

## Sunny future for auto part manufacturer

A 30-year-old Markham Ont.-based company is proving that auto part manufacturing expertise is a natural fit to grow the burgeoning solar energy industry.

By Noelle Stapinsky | January 27, 2010 Features Editor



When Woodbine Tool and Die Mfg. (WTD) was approached by Menova Energy Inc.—an Ottawa-based solar energy solution provider—to enter into a solar panel manufacturing partnership, it was just the type of contract that flexed WTD’s machining muscles and segued it into a new emerging market.

Established in 1979 as a three person, 5,000-sq.-ft. tool and die shop, WTD has since grown into two facilities—a 50,000 sq. ft. tooling facility and a 150,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility—employing 195 people.

As a Tier Two automotive supplier, WTD supplies a variety of dies, stampings and assemblies to Tier One companies such as Magna International Inc., Van-Rob Inc., Martinrea International Inc. and the ABC Group Inc.

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What gives WTD an advantage over competitors is its development of niche areas such as building and running tooling that performs extrusion and in-die tapping, a special process that adds necessary threading to parts during the progressive stamping process, which cuts down on cost, labour and quality issues.

For instance, if someone wants a multi-dimensional bracket with three to five different fasteners on it to attach bolts or other parts, the threading would traditionally be done in a secondary process.

“We have perfected a die built process, which uses original part material and extrudes it out to the necessary fastener diameter and height,” says Max Popov, WTD’s head of business development. “After extruding, we roll tap the actual threads to it at the speed of up to 30 strokes per minute. This saves an extra cost of separate fasteners and their installation for our customers.”

This ability to develop novel processes—and the staff to make them work—are what positioned WTD to be a preferred outfit for solar panel manufacturing.

“Menova was looking for an automotive company that could bring automotive expertise to manufacture its solar systems to tight engineering standards,” says Gunter Riegel, co-owner of WTD.