

Felder shows its class



Derek Jones visits the new Felder showroom and discovers that a combination of efficiency and ingenuity is a winning formula

Heavy machinery being lifted into the factory as it was in 1965

We last came over to Innsbruck six years ago to see the production line of world class machinery manufacturers, Felder. Hard to imagine now that the recent success of the company was founded on what appears today to be humble beginnings. In this relatively short period of time the manufacturing facility has expanded beyond all recognition. What was the central

hub of the factory is now largely given over to warehousing and pre-delivery storage. A series of purpose built interconnecting buildings are now the platform on which the Austrian company produces some of the finest woodworking machines available.

With any large-scale developments there are inevitably some aspects of production that come under question as to their suitability for expansion.

“Felder machines have tenacity and longevity built in”



“German efficiency apparently comes from Austrian ingenuity”

► Up until 1999 Felder had their own foundry where a majority of their cast iron components were produced in-house. Demand for their machines has grown and the increase in the range of products available meant that developing this facility to meet the demand was impractical. Reluctantly the decision was made to forgo this luxury and expand the plant to cope with growth in other areas.

The Felder philosophy is based on logic. Clearly defined objectives are met with appropriate resources to get the job done. There is no fat.

In the pursuit of excellence there will always be extravagances and should you set out to be the best at what you do then attention to detail in the extreme is part of the process.

I mentioned on one occasion (only once mind) that the factory had an air of German efficiency about it. The spectacularly beautiful but rapid decent into Innsbruck airport had disorientated me sufficiently to make such a faux pas.

German efficiency apparently comes from Austrian ingenuity. Moving swiftly on and narrowly avoiding becoming fork-lift road-kill, our guide for the day, area sales manager John Calverley, showed

us to the main distribution hangar; a multiple layered parking facility for machinery. Access is by yet another sophisticated machine disappearing off into the darkness to retrieve an order for dispatch.

First impressions

One of my first observations was to liken the headquarters to that of an international bureau of intelligence. A main corridor, longer than the par three at my local pitch and putt, acts as a conduit between marketing and development suites. People dart in and out of plush offices with a purpose, clearly on a mission which just adds to the atmosphere of a well oiled machine.

As it is with all things continental, at midday there is a mass exodus by everyone young and old to seek food and relaxation. I'm easily persuaded and anyway I wouldn't want to offend.

As the crow flies it's not that far to the new Felder showroom from their headquarters in Hall, but the town's split by a railway, which incidentally runs smoothly despite the recent snowfall. 1200sq metres of display area is comfortably laid out with machines and accessories that in many cases need little explanation.

Upstairs however is an equally gargantuan space given over to machines that require demonstration and instruction on their use and application.

The basement houses a similar space divided up into lecture rooms and tutorial workshops for a more practical induction to working the Felder way.

Global operation

Although it was clear to see that there have been a number of massive changes over the past years, what was more interesting was to learn about the key events that have helped to turn the small family run company into the worldwide operation that exists today.

The first major catalyst to success was the market domination of the combination machine. Post-war, when raw materials were scarce and expensive, a machine that could offer several operations in one took the market by storm.

Expansion into the export markets also played a major part in the development of the company. In the 20 years between 1965 and 1985, the company grew from 30 to 150 employees, with export increasing

Felder showroom opened in 2010





There are some big thinkers behind the global success of Felder, a philosophy not spared on the new showroom at Innsbruck

from 5% to 50%. Export sales have always continued to grow and now account for 95% of total sales. There's barely a country in the world that's missing on the Felder map.

Probably the biggest change in the direction of the company came at the end of the millennium. It was coming to the handover time of the company from Senior Chief Johann Felder to his two sons Hansjörg and Martin.

Together they'd kept the company on a level heading, growing steadily year on year. It was clear however that as the quality of eastern imports was increasing, competition was no longer a threat from the local neighbours in Germany and Italy, but from companies all over the world offering a range of machines in every quality and price category.

It was make or break for the company; stay small and maintain a business selling to local companies and private customers, or expand, take advantage of a booming economy and become a major player.

The fact that we're writing a report following the recent opening of a 3000m² showroom is evidence that the gamble paid off. Although to imply that it was anything less than well calculated would be remiss.

The grand opening of the new showroom had to be split over

several months so that all customers, employees, dealers and dignitaries could attend. It's hard to believe there simply wasn't space to accommodate everybody at once.

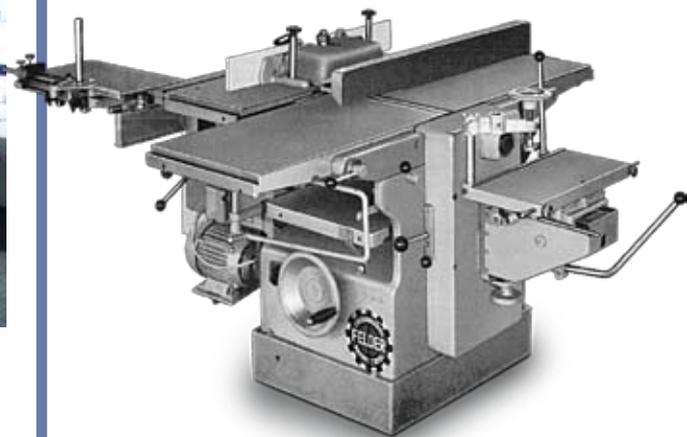
Johann Felder

And what of the Felder founder, Mr Johann Felder? Celebrating his 80th birthday in November 2010, he continues to walk to work every morning and as Head of Service he has plenty of responsibilities to keep him busy. At the new year meeting he welcomed all of the 300 guests to the event and captivated them with the motivation and drive that he still brings to his daily work. No surprises then for guessing why the company is such a success. Felder machines have tenacity and longevity built in.

With business taken care of it was time to head for the airport. Maintaining eye contact in the rear view mirror our taxi driver let on that his fiancée was employed as part of the sales team at Felder HQ. Small world, synchronicity, coincidence or careful planning? There was plenty of time to ponder this as our return aircraft was still up to its ankles in snow at Gatwick. Meanwhile, from the serenity of our departure lounge, we could see the rail network sticking to a rigid timetable. *F&C*

Evolution of a workshop icon

The major advancements by Felder over the last 50 years include the X-roll sliding table system replacing a conventional ball bearing system, the Easy Glide system for saw and spindle tilt allowing grease free adjustment of the angle and a removable spindle for a quicker changeover from moulding to routing and the Felder system for quick change of planer knives. Plus of course some body styling.



A Felder combination machine from 1970



A Felder machine from the 1980s



The equivalent Felder combination machine today is now the CF741SP