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# PRODUCTION ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

## Going for grinding gold

DF Precision: a new business  
with a seasoned pedigree

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# Going for grinding gold

**PES Report**

Dave Tudor



While manufacturing technology is advancing like a cheetah on steroids, there are some machine brands that buck all the trends and remain iconic simply because of their longevity and reliability. In the grinding world, one such marque is Jones & Shipman (J&S), now supported globally from a spares and service perspective by Lutterworth, Leicestershire-based DF Precision Machinery. Dave Tudor reports.

**M**ike Duignan and Alan Fisher are the owners of DF Precision and both have a longstanding pedigree in grinding technology that spans decades.

Indeed, the duo were at the heart of the Jones & Shipman Hardinge management team when Hardinge acquired J&S back in 2010. For both individuals, the association represents the best part of a lifetime's work – they served their apprenticeships with the company back in the 1980s.

DF Precision Machinery has been trading for just over a year now and was set-up by Messrs Duignan and Fisher following a decision made by Hardinge to call time on Jones & Shipman manufacturing and its UK facility, allowing it to focus instead on its other grinding brands – Kellenberger, Voumard, Tschudin, Usach and Hauser.



DF Precision owners Mike Duignan (left) and Alan Fisher

This was all part of a wider plan by Hardinge to consolidate its manufacturing facilities around the world to increase efficiency, reduce costs and streamline operations. However this strategic move created a problem as Mike Duignan explains.

"At the time, Hardinge realised that J&S machines would still need to be supported globally," he says. "The brand has been around for over a century, is well-established and there

are literally thousands of machines still in use so there's a significant demand for spares and service.

"Additionally, there were other challenges that needed to be solved: Hardinge needed an outlet to represent its other grinding brands in the UK, as did Okamoto – a Japanese grinding machine manufacturer that we've represented independently in the UK for years.

"The rest is history," he adds. "Hardinge, although it still owns the J&S brand, transferred liability for all Jones & Shipman global contracts to us along with the support for J&S spares and service globally; we set-up exclusive agency rights to sell and support their other grinding products – Kellenberger, Hauser, Voumard and Tschudin – in the UK; and we were able to maintain our existing relationship with Okamoto for their extensive range of surface, cylindrical, vertical and rotary grinding machines. DF Precision Machinery was conceived with those three objectives in mind."

## Looking after legacy machines

The new company comprises six members of staff, all with many years of specialist experience as former Jones & Shipman Hardinge employees: managing director Mike Duignan; operations director Alan Fisher (formerly service and engineering manager at Jones and Shipman Hardinge) plus two technical engineers and two in-house customer

support staff.

On the J&S side, grinding machine owners can rest assured that they'll be well looked after in terms of spares and service. If ever there was any doubt, visitors to DF Precision's website are greeted with the words: "From belts to ball screws – DF have the biggest stock of Jones and Shipman spare parts in the world!

And that's because they do. When Hardinge transferred the global support for J&S products over to DF Precision, it also provided all the historic sales and OEM database records (hardware and software) for Jones and Shipman machines sold globally by serial number – absolutely invaluable to ensure the right spare parts are provided when they're needed.

So, the chances are, if a user needs a spare part for a J&S machine and can provide the serial number, the team at DF Precision will have a historic record of the machine's bill of materials – including any modifications made to the original specification.

DF supports a wide span of J&S machines – from classic models such as the 310T, 540, 1400, 1430, 1411, 1300, 1070 and 2000 ranges, through to Format 5, Format 15, 1300X, 540 and 400 X and E models, and Ultragrind, Ultramat, Dominator, 524 easy, Techmaster, Progrid and Suprema ranges.

"We have a warehousing facility in Lutterworth and stock literally thousands of



We're finding in particular that the lower entry models appeal to J&S machine owners in the UK looking to upgrade to a new machine without breaking the bank. They're excellent machines at really competitive prices



parts," Mr Duignan affirms, "This comprises everything from ball screws, bearings, wheel head sub-assemblies, linear scales and motors through to belts, filters and solenoids; if it's in stock we can usually ship the same day.

"While we can't guarantee that we'll be able to support every machine, it's certainly not unusual for us to supply spares for J&S machines that are over 30 years old – and remember there were around 80,000 machines sold globally so we're kept pretty busy. Our biggest markets are the US and Europe; there are still many machines in service in the UK."

It's important to note that if you buy a spare part from DF Precision, you're getting a brand-new component. DF inherited a vast amount of genuine, authentic J&S stock following the ownership transfer from Hardinge, but

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in the event of something not being available, DF Precision can get the part manufactured from scratch via a UK-based trusted supplier network.

It goes without saying that DF Precision provides spares and service for all the other brands it represents – Okamoto and the various Hardinge grinding brands. Here, minimal fast-moving stock is held in the UK, but other parts can be sourced from Europe on a rapid turnaround.

“At the end of the day we’ve had strong relationships with manufacturers like Kellenberger, Hauser and Okamoto for more than a decade so nothing has changed operationally,” Mr Duignan asserts. “Our customers often take out extended warranty agreements and service contracts with us because keeping machines running is an absolute priority.”

### Machine sales on the rise

The other arm of DF Precision’s business of course is machine sales. The company is the exclusive agent for Hardinge brand grinding machines in the UK and Ireland and the UK distributor for Okamoto.

Because machine sales were heavily subdued during 2020 because of the pandemic, DF Precision relied heavily on the provision of J&S spares and service during that period for revenue generation. Looking forward however, Mr Duignan has seen a sharp uptake in UK sales of capital equipment in recent months and fully expects this part of the business to take pole position in the near future.

“There’s no doubt that enquiry levels on new grinding machines have really picked up in the UK,” he enthuses. “For example, in the past few weeks we received a really nice order for a Kellenberger CNC grinding machine with automated robot. In fact, projects involving automation are gaining traction at the moment. In these instances, we often act as a systems integrator, bringing the various elements of the project together.”

DF Precision’s product portfolio covers all bases



An Okamoto 208 CH-iQ high precision surface grinder recently installed by DF Precision at Ametek Taylor Hobson’s facility in Leicester

simply because it’s so extensive, but on volume of sales alone, it’s Okamoto that takes the top spot. Mr Duignan explains: “Okamoto make excellent machines; they have their own foundry and manufacture 95% of the mechanical component parts used in-house which means they have total control over design, manufacturing processes and quality.

“Their USP however is the diversity of their machines and their respective price points. Prices for an entry-level surface grinder start at around £50K rising up to

£350K for their top of the range rotary machines. We’re finding in particular that the lower entry models appeal to J&S machine owners in the UK looking to upgrade to a new machine without breaking the bank. They’re excellent machines at really competitive prices.”

### Something for everyone

The Hardinge range of grinding machines on the other hand comes into its own for more complex, demanding tasks – often involving a degree of machine customisation. DF Precision

holds no stock of machines in the UK, but Kellenberger in Switzerland acts as the grinding hub for Hardinge (and all its constituent brands) in Europe, and Okamoto has its European headquarters based in Langen, Germany. Machine availability, technical support and demo facilities are therefore relatively close to hand and centralised.

In conclusion, Mike Duignan is keen to emphasise that through his new business, DF Precision, he can continue to offer customers the latest in grinding machine technology backed by exemplary levels

of service.

“The acquisition of the Jones & Shipman global business was a real coup and will enable us to continue to support the thousands of loyal J&S customers around the world,” he says.

“For those companies using J&S surface and profile grinding machines looking to upgrade, we can offer the highly cost-effective Okamoto series. Similarly, for businesses looking for high performance cylindrical grinding machines, the Kellenberger range will tick all the right boxes.”

As a side note, DF Precision Machinery is looking to recruit a new member of staff to provide technical helpdesk support. Although predominantly based in the office, the position may involve some field work and visiting customer sites. Experience in grinding technology is ideal, although candidates with technical machine tool experience would be considered.

Interested parties are invited to call 0116 201 3000 or email Mike Duignan at [mike@dfpmach.com](mailto:mike@dfpmach.com).

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# Wide belt technology provides a competitive edge

The recent arrival of an 81 series wide belt precision grinding machine at metal polishing and finishing specialist Van Geenen has had an immediate impact. Through improved capacity, productivity and overall capability the Rijssen, Netherlands-based company is opening up new business opportunities. PES reports.

**F**or a business that began back in 1977 when Arnold van Geenen and his sons Nico and Gerrit joined forces to provide a hand polishing service, with the founders having to sell their cars to buy the vital tools required to get started, Van Geenen B.V. Metaalafinishing is unrecognisable.

Now under the guidance of Nico's son Bart van Geenen

the company operates from 5,000m<sup>2</sup> premises, housing the latest in polishing and grinding technology. The most recent arrival being the €2 million investment in the Timesavers 81 Series grinding machine, which places the business firmly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

From those early days the company began to specialise, particularly on stainless steel and other exotic materials.

The emphasis is firmly on producing sheet and tube material to the highest quality in terms of surface finish (right up to Mirror 8 grade), with greater efficiency and consistent technical quality of products.

"Hand polishing remains a critical part of our business, but automation has been central to our development since our first investment in Grindingmaster/Timesavers

equipment back in 1984. We are always looking to improve efficiency and our investment in automation has boosted productivity," says managing director, Bart van Geenen.

"As such, our partnership with this major investment in the 81 Series machine, an investment that driven both by the heart, with my father's desire for manufacturing technology, and head, with me focused on the commercial potential."

The 81 Series is a genuine alternative to conventional processes and, it is my role to convince customers that the process is viable and meets their requirements

## Quality and relationships

Van Geenen prides itself on the quality of its work and the strength of its relationships with customers – a combination that has opened up new business opportunities for its polished sheet and tube products across markets including architectural, tanks, and food processing.

"We have always had the ability to do things that our competitors can't and to continue that we recognised it was time to move into precision grinding," Mr van Geenan adds.

The scale of the 81 series will also futureproof production at

Van Geenen; with an overall length of 24m the machine has the capacity to grind sheet or plate from 0.15mm up to 100mm with stock removal rates of up to 0.2mm/pass achievable with a table size of 2.1m x 8.5m to an accuracy of ±0.02mm and 0.3 Ra.

The 81 Series is already delivering significant time savings for van Geenen compared with existing processes. For example, producing a 4m long, 2m wide by 20mm thick sheet for a customer in the food processing industry, which required a 0.8 Ra surface finish used to take between four and five hours to



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Nico (right) and Bart van Geenen with their Timesavers 81 Series machine, an investment driven both by the heart and head