

Century Yuasa Case Study – Another Valued Hi-tech Tooling Customer

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Century Yuasa Batteries (CYB) is Australia's only manufacturer of automotive batteries and has been manufacturing at Carole Park in Brisbane since the early 1970s. The company uses the latest technology to build batteries under a number of labels including the iconic Century brand and the premium Yuasa brand.

CYB's manufacturing process requires a range of tooling for various components, with the major ones being moulds for the production of plastic battery cases and lids. Apart from the technical requirements of strength and ease of assembly, the cases and lids are a key aspect of the marketing of the products. They are essential to the batteries' identity and customer recognition.

Century's product range is regularly reviewed in order to ensure that it continues to meet customer needs and maintains pace with changes in technology.

In late 2015, the decision was made to introduce sealed, maintenance-free (SMF) batteries, with the product launch planned for mid 2016. This meant that new cases and lids were required for all of the battery models involved, as the requirements of SMF technology are quite different to those of traditional car batteries.

CYB outsources the production of its cases and lids, but provides and owns the tooling used. Traditionally tooling has been sourced from Taiwan as a best compromise of reasonable quality and price. Hi-tech Tooling has been a long-term supplier of some smaller tools and has also provided maintenance services when required. CYB has long been aware of Hi-tech's quality and service, but has found in the past that tooling made in Australia has not been price competitive.

For this latest product revamp the total tooling requirement was substantial – it would be the largest order for tooling placed in Australia for the year. It called for 15 new tools, weighing up to 3 tonnes each – 6 for the battery containers, 7 for covers and 2 for handles. Century called for submissions from local and international suppliers for the mould tools that would be required. They assessed that Hi-tech's offer, although not the cheapest, was the best overall based on quality, technical capability, reliability and price.

Hi-tech's proposal involved sourcing from their manufacturing partners in China. Hi-tech would take responsibility for the quality and delivery of the tooling and would manage the communication with their suppliers with whom they have built very strong relationships over a number of years.

Andrew Day, CYB's Product Engineer was responsible for bringing the project in on budget and to meet the launch date deadline. His previous dealings with Hi-tech meant that he was very comfortable that they would deliver the quality tooling that was required within the timeframe. It was an ideal situation having his tooling supplier close by, able to engage in face-to-face meetings and still achieve the savings that manufacturing in China offered.



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Andrew was able to hand over the detailed management of the tooling aspect of the project to Hi-tech, which allowed him to focus on the bigger picture of delivering the new battery models as a whole. Hi-tech functioned as part of the project team and took a proactive role in suggesting amendments to the design where they thought it to be advantageous. Critically, they remained in constant communication with CYB regarding the production of the tooling.

When the first tools were ready for commissioning, Andrew accompanied Hi-tech on a visit to the suppliers in China. What he found was a modern facility with very knowledgeable and dedicated staff who listened and responded to his suggestions. In one instance, they worked through the night to ensure that he could see the result of a design suggestion that he had made before leaving the next day. The visit left him feeling very confident that the tooling part of the project was in good hands and under control. He was pleased to see that they proceeded to incorporate the suggestions that he had made in the production of subsequent tools, without being reminded or followed up.

“Hi-tech have been actively involved in all aspects of producing the tooling for this project”, Andrew said. “The whole process has been very open and transparent and there have been no surprises. The combination of having a tooling supplier who is located close by who can also access cost savings through their relationships with Chinese toolmakers is great”, he said. “We have the utmost confidence in Hi-tech. They look after any issues that arise with the injection moulders and keep us informed. For us, it is an ideal supplier relationship”.