

HQ investment reaping rewards for F1 supplier

A £1 million investment in its Midland headquarters has put a manufacturer which supplies the Formula One industry on track for its ambitious sales target.

Arrowsmith Engineering, based in Coventry, has seen sales rise by 20 per cent in the past 12 months, and is on target to reach plans for a £4 million turnover.

The company, which also supplies precision components for the aerospace industry and the energy sector spent £1 million to complete its headquarters, increase floor space by a third, to 15,000 sq ft, and invest in new facilities.

The firm, which makes engine and actuation parts for some of the world's leading primes, including Rolls Royce, Goodrich, Pattonair and Meggit, has tapped into support from the Manufacturing Advisory Service – West Midlands (MAS-WM) to embark on a growth surge.

Managing director Jason Aldridge said: "We are working to a five year business plan that will see us move from a £1.8 million turnover to a firm that is commanding in excess of £4 million in annual sales.

"Naturally, up to 10 new jobs could be created as a result of this growth.

"Our growth has been based on establishing more strategic partnerships with our clients that see us work even closer with them to improve quality, on time delivery and offer them added value design.

"This approach has reaped dividends and we now hold approved supplier status with Rolls Royce in Canada, Germany, Singapore and the UK, Goodrich, Bombardier and Eaton. We are also taking this same strategy with the energy firms we currently work with."



Jason Aldridge shows Minister for Business Mark Prisk around Arrowsmith Engineering's site in Coventry

Arrowsmith Engineering, which employs 39 people, provides turning, milling and grinding services in both large volume and low quantities, including after sales, development projects and aliens and strangers.

The firm, which was recently visited by Business Minister Mark Prisk, has diversified its offer to become a global specialist in high precision, complex components in exotic metals.

Many of its manufactured parts are being used in the Rolls-Royce Trent series engines used on the Airbus A380,

A350 and the Boeing 747 and 787.

Its investment in new machinery has included a thread rolling laboratory and three CNC lathes.

Mr Aldridge, who became managing director in 2009, added: "MAS-WM has been an important driver in our expansion with specialist adviser Peter Jones providing constant mentoring and help on specific projects, including the layout of the new factory, links to probing trials and giving us access to new machinery and technology.

"MAS understand what manufactur-

ers want and have access to specialist experts that can make a real difference to our bottom line."

Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) in 2012 will continue to deliver a national service to all manufacturing businesses in England.

It is aiming to create £1.5 billion in economic growth, 23,000 jobs and safeguard 50,000 jobs.

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Taxi firm brings in finance chief

Former Brintons Carpets director Peter Johansen has been appointed as the new group finance director at Manganese Bronze.

The Coventry-based firm, the leading manufacturer of the distinctive London taxi, said Mr Johansen would officially start work on December 1.

He previously held the role of group finance director at Brintons since 2005 and Manganese said he "played an instrumental role in establishing its new factory in Suzhou, China".

Mr Johansen has wide experience of international global businesses gained while working previously for Jotun A/S and MacDermid.

Tim Melville-Ross, chairman of the company, said: "I am delighted that Peter Johansen is joining us and I believe that he will make a significant contribution."

Mr Johansen has a BSc (Hons) in international banking and finance.

Non-UK sales boost Hill & Smith

Manufacturing group Hill & Smith Holdings has said international income – particularly from the US – has helped it meet management targets.

The Shirley-based firm said export sales continued to underpin its performance in the first half of the year.

The group, which was previously chaired by recently deceased industrialist David Grove, said it had managed to reduce net debt to £110.8 million, compared with £113.9 million as reported at the half year.

It has been wholly focused on infrastructure products and galvanizing services as part of growth plans.

The group, which makes road safety barriers and bridge parapets among other things, said the UK roads market "remains challenging against the background of reduced government infrastructure spending".

However, it added: "Our expansion into other road markets through the recent acquisition of ATA in Scandinavia, and our push for international growth in

Australia and the Middle East, are helping to mitigate the UK downturn."

The group said its utilities arm had a robust order book and, as anticipated, was delivering a stronger second half performance, despite its Thai facility, while not directly impacted by the current flooding in Bangkok, experiencing flood-related issues with its supply chain.

Speaking of the death of Mr Grove OBE on November 12, chief executive Derek Muir paid tribute to his time with the group.

He said: "As chief executive and latterly chairman, from 1998 until his retirement in 2009, David was the prime driving force behind Hill & Smith Holdings and the architect of the business it is today.

"During that period he drove the expansion and profitable growth of our group, and embedded the entrepreneurial culture that remains at our heart today. Our thoughts are with his family at this very sad time."

Michelin unveils £50m investment

Tyre giant Michelin has announced plans to invest up to £50 million in its UK manufacturing sites – including in Staffordshire.

This plan will be supported by grants from the UK and Scottish governments and will help the firm increase production and help secure employment at all three of its UK production sites.

Implementation of these plans has already begun at Dundee with the hiring of 140 people to fill newly-created positions, while in Stoke-on-Trent work has commenced with the conversion of an existing building, ahead of the installation of new state-of-the-art equipment for the manufacture of the latest generation Michelin Remix truck tyres.

Eric Le Corre, Michelin UK's managing director, said: "We are extremely excited about this planned investment as it shows that the Michelin Group is firmly committed to the future of tyre manufacturing in the UK."



RICHARD WILLIAMS Prize serves as reminder

The new 'Nobel Prize' for Engineering, offering a biannual award of £1 million for innovation in engineering, serves to remind us that engineering is at the very heart of society.

Engineering is the pathway through which discoveries and ideas are delivered to society. The UK's most prestigious professional body of engineers is behind the formation of a trust to award the 'Queen Elizabeth Engineering Prize'.

If anyone needed reminding engineering remains a keystone activity and the routes to develop economic sustainability. The public perception of engineering is sometimes associated with mechanical fixing (large spanners and oily overalls). The reality is that engineering encompasses a broad range of activities from design of products, processes and policies through to construction and operation of buildings, refining of metals, foods and fuels, electronic devices and even human body parts. Engineering is truly at the heart of society.

Birmingham and the West Midlands is also at the literal heart of UK engineering with a longstanding heritage. Engineering is enjoying a renaissance in the creation of companies underpinning biomedical, transportation and energy systems.

Currently manufacturing accounts for 12 per cent of the UK economy but more than 75 per cent of physical exports. In our region its importance in employment is amongst the highest proportion in the UK reaching up to 11.8 per cent in the West Midlands and this is set to expand. We can almost 'feel' this in our region with evident growth in our world leading automotive and aeronautics sectors and in new initiatives such as the incredible Manufacturing Technology Centre in Ansty.

Employment opportunities for engineering graduates are very strong and at the University of Birmingham there has been a marked change in the demand and quality of school students enrolling in engineering degree programmes – but the number of such graduates is still insufficient to meet market demands. The University of Birmingham is investing in developing new capabilities in advanced manufacturing technology to create and inspire the next generation of professional engineers. The requirements for modern manufacturing are rather different to the factories of the past. Pioneering research at the university is also able to be linked to others in our partner cities in Guangzhou and Chicago, amplifying our influence and attracting new income and talent to the UK.

So for the continued wellbeing of our national and regional economy let's hope the new Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering will raise the profile of engineering.

Professor Richard A Williams works at the University of Birmingham