WRAP IT UP

by Kip Hanson, senior editor

A Keystone State fabricator saves time and reduces risk with a stretch wrap machine
For those of you who’ve poured your hearts and hundreds of hours into a batch of precision parts, stacked them lovingly on a pallet and wrapped it all in plastic, cardboard and metal banding before placing it into the back of the company F-150 for delivery to the customer, only to receive word a few hours later that your once beautiful parts now lay scattered across the floor of the truck bed after the driver had to slam on the brakes, read on.

From waste to winning
Fortunately for Kyle Cloman, president of Waste Gas Fabricating Co. Inc., Fairless Hills, Pa., this unhappy story has nothing to do with him or his company. It is, however, a real-world example of what can go wrong when packaging is taken lightly.

Hand wrapping pallets takes time and effort. It’s easy to misjudge the amount of plastic needed or tension applied, and a bad wrap job can lead to scrapped parts, damaged equipment and injured people. This is one of the reasons why a few years ago Cloman invested in a Yellow Jacket 87-M Orbital stretch wrap machine from load containment solution provider Muller LCS (and don’t tell the Muller sales rep, but Cloman might soon be buying another one).

Waste Gas Fabricating has its own story. Cloman, his brother, father and two partners started the business in 1975, rebuilding waste gas processing devices for the steel mills that once prospered on the East Coast.

Sadly, the mills are all gone now. One of the last big jobs Cloman and his partners did was for a customer that filed bankruptcy the day after February 2017.
delivery. Two days after that, Cloman’s father had a heart attack and his now ex-business partners abandoned ship. Cloman was left holding the bag.

Rather than declare bankruptcy himself, Cloman made deals with his vendors to work off his debt.

“They applied half of everything I paid them toward my outstanding bill, and the other half toward the supplies I needed to operate,” he says. “I fixed pallets for handling bottled gas and took on whatever work I could find, welding trailer hitches on trucks, you name it. Within about six months I was solvent, and I found that I could make a living in the steel fabricating industry.”

That’s an understatement. Waste Gas Fabricating today averages $30 million in revenue, employs 80 people and has more than 400 customers, many of them large OEMs in the defense, shipbuilding, agriculture and energy industries. Its 70,000-sq.-ft. facility houses laser and plasma cutters, shears, plate rolls, press brakes, paint booths and more, and once the current expansion is complete, it will be 40,000 sq. ft. larger.

Cloman insists Waste Gas is a fabrication company, but it also commands a well-equipped machine shop. Its most recent capital equipment investment was a Mazak HCN6800 horizontal boring mill, and there are enough other Mazak CNC machining centers and lathes to make the local machine tool distributor proud. Top that off with grinding, honing and EDM capabilities and there’s little this manufacturer can’t handle.

“We primarily work with carbon steel,” Cloman says, “but also a large amount of stainless and a little aluminum, ranging from tissue thin to a foot thick or more.”

One-man job

The Waste Gas team ships a lot of parts. Cloman says more than 300 pallets go out the door and onto one of the company trucks each week. That’s a lot of wrapping. For years,
And even though Waste Gas produces plenty of heavy, awkward-to-wrap parts, Cloman says there have never been any incidents with wayward parts. The company has even achieved SHARP status (the safety and health achievement recognition program) from OSHA, an award that eliminates those unexpected, and occasionally unwelcome, surprise inspections.

However, Cloman’s reason for purchasing the Yellow Jacket is far less exciting than potential injury or the risk of parts flying off the truck: it’s efficiency. “It’s really cut down on the labor costs,” he says. “Instead of two people tying up a forklift for 10 minutes to wrap a pallet, it’s now a one-person job that takes two to three minutes. The Yellow Jacket probably paid for itself in six months.”

There’s also significant savings. Cloman estimates that his shipping department goes through around 1,500 rolls of 20-in.-wide, 90-gauge stretch wrap annually. “It’s enough to stretch from here to Tucson,” he laughs. That may seem like a lot of wrap, but it’s half of what the company was using before the Yellow Jacket’s arrival.

That’s a wrap

Neil Weisensel, brand and marketing director for Muller LCS, says results like these are typical with the semi-automatic Yellow Jacket. “Not only can most companies wrap skids in one-fourth the time, it takes fewer workers, uses less consumables, and produces a far more secure and predictable wrap.”

The Yellow Jacket 87-M uses standard 20-in. machine-grade stretch wrap and accommodates pallets up to 68 in. diagonal (52 in. sq.). The maximum wrapping length is 77 in. Pallets are positioned inside the ring, which rotates around the pallet at up to 20 rpm, pulling stretch wrap as it goes. The operator then guides the ring back and forth along the length of the pallet until the load has been completely wrapped.

this was done manually with two shipping clerks standing on either side of the forklift, passing a roll of stretch wrap back and forth, going around and around the pallet until they deemed the load secure.

“We ship a good deal of product in kit form where we’ll put eight to 12 parts on the skid for our customers,” he says. “Then, all they do is take the skid to the work area and cut away the stretch wrap. We also build custom steel pallets for them, which they return to us once they’ve received the shipment. In either case, we double-wrap each pallet, going one direction and then flipping it 90 degrees and wrapping it again. It takes a lot of passes.”

Even large, bulky parts can be wrapped in minutes with Muller’s Yellow Jacket 87-M stretch wrap machine.
Stretch wrap tension is adjustable from 0 to 150 percent, and the machine is controlled via push button or foot pedal. There's also an 87-SA model, which can be operated via a lanyard on the fork lift. Operator training for either machine takes about one hour.

If the Yellow Jacket isn’t the right fit, Weisensel says Muller has several other load containment solutions, ranging from semi-automatic, turntable-style wrappers to high-speed, fully automatic conveyor-fed systems. And as a brand under the umbrella of its parent company, the Signode Group, he notes, virtually any packaging or containment need can be addressed.

“We break down most packaging into three categories,” he says. “Type A loads are very straight, unified...
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Kyle Cloman, president, Waste Gas Fabricating Co. Inc.

loads, typically a single product with square corners and quite easy to package. Type B loads are a little more difficult, usually with multiple products that might be stacked haphazardly on a skid. The Yellow Jacket is aimed at Type C loads, which is what you see at Waste Gas and at most fabricators.”

Type C loads vary from pallet to pallet, with inconsistent vertical and horizontal profiles. Sharp edges are also common with Type C loads, often requiring additional stretch wrap.

Whatever is being packaged, throughput should also be considered before investing in a containment system, but compared to what many refer to as the “three-ring packaging circus,” the Yellow Jacket is a huge improvement for the majority of its customers. And for those with an eye toward product branding, Weisensel says it’s easy to add logos or other company information to the stretch wrap for a 10 to 15 percent upcharge.

Waste Gas has not yet availed itself of this service, although Cloman says it might be interesting to look at it in the future. For now, he has his hands full with the building expansion, and the transition to employee ownership of the company.

“We have an ESOP (employee stock ownership plan) in place, and I’m in the process of selling the business to my employees,” he says. “I’m very fortunate to have some great people who’ve been with me since day one and who look forward to retiring here someday.

“As for the Yellow Jacket, we’ve had a very good experience with it and with Muller, and wouldn’t hesitate to buy another machine from them.”

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