

# Super-fast



**“Speed of delivery is a cornerstone of our business philosophy”**

**– Jonas Pihl, MD**

Now in its fourth generation, Harald Pihl is a family-run Swedish stockist which has been supplying special metals for over a century. The company prides itself on extremely short delivery times and has embraced the latest technologies to stay ahead of the competition and become a ‘one-stop-shop’ for customers. Managing Director Mr. Jonas Pihl sat down with Stainless Steel World to explain how the company has upgraded its online services to make life easier for its customers while still retaining its essential character as a trustworthy, versatile, and reliable family-owned business.

*By Joanne McIntyre*

**H**aving built up the family-owned business over the past century, Harald Pihl distributes the largest range of nickel, titanium and alloys in Europe. “We stock pretty much everything,” explains Jonas. “From plates to tubes, to round bars, wire and welding materials – we strive to be a one-stop-shop for our customers where they can find everything they need under one roof; and on one website.”

## **Largest stock in EU**

The company’s huge stock has been built up over the past twenty years due to its unique location. “Sweden has many large companies producing a very diverse range of products,” Jonas explains. “They all

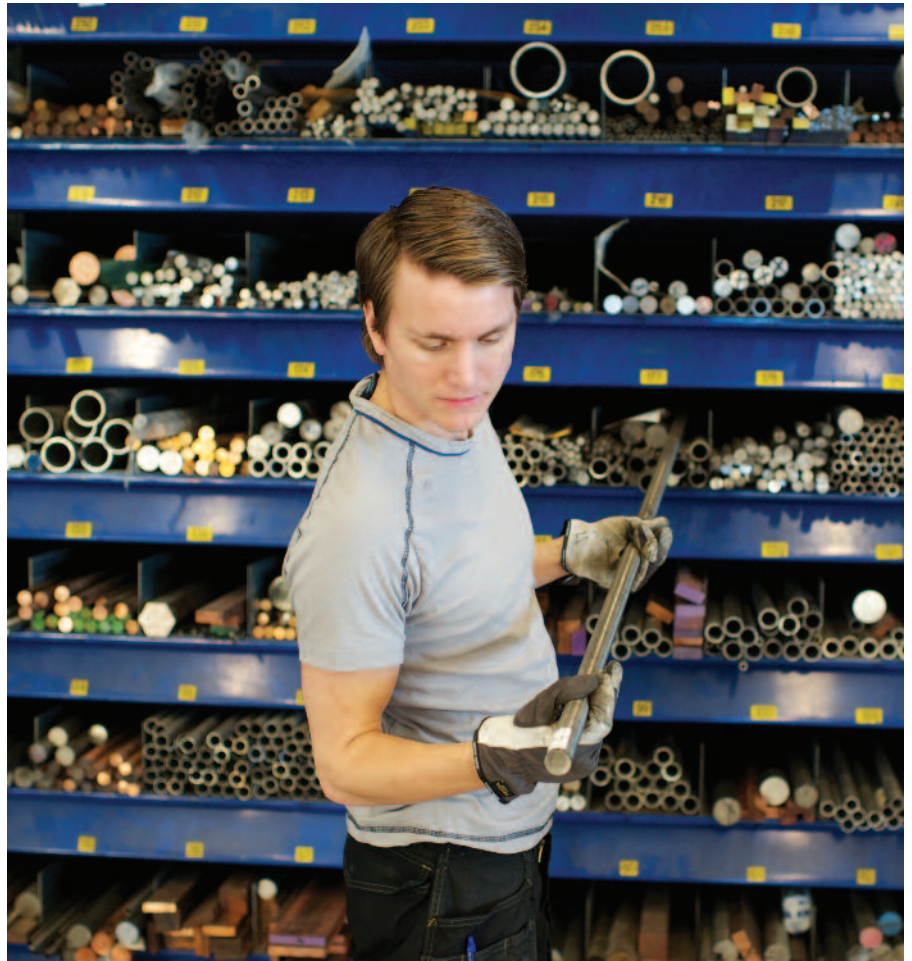
# delivery gives Harald Pihl the edge

seem to be doing something different so the range of materials they require is very diverse; there is a strong demand for small quantities of many different materials. In order to supply to them we needed to stock a little of this, a little of that, and gradually we built up a very broad inventory. We have products in literally every form, every diameter, and almost every material. Today we have the largest variety of stock available in Europe. So our complex domestic market is responsible for the incredible diversity of our stock.” The target markets for the company’s stock has changed and grown over the years. “Looking back five years, we were exporting around 20% of our sales. Today we export 70% due to the broadness of our stock which is unique in the business. Our competitors are all specialized in particular areas, for instance round bar over 100mm diameter, or thick plates, etc., however we stock everything. If you need 2 kg of one product, 4 kg of another, and 5 kg of yet another, we are able to put those orders together in a complete package. We don’t have any minimum quantity requirements so customers can order as little as they want. This is one of our unique strengths.” The markets that the company supplies today remain very broad. “The diversity of our stock means we can supply almost every market. Every high tech industry uses materials that we supply, so we don’t focus on one particular market. Our recently acquired Aerospace EN 9120 approval means that we can even supply directly to that application.”

## Super-fast delivery!

“Speed of delivery is one of the cornerstones of our business philosophy. As we are situated in Stockholm and quite far from central Europe, we need to be fast for customers to have the feeling that we are close to them. Our specialty is very fast delivery times. All enquiries are answered within an hour and orders placed before lunch are shipped the same day. If you

are in France for instance, you will have your order within four days. Our competitors take one to two days to answer an inquiry, another two or three days to get the material out the door, then shipping takes a few days on top. We can always deliver faster.” Today Harald Pihl is represented right across Europe and in almost every country. “We recently opened offices in UK, Italy,



*Harald Pihl has the largest range of nickel, titanium and alloys in stock in Europe.*



*The company is able to rapidly supply any quantity of product from their huge stock near Stockholm, Sweden.*

France and Denmark and our next step will be to expand beyond the borders of Europe. We are considering Turkey, Brazil, Argentina and India and looking for local partners in those countries.

### **Easy online shopping**

Harald Pihl's entire stock offering is listed on the company's website. The clear, easy to use site saves customers a lot of time as they can easily and quickly find the

products they need in the materials and sizes required, explains Jonas. "On the site you can immediately see what's in stock. In the unlikely event that what you need is not available you can see the incoming quantity that is scheduled to arrive and simply click to send an automated enquiry to find out the price of the incoming material. The site is all inclusive and open to anyone. When we launched this system in 2000 our

competitors said we were mad to show everybody exactly what we have in stock, because they would also know what we don't have. However we believe – and experience has proven us right – that people appreciate being able to see what is available, and they know that we can very rapidly supply any items not in stock. It also means that customers can immediately see the range of products we offer and not waste their time enquiring about ranges we don't stock."

With the entire inventory controlled on line the company is able to know exactly how much of each item is on the shelf, how much has been sold and what needs to be reordered in advance, all of which makes the operation a smoothly operating and lean system. The warehouse is staffed by five experienced people and is highly organized. "We are very pleased that the management philosophy has been taken on board by everyone right down to the people who are processing the orders. They know that it's important that we are very fast and why; to compete with the suppliers located closer to the customer we have to be very good at what we do. Everybody in our organization understands that. Our staff enjoy the fact that we are increasing our exports to countries that have really tough competition next door to our customers."

### **A century of steel trading**

When he set up his company in 1912, Mr. Harald Pihl was already in business as a trader of primary materials such as copper alloys, zinc and nickel. Originally, the nickel he sold was re-melted to become nickel silver, metal finishing and alloy plates for military battleships. When stainless steels became commercially available in the 1920's the company began to supply ever greater amounts of primary nickel in the form of pellets and squares – supplying major Swedish companies, such as Sandvik and Avesta. In the 1940s, technological advances increased the demand for more advanced alloys. Harald Pihl picked up on this trend and began to offer nickel alloys in finished products. Sheet, plate, bar, tube, wire and welding consumables quickly became part of what the company offered. While nickel alloys remained Harald Pihl's primary trade, titanium was gradually added to the portfolio during the 50's and 60's. During the 1970's, Harald Pihl also worked with American company Brush Wellman to make available a number of special copper alloys. These alloys demonstrated special qualities such as wire resistance, spring properties and electrical conductivity. In 1974 Harald Pihl took the big step to become a stockist as well as a trader.





*Harald Pihl remains a family-owned enterprise with Carl, David, Jonas and Johan Pihl providing all holding key leadership roles.*

## Maintaining an edge over competitors

Harald Pihl gained Aerospace EN 9120 approval in June 2013. "Having gained the approval we look to the future with great hope as it should open a lot of new doors. The next step is for aerospace companies to give us their approval and pass this on to their manufacturers and suppliers, which means we are then allowed to supply to them. It's a huge market and once the approvals start coming in it has a snowball effect to get other approvals. We are still in the middle of this process so we look forward to seeing how it develops for us. Effectively EN 9120 is a quality stamp which will

stand us in good stead when we are searching for new customers."

The company also supplies NORSOK M650 certified material in titanium Grade 2 and Grade 5. This is mainly used in the oil & gas industry for pipes, bars and fittings. "We've supplied this range for six years and it's a growing part of our business," explains Jonas. "Increasing amounts of these materials are being used in the UK." "Quality assurances such as NORSOK M650 and Aerospace EN 9120, our long history and that fact that we have the highest credit ranking possible make us reliable partners for new customers to start working with. It gives us an edge entering new markets."



*Watch a short interview with Managing Director Jonas Pihl during the Stainless Steel World Exhibition: [www.stainless-steel-world.net/pihl](http://www.stainless-steel-world.net/pihl)*

## Game-changer for small orders: Alloy-Store.com

One of the gems on the Harald Pihl website is Alloy-Store.com - an online portal for small quantities of special metals and titanium for a reduced price and free shipping within 24 hours. The goal is to serve customers all over Europe with high end material where traditional suppliers would not supply due to small quantities; and to shorten the purchase process and delivery time to a minimum. The range includes nickel and titanium alloys as wire, rod, sheets, plate, strip, tubes & pipes, each product available in several dimensions.

Purchasing via Alloy-Store.com is as easy as buying books or clothes on line. Simply tick the boxes, enter deliver and credit card details, and the products are shipped within 24 hours. "Our philosophy with Alloy-Store.com is that if you need a small order of for instance 1 kg, it takes the same effort for our staff to process that order as it does for 100 kg. To save time and effort we can now handle small orders via the website with a fully automated process at a reduced rate. Once you've paid the delivery note is automatically printed in the warehouse and you receive all the documentation directly as a pdf file. For larger quantities that are not in the Alloy Store you simply contact our sales team as normal. Once customers use Alloy-Store for the first time they realize what a great tool it is; easy to use, cheaper, and very quick. It's a game changer for small orders."

# NEW LOCATION!

Returning to the Galleria

**Stainless Steel World Americas**

**Conference & Exhibition November|18-19|2014**

Hilton Houston Post Oak Hotel

& Convention Center

Houston, TX, USA

# WORLD STAINLESS STEEL

## AMERICAS

### Conference & Expo

To book your stand please contact

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