

HK Engine Components Looks to Grow, Improve

By PAM KASEY

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In HK Casting of Weston, the late Lou and Patricia Meinhardt created a world-class foundry with few competitors.

Now HK Engine Components, the company pours gray and ductile iron castings, according to General Manager J.D. Schmidt.

Schmidt worked for an HK supplier in Ohio, first as a maker of wood patterns for sand molds and later in technical sales, and knew the company's product line and tooling. He came on after Patricia Meinhardt's death last fall.

HK's main product line is heads, liners and pistons for locomotive engines, Schmidt said.

"We do the casting of the metal here into sand molds and actually do some pre-machining at our facility here in Weston, and the finish machining and assembly are done in Hagerstown, Md., at the other division of HK Engine Components," he said.

After the components are assembled, the newly formed engine power packs are shipped all across the world, he said.

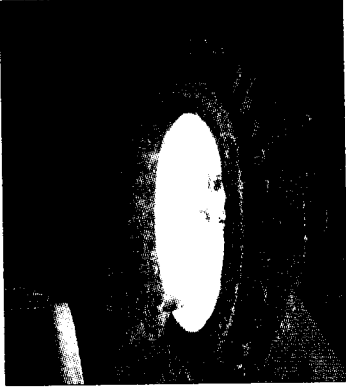
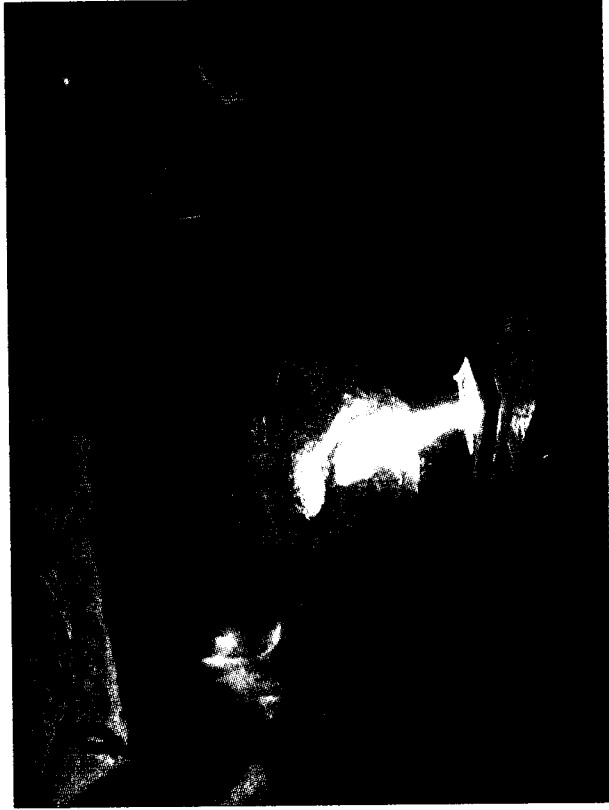
The company produces three basic different engine models, Schmidt said. Major railroad lines and countries that operate their own rail systems purchase the parts for engine rebuilding, domestically and as far away as Africa, India and the Far East.

The 37 workers at the foundry include molders, iron pourers, people who make and close the molds, grinders and the quality department, Schmidt said.

Except for Schmidt, they're all West Virginians, and all trained in-house.

"I am the first person that was brought in from outside of West Virginia," he said.

"When the foundry was started in



Photos courtesy of HK Engine Components

Seventeen-year-old Weston foundry HK Engine Components produces precision locomotive engine parts for shipment around the world.

four different foundries in the U.S. and Mexico.

"The very first sample, we shipped them a product that was usable," he said.

Changes are coming to HK.

The company was purchased in March 2005 by South Bend, Ind.-based Magnetech Industrial Services, Inc. More recently, Magnetech's parent company MISCOR Group Ltd. filed in October with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission for a public offering of its stock.

But ownership by a large and growing corporation — Magnetech appeared on Inc. 500's lists of fastest-growing U.S. companies in 2004 and 2005 — also brings a welcome infusion of capital.

"With the ownership of Magnetech we've got strong financial backing and we look to improve some of our equipment strategically over the next couple of years," Schmidt said. "That will help us produce more at higher quality."

Motors that occasionally purchases castings from HK. The other two, he said he believes, are outside the United States.

In addition to its main product line, HK also does jobbing work, pouring castings from under a pound to about 1,000 pounds for shipment within West Virginia and to

Ohio, Pennsylvania, the Carolinas and Texas.

As a testament to quality, Schmidt said a casting HK is making for a company in Texas originally had been sampled unsuccessfully in

1989, none of the employees had ever been in a foundry before. And," he added, crediting Lou Meinhardt's careful training, "we make some of the most difficult castings in the world."

Difficult, he said, because the parts, which include cavities where coolant runs through an engine, have to be water-tight.

"To do that without having them leak is a very difficult thing," Schmidt said.

Only about three other foundries in the world make this type of part, he said. One is a wholly-owned subsidiary of General

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