



Lillbacka Finn-Power: Helping Companies Crimp, Join, Form and Expand for 50 years

Lillbacka Finn-Power is considered one of the leading companies in the crimping business. Finn-Power machines are recognized all over the world for their crimping accuracy, repeatability and durability. The company, now in their 50th year, are looking ahead to bring quality 21st century crimping solutions, new products, and expanding locations.

The company was founded in 1969, when Jorma Lillbacka started his machining workshop in an old school house in Alaharma, Finland. At their start, the company provided high-quality subcontracting services to large businesses. However Mr. Lillbacka wanted to introduce better solutions to the market through his passion, vision and knack for innovation, and therefore developed the company's first product line—the hydraulic crimping machines.

Hose + Coupling World recently had the pleasure of speaking with Tomi Ketola, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Lillbacka USA; Sam Dyke, Vice President of Sales, Lillbacka USA; Mika Luopajarvi, Chief Business Officer; and Markus Kihlström, Sales & Marketing Director, Lillbacka Powerco, to discuss Lillbacka's crimping products and solutions, their distribution process and customer service goals, and the company's 50th year anniversary.

By Sanket Sharma

A large part of the Lillbacka Finn-Power's story and reason for their success is Jorma Lillbacka. For founding and leading the company, he was awarded the 'Export Prize' by the President of Finland in 1980, a mere 11 years after the company's inception. Around the same time, the company developed several key products and grew exponentially. Right from the get-go, their operations were supported by their own logistics and transport companies in order to provide the best customer service in the business.

For the first 30 years, the company saw exponential growth in several marketplaces. In the early 2000s,

another era was born, as a major part of the company—working with sheet metal machines and technology—was sold to investors. In the following years, the next generation of the Lillbacka family continued the family business and legacy, as Mr. Lillbacka took a step back from the company to pursue his childhood dream of building the PowerPark amusement park.

With 50 years of experience under their belt, Lillbacka Finn-Power is now considered a crimping solutions leader in the industry. 'Finn-Power' equipment is known for its durability with excellent performance, and for machines that are instantly recognized worldwide.



Available around the world

Lillbacka Finn-Power's headquarters are in Finland, in a small town called Härmä. Although they export almost all their manufactured products, the company exclusively manufactures in Finland. However, the company's sales and operations are carried out around the globe. A major extension of the company, Lillbacka USA, headquartered in Orlando, Florida, handles all of the company operations and sales for North America.

Their operations are supported across the globe by local distributors in 90+ countries. Speaking on their vision to expand in the future, Markus commented, "This year we have expanded our network to Bahrain, Chile, Kuwait, Oman, Paraguay, Qatar and Vietnam. We are constantly looking to expand our business." Mika added, "Lillbacka Powerco has made a remarkable investment program in Härmä, Finland, to meet strategic targets. The program covers production equipment and facility, operational developments as well as management systems."

The investment programs are implemented to secure the quality of the products and improve the efficiency by providing shorter lead times from order to delivery. Customers benefit from shorter lead times with timely machine and spare parts delivery. The expansion will also aid the central idea of achieving better responsiveness with customer support whether it is related to new product applications or service request.

Innovative products

Although the backbone of the company is the crimping machine, Lillbacka Finn-Power also produces hose saws, skivers, hose reels, tube expanders, and process management software.

ICC Control, the FP series, and the Simple Crimping Control - SCC

The company offers a whole range of crimping products, including the newly remodeled FP120, which is one of the most advanced crimping machines in the world. Designed with the aim of reducing human error during production, the new FP120 is available with quality options which brings the probability of making an error close to zero. The ICC Control eliminates the need for manual configuration which is usually entered by the operator.

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The ICC4 Graphical Quality Monitoring is a unique system which monitors the whole crimping process and reports the crimping results automatically, in real-time. The system detects the smallest problems in production and takes action, it decreases customer complaints significantly and it makes the operator a better operator. The ICC4 systems are available for all FP-series machines in the Lillbacka catalogue. Later this year the SP side-feed models will have the ICC4 option.

The Simple Crimping Control (SCC), an alternative crimping system, brings many advanced features and connectivity to benchtop machines. It also enables connectivity to a service van business, which allows companies to manage, monitor and control their service fleet. SCC is a cost-efficient solution for those who don't need the high level of the ICC in their FP 120/140. The product is designed for and supports smaller workshops and developing markets. Markus summarized, "The Simple Crimping Control is the 'little brother' of the ICC."

The Watchman

To better support the production management of companies, Lillbacka Finn-Power, has also designed a one-of-a-kind software system for





crimping business—the Watchman. The Watchman is designed with the sole intention of facilitating the digital ordering process and eliminating paper orders and manual reporting. The system automatically configures all the necessary parameters to all the machines that are connected to Watchman. This reduces the possibility of human error significantly. Together with the ICC machine, this system takes care of order management, machine configuration, quality control and automatic reporting. The Watchman comes with quality control mechanisms that collect the crimping data and, at the end of the process, creates quality control reports. These reports are sent back to its source, where the orders first originated. At the same time, companies using the system can monitor and track the progress of their orders online. Every single action happening in the work cell is traceable. Mika stated, “Our new products are mostly related to digitalization and integrations.”

The irreplaceable mindset of the personnel

Speaking to the quality assurance systems within the company Mika stated, “Our quality assurance starts from the mindset of the personnel; any system or software cannot replace that!”

Speaking about quality and standards Markus informed us about the ICC3 Quality Control and the ICC4 Graphical Quality Monitoring. He added, “ICC4 is THE ONLY in-built quality monitor system in crimping machines. Patented by Lillbacka Powerco. ICC4 monitors the crimping process from start to end, and if the crimping pressure goes outside of set tolerance area the ICC control stops the crimping process and gives an alarm. The operator can reject the product and move to the next one.”

With graphical controls, he said they can very easily detect even small problems. He added, “Cracks in

the fitting, abnormalities in the process, or something wrong with any of the parts that you are crimping is easily detectable.”

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– Mika Luopajarvi

Distributing around the globe

Operating in more than 90 countries around the world, Lillbacka Finn-Power is truly a global company. Explaining the extent of their global reach, Mika said, “Only five percent of our turnover is created from the domestic market here in Finland. The rest of the 95% is exported.” With such a strong export market, it is no surprise that the local distributor is very crucial to the company. Mika explained, “The local distributors are very important to us. They are the eyes, ears and hands in the local market, and they act as an interlink between us and the customers. The distributors are also responsible for servicing the machines and selling the spare parts. One of the strengths of our business model is that we are really present in the local market that we sell our machines in.”

Customer service

One of the key focuses for the company is providing excellent customer service. Markus said, “Customer service is one of the keys to success. Happy customers come back, and we have a chance to build long-lasting customer relationships.”

With customers in very high efficiency and critical business segments—such as the automotive and the aerospace industry—the critical issue when purchasing one of the machines is lifetime support. The customer gets support from distributors or directly from the factory. Further emphasizing on customer service, Mika said, “Customer support is something that we truly believe in and in the future are going to put in more



LILLBACKA AT A GLANCE

- **Founded 1969**
 - Industry advisor Jorma Lillbacka
 - Engineering workshop and sub-contracting for Saab and Wartsila Diesel
- **1973**
 - Manufacturing crimping machines
 - Trademarks ‘Finn-Power’
- **1980**
 - Receives Export Prize from the President of Finland
 - Laser and sheet metal machines begin
 - Opens North America office in Chicago, IL
- **1995**
 - Business grows rapidly
 - Lillbacka creates a transportation business for its own business
- **2000**
 - Business diversifies
 - Adds Mika Salo Circuit- go kart racing
 - Adds Power Park-amusement parks
- **2002**
 - Sale of laser and sheet metal business
- **2003**
 - Launches ‘Ro-Ro’, Roll-On Roll-Off Ship Business
- **2009**
 - UC Digital Programmable Crimper Control introduced

effort to improve.” Markus added, “We are making lifelong relationships with the customer because customer service is key. If you are looking at lifetime cost of machines, we are by far the lowest. Our machines will last 30 to 40 years without a problem.”

Authorized Finn-Power service centers offer quick original spare part delivery and are found all over the globe. Their global service network was meticulously built over several years to ensure that the quality of authorized Finn-Power products is consistent around the world.

Oil & gas and offshore

In the offshore industry, Lillaback Finn-Power offers a lot of machines in the large umbilical market place. Products like hand pump machines can be used by divers and dive shops to crimp their own lines on site versus sending out to a shop. Sam explained, “If you’re working on an umbilical or subsea cable, it could be to be thousands of feet long with many connecting crimps. You want crimps to be accurate and within spec at the bottom of the ocean. You want something that is reliable. With our machines’ accuracy and repeatability, we do rather well in this market place and our products are highly regarded.”

Sam further added, “If you are going to put a crimp under the ocean you want to know beforehand whether the crimp passed or failed. That’s the value of the ICC4 control. You’ll know it in real-time based on your specifications if the crimp has ‘Passed’ or ‘Failed’. No one wants a problem. Traceability is important.”

What the future holds

While discussing the overall company goals for the future, Mika said, “The company has set a strategic target to be ‘the most wanted partner’ in the market by 2021.” He further added that their in-depth understanding of being ‘the most wanted partner’ will help them create steady and profitable growth for the future. Of the many highlights the company has to offer, they are most excited about the new product launch in Hannover—like the



FP120/140 crimping machines with both the ICC and SCC controls—and the ICC4 machines, which are also available as an option to these new machines.

As the company moves forward in 2019, expanding and growing the core business as well as branching out to offer related solutions is one of the primary goals of the company. To aid that, and in honor of their 50th year celebrations, the company is offering installation of the ICC4 Graphical Quality Monitor for free for all newly purchased FP120 and FP140 crimpers. The promotions are valid until the end of April 2019.



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—Markus Kihlström

Sam said, “We are not just typical hose crimpers. We think outside the box and a lot of our business is automotive and aerospace. We are across the board and we look at things differently.” Mika, adding to that stated, “We are expanding our business to key application areas.”

In the past couple of years, the company has seen a few changes within the management, and are moving forward with a new and fresh approach. Markus and Mika started with the company two years ago, and Tomi began as CEO in 2018. Alluding to that Markus said, “You wouldn’t recognize this company as the same company anymore. And our aim is to take the company to next level in coming years.”

Speaking of the future of the company, Tomi says, “We had people retire in our company and we added new Regional Managers. We do marketing and other activities together now on a global scale. So, we are all on the same page.”

