RAMONA HÖNL

# Sheet metal production in Japan: lawn mowing with go-kart feeling

**Combining Japanese craftsmanship and industrial manufacturing expertise is a great way to create world-beating products. The agile utility vehicles from Canycom are a good example. Easily recognizable thanks to their eye-catching design, they keep moving even when the going gets tough. Equally at home on American construction sites and Italian vineyards, these nimble carriers and dumpers can carve out a path in even the most inaccessible terrain.**

Canycom's specialized utility vehicles are a popular choice in over 50 countries around the globe – and it's not hard to see why. Combining high-quality workmanship and practical ingenuity, they keep things moving in even the toughest terrain. "Work can sometimes feel exhausting and demoralizing, but we do everything we can to make it more fun!" says Canycom chairman Hitoshi Kaneyuki. Owned by the same family for 20 generations, Canycom is steeped in tradition. The Kaneyuki family can trace its ancestry back to a master Samurai swordsmith in the early 14th century who was renowned for the craftsmanship of his curved katana blades. As much a work of art as a weapon, these swords often took weeks of painstaking work to create. Although this mid-sized manufacturer no longer produces Samurai swords, it is still inspired by the idea of making the perfect product.

Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki, who took over the day-to-day running of the business from his father in 2015, argues that Canycom's success is based not only on reliability and robustness, but also on a healthy dose of playfulness. "It's quite an achievement to make tedious work fun – it might even be the main reason customers choose our products over others," he says. That's why the Japanese principle of asobigokoro – or 'doing something in a playful way' – plays such a central role in all Canycom's products.

Canycom combines Japanese craftsmanship with industrial manufacturing expertise.

**Masao ride-on brush cutters**

Perhaps the most striking example is the Masao, an industrial ride-on brush cutter that could easily be mistaken for a go-kart. Its popularity comes as little surprise to chairman Hitoshi Kaneyuki: "Mowing grass and vegetation used to be such hard work, and I was constantly asking myself how we could make it more fun. Nowadays people really enjoy using our nifty and agile brush cutters. Before you know it, the job's done. I've often found myself searching for more patches of grass just so I can keep going, and I know I'm not the only one!" says Hitoshi Kaneyuki.

Canycom products are renowned for their remarkable versatility. For example, the task of harvesting fruit and vegetables requires vehicles with a low body height. This makes it easier for farmers to navigate swiftly between bushes and trees without grazing the branches or damaging the fruit, and it ensures barrier-free access when it comes to loading and unloading the vehicle. Forestry throws up very different challenges, such as collecting logs in steep, inaccessible terrain and transporting them back to base. Canycom's timber carriers are on hand to help, offering a rugged solution with truly outstanding maneuverability. "Japan still relied heavily on horses and cattle for transportation even as late as the 1970s. That was when we embarked on an initial wave of mechanization," says Hitoshi Kaneyuki. Canycom came to dominate the forestry and construction sectors and started to expand overseas. The company's rubber-tracked buggies, compact carriers and ride-on mowers are now hugely popular in Europe and the US – two regions where Canycom hopes to see strong international growth in the future. In 2021, the company posted sales of 7.1 billion yen (approx. 51 million euros), 40 percent of which were generated outside Japan. This figure has been increasing at a steady rate of between six and seven percent a year.

Canycom's ride-on brush cutters could easily be mistaken for go-karts! They are one of the company's best-selling products, especially in Europe and the USA.

Canycom's 280 employees design and build most of the company's vehicle components in-house.

## New production hall in Ukiha

Canycom has traditionally carried out the design, development and manufacturing of its products at its headquarters in Ukiha. A city of 30,000 people located in southern Japan's Fukuoka prefecture, Ukiha is some two hours from Tokyo by plane. The climate and geography are similar to that of Switzerland, and the region is a major producer of fruit. Canycom built a new manufacturing facility there just last year to meet growing demand. The production lines at the new facility, which it began installing in July 2021, are exclusively kitted out with machines and systems made by TRUMPF. It's not every day that a Japanese company chooses to switch to a new supplier. TRUMPF installed a TruLaser 3030 fiber 2D laser-cutting machine in combination with an automated SortMaster system, plus a TruMatic 6000 fiber punch-laser machine, press brakes including the TruBend 5130 and 7036, and a TruBend Center 5030 bending system. This was the first time that many of these machines had been supplied to Japan, and the normal approach would have been to send assembly engineers from Germany to Ukiha. However, this was impossible due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, so all the support required to install and set up the machines had to be provided via a remote connection established by the TRUMPF experts. TRUMPF's head office in Germany worked closely with its regional office in Japan to ensure that everything ran according to plan. All the machines are now up and running and Canycom is delighted with the results. "Opting for TRUMPF turned out to be an excellent decision," says CEO Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki.

It was 2017 when Canycom first considered equipping its new manufacturing facility exclusively with TRUMPF systems. During that time, it had regular contact with TRUMPF Japan, which offered advice, expert input and on-site visits. After two years of careful consideration, Canycom finally placed the order. "We were struck by how TRUMPF prioritized our needs and wishes. Canycom shares that belief of putting the customer first. The fact that we have this philosophy in common has convinced us to opt for TRUMPF machines in the future, too", says Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki. The results to date are even better than he had expected.

The meticulously planned layout of the new production facility and the configuration of the TRUMPF machines has reduced production time by 40 percent.

Chairman Hitoshi Kaneyuki is the face of Canycom. He has been shaping the family business for nearly 50 years.

## High flexibility, short cycle times

Everything about the new manufacturing site is impressive, from the meticulously planned layout to the configuration of the TRUMPF machines and the seamless flow of materials on the logistics side. Part throughput rates are higher than ever, and the punching and bending processes are a full nine hours faster than before thanks to laser-measured angles and fully automated tool changes. Overall production time has fallen by 40 percent. The TRUMPF systems guarantee both precision and efficiency in equal measure. What's more, the Canycom factory in Ukiha now has the flexibility to carry out high-mix/low-volume manufacturing, something that is particularly important to Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki. He appreciates how the TRUMPF machines offer both high flexibility and short cycle times. "That's the perfect formula to push our profitability even

higher." The TRUMPF machinery in the new factory building in Ukiha has been fully operational since the beginning of this year. Canycom primarily uses the facility to manufacture construction dumpers and powered wheelbarrows for overseas markets.  The company is also planning a new spare parts warehouse as part of its dynamic growth strategy.

**Harnessing the play instinct makes tedious work fun – it might even be the main reason customers choose our products over others.**

Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki, President Canycom Inc.

## The perfect mix of parts

Canycom designs and builds most of its vehicle components itself, though it also relies on external partners for parts that require specialist expertise, such as engines and rubber tracks. "By joining forces with the very best suppliers, we can provide our customers with products that exceed their expectations," says CEO Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki.  At the same time, Canycom actively pursues the Japanese management philosophy of "going to Gemba". From fields and plantations to forests, the company's design engineers spend as much time as possible going to "the place where the work is done" (Gemba) to discover exactly where value is created for its customers. Meanwhile, Canycom's sales team conducts regular video interviews and encourages users to offer feedback and suggestions for improvement as well as criticism and complaints. This inspires Canycom to constantly reflect on its customers' needs and to tailor its products accordingly.

"Our products are designed for real flesh-and-blood people to use, not for some faceless statistic," says Hitoshi Kaneyuki. He believes his team of developers needs to have first-hand experience of how customers use their products in real life. This approach can give rise to radical new ideas and solutions – a philosophy that both Canycom and TRUMPF see as vital to their business. The importance of getting close to customers is not the only philosophy Canycom and TRUMPF have in common. Both companies know what they need to prioritize to achieve great results: a partner that listens to feedback, presses ahead with topics that will make a difference, and actively supports efforts to put them into practice. That's the recipe for success that lies at the heart of Canycom's new "Enka no Mori Ukiha" factory.

**RAMONA HÖNL**

□□□ □□□