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Batteries and other products



AAG offices in Birmingham

PLATINUM INTERNATIONAL - MORE THAN JUST BATTERIES...

Platinum International is a company that has gone from strength to strength supplying in excess of 1.5 million batteries a year and with a turnover in excess of £100 million. Now part of one of the world's largest automotive and industrial parts distribution companies, Platinum is able to offer a wide variety of products to the access, plant and lifting sectors. Mark Darwin spent time with OE/OES & Industrial sales director John Richards to find out more.

The company was set up in 2002 as UK Batteries operating from a single location in Manchester. UK Batteries acquired Platinum Batteries Ltd in 2005 renaming the entire company Platinum International.



John Richards

The company sold automotive batteries to the independent aftermarket, national fast fits and original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). Its first real taste of the powered access market came in 2009, when Platinum was appointed as the master distributor for Trojan batteries after the previous distributor - Energy Batteries - went into administration. Platinum added the Trojan product to its OEM & Industrial division with a key focus on the access, plant and lifting sectors. Platinum was also able to complement the deep cycle offering with their automotive range which accounts for 50 percent of this sector.

"When we took on Trojan, there was very little stock in the country and very little on order - due to the situation of the previous distributor. The access sector was a new market for us and got us into selling deep cycle batteries in volume. By that time, we had increased to 10 branches across the UK with more than 60 vehicles and drivers so we could deliver two or three times per week offering a service with no minimum order quantity or value stipulations," said Richards.

"By 2018 we had increased our market share of the access, plant and lifting sectors to between 75 and 80 percent which included supplying OEMs.

That figure may be even greater today as we have gained further business with the national rental companies and buying groups."

AAG ACQUISITION

In October 2018, Platinum International was acquired by the Alliance Automotive Group (AAG) - a division of Atlanta based Genuine Parts Company (GPC). GPC is one of the world's largest automotive and industrial parts distribution companies - and its global flagship brand NAPA - with a stock market valuation currently of around \$25.5 billion.

"Immediately one of the largest benefits to being part of GPC and the AAG family is our incredible purchasing power given the enormity of the group globally. This has certainly benefitted us in securing product availability for our customers, even in the challenging times the industry is currently experiencing."

An added benefit to Platinum International customers is the wider AAG Group offering which includes product ranges such as lighting, lubricants, shock absorbers, Milwaukee Tools, consumables and braking from the AAG businesses FPS Distribution and APEC. Through these companies AAG brings to market major brands such as Bosch, Gates, Schaeffler and SKF to name but a few.

PANDEMIC PROBLEMS AND AVAILABILITY ISSUES

The demand for batteries throughout the pandemic was exacerbated by OEMs restarting production, together with the aftermarket sector having a high requirement for replacement product. This was as a result of the machines



Apec parts

being stood inactive leading to battery sulphation.

"When the pandemic struck the deep cycle battery manufacturers had availability issues to the point where major access manufacturers were unable to source deep cycle product," says Richards. "Even our own suppliers couldn't provide product and had extended lead times. This was unacceptable when we are supplying OEMs with fixed schedules and rental companies which rely on machines being out in the field and operational."

Our procurement team worked closely with us to establish alternative suppliers that our OEM customers were able to test and approve. This led to us selecting and moving forward with a supplier with proven quality along with the integral commitment to availability which they have honoured to this day."

WASTE BATTERY RECYCLING

An increasingly important aspect of supplying batteries is a legally compliant and environmentally friendly waste recycling scheme. "Waste batteries are a massive plus for us and so many people don't know we do this," says

PLATINUM BATTERIES

Richards. "Our recycling scheme gives customers a credit for each battery that is recycled. We collect the old batteries and also cover the cost of the waste consignment note which is legally compliant. This service is a challenge to many in this sector as they do not have the distribution model to support the collection and recycling. With our transport, logistics and branch network we can do this effectively."

LITHIUM BATTERIES AND EFB/AGM TECHNOLOGY

Platinum is currently in discussions with a number of potential suppliers of Lithium product for the access, plant and lifting sectors.

"Within this sector we do not yet see a mass market requirement for lithium product although we do accept it is an emerging longer-term option," says Richards.



"The purchase cost is too high coupled with the additional cost and difficulty to recycle them safely and cost effectively. You cannot treat a used lithium battery like a used lead acid battery due to the recyclability factor. Lithium batteries have to go through several processes to be recycled safely, and this comes at significant cost to the customer. Lead acid and AGM batteries on the other hand are 99 percent recyclable with a value being credited back to the customer."

Another disadvantage to lithium technology in the sector is due to the weight disparity. Additional ballasts will be required to fit lithium due to the counterbalance and losing the weight that lead acid batteries add.

A shift that has certainly been seen in recent years within the sector is towards EFB/AGM battery technology and away from standard lead acid, a development driven from the automotive sector which is now being replicated in other markets.

"AGM technology has developed significantly over the last 10 years through stop/start cars

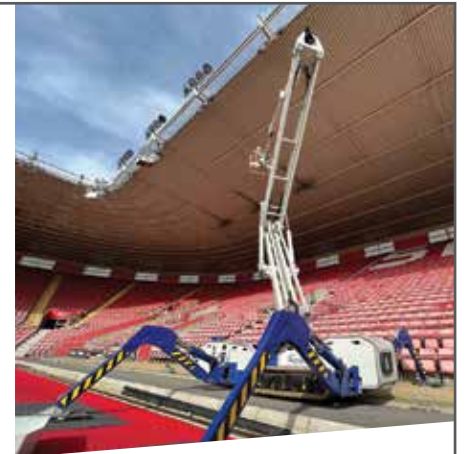


Loading area - Birmingham

which need either AGM (Absorbent Glass Matt) or EFB (Enhanced Flooded Battery). The new vehicle technology demanded a battery that was significantly more cyclic, was maintenance free, vibration resistant and performed better in colder climates. EFB batteries were introduced as a halfway house between flooded and AGM with thicker plates than a standard battery but not as thick as an AGM battery. AGM/EFB batteries now make up 95 percent of the automotive sector," he said.

CLOSING

"Our objective is to make sure customers understand that we are a major player in this sector and are here to stay. We are stronger than before, have significant resources and a growing 12 plus depot network covering the UK and Ireland. As part of GPC and the AAG family we will continue to exceed our customers' expectations and requirements." ■



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