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Tanning Tech review 2007

After eighteen months of hibernation, Tanning Tech returned to the exhibition halls of Bologna, running concurrently with the SIMAC footwear machinery exhibition. But those who anticipated a return to the visitor and business levels of years gone by were again disappointed. Springtime in Bologna is undoubtedly very pleasant, but with the event just weeks after the Asia Pacific Leather Fair and at the same time as the FIMEC exhibition in Brazil, low numbers of international visitors seemed assured—and so it proved. The stands and aisles were eerily quiet for most of the time, and those that ventured into SIMAC and Lineapelle reported things to be little better.

The regular visitor was immediately struck by the reduced size of the exhibition. With the footwear machinery occupying Hall 33, Tanning Tech was restricted to Hall 35 and perhaps only 60% of its former space. Some manufacturers had scaled down their stands, several had exhibited as groups rather than individually, but the most noticeable absences were of small scale manufacturers, component suppliers, traders and the like, who would seem to have largely abandoned Bologna as a shop window and international meeting place. Perhaps this is inevitable as Europe, and Italy in particular, can no longer claim to be the undisputed centre of gravity of the tanning industry. Italy, however, remains at the forefront of machinery manufacture and development, and Tanning Tech is still the favourite showcase for presenting their latest innovations.

AF of Calcinaia produces a range of perforating machines for leather and synthetics, and displayed its AF1600 model (Figure 2), a compact machine with 1600mm working width and touch-screen PLC control.

New designs in samming and setting

Bauce, specialists in throughfeed samming and setting, showed the latest models of its whole-hide machines for wet blue and dyed leather, together with an interesting development for use with them. Throughfeed samm machines for dyed leather require the hides to be soaking wet when fed into the machine, in order to allow the operators to spread them easily onto the feed conveyor. This is usually achieved by holding the hides in a water-filled tank at the infeed, but scrap pieces can tend to accumulate in it and be transferred with the hide into the machine, being pressed into the felts or the hide surface. Bauce has developed a special tank with aeration of the float to free particles from the hides; the float is then circulated and ➤



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Figure 1: Persico's throughfeed fleshing machine—still the market leader

Figure 2: AF1600 model perforating machine

Figure 3: Bauce's new infeed holding tank for hides incorporates, aeration, filtration and a motorised lifting floor)

Figure 4: The Soft stacker from Bertech incorporates a special geometry of conveyors to ensure hides are laid flat



filtered to remove the scrap (*Figure 3*). The tank also has a lattice floor which can be raised by the operators as the leather batch is processed, bringing even the last hides to within easy reach and maintaining infeed speed.

A wide range of products was exhibited by Bergi, including its Finilux and Starlux ironing and embossing machines, Versus and Supercoat rollercoaters, and a new version of its established de-duster, the Ariosa DP, specially designed to handle soft leathers. Bergi has now established a new group company, Bertech, specifically to manufacture stacking and leather handling equipment, and it exhibited two new stackers, the Armless and the Soft. The Armless stacker operates without side support arms for the final conveyor, making it extremely compact; the machine exhibited was equipped with a split final conveyor, enabling it to stack sides or skins on to two separate pallets, or to revert to whole hide stacking at the touch of a button. The Soft stacker (*Figure 4*) incorporates patented design geometry to ensure that the leather is laid flat without pleats or wrinkles.

An integrated vacuum drying, staking and conditioning line from Cartigliano would occupy a good proportion of the exhibition hall, so it restricted itself to displaying the latest model of whole-hide dry staking machine, the Staktreking. It is interesting to note that a 24 month warranty is offered on this machine—is this a sign of a new trend?

CM presented its R200T throughfeed samm machine (*Figure 5*), incorporating six pressure cylinders, four hydraulic drive motors, which are capable of applying 200 tonnes of pressure, with independent pressure control at each nip.

Finishing on a high

Automation specialist Feltre is moving further into the 'dry' end of tannery operations, and displayed one of its 24v battery-operated, radio-controlled Transfer units (*Figure 6*) for moving side leather in finishing areas. It has recently completed a major installation for an important Italian shoe upper producer with automated transfer of packs of leather from vacuum drying to staking, buffing, trimming, rollercoating and polishing operations, and incorporating a vertically stacked storage and holding station. The position of each pack of leather in the system is held in a computerised tracking system.

Finishing specialist Gemata has expanded its range yet further with an electric version of their Stardrier (*Figure 8*) for use with its roller coaters and spray cabins. This electric drier uses infra-red radiant heat only from filament lamps, without air circulation which might carry dust onto the finished leather surfaces. A new design of scrubber tower for its Spraystar cabin has also been developed by Gemata to replace proprietary units; this unit is manufactured in AISI 304 stainless steel and has 4-stage scrubbing with a number of new innovations such as self cleaning spray nozzles and solvent resistant filtering spheres.

Ger Elettronica showed a selection of its range of machines, which has expanded from simple area measurement and spray control to include stamping, labelling, folding and complete ➤

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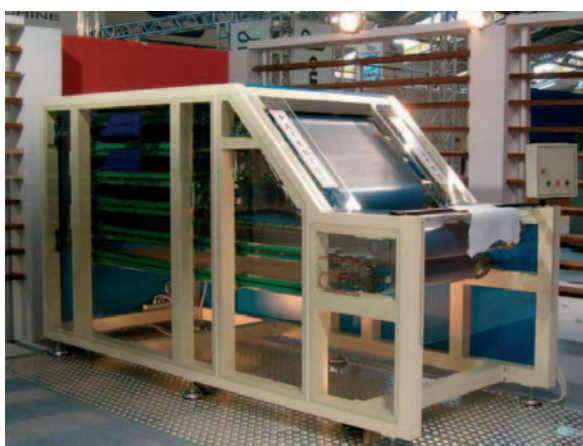


Figure 5: CM's 6-roller throughfeed samm machine, the R200T

Figure 6: 24v battery-powered Transfer unit from Feltre runs on tracks under radio control

Figure 7: Radiant infra-red Gemata Stardrier for dust-free drying

Figure 8: Mini Practika Plus model digital colour printing machine



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systems for tracking work in progress.

Laboratory equipment manufacturer Giuliani displayed a range of its testing equipment, including the IUF 450 rub fastness sample autolevelling system, and the new Acquatest dynamic waterproofness tester with 500k memory upgrade.

Linta continues to promote and develop its Diamond splitting machine with its unique 'upside-down' geometry and fully opening frame design for easy access and cleaning. Latest developments include the possibility of automatic feedback and adjustment of the splitter from the measured thickness profile of the split leather.

The whole picture

Much Colours, specialist in digital printing, presented its Practika range of ink-jet printers which can reproduce full colour photographic designs onto leather pieces and components (Figure 8). The specially-developed 'nano-colour' pigments also allow it to print onto glass and ceramics.

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Poletto Technology continues to offer most of the machinery range of the old Poletto company, but to date only the Millennium milling drum has seen a radical facelift; it remains one of the most stylish pieces of design to be seen at Bologna (Figure 9).

Czech manufacturer Strojovsit introduced a new model conventional whole-hide fleshing machine, the 070055 P1. This new design with 3300mm working width has a 'frameless' construction so that it does not need an operating platform, three-section pneumatic bolster to allow lighter fleshing on the flanks, and an increased bladed cylinder diameter of 245mm for greater cutting speed, among other developments.

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Handling and automation specialists Thema of Val D'Arno presented its newly-patented Dry-Flat continuous drying and conditioning system (Figure 10). Leather travels slowly through the unit for over two hours in circulated air of PLC-controlled temperature and humidity, allowing precise, evenly distributed moisture content at exit. There are no internal conveyor transfers in the machine—the leather is firmly held flat between two fine mesh conveyor bands from infeed to outfeed, and cannot be dislodged within the unit. The Dry-Flat system is a modular design, available in working widths of up to 3100mm and in varying lengths dependant on customer requirements.

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3P is now under the same ownership as Escomar and Mosconi, and exhibited on a combined stand as New3P. It will continue to manufacture its current range of machines, including the unique automatic toggle drier, but in areas where it might apparently compete with Escomar (such as the 3P Daytona through feed samm machine against the Escomar PCR5) it will concentrate on basic designs while Escomar aims at the more sophisticated market. Mosconi showed the 2007 version of the Super Zenit splitting machine (Figure 11), now with five position adjustments of gauge roller cambering.

Drumming up business

Drum manufacturer Vallero International showed its new

Figure 9: Italian style! Poletto's Millennium milling drum

Figure 10: Thema's new Dry-Flat drying and conditioning demonstration unit

Figure 11: The Super Zenit 2007 splitter from Mosconi

Figure 12: The 'Dragon' shelf in Vallero Vortex drum



Mistral dry milling machine, a stainless steel rotary basket unit with radial air circulation and a fully enclosed structure requiring no guarding; high loading capacity and reduced processing time is claimed against traditional milling drum designs. Also on display was Vallero's slow speed Vortex drum design available in wood or stainless steel for liming, tanning and dyeing, incorporating its 'dragon' toothed shelf design (*Figure 12*) which is claimed to optimise hide and float circulation.

Tanning Tech 2007 ended leaving more questions than answers over its future for the machinery manufacturers. The continuing increase in on-line communication and information, and the cheapness of air travel, particularly within Europe, are continuing to work against the concept of the traditional trade fair. European machinery manufacturers, however, still need a biennial showcase on home soil at which they can physically present their latest developments and innovations to the industry at large. What is needed is to attract more potential customers, particularly from the Far East and the Americas, and in this respect an April exhibition has possibly proved a backward step. 

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Figure 13: Not a new concept in flexible manufacturing—Italprogetti's 4.2m plastic drum was just too big to get on the stand!

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