explains: *“At last, we can machine tubes with high quality. Until last year, I suggested to the sales office to avoid, if possible, customers asking for tube machining. If they asked for a simple slot we had a hard time: if they were machined by plasma, quality was poor, by cutter, they were too expensive. Even cutting to size with a hacksaw was a problem, what accuracy could we ask for, also taking into account that a newcomer always lands on the hacksaw!”*

Savoia knew the Lasertube systems as he saw them a long time before at the Open House of BLM GROUP, so he was well aware of what these systems could do. Nevertheless, when the machine arrived, some aspects were especially appreciated. Pietro Savoia, who has recently started working with his father at the family company, now talks, for example, about software - one

of the strong points of the Lasertube system: *“I have started using CAD/CAM Artube to make some details of a new project just two days ago, I had no time to attend a course, so in just a few minutes I was given basic instructions how to start. After two days, I already produced the programs for 150 parts ready to be sent to the machine and processed. The software is user-friendly and intuitive”.*

With the LT8.10 by BLM GROUP, we received new jobs and requests that would not have been feasible before and not only as a matter of quality. Mr. Savoia makes a practical example: *“An important customer who produces printing systems needs a filter consisting of a tube ending, on one side, with an area covered by about 500 small holes. It was very difficult to produce that filter. We started from laser cutting a sheet metal with 500 holes that later was calendered and welded on the end part of a tube in order to create what was requested.*

The result was not aesthetically exceptional and also took a very long time to produce. Also the time lost moving from one machine to the other and preparing welding should be added to production times, not to mention the possible errors in each phase. Now the tube is cut to size by the laser and the 500 holes are cut in the same cycle, three minutes to obtain a finished part, with quality and aesthetic greatly improved”.

New opportunities come for Mecal after the arrival of the Lasertube system: *“The investment was made thinking about us and our product. The system productivity is really very high and we wanted to get the word out, so we started a web marketing campaign promote our new capabilities. We tend not take on work for the flat laser, as it is a market characterized by a price war in which we are not interested. Therefore, we use the flat laser for our production. For the tube it is a different matter. We want to expand our business and are confident that new opportunities will come”.*

The web marketing campaign is used to cover the hours available on the Lasertube, but also to spread the culture of the laser tube that is not known in the market yet. Savoia affirms: *“There is a cultural problem as many entrepreneurs have no idea of what you can do with this type of system. We have started with someone producing cabins with tubular structure but without using the joints and all the machining processes that can be done by means of the laser”.*

Investments concern machineries and processes that made Mecal sufficiently independent in its production, but to meet customer needs it has been necessary to invest also in the integration of the production systems. *“We had to integrate more advanced management systems, not only notes and invoices, but also systems that could allow us to check production and, when we bought the LT8.10 we also bought an automatic magazine for bars, necessary to make full use of the machine potentialities. This magazine is connected to the information system that automatically manages loading and unloading operations of the material required by the different jobs”.* Industry 4.0 strikes again.

But technology is not everything and engineer Savoia has always focused on people: *“Investing in technology without investing in the people reduces its effectiveness. Investing in people means making them feel important, giving them space to develop their potential and aptitudes. Maybe by changing or rotating roles. And also trying to create a serene and, why not, even cheerful working environment.”*

In conclusion, a look at the future given by the owner: *“Our investments prove confidence in the market. I look at the future with positivity because so far we have been able to grow thanks to our ability to understand our customer needs and our availability to change”.*