

# MOVERS, SHAKERS, & DRIERS

by Vaughn Entwistle, Features Editor, Milling and Grain

From its humble beginnings in 1947, Perry of Oakley Ltd has grown to become the UK's most experienced manufacturer of materials handling and drying equipment. In 2017, the manufacturer, based in Honiton, Devon, was awarded "Exporter of year," by SHAPA, the solids handling and processing association.

Such an impressive pedigree makes this British manufacturer stand out in a field crowded with competitors. To find out more about this unique company, Milling & Grain visited them on a rainy day in March, where we sat down with managing director David Perry who ran through the impressive product line that Perry's produces.

"Driers for grain and biomass are a big part of our business," Perry explained, "But we also do belt driers, and materials handling equipment. We are about 40 percent farming, 30 percent large scale farming, with a tiny percentage of ports grain handling and the remaining balance on the biomass side".

**F**or years the Perry name has been synonymous with grain driers and handling systems, but that is beginning to evolve. "Until around five years ago all our design capability was focused on grain," Perry explained.

"Now we're producing driers for other products. Fundamentally, it's all about hot air flowing through furnaces – all stuff we know a lot about. As well as driers, we support all forms of handling: conveying systems, bucket elevators, screw conveyers, belt driers. We add new systems every year, so our product line is continually growing."

But with so much competition, we asked: Why should a customer choose Perry's?

"Because everything is done here in-house," Perry answered. "A drier is more than just a metal box. We write our own software and design our own control panels. I've seen huge complexes with thousands of silos and one drier that is handling everything that goes into those silos, so it's one of the most important parts of the system. The interface for your customer is arguably the most critical component. If something goes wrong (especially for an export customer) he doesn't want to have to phone his importer, who then phones his rep, who then phones the manufacturer to talk to someone who wrote the software or designed the drier. Because we design the driers and the software in-house they can call us directly; or if there is a language barrier, we can three-way

Skype with our rep who can then translate for the customer. We also encourage customers to connect their panel to the Internet. The PLC is data logging the whole time, so we can connect to the panel and download the data from here to see exactly what's going on."

## An engineering approach

We noticed that many of the company's products feature stickers proclaiming, "Perry Engineering", which is a legitimate claim, because engineering is the lifeblood of the company.

"Everything is manufactured in-house," Perry said. "I'm very proud that we don't sub anything out. We do all the machining, welding, fabrication and sheet metal. We punch all the blanks for our machinery using two computer-controlled punches that can handle sheets up to 6mm thick. We've thought about investing in a laser cutter, but for the type of work we do – with lots of secondary operations like dimpling, countersinking, thread forming – it all happens in the punch before the metal blank drops out."

## Who are your customers?

"We have equipment in around 20 countries," Perry said, "With a mix of working with dealers and direct customers. Obviously, the UK market is important to us. We don't export anything to the EU, but we export to countries such as Russia and Ukraine, where you have to do all the difficult paperwork. Exports are very important to us, and at the moment we are focused on sub-Saharan Africa because the DIT (Department of Industry and Trade) is doing a big

push there. I give the DIT a lot of credit. They're doing a great job for British manufacturers, especially if you are interested in the countries they're targeting, like the Ukraine. We attended a big exposition there just a few weeks ago."

### **The manufacturing difference**

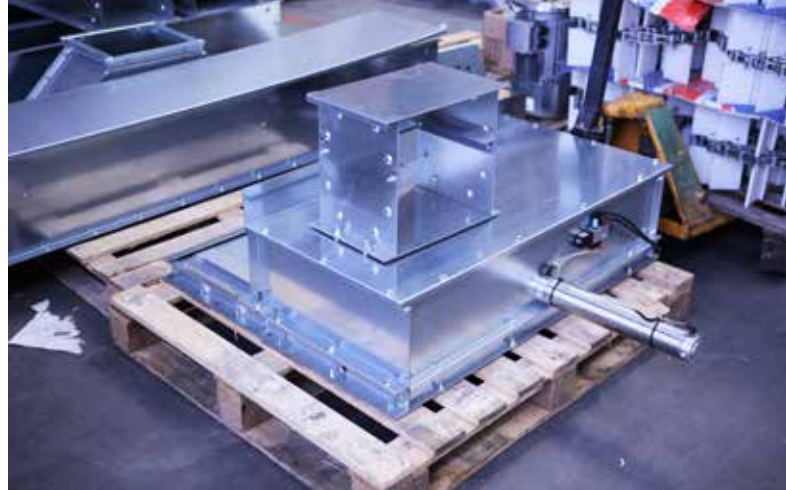
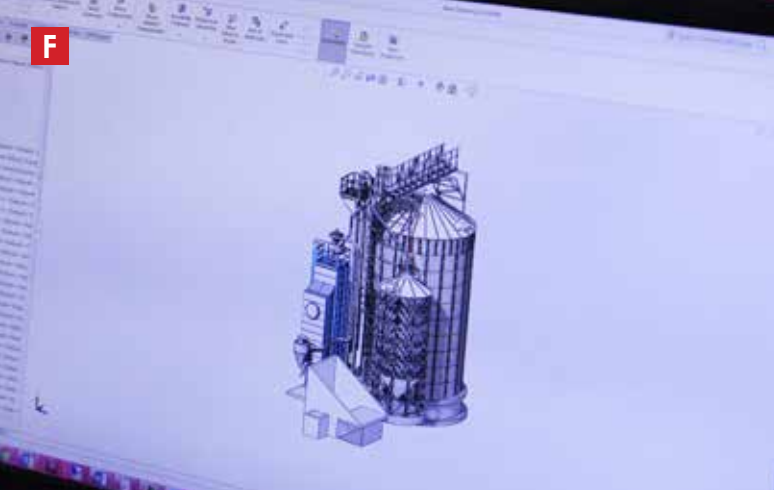
Perry's engineering know-how gives them an advantage over companies that merely resell other manufacturer's machinery or only make a part of the total system. Perry's manufactures everything on their own premises, which especially helps with bespoke orders. "We can custom tailor solutions for our customers," Perry added. "If they order a belt conveyer and need supports, we can make the supports for them, so we can provide a complete package. It's all about making a customer's life easier. When we sell a drier, nine times out of ten we will also sell a handling package to go around it. We cover the full spectrum of products: the agricultural at 20 to 30 tonnes an hour, and the industrial at 800 to 1,000 tonnes an hour. That said, the bulk of our sales is around 300 tonnes an hour."

### **The importance of spare parts**

All equipment, no matter how well made, will break down eventually—especially if a stray chunk of wood gets accidentally fed through it. But downtime due to failures can cost a customer dearly in terms of lost production. Perry's approach to customer support is part of the reason for the company's success.

"We like to ensure that our machines are well supported, so that's an increasing part of our business. This year we shipped our first machines to a number of customers in new territories. Shipped along with those machines was a package of spare parts that belongs to us, but which can be used by the customer should





the need arise. For peace of mind, the customer can keep the package of spares for a year.”

He summarised, “Afterwards, the customer has the option of buying the spares or they can be returned to our dealer and shipped back to us. We always carry a lot of spares, as support and backup is part of our USP. After all, we’re an engineering-driven company. If we were an accountancy-driven company, we wouldn’t carry the amount of spares we keep on hand.”

### Factory tour

During our tour of the facility, we got to watch the two robot punches in operation. Fast, quiet, tireless and ruthlessly accurate, the immaculate blanks they produced had even been beautifully deburred to protect the hands of Perry’s technicians and customers down the line. From there we moved through Perry’s sprawling complex of buildings, lingering long enough to visit the sheet metal fabrication, machining area, chain assembly, and paint booth where parts like grain troughs are sand blasted and powder coated.

Once the machinery is assembled and tested it is palletised and plastic wrapped ready for shipping to any point in the world. Finally, we visited the engineering offices, where engineers design each bespoke order using two and three-D CAD systems.

### Brexit

Before we left, we asked David Perry about Brexit and the uncertainty of a changing economy. While many manufacturers view the looming prospect of Brexit with gloom, Perry is more sanguine, “I can only see it as a good thing for us.”

He reflected a moment and then added. “As long as we can get staff. The weaker pound is definitely a good thing—it helps us export. And the bulk of our competitors are from abroad, so it helps on both sides. Plus, it’s so cheap to ship stuff these days. If you can fill a container, it only costs around three thousand



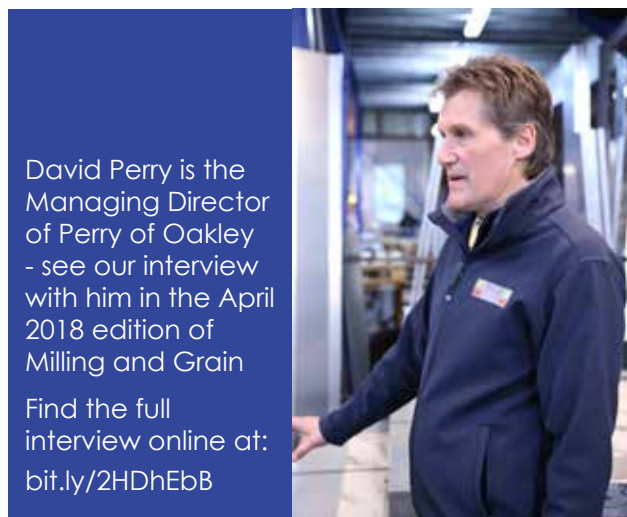
pounds to ship it half way around the world.”

### Challenges for the future

As we readied to leave, David Perry left us with a final thought, “It’s quite humbling when you realise how much competition we have out there but here at Perry’s we try to build a solid relationship with our customers. We are engineering oriented—Engineering first, marketing second. I think because we make everything in-house we can speak to our customers in a more informed way. I think that’s where we shine.”

### About Perry of Oakley Ltd

If you require a materials handling or drying solution, call one of Perry of Oakley’s experienced engineers on +44 1404 890300. Or, for more information on their products and services visit their website at [www.perryengineering.com](http://www.perryengineering.com).



David Perry is the Managing Director of Perry of Oakley - see our interview with him in the April 2018 edition of Milling and Grain

Find the full interview online at: [bit.ly/2HDhEbB](http://bit.ly/2HDhEbB)