

SHARP SHOOTER

Molins' new plug distribution system, the Pegasus 3000, offers ultra-high filter shooting speeds.

By Brandy Brinson

The latest evolution in Molins' Pegasus line, the Pegasus 3000 plug distribution system is winning over customers thanks to its higher filter shooting speeds. The fast speeds allow customers to use one system to supply a high-speed cigarette making line rather than multiple systems. Molins says the system can improve efficiency in the making line and ultimately save the cigarette producer money.



PEGASUS. The Pegasus system is a pneumatic filter delivery device for transporting filter rods from the plug-making area to the cigarette-making machine. It was designed with a modular concept, in which each module (or channel) is self-contained and completely independent. The Pegasus can handle a wide range of plugs, from acetate to charcoal, at speeds up to 3,000 plugs per minute. The system is composed of two separate units—the distributor, known as the DX, and the receiver, known as the RX.

The Pegasus was initially created to address issues with handling new types of filters. Mike Kent, senior systems engineer of Molins, explains, “The key factor that led to the development of the Pegasus product range was the inability at the time for any filter shooting system to send and efficiently receive very fragile carbon-impregnated and pocketed multi filters. This led to a situation where maker speeds were limited or extra staff was required to hand load filters. As

labor costs increased, this became less and less acceptable. Pegasus was designed from day one as a modular ultra robust machine—this has led to it being very popular with operators and mechanics alike.”

EVOLUTION. The Pegasus 3000 is an evolution of the Pegasus range rather than a complete redesign. Its key feature is the ultra-high filter shooting speed, allowing one machine to supply a high-speed making line.

Kent says the Pegasus 3000 offers the latest technology designed to match advances in cigarette making technology. “The industry has moved forward into high and ultra-high-speed cigarette making lines, but the Pegasus is the only product on the market in our opinion that has kept up with improvements in maker technology. Competitive machines seem to have duplicated themselves rather than striven to improve their overall efficiency.”

Using one plug shooting line rather than multiple lines can save the customer money, as there are hidden costs in the installation and maintenance of multiple transmission lines. Kent says, “In countries with high labor costs, this can be very excessive but is often unseen as it forms part of the factory running cost rather than capital outlay.”

Having just one plug shooting line also offers more efficiency. Kent says, “You could argue that you should have more than one plug shooting line, but how many machines are fitted with two tobacco feed systems in case one fails? Our emphasis has been on improving the overall system efficiency of the filter sending line rather than assuming a low overall running competence and duplicating it.” ▶



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Another unique feature of the Pegasus is its inspection system. "As far as we are aware, the Pegasus 3000 is still the only machine on the market today that has a true inspection system."

This system qualifies filters before they enter the transmission lines. "The pre-inspection of filters offers huge benefits since faulty filters are rejected before they can cause line jams or receiver jams. It is also in our opinion highly desirable to reject the faulty filter offline from the main production arena rather than allow them to interrupt a high-speed making combination," says Kent.

At some point, all filter receivers made by any manufacturer are going to jam. In the Pegasus system, when a jam occurs, the transmission tubes are automatically emptied via a patented dump gate system. Thus, on a subsequent restart, the transmission lines are empty and are in optimum condition for the restart. "Experience has shown us that most line jams take place when a machine is attempting to restart after a jam. By not allowing this condition to exist, [it] virtually eliminates line jams."

SUCCESS. Molins is already seeing success with the Pegasus 3000. The company recently undertook two major installations—one in China and one in North America. Both customers are replacing their existing twin and triple filter-shooting line equipment (made by competitors of Molins) with the Pegasus 3000 single line. The single lines have been installed on makers running at speeds up to 10,000 cigarettes per minute.

Neither of the customers had previous experience with the Pegasus product, says Ray Sweeney, a design engineer with Molins, and it took some convincing for them to make the switch. "One of the installations was after an extensive six-month head-to-head trial against a competitor's latest twin line filter shooting distributor and receiver. The customer was somewhat skeptical that a Pegasus single line could outperform a twin line system. We were confident that once [we were] given the chance to demonstrate Pegasus'



Molins' emphasis has been on improving the overall system efficiency.

performance, the customer would see the benefits firsthand. This was proven when over the trial period Pegasus consistently outperformed the competitor's equipment. This has resulted in a substantial order from this customer, who will be replacing their entire existing filter shooting and receiving equipment over a 10-month period."

The first phase of the replacement project has been installed and running for a couple of months. Sweeney says the line has performed with "very impressive results, surpassing even our expectations, with the customer, and more importantly, with the operating staff complementing Molins on the quality of Pegasus. They have already seen improvements in production efficiency due to Pegasus and want to bring forward the installation program due to the success of the fast installation. [This] minimizes disruption to production targets, which can quickly be brought back on target due to the increase in production achieved post installation."

The two customers have seen how the Pegasus line can improve efficiency and save money in the long run. Sweeney says, "These two projects have highlighted how shooting filters at a higher rate per line can improve making machine efficiency as long as the equipment is up to the task. If you can make improvements using one channel against twin and triple lines, this proves there must be major cost savings in operating a Pegasus 3000 system."

Although the system could ultimately save the customer money, it's not always an easy sell. He explains, "Our biggest

problem is in convincing customers that this is the way to go and is the best solution on a cost basis. The industry tells us they want innovation from the OEMs to reduce their operating costs, but when they are faced with a product that gives them a choice, are they brave enough to make the right decision?"

The success of the Pegasus will depend on whether customers are willing to invest in such technology. "Pegasus is a well-proven, quality product. Will the industry let Molins take it on to the next level?" Sweeney asks.

Ultimately, he believes, the need to save on the cost of labor will lead manufacturers to make the investment in technology like the Pegasus. "As labor costs rise and maximum benefits are achieved moving to low-cost arenas, we foresee more labor-saving systems such as Pegasus being installed to reduce overall factory headcount."

FUTURE. As for future improvements to the Pegasus, Kent says Molins is not likely to further increase the speed of the Pegasus any time soon. Rather, the company will focus on how to handle innovations in filters themselves.

"The future of the Pegasus product line will be very much driven by the direction the industry wants to take in the next few years. We do not foresee the need for a higher-speed version of the product line but aim to play on the Pegasus' core strength—distribution of complex and multi filters. As cigarette designers become more creative with the filter components and materials, we see more opportunities for Pegasus to transmit these often very fragile and exotic rods." TR

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