



Breaking the mold

BTM Metal Cutting Bandsaws breathes new life into an old device

BY GRETCHEN SALOIS

In an industry where design remains stagnant and manufacturers find themselves merely “getting by,” BTM Metal Cutting Bandsaws, Bergamo, Italy, offers more than 70 different models of bandsaws to meet each manufacturer’s needs. When Steve Thomas, structural line supervisor for Nucor Building Systems, Brigham City, Utah, needed a bandsaw for Nucor’s new facility, he was referred to BTM, which expanded to North America in 2004. “I was familiar with BTM and already knew what problems we had run into in the past with other manufacturers’ saws and were looking to avoid those problems with our new facility,” says Thomas.

After looking at a few demo models, Thomas was convinced, and the company purchased a BTM 120.70 SA DS double mitering beam saw. “We’ve been in production for about three years now,” Thomas adds. “We’ve had fewer maintenance concerns, and BTM’s customer service has been very good.”

When Thomas had program problems, a technician from BTM responded right away and came to the facility to work out the issues. “The saw and accompanying customer service have been very reliable, and other than general maintenance, we’ve had no issues,” he says.

Worth the investment

A new bandsaw can be a significant investment, costing anywhere from \$20,000 to \$100,000. In addition to the initial investment, maintenance costs and costs to replace saw blades also can add a considerable burden to facilities. “The real cost will be buying blades week in and week out over the lifetime of the machine,” says Ian Tatham, president and owner of BTM North America. “You’ll put more money into the blades than you did into the original machine. People end up paying three or four times more than that down the road just on blades.”

Alabama Metals Industries Corp., Birmingham, Ala., was in need of a machine to cut bar grating and purchased the 125 SA grating/panel saw, which cuts metals and fiber panels up to 49 inches wide. “We saw 30 percent productivity improvement within the first month of operations,” says Jeff Lyons, general manager. “Along with improved productivity, we noticed a significant improvement on blade life due to BTM’s blade coolant/lube system.”

In addition to less upkeep, Lyons notes the company experienced a return on investment in approximately 13 months. “We get two times the life using a BTM saw than other bandsaws we have used in the past,” Lyons adds. “Replacing less saws has saved us thousands of dollars a year.”

Thomas also noticed significant savings accrued by switching to a BTM saw. “For the reduced amount of downtime we’ve had with this saw, and despite the fact that it was initially cheaper than our previous saw, it’s definitely paid for itself,” Thomas says.

When shopping for bandsaws, options sometimes are limited in regards to scope of designs and price points. Although North American bandsaw options are cheaper than German or Japanese options, their efficiency and productivity can be limited. “Productivity development has been slow-going in America,” adds Tatham. “Development is a lot faster-paced in Europe—you have a choice between a less-expensive but lower-quality American machine or an expensive-to-purchase-and-run German or Japanese option.”

Top: BTM machine model 1000 CNC can cut up to a 39-inch diameter.

Middle: View of back side of BTM model 61.41 AFC NC 3000.

Bottom: View from back side of BTM model 61.41 ADS CNC 3000, a pivot-style bandsaw.



A static design

Tatham says bandsaws are the “neglected stepchild” of the machine tool industry, primarily because until now, “there’s been no efficient way to do it.” Because current options are limited, manufacturers are forced to “put up with the inefficiency.” BTM is unique in that it has taken the original design, applied innovations meeting customers’ different needs and “turned it into a money-making operation,” says Tatham, who also notes customers are realizing they can process pieces efficiently at a rate they never thought possible.

“Why go out and replace your current bandsaw with something that’s identical to what you have when you can instead upgrade your operations?” asks Tatham. “Our goal is to meet the domestic price point but provide better quality than what foreign producers can offer.” According to Tatham, the key to BTM’s success is the fact that the company takes care to match the machine to what the customer is trying

to do. Some plants offer 12 different models and match the customer to the machine—but there are a lot of gaps and that ends up being less efficient. “We try to offer customers options, creating machines that cater to their specific needs,” Tatham says.

One quality Thomas felt other bandsaw companies lacked was the ability to accommodate individual companies’ needs. “One thing that I was looking for that competitors didn’t offer was the ability to rotate off 90 degrees in both directions, which gives you more flexibility in production,” Thomas says. “The old bandsaw I had processed in one direction but limited you more. It was difficult.”

According to Thomas, BTM’s saw was a two-post type of saw that raised up and down as one unit, as opposed to the head operating in a more traditional, scissor-type action. “I think that design allowed the bandsaw to have rotation that other options lack,” says Thomas.

At Alabama Metals, BTM was able to offer an option that allowed customers to cut bar grating—exactly meeting his needs. “BTM took into account all the bells and whistles we add after purchasing standard machine tool bandsaws,” says

Lyons. In this case, BTM designed the entire bandsaw around cutting bar grating from downs and material handling to setup of speeds and feed. It’s “the only one [bandsaw] I know of in the industry,” adds Lyons.

BTM meeting Alabama Metals’ needs is no small feat, says Lyons. “Bar grating is not a solid piece of material. ... Most

bandsaws are designed to cut the spacing between bars, bringing another set of issues to the table,” Lyons says, noting material movement during the cutting process, squaring of the material and blade life are all issues BTM took into account when designing this model. “It works well, believe me,” adds Lyons.

Saws are designed to meet specific needs, and technicians are readily available to answer any questions. Although Thomas says Nucor doesn’t call BTM much because processing issues are rare, BTM does call Nucor from time to time to check on the machine. “If we had a problem we couldn’t figure out, we’d call our [personal] technician,” says Thomas, adding the company doesn’t need to go through a customer-service channel but simply speaks to its technician directly, who then responds in a timely fashion.

“You have your regular wear-and-tear, addressing bearings on the motor, etc., but overall a bandsaw should last for years and years if properly maintained,” says Thomas. “We’re very confident that future maintenance on our BTM bandsaw will be easy.”

According to Lyons, BTM’s selection was better and “affordable. We have since purchased other BTM saws for our other locations,” he says. ■

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