

Breaking the mould

Producing products that push the boundary just that little bit further is what the industry is all about. With the demand for increasing variety and the creation of more niche markets, bakers and equipment manufacturers need to be flexible. Writer **David Abbott** takes a look at the world of moulders, rounders and dividers.



GERD MAAG

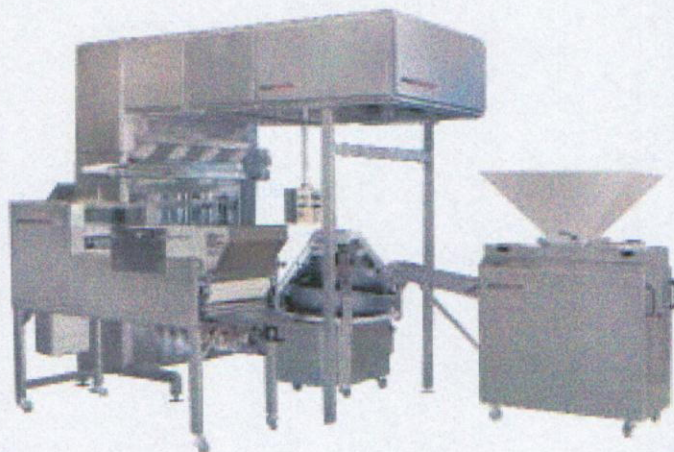
A very well-placed contact in the bakery equipment industry (who shall remain anonymous) told me that there are three big players when it comes to moulders, rounders and dividers. The names he mentioned were: Baker Perkins, Benier, and WP-Haton. Of course, he is right; these are the big players – but more of them later.

The interesting thing about bakery equipment is that it's hard to predict how a company will develop in a fast-moving business environment and, no matter how big the big players are, you can always find other manufacturers keen to get in on the act.

Take Backtechnik S.I. based in Unterkirnach down in the Black Forest where they know a thing or two about baking. Here's a company that started out by re-servicing ovens and yet is now producing its own tailor made lines and a range of equipment including moulders, rounders and dividers.

The company was started back in 1998 after Winkler had gone bankrupt and the first 10 years have seen it transformed into one of the better known and more innovative – but perhaps smaller – companies working in the industry.

One of the company's aims has been to develop bread processing lines which use computer technology to control the whole bread line.



BACKTECHNIK'S BREAD LINE USES COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

"The man who works the line doesn't have to think about anything," says Gerd Maag, General Manager.

Maag says that computer technology makes for a line which is easy to use, cheap labour costs and consistent quality of bread. The systems can be programmed with many different recipes, and once in the computer they can be changed by the baker, but computer technology allows every aspect of the process to be repeated time and time again with exactly the same consistency.

More programmes can be added with ease and the labour savings mean that the equipment can be paid for very quickly.

The other great point in favour of computer technology says Maag, is that knowledge stays in the bakery. Staff can come and go, but successful



recipes stay in the computer. In a knowledge economy when competitive advantage lies not so much in what you do, but how you do it, that can be a significant advantage.

It's worth emphasising that Backtechnik's system controls every stage of the line, not just one. As Maag explains, there can easily be around 20 parameter settings to change each time a different product is made and that leaves a lot of room for those little slips which chip away at consistency. The computer control system means that the chance of these errors occurring can be removed in one go as the computer system automatically adjusts all the parameters.

"In my opinion, all over the world more and more bakers want to work with really soft dough, with high humidity and fermenting in the bowl before it goes to the divider," says Maag.

Maag says that what makes Backtechnik stand out is that their divider system works with oil hydraulic pressure instead of a spring.

Spring mechanisms tend to give high pressure, making it hard to handle the dough gently and making it more likely that the dough is damaged by an over-vigorous action. A hydraulic system makes the handling very gentle; in fact you can say that it's as good as a pair of hands, and when it comes to quality, that really counts. The soft touch is also a feature of Backtechnik's moulder which uses three Teflon-coated rollers to give a very fine and elastic structure to the dough. But there is also a combined bread and baguette moulder in one machine, so all needs are catered for.



THE ALLROUND 3B CONICAL DOUGH DIVIDER

CLEVER TECHNICAL TRICKS

Backtechnik also produce a conical rounder which has a few clever technical tricks built in to the design. The conical rounder uses a special oiling system; two pipes – a larger one for air pressure and a smaller one for oil – allow the oil to be applied with the lightest touch. This allows the oil application to be regulated with complete control.

All of the equipment can deal with big capacity and big weights, is built from stainless steel and is

proving very popular.

Around 80 per cent of Backtechnik's machinery is exported, going to the USA, Europe and the Middle East. Three years ago, Backtechnik set up a line in Iran. That's a pretty impressive record and it's not difficult to see the attraction. You don't have to speak to Maag for long to get the impression that this is a man with a highly detailed understanding of precision engineering and a passion for improvement.



THE SOFT3B DOUGH DIVIDER

“All over the world, more and more bakers want to work with really soft dough with high humidity.”