

Top team pumps out the profits

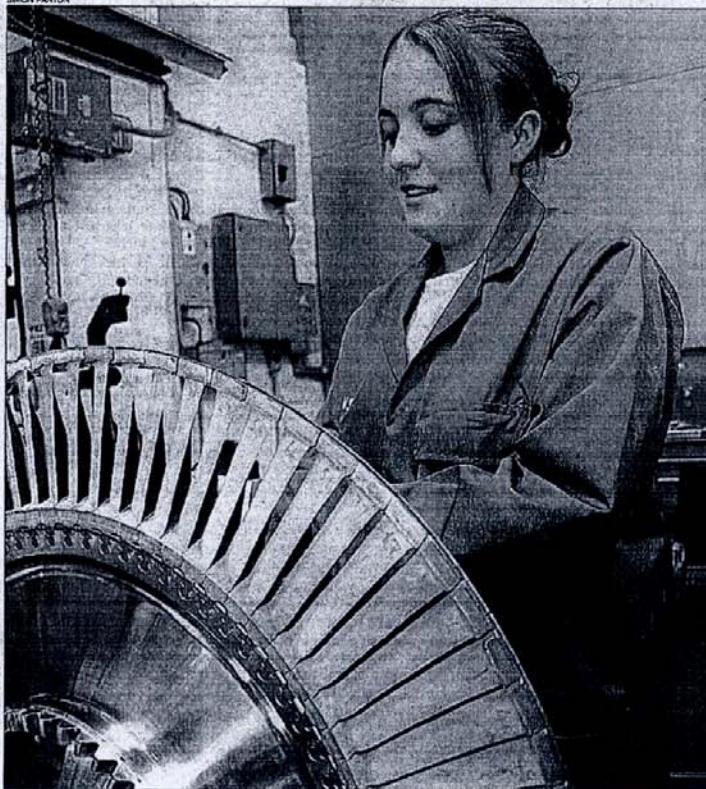
MAKING the world's biggest pumps is a hard enough task but delivering the 50-ton brutes is another challenge. When Sulzer Pumps (UK) has a product ready to go, it has to agree on the route and timing with the police, *Jenny Knight writes.*

Usually the pump is lifted on to a low loader and sent off in the early hours of Saturday to the docks. If a low bridge is in the way, a temporary metal road may have to be laid so the lorry can make a detour.

Small wonder that the company was so engrossed in the engineering side of the business that it forgot to concentrate on making money. That has changed now. By introducing a programme of measuring performance, managing finances and motivating staff, the Leeds-based company's profits have risen from just over £1 million in 2002 to more than £6 million last year.

Richard Whiteley, deputy managing director of Sulzer, which has won the Award for Financial Management, explains: "We laid out our aspirations, communicated them to staff and motivated each member of staff with individual incentives."

SIMON PANTON



Bright future: Siemens' initiatives with local schools have inspired girls to take up engineering

Partnership with schools attracts young recruits

TEACHERS, known for their cynical attitude to the business world, and pupils, who regard manufacturing as far from cool, are being convinced of the value of the industry thanks to initiatives by a company in the Siemens group.

Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery, based in Lincoln, has supported three schools in the area to develop specialist school status. It sends science and engineering ambassadors into primary and secondary schools and encourages boys and girls to do work experience at its plant.

The initiatives have won the company, which employs 2,000 staff and makes gas turbines, the Award for Best Partnership between Business and Education. Dr Angela Borman, the company's collaborative projects officer, says the specialist schools programme involves financial support and staff from the schools visiting the factory to gain an understanding of the business and projects. It also helps to "win over" teachers to the value and importance of the industry.

The firm has 38 staff quali-

fied as ambassadors, and another 12 undergoing training. They visit schools to encourage pupils to explore how much science, engineering, technology and maths have to offer. Students also visit the factory to help them link industry to their school work.

Borman says: "The benefit of this investment is now showing in the number of applications we are receiving with the right level of academic achievement. Also, the number of females who have applied to undertake work experience placements with the business is positive and, from this, it can be assumed that more girls are being inspired to consider engineering as a career."

Selex Sensors and Airborne Systems was commended for its collaborative projects with primary schools in Basildon, Essex. The firm, which makes surveillance and protection systems and produces infra-red detection material from crystals grown on its Southampton site, also won the Award for Innovation in Microsystems and Nanotechnology.

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Plugging into people power

Motivating employees to produce world-class products has given two companies a leading edge, reports Jenny Knight

ONE of the big fears facing many UK companies is that their customers will desert them for cheaper suppliers elsewhere in the world where labour costs are rock bottom.

A way to avoid this fate is by training and encouraging staff to produce such first-rate work that customers will not risk switching. Two of the companies among the winners of the Manufacturing Excellence awards put particular emphasis on their people power.

Power Panels Electrical Systems reckons it has become "China-proof" thanks to its decision to move into more specialised and complicated work requiring highly skilled and motivated workers.

BGB Innovation, winner of the Award for People Effectiveness, specialises in designing and manufacturing electrical slip rings for niche markets such as wind turbines. Almost 90 per cent of the Grantham company's products are exported and the business is growing so fast that it is extending its premises to almost double the size.

Despite employing just 53 workers, turnover is up to £4.8 million a year. BGB recently acquired another company and also manufactures under-

water lighting and cameras for the fish farming industry. Already the European leader in slip ring technology, it is now aiming to reach the same heights with its new products.

Power Panels Electrical Systems, winner of the award for the Best Small or Medium Enterprise, also has an inspiring story to tell.

In five years sales have gone up from £5.78 million to more than £15 million. Tony Hague,

'By going up the value chain we made ourselves China-proof'

managing director of the Walsall company, which has 172 employees, says: "In 1994 our quality was measured at 95 per cent, by 2000 we had increased that to 98 per cent which was deemed world class. But we have now improved our quality to 99.8 per cent which really is world class."

"We ensure excellent work by giving people responsibility for their own work so that they take ownership of it and build a bigger sense of pride." The

company was set up in 1967 to design and build electrical and electronic assemblies. Twelve years ago it formed a working partnership with the world's largest machine tool manufacturer, Mazak.

This deal led to an even greater interest in quality and to an emphasis on getting the best out of the workforce by continuous training.

Each employee is offered a path to progression and better qualifications. The company has a policy of promoting from within, with staff able to move up to become team leaders and managers. There is an in-house training school of excellence, where technical skills are taught alongside the company culture on working for continuous improvement.

Hague says: "We have made ourselves China-proof by moving up the value chain. We do work of high complexity and the value we add is high."

Power Panels also works with local schools, which will supply its future employees.

The company aims to move even higher up the value chain by using the best precision equipment and by increasing the work it does for customers, from supplying the electrical assemblies to fitting them.