

BY LINCOLN BRUNNER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Making impressions

Aida works on advancing technology,
foothold in Chinese market

With an energetic new foray into China, mechanical press manufacturer Aida Engineering Ltd. is hoping to grow its presence in the mushrooming Chinese press arena while advancing its technological prowess here and abroad.

The construction of Aida Manufacturing (Shanghai) Ltd.'s 31,000-sq.-ft. assembly plant in the city's Waigaoqiao Free Trade Zone last autumn has coincided closely with the recent introduction of the company's ServoPro press technology to North America and China. The two may be coincidental, but the result has been to push deeper into the world's most dynamic industrial economy while raising the technology bar higher there and in the United States.

Kings in the Middle Kingdom

As a Japan-based company, Aida already enjoys a well-established presence in China, with more than 3,000 presses in service on the mainland. Aida's best-selling machines in the Chinese market are the NC1 and NC2 gap-frame presses. The plant, which assembles press components manufactured in Malaysia and Japan, is mainly producing NC1 units from 60 to 200 tons. In the near future, Aida plans to begin assembling NS1 and UMX straightside machines in Shanghai.

The entry-level price for an 80-ton Aida mechanical press in China is about \$50,000, according to Tommy Shu, vice-managing director and general manager of Aida Hong Kong

Ltd. Sales of the NC series have remained strong even as the company's main customer sectors in China have changed, from electrical appliances 20 to 25 years ago to IT and telecommunications equipment in recent years to more automotive applications today.

"Appliance is still our major field, but we also will put our force into the automobile industry, mainly for the parts," said Zhang Qing Lin, vice chairman and managing director of Aida Manufacturing Shanghai, during *FFJ*'s tour of the plant in early July.

The servo connection


Aida Engineering introduced its servomotor technology to Japan just two years ago and now is making a move for customers in the U.S. and China. While the company has five machines running in the U.S., the market in China is much more nascent. But Zhang hopes that will change.

"We are still researching whether the servomotor machine can sell in China," Zhang said. "We expect there is a potential market for the servomotor machines here in China."



Photographs by the author.

here and abroad



The biggest difference, of course, between the ServoPro and Aida's stand-by mechanical presses is that the traditional guts—flywheel, drive motor, clutch and brake—have been replaced by a direct servomotor drive. Having a servomotor provide the force for the driveshaft offers users the ability to program the stroke of the press for specific applications, including stroke length and speed. Users also can reduce the velocity in blanking, hardware insertion or indie tapping applications. Though the ServoPro can run up to 140 spm, Aida

Shanghai is emphasizing its precision in hopes that the technology will catch on with its IT and telecommunications customers that are producing high-tolerance parts for mobile phones, computers and other hot Chinese markets.

However, because of the plant's location in the free trade zone, Aida Shanghai also has a sharp eye on the export market—workers were readying a pair of 200-ton presses for export to Mexico during *FFJ*'s tour. And now that the ServoPro has gained a firm foothold in Japan and other parts of Asia, Aida has its sights set on the U.S. market.

"We have sold machines here," said Denny Boerger, product manager for Aida-Dayton Technologies Corp., Dayton, Ohio, who noted that the company has sold several more than the five it has operating around the country right now.

"It's a product that's beginning to develop a toehold here, as well," Boerger said. "We've sold hundreds of them in Japan and Asia. The introduction was there. The manufacturing is there. The emphasis was there initially. It's going to take us a little while to catch up, but we're beginning to see some definite inroads."

As for new markets such as China, Zhang said that the Aida

An Aida technician (right) looks over a 200-ton gap-frame mechanical press being readied for export to Mexico at Aida's Shanghai press assembly plant.



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way is to develop a strong service and maintenance team first, then begin the all-out selling push. The factory had already sent two engineers to Japan to receive training on the ServoPro in early July.

“Aida is a well-known press maker,” Zhang noted. “We want to focus on service first. Then we will focus our forces to promote the servomotor machine in China as a second step. This is the Aida style.”

Eye on the future

Aida hopes to produce 100 presses in Shanghai annually and had assembled about 40 there between October and July. The company’s annual sales growth rate in China has been about 10 percent, a figure Zhang predicted would be well within Aida’s reach for each of the next five years.

One of Aida’s goals in locating the

plant, which employs about 30 people, in the industrial mecca of Shanghai was to be close to its Chinese customers. However, Zhang noted although China is the main market for the plant’s presses right now, it does not make a lot of sense for that trend to continue, considering that land within the free trade zone is three times as expensive as the real estate surrounding it (though still cheaper than in Japan), and the key advantage of residing in the zone is freedom from import/export taxes.

“If we only consider selling machines into China, it’s not a good place for Aida,” Zhang said. “In this free trade zone, land is very expensive.”

The factory stands on almost 252,000 sq. ft. of land, giving it plenty of room to expand its current facility.

“We have only one factory right now, and it’s in its first phase,” Zhang

said. “We still have a lot of empty land. We moved quite smoothly through the first phase.”

And as China itself opens up and new products such as the UMX and NS1 begin rolling out of the plant, Shu is hopeful that the success will continue.

“China has been changing a lot, economy-wise,” he said. “The government is being more open. They are more open than before. They have to do that. They are opening the market and opening up politically—a little bit.” **FFJ**