



ITEMS

NEWSLETTER

April 2005

AB&I Engineers Remark on Newly-Installed Disa 270 Molding Machine - "WOW!!"



AB&I president, Allan Boscacci, and Chief Operations Officer, Kurt Winter, inspect the new Disa 270 during its recent installation.

AB&I's newest addition to the foundry, the Disa 270 molding machine, has caused quite a stir among the engineering and production teams. This new technology, the first of its kind in the world, has launched AB&I into the twenty-first century, ensuring the foundry's ability to remain competitive in the world market for gray iron castings well into the next two decades.

"The new Disa's performance has exceeded all our expectations," said AB&I president, Allan Boscacci. "This new technology will keep AB&I on the cutting edge for years into the future."

AB&I's first foray into automated Disa molding technology came in 1969 with the addition of the DisaMatic 2013. Two more 2013s were added over the years, but the next major technology jump came in 1992, with the purchase of the DisaMatic 2070. The 2070 set the industry standard for molding efficiency until the recent introduction of the newly-designed Disa line of molding equipment.

"We bought the first Disa 270 ever produced," said AB&I vice president, Kip Wixson, "as part of our ongoing program of constant modernization and production improvement." Purchased in late 2004, the equipment was delivered in February, with final installation completed in March.

"This Disa is 50% faster and 80% more accurate than the 2070," reports Boscacci, citing that these improvements will increase

productivity through added speed and a dramatically-reduced need for finish grinding. Additionally, the new electronics featured in the 270 significantly reduce downtime due to maintenance.

Competitive pressures, often from parts of the world where labor costs are lower than in Europe and the US, have forced AB&I to rely on technology to constantly improve efficiency and productivity.

"We produce more per man-hour than perhaps any foundry in the world," says Wixson, "while at the same time providing a safe and well-paying workplace for our team members. We simply could not meet our commitments to our customers and our team without the aggressive application of new production technologies."

Customers are encouraged to visit the AB&I foundry in Oakland to see the new Disa 270 in action. To arrange a plant tour, contact Customer Service at 800/GOT-IRON.

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Perspective

Current Gridlock Should Begin to Clear Soon, But Don't Look for Instant Return to Normal

Ask a person in LA, "How long does it take to get to Disneyland?" Chances are good that the person will stop, appear to be calculating, then say something like, "45 minutes, depending on traffic." They could go on to explain that it could take an hour and a half, but once, a couple of months ago, they made it in 30 minutes flat.

Armed with that not-so-finite answer, you then start to make your plans, and you are almost certain to be either 15 minutes early or, if the freeways are gridlocked, an hour late.

It occurs to me that the current climate in the plumbing industry resembles that gridlock so often seen on the LA freeways. Business has slowed to a snail's pace, but everyone knows it's temporary, and the forward scouts are telling us it's clear just ahead.

Traffic experts who have studied the gridlock phenomenon have concluded that they are almost always caused by varying or inconsistent speeds by one or more vehicles near the front of the gridlocked pack. If we use this analogy for our current state of business, we might ask the question, "Why are we gridlocked, where are we in the gridlock cycle, and how long will this damn thing take to clear?"

Let's start with the back of the pack, the manufacturers. Most of them (us) have been cruising along at a pretty good clip for quite a while, only to now see nothing but a sea of red lights in recent weeks. Occasionally, we see a manufacturer who has rear-ended the guy ahead because they weren't paying attention.

So here we sit, wondering what's going on. The distributors just ahead of us are moving slightly more quickly, but mainly in

fits and starts. The contractors in front of the distributors are also barely moving, and some are moving off to the side of the road (laying people off). Just ahead of the contractors is the culprit in this gridlock mess - the unseasonable rains that have plagued much of the West.

Once in a while, someone goes zipping by in the commuter lane. Were there three in that car? Was that driver following the rules, or cheating somehow?

The radio traffic guy in the helicopter tells us that the gridlock goes on for a while, but that the people at the very front of the pack, the engineers/architects/and owners, are moving at a good speed, with clear driving ahead.

So, we think, if it's clear way up ahead, it will clear for us at some point, too, so we wait. After a while, the traffic will begin to gain speed. At first, it will look like we'll get back to the speed limit again, but things will level off for awhile at 45 mph or so, then slowly increase to 50, then 55, then eventually will get back to 65, but it won't happen quickly, and there may be some intermediate slowdowns before we get to the speed limit again.

Nobody likes gridlock, especially when things have been moving so quickly for so long. We scream at the idiot who zips back and forth between lanes, trying to squeeze one more car length ahead. If only everyone would realize that this gridlock is beyond our control, that it won't last much longer, and that the road ahead is clear, we could avoid some of the inconsistent speeds that result in more gridlock.

So, how long does it take to get to Disneyland? About 45 minutes, unless some fool ahead does something dumb.

By the way, our raw materials suppliers are starting to slow down because they are seeing OUR red lights. They may now be at the back of the pack...

We got a fair amount of feedback on our story last month questioning our culture's near obsession with professional sports and with those who play them. Almost everyone agreed with me that we've gone too far in idolizing athletes and that, for many of us, our dollars could be better spent fixing up the house or educating our kids and grandkids instead of traveling to New Orleans to watch a ball game.

At press time, we are all mourning the loss of Pope John Paul II, a truly great man and singular leader. For those who share his faith, he was the leader of a billion Catholics

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around the world, and a devout advocate for the poor and oppressed. Even for those of other religions and no religion at all, he will be remembered as the man who made it possible for Poland to shake off the shackles of Soviet tyranny and begin anew. His steadfast adherence to basic principles of human dignity and self-determination played a major role in the disintegration of world communism, thus ending a cold war that lasted for half a century. His contributions to the world are legion, and his light will shine on the rest of humankind for centuries.

He will be missed.

AB&I Product Engineering Specialist Reports Overwhelming Response from Specifiers

AB&I's product engineering specialist, Gregg Carr, has spent the last four months calling on plumbing engineers, architects and other specifiers, bringing them the message that domestic cast iron pipe and fittings offer distinct advantages over plastic or imported material.



Gregg has been tasked with the important job of educating the specifying community about the "ins and outs" of DWV materials, and of the many pitfalls that could result from choosing the wrong material for the job.

"The response I've had when calling on these specifiers has been overwhelmingly positive," said Carr, who reports that many engineers deeply appreciate the time he spends with them, bringing them up to date on issues of concern.

Gregg's messages are clear and simple: cast iron DWV is more appropriate than plastic in many applications, for public safety, integrity and customer-satisfaction reasons. Also, domestic cast iron is preferable to imported product for those

same reasons, plus added environmental concerns push the decision on what product to specify toward domestic cast iron.

"Many people I talk to aren't aware of the liability issues that go along with allowing imported cast iron on a job," says Carr.

He cites recent reports about asbestos being used on some imported pipe as an example of information many engineers are just not aware of. "My hat's off to AB&I for their decision to fight the importers by informing the engineering world about this important problem," said one engineer during a recent meeting.

"I keep reminding the engineers that plastic burns and creates toxic gases, and that imported iron has all kinds of issues," says Carr. "I always recommend that whatever gets specified should meet CISPI (Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute) and ASTM standards. If that's done, there should be no problems with safety, health or quality issues."

Price Lists Now Available in Excel Format

Due to specific requests from several customers, the complete line of AB&I price lists is now available in Excel format for simple integration into customer spreadsheet and financial software.

"We have been asked to provide our data in this format for quite some time," says Gary Wickham, plumbing division manager for AB&I, "so we went ahead and developed the price lists in Excel."

All price lists are available through the Download Center on the AB&I website at www.abifoundry.com/download_center.htm.

From this webpage, price lists can be viewed and printed in either .pdf format or Excel.

For more information, contact the customer service department at 1-800-GOT-IRON.



AB&I Engineering and Maintenance Teams Surprise Disa with Efficiency

When AB&I bought the new Disa 270 molding machine, one of the terms of sale was that Disa would send a team of factory people to AB&I to supervise the installation. Disa told AB&I that preparation work at the foundry would take a month to complete. "Call us when you've got the prep work done," said Disa.

Well, just 17 days after starting the prep work, AB&I called Disa to tell them to send their people. "We're ready for you," we said. Disa was shocked. When they got to the AB&I plant, they were not only impressed with the speed at which the preparation work was completed, but with the quality of the work as well.

"There is no doubt that we have the best people in the foundry business on our team," said AB&I vice president, Kip Wixson. "They manage to wow us every day."

Asbestos Cited as Present in Some Imported Pipe

This may be an old story, but nothing typifies the lack of understanding of product and industry better. Who today would...

The following information is excerpted from a May 2001 article in this newsletter concerning the presence of asbestos in some imported cast iron pipe. Use of this asbestos was discovered in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) provided by the importer itself. Such documents are required to disclose all materials and chemicals used in the manufacture of certain products.

The presence of this asbestos could cause serious health problems, particularly for plumbers charged with cutting or installing this material without the proper breathing equipment.

"We are astounded to discover that there is at least one importer selling pipe and fittings to contractors that contains asbestos, a known cancer-causing agent," said AB&I's Kip Wixson.



"What puzzles us is why anybody who knows anything about selling in the American market would think it's OK to make pipe that contains asbestos," said plumbing division manager, Gary Wickham. "It's crazy that these manufacturers know so little about how we do business in this country, and have no problem exposing their customers and the downstream public to the dangers and liability of this material."

Distributors and contractors are urged to verify that none of the pipe and fittings they sell or use contains this dangerous asbestos. Health risks and the related legal liability that could accompany the use or sale of these products warrants careful consideration. Anybody buying, selling, or using cast iron DWV material should make sure that all products meet the standards set forth by the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute and other code and standards bodies.

Just for Fun...

Rodney Dangerfield on Golf...

When I play golf I always hit the ball really good. But it always goes someplace really bad.

When I start out on the first tee, I feel like Tiger Woods. But after nine holes I feel more like Winnie the Pooh.

I think I've finally figured the game out: if it goes right, it's a "slice." If it goes left, it's a "hook." And if it goes straight, it's a miracle!

To give you an idea of why my golf shots aren't hitting the fairway, the other day I went fishing, and on my first cast, I missed the lake.

I know you're supposed to replace your divots—but mine are too heavy to carry back.

My golf game is really improving. Last weekend I played 36 holes and only fell in the lake once.

I played golf yesterday, and I didn't even break par. I did break my three wood, my putter, and a window in a nearby condo.

Golf is what you play when you're too out of shape to play softball.

I was in the sand so much I saw Yassir Arafat twice!

The only reason I play golf is to bug my wife. She thinks I'm having fun.



You know it's too wet to play golf when your cart capsizes.

Best Political Quotes of 2004

"This is the best election night in history." —Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe, Nov. 2, 2004, just before 8 p.m. EST.

"This race is hotter than a Times Square Rolex." —CBS Anchor Dan Rather.

"I even accept for the sake of argument that sexual orgies eliminate social tensions and ought to be encouraged." —Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, speaking at Harvard.

"You forgot Poland." —President Bush to Sen. John Kerry during the first presidential debate, after Kerry failed to mention Poland's contributions to the Iraq war coalition.

"You bet we might have." —Sen. John Kerry, asked if he would have gone to war against Saddam Hussein if he refused to disarm.

"Too many good docs are getting out of the business. Too many OB-GYNs aren't able to practice their love with women all across this country." —President George W. Bush.

"Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we." —President George W. Bush.

"As I was telling my husband—" —National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, overheard making a slip of the tongue at a Washington dinner party. Rice, who is unmarried, stopping herself abruptly, before saying, "As I was telling President Bush."

