

Dutch Mastery

Specialising as a fabricator in stainless steel in high alloy materials, FIB industries has grown to become a major player in the process and pressure containing equipment market; its hallmarks, said International Sales Manager Ruurd Schut, are “high quality, perfect workmanship and total reliability.” Report by Colin Chinery.



Typical equipment



Bird view of our premises

FIB Industries is a major player in the process and pressure containing equipment market, proud exponent of traditional Dutch standards of integrity and plain dealing with a major focus on the oil and gas sectors.

A fabricator specialising in stainless steel and high alloy materials, FIB started 70 years ago as an insulation company marketing to the large Dutch dairy industry. By the mid-1960s the chemical and petrochemical industries were assuming an increasing market share and today, petrochemicals accounts for two thirds of its activity. With leading international oil companies among its long-standing high profile customers, the oil and gas niche has been designated as a specific FIB operational segment.

“Roughly 30 per cent of what we are doing is oil and gas related both offshore and on shore. It’s a significant niche and for FIB Industries, it is growing,” said International Sales Manager Ruurd Schut. As we spoke, Mr Schut was close to concluding a half million

euro deal involving a North Sea platform. “The value is not especially high but the application is new and this makes it very appealing both for us and the customer.”

Masters of Complexity

With 99 per cent of design and manufacturing undertaken in-house, FIB’s focus is on complex equipment, a vital component of a processing platform or plant and whose manufacture demands skilled engineering and craftsmanship.

Part of the €350 million-plus turnover Andus Group – 30 per cent related to the oil and gas industry – FIB has access to numerous engineering houses, a facility enhanced by its partnership with Rotterdam-based Andus sister company HSM Offshore.

With its extensive expertise in production, compression and wellhead platforms, jackets and other types of substructures, modules and transformer stations, HSM Offshore has since the



Distillation column for refinery



Equipment for gas compressors

early seventies completed numerous multidisciplinary projects for the oil and gas and offshore windfarm industries.

Located in the north of the Netherlands, FIB has its own technical department which produces designs and carries out structural calculations in accordance with applicable construction regulations.

Advanced, computer-driven calculation and drafting systems such as finite element analysis and 3D Inventor are deployed, and with an extensive experience as a preferred vendor, dedicated vendor, authorised vendor or co-manufacturer, FIB is involved in the development of equipment at very early stages.

The professionalism and expertise in FIB Industries' manufacturing process spearheads the organisation. Work is smart and precise due to extensive knowledge of materials. An extra dimension was added recently: an ultra modern plasma cutting and welding robot, unique in the Netherlands.

Enabling fully automated cutting and welding of connections in dished heads and cylinders, the robot is controlled by software deriving data directly from the 3D design drawings. With human errors ruled out, the result is strict dimensional tolerances, enabling FIB to carry out highly efficient single and serial production runs.

Perfect Workmanship

FIB's delivery and reputation, said Ruurd Schut, is anchored on "High quality, perfect workmanship and total reliability. We have a number of OEM customers for whom we make a series of products or solutions, but our main expertise is non-standard items. FIB is synonymous with high craftsmanship, and with engineering and welding in-house, everything is under our full control."

FIB delivers and installs stainless steel and high alloy materials that are essential components of high tech equipment. Products are constructed in all types of stainless steel, duplex steels, high nickel alloys like monel, inconel and hastelloy and exotic materials such as titanium.

"And with 100 per cent traceability of materials, our special software can even trace the way we welded - very important when working with special materials - and show who welded, at what moment and at what temperatures."

FIB's geo focus is mainly on Europe and the Middle East, and until recently the operation was entirely Netherland's-based. But now FIB has opened its first branch office - in the Rhineland - a prime location with Germany accounting for a quarter of Europe's €500 billion petrochemical market.

"By having our own German branch and postal code we are no longer considered as a Dutch company trying to do business in Germany. And this makes a difference."

As a designer and manufacturer of OEM equipment, FIB builds on behalf of companies in Britain and Norway as well as the Netherlands - but not under its own brand name. And this presents an identity issue that it is keen to address.

"While we are far from being a small company, we are not known everywhere because a big part of our turnover is through engineering houses and OEM companies. Visiting a company in Germany recently, I was asked 'how can it happen that we didn't know you before?' I said, 'You did know us because you have bought equipment through engineering houses from us; we are the company that built it!' This happens more than once and is one of the reasons why we are striving to advance the name of FIB."

But with low oil and gas prices set to continue, FIB is not anticipating significant investments in these sectors. Ruurd Schut is unfazed. "This is not the only big market for us and therefore is not a very big problem. And the current situation gives us an opportunity."

"With an increasing focus on making plants more efficient and getting the last drop of oil or gas out of wells, operators might require special equipment, and this is what we are looking for - we are doing this already with a Norwegian company for whom we are building exactly this kind of equipment."

"So although investments will be low, we still see opportunities. There is also a lot of demand in very specialised, more durable materials and this is exactly within our scope."

"As a Dutch company with 100 per cent Dutch costs, we cannot compete on labour costs. But we can compete on efficiency and complexity, and this might be in material choices, paperwork - not everyone is capable or willing to handle all the paperwork - and undertake all the component areas such as engineering or house calculations. So we have everything in our own hands, which I believe places us in a strong position."

Relationships and Added Value

This year, FIB will be attending the Offshore Energy Exhibition and Conference 2016, and while continuing growth is high on the agenda, Mr Schut is not setting percentage targets. "As a well known company in a certain niche we have the ambition to build complex equipment for the oil and gas industry and if possible in cooperation with OEM customers. We want a healthy business with long-term relationships, bringing added value to customers."

"FIB is not a hit-and-run company; we are very much focussed on long term relationships. If you buy with us, you know three things; you get exactly what you want, you will get it on time and you are dealing with a quality, trustworthy company."

"We are typical Dutch - straight, open and direct, a company that sticks to its obligations. If we say we will do it we will, no matter what. Our word is our bond." ■