CATHARINA DAUM

Small company big ambitions

Småland is a lovely place. The setting for the Emil of Lönneberga series of children's novels, it features beautiful landscapes dotted with pretty red houses. But this southern Swedish province is far more than just a rural idyll. It is also home to ambitious sheet metal fabricators such as Stewes Servicefirma – a small company with big machines and even bigger ideas.

Stewes is run by Britt Johansson and Jonas Engberg, a motherand-son team that share a keen sense of curiosity. Their inquisitive nature drives them to delve ever deeper into issues of technology, progress and the future of sheet metalworking. Although it only employs 16 people, Stewes is one of the region's most important suppliers. It serves a range of companies, including a local manufacturer of electrical distribution substations. Much of its success stems from a visionary decision that Jonas made nine years ago when he opted to invest in a TruMatic 7000 – the first company to do so in the whole of northern Europe. It quickly became clear that his instincts had led him to make an excellent purchase, and new customers and orders were soon flooding in. The machine was so new at the time that none of its documentation had been translated into Swedish. "But our TRUMPF account manager translated the whole lot for us in just one day!" says Jonas.

The high-end punch laser machine is one of the most expensive – and most productive – machines in TRUMPF's portfolio. And Jonas and Britt decided to go one step further by choosing the automated version of the TruMatic 7000. Equipped with a SheetMaster and GripMaster, their punch laser system is even faster and more versatile. Stewes also offers bending services to its customers with its three TruBend machines. But it's the company's vision that really makes Stewes stand out from the crowd. "TRUMPF machines can do so much. Our job is to exploit those capabilities to the full, ensuring that each of our customers gets a cutting-edge design and the best available product. Essentially, we use our machines to continuously innovate and push ourselves to the next level," says Jonas. For this reason, it comes as no surprise to learn that Jonas opted for the TruMatic 7000 even before he had any suitable customer projects in the pipeline: "It's true that at the start we only had one customer that benefited directly from laser cutting. But I was confident that others would follow in their footsteps." And he was right.

Jonas jokingly refers to the fact that he turned 30 two weeks after buying the machine: "You could say I gave myself the TruMatic as a birthday present! It took me a little while to work up the courage to tell my mother what I had bought." Britt, who was more inclined to take a purely rational stance to weighing up the benefits of the punch laser machine before buying it, was quickly won over: "Nowadays we only have to work in one shift instead of two. The machine saves us a lot of time and is a great support to our team on the shop floor."

From Ditzingen to Sweden: Britt Johansson has an excellent overview of proceedings from her unusual office, which is even painted in the TRUMPF brand color.

Swedish idyll: red houses are everywhere in Småland province. This one belongs to Jonas's brother and is just five minutes from the company's premises.

Making life easier on the shop floor: the Konga production facility also has three TruBend bending machines.

All this was still to come when Jonas's father Stewe Engberg founded the company in 1986. But one thing was clear right from the start: the company's mission was to prioritize its customers and their products, and Stewes quickly gained a reputation for its professional problem-solving skills. "For a long time we didn't have our own factory building, so we would simply sort out problems and carry out repairs on site, a bit like mobile service engineers," says Jonas. His father, who founded the company and gave it his name, was always on the road. In the year 2000, the family finally found a suitable production facility. To begin with, they continued to use their customers' plants to make some parts – not during the day, but at night. "Our customers didn't use their machines at night, so it gave us the perfect opportunity to build up some expertise and improve our skills," says Britt. It didn't take long for this unusual approach to pay off. When Britt and Jonas purchased their first TRUMPF punching machine in 2004, they were able to benefit from their years of experience and shift into top gear almost immediately.

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Not many of the world's sheet metal fabricators are run by a woman, and Britt was initially something of a rarity in Sweden, too. "At first, many of our customers opted to talk to Jonas or another male employee instead of me. But they quickly changed their tune when they realized that I was the managing director," says Britt. The former preschool teacher has transformed herself into a successful entrepreneur. "Sometimes she still has that teacher vibe though," says Jonas with a smile. A mother of three children, Britt instinctively knows how to take care of her staff, because she understands just how important they are to the family-run company. Every morning at nine o'clock, the team sits down together for breakfast at the kitchen table and discusses the current project status before they head back to the automated production facility. The company's investments in new machinery stem from a mix of pragmatism and entrepreneurial vision – a quality that clearly distinguishes Stewes Servicefirma from the competition.

Having a clear vision for the future doesn't depend on the size of a job shop, but rather on the progressive men and women who run it. It makes little difference whether you employ 16 or 1,600 people, though arguably small firms have to show even greater entrepreneurial vision, because the competition never sleeps. Clever business people can find a solution to any challenge, much like the resourceful little Emil of Lönneberga, the protagonist of bestselling author Astrid Lindgren's series of children's books. He always knew how to get himself out of a fix – and even when he got his head stuck in a soup tureen, he still had a plan. Jonas can't help grinning when Emil's name is brought up as a comparison. He certainly put his own acumen

to the test by purchasing the TruMatic. Next year Jonas turns 40, and although he hasn't made any concrete plans for this important milestone yet, perhaps he'll end up buying himself another top-notch TRUMPF machine.

Key facts: TruMatic 7000

Stewes Servicefirma demonstrated impressive entrepreneurial vision by adding automated punch laser processing to its portfolio in 2009. Determined not to do things by halves, the family-run company in Sweden opted for a TruMatic 7000. That's a decision that Managing Director Britt Johansson has never regretted. The TRUMPF punch laser machine is a reliable partner for existing jobs – and for whatever jobs the future may hold.

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