



Italcontrol - Gate to the world of testing

Located only a few kilometres away from the Italian international airport of Milano Malpensa, you can find the production site of Italcontrol. This family-owned company has been producing hydraulic test benches and rigs for various valves and applications for twenty-one years now and their products are being used for testing all around the world. All in all, the right time for a cover story in Valve World. We sat down and spoke with Mr Fabio Castiglioni who is the founder and owner of Italcontrol. We talked to him about the founding of the company in the early 1990s, the actual status, the benches and rigs they manufacture, and what he foresees for the future of the company.

By Christian Borrmann

Before founding his own company in 1991, Mr Castiglioni worked together with his father in another Company manufacturing test benches. "It was roughly thirty years ago, when I came out of school, that, together with another partner, my father and I founded a company for test benches. We worked together for almost 10 years in this

factory, however in 1991, I wanted to run my own business. That was the time when I founded Italcontrol," explains Mr Castiglioni. Although he had 10 years' technical experience of being in the business, it was a difficult beginning for Italcontrol as he points out: "You have to have a name and reputation in this business and we did not have this when we started off with just 4 people. However, over the past twenty-one years we have slowly

but surely built up our reputation as a reliable and customer oriented test bench manufacturer. In fact over the last five years we were able to increase our annual turnover by around 20% each year." The company started off small with deliveries to valve manufacturers and valve repair companies and built up their reputation by word of mouth recommendation to the status they currently enjoy. "In a lot of cases our potential customers heard about us from our existing customers. The conversations usually go like this: 'Hey, you are using a test rig from Italcontrol? You happy with it?' – Thanks for the tip and contact details, we will see whether we can work together with them too.' You can imagine that this is the best possible advertising that you can get and it helps us to sell our products all over the world mainly through agents and distributors, with special focus on the important industrial markets in the USA, Europe, the Middle East and Asia where Italcontrol has sales representatives.



And Mr Castiglioni goes on: "Our company is also ISO certified and although the regular evaluations are roughly every two years we make sure that we have more frequent checks in order to make sure that everything is top-notch. And currently everything is going very smoothly and the company is standing on healthy ground." "Currently, we have 25 people working at Italcontrol which means that we can produce even more than 50 units per year without any problem. However, our goal is to increase this number and the future looks positive as we have orders in hand for at least the next 6 months."

Test benches

Speaking about the company's products, Mr Castiglioni proudly explains the how large they can go. "We can produce a test bench unit to test 120 inches which is extremely large, although there are very few manufacturers making valves of this size. But, whenever a manufacturer needs anything in particular, for example larger

than our standard manufacturing and with a huge reaction force, we are really happy to solve their requirement with our expertise."

The test units are designed to close over both sides of a valve for pressurising. But not only valves; the company's test benches can test tubes in the same way and also they can test actuators in order to find out whether they will be able to close the valves properly.

Says Mr Castiglioni: "In a lot of cases the pressurised testing is on line with the detection of fugitive emissions but, according to customer specifications, we can work with them to design and develop according to their expectations."

"A specialty of our company is the rig for testing of safety valves as they have to be tested in a unique and different clamping system for different types of safety valves and we can comply with a production of this specific unit."

For whom and why Italcontrol?

Usually Italcontrol works together with a valve manufacturer or with a valve servicing/repair company, because they are the ones who need the benches in order to test valves properly and in the first case, perform corrections to the products and in the latter case to repair the leaking valves. "From our perspective," explains Mr Castiglioni, "the cooperation with the manufacturers is a bit easier because their requirements are clearer to identify – the

company makes this or that type of valve and that's it. So we only have to build a test rig that fits to that specific valve."

The work with the repair/service companies he describes as a bit trickier because these companies work with a whole range of different valves in production from different manufacturers, so how these units are constructed and the set up is therefore more complex. "It's challenging, as we need a good understanding of the manufacturer's product and the requirement of the valve repairer, which in combination makes it higher than only the manufacturer's requirements. But as you can imagine it is quite satisfying, when it works out perfectly and the customer is happy too, which is the most important goal of course."

Asked why the manufacturers and service/repair companies should choose Italcontrol, Mr Castiglioni says that "we let the facts speak for themselves. If a potential customer asks us and other manufacturers the same questions about a unit, I am confident that the answers they will get from those other manufacturers will make the decision for them, more effectively than anything I can tell them."

And he goes on: "Let me give you an example: A potential customer will compare our products to those offered by other companies across Europe which is a logical process and I would do the same thing if I was them but even if our prices are in some cases higher than some of our

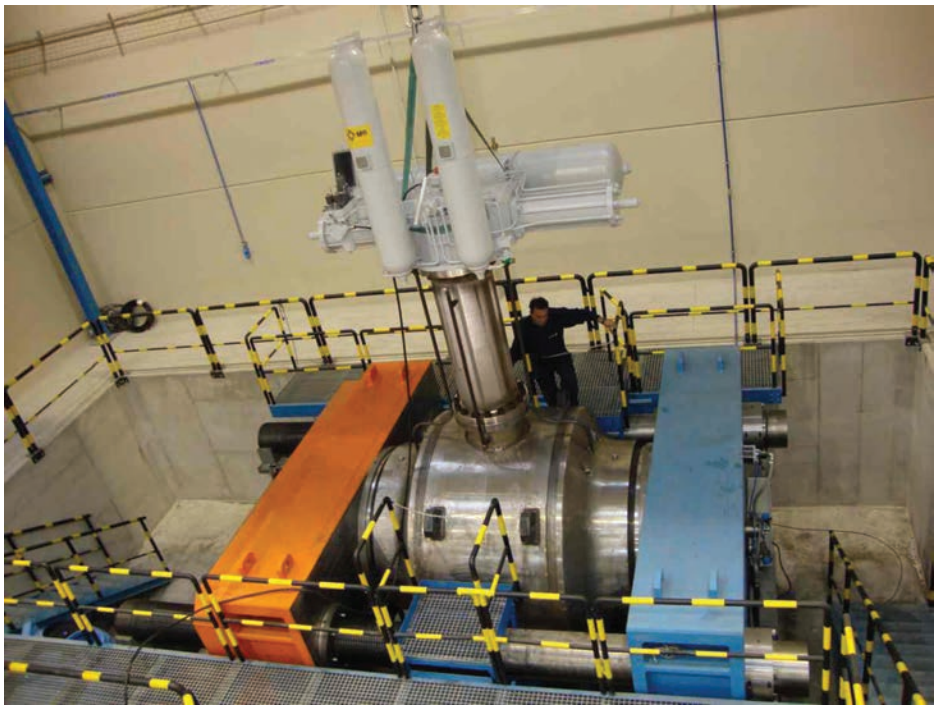


Italcontrol staff working on a horizontal test unit which is suitable for 5000 tons.

competitors, we show how strong the rigs in the existing production are and the high level components mounted onto them. This shows then that there is a higher quality, which obviously has somehow to be recognized! Our units are extremely strong and robust and virtually unbreakable as they contain more steel than less robust types, and steel has a cost."

Mass market vs tailor made

Italcontrol does not only produce test benches for the mass market but they also produce tailor made units for individual customers as Mr Castiglioni points out: "When a customer comes to us, and they can provide us with all the information we need as to their exact requirements, valve testing, valve type and so on, we can then make a test bench especially designed for that company only. We start with the basic unit which we will then format to incorporate the correct suite of requirements to suit the customer needs exactly, and according to their expectations. Each customer has a particular specification in length, width and height that they need. A unit, that we produced for another customer a few months ago may be completely different." In order to achieve the best possible test rig Italcontrol talks intensively with their customers to understand exactly what they want and need. "When you are building a unit costing hundreds of thousands of Euros you have to get it right from the



A valve including actuator during the testing phase.

beginning. And when the unit is built, the customers come here to see it and test it before finally they accept it. Only when the customer is completely satisfied we begin the shipment process."

"Before starting manufacturing operations we always send the customer all the technical drawings for the test bench along with all the layout for placing the parts in their production area. By doing so we make sure and double check with the corresponding customer that they have all the right information," explains Mr Castiglioni and he goes on: "We ask them

to check this carefully before we start so that any areas of concern are taken care of at that stage. When we get the green light to go ahead and start building, it is already as per their expectation."

A look towards the next years

As already mentioned, Italcontrol has been successful over the past five years, when the company managed to increase the turnover and production by roughly 20% each year. And according to Mr Castiglioni this will continue and he expects that it will continue even better. "Already this year we can see that by the end of 2012, we are likely to have increased by more than another 20%," he says. "There are several reasons for this development: We have some more people than we did last year and also the valve manufacturers, who are the first to use our units, are saying that, all over the world it seems that valve and test work is restarting."

As a customer oriented company, with a specialty on tailor made benches, the customer dictates what the requirements also in the future will be. And in order to be able to service all customers, even those who can not afford an Italcontrol test bench, through a cooperation with the sister company Italiana Collaudi also belonging to Mr Castiglioni and located in





A multi-station vertical test unit which can test 3 times 120 tons.



A 4000 tons test unit.



A 200 tons test unit for valves that are used in nuclear applications.

the neighbourhood of Italcon, there is the possibility to perform tests on valves on a subcontractor basis. "This sister company working with Italcon test benches is able to test up to 32" valves and gives to us a know-how about valve testing and although they are not a manufacturer or service/repair company, they know exactly how to work with these benches in order to get a valve tested, approved and released by a third party inspector which is very important for our customers. We know that these inspectors are wholly focused on checking the valve quality, leak tightness and all technical requirements

which have to be clarified to their satisfaction 100% before they will release the valve," says Mr Castiglioni. Looking at the coming five years, Mr Castiglioni expects that his company will continue to grow and to further stabilize their market position in Europe in order

to work together with agents towards important industrial areas such as the US and the Middle East. "Apart from these commercial aspects we are also heavily moving forward with our product developments. Our customers want not only quality, safety and reliability but they also want and need to save time. With pre-programming and automation we are taking away the need for a manual programming each time. Also, we can produce units with 5 station testing so, for smaller valves say, from 4 to 6 inches that can be loaded by hand, in the time it takes to physically test one valve, five can be tested."

"Our goal is to continue to provide quality, reliable, and safe systems that our customers will be confident in purchasing and using. We want to improve this wherever we can, and incorporate the latest technologies in order to meet any new customer requirements and desires," concludes Mr Castiglioni.

Italcon in short

Name:	Italcon
Owner:	Fabio Castiglioni
Number of employees:	25
Products:	Test benches (for all types of valves and actuators)
Industries served:	Oil, Gas, Nuclear, Petrochemical, Water, Wastewater, Food, Beverage