




COMPANY PROFILE

Gear Technology

Long known for quality and precision, this company continues making strides in the commercial aerospace and defense industries, with new markets on the horizon.

By Russ Willcutt





When he was a student at Loyola Marymount University, Tom Marino used to watch planes land at the nearby Hughes Aircraft plant in Culver City, California. Little did he know at the time how the activity he observed would eventually figure into his own future.

“My father, James John Marino, was a WWII bombardier who ended up running Sawyer Industries, which was a Southern California company that produced motors and gearing,” he says. “At the same time there was another company nearby that was owned by Elmore Nelson and known as Kosmo Gears. One day a representative from Hughes walked in his door with a proposition. They went to a nearby diner and sketched out a million-dollar contract for all the gears used in the chain gun they were developing for the Apache helicopter on a napkin, which is the type of agreement you don’t see very often these days. My father, who had decided he wanted to go out on his own, ended up purchasing Kosmo Gears in the late eighties, and that contract is still in place. It’s not with the same company, of course, but we’ve managed to maintain that relationship for quite a few years now.”

Now known as Gear Technology, with Tom Marino is its president, the company has long been known for producing the type of high-precision gearing that leads to relationships with industry giants. “We have gears on the Mars Rover, for instance, which we produced for NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory,” he says, “and gearing in the V-22 Osprey, which we manufacture for the Triumph Group. We also make gears for the Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, or AMRAAM, which we ship to Raytheon in Scotland, and all the gears in the gearbox that Goodrich provides to Boeing and Airbus for the cargo rollers and power distribution units in the bellies of their planes. So we’ve always been heavily involved in the commercial aerospace and defense industries, among others.”

A relatively small shop of just 20 employees and now located in Rancho Cucamonga, just outside of Los Angeles, Gear Technology is recognized as a premier source for complex gearing. The company’s high-tech facility is compliant with

both ISO 9001:2000 and AS9100 Rev. B Quality Management Systems, and it is certified to fabricate gears up to AGMA class 14. Its respect for its customers is apparent in its physical presentation. “When people tour our facility they’ll usually say ‘you’ve really got a jewel here,’ and we do,” Marino says. “Some of the buyers we work with have never seen how a gear is actually made, but anybody can recognize a clean, organized operation no matter what kind of work they’re involved in. In fact, we just had someone visit from MD Helicopters who wanted to conduct an audit and take a look at our quality system. He’d scheduled a couple of days to complete his work, but once he’d arrived he was so impressed that he said ‘you guys are so good at what you do, and so organized, that I’ll be out of here in three hours.’ So that’s something we really take a lot of pride in.”

Over the years Marino has seen many changes in American manufacturing, especially in his home state. “When we first started out probably 90 percent of our customers were based right here in California, and now I’d say that same percentage is found outside the state, with many of them now located outside the country. Most of our vendors, such as platers and heat treaters, are still found nearby, though.”

In servicing his customers Marino seeks to sign contracts of various lengths, which has helped both get through the recent economic downturn. “When we have a contract in place not only does that guarantee their price, it also allows me to negotiate with my own vendors so that I can lock in my pricing for raw materials and things of that nature,” he says. “We’ve also continued to invest in expanding our capabilities, with the recent purchase of an automated hobber from Koepfer America, a new CNC shaper, an automatic deburring machine, and an ultrasonic parts-cleaning system.”

As is the case with many in the gear manufacturing industry, Marino is always on the lookout for new opportunities, including the possibility of cutting gears for the wind industry at some point. “We’re looking at that very closely to see if the capital investment required would be justified. Right now we can manufacture gears so small you can fit 1,000 in your hand to others that are eight inches in diameter, so we would need to significantly increase our work envelope.”

Still, he is certain that he and his colleagues in the gear-manufacturing industry will find ways to weather the current economic storms and emerge even stronger than before. “I think the gear industry has a very proud tradition, and even though it’s taking a beating right now these are a really tough bunch of guys, and we’re going to get through this,” he says. “And I think that’s a testament to the intestinal fortitude of the manufacturing entrepreneurs in this country.”

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