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Easy rider Italian style

The Italian company MT, manufacturer of motorbike and scooter frames, has 21 welding systems. If this seems a lot, consider that it produces hundreds of thousands of frames each year for all the best-known Italian and foreign motorbike brands.

> There is so much passion in the work of Guido Giovenzana, an owner of Italy's MT, a manufacturer of motorbike and scooter frames. Before starting his own business, Giovenzana worked with Fantic Motor, one of Italy's legendary moped companies. "At the time" Giovenzana explains, "a generational change was taking place in the company's management and a new management was brought in. I decided to try and go it alone. It was very tough at the beginning. The space that we could afford was too small, and we didn't have any money. So we began as subcontractors – working really, really hard."

The turning point came a few years later with the advent of scooters with frames and the development of welded aluminum frames for motorbikes.

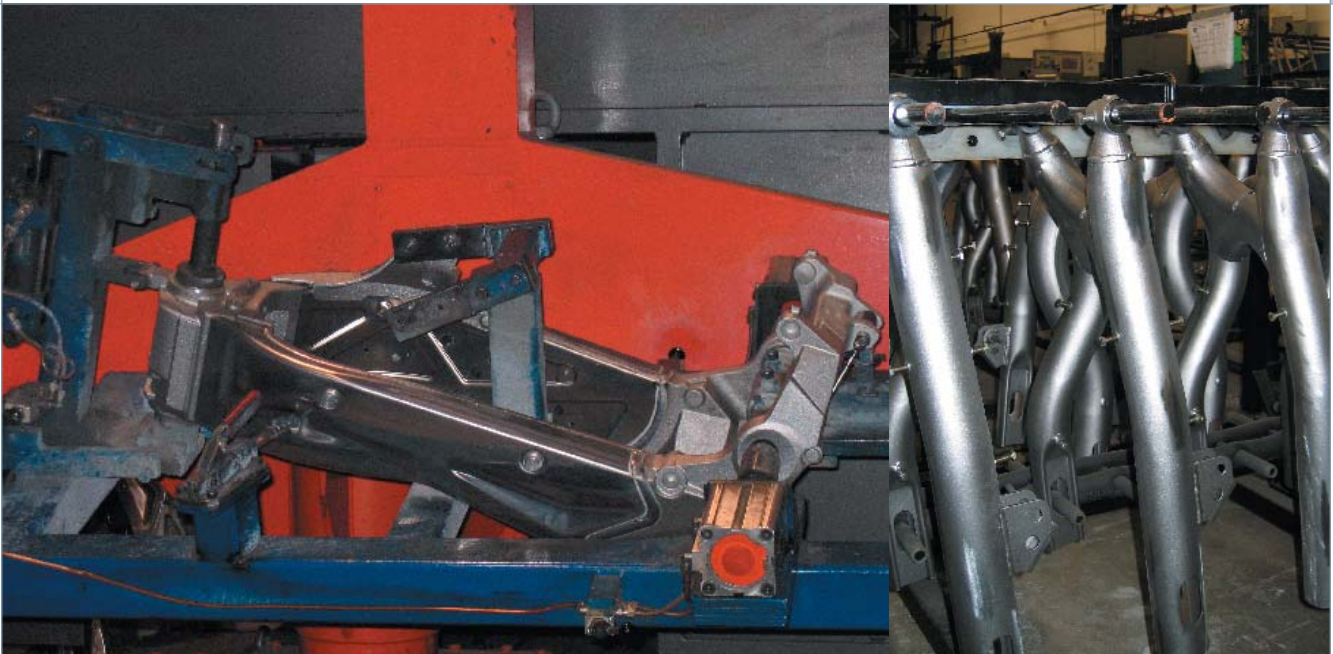


Welded aluminum frames for motorbikes was a turning point for MT.

"About fifteen years ago, Japanese manufacturers started producing welded aluminum frames," Giovenzana explains. "We went to Japan to discover how these companies worked. It was the beginning of robotized welding, and the company that was doing it was owned by ABB. It left a great impression on us, not just because of the kind of parts it was processing but because of its new and highly productive way of working. When we got back to Italy we bought the same welding system. I remember ABB came to give us a demonstration, and the welding island the company showed us produced such good results that we decided to buy one straight away.

"It didn't stop there, though," Giovenzana continues. "I insisted that ABB send us the very same welding system we had seen in the demonstration. It was a big investment for us, an unprecedented leap of faith that left no room for error. The cost of the automated system was equal to about 90 percent of our annual turnover at the time, so you can begin to appreciate what a risk we took."

Today MT has 21 welding systems, and the company is made up of two manufacturing units, each specializing in a certain kind of motorbike product. The original company headquarters at Garbagnate Monastero, Italy, produces motorbike frames, while the Santa Maria Hoè plant in Lecco, Italy, makes scooter frames. Says Giovenzana: "Modern scooters have a plastic body that covers everything, and so we have to produce welds that are effective but do not necessarily have to look great. For motorbikes, however, it is important that the weld look very good. During the heyday of the scooter, we were producing upwards of 500,000 scooter frames



The motorbike manufacturers know who to trust with their fine-tuning.

An important new project is to improve the look of the welds on motorbikes.

“We are trying to improve the look of the welds on motorbikes with visible frames. This is a task that many thought was almost impossible.”

Guido Giovenzana

in a season. Today the figures have stabilized at around 300,000 units per year.”

MT works in close collaboration with motorbike designers, discussing all the strategies available to enhance product industrialization. It is a painstaking task that Giovenzana’s employees carry out with great care because the quality of the finished product depends greatly on this initial phase of development.

There is an ongoing cooperative relationship between MT and ABB that concerns all aspects of the welding process. The relationship has been very profitable in terms of product quality and reliability and in reducing the number of units discarded as substandard. This is an aspect of the business that cannot be underestimated because, says Giovenzana, “when building motorbike frames, the tiniest error is enough to turn a product designed to support and withstand extremely high stresses without breaking into a vulnerable product that is unfit for use.”

Even now, the way is being paved for the introduction of a new, important technological development in frame production. Says Giovenzana: “Our work has been able to progress due partly to our ongoing cooperation with ABB. We are an important testing ground for ABB, and the company is just as important to us as a technological partner. Now, for example, we

are trying to improve the look of the welds on motorbikes with visible frames. This is a task that many thought was almost impossible.”

All this qualitative and productive success is encapsulated in a tiny MT logo, positioned in parts of a motorbike frame that are almost impossible to reach. Not many motorbike component manufacturers are good enough to brand their products, even though the components they produce may well go on to become associated with major, world-renowned names. But the MT logo is there – a mark of quality important enough to be spoken of in the same breath as the names of many of the high-performance bikes that turn heads on the streets today. ☉

>FACTS

Advantages with automatized welding allow for

- Fine-tuning throughout the production process.
- Improving the look of the weld on motorbikes with visible frames.
- Mass production with handmade quality.
- One producer to specialize in several different models/products.