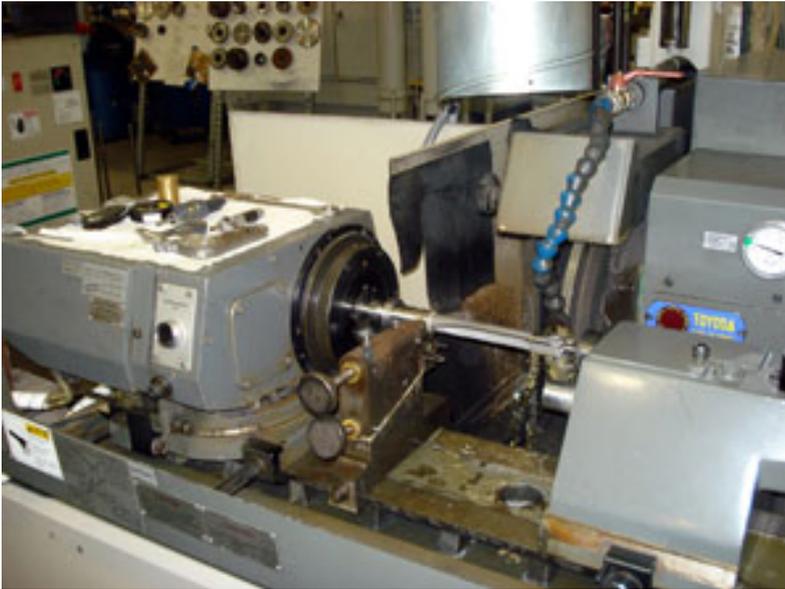


Simplicity On The Road To Recovery

Listen to talk radio or the cable news pundits, and it's easy to believe Michigan, and its largest city (Detroit), are industrial wasteland. True, the unemployment levels are the highest in the nation, and the battering the automotive industry has taken has been significant and deeply felt. But as automotive and its many related manufacturing industries restructure, so, too, are the surviving suppliers. Ossineke Industries, a subsidiary of Star Cutter Inc., is one of those survivors.



A rebuilt Toyoda grinder grinds a gun drill OD at Ossineke Industries.

Headquartered in Farmington Hills, MI, Star Cutter was established on Epworth Boulevard in Detroit in 1927, serving Chrysler and Chevrolet Gear and Axle with 10 employees. From this small beginning, Star Cutter Company has developed into a world leader in the cutting tool industry with four manufacturing divisions and five manufacturing facilities producing seven product lines, from gear-cutting machine tools to gun drills, reamers, and broaches. Each manufacturing facility specializes in producing a specific type of product or service. Today, Star Cutter Company has grown to nearly 350 employees, with Michigan manufacturing plants in Elk Rapids, Lewiston, Ossineke, Farmington Hills, and East Tawas. Through its international organization, Star Cutter markets and services its products in North America, South America, Europe, and the Far East.

Since 1972, Ossineke Industries, a wholly owned subsidiary of Star Cutter Company, has manufactured deep-hole drills, gun drills, carbide drill tips, and steel shanks in the northern Michigan town of Ossineke, near the shore of Lake Huron. "Our big customers are automotive, the arms industry, heavy equipment, small engine, oil and gas, and agricultural," says Plant Manager William Keen. "We do turning, milling, threading, tube forming, heat treating, annealing, straightening, and many

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operations in between.”

But in the economic downturn of the past few years, the plant has suffered accordingly, seeing sales dip 40 percent and head count reduced in half from years past. “Cutting costs while maintaining if not increasing efficiencies is job one,” Keen says.

In the mid-1960s, Star Cutter Company represented a European model of external grinding machine, which it sold and also used in its own plants for decades. “Prior to the late 1980s, we didn’t run CNC grinding equipment — everything was manual,” says David Leslie, applications engineer and facilities manager. “Holding sizes and step lengths was very operator-influenced.”



Finished gun drills ready for shipping.

When it came time to upgrade, Ossineke Industries chose CNC grinders from Toyoda Machinery in Wixom, MI. “Where we were limited in the style and amount of grinding we could do based on our equipment, the straightforwardness of the Toyoda machines was a big advantage,” Leslie says. “They were easier to set up and operate and they increased our capabilities at the same time. We could program the Toyoda grinders for eight tools versus one at a time on our manual equipment.”

Ossineke originally bought three of Toyoda’s GE4 series of general-purpose cylindrical grinders, the last being a GE4P-100, purchased in 2007. Star Cutter has more Toyoda grinders in its other plants. “I hear from all the plants,” Leslie says. “The Toyoda machines are reliable, provide excellent size control, and are easy to maintain.”

For a plant that mainly produces gun drills, Ossineke Industries does a “phenomenal amount of OD grinding,” says Bill Keen. “A year ago, we were running 24 hours a day for five or six days per week,” he says. “Even today with reduced hours, downtime is unacceptable. We schedule offline maintenance, and every time there’s someone at Toyoda jumping through hoops for us. Our experience, whether

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it's replacing parts or rebuilding machines, has been a 'whatever it takes' attitude that we've come to expect. There's never been a problem."

That attitude, plus the ease of programming and operation on Ossineke's Toyoda grinders, was put to the test in July 2002 when a fire burned the plant to the ground. "We found other facilities immediately while our ownership committed to rebuilding," Dave Leslie relates. "By September, our production was running again with new Toyoda machines."

"The Toyoda grinders are so consistent, we were assured our people could continue to make what we make while we were able to pursue adding new functions in other areas, such as grinding profiles or adding a B and C axis," adds Bill Keen. "New technology and additional functions are important, but our most important asset is our people. It's the only thing that continues to appreciate."

Adds Dave Leslie: "We've been grinding carbide on every drill we manufacture since day one. These aren't the first tough times we've gone through. With our people and also with user-friendly, reliable production equipment, we'll be stronger than ever on the other side."

For more information, visit www.toyodausa.com [1].

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