

Plastic blast media comes of age

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Because the use of plastic media provides the ideal combination of control and substrate protection, the development is seen of being of particular note where relatively delicate applications are required. Again, the company highlights paint removal from aircraft during maintenance and refurbishment procedures as well as the loosening of deposits from glass fibre boats as prime examples where its benefits are well illustrated.

Alongside this general choice of plastic media, however, Mac'Ants has also developed specific products within its range that have been shown to be highly effective for even more precise applications. One example is 'PolyFlash', a polycarbonate de-flashing media, which is formed from extruded polycarbonate rather than the Mil specification 'Type VI' alternative. PolyFlash is well suited for de-flashing plastics and can also be supplied as cryogenic grade for rubber removal. 'NyFlash' is another example – offering lower density than PolyFlash, it is typically used for de-flashing plastic components or delicate castings and is ideal for use in a wheel or air blast system.

"Apart from the manufacturing and engineering sectors, there are a number of other application areas for plastic media which are becoming increasingly popular," says Kent Martin. "These include material for blasting buildings and stonework – markedly different from the precision engineering sector but of particular note because of the environmental benefits the products offer."

Each batch of media is assessed in the company's fully equipped testing facility to ensure consistent quality standards. Product development is continually in the spotlight through a focus on liaising with customers to develop new applications where appropriate – all fully supported by comprehensive technical assistance.

"Mac'Ants is now a genuine global supplier and we have a wide network of distributors and agents throughout the world," comments Sean Williams, the company's international account manager. "Indeed, we are proud to have risen to become one of the top five producers of plastic blast media."

"This growth has been based on product quality, technical excellence and a willingness to build relationships with distributors and assist growth," he continues, "and also from our strong position of being able to offer all solutions to surface preparation problems from our large stocks held at our premises in Sheffield."

"We are confident that our growing range of plastic media reflects greater awareness of its benefits across our customer base," adds Kent Martin. "In conjunction with equipment and services from our METS and MSE divisions respectively, we believe this is an area where the growth in sales that we have seen in recent times is set to continue."

Mac'Ants – the "one-stop" shop

In addition to its proven expertise in the field of plastic media, the Mac'Ants Group prides itself on being a true "one-stop-shop" for surface preparation and blast finishing equipment and services.

The company supplies alumina-based materials from stringently controlled fusion and grading plants worldwide including China, India and Eastern Europe, as well as other media types, including glass beads, silicone carbides, vegetable products, expendable synthetics and natural minerals.

Added to this, the METS Division of Mac'Ants works closely with both the abrasive and plastic media elements of the business in providing a complementary range of application equipment. This includes surface finishing machines, cabinets, blast rooms and wheeled machines as well as a comprehensive back up service, spares and maintenance.

The company's MSE Business Division was developed to provide a dedicated sub-contract blasting service to customers. This is of particular note where in-house plants and operators are not available and often provides a solution to short term capacity requirements. The division offers a full range of surface finishing processes and re-coating facilities.

With the twin aims of improved performance and environmental betterment, the Mac'Ants Group maintains a long-standing commitment to product, equipment and service innovation. Its success in processing and recycling material as well as in developing techniques such as plastic media stripping are evidence of its leading position in this field. Indeed, its activities in the recycling and re-processing sector bring the organisation back full circle to its origins. In particular, the re-processing of spent alumina, glass and plastics into construction and refractory materials pays testimony to its ongoing expertise.

The Mac'Ants Group is also a supply partner to the AeroChemicals Group brand – the dynamic alliance of international specialists. Seen by customers as a mark of confidence and capability, it is an achievement which positions Mac'Ants in a global context within which it has a close liaison with other group members who have achieved leading positions as international specialists in the aerospace sector. Tel: 01909 552500, www.macants.co.uk

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Automatic system increases throughput

A recent example of Mac'Ants 'METS' blast finishing equipment in action is pictured here. The purpose-designed system has achieved a six-fold increase in throughput at one of the country's leading suppliers of rubber and metal finishing services – Birmingham based, Blastrim.

The facility is dedicated to the removal of flux deposits in four specific welded areas of sunroof frames destined for a highly prestigious automotive OEM. Blastrim's customer – specialist manufacturer Webasto – uses a weld in each of the frames' four corners to fixed short tubes that in turn link to the panels' drainage system. This can leave deposits from each weld that, unless removed, could inhibit the eventual painting process and potentially affect the high quality for which the marque has a leading reputation.

The previously manual operation has now been fully automated with the Mac'Ants equipment, enabling Blastrim to meet significantly increased production turnaround demands, as Technical Manager Nigel Byrne explains: "Initially, volumes were such that we were able to meet Webasto's requirements via manual processing. Now, with this new installation, we can meet dramatically increased demand, which calls for up to 275 individual roof panels per day to be processed over the next 18 months."

The self-contained blast cabinet features four fixed nozzles positioned to direct chilled iron grit blast media at the welded fittings. The process now requires each panel to be simply loaded from a mobile carrier by hand onto guide rails, which position the units in the cabinet at the touch of a button. After completion, in no more than 15 seconds, the machine then ejects each panel for cleaning-off and placement onto a separate carrier for onward shipping to the customer. This automatic process not only now meets the throughput requirement but also produces a highly consistent, high quality result. Also, because it is self-contained, there is no significant environmental impact for the operators.

The installation of the blast cabinet is just the latest of a series of projects undertaken by the Mac'Ants Group over the last two years for Blastrim. The organisation also supplies blast media for other applications, notably its cryogenic de-flashing operation – the company is one of only two in the UK to offer this service.

