

TOOLING & PRODUCTION



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Retooling Lands Single-source Tier One Auto Contract

Molds from U.S. or China?

Investments in technology and new machine tools have paid off for a metalworking company supplying molds to original equipment manufacturers. JMMS, a second-generation family-owned company in Easley, S.C., was recently awarded a substantial tooling contract from a Tier One supplier to a major automotive manufacturer. The company uses a “next generation” approach to tooling that includes global manufacturing and ongoing capital investment. In February 2009 they installed a new OKK HM1250S horizontal machining center. It can produce gigantic cores and cavities, with an 11,000 lb per side capacity, making it well suited for tooling for car hoods, fenders, doors and dashboards. It produces super-accurate, rigid components, with the advantages of a smaller footprint and “lights-out” manufacturing.

Over the past decade, the company has purchased several machining centers that yield high accuracy, improved surface finishes, and rapid metal removal rates.

David M Bowers II, JMMS CEO, says, “Together, these new capital investments streamlined our machining processes and made them much more efficient. The OKK machines were Ethernet-capable and could handle larger files, whereas our old machines required a computer DNC system linked to the CNC controllers. The old machines could only move as fast as the data drip, so our new OKK installations give us substantially more bandwidth and throughput. They also moved us away from proprietary CNC standards toward the open architecture pioneered by FANUC and Mitsubishi.



The new OKK machining center at JMMS produces super-accurate, rigid components, with the advantages of a smaller footprint and “lights-out” manufacturing.



“Our other major decision was to partner with Chinese toolmakers, instead of fighting a losing battle based on low prices. I went to China in 2004 to meet with prospective partners, visit their plants and look at their work. In the last four years, I’ve made 15 trips to China. Combining the new capacity in our South Carolina plant with Chinese partners has helped to drive our evolution from toolmaker to tool manufacturer. We’ve also invested heavily in design and concurrent engineering capabilities on the front end and built a dedicated maintenance operation on the back end.

“In today’s economy the key question is ‘What is the manufactured cost?’ Molds have become a commodity,” Bowers says. “Some business that used to be done in China is switching back to the U.S. because of transportation costs. Chinese mold manufacturers can deliver prototypes very quickly but they’re challenged when it comes to production tool quantities. U.S.-made molds become very competitive when you factor in the transportation costs and delivery time from China.” Mr. Bowers noted that JMMS expects to see sustained new growth beginning in early 2010.

JMMS CEO David M. Bowers II.

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