



Q & A



Welding World spoke to Neil Pulsford, UK managing director of GYS about the business journey of the company, how the coronavirus has changed the climate we are working in and what trends he sees emerging.

Introduce yourself to our members and the wider business community, who are you and what do you specialise in?

GYS is a family owned French industrial group manufacturing welding machines, car body repair and battery maintenance equipment. Today with over 700 employees the GYS factory in France is now maybe the largest welding factory in Europe. GYS has also become the world leader in vehicle body repair and the largest manufacturer of battery chargers in Europe.

Describe any successes or achievements your business has achieved and the reasons for these?

It has to be the transformation and growth of the business. When Nicolas and Bruno Bouygues purchased GYS in 1997 it was a small and failing transformer factory with

just 30 employees. Following two decades of consistent growth through investment in people, research and development, the building of a modern integrated manufacturing plant in Laval and expansion around the world the current picture of GYS is quite different. As well as scale, innovation and technology perhaps the best measure of the transformation is that from its humble roots GYS today is now the chosen partner of some of the world's largest manufacturing companies. Behind this is the structure of the company, being family owned enables a long-term vision to be implemented and realized without the disruption often seen by quoted companies subject to takeovers and mergers.

What are your views on the current business climate?

Like the 2008 recession the current coronavirus induced situation will be very serious for our sector. The challenge will be to maintain investment and a positive future outlook during the period we are now in whilst we wait until we have better treatment or vaccines available. Though demand may drop welding is a major and essential part of industry. Businesses that have accrued some resilience and are committed to the industry will be secure and will have opportunities to grow. GYS is now a €100m business with strong cash reserves. We are confident that over the longer term the impact will be seen as a temporary slowing to the company's progression.

What issues are of importance to your customers and how are you addressing them?

There are many but I will pick two. Firstly technology, welding equipment is now part of the advanced electronics world, we are developing and utilising ever more advanced electronics and ever more powerful processing power. Performance is a function of research and development investment, the capability of welding

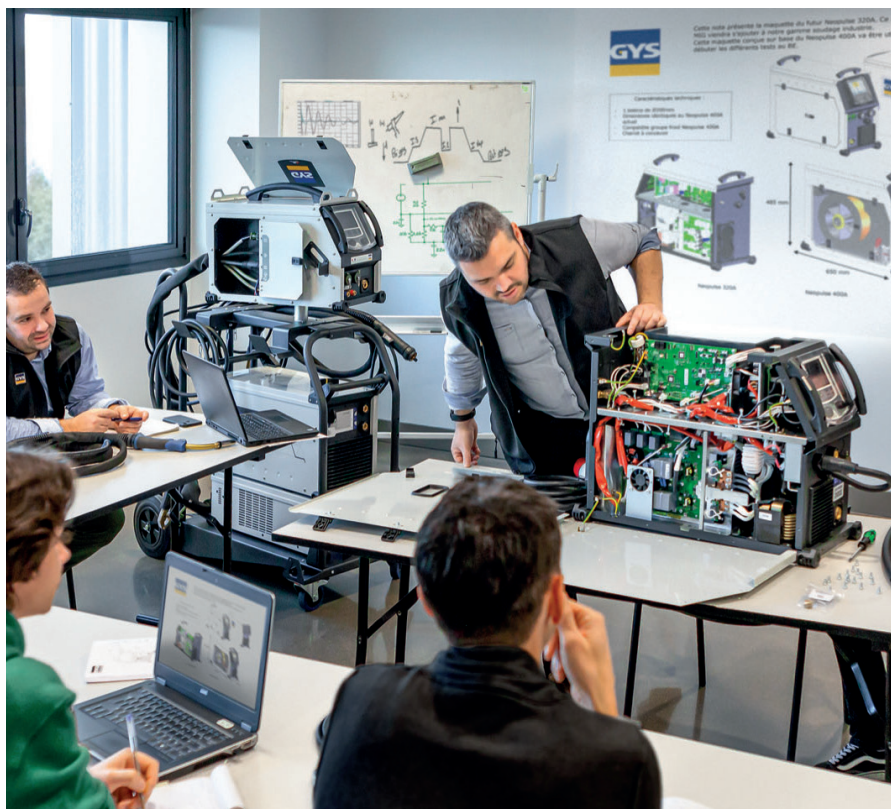
equipment is progressing and as cost comes down new technology will reach more segments of the market. This offers efficiency opportunities for the end user. To the distribution sector keeping up to date can be a challenge to keep up to date to ensure they continue to offer the best advice to their customers. Distributors will need more than ever the support from the manufacturer. Secondly range, equipment ranges are expanding, GYS offer over 80 welding machines and this makes stocking and thus customer service at distributor level difficult.

Therefore the GYS strategy is a joint one, major investment in R&D backed with investment in local markets, this means growing our sales and technical support subsidiaries. Putting stock in country close to point of sale and critically investing in skilled people to provide the support to end user and distribution partners.

What trends do you see emerging in the industry?

At manufacturer level in recent years we have already seen consolidation and the removal of some brands. The commercial violence from the coronavirus crisis will feed yet more corporate consolidation and possible loss of some players.

Technology will continue to enable advances in welding technology, we will see wider implementation of robotics as costs come down along with a continual gaining of momentum of Industry 4.0. It's a great time to be in the welding sector, with technology offering efficiency gains and likely to continue to do so and at lower cost than ever before.



Which new products have you launched recently or do you intend to launch in the near future?

Historically GYS had become regarded as a manufacturer of smaller or lower specification welding machines now with the recently introduced 400/500A inverter family GYS is able to compete in wider markets. Currently building on our experience in body repair we are developing a new range of capacitor discharge and drawn arc machines to add to the range. Also we are applying the research & development team to

automation, and robotics, our first Cobot collaboration in the marine industry is happening this summer. Also we have opened up working relationships with system integrators and in addition we have embarked on several projects developing customised solutions for specialised users.

Do you have any new initiatives both in the home and foreign markets which are planned?

GYS is a growing company so there is always much going on. At the moment we are completing the first phase of our new European Logistics Centre in France. This is a brand new 120,000sq ft (12,000sqm) facility which started operation in January. On the same site we have capacity to add a similar size factory extension. Elsewhere GYS is expanding its investment in Italy, a small sales subsidiary was set up in 2015 and we are purchasing land to build a larger operation. We are also looking at several markets to open the next overseas GYS subsidiary. UK investment is also continuing and following the doubling of our office space in 2019 more expansion is planned. To reflect the move into automation and robotics we are preparing to build a new robotics centre at our head office at Rugby. ■

