

Laser calibration reduces costs and gives four-fold accuracy improvement

Czech manufacturer PTV, spol s.r.o., based in Prague, has experienced a very rapid increase in sales of its CNC water-jet cutting machines. To help manage this growth, the company uses Renishaw's ML10 laser interferometer measurement system and QC10 ballbar, which has reduced manufacturing costs and increased machine accuracy by a factor of four.

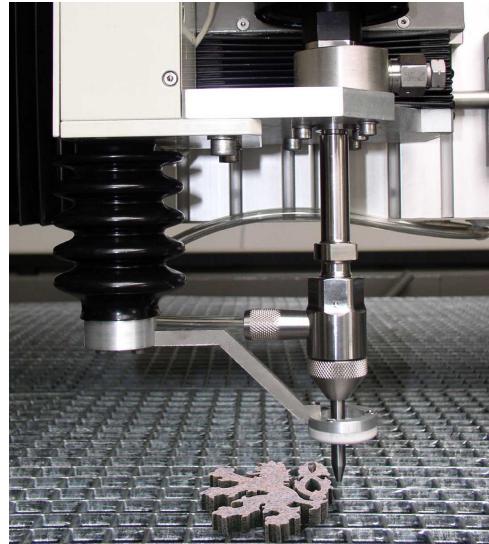
Precision water cutting has a huge number of applications, and particular advantages over traditional CNC machine tools in processing high specification metals, composites and other media. Thin, flexible or sensitive materials, such as rubber, plastics and even paper, are especially difficult to 'machine' using traditional methods. In these cases water cutting offers many of the advantages of laser cutting machines, but at a lower cost.

In the cutting process, the water is compressed to a pressure of over 4000 bar, then directed through specially designed nozzles. For certain materials and for high-speed grinding, water is mixed with natural garnet abrasive prior to cutting.

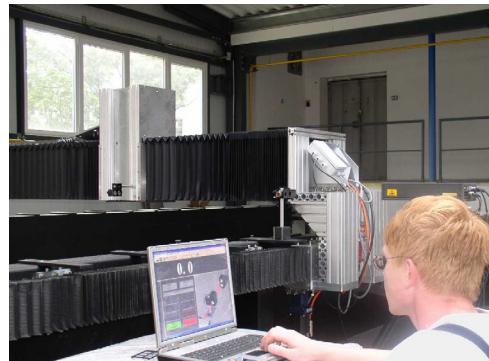
PTV manufactures one design of machine, but is able to vary the X and Y dimensions over a large range, according to customer needs. In effect, every machine is customised - PTV engineers can easily adapt machine components to different requirements, both in initial construction in Prague, and during installation at a customer's site.

Alignment problems

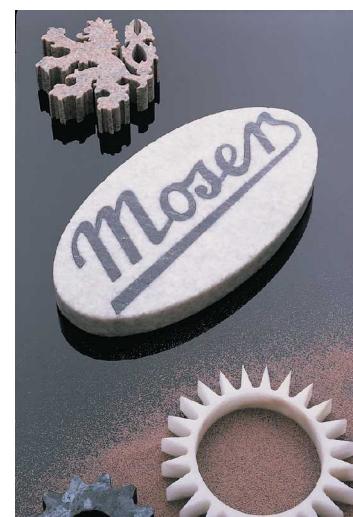
The PTV machine was designed in 2002, originally with a magnetic linear encoder system and a MEFI CNC control. Initially there were problems with maintaining the precise separation required between encoder and readhead, particularly over distances greater than 6 metres. There were also dynamic problems in achieving the required machine accuracy, due to the lightweight aluminium structures for the X-axis and Y-axis. PTV therefore sought advice from MEFI, who suggested using a laser interferometer to identify the causes of these inaccuracies.



PTV water-jet machine cutting high precision granite component



Renishaw's ML10 laser interferometer system calibrating the X-axis of a large water cutting machine



Typical components cut with PTV water-cutting machines

IN402

Case study

Renishaw's solution

PTV searched the Internet and, from a short list of possible systems, reviewed Renishaw's ML10 laser interferometer measurement system. Explained Jan Kunert, CNC engineer, "We visited one of our customers, where a Renishaw engineer demonstrated the ML10 system to us. We realised that not only could we use it to identify the dynamic errors, but we could also use it to map errors during machine production. We were only looking for someone to do a one-off study of our machines, as a sub-contract service, but very quickly knew that we had to have a system ourselves. In fact, the system we bought is now used so extensively, both in the factory and during on-site installation, that we intend to buy another."

Linear accuracy improved from 0.2 mm to 0.05 mm per metre

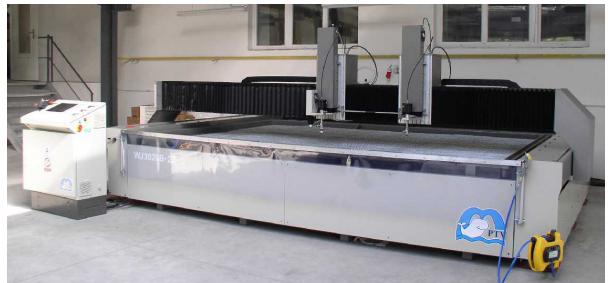
PTV removed the magnetic linear encoders from the original design, instead taking positional feedback from the rotary encoders integrated onto the drive motors. These encoders had always been there, but had been thought to provide inaccurate feedback, due to the variable distance and the resulting effects from the twisting of the ball-screw.

This is where the Renishaw ML10 laser interferometer measurement system and Laser10 software proves its worth. The system's laser optics are mounted onto the structure of the finished machine and readings taken at every 20 mm of axis movement. This is compared to the value provided by the machine's rotary encoder, which is at least always repeatable, to generate a compensation value for that specific position.

The positioning uncertainty on the original design could be up to 0.2 mm per metre. Jan Kunert now knows that accuracy is always better than 0.05 mm per metre and provides customers with a certificate from Renishaw's Laser10 software to prove it.

Proving quality through international standards

The ML10 laser interferometer measurement system is a reference standard on which PTV relies, using the highly stable wavelength of laser light, to provide performance verification to ISO 230-6 and traceability of the measurements in line with their ISO9001 certified systems. PTV sees both these factors as crucial in winning new customers, especially in markets where it is unknown.



The finished machine, which is laser compensated at the factory and then checked again during installation at a customer site

Combining Renishaw solutions for maximum efficiency

In addition to the compensation provided by the ML10 laser interferometer for linear positioning, there are a series of other machine characteristics which PTV checks and adjusts through the use of a ten-minute test with a Renishaw QC10 ballbar.

During the test the water cutting machine is instructed to describe a circular path in the X-Y axis, with the QC10 ballbar coupled to the machine on special magnetic mounts. Any variation from the normal test circle radius is picked up by the ballbar's highly sensitive transducer and data fed back to a PC running Renishaw's Ballbar5 analysis software. This immediately provides exact error values for 21 different machine characteristics.

Considerable time-saving

PTV finds that backlash and scale mismatch are two major sources of error, but provided with the exact values from the QC10 ballbar, the engineers can now adjust them immediately. Jan Kunert estimates that the company used to spend half a day on a machine attempting to find and remove errors. Now it can be done in 30-40 minutes. Says Mr Kunert: "Without the Renishaw ballbar, even if we thought we knew the problem, we weren't always right. We often brought in service companies, for example for the motors, to find it was a waste of time. We have one engineer here who is very good at guessing errors, but previously, if he was out sick, or at a customer when we had problems here, we were stuck."

Rapid increase in business

The future is looking bright for PTV. After long experience in this field, distributing machines from the U.S, it is now selling an increasing number of its own machines. Its largest customer, V.S.M.P.O. in Russia, already has six machines and has ordered a special 5-axis machine, which it will use to cut titanium for military and aerospace applications. PTV is also building a new factory, with an increased area for production and new demonstration facilities.

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About Renishaw

Renishaw is an established world leader in engineering technologies, with a strong history of innovation in product development and manufacturing. Since its formation in 1973, the company has supplied leading-edge products that increase process productivity, improve product quality and deliver cost-effective automation solutions.

A worldwide network of subsidiary companies and distributors provides exceptional service and support for its customers.

Products include:

- Dental CAD/CAM scanning and milling systems.
- Encoder systems for high accuracy linear, angle and rotary position feedback.
- Laser and ballbar systems for performance measurement and calibration of machines.
- Medical devices for neurosurgical applications.
- Probe systems and software for job set-up, tool setting and inspection on CNC machine tools.
- Raman spectroscopy systems for non-destructive material analysis.
- Sensor systems and software for measurement on CMMs (co-ordinate measuring machines).
- Stylus for CMM and machine tool probe applications.

Renishaw worldwide

Australia T +61 3 9521 0922 E australia@renishaw.com	Italy T +39 011 966 10 52 E italy@renishaw.com	Spain T +34 93 663 34 20 E spain@renishaw.com
Austria T +43 2236 379790 E austria@renishaw.com	Japan T +81 3 5366 5316 E japan@renishaw.com	Sweden T +46 8 584 90 880 E sweden@renishaw.com
Brazil T +55 11 4195 2866 E brazil@renishaw.com	Malaysia T +60 3 5631 4420 E malaysia@renishaw.com	Switzerland T +41 55 415 50 60 E switzerland@renishaw.com
Canada T +1 905 828 0104 E canada@renishaw.com	The Netherlands T +31 76 543 11 00 E benelux@renishaw.com	Taiwan T +886 4 2473 3177 E taiwan@renishaw.com
The People's Republic of China T +86 21 6180 6416 E china@renishaw.com	Poland T +48 22 577 11 80 E poland@renishaw.com	Thailand T +66 2 746 9811 E thailand@renishaw.com
Czech Republic T +420 548 216 553 E czech@renishaw.com	Russia T +7 495 231 16 77 E russia@renishaw.com	Turkey T +90 216 380 92 40 E turkiye@renishaw.com
France T +33 1 64 61 84 84 E france@renishaw.com	Singapore T +65 6897 5466 E singapore@renishaw.com	UK (Head Office) T +44 1453 524524 E uk@renishaw.com
Germany T +49 7127 9810 E germany@renishaw.com	Slovenia T +386 1 527 2100 E mail@rls.si	USA T +1 847 286 9953 E usa@renishaw.com
Hong Kong T +852 2753 0638 E hongkong@renishaw.com	South Korea T +82 2 2108 2830 E southkorea@renishaw.com	For all other countries T +44 1453 524524 E international@renishaw.com
Hungary T +36 23 502 183 E hungary@renishaw.com		
India T +91 80 6623 6000 E india@renishaw.com		
Indonesia T +62 21 2550 2467 E indonesia@renishaw.com		
Israel T +972 4 953 6595 E israel@renishaw.com		

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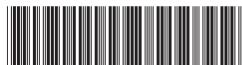
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