

Ford specifies automatic container handling system from Axiom



Axiom GB Ltd has secured a prestigious £300,000 contract to design, manufacture and install an automatic container handling system for Ford Motor Company Limited's state-of-the-art production plant at Cologne, Germany.

Ford has been a world leader in the design and manufacture of cars for almost a century. The company has an unrivalled reputation for the performance and reliability of its vehicles and the Ford brand continues to be the first choice of many drivers. Ford is a truly global company with manufacturing facilities and distribution networks throughout the world. The company's extensive manufacturing plant at Cologne supports production of its popular Fiesta range. To increase efficiency at the plant, Ford recently specified an automatic container handling system from Axiom GB.

The handling system has been designed to ensure the fast and efficient movement of reusable plastic containers used to transfer assemblies and components. These containers measure 1m x 1.2m x 1m and feature an integral pallet base. Significantly, the fully automatic handling system can process over 100 containers every hour and accommodates both full and half-height units.



The works cycle begins with the parts being removed from the containers, leaving only packaging waste such as dunnage, cardboard and plastic in each unit. The container then travels along a conveyor until it reaches a machine module where a special frame assembly grabs and lifts the container and positions it over an adjacent belt conveyor that serves two compacting machines. The assembly then automatically pivots to tip the container and release the waste ready for compacting and disposal.

Once emptied the container is returned to the conveyor where it is automatically unlatched and collapsed. The units are positioned within clamps which hold and

then lower each side of the container in a particular sequence. Integral sensors check that the ends are folded correctly before the flat packed unit is released.

To ensure that each unit is returned to suppliers complete and ready for reuse, the final stage in the process involves the positioning of a replacement lid on top of each collapsed container. This is achieved by the use of vacuum pick-up assemblies which transfer lids from an adjacent stack and place them onto the folded containers. The containers are then transported to the end of the conveyor line where they are stacked up to eight high ready for collection by fork truck and return to suppliers. This entire process is managed by a single control centre which monitors every aspect of the operation and can be accessed via an easy-to-use graphic touch screen.

Axiom secured the Ford contract by demonstrating its total in-house capabilities which embrace electrical, mechanical and software expertise. In addition, Axiom has proven project management and automotive industry experience and, crucially, the company has the ability and resources to provide comprehensive support to Ford. This support not only includes the development and manufacture of software and equipment in the UK but also the provision of local engineering support at Cologne.

John Nickson, Managing Director of Axiom GB, says "Ford is known throughout the world for its uncompromising stance on performance and quality. This commitment extends beyond Ford's own products to the company's relationships with its suppliers. By securing this contract, Axiom GB has further enhanced its reputation as a key supplier to blue chip companies. Our unique and comprehensive service means that we can provide fully customised solutions from a single source and provide unrivalled customer support."