

Press Release



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ALPHA EXTENDS STOPA AUTOMATED STORAGE SYSTEM FROM TRUMPF

Following Alpha Manufacturing's investment in a STOPA four-bay automated material handling and storage system from TRUMPF in 2016, the company has extended to a 10-bay system that now runs 62m down the centre of its factory near Stafford. The STOPA – which serves machines such as a TRUMPF TruLaser 3030 Fiber, TRUMPF TruMatic 6000 laser/punch combination, TRUMPF TruPunch 5000 and TRUMPF TruBend Cell 7000 – houses more than 600 tonnes of raw material and part-processed items in a total of 207 available pallet spaces. The completion of the STOPA marks the culmination of Alpha's journey to automation and its 'smart factory' vision, delivering competitive advantage for both the company and its customers.

Plans for the large-scale installation were first set out in 2015. The aim was to make Alpha Manufacturing the UK's foremost precision sheet-metal fabricator in just five years, doubling turnover in the process. With the completion of the STOPA system extension in July 2020, the total investment is close to £4 million, securing Alpha's position as one of the most technically advanced factories in the industry.

Part of the Bri-Stor Group of companies, Alpha Manufacturing is a privately-owned business established in 1989 that specialises in sheet-metal fabrication. Over 150 people are now employed at the firm's 65,000ft² facility, where a range of materials are processed in thicknesses from 0.5 to 25mm. Sectors served include automotive, retail, electronics, agriculture, construction, street furniture, security, healthcare, horticulture and petrochemical.

The STOPA system improves daily business at Alpha in a number of ways. For instance, it has allowed the company to automate stock storage, movement and transfer between machines, with all raw sheet metal stored in the towers and called out at the touch of a button. This capability has had a hugely positive affect on Alpha's performance with regard to both efficiency and capacity.

"One of the biggest benefits is removing all WIP [work-in-progress] from the shop floor," states Rob Eley, Commercial Director. "There are no more pallets of parts, or need to

transport those pallets around the factory using forklifts. The STOPA has led to massive improvements in efficiency, as well as reductions in costed manpower resources. Furthermore, tasks such as stock control and management are now significantly easier.”

Managing Director Paul Clews adds: “We’ve achieved everything we set out to do and more, and this final investment will take us to our goal in terms of automation and efficiency. We’re not unique in buying the best machinery; a lot of companies have high-specification technology. However, we aim to differentiate in our operations, through the highest levels of efficiency and productivity. The STOPA system provides the ability to identify, locate and deliver any piece of sheet steel, punched/laser part or folded sub-assembly to any location at the touch of a button. In doing this, we dramatically reduce the amount of waste from our processes in terms of people movement and component transportation.”

Alpha decided to choose TRUMPF technology even before the 5-year expansion plan was realised. TRUMPF being the premier solution provider was aided by the synergy with the STOPA storage system, and for over three decades, STOPA and TRUMPF have been working as global partners. The technical interfaces between each solution are perfectly matched to provide the customer with a fully automation solution.

As a point of note, the planned investment at Alpha continued despite the arrival of a global pandemic. Alpha is in the enviable position of being financially robust. With no debts leveraged against the business, no mortgaged properties and years of shrewd accounting to fall back on, the company has used its agility to carefully navigate through these turbulent times.

“We were resolutely committed to our ambitious five-year investment plan and already had the capital set aside for completing the automation of our facility with the STOPA extension,” explains Mr Eley.

The Alpha factory never completely stopped production throughout the entire lockdown period, primarily due to demand from customers involved in supporting key workers, those directly supplying the NHS, or companies providing protective equipment. For example, protective screens are currently being produced for a leading internal screening supplier that requested Alpha’s support to keep up with the extraordinary increase in demand. Alpha quickly established an assembly line to produce the screens at a rate of 300 per week.

In conclusion, Alpha’s facilities are today unrecognisable from the set-up of 2015 when the investment strategy was announced. Moving forward, the company will continue working to best utilise the machinery and systems in order to achieve total stock/material handling automation.

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