



The Pihl Management team, from left to right: David Pihl, Klas Pihl, Johan Pihl and Jonas Pihl

Harald Pihl: Carrying on a family tradition

Established in 1912, Swedish stockist of stainless steel and special metals Harald Pihl has a long and impressive history, a heritage that it is rightfully proud of. Stainless Steel World met with Managing Director Mr. Johan Pihl, a third generation member of the Pihl family involved in the family business. He explains how he carries on a family tradition, what sets the company apart from other stockists, and what he believes the future has in store for Harald Pihl.

By John Butterfield and Esther Aiking-Martensen

As soon as he begins to talk, it is obvious that Mr. Pihl is very proud of the company his grandfather founded almost a century ago. He elaborates on its history with great enthusiasm: "My grandfather, Harald Pihl, established the company that bears his name 96 years ago but he worked as a trader of primary material, such as copper alloys, zinc and nickel even before that." Originally, the nickel he sold was meant for remelting, for example for nickel silver, metal finishing and even for alloy plates for battleships. Nickel, however,

quickly became the cornerstone of his company and in 1919 Harald Pihl even became a representative in Sweden for the Inco International Nickel Company now Special Metals. When the first stainless steels became available on the markets in the 1920s, the company began to supply large amounts of primary nickel, in the form of pellets and squares, to companies such as Sandvik and Avesta for remelting as parts in the final product. A bit later, in the 1940s, many stainless steel producers shifted their focus and

needed more advanced alloys, for example for the production of jet engines. Harald Pihl picked up on this trend and began to offer nickel alloys in finished products, such as sheet, plate, bar, tube, wire, welding materials, and more. And although nickel alloys remained the company's main trade, the fifties and sixties also brought about an important expansion of the product range when titanium was added to its portfolio. "Initially, we worked with some smaller titanium producers, Mr.



on in style

Pihl says, "but then we joined forces with IMI in the UK, which is now owned by Timet. Our titanium business has grown considerably over the years and we now buy and sell titanium across the globe, to and from places as far away as China, Japan and the USA." As a next step, during the 1970s, a number of special copper alloys was also added to the product range, the result of a cooperation with American company Brush Wellman. "These are copper alloys with special properties, like wire resistance, spring properties and electrical conductivity," Mr. Pihl explains. Until the 1970s, the company operated as a supplier but in 1974, it was felt that the time was right to set up shop as a stockist as well. A new era was born.

A complete service centre

More recently, Harald Pihl also added a service centre, which means that Harald Pihl can now deliver a number of value-added services in addition to its products, such as sawing, shearing, and welding and cutting – laser, plasma and water jet. For this last purpose in particular, it has installed an advanced welding facility, a complete plate shop, Mr. Pihl: "Especially with regard to heat treatment, we can even make some finished products here, such as muffles, big vessels, furnace heaters, fans and radiant tubing.

"Through time," Mr. Pihl says, "we have always continued to grow and add new products, materials and services to our portfolio. Today, in terms of the number of different alloys we carry, we are one of the largest stockholders in Europe. We work with more than 500 suppliers across the globe, with offices in Sweden and Finland and a lot of partners across the globe. Currently, our export accounts for about 50% of our revenues. We are a very close-knit company, with about 20 employees and with an excellent reputation, both in Sweden and beyond. I think we are doing well."

New warehouse

Business is going well for Harald Pihl indeed these days, mainly due to its impressive array of products and services, Mr. Pihl says proudly: "Today, in addition to nickel alloys, copper alloys and titanium, we also stock many other – and often more exotic – materials, such as INCONEL, MONEL, INCOLOY, hastelloy and molybdenum, just to name a few. And our product range stretches from plates, tubes and



Harald Pihl recently added more storage space but the warehouses are almost at full capacity even so.

bars to wire, welding materials, strip, sheet. You name it and we will most likely have it in stock! In fact, even though we just added 2200m² of storage space, our warehouses are so full that we are almost at maximum capacity these days!"

One example that underlines just how complete Harald Pihl's product range is, is the fact that, according to Mr. Pihl, the company is one of only a few companies in the world, if not the only one, that keeps Kovar alloy tubing in stock: "This is a highly specialized iron-nickel-cobalt alloy with a coefficient of thermal expansion similar to that of hard glass. It is used in the electronics industry for the purpose of bonding metal parts to hard glass envelopes, for example for power tubes and x-ray tubes, and also for measuring equipment, where you need a stable reference point. And this is just one of the many examples of rare types of steel that we can deliver straight from stock."

Technical staff

And with this wide range of materials also comes an extensive product knowledge, Mr. Pihl emphasizes: "We pride ourselves on our technical expertise and our knowledge regarding the products we keep in stock as we make it a point to know exactly what it is that we are selling. This knowledge certainly benefits our clients. Over the years, we have accumulated a wealth of expertise on issues such as heat resistance, corrosion resistance, controlled elongation properties and welding properties." Of course this is not something that is done easily. It requires extensive training, and





Harald Pihl AB offices and warehouse

experience, Mr. Pihl says: "The people we hire are all well-educated to begin with but they still receive extensive, and continuous, training from us. This goes for myself as well. I have been with the company for over 30 years and on most days, I still learn something new." As a result of all this experience, Harald Pihl can not only supply end-users with a wide range of products and materials but also advise them on their requirements and sometimes offer more cost-effective solutions which they may not have thought of themselves. According to Mr. Pihl, many clients now contact the company before they embark on a project and ask for recommendations in terms materials selection. "We offer them much more than a standard solution," he feels.

An example of this is a project the company did for Höganäs, the world's largest producer of metals powders. Mr. Pihl explains: "They wanted a quote for a tube construction for a boiler that uses stainless steel and has a lifespan of only about half a year. This is because temperatures within the construction can run up to about 900 degrees C, with boiling water on the inside and a furnace atmosphere on the outside. Finding a better solution for them than the one currently in use was very

difficult. Initially we even thought we would not be able to help them because it needed a specific technical welding certificate which is very costly. However, when they slightly modified the design, Harald Pihl managed to come up with a solution that has a lifetime that is 5 to 10 times longer."

Online stock list

Another factor that sets Harald Pihl apart from other suppliers are the very short delivery times, Mr. Pihl feels.

"These can be maintained for three reasons. The first one is the stock list on the Harald Pihl website. Here, our clients can see, at a glance, not only what we currently have in stock but also what will be coming in shortly, making a selection by alloy, application, product form and dimension and also provide technical information. This stock list makes it easier for purchasers to see if what they need is available indeed before they contact us. This information is updated automatically on

Alloy	Product form	Dimension	In Stock	Incoming Stock
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn, pickled	Dia=6.00 mm, Weight=0.35 kg/m	237 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn	Dia=8.00 mm, Weight=0.42 kg/m	282 kg	0 kg
INCONEL C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn	Dia=9.50 mm, Weight=0.68 kg/m	0 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn	Dia=9.50 mm, Weight=0.7 kg/m	0 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn	Dia=10.0 mm, Weight=0.7 kg/m	179 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn, sol. ann.	Dia=12.0 mm, Weight=1.01 kg/m	298 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: cold drawn, sol. ann.	Dia=14.0 mm, Weight=1.8 kg/m	414 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=20.0 mm, Weight=2.85 kg/m	217 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=25.4 mm, Weight=4.5 kg/m	355 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=30.0 mm, Weight=6.1 kg/m	270 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot rolled, sol. ann.	Dia=31.8 mm, Weight=7.05 kg/m	572 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: peeled	Dia=35.0 mm, Weight=7.95 kg/m	217 kg	300 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=40.0 mm, Weight=11.3 kg/m	319 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=45.0 mm, Weight=14.15 kg/m	273 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=50.8 mm, Weight=17.3 kg/m	382 kg	0 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=55.0 mm, Weight=21 kg/m	496 kg	300 kg
ALLOY C-276 (Ni/15Cr/16Mo/4W)	Round: hot finished, peeled	Dia=60.0 mm, Weight=25.1 kg/m	682 kg	0 kg

The online stocklist makes it possible for clients to see not only what is in stock but also what will be coming in shortly



a daily basis and it is something we are very proud of. The second reason is a rule we have at Harald Pihl: if we have it in stock, you should have our offer within the hour."

And, thirdly, if an order is placed, Harald Pihl can normally supply it the same day, Mr. Pihl says: "As long as we have received an order by noon, even if it needs to be transported by air, in the majority of all cases we are able to do this. We can make all the arrangements, deliver the material to the airport, with the right documentation, all to make sure it reaches our customers as quickly as possible."

When asked where this customer base is located, Mr. Pihl says that 50% of its products are sold to the Swedish – home – market. The other 50% is exported across the globe. Finland is Harald Pihl's main export market but the company also services countries as far away as Brazil and Korea and Japan, and of course Europe to North America. "All in all I would say we currently have about four thousand customers, many of them end-users who are involved in the petrochemical industry, nuclear power generation, pulp and paper, steelworks, the aviation industry and the electronics industry.

Carrying on a family tradition

Finally, when we ask Mr. Pihl where he believes the company will be heading in the future, he says that he feels that, whatever happens, it is important for Harald Pihl to continue the rich family tradition of the company. "I am the third generation member of the Pihl family to work for this company and the fourth generation has already joined the ranks as well. My cousin Klas, vice president, and I both have sons who work here too. We believe that in the clinical and cold business world of today, it is one of the things that distinguishes us from some of our competitors and works to our advantage. And it is a tradition we hope we can carry on through future generations of the Pihl family".

The focus of this growth will be on the export markets, he adds: "Our export business is expanding rapidly and we receive inquiries from foreign customers almost on a daily basis these days, thanks in part to our Internet site with the online stock list." In terms of size, Mr. Pihl says that Harald Pihl has no intention to become a huge conglomerate. "That is not how we want to conduct our business. Of course we would like to continue to grow along with our markets and maybe double in size over the next 10 years but first and foremost we want to be able to continue to work as a family enterprise, doing business on a personal level, with clients who know we will go the extra mile for them where necessary."

Harald Pihl at a glance

Company name:	Harald Pihl AB
Offices:	Täby, Sweden (head office), Tammisaari, Finland
Products:	corrosion resistant alloys, heat resistant alloys, creep-resistant alloys, special alloys, stainless steel, titanium alloys, low melting point alloys, copper alloys, welding material, demisters, refractory metals
Main markets:	petrochemical, nuclear power generation, pulp and paper, steelworks, aviation, electronics
Website:	www.haraldpihl.se



The Harald Pihl Mascotte