

## Stalalube: A synonym for

With its recent introduction of I-beams, Finnish Stalalube has reached another major milestone: The company can now offer to its global customers not only an impressive range of stainless steel, duplex and lean duplex hollow sections, but also a complete family of structural products. Coupled with an extensive service offering and tailor-made solutions, this exhaustive product portfolio makes Stalalube a one-stop shop for clients from a variety of industries. The company's commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction is paying off, as are ventures into new market segments.

By Matjaž Matošec

With a history of more than four decades, Stalalube is a well-established producer of structural products which encompass square and rectangular hollow sections, press brake tubes, flat bars and I-beams, all available in standard as well as customized shapes and dimensions. Over the years, the range of their products has been constantly expanding, both in terms of sizes and material grades, to meet all current industry requirements, even the most demanding ones. This would not have been possible without closely following industry trends and staying in contact with end-users. "We are not the type of company that manufactures a limited range of standard products on a massive scale and then tries to sell them on the market," explains Sami Packalén, Marketing Director at Stalalube. "Rather, we try to understand our customers' needs and create tailor-made solutions. Having the world's widest range of stainless steel structural products is a natural result of this philosophy."

Stalalube was one of the first companies in the market to start producing hollow sections made from lean duplex grades, in addition to more traditional austenitic and ferritic as well as duplex grades. The company has now over ten years of experience in manufacturing and delivering lean duplex stainless products, which have been found to be fit for different applications, particularly the more demanding structural ones. "We see more and more substitution of carbon steel with these new lean duplex as well as some other special grades," comments Mr. Packalén. "Not only do they offer higher strength, lower nickel content and better corrosion resistance, they also provide a more economical solution when the total life-cycle costs are taken into account."

### Bus body & chassis

Recognizing the benefits of lean duplex, accurately anticipating market trends and acting proactively has helped Stalalube become the world's leading supplier

of hollow sections for the bus and coach industry, making transportation equipment manufacturing the company's fastest growing sector. Less than a decade ago, Stalalube ventured into the bus body frame business from zero and has since grown at a rate of 10 percent a year, holding presently more than 50 percent of the global market share.

Taking over the market in such a short period of time has required rapid product development and an ear for what is happening in the field. "We are constantly introducing new solutions and doing R&D work for our customers, to help them meet increasingly stringent environmental and safety standards. Through these efforts we have become the only manufacturer possessing all the knowledge and resources to deliver finished products to end-users from the bus and coach industry," explains Mr. Packalén. These products include components for bus chassis and body structures such as tubes, sheets and ready-made parts. They use both traditional ferritic stainless steel and lean duplex, making it possible to manufacture the lightest buses and coaches on the market. Lean duplex is therefore superior to carbon steel and aluminum not only in terms of life-cycle costs, strength and corrosion resistance, but also in terms of eco-friendliness. The lightness of the material helps reduce fuel costs, increase passenger capacity and reduce the environmental footprint. Currently only a certain amount of buses globally are made of high-strength stainless steel, but due to the potential weight savings Stalalube is bound to experience further growth in this area.

### Key industries

The company's products are indispensable to a variety of industries where different applications are exposed to corrosive or otherwise demanding environments. Among them are heavy machinery, transport, construction, all kinds of process industries, energy and oil & gas. "Large-scale projects in the North Sea are a good example of



Sami Packalén, Marketing Director, Stalalube.

our long-term involvement in the oil & gas industry," illustrates Mr. Packalén. "Stalalube has delivered stainless hollow sections to several oil platforms, including the recent Johan Sverdrup project. The products supplied for this project range from medium-sized hollow sections to very large ones. Projects such as this clearly demonstrate our ability to deliver complete packages, thanks to our extensive product portfolio and commitment to create custom-made solutions."

Stalalube has also many years of experience in supplying the energy sector where there is high demand for stainless steel products, particularly for support structures and machine frames. The high strength of Stalalube's hollow sections can be utilized to achieve lighter structures and savings in both material and processing costs. Customer projects are handled according to the Stalalube PRO model, which has been developed according to customer needs so as to ensure the highest product quality.

Recently, the company has been becoming increasingly active in another industry related to power generation, namely the nuclear industry. "In the past six months there has been a growing number of nuclear projects for which we have supplied some special dimensions and materials. We see a lot of potential for certain applications in this industry and anticipate further growth for us in this area."

### New opportunities

While expanding their existing networks of customers, Stalalube is also on the lookout for entirely new business opportunities. And quite a few have already been identified, as Mr. Packalén explains, "Among the industries where we see some possibilities for us is the solar power industry. Many solar power plants are located in demanding environments such as deserts where, for example, you can have the damaging combination of heavy sandblasting from sandstorms and saline air from the sea, creating perfect conditions for corrosion.



Irizar coach built of Stalalube products.



I-beams complete Stalalube's offering of structural products.

## quality and innovation



Stalutube products for the transportation industry.

Our products would be perfect for structures supporting solar panels, so we see this as a potential market for us and are presently looking into it. There is also potential in project businesses, particularly in the desalination and water treatment areas. Lack of water in many regions of the world—because of drought or increasing population—is a mounting challenge that humanity is facing, but at the same time also an opportunity for business like ours, to get involved in solving global problems. Our wide product range, combined with many material alternatives and product-related services, all make Stalutube an optimal partner for these kind of projects.”

### Custom-made as standard

When asked about the company’s unique points, Mr. Packalén answered without hesitation that, “Custom-made is our standard. Our technology as well as our extensive expertise and know-how are at the full disposal of our customers. We offer thorough technical guidance, carry out all sorts of testing

and documentation according to project standards and assist in the selection of optimal materials. Tube laser cutting and cut-to-length service give customers the possibility to customize the products according to their needs. In customer projects, we take care of the entire process and deliver products on-site, ready to assemble. We provide assistance to guarantee that the best weight-to-cost relationship is achieved. If our customers have any queries about processing or welding, Stalutube is always ready to help. To ensure all this, we collaborate with numerous engineering and design companies.”

Yet another way that Stalutube assists their customers in choosing the right product is the modeling software known as Tekla 3D Structure. Mr. Packalén explained the benefits of this highly innovative and creative tool: “This software enables our clients first to download the complete library of Stalutube products, then to match their requirements with what is supplied by



Laser cutting is one of the services whereby Stalutube enables its clients to customize the products according to their needs.



Many oil platforms located in the North Sea are constructed of stainless hollow sections manufactured by Stalutube.

us and finally to try out, in the safety of the virtual environment, what works best for them in a specific situation. This extra service offering can be seen as a direct result of our extensive talks with construction designers on how we could help them make the designing process with stainless steel more convenient. Now that the program is available and fully developed, we are educating designers and engineers about the many benefits of using stainless steel in construction. The ABC (Architecture, Building and Construction) industry is very traditional, which partly explains why it hasn’t been using stainless steel to its full potential. Despite the fact that technology has immensely progressed in the past few decades, certain beliefs continue to persist, such as that stainless steel is difficult to weld, for example. Finding this industry very important for us, we wish to change the old thinking, and we are doing so by training the designers and giving them the tools to design with our innovative products.”

### Service and reliability

Tough economic climate and fierce competition from Asia have forced many a company to find ways to adapt to the new market conditions, either by devising fresh business strategies or by reinforcing their core values. Admitting that Stalutube has not been entirely immune to the still-ongoing crisis, Mr. Packalén in the same breath proudly revealed the secrets of the company’s success in overcoming these challenging times: “As we are no exception to this influence, our strategy has been to become even more flexible and specialized and to focus even more on producing tailor-made products. Perhaps crucially, we continue to place great emphasis on customer service and reliability, which are two key factors in the battle against competition.” Together with a wide range of high-quality and innovative products, this approach is sure to guarantee Stalutube a flourishing global future.



Stalutube products for the transportation industry.