

Investing to make a difference

GYS is a French family-owned battery-charging and welding-equipment manufacturer based in the northern French town of Laval. They have successfully gone from strength to strength, regardless of current global challenges, due to a robust investment strategy and a willingness to advance their sector through cutting-edge research and development. The company has continuously invested in almost every area of their growing business; from opening a brand-new logistics centre to carrying out cutting-edge industry research, not forgetting that they recently doubled their logistics capacity. Their goal is to provide every one of their customers with the latest breakthrough innovations and it seems to be serving them well.

GYS specialise in battery-charging, welding and bodywork-repair equipment and they never seem to stand still. When the business' CEO, Bruno Bouygues, initially planned to build a state-of-the-art logistics centre only a few miles from their Head Office and production workshop, no one seemed to realise just how strategically important this asset would be. But a year on, the numbers speak for themselves; GYS is expected to report a total turnover of €120 million in 2021, an increase of around 25% year-on-year and 27% compared to 2019. This growth has taken place during a really difficult period for businesses with a severe lack of supply in certain sectors. However, this has meant that many distributors across Europe have had to turn to GYS. These clients have

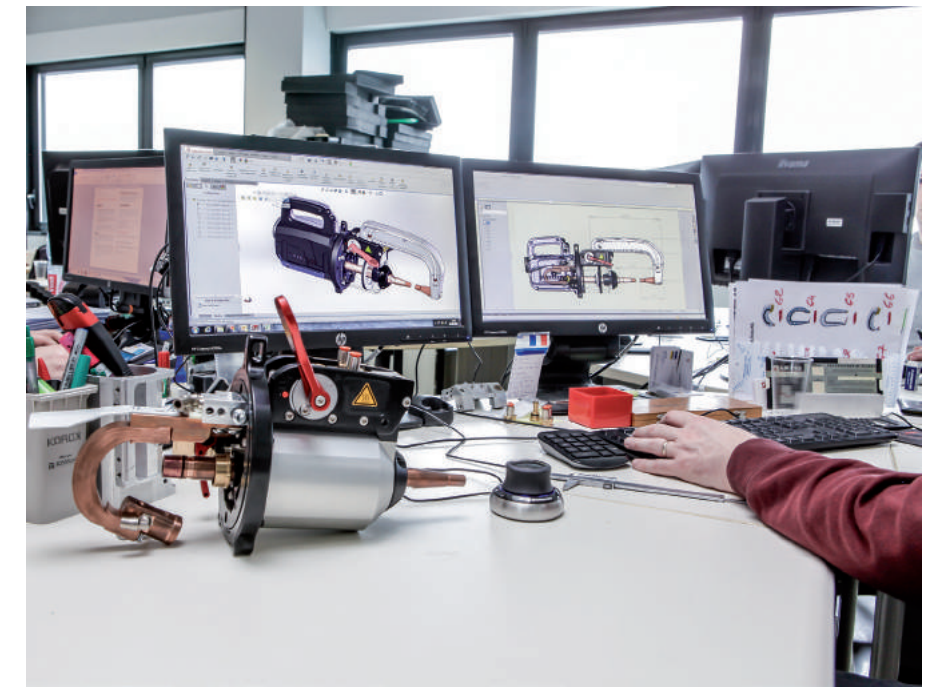
been pleasantly surprised to find a company holding stock that can be delivered immediately. The new logistics centre can hold three months of stock, whereas the original facility only held two weeks' worth and the company can now deliver products to its customers within 48 hours by dispatching orders the day they are received. Availability and responsiveness are more important than ever at a time when supply difficulties have become widespread in the industry. 'We have to be ultra-reactive because a break in distribution means no sale', stresses Sales Director, Hervé Barbaroux. 'But we want to go even further. Next year, we want to see all small orders being delivered within 24 hours and a tracking service that will enable distributors to track their parcels by 2022'.



The Research & Development Department is made up of experts from multiple fields (in this instance, electronics and mechanics) and currently employs over 100 people.

40,000 m² of production space

In the midst of all this, a new 7,500 m² production unit is underway for 2023 bringing the company's total production area to over 50,000 m². With this added facility, GYS now operates the largest industrial welding- and cutting-equipment manufacturing site in Europe. This most-recent facility will boast some of the most technically advanced production spaces anywhere in the world with 24 specialist, industrial machines.



GYS' cutting-edge technologies are the result of regularly updating and upgrading their existing equipment and building facilities, having only recently completed a 5,600 m² extension in early 2020. This year alone, GYS has installed two new punching machines (including a hybrid punching / laser machine), an automated Mazak milling-machining centre, two AI-equipped turning lathe centres (only the third and fourth machines of this type found anywhere in France) and a three-dimensional inspection machine. On top of this,

two press brake machines have been replaced by more productive and energy-efficient models.

The investments will continue into 2022, with a significant portion dedicated to modernising the electronic-card-checking machines and setting up a brand-new, automated varnishing production line, as well as upgrading a SMD (surface-mounted device) installation machine.

Triple the storage capacity

The newest logistics centre, GYS II has increased storage space from 3,000 to 9,000 m². However, even this latest facility has already almost reached its maximum capacity! This is why a new €15-million investment is already in the pipeline for the French site. In early 2022, a ground-breaking ceremony will take place to celebrate the construction of a 10,000 m² extension to the current logistics facility. This twin warehouse will be operational by 2023, bringing GYS' total storage capacity to almost 20,000 m². The increased storage capacity will allow them to bring in an additional 8,000 - 9,000 pallets, or 20,000 pallets in total.

The mechanical workshop has taken over a large part of the former shipping area. Two new state-of-the-art machining centres will be delivered this year bringing the total number of machines to 24.



A network of leading experts

Logistics and production are not the only areas to see huge investments, GYS is always recruiting and investing in its people, having recently announced that they are now hiring additional staff to develop their Industrial Welding business, aiming to double its size within three years. Their current Technical Sales Department is a group of welding experts whose mission is to promote the latest, high-powered equipment to industry leaders all over mainland Europe and the UK.

Although GYS sells its products through a network of trusted distributors, the Industry Department travels the country visiting production workshops, giving demonstrations of their innovative products and building up real professional relationships with their distributors. This has allowed GYS to open up a whole new market for their business. The network of recognised distributors each boasts its own specialist welding-equipment sales staff with the technical know-how to give detailed demonstrations. 'We are strongly committed to only having one or two distributors in each French regional department, this means that we will be investing a lot into these partners', explains Sales Director, Hervé Barbaroux.



The assembly teams have taken over the 5,600 m² extension. A great deal of attention has been paid to workstation design to avoid musculoskeletal disorders (MSD).

Present in 130 countries

Exports now account for more than 50% of GYS' turnover, including 40% in Europe, with growth expected to reach 30% by 2021. Following lockdown, the company immediately invested in video conferencing tools to help maintain customer relationships. Depending on the country, GYS relies heavily on customers who import goods directly from France, but also from their worldwide subsidiary offices present in Germany since 2006, Great Britain since 2008 and Italy since 2016. Each subsidiary company has its own sales team, after-sales service and logistics centre, with two trucks leaving the warehouse in Laval each week for Germany, one for the UK and one for Italy.



Nearly 30 people make up the Export Sales Department. This team is active in more than 130 countries and is able to communicate in 13 languages.

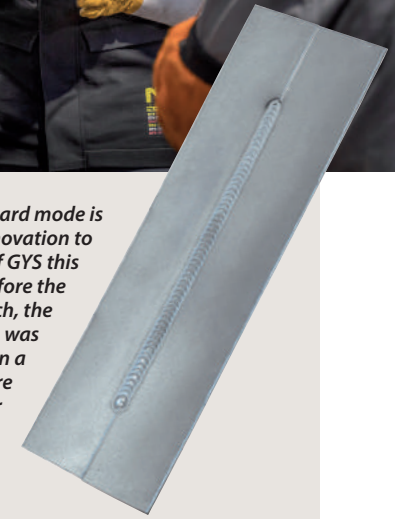
A major portion of the company's investments has been spent on buying and developing their premises, most notably at the moment in Italy, to house presentation/training facilities for new technologies, such as robotics, automation, welding, manual cutting, bodywork and battery maintenance. 'We are witnessing a profound change in the purchasing behaviour of the major European retailers: turnkey concepts, full-quality traceability, sophisticated marketing solutions and the ability to pass on information are becoming the primary selection criteria. Undeniably, price does remain one of the discussion's key components but it no longer spearheads the negotiations', says Export Director, Cédric Ouguergouz. Other subsidiary offices are also in the pipeline in mainland Europe and the Export Department has already strengthened its in-house language skills with the recent addition of Romanian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Polish.

GYS revolutionises aluminium TIG welding

Alu Wizard mode, a TIG tack- and spot-welding system designed especially for aluminium. It was born out of an observation made by GYS experts when TIG-welding aluminium. The alumina present on the surface of this material is electrically resistive and must be broken up during the welding process by reversing the polarities. This action, which is technically very difficult, requires the addition of filler metal and perfect control of the welding movements to ensure a high-quality tack-weld. Based on this observation, the GYS Design Office has worked non-stop to simplify aluminium welding, making it more accessible to all welders. With or without filler metal, the Alu Wizard feature, built directly into their TITANIUM range (with free upgrades for existing devices), ensures a quality tack-weld in under a second. More specifically, welding metal sheets between 0.5 - 5 mm thick, without needing to use filler metal, could not be simpler with the Multi Tack Alu Wizard mode. Synergies have been developed for four separate tack- and spot-welding positions: flat butt, lap, outside fillet and horizontal fillet. Offering a productivity gain of around 30% thanks to its simplicity, this solution is obviously of major interest to manufacturers looking for a more efficient production method whether it be a manual or automatic process.



The Alu Wizard mode is the biggest innovation to come out of GYS this year. Before the market launch, the new process was presented in a training centre by one of their experts.



Alongside their sales teams, GYS has been developing targeted marketing teams in their main French office as well as in their subsidiary

offices abroad. This has enabled them to be more responsive to a growing number of customer requests. A PIM (Product Information Management) and a DAM (Digital Asset Management) system have just been set up, meaning the teams are now able to transmit all data-types to distributors. This technological advantage makes it much easier for distributors to update their websites with new information or updates. Impressively, the Export Department now boasts an online order-tracking system and an after-sales repair tool. All the marketing teams are supported by the Design Office, based in Laval, who develops all the catalogues, packaging and graphics.



Welding automation is at the heart of GYS' development strategy. They are in the process of developing strong partnerships with robot/cobot manufacturers to offer their clients turnkey solutions.

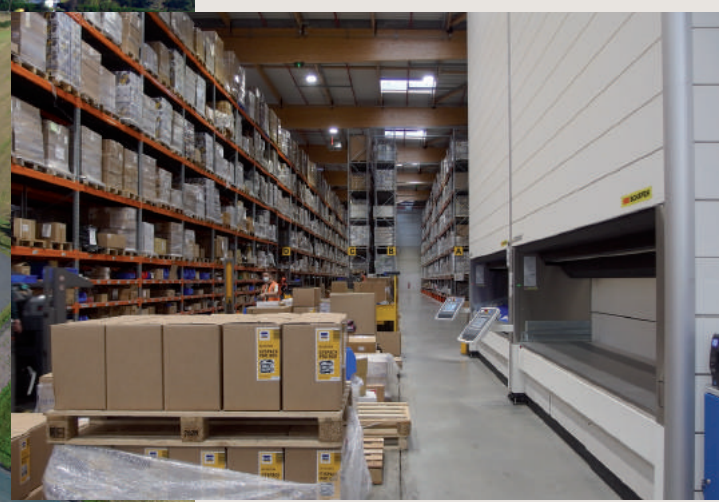


The pulsed NEOPULSE 400 CW MIG/MAG welding unit is the latest appliance in this cutting-edge range. It is an all-in-one solution boasting an integrated cooling unit and wire-feed roller. It also has full weld-bead traceability.

Tripled storage capacity



GYS II, the company's custom-built logistics centre in Laval, France, has been operational since January 2020; it covers 10,000 m², including 1,000 m² of communal space. In 2023, the warehouse will gain a further 10,000 m² of additional space.



The warehouse combines four storage systems, the first of which is an automated storage tower dedicated only to small parts (accessories and welding consumables, etc.). It has 140 trays that are inclined towards the operator making them more comfortable to use.



The second storage system consists of storing small products with a high turnover rate on racks in the lower sections. When a collector receives an order, the barcode scanner shows them the location of each part and the easiest and fastest route to its location.



The third storage system used is based on conventional 13-metre high racks (10 metres of which is used). Forklift drivers are in charge of the stacked pallets and they leave them at ground level for the collectors.



Today, all of their orders are sent from this site to 130 countries worldwide, including to the subsidiary offices. All of them are placed in a specially designated storage area. The warehouse has nine loading bays, three of which are for receiving goods. It centralises all the products from GYS I, located only a few kilometres away, as well as those from GYS China and the trading products. Two shuttles a day run from GYS I and GYS II.



Designed to optimise travel and increase productivity, this site is organised into several well-differentiated zones. The WMS software indicates where to place the product according to its dimensions and turnover rate in order to most efficiently fill the space.



The fourth storage system is for non-standard pallets that cannot be stored in racks. If customers order directly, this is also where these pallets are stored during processing. As the site has over a 93% fill rate, some pallets have also been taken out of the conventional racks and stored in this area.



The collector places the pallet in the waiting area and then the packer takes over. This system includes the double-checking of orders, which has halved the number of customer disputes. The automatic plastic-wrapping machine is capable of wrapping 40 pallets an hour and the transparent film is recycled. In total, the Processing Department handles 250 orders every day; from a simple envelope with a nozzle in it, to a full shipping container.

Disruptive innovations

GYS' goal has always been to understand the real-world problems facing welding professionals and to then design machines that solve these issues. The business meets regularly with end users to work out how their R&D Department can provide them with new solutions to make the welder's job easier and safer. GYS aims to shake up the professional and industrial welding sector by introducing useful and disruptive innovations.

GYS invests 5% of their turnover back into their R&D Department where they employ over one hundred of the world's leading experts in electronics, mechanics, mechatronics, industrial IT and robotics. Some of their most recent products demonstrate this department's strength; the pulsed NEOPULSE 400 CW MIG/MAG welding unit that has a built-in traceability feature that tracks every individual weld bead. To make their customer's experience even better, this feature comes as stan-

dard and can be retro-fitted as a free upgrade for existing GYS machines.

In early 2021, TIG welding will be completely revolutionised by the patented Alu Wizard, their filler-metal-free aluminium tack-welding mode. This pioneering feature is going to be on the TITANIUM 400 AC/DC TIG-welding machine and is fully ready for automated welding systems. It promises to make the manufacturing of aluminium parts 25-30% faster and can be used by less experienced welders. This pro-

ductivity-enhancing technology, born from an observation made by the market and by the sales team out in the field, will revolutionise the aluminium-processing industry. Not to mention their Lab Wizard mode, aimed at more experienced welders. It gives them access to all the welding machine's user settings, so that the user can customise each stage of the cycle and set their own individual welding curves.

Agnès Richard