

# OMB Fluicon reveals a

OMB? Don't they manufacture top quality forged gate, globe and check valves? Well yes, but that's only half the story. In fact, OMB initially focused on floating ball valves and the OMB Fluicon Division was established in the early eighties to furnish a range of floating ball valves, moving to trunnion mounted in the early nineties. Yet despite the fact that OMB Fluicon has already sold ball valves to engineering contractors and end users around the globe, it still remains something of an unknown quantity to many within the flow control industry. However, more and more people could soon learn about this well-kept secret, as OMB Fluicon is set to strengthen its presence in the offshore and subsea markets and to establish a network of stocking distributors. Intrigued, Valve World headed off for Bergamo, North Italy, where we received warm hospitality from this family-owned firm.



Headquarters OMB valves SPSA.



Headquarters of OMB Fluicon division.

Italy. Saudi Arabia. Algeria. Oman. Pakistan. Malaysia. Brunei. The list of countries which OMB Fluicon has exported ball valves to is incredibly long. Yet despite the number of orders it has successfully filled, many people still seem unaware that ball valves are also manufactured under the OMB flag. "It's an issue we face all too often," confirms Sales Manager Stuart Matthes with a wry smile. "People readily associate the OMB name with quality small bore gate, globe and check valves, but don't realise that the OMB Fluicon Division can provide ball valves as well. When we tell them about our ball valves they are immediately struck by the size range we

offer - from 2" up to 36" - and the types of valves, such as API 6A, API 6D trunnion-mounted, floating, sub-sea, etc. Obviously, this division has not been around quite as long as our parent, but as you can see we have a solid product portfolio, a growing customer base and a developing presence world-wide. We are a ball valve manufacturer in our own right and I think many more engineering contractors and end users could benefit from knowing about OMB Fluicon's products."

Discussing why OMB Fluicon was established as a separate division, Mr Fabio Brevi, son of OMB's founder Roberto Brevi and General Manager of the compa-

ny, explained that the production and marketing of ball valves differs considerably from that of forged gate, globe and check valves. "For example, we have some major customers who are active in gas processing or transmission applications where there is little call for small bore gate, globe and check valves. Machining requirements are also different, so it makes a lot of sense for us to be independent and to pursue an optimum strategy. In one way I imagine that's why OMB Fluicon's ball valves are not as well known as OMB's gate, globe and check valves. Not yet as well known, at any rate. It's not our ambition to become a huge company, but we certainly do have plans to enhance our global presence, serve more end user markets and generally increase our brand awareness."

## Materials

Even though there are some good historical and technical reasons for keeping OMB's divisions as separate entities, OMB Fluicon does benefit in no small part from its parent company. Firstly, of course, they both enjoy the drive and commitment

# well-kept secret



of the entrepreneurial Brevi family. Father Roberto Brevi established both companies (and is currently President of OMB Group), whilst sons Simone Brevi and Fabio Brevi have taken up the reins in the areas of gate and ball valve, respectively. Secondly, the combined raw materials requirements of the two companies gives them both additional procurement leverage. Thirdly, both OMB Fluicon and OMB benefit from sharing their extensive knowledge of forged materials. Indeed, a brief walk around OMB Fluicon's well-appointed manufacturing shops is enough to confirm the huge range of forged materials the company can process. Parts can be seen not just in carbon steel and 316 stainless steel, but also in duplex and super duplex. In fact, it seemed that a significant proportion of the valve bodies being machined were made of the duplex family. Mr Matthes provided two explanations, starting with the fact that the market seems to be standardising on duplex instead of 316. "I believe that cost developments are largely responsible for this. Ten years ago, the price differential was much larger, but as the consumption of

duplex has gone up, so the price per kilo has come down. That means today's consumers can benefit from duplex's superior material properties at marginal extra cost. That's good news for us, of course, as we are one of the few valvemakers who can successfully work with such materials." Mr Matthes' second reason why so many duplex valve bodies could be seen in OMB Fluicon's workshop is because the company's own workforce focuses mainly on the production of specials. That means valves made of demanding materials such as the duplexes, valves with unique design features or valves required at short lead times, etc. Mr Matthes: "To give an example, we recently supplied class 1500 valves from 2-24" with duplex trims to the PDO project in Oman. As part of another shipment a range of class 1500 valves from 6" to 26" for Saudi Aramco was manufactured within a window of just twelve weeks. Of course, standard valves are very much part of our product portfolio too. However, in these cases much of the machining is outsourced. Here in Italy we have the advantage of an extensive network of machine shops and mechanical engineering centres who fully understand the needs of the valve industry. They contribute in no small measure to our flexibility, quality products, short lead times and attractive prices."

Despite the outsourcing of some production activities OMB Fluicon has continued to invest in its machine park. Extra floor space was added to the factory last year and plans are being made to increase capacity again in 2004. Mr Matthes: "The owners have a very methodic approach to development and investment, enabling us to follow growth in demand and benefit from changing market requirements. Investment isn't just restricted to CNC machines, of course. We have equipment

in-house as well for testing (all valves are 100% tested), cryogenic evaluation, painting, quality control, shipping, etc."

## Sub-sea potential

Also evident from the plant tour was OMB Fluicon's growing potential to serve the sub-sea markets. In fact, OMB Fluicon has recently enhanced its engineering and production capabilities in this field and taken on some highly experienced offshore engineers, such as Ian Black. He explained that OMB Fluicon is further developing a range of metal-seated ball valves especially for offshore applications. "The North Sea is an attractive market for valves but it is very competitive and also conservative. Manufacturers need to have the right qualifications, win approvals, establish a track record, etc, before end users will consider them. Clearly, the strength of the OMB brandname does help us out here. Our aim is not to be a large volume producer, but rather to provide valves that others cannot, such as engineered products, valves requiring quick turnaround, exotic materials, etc. To give an example of what we can do, I can tell you that as of this moment we are finalising an order for various metal-seated ball valves, class 2500, for the Norwegian offshore sector."



16"-24" class 600lbs valves supplied to Saudi Aramco.



**Class 600lbs, all-welded transmission valves in carbon steel with stainless steel trim and sizes up to 20" supplied to BHP - Pakistan.**

One of Mr Black's key roles will be to balance the needs of marketing and engineering. As he put it, there's no point making the ultimate valve if it is too expensive.

"Being a flexible, market driven company we can easily link the engineering and sales disciplines. My main task will be to develop cost-effective valves. The sub-sea market is very much price driven. However, we can offer attractive prices and fast deliveries for all our valves, be they side entry, top entry, metal seated, etc."

Mr Black predicts that demand for sub-sea valves is set to increase. "Even in mature

areas such as the North Sea there's a lot of oil left in the ground. That's because technology simply didn't exist before to tap into deep or marginal fields. Now the oil companies can put wellheads on the seabed and pipe oil into the nearest platform or transmission pipeline. This creates a need for high integrity valves which we are already geared up to meet."

In this respect, OMB Fluicon is helping to push back the boundaries of sealing technology. Mr Black: "Valves deployed sub-sea should ideally be maintenance free for the lifetime of the installation. That places

great demands on the chosen sealing system, especially for metal-seated ball valves. This is an on-going area of attention for us and our aim is to match the emissions performance of the soft-seated valve whilst retaining the longer lifespan of the metal-seated version. We already have a good reputation with low pressure classes and now plan on expanding into higher pressures, up to #2500, and also API6A valves."

Mr Black also added that OMB Fluicon could, if deemed appropriate, develop fully welded and top entry valves. "Our expertise with forged materials is appreciated by our customers," he said. "However, what people again don't know is that, when OMB Fluicon was launched, we acquired a respected Italian ball valve maker with an existing line of cast top entry valves. We still have the existing patterns as well as the engineering skills required to re-establish a range of cast top entry valves should the market seem right."

### Targeted growth

Finally, Valve World had the pleasure of meeting OMB's 'founding father' and President, Mr Roberto Brevi and his son Fabio. Originally trained as an architect, Mr Brevi spent his life between engineering valves and designing new equipment before setting up OMB back in the early seventies and OMB Fluicon in the eighties, after 20 years spent as manufacturing manager for an American owned valve company.

Today, the character of this professional, charismatic and hospitable gentleman can be found throughout both companies. Asked about his recipe for success, Mr Brevi was quite direct: product quality and empowered staff. "My philosophy is quite simple," he explained. "Obviously, product quality is the top priority. Customers have to have the feeling that we respect their concerns and needs and have the products that will solve their flow control requirements. To reach that stage, the successful businessman knows he needs a serious management team and dedicated employees. At OMB, we encourage all our people to learn and grow, with plenty of support and internal opportunities." Despite some very interesting offers, Mr Fabio Brevi confirmed that OMB will remain a traditional family business - in-



**24" class 1500lbs, metal seated single isolation valves in carbon steel with duplex trim.**



All valves are subject to stringent final inspection prior to shipment. The valves shown above were supplied to NIGC -Iran.

the Americas also being strong regions. We plan now to consolidate these markets by establishing strong ties with stocking distributors over the next two years. Concurrently, we will develop our range of standard valves to give us better penetration of the MRO markets. But specials is definitely an exciting area for us. Valve designs may not have altered much over the past thirty years, but customers do appreciate the fresh thinking we can bring to solving flow control problems. So whenever and wherever people need quality ball valves, I want them to think of the name OMB Fluicon first.” ■



36" - Class 300lbs ESDV's supplied to Qatar Petroleum.



Top entry valves.

dependent, flexible and responsive to market needs. “We are not driven to become the biggest company, or have the best turnover, or the largest valve. Our goal is to focus on a few areas but to do them exceptionally well. So we will further develop product quality and marketing activities, especially as regards our export markets. I can tell you that the Middle East - especially Saudi Arabia, where we just opened a new JV operation for gate valve, Oman and Qatar - and the Far East - in particular Singapore, where OMB (valves) Asia pte ltd is active since 1994, Malaysia and Indonesia - account for sixty per cent of our ball valve turnover, with Europe and

## FACTS & FIGURES

### About OMB Fluicon

Founded: 1982  
 HQ and manufacturing: Bergamo, Italy  
 Employees: 30  
 Turnover: EUR 7 million  
 Principal products: Trunnion-mounted ball valves (1½"-36", # 150-2500); floating ball valves (¼"-6", #150-2500); through-conduit gate valves (½"-2", #150-2500).  
 Key markets: Petrochemicals, oil & gas, power.  
 Distribution: World-wide network of agents and (stocking) distributors

### About OMB:

Founded: 1973  
 HQ: Bergamo, Italy  
 Manufacturing: Italy, Singapore, Saudi Arabia (lic.)  
 Employees: 150  
 Turnover: EUR 25 million  
 Principal products: Forged gate, globe and check valves. Eco-L-Valve"  
 Key markets: Petrochemicals, oil & gas, power, process plants.  
 Distribution: World-wide network of agents and (stocking) distributors