



INVESTMENT FOR GESIPA'S UK PRODUCTION HUB

New machinery, new fasteners in production and capacity expansion... GESIPA UK Managing Director **Diana Scholefield** updates Torque with the latest from Keighley.



While the Midlands might be the best known centre for manufacturing in the UK, there are thriving production hubs throughout the nation, not least in the West Yorkshire town of Keighley.

Fastener manufacturer GESIPA is among the businesses based in the town, which is something of an automotive hotspot.

"You'd be surprised," GESIPA UK boss Diana Scholefield tells Torque Magazine. "There are not many vehicles around that don't have something made in Keighley. There's Teconex up the road which is a big automotive supplier and many others. Through working with Keighley College, we've come to realise that here are even more nearby than we thought. This valley is unbelievable."

The company has been producing rivets in Keighley since 1972, with the site housing R&D as well as production, sales (backed by the technical sales team out on the road) and more recently, a fully kitted out demo room.

"Our demo room is a fantastic facility. When customers come up here and see the demo room and production halls, it brings it all together for them. They realise that fasteners are such a commodity and see what goes into making them. We love getting people here, I'm very proud of what we do in Keighley."

The demo facility is one of many enhancements at the site. Walls have come and gone to create space for new machines: "Since 1972 we've made plenty of changes," Scholefield elaborates. "It's amazing when you look at what we've added on. At times it is like a jigsaw, piecing it all together, taking down one wall and putting up another."

Recent investments in the site have seen new blind rivet nut machines – in corporate blue and yellow colours – producing blind rivet nuts and rivet nut studs from thread sizes M4 up to M12.

Threaded fastener production was added to the site back in 2003, marking the beginning of a significant transition for the manufacturer that accelerated when GESIPA was acquired by SFS in 2009.

"Now we predominantly produce threaded fasteners on this site," says the GESIPA UK boss. "It was a big change for us, but it allowed us to focus and develop more in that area. Now we are GESIPA's centre of excellence for threaded fasteners."

"We still sell the rivets and the other tools as well, but we're the only GESIPA site that makes threaded fasteners. We work very closely with GESIPA Germany on the technical side developing them."

"One of the benefits of manufacturing on-site is that we can specialise and look to give customers value by bespoke product to their needs."



We see it as a partnership, working together on their fastening needs and also at their tooling needs as well, which is an area that's really growing at the moment. With the process control that we offer through WinTech, tooling is much smarter now. We look at offering the system, so that you can assure the quality of the joint."

In terms of Britain's impending exit from the EU, GESIPA UK is in an interesting position. Owned by Swiss group SFS and with the rest of the company located in Europe, how is Scholefield approaching Brexit?

"We are carrying on with the strategies that we have put in place and we will react to whatever happens when it happens. To be honest, we just have to get on with it because we can't change what's going to happen. We've set out our business plan and our strategies with the group going forward and we've continued on with that."

Aside from Brexit, are there other challenges on the horizon?

"Wire price increases are a constant at the minute across the industry. But again, you just have to deal with these things as they happen."

"We have plans for growth and we do see WinTech as a growth area. The tools are becoming smarter, they can do much more. We launched a new tool in May, the iBird Pro. These are intelligent tools that tell you when they need servicing. You can order new jaws for it on the app, for example...it's all moving towards being a lot more intelligent. I think that's a great opportunity."



DEMO ROOM

GESIPA is keen to get customers into its demo room at Keighley, which the company created in 2014. It gives customers a full overview of GESIPA's tooling options and what those tools are capable of.

Customers often visit with applications and fasteners in hand, Torque is told, and they try out different tools to find the one best suited to the application. "Bring as many people as you can, the more the merrier," is the message from the GESIPA team, eager to welcome operators as well as decision makers to ensure the most appropriate tools are selected.

Over the years, GESIPA's tool offering has evolved considerably, with a multitude of options available, from those tailored to fully automatic robots, to standard air tools, assembly cell set-ups and more besides.

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Smart tools and WinTech's process control technology ties into the shift towards a zero defect policy, something that has, arguably, been driven by the automotive sector.

"We do see industrial customers' standards have been raised. But we don't differentiate between a fastener that's made for the automotive market or for Joe Bloggs down the road. Everything goes through with the same quality system and is produced to the same standards. That's the way that we work. We've certainly seen the standards get higher and that's a good thing. It's good for us and our tools help prove standards."

"Automotive has certainly grown. Electronics industry has grown for us too. We've seen growth in a lot of markets and manufacturing has grown in the UK. That has helped us and we've seen some unusual industries spring up."

Visitors to GESIPA UK are greeted by Keith the Dragon. Playing on the heritage of Keighley (the crest of the ancient local family contains a dragon's head), the aluminium and copper sculpture is – of course – riveted together with a range of different rivets, all produced at the Keighley factory.

"That was a local artist who we wanted to showcase in the reception and everyone who comes always comments on it. It is a fantastic piece of art."

GESIPA's local outreach also engages with local schools and colleges, in part to seed future employees.

"We have some very long term employees and that's a good thing because we have expertise. But it can be a challenge to get new blood in the pipeline. If you look at our age profile then we are more towards the higher end! But if you speak to anyone out there it's the same."

"We're very keen to develop people from within the business. We have people that started as machine setters and are now team leaders."

"I've been here 22 years and started as a Project Engineer before becoming Quality Manager – you learn so much there. I then became Commercial Operations Manager, working with the Engineering and the Commercial side of the business. And I became Managing Director about four years ago."

"What I love about this industry is that you are constantly learning. You ask anybody who has been here a long time – no two days are the same. We get different challenges internally and from customers and that's what makes it exciting. It never stands still. It's great, I love it!"

