



**PRESS RELEASE No. 5708**

December 2006

Press contact: **Tom Moriarty**

Tel: 01442 843 000

[tom@thomas-moriarty.com](mailto:tom@thomas-moriarty.com)

Waterjet profiling

## **From advanced technology to art-form**

**A south-of-England company shows just how easy it can be to use a top waterjet profiler for an exciting and apparently unlimited range of applications. When first launched, many in the manufacturing industry thought waterjet technology would be largely used as an alternative to laser and plasma cutting devices in the sheet metal field. Its ability to cut cleanly through thick slabs of marble and granite were thought of as some sort of interesting spin-off.**

What may come as a surprise to traditionalists is the remarkable take-up of the process by those in the architectural, building and ceramics industries and, more recently, even by those with very clear artistic ambitions.

### **Enterprising expansion**

Charged with the task of installing a highly-individual surround to the luxury swimming pool at the multi-million pound residence of a world-renowned football club owner, the hard-working tiler involved found himself having to source a means of cutting grills into the stonework.

Having seen an existing Water Jet Sweden user in the North of England and the ease with which the cutting contract was fulfilled, the tiler was convinced that he was on to something with huge potential and persuaded his business partner, who also happened to be his father, that the purchase of one such machine could revolutionise their own local tile distribution and contracting business.

Waterjet machines such as those supplied by WJS do not, by UK sales manager Chris Baker's own admission, come cheap, but so totally convinced was the customer that he had 'seen the future', he was prepared to mortgage his own home to grasp the opportunity he visualised.

### **Ingenious uses already featured on national television**

Installed earlier this year, the WJS 3015EB has now been featured on national television on the "National Geographic Channel" in their programme "What You Didn't Know About Water". Already the new installation is pulling in business from an astonishingly wide customer base, including applications that

might seem bizarre to those more accustomed to its hitherto industrial applications.

Who would have thought, for example, that the self-same equipment that might be totally at home profiling marble friezes for the St Paul's cathedral refurbishment and granite slabs, would be called upon to produce individually designed leather fashion belts that look like lace - or would even be hired out by the hour for the production of fashionable jewelry accessories to design students?

Peter, the younger of the partnership, says that he considered several makes of waterjet profilers but, as somebody with absolutely no experience of such equipment, good support would be absolutely vital. After meeting with Chris Baker, managing director of Water Jet Sweden UK, and visiting the Swedish manufacturer's factory, he was in no doubt that it had to be a WJS machine or nothing.

#### **Standard model**

The machine chosen, a standard 3.0 x 1.5m cutting size, has twin heads for flexibility, enabling it to cut two identical parts at a time or, as some users tend to do, leave one head for use for water-only cutting and the other for abrasive cutting. It was found that a 0.2mm orifice for the former and a 0.7mm orifice for abrasive works were ideal.

There seem to be no 'typical' applications here but probably the most frequent tasks are the profiling of artistic patterns in ceramic tiles for architectural, domestic or commercial building work and, in this connection, the distinction

between commercial products and art is becoming quite blurred.

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the waterjet cutting process is capable of bringing art into the homes and lives of people who might never otherwise have the pleasure of enjoying it in their daily lives.

The fact that this success can be profitably achieved by someone having no previous experience, and on a perfectly standard machine, says a lot both for the WJS 3015 and its user.

Probably the two key factors in all of this are the customer's own open-minded approach and the choice by WJS of using a Fanuc 18i-MB CNC computer control system to operate the machine.

#### **One week training course in Sweden**

The one-week course offered by WJS in Sweden as part of its sales package, rapidly enabling learning how to use the programs involved, particularly the GEMS R5 that enables drawn shapes to be entered into the system, get the user off to a great start: "Programming is easy!" says the user but the way he has introduced so many fascinating designs is probably as much a testimony to his own abilities as it is to the system itself. After all, other companies may require operators to have a clutch of 'qualifications' before letting them loose on such a high-value piece of production machinery.

**Stunning effect**

A couple of highly-stylized 'designer chairs' are examples of new, imaginative enterprise having been assembled from 25mm-thick plywood profiles. It is worth mentioning that, when producing shapes such as these, the 'nesting' facility within the CNC program can be used to ensure the maximum yield from the sheets of material provided, thereby holding down costs. Other examples include ceramic motifs using contrasting colours that are then inlaid to one another to stunning effect.

**Industrial applications**

This installation is just as much at home providing a cutting service for industry. As an alternative to EDM, laser and plasma cutting, or even machining, parts such as cycle chain wheels in steel, large stainless steel washers, and many engineering components in materials ranging from aluminium to zinc, including carbon fibre, are handled.

An ability to leave as little as a 1mm wide piece of material in thick sheet is another advantage to industrial users as has been the ability to meet whatever degree of accuracy (0.3mm) that has been asked for so far.

**Editor's note**

The first Water Jet Sweden AB plant built only 14 years ago at Ronneby, Sweden, has established itself as the leading source worldwide of the ultimate in accuracy in water jet cutting technology and the construction and supply of the much larger waterjet cutting machines, hence its rapid growth to a supplier of standard and custom-built machines around the world, including Russia and China.

Shop fitting and display sectors call for the use of plastic materials, while glass profiling requests are just as likely to come from heavy industry, such as automotive, as from designers of giftware for top retailers.

Says the user: "The applications are only limited by your imagination!" In truth, after years spent on his knees tiling and then suffering physically as a result, he is now flying free and looks forward to every new day to see what exciting challenge it might bring.

**Television appearance**

A recent pleasant surprise was to be featured on an edition of the National Geographical TV channel's 'I didn't know that!' program.

Last word goes to Chris Baker who has sold waterjet machines to many UK users. "I have always been aware of the broad markets open to this technology, but it is always a pleasure helping open-minded customers like this to get the most out of their investment and I never cease to be surprised at the things they achieve".

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The company will double its output capacity with the start-up in November 2006 of a brand new, second plant and newly-built Showroom on the Ronneby site in southern Sweden. Production of the new plant will even exceed that of the existing plant as a result of the introduction of new, more advanced manufacturing technology.

In Europe, in addition to Germany, there are subsidiary companies established in the UK, WJS UK Ltd, and Poland, Water Jet Polska.

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**For further information:**

Chris Baker  
Managing Director  
WJS UK Ltd  
Moat House Square  
Thorp Arch  
Wetherby  
West Yorkshire LS23 7BJ  
Tel: +44 (0) 1937 845 499  
Fax: +44 (0) 7092 860 980  
e-mail: [info@wjsuk.com](mailto:info@wjsuk.com)  
website: [www.waterjet-international.com](http://www.waterjet-international.com)

**Issued by and press contact:**

Tom Moriarty  
Thomas Moriarty International Ltd  
Springwood House,  
Ringshall  
Berkhamsted  
Herts. HP4 1ND  
Tel: +44 (0) 1442 843000  
Fax: +44 (0) 1442 843666  
e-mail: [tom@thomas-moriarty.com](mailto:tom@thomas-moriarty.com)  
website: [www.thomas-moriarty.com](http://www.thomas-moriarty.com)