

Luciano Dinatale, Executive Vice President of Sales & Business Development, and Aldo Viola, Executive Director of Sales & Global Key Accounts at paint shop innovators Geico talk to Simon Duval Smith about their exciting new OEM contracts and innovative products.



Geico have won some highly significant contracts recently, including a paint shop for truck maker MAN in Germany and two projects with Mercedes-Benz cars group, a complete paint shop in Brazil and a paint facility expansion project in India. I ask Luciano Dinatale about the importance of these contracts and about the special challenges they presented. "Both projects were very important from the strategic point of view because they were the first significant contracts that we developed for a German OEM since we became a stand-alone company in 2005. Also, these projects included two of our new and innovative technologies: a new conveyor system product called LeanDip, and new Dry Car systems in the spray booths," he says. I ask him to explain the features of LeanDip. "It

is a very simple mechanical system, it uses less power and is able to rotate the vehicle body 360 degrees, with a production rate from 40 to 80 jobs per hour for car bodies."

MAN and Mercedes-Benz in India and Brazil

Geico won the most important part of the MAN project: the cataphoresis and pre-treatment lines, using the LeanDip conveyor system, and also the overall management of the project.

The relationship with Mercedes Benz Group started in October 2014 with the commissioning of the complete paint shop in Brazil.

The project consisted of a greenfield paint shop located in Itapetininga (San Paulo State), with start of production scheduled for the end of 2016, in a truck

plant that covers 2.5 million square metres.

“Mercedes chose Geico for its top-level technology solutions, efficiency and innovative approach, qualities that the Mercedes top management team found when it visited our R&D facility, the Pardis Innovation Centre,” says Dinatale. “Two months later we also got the order for the expansion of the existing plant in Pune, India.”

Geico decided quite recently to concentrate its activities on the German market, as Dinatale says: “As well as Mercedes-Benz, we also won a small but important order from Rolls-Royce in Goodwood, UK.

“Now we are looking at being in real competition with the other major players, hopefully throughout Germany.”

Qoros and Geely

Geico had a very successful contract with Chinese carmaker Qoros and I ask Dinatale if he felt that this was influential in winning the business with Geely. He confirms this, saying: “I think the Geely contract has come from the very positive experience that Qoros had with us; which gave us a very good recommendation. The Qoros paintshop was one of the most important and innovative paint projects in the world. Production at Qoros is rated at 40 jobs per hour in the paint shop already, a very good figure for a new OEM. This was a very good reference for us to present to Geely and win its business.”

What is now the business unit of Geico was previously part of the Fiat Industrial Group, through the machinery and equipment company Comau. I ask Dinatale if the Fiat ‘connection’ could help to win business with Chrysler, now that it is part of the FCA Group.

“Absolutely not, I don’t believe that this Fiat connection in the past could help Geico to win business with Chrysler,” he says.

“In the history of Geico, we always had a very good relationship with the Fiat Group,” he adds, “The last contract we won from the Group was at the FCA Jeep Pernambuco plant in Brazil. This is a very large plant with a production rate of 60 jobs per hour. We are looking very closely at Chrysler’s and indeed all carmakers’ investments in North America and we are ready to support them.”

Mexico is a particularly vibrant growth area in North America and I ask Dinatale if Geico has plans to try to win business there. “We have a presence

there but no projects at present,” he says.

J-Hive - painting in the round

Geico’s Innovation Division has recently launched a project called J-Hive that consists of an eight-sided cell designed for painting both the interior and exterior of a body in one station. The system is geared towards low production lines, niche models or retouch lines where the body can be completely painted by one robot. Aldo Viola takes up the story of J-Hive. “We have recently built a complete J-Hive cell in our Pardis Innovation Centre in Milan. We see opportunities for J-Hive in low capacity plants. There are a lot of OEMs that have a requirement for low-volume paint facilities to help introduce their brands into new markets. J-Hive also reduces the footprint of the painting cell by 27%, and the energy consumption by 22%.

“In the J-Hive system, it is the car which moves back and forward on the conveyor, controlled by a seven-axis robot. Furthermore, the body can rotate and the six-axis robot, usually wall-mounted, is fixed on the side of the booth. In traditional painting cells, at least two robots are mounted on a rail to allow them to move along the vehicle’s length.”

Another novel feature of the J-Hive is its flexibility; it allows a curved track to be used for bodies. This allows them to enter and exit the booth by more than two gateways, making it ideal for customisation and other low volume and multi-model processes. Its compact and modular construction also makes it ideal for other surface treatments like sealing, two-tone painting and for cleaning cells, where the cycle time is shorter than a typical painting operation, as it is not part of a ‘queue’ on a linear paint line. Thus one cleaning station can serve two or more different paint lines, another example of how Geico is working to streamline paint lines, increasing efficiency and saving energy. ■



Luciano Dinatale says Geico is looking hard at winning more contracts with German carmakers.

The highly flexible J-Hive system allows bodies to enter and exit through several gateways, enabling it to serve several paint and assembly lines.

