

Release Date: 25th August 2010**WC131- (08/10)****Version 4 - Approved****CASTING THE NET. RAUTOMEAD LOOKS BEYOND THE OBVIOUS TO
MAXIMIZE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES****PHOTO : Brian Frame, Managing Director, Rautomead Limited**

Continuous casting technology specialist Rautomead of Dundee has a proud history of innovation going back to 1978 when the company began building horizontal casting machines for non ferrous metals to its own proprietary design.

PHOTO: RT 850 horizontal casting machine (Photo Ref. Dept3-01.jpg RT 850)

The foundation of the company's ongoing growth and success has been the design and development of its unique casting process which is based upon the use of a graphite holding crucible, to contain the liquid metal, surrounded by electric resistance heating elements to provide the power for melting. The totally enclosed nature of the process, with molten metal in contact with pure carbon surfaces, is designed to eliminate any oxygen present and produce high-quality metal (alloys) free from contamination or impurities.

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

In 1994, Rautomead adapted the graphite furnace technology and applied it to upwards vertical casting to facilitate production of the highest quality oxygen-free copper rod. The technology has been developed further to facilitate the manufacture of special conductor alloys and also for high quality brass wire rods.

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End use applications for materials produced through the continuous casting technology include contact wires for high speed trains, data communication cables, enamelled wires, EDM cutting wire, bronze bearings, machined and forged brass components, jewellery items, gold and silver coins as well as dental alloys. There are currently more than 350 customer installations, in no less than 45 different countries worldwide.

PHOTO: RS3000/5-CuMg Continuous casting machine producing rod for eventual manufacture of contact wire for high speed trains – (Photo Ref. 423 RS3000 5CuMg)

A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF INNOVATION

Rautomead maintains an R&D casting facility at its Headquarters in Dundee UK which is available for the production of customer samples and also for developing and testing of new machine, tooling and control designs all of which are consistent with the Company's strategy of continuous development and improvement.

Rautomead Managing Director Brian Frame explains: "A notable recent example of the company's programme of continuous improvement is the revolutionary new 'SQ' continuous casting technology which caused quite a stir when it was recently showcased at the 'Wire' Dusseldorf show. By harnessing a new, advanced casting die/cooler design and a sophisticated new precision casting control system, SQ technology produces oxygen-free copper wire rod with a notably superior surface quality that minimizes the characteristic pulse mark effect.

"And, in general terms, our focus is on a more economical use of materials, improved performance, better energy consumption levels, process elimination, environmental improvement and the elimination of hazards.

"Collaborations with Universities, other research bodies, customers, upstream and downstream technology providers are also very important elements in helping us to keep abreast of the very latest research findings and technological innovations as well as the ever-evolving needs of our customers."

BRINGING HOME THE PRECIOUS METAL

It's a tough business environment out there these days whatever line of business you're in. But being a provider of continuous casting technologies comes with its own unique set of challenges.

Consider this. Many of Rautomead's very first machines are still in daily use today more than 25 years after they were installed. As Brian points out: "It's fair to say that 'built in obsolescence' is a concept that's completely alien to the Company. But, of course, a product that's robust, safe and reliable is a great thing for our customers. The implication for a technology provider such as Rautomead is limited repeat business, a greater dependence on market expansion and a constant pressure for the development of new technologies for new market opportunities. Many of the new developments and improvements in the equipment designs are retrofittable to older existing machine installations where the core technology remains, essentially, the same.

CASTING FAR AND WIDE

To meet these challenges head on, Rautomead has developed a proactive strategy that makes great play of its strength, its heritage, its global profile, its technological know-how, its people and their skills to cast its net wider than ever in search of growth to ensure that 'a good year last year leads to a good year this and next'.

This strategy falls into three distinct parts that the company has called: 'Using the now', 'Extending the now' and 'Creating a new now'.

'USING THE NOW'

The first stage in the process involves the here and now: wringing the maximum benefit from existing customers, markets, opportunities, suppliers and technologies to generate 'current era' sales.

'EXTENDING THE NOW'

The second phase, 'Extending the now', concerns applying established processes and technologies to new applications, materials and markets to forge new opportunities in existing markets and open up new market sectors.

'CREATING A NEW NOW'

Finally, 'Creating a new now' means developing new continuous casting technologies and processes and 'looking at the same thing from a different viewpoint', with a focus on applying the company's continuous casting expertise to provide its customers with a keener, sharper competitive edge. This will involve collaboration with existing and potential customers, industry peers, suppliers and third parties to create new 'baseground' markets which can themselves be used as a launchpad for a similar three-pronged approach.

NOT SOMETIME OR ONE DAY BUT NOW

It's important to note that the company's three-pronged strategy for developing the business is no mere theoretical tract for internal consumption, however.

'Using the now' is being actively driven – right now- by the company's existing sales team, to maximize the benefit from sales support systems and networks, customer base, relevant industry exhibitions, agents' networks, market analysis and other tools.

In 'Extending the now', Rautomead is actively developing the capability to process new alloys, improve alloy tolerances and variations, improve and/or extend product specification and implement new applications of commercial agreements between the company and its customers.

While, for Rautomead , 'Creating a new now' involves the development of totally new processes, the extension of existing processes and technology for entirely new applications and the creation of a focused and innovative R&D environment within the organization, all designed to sit beneath the 'umbrella' of 'continuous casting technology'.

"All of these measures are designed to help improve the long term stability and value of the Rautomead business," adds Brian, " by focussing on broadening the appeal of our products and technologies to provide innovative solutions which will improve the competitive edge of a wide range of businesses in diverse market sectors."

Rautomead, clearly, sees its strategy of casting the net wide as the way to achieve net gains.

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