



## EXPERTISE THAT GIVES YOU THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

**Lauener, based in Boudry, was the very first company Tornos interviewed in the decomagazine 10 years ago. So what of the forecasts for the future made at that time? What has happened to the company that was then so quick to see the potential of the DECO? How does today's on-site team view the future?**

**To answer these questions and many more besides, decomagazine went to see Mr. Forster – managing director and Mr. Lamy – head of the “medical” sector workshop.**



At Lauener, numerous workshops, DECO 10a, 13a, 20a... everything is in place to ensure the maximum amount of quality parts are produced each day.

**decomagazine:** When we last met, 70 % of your activity was in the connectivity business with 30 % in watchmaking and you had just ordered your 10th DECO. Is this market split still the same?

**Mr. Forster:** 30 % of our business is still in the watchmaking sector, but several years ago we diversified into the medical sector and this also represents roughly a third of our business today. We currently have nearly 50 DECO on our two production sites in Boudry (Switzerland) and Shanghai (China).

**dm:** In 1997, Lauener saw various advantages of working with the numerically controlled DECO over the cam-type machine, principally the ability to produce complex parts without a fixture change. Did these machines meet this need and what were/are the major trends?

**Mr. Lamy:** Yes, the DECO machines did enable us to complete a large volume of workpieces. And, over the years, we have needed to be able to produce ever more complex parts and these machines meant we could “stay in the race”.

**Mr. Forster:** To put it simply, we were able to diversify into the medical sector thanks to the capacity of these machines.

**dm:** So, we can safely say this forecast was proved correct. At the time, you also told us that this type of product was an important aspect in putting the value back into the profession of bar turner. Did these machines make it easier for you to find skilled staff?

**Mr. Forster:** Our staff and the “man-machine” partnership are what made the difference. It is imperative that we are able to maximise the



The DECO 13a workshop: machines ideally suited to the "medical-dental" sector.

machine's performance by using it to the best of its capacity. The positive effect that NC machines were to have was such that they rendered our range of cam-type machines more difficult to use.

**Mr. Lamy:** I must say that younger operators working on cam-type machines see the introduction of NC as a step forward in their career.

**dm: So you still work with cam-type machines? Are they still suitable for today's requirements?**

**Mr. Lamy:** Our cam-type machines are used for fairly large production volumes where flexibility provided by NC is unnecessary. For those parts that haven't really changed in the last 10 years, there is considerable benefit to be had from a cam-type machine park which has already been amortised.

**dm: Are there any trends in the size of series runs and complexity of parts?**

**Mr. Forster:** Series are getting smaller and parts are getting more complex, that's for sure. Today, we produce parts we couldn't even have imagined 10 years ago.

**dm: How do you cope with declining production runs on cam-type machines? Do you take the risk of producing parts for stock?**

**Mr. Forster:** One of the major trends over the last few years has been the increasing participation of our suppliers. To give you an example, some of our customers no longer place orders with us! We are an integral part of their control system and decide our-

selves when we need to produce parts based on our customer's consumption levels.

**dm: Isn't that too much to manage?**

**Mr. Forster:** It's a skill we had to master, we need to be involved with and close to our customers... It's a very intense form of customer focus.

**dm: How do you explain Lauener's current success?**

**Mr. Forster:** There are various aspects to it. One thing is a given – quality no longer makes you stand out from the competition. It is absolutely essential to stay in the race. Then the parameters change depending on the business activity. In the connectivity business, reactivity is definitely decisive, being able to produce relatively large volumes very quickly. In the medical sector, the rhythm is slower, validation periods are needed and production runs are short.. but just like the other sectors, being able to produce parts to "zero defect" standards and as efficiently as possible.

**dm: You mention efficiency. Is that the same as productivity in your mind?**

**Mr. Lamy and Mr. Forster:** Cycle time is part of it, but it isn't the whole story. If a given machine runs a little less quickly but enables a higher quality level to be reached, or if it makes production smoother, we will produce more parts at the end of the day. We need to get the balance right between all these parameters.

**dm: To reach this level of efficiency and expertise, you must need highly-skilled bar turners. Do you have programming specialists supporting the bar turners?**

**Mr. Lamy:** At Lauener, we made the decision to leave all the expertise with the bar turners, so they are responsible for programming, set up, optimisation and production. This is important to keep the profession attractive.

**Mr. Forster:** To reach this level of work quality, we have a permanent internal training policy. We train our bar turners in-house and they also have training with Tornos, mainly on programming.

**dm: You have said that expertise is key but is there not a current trend towards "less operator expertise and more machine expertise"?**

**Mr. Forster:** There are tools that can provide support, like CAD/CAM software, but they can't replace the human element, sound professional know-how will always be needed, even more so because we are faced with ever-greater challenges.

**dm: What are they?**

**Mr. Forster:** As we already mentioned. Impeccable quality is an essential prerequisite... achieved with shorter and shorter lead times. These are two funda-

mental parameters to which we can often increasingly complex operations and more demanding materials to work in. Our bar turners have to master as many of these parameters in order to come up with the "best solution".

**dm: To go back to what you were saying about part complexity, the medical sector is very demanding. You ventured into this field before it became fashionable to do so. Several companies are riding the "medical wave", and even if this market does not seem to be cyclical, are you not worried about saturation?**

**Mr. Forster:** The market is definitely highly populated. As we were one of the first, we have perfect control over the parameters in this field... but I agree we must also think of the future, other sectors seem to be opening up to us...

**dm: I suppose you won't be telling us about these aspects of your strategy today?**

**Mr. Forster:** I'm afraid not...

**dm: We will come back to this in 10 years time, if that's OK with you. Talking of the future, what will the machines be like, in your opinion?**



At Lauener, the "man/machine" relationship is a genuine tool working to improve performance.



The flexibility of the DECO 10a machines enable Lauener SA to finely manage their production.

**Mr. Forster:** OK. See you again in 10 years time. As far as the machines are concerned, I think the key feature will be user-friendliness and reliability. We will really need machines that we can leave to produce "on their own" resting assured the finished parts will be perfect, again and again.

**Mr. Lamy:** Machines will have to enable us to produce complex parts, ever-more complex in certain cases and in a straightforward way, when it comes to both programming and set-up.

**dm:** Can you imagine a similar trend in upstream operations to the one you are currently witnessing in downstream operations? Can you imagine a machine manufacturer connecting up to your control system to see what kind of parts you should be producing in order to propose the machine best suited to your needs?

**Mr. Forster:** Not really! However, the basic idea is the same, it's all about getting closer to one another, a partnership that encourages the machine manufacturer to allow its customers to look into new machine production. It's actually about customer focus.

**dm:** You talk about the importance of the bar turner, the importance of the relationship between partners as being the real roots of success, isn't this minimising the importance of technology?

**Mr. Forster:** You know, you can purchase machines everywhere, Tornos included, they are the same... but what makes Lauener stand out from the rest and

in Switzerland in general is this ability to go beyond the technical aspect and offer more. These days, on certain markets, the fact that you are Swiss and you have this "quality and ingenuity" in everything you do is a definite advantage.

**dm:** To conclude, how do you feel when you look back on the last 10 years?

**Mr Forster and Mr Lamy:** Basically, the job has remained the same, demands are higher, challenges greater, parts more complex and pressure on prices is high... but what really makes the difference at the end of the day is the relationship between man and machine at our customers service.

And this will continue...

## LAUENER SA

*Number of turning machines: approx. 150*

*Number of DECO units: approx. 50*

*Production sites: Boudry (Switzerland) and Shanghai (China)*

*Target markets: 1/3 connectivity business, 1/3 medical, 1/3 watch making*

*Number of parts produced per year: over 250 million*