

## Italy's Techne SpA sees 'Advance' in blow molding technology

By Bill Bregar

June 22, 2009

PLASTICS NEWS STAFF



Techne SpA CEO and owner Moreno Minghetti shows the inner workings of the company's high-output Advance blow molding machine, which the company bills as an alternative to long-stroke machines. (Joe Wilssens photo)

CHICAGO (June 22, 7:40 p.m. ET) -- Visitors to the Techne SpA exhibit (Booth S18048) can see the new Advance machine, billed as an alternative to long-stroke blow molding machines.

Long-strokes machines work by lining up a large number of mold cavities, which zip back and forth under the parisons.

The high-output Advance turns that concept on its head with a carousel-type arrangement. Two or four mold clamps shuttle beneath a single, stationary extrusion head, accept the parisons and then move away for blow molding.

The all-electric machine outperforms long-strokes in productivity and energy efficiency, according to Moreno Minghetti, Techne's CEO and owner.

"Compared to a long-stroke machine, the output is something like 5-8 percent higher. But the electrical consumption is 35 percent less — and we're doing it with half of the parisons," he said in a pre-NPE2009 interview.

The mold carriages are much smaller and simpler than those on long-stroke machines, Techne officials said.

The company in Castel Guelfo di Bologna, Italy, still makes long-stroke machines, but interest has been growing in the Advance since Techne showed a prototype at Germany's K2007 trade show in Düsseldorf. So far in this year, Minghetti said, the Advance accounts for 60 percent of quotes and about 25 percent of sales for the company.

### Firm growing globally

Techne is going through an important period of advancing technology, opening a brand-new factory and expanding into India, Minghetti said.

Founded in 1985, the company will pass the mark this year of 1,000 blow molding machines sold, Minghetti said. Techne exports 95 percent of its production and has sold presses to 61 countries.

Techne invested about \$15 million to build a 100,000-square-foot factory in its home province of Bologna that opened in September 2008. The plant replaced four buildings that sprouted up as Techne

grew over the years.

In addition to a machinery assembly area, the new plant has a production trial area, complete packaging test laboratory and a pilot mold development center.

At PlastIndia 2009, officials announced that India's Lohia Starlinger Ltd. is making blow molding machines for Techne in Kanpur, India. Minghetti said Lohia will make smaller shuttle machines. Techne has discontinued assembly of those price-sensitive shuttles in Italy, he said. The firm plans to export the Indian machines to Russia, China and South America.

Techne generated 2008 sales of 33 million euros (\$48 million), and employs 115. The company built 47 long-stroke machines last year. In the new Bologna plant, production capacity is about 65 long-stroke machines, Minghetti said.

Kyle Grodzinski, vice president of Techne North America Inc., said the company focuses on high-level packaging equipment.

"The production of our machinery is typically double that of a standard machine that's in the market: higher production, faster cycles, more bottles per hour," he said.

Techne North America is based in Aurora, Ontario. It also runs a parts and service operation in Fort Worth, Texas.

Techne was one of the pioneers of long-stroke machines. But after the 2004 K show, Techne leaders realized the market was getting crowded with new players. "We saw that everybody was moving on the long-stroke. We had to do something better," Minghetti said.

As long-stroke technology advanced, the mold carriages kept getting longer and longer. Machinery makers developed ways to move the molds longer distances. But cycle time suffered, Minghetti said.

"You lose a lot of cycle time moving the carriage. Then there was no great advantage any more to have a longer stroke, after a certain point," he said. Also, as the number of parisons increased, controlling them became more complicated.

The decision was made to develop an all-electric machine. But it was not possible to make an all-electric long-stroke, since the large number of cavities required a lot of clamping force, according to Minghetti.

The Advance was the solution, developed between the 2004 and 2007 K shows, with an investment of 4 million euros (\$5.6 million). The Advance's simultaneous movements — its shuttling in and out — would not be possible without all-electric technology, Grodzinski said.

Minghetti is pumped up over the new technology, which is patented. "You have a fully electronic machine with a faster cycle," he said.

At NPE2009, Techne also is discussing — but not displaying — its Unika system, which integrates a blow molding machine with a filling line. Techne introduced the "combi" machine in March at the Anuga Foodtec trade show in Germany.

*Entire contents copyright 2009 by Crain Communications Inc. All rights reserved.*