

Reel after reel of coiled tubing stocked nine metres high in Merinox's warehouse.

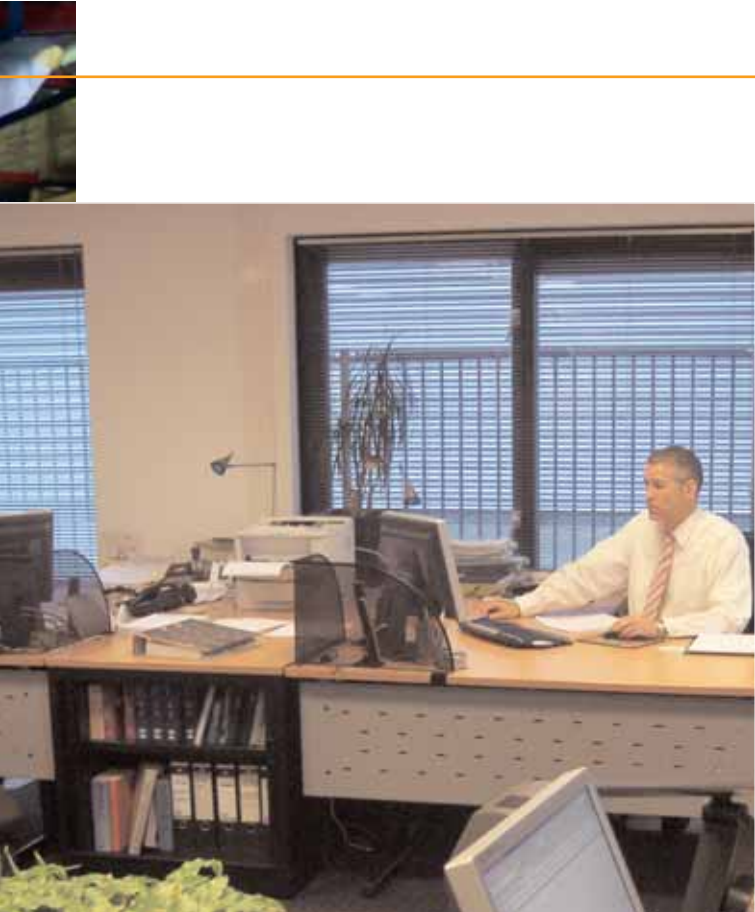
Merinox – specialist stock of high-quality stainless steel

An ideal location, high-quality, wide-ranging products and flexible, well-trained staff are the key elements to Merinox BV and the company's success over the last ten years. In an interview with Mr Peter Valk, Director of Merinox BV, Stainless Steel World found out just what it takes to support such a growing company in the specialised niche market of seamless stainless steel & nickel alloy tubes.

By Sarah Thompson

UNIQUE

Merinox BV is a modest company with headquarters near to the port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. In the case of Merinox, however, the size of the company certainly does not reflect its ability to provide exemplary service, products of the highest quality and one of the widest selections of seamless stainless steel tubing in Europe. Mr Valk started: "We have a total of 18 members of staff. We started out in a small office in 1996 with a small stock of 220m² and within two years, we had grown so much that we needed to expand our premises. Our first expansion encompassed an additional 440m² and 500m² outside, the second, a grand total of 1000m² in our new premises in Alblasterdam, near Rotterdam. Mr Valk added: "When Kees van Reijn and I started Merinox on 1 April 1996, almost ten years ago, we made a conscious decision to concentrate on one product group and one product group only, namely seamless stainless steel & nickel alloy tubing. This has turned out to be a good decision and one of Merinox's



Kees van Reijn (left) and Peter Valk (right), the founders and joint directors of Merinox BV.

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most important market advantages. We are the only European specialist supplier of exclusively seamless stainless steel & nickel alloy tubing and have developed a wide-reaching and extensive selection of different grades and dimensions. By specialising in such a specific niche product, we are unique."

COMPREHENSIVE

The Merinox product range comprises capillary, instrument, precision and hydraulic seamless tubes. All of the company's products are ASTM, DIN and ISO 9001 certified and its hand-picked well known manufacturers are all ISO9001 and ISO2000 approved. Mr Valk: "We can guarantee our customers with one hundred per cent quality. Our tubes are often used for a variety of applications ranging from manometers, sensors, analyzers, measuring equipment and medical instrumentation to shipbuilding, offshore installations, drilling rigs and chemical plants. With high-quality, certified products and manufacturers, we can assure our customers of

reliable, durable equipment." Tube dimensions range from 0.1mm outside diameter to 100mm outside diameter and can be supplied on random lengths of 6 meter and on coils up to 1000 meter long.

EXTENSIVE

In addition to supplying a wide range of sizes and dimensions, Merinox also supplies a broad selection of grades to destinations involving critical environments; high pressures, high temperatures and corrosive atmospheres or media. Mr Valk continued: "We have put a lot of thought into the grades that we currently offer. Our main goal has been to supply to even the most severe applications. We stock 304, 316/L, 310/S, 316Ti, 321, 904L, 6Mo, Alloy 28, 400, 600, 625, 825, C276, Duplex 31803 and Titanium grade 2." Merinox has supplied many orders of these exotic grades to projects all over the world. Mr Valk: "We are proud of the extensive nature of our product range, the majority of which we can supply from stock."

THOROUGH

Merinox has a lot of experience in providing large and detailed orders for extreme environments all over the world, but it does not stop there. Small quantities, to universities and research institutes of tubing in uncommon grades and sizes is not a problem either, neither are whole tubing packages. Merinox's products, whether sold individually or in complete packages are delivered on request with independent authority inspection such as Lloyd's Register, Det Norske Veritas and Germanische Lloyd. Mr Valk continued: "We supply all the necessary documentation and certificates needed to supply anywhere in world. We can supply a total of 50 different qualities, all manufactured to high standards and if a customer needs something else, we will have tubes manufactured by our preferred producers, tailor-made to customer specifications and drawings, even for small orders of only totalling 1 metre of tubing."

"Our customers appreciate the flexibility we have to offer as an integral part of our service."

SERVICE

"Quality, quantity and well selected products only get you half way there," Mr Valk commented, "there is much, much more to being a successful supplier". Mr Valk: "What stands us apart over and above the specialist nature of our company is the level of service we have to offer and our flexibility. This is an important element in the market today. Being a relatively small company allows us to offer a flexible service to all our customers.

Whether an order be for one metre or one hundred metres, we will initiate contact with the customer within ten minutes, either by telephone, email or fax. We are always able to process the order within one hour and customers can come and pick up their orders from us in that same hour or the order will leave our warehouse for its destination the same day." Mr Valk continued: "We have customers all over the world. It is not unusual for us to have to fly orders direct to Singapore or Dubai and even as far away as New Zealand. We see this as an extra service for our customers, to ease their workloads. However some customers like to pick up their orders from our depots themselves. Being so close to Rotterdam port (ten minutes), Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (sixty minutes) and Antwerp port in Belgium (forty-five minutes), puts us in an ideal location." As soon as the order is placed at Merinox, customers can be assured that it will be handled from start to finish; a total package.

GROWTH

In the rapid growth over the past ten years, Merinox has needed to move offices numerous times and increase warehouse capacity due to the rapid expansion of the product range. Furthermore, Merinox made a strategic decision to open new branches in the UK and France. Mr Valk: "Our moving to newer and bigger



Henk van Lith, Product Manager deep in discussion with Peter Valk.

premises has been due to the expansion of not only our team but also because of the rapid rate at which our product range has expanded. In addition, we opened our first branch outside of the Netherlands in Oldham, near Manchester, UK, in 1999. This UK branch is managed by Peter Fryer. We set up the new warehouse and sales and distribution office with ten per cent of our existing stock with the view to focus on the UK and Irish markets. Following on from the success we had in the UK we then decided that France should be our next point of expansion. In 2002, we followed the same formula and settled more stock in Lumigny-Nesles-Ormeaux, near Paris, France, which is managed by Helmut Zerling." Mr Valk added: "Of course in other countries, customers expect different specifications, and our stocks there reflect that." Merinox's total stock currently exceeds 4800m² and more than 600,000 metres of tubing.

Product range

Products: - Seamless capillary, instrument, precision, hydraulic tubes
- Coiled tubing (seamless and welded)
- Tube bundles.

Diameter: from 0.1 mm up to 100 mm o.d.

Grades: Available from stock
310, 316L, 904L, 6Mo, Alloy 28, 400, 600, 625, 825, C276, Duplex 31803 and Titanium grade 2

Available on request
304H, 321H, 316H, 316LN, 310H, 317/L, 347, 6 Mo, 254SMO, Duplex 1.4362 / S 32304, Super Duplex S32750, Cunifer, Alloy 33, -75, 718 and X750.
Alloy 200, 201, K500, 601, 625, 800, 800H, 800HT, C4, C22, B2, Titanium grade 1 till 5, Zirconium 704, Tungum, Copper B68, CuNi 70/30, CuNi 90/10, Aluminium 99.5, ALMG3.

Tolerances & Standards:
Tolerances according to ASTM A269, A213, A632, A262, A450. NACE MR0175-03.

Facts & Figures

Name:	Merinox BV
Head office:	Alblasserdam, The Netherlands
Branches:	Merinox Ltd, Oldham, UK Merinox Tubes S.A.R.L., Lumigny-Nesles-Ormeaux, France
Products:	Seamless stainless steel & nickel alloy tubing
Markets:	Chemical Industry Petrochemical Industry (offshore) Hydraulic circuits Process Industry Instrument Industry



Merinox's premises in Alblasterdam, near Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

FUTURE PLANS

Firmly established with three European branches of the Merinox group, there is little stopping this budding company from expanding further. Mr Valk: "We see potential for growth in a number of regions across the world. Germany, Italy and Spain and Scandinavia are important markets for Merinox, as are Singapore, China, Korea and the Middle East. Export makes up seventy per cent of our business, so we are not ruling out the possibility of setting up new branches in some of our more significant geographical regions." Mr Valk also fully appreciates the potential of USA, Australia, South Africa and Russia, but admitted that this would have to be something for the more distant future. "However, we are keen to keep any possibilities open for cooperation with other strong partners in different regions of the world. Mr Valk continued: "In contrast to our tentative but sure advances in geographical distribution and geographical location, when it comes to

**"For the outside world,
a tube is a tube. But there
is far more to it than that."**

expansion of our product range, we are never at a standstill. We are continuously adding to our selection and the amount of stock increases in sync with each of these new additions. This is something we are sure of.

We know we will be concentrating on seamless stainless steel & nickel alloy tubes for the years to come. Being a specialist stockist has been a very successful formula, we would not want to spoil it now."

To conclude, Merinox has no concrete plans for new branches but sees unlimited potential for expanding the Group to new global markets. Mr Valk: "When you need seamless tubing, we are a very strong partner. Through the specialist nature of our company, our flexibility and our determination to provide the highest quality seamless stainless steel tubing, we can be certain that the future will bring some exciting developments for Merinox BV." ■

Automation and information technology

High on the agenda at Merinox has been the need for high-tech automation and information technology in order to streamline its service even further. As a result, a new, comprehensive hard- and software system was installed at its offices early this year meaning that Merinox is now capable of generating state of the art management information, price calculations as well as supporting project handling. Direct communication with the customers' purchasing systems, including Trade Ranger, is now also possible.

Customers can also contact Merinox interactively via its website, in order to simplify and streamline the ordering process for all of its customers.