



PROFILE **GYS**

# JOINED-UP THINKING

Established in 1964, GYS is a family-owned company with over 600 employees around the world. Built around continuous investment in research and development and the acquisition of knowledge, the company is now a major player in the design and manufacture of welding machines, battery chargers and car body repair equipment. *bodyshop* magazine caught up with Neil Pulsford, GYS UK commercial director to find out more.



The stats speak for themselves: €80m turnover; some 650 employees; two production sites (France (95%) and China (five per cent)); 50 plus people in research and development; products sold in 123 countries; and five commercial subsidiaries in Germany, UK, China, India and Italy. Clearly, the business of manufacturing 'transformer' technology along with its automotive industry related products and equipment is vast. GYS is living proof of that.

The story dates back to 1964 when EDF decided to change domestic voltages in France from 110 to 230 volts. The result was that every house required a transformer and a man by the name of Guy Yves Stephany created GYS in 1964 with the purpose of manufacturing transformers on behalf of EDF for the west part of France.

The company 'ticked along' until 1997 when, following some financial difficulties, it was acquired by its current owner Nicolas Bouygues (now chairman of the board), father of now president and CEO of the company Bruno Bouygues.

Investment in the business soon followed with expansion of its research and development capabilities – building an engineering workforce and acquiring knowledge along the way. The result was that product and technological developments became a by-product of the business and before too long, and in the midst of a technology revolution in welding, GYS created its first inverter electrode welding machine.

## Approach

'This approach to business is something that continues today,' explained Neil. 'GYS is exactly the same as this organisation we knew back then but many times larger



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and many times more knowledgeable.' Such is the positive contribution of that approach that the business boasts organic growth for the past 20 years.

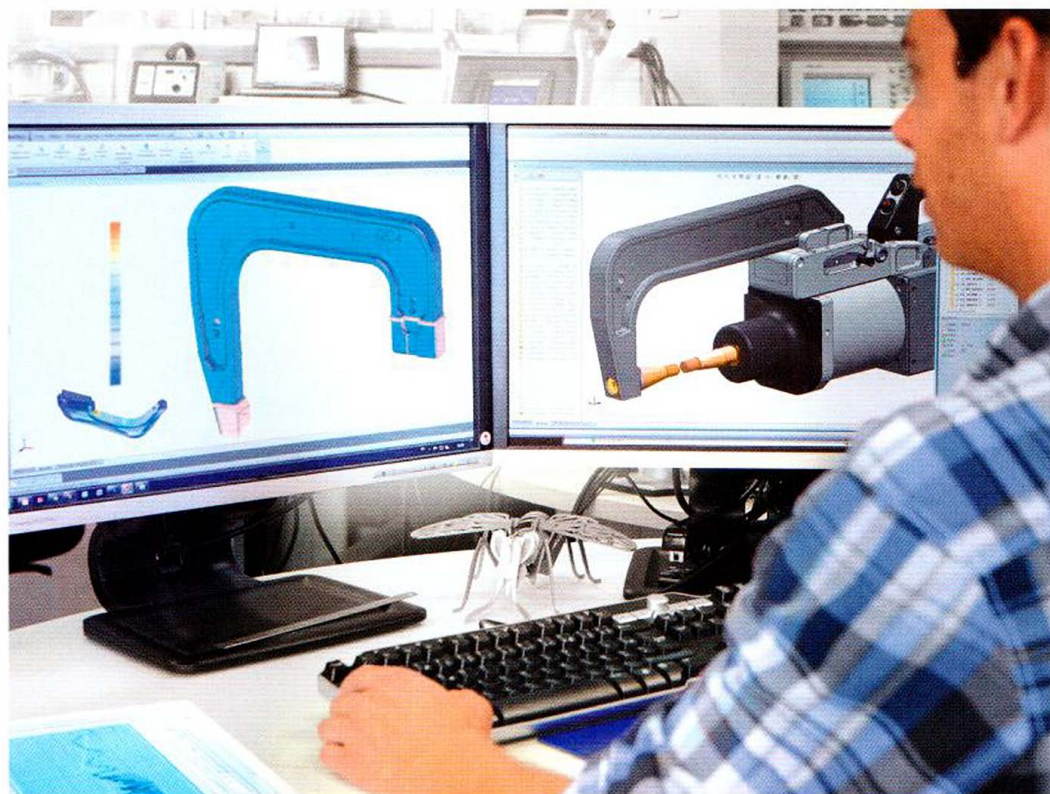
Described by Neil as an 'integrated manufacturing company' everything that goes on within GYS is proprietary GYS technology and expertise. 'If we don't know how to do something we invest in the research and development, and learn how to do it,' said Neil. 'For example, we didn't initially have the capabilities to manufacture induction heater technology, so we went and discovered how to do it. Riveting is another example that has become interesting in recent years – we didn't have expertise in this field at one stage so we went and learnt it.'

In 2006 GYS commenced a major chapter within its history – the opening of its first international subsidiary within Germany, the largest market in Europe. From a standing start, the business now is the largest non-German industrial welding company in Germany and the market leader in car body – even more remarkable considering it went head-to-head with some leading domestic brand names such as Wielander & Schill and Elektron.

## Subsidiaries

Specific to the UK, the wholly owned GYS subsidiary entered the market nine years ago – one of five subsidiaries in operation throughout the world today. Neil has been at the helm from the outset, having joined the business from Euro Car Parts, and prior to that Caterpillar.

'As a business we are ambitious,' explained Neil, who points to the company's desire to have a large market share in the countries within which it has interests. 'The



original idea in the UK was to follow the German model but something unforeseen happened within the car body product market literally as we were planning the subsidiary,' said Neil.

That 'something' was the collapse of major competitor Elektron which, to a degree, cleared the way for GYS. 'This unanticipated set of events provided us with a great opportunity to fill the space within the market,' said Neil. 'We had a mature product range and suddenly became the up and coming car body repair equipment range.'

### Entry

Entry into the UK was assisted by Stanners who acted as distributor for the brand – the business for which Elektron had previously partnered. 'We basically split the business with the GYS subsidiary launching the Welding and Battery Charger catalogue and Stanners took on the body repair catalogue,' said Neil. 'It was a great match.' That arrangement came to an end in 2014 and GYS subsequently took the body repair business back inhouse.

Today, GYS a leading force in the manufacture of welding machines, battery chargers and car body repair equipment – sold in the UK via traditional distribution channels. Its welding products carry approvals from most vehicle manufacturers, including the latest feather in its cap – global approval from Tesla for the use of its PTI spot welder on its Model 3.

'We work with most of the vehicle manufacturers in a reciprocal fashion – we need approvals for our machines and they need to know their cars can be repaired properly,' explained Neil. 'The last thing a vehicle manufacturer wants is to make cars that cannot be repaired so we maintain a dialogue with them because

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### Charging

An area of the GYS business which is experiencing considerable growth at present is centred round its battery charging offering, an area Neil describes as 'very interesting due to the incredible expansion of vehicle electronics.' He suggests at present there are two or three vehicle manufacturers leading the way in mandating specific battery chargers for use in their showrooms and workshops in order to maintain a constant energy supply to 'connected' vehicles. Neil described it as 'a customer care issue which can impact on warranties' and sees it as an area which is only likely to become more necessary in the coming years as vehicle technology continues to increase.

Like most businesses within the sector, GYS has faced the challenge of moving goalposts head on. 'We used to sell welding machines, now we sell computers,' said Neil as he pointed to how the integration of software and the requirement for powerful processing was becoming part of spot welders and pulse MIG welding. However, confident that GYS is at the top of its game when it comes to its existing expertise of inverter technology, Neil said, 'We are a research lead company and we have to continue investing to stay ahead of the technological development used in vehicles, both in terms of body construction and also the continual development of vehicle electronics, this of course affects our automotive battery charging business but also now impacts body repair. GYS is well placed to continue on its journey and to serve both the vehicle manufacturers on one side and the repair sector at the other end.'