

Citizen celebrates new strengths

Holding the first Open House event under its new name, Citizen Machinery UK, there were many reasons for the company to celebrate. Steed Webzell went along to find out more

Speaking on the last day of Citizen Machinery UK's three-day autumn Open House, managing director Geoff Bryant was clearly pleased. "Considering the gloomy economic outlook portrayed by the mainstream media, the event has been very successful."

With over 100 existing and potential customers attending the company's UK headquarters near Watford, and several orders confirmed as a result, Mr Bryant is convinced manufacturing can weather the storm.

"It's the absolute truth when I say that

Unicut A32-VII pioneer

Among the first to order Citizen's A32-VII was Unicut Precision. The order, worth some £220,000, will bring the total number of Citizen machines installed at the Welwyn Garden City facility to 25.

"The A32 specification will give us at least 40 per cent better productivity on the specific contracts we have in mind," says joint managing director Charles Kenny.

"The Citizen A32s will free capacity on our high specification Citizen M32 machines which will then be used for new and more complex work on difficult materials involving lots of driven tool milling," he adds.

all of our customers are busy," he states. "And while a few may be a little more apprehensive about investment than they were six months ago, workload and the need for more capacity continue to dictate capital expenditure."

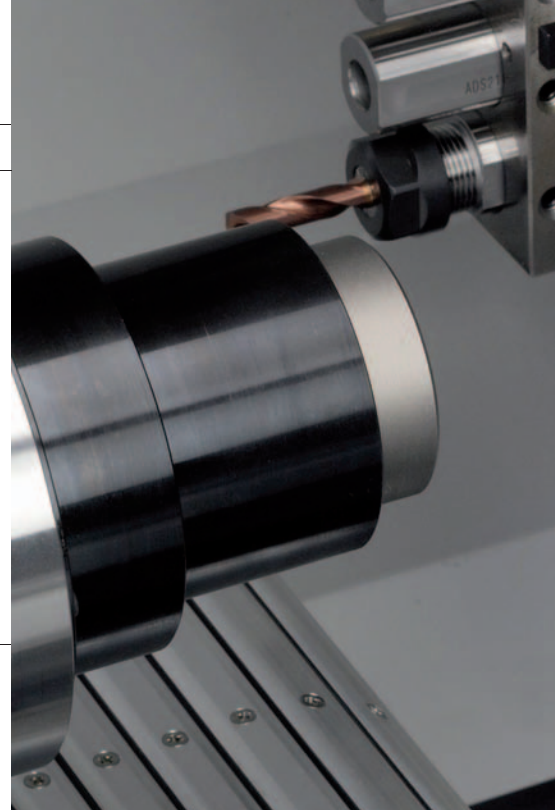
Mr Bryant has been involved with Citizen since the mid-1970s but the recent name change from NC Engineering to Citizen Machinery UK better reflects the company's ongoing support for its Japanese principal, as well as the growing reputation of its brand, it is claimed.

"We now have a 50 per cent share of the UK sliding-head market," says Mr Bryant, "which is one of the biggest that Citizen can boast worldwide outside of Japan. For this reason, Citizen in Japan takes great interest in the initiative we show here and is keen to replicate our formula elsewhere."

BEST SHOWROOM IN THE WORLD

He says that the new UK facility and showroom, built in 2000 entirely from capital generated by the business, is arguably the best Citizen showroom in the world. And there were two new CNC sliding-head lathes to be found there at the recent Open House – the A32-VII and the A20-VIICL.

Not only is the A32-VII CNC sliding-head lathe competitively priced but Citizen says it is also the fastest 32 mm machine of its type in the world. This heavy duty machine takes the A20 design,

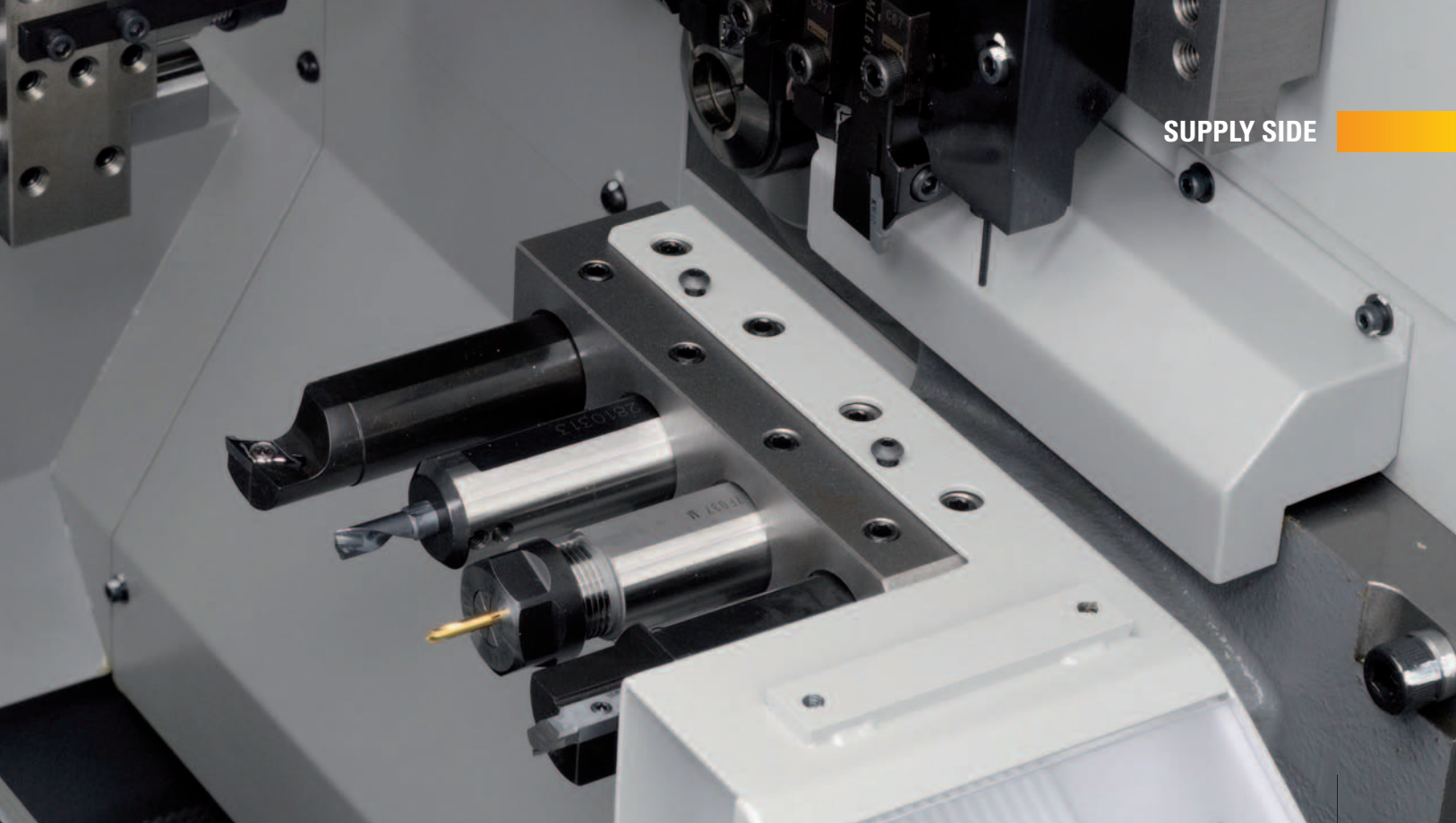


Citizen's most successful new machine launch, into the larger material size – 32 mm diameter and 320 mm long.

The A32-VII is targeted at heavier duty single operation machining cycles with a 7.5 kW main, 3.7 kW 2-axis sub-spindle and 1 kW motors to power its driven tools. As standard, 23 tools can be carried, six for turning and four driven for cross machining from the 2-axis cross-slide. Mounted on a substantial over-arm attached to the cross-slide, are four tool positions for drilling at the main spindle and four for back drilling at the sub-spindle.

A prototype of the A32-VII appeared at the MACH show in April where six of these machines were sold, but Citizen Machinery UK now has the first production model outside of Japan (see adjacent panel).

"The A32-VII will suit many applications, but particularly higher volume markets such as automotive, where aggressive machining is required," says Mr Bryant. "With its 45 m/min rapids we estimate a cycle time reduction of around 30 per cent compared with the previous generation machine."



Left, a busy Open House event at Citizen Machinery UK; above, the A20-VII's working area, now joined by big brother A32-VII

Furthermore, we are hoping to quantify substantial energy savings in the near future once we have concluded a small series of studies."

Also new at the Open House was the Citizen A20-VIICL, a non-guide bush machine developed to provide more competitive production of shorter length-to-diameter ratio components up to 20 mm diameter.

"There is increasing demand for non-guide bush sliding-head technology," says Mr Bryant. "This is because these machines offer all the benefits afforded to sliding-head models but can also provide fixed-head attributes, such as machining short bar remnants if required, which can create valuable savings on expensive materials."

Standard Citizen sliding-head lathes have a guide bush between the collet and cutting tool that provides support to the material as it is advanced into the machining area, minimising any tendency to deflect when machining longer components. The sliding headstock pushes the material through the guide bush during the cutting process, creating the Z-axis motion and enabling the cutting tool to be positioned as close to the support point of the bush as practical.

With a non-guide bush machine, parts with lower length-to-diameter ratios can also be machined accurately with all the advantages of normal

sliding-head lathes. With a shorter working stroke – up to 55 mm, instead of the 165 mm of the standard A20 – the length of the bar end remnant produced is reduced.

HIGH END MACHINE PROMISED

As for future developments, Mr Bryant hints at a totally new high end MH32 machine, set to arrive on UK shores in

mid-2009. This multiple tool, 32 mm capacity CNC sliding-head model will sit above the current top of the range M-Series to provide a higher value machining solution featuring a B-axis and three Y-axes to process the most complex parts in the fewest operations and in the fastest possible cycle times. The current M-Series, a UK top seller, will continue in its present form. □

Joining forces

Already holding just under 30 per cent of the shares (17,500,000) in fellow Japanese machine tool company Miyano Machinery, Citizen has added another 20,283,000 for a 64.56 per cent controlling stake in the fixed-head lathe specialist. Demonstrating the new 'combined' force of the companies, Miyano Machinery UK had a presence at Citizen Machinery UK's Open House, where managing director John Stretton was on hand to show visitors the latest Miyano BNJ-51SY2 turn-mill centre.

Mr Bryant says that with the further coming together of the Miyano and Citizen machine tool businesses in Japan the combined operation will be stronger: "In turning machines sold, Japan has a 'premier league' of three – Mazak, Mori Seiki and Okuma. The joining of Citizen and Miyano will bring the new organisation within touching distance. If asked at any time in the past 15 years which product family I would like to add to Citizen, I would have said Miyano. The two are complementary: Citizen's strength is 32 mm diameter and below, while Miyano is particularly adept with 35 mm and above."

Synergies and efficiencies are currently being pursued, taking in development, procurement, manufacturing, sales and service. The companies will share a stand at this year's JIMTOF exhibition in Tokyo. Mr Bryant says that although the two brands will remain separate, some collaboration is already underway. Indeed, Miyano has already developed a model using Citizen CNC software – its BNX machine.