

Auxiliaries move towards quality

The 10th Asian Pacific International Plastics & Rubber Industry Exhibition (Applas) held from 29 Nov to 2 Dec last year in Shanghai was a significant platform for many ancillary equipment suppliers to showcase their latest products. Renee Seow reports

With the growth experienced in high-end applications markets in China, processors find that meeting quality processing criteria such as drying and optimised automation are important and necessary.

At Applas 2007, **Matsui China** exhibited a range of its Plas-Aid range of ancillary products and one of their key products aimed at the Chinese market was the MJ3, a dehumidifier, dryer and loader combined in a compact unit.

The MJ3 integrates a dehumidifying dryer and vacuum loader which supplies stable dry air of dew point -40°C. Its honeycomb desiccant rotor is said to be more efficient, cutting drying times by almost half. With the dryer and loader integrated into a simplified structure, emphasis is placed on easy maintenance. Also, it offers more features as standard equipment with a smaller footprint than comparable systems.

Apart from dryers, granulators and mixers are also part of Matsui's focus in this part of



Takayoshi Motoda, general manager for Matsui China, sees potential in high end applications for the Plas-Aid product platform

Asia. Incidentally, Matsui's auxiliary products, including the MJ3, were interfaced with injection moulding machines at the booths of Toshiba, Fanuc and China-based Guangzhou Borch Machinery.

Matsui's Plas-Aid product line offers a global standard platform and assembly of shared components optimised in production bases around the world. Starting last year, Matsui's parent company in Japan has realigned its entire ancillary products to come under its Plas-Aid brand platform to reflect the company's globalised quality production outlook.

According to Takayoshi Motoda, general manager for Matsui China, processors in China and the region are veering towards manufacturing high-end applications using engineered plastics like PC, PA, PET and PEEK.

"In a growing sophisticated Chinese market, end users and processors demand plastics to be supplied in reliable volumes and to have consistent processing performance. High-end processing systems are essential in helping them scale up the technology on their production floor," said Motoda.

Examples of growing high-end applications in various industry segments include automotive components, complex parts such as connectors for mobile phone parts, electronics, optical and medical applications, as well as packaging applications for the cosmetics industry which require a certain colour consistency and transparency.

Kawata (Shanghai) also showcased several materials handling products, one of which is a small-scale dryer that is produced at their Shanghai plant. The Dove SSD series small dehumidifying dryer is applicable for fitting onto small moulding machines measurements for material drying time for a specific time.

"The dryer offers high precision drying and good operability and is produced at our Shanghai facility with the exact same quality



Strong growth momentum in IML applications has been encouraging for Wittmann according to Wittmann China general manager Jonathan Ching (left) and company founder Dr Werner Wittmann

standards as Japan," said Wang Hai Feng, Kawata (Shanghai) section manager.

The dryer is targeted at the electronics manufacturing industry such as the making of precision components like connectors and optical lenses. Wang also said he is seeing a trend of processors specifying the use of dehumidifying dryers in China for high-end applications such as the manufacture of automotive components.

About 40% of Kawata's customer base in China is made up of Japanese manufacturers, with the rest consisting of Chinese and Europe-based companies, said Wang.

Also present at the show was **Wittmann China**, who is planning to add production lines to its material handling and temperature controller range in 2008. A second line of granulators for global production will be introduced as well as new dryers that offer low-noise, low-speed, screenless and dust-free capabilities.

According to Jonathan Ching, Wittmann China general manager, the second phase of expansion of its Kunshan plant was completed in the fourth quarter of last year and the company is in preparation to begin production and assembly very soon in 2008. With the expanded capacity, Ching estimated that the assembly rate of granulators will increase from 600 units per year to up to 1,000 units per year.

A Wittmann W727 robot model for in-mould labelling (IML) applications was displayed during the show. Ching said that IML take-up is growing at an increasing rate, thanks to the advantages offered such as improved aesthetics.

"More and more local processors in China are building up their technology platforms and they realise the necessity of incorporating automation and peripheral machinery, and to serve their processing needs, we will try to promote a one-stop package solution which includes label handling," said Ching.