



HARALD PIHL: The go-to supplier for quality alloys

As an international supplier of speciality alloys, HARALD PIHL continues to innovate and expand its presence around the world. The company has always focused strongly on reliability and speedy delivery; now investments in digitalisation and quality control are enabling it to guarantee consistent delivery of top-quality materials. As well as a huge range of Titanium grades, nickel alloys, duplexes and hard-to-find alloys, they have recently started supplying rare AA grade titanium to the most demanding industries. Stainless Steel World spoke to Managing Director Jonas Pihl about these latest developments.

By Joanne McIntyre

HARALD PIHL is an international family-run business located near Stockholm, Sweden, that was founded in 1912 and is run by third and fourth generations of the Pihl family. The company stocks a very wide range of products, from special alloys to wire and welding materials, to stainless steel small diameter tubes. Since Stainless Steel World last spoke to Jonas in 2018 the company has added another 30% to its already vast range of products.

International expansion

Distributors of the largest range of nickel, titanium and copper alloys in Europe, HARALD PIHL is expanding its global presence with new offices around the globe. "We are a very international company, and our target is to be present in every geographical region within five years" Jonas explains.

HARALD PIHL now has thirteen offices strategically located worldwide. In 2018 its Chinese branch opened in Shanghai with a plentiful stock of alloys. "The local aerospace market has a strong demand for high-end alloys, so we are steadily expanding our product offering in China as we identify customer requirements. While aerospace is our primary focus at this early stage, our Chinese business will continue to grow organically over time as our customer base expands. China is proving to be an exciting and growing market for us." Most recently the company has opened offices in Pune, India; near Jakarta in Indonesia; and also in Istanbul, Turkey.

Combining digitalisation & quality

Large investments in digitalisation and quality control in recent years are



The company's service centre cuts bars and pipes up to 460mm in diameter.



ISO 14001 certified

In 2019 HARALD PIHL is aiming to gain ISO 14001 certification, an international standard that specifies requirements for an effective environmental management system. It provides a framework that an organization can follow, rather than establishing environmental performance requirements.

“We decided to pursue this certification in response to requests from the market,” explains Jonas. “Some of our larger clients prefer their suppliers to have this certification in place, including several of our aerospace clients. It’s a very nice quality stamp to have and fits perfectly with our pursuit of quality and responsibility in our business practices.”

Specialist Ti supplier

HARALD PIHL is constantly enlarging the range of alloys it supplies and has expanded its product range by 30% since Stainless Steel World last spoke to them in 2018. The company is steadily expanding its already extensive offering of CP Titanium and titanium alloys in response to customers’ needs and as it expands into new geographies.

“Historically we started with ASTM for industrial applications but we soon began stocking a full range of AMS material in Gr5 bars and plate. Recently we added Titanium AMS 4928 with ultrasonic test AMS2631 C1 AA. This class AA is for high-class F1 racing and an aerospace customer who needs the best quality. Now we are starting to enter the medical market with premium titanium from Japan, this will be a challenge for 2019-2020.”

now paying dividends as today the company is reaping the benefits. Jonas: “Now digitalization and quality control are connected in fantastic synergy. Having the digitalisation process fully integrated with our quality department enables us to handle orders more efficiently. This is particularly important for customers who have very high demands, such as aerospace and Formula One clients. Full digitalisation provides thorough control of incoming material, and purchasers can see in real time who is supplying their orders and when they will arrive. It’s a state-of-the-art system which enables us to constantly evaluate - in real time - how our suppliers are performing.”

“Digitalization has great synergy with quality control”

“Combining quality and digitalisation enables us to focus on suppliers who provide us with what we need, and conversely to put pressure on suppliers who are not. This year we will be more demanding of our suppliers, we will check materials more rigorously, and we’ll be tougher on all aspects to improve quality. The system enables us to order material correctly and

identify any problem areas before its delivered. It’s a self-learning circle which ultimately will result in a much better chain of supply.”

An additional bonus of full digitalisation is that the company is now truly paperless. “Getting rid of paper files has generated lots of extra office space. This generated room to take on new employees, which is fantastic.”



Part of HARALD PIHL’s extensive range of customer services including coil handling.



The HARALD PIHL team are keen to celebrate another record year in 2019.

The HARALD PIHL warehouse in Stockholm carries approx. 200 tons of titanium;

- Titanium Gr2 and Gr5 bars Ø3-350 mm
- Titanium Gr1, Gr2 and Gr5 sheets and plate 0,4-76 mm
- Titanium Gr2 tube Od0, 5-60, 3mm and pipe from ¼" sch10s to 10"sch10s.
- Titanium Gr2 Fittings
- Titanium Gr2 and Gr5 welding material.

Improved online systems

One important area HARALD PIHL is always looking to improve is their online presence and ordering systems. Their accessible website is very clear with a good overview of what's on offer and customers can easily find what they need online. The unusually transparent system allows the customer to see online exactly what is in stock. This is very beneficial for the customers as they know immediately what stock is available and when new stock will arrive, saving them precious time. Jonas explains: "Customers can track the progress of their orders, including when it's ready to be packed, collected or shipped. They can also download invoices, see if they have invoices that are due to be paid, and download product certificates. Furthermore, repeat orders can be executed with the simple click of a button."

Internally this platform is also used for delivery monitoring. "We are usually keeping track of up to 250 incoming shipments, so what we've done now is set up a system where everyone in the company can monitor these pending deliveries. Literally everyone, from sales to the warehouse, has access to this system making us even more efficient and transparent. The result is that we can all very clearly communicate about the deliveries to our customers."

Investing in thicker plates

An important development in the company's constantly evolving product range is an increasing focus on thicker plates. "Our facilities carry an extensive range of thick plates," explains Jonas. "While we've always maintained a significant stock of titanium plates, in

"By the end of 2019, we will have Europe's largest stock of AA titanium"

recent years we have added many new nickel-based alloys in thicker plates (alloy 36, C-22, 718 to mention a few). Today we carry the widest range of plates in titanium and nickel-based alloys combined in all of Europe."

In parallel with its increased turnover of thick plates, HARALD PIHL's water jet



cutting service has expanded as well with turnover tripling over the last three years. "The water jet cutting service is now our fastest-growing business area, last year it representing 7% of total turnover. Based on this success, HARALD PIHL will continue to invest in widening its stock range for thicker plates in the future. Other significant investments are the expansion of the warehouse in Sweden by 700m² in the coming year with new storage areas, water jet cutting facilities and another water jet cutting machine. "These investments will enable us to handle the increased business while providing our customers with the service we are famous for – fast deliveries and good results."

Innovation and modernization

It is not only in their online presence and digitalization that make HARALD PIHL a forward-looking company; they



The company's water jet cutting service is its fastest growing business area.



Full digitalisation provides thorough control of incoming material, plus purchasers can see in real time who is supplying their orders and when they will arrive.



HARALD PIHL stocks the largest range of nickel, titanium and copper alloys in Europe.

have changed and innovated in other areas as well. The company now has a much stronger focus on modernization and innovation. “Ten years ago we were less flexible; what happens today was the same as what was done yesterday. Now, however, everyone here is very motivated to make changes and improvements. We pride ourselves to being a modern, innovative company that constantly strives to be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.”

To do that HARALD PIHL has chosen a different and innovative way to hire new people. “We told everybody we work with that if you find a good person out there who you think is suitable to work with us, give them a call. We want to create a good atmosphere at the workplace so people enjoy working here and deliver work of a high standard. That has resulted in good, top-quality people coming to us.”

One-stop-shop service centre

HARALD PIHL combines its extensive knowledge in special alloys and titanium with customer services to provide materials at the desired length and profile directly from its warehouse.

- Water jet cutter Plates up to 96 mm thickness
- Guillotine Plates up to 8 mm thickness
- Band saws Bars & pipes up to 460mm OD
- Abrasive cutting wheel Fine tubes from 2mm OD
- Coil handling machine Cutting coils to lengths

Much of the success of the company is therefore due to the people that work at its heart. There are now fifty people working in all thirteen offices combined. “Since everyone in the company knows we are focusing on being a modern company with innovative ideas we get great suggestions. We have very open discussions about improvement and compassionately doing business. Because we are a small, tight-knit group of people we have a very short decision-making time; if we hear a good idea from anyone, we can make it happen very quickly. We give people a lot of responsibility, and I think that is a very important way to make people feel valued and be passionate about their work.”

Compassionate business

The company’s employees are also directly involved when it comes to being a compassionate business. Jonas explains: “We have an internal discussion about the best choice versus the right choice. The *best* choice reflects the hard values like delivery, quality, packing, marketing, things everyone is trying to be good at. We are aiming to be the best in the hard values. The *right* choice reflects the soft values, like how to support the environment, how you treat other people, what kind of company values you have. So if two companies offer the same standard in the hard values, you should look at their soft values to make a choice.” HARALD PIHL has been working on its soft values for several years. “We look at workplace diversity and equal opportunities for everyone. We have

people working with us from many different ethnic backgrounds and we have an open discussion about all sorts of issues that could come up on the work floor. We want to be a good employer. These issues have been very high on the agenda recently and we are dedicated to being a modern and inclusive company.” HARALD PIHL has not only focussed on being a good employer; they have also reached out to the wider community by supporting local projects and UNICEF. “For every order someone places with us we donate to UNICEF. The more you buy, the more you contribute. As a customer, you can see directly the total donations your orders have delivered.” Jonas adds “We aim to look to the future; it’s not about always making as much money as possible but also about contributing to a wider goal. This way of working has a motivating and stimulating effect on us as a company, and it benefits everyone; our customers, our suppliers, our business, our employees and the wider community.”

Facts & Figures

Name:	HARALD PIHL
Founded:	1912
Employees:	50
Locations:	Sweden, Norway, Germany, China, India, Finland, United Kingdom, Denmark, Turkey, France, Poland, Italy, Indonesia
Products:	Nickel alloys, titanium, welding materials, copper alloys
Website:	www.haraldpihl.com