

Harald Pihl focuses on continued innovation & service



The company's traditional Christmas party was undertaken with the necessary Corona restrictions.

While the past year has presented challenges across the business landscape, it has also offered opportunities to focus on improvements and business. The Covid19 pandemic has been a time for companies to take stock of their operations and prepare themselves for challenges to come. The team at Harald Pihl in Sweden utilised the calmer market to increase investment across the board, from staff and stock offerings to quality systems and digitalisation. Stainless Steel World spoke to Managing Director Jonas Pihl about how the supplier of speciality metals has continued to grow and thrive in the market.

By Joanne McIntyre

“We were lucky enough to have a good year in 2020, despite the tragic circumstances around the world,” begins Jonas from the company headquarters in Taby, Sweden. “It was the culmination of several years of rapid growth, from turnover and new global locations to investments in value-added services. A strong focus on innovation is steering us on a course to greater expansion in the international markets for high-end alloys. Today around 70% of our sales are exported, and our global footprint continues to grow.” As a special metal supplier, HARALD PIHL has always maintained a strong focus on reliability, quality and speedy

delivery. The past year has seen the company add even more grades of material to its already enormous stock portfolio.

A team effort

Jonas’s business philosophy imbues the company with a strong sense of identity that embraces innovation, flexibility and inclusiveness. The steady increase in business also led to Jonas expanding his dedicated team with several new recruits. “We’ve created an atmosphere here where everybody’s ideas are valued and embraced,” explains Jonas. “It is fantastic to see how everyone understands this philosophy and is

enthusiastic about contributing ideas on how to do things better tomorrow than we do today. It’s gratifying to know that they have responded to my call to pursue constant improvements. So many good ideas have come from our people; it’s truly a team effort.”

An example of this hard work is Harald Pihl recent certification for ISO 14001, a reflection of its team’s dedication to excellence.

Record-breaking turnover

The inclusive environment certainly pays off for the innovative HARALD PIHL team. The past two years have seen turnover increase by 35% across the board.



“Of course, we’re delighted with this result, and especially with the fact that we grew across all of our markets,” smiles Jonas. “Our customers are also pleased to see that we are doing so well because they know we are a reliable and trustworthy partner. Dedication to excellence and a constant drive to improve pay off for them as well. They know us as their ‘go-to’ supplier for Europe’s most extensive range of nickel, titanium and copper alloys, and guaranteed on-time delivery. Our success helps them to achieve their goals as well.”

Roaring ahead with motorsport

One of the stepping stones to HARALD PIHL’s success was the company’s entrance into the motorsport industry. “A few years ago, we were approached by one of the largest players in motorsport to supply nickel alloys and titanium for high-performance vehicles. We were, of course, happy to comply! The demands placed on suppliers to motorsport are very high. As a result, our involvement led to us implementing improvements across our business. In time, this resulted in doors opening



for us into the aerospace industry. The stringent quality demands for motorsport are quite similar to those for aerospace; therefore, this was a logical progression for us.”

The sky is the limit with aerospace

From those early days, the HARALD PIHL team has built up years of experience supplying aerospace alloys to the aviation industry. Stock includes an increasingly wide range of high temperature and corrosion resistant aerospace metals, including titanium Grade 5 AMS from western production.

The quality management system is approved and registered to ISO 9001 and AS9120. The company is an approved source for many of the key aerospace manufacturers, including Europe’s largest aircraft supplier. In 2020 experienced staff were recruited to strengthen the aerospace team and support the company’s global activities in this market.

“Our focus is on supplying aerospace materials to the European aerospace industry, and in particular, we’ve increased stock levels of Western aerospace titanium”, continues Jonas.

“However, we are also expanding further field in this sector, and recently added small diameter Alloy 718 for fasteners to our stock in China.”

“With strong demand for high-end nickel alloy and titanium alloys, aerospace is a lucrative but very demanding industry with the most

stringent demands. We have a dedicated team in-house who focus solely on servicing our aerospace clients. The number of approvals we have attained for aerospace companies is a good indicator that we are on the right path.”

In recent years the company gained several new accreditations for the aerospace industry in its drive for contact improvement.

As the supply of high-end alloys to the aerospace industry has grown to achieve greater importance to the company, it has driven the HARALD PIHL team to enforce the highest possible quality controls in its business practices.

“The target of becoming a leading supplier to the aerospace industry meant adopting a new way of thinking across the company,” explains Jonas.

“We continue to push ourselves. For example, one of our most recent investments is a new, top-of-the-range system for inspecting incoming goods.

Europe’s largest stock of Ni & Ti alloys

HARALD PIHL stock and trade sheet, plate, strip, bar, wire, tube, pipe and welding material. Its stock includes nickel-based alloys, heat and corrosion resistant alloys, titanium and titanium alloys, copper alloys and stainless steel, among other materials.

[COVER STORY]

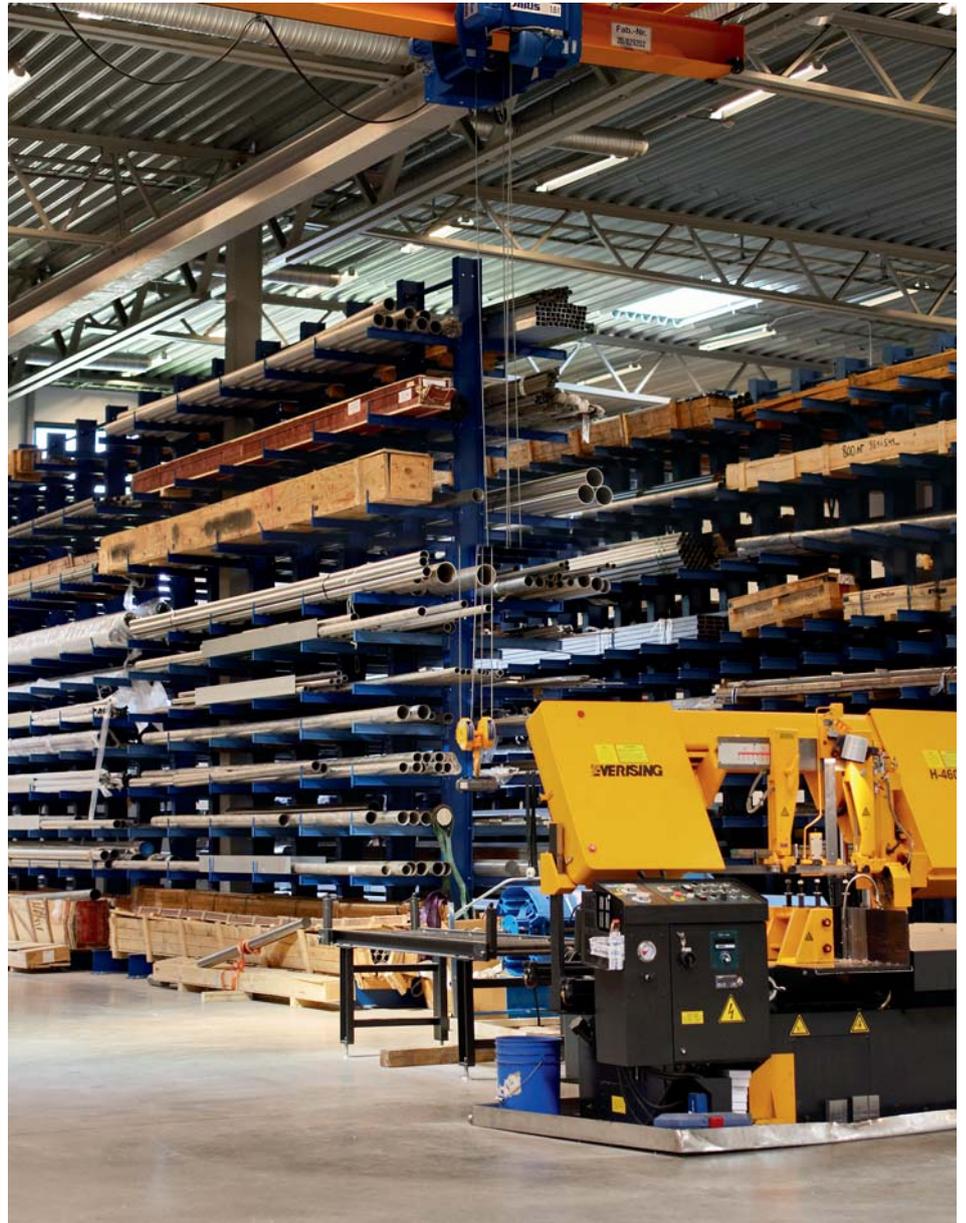
We put a great deal of energy and thought into it this investment. Our quality systems were good before, but now the level is outstanding. It has raised the quality bar and created a lot of positive spin-offs in every aspect of our business.”

“The aerospace industry has zero-tolerance for mistakes. Meeting that demand benefits all of our customers; they have total trust in what we are doing. And our motorsport business is also continuing to grow because they see that we have outstanding quality. It’s a nice circular effect.”

Waterjet cutting services

HARALD PIHL has offered waterjet cutting as a service to its customers for many years. “By combining our extensive knowledge in special alloys and titanium together with our cutting service, the customer gets a complete service where both material and waterjet cutting are available directly from our warehouse,” explains Jonas. Waterjet cutting is ideal for materials that are sensitive to the high temperatures generated by other cutting methods. It is also an environmentally friendly method with high cutting-accuracy. The high standard of quality and fast delivery HARALD PIHL is known ensured its waterjet service’s success, and it is their fastest-growing component.

Jonas explains: “We operate two waterjet cutters, enabling us to offer customers very short lead times for their orders. Both waterjet cutters work 24/7 providing custom-cut products to our clients.”



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Digital Service Area

Since 2017 Harald Pihl has operated a digital service area offering customers unrivalled on-time delivery performance supported with full documentation. The service area features:

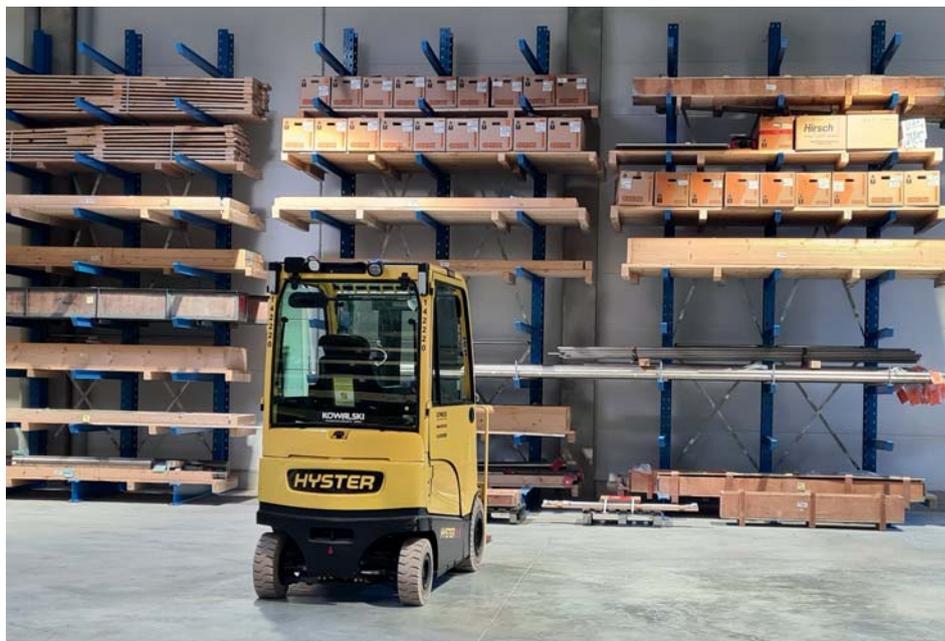
- Instant feedback on order status and due dates
- Actual delivery date including any reasons for delay
- Material test certificates, invoices, documents related to PO
- Order history
- Tracking of goods
- Each clients contribution to Social Engagement projects (UNICEF)

Global expansion

With business doing so well, it is no surprise to hear that HARALD PIHL continues to expand its presence worldwide. The company now has fourteen sites around the globe (including agents), with the latest office opening taking place in Vietnam. “A key factor for our work ethic is to have a local presence in the markets we serve. By having offices in many countries, we can ensure our customers can talk to local experts, no matter where they are.” A key country that Harald Pihl has focused on in recent years is Germany. A newly opened purpose-built warehouse and office facility now allows the team to serve that market with greater efficiency and focus. “There are many opportunities for us to expand our market share in Germany further,” explains Jonas. “Two key personnel changes will assist us with that. The first is the appointment of Mr. Ingo Stiebe as our new Managing Director in Germany. Secondly, Mr. Kristian Seppänen has taken over as Sales Director. Mr. Seppänen has been with the company for several years and will add even more customer-oriented experience to the sales team. We’re excited to see how this market develops.”

Efficient online systems

One important area HARALD PIHL is regularly improving is digitalisation, with ongoing investments in its online presence and ordering systems. The company’s website is self-explanatory with a good overview of what’s on offer. Customers can easily find what they



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need online. The company’s unusually transparent system is highly beneficial for customers. With the click of a mouse, they can instantly see what stock is available and when new stock will arrive, saving them precious time. Jonas explains: “Our customers can easily track the progress of their order, see when it will be ready to be packed, collected or shipped. They can also see if they have invoices that are due to be paid and download documents such as product certificates or new invoices. Repeat orders can be placed 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 at a time, so we’ve created a system where everyone in the company can monitor these pending deliveries. 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.”



Harald Pihl recently opened a purpose-built warehouse and office in Germany.

Facts & Figures

Name:	HARALD PIHL AB
Founded:	1912
Headquarters:	Taby, Sweden
Subsidiaries:	Harald Pihl GmbH, Germany (sales office, warehouse); Harald Pihl Suzhou, China (sales office, warehouse); Q-Metal, Denmark Representation by Euraccai s.r.l. in Italy
Offices:	China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Norway, Poland, Turkey, UK, Vietnam.
Employees:	52
Products:	Nickel alloys, titanium, welding materials, copper alloys
Website:	www.haraldpihl.com