

WORKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Robinson Custom Enclosures pushes the boundaries in development and fabrication of machine enclosures

By Mike Brezonick

It's very easy for even the most successful companies to become pigeonholed, associated in people's minds as specializing in just one small area. For example, when considering Robinson Custom Enclosures, what no doubt comes to mind for a lot of people is the image of a company that focuses on enclosures for smaller generator set packages, primarily in the Midwest.

That's accurate as far as it goes. Yet in reality, that image of Robinson misses the full range of capabilities the De Pere, Wis., company can bring to the table by a wide mile. Robinson can supply highly engineered enclosures for packages in excess of 2 MW and can build and outfit trailers and containers of all sizes — and not just for power generation systems, as demonstrated by a specialized enclosure designed for a global manufacturer of railway maintenance equipment.

"Before I got here in 2001, they really didn't have anyone in sales," said David Oshefsky, national sales manager at Robinson. "They had sold everything through word of mouth and reputation.

"The business was growing well enough to make that approach work. But because of that, there are still a lot of people out there who don't really have a good idea of what we can do."

What the company can do is perhaps best exemplified by some of the things it has already done. "We had one order



While Robinson Custom Enclosures is best known for its enclosures for stationary engine systems primarily used in power generation, the company's capabilities extend well beyond a single industry. A good example was a highly specialized enclosure for a mobile track welding machine. The enclosure had to fit within very tight dimensional and weight specifications in order to be able to operate in small European rail tunnels.

where we fabricated 48 ISO containers in six weeks," said Oshefsky. "We did not hire any welders, we did not get any temporary labor to do it. We ramped up in three days, pulled anyone we could from the fab business, from heating and cooling and manufacturing and we got them all done in that time."

"That goes to the quality of our workforce," said Tom Verboncouer,

Robinson's marketing manager. "We have a talent pool in house that really is unique. Most all of our people are cross-trained. They can weld, they can fabricate, they can do just about every job that needs doing. That's how we can respond so well to those kinds of situations."

An even more recent example — and one that aptly demonstrates that Robinson is not exclusively tied to the

power generation industry — involved a contract with Holland Co. LP, a leading manufacturer of track maintenance equipment. Holland, headquartered in Crete, Ill., produces a line of mobile track welders with dual-purpose highway and rail chassis.

When the company began looking at selling mobile rail welding equipment into the European markets, it found that its products were essentially too large to fit into smaller European rail tunnels. In addition, its conventional fiberglass reinforced plywood body style was too heavy to accommodate European vehicle weight restrictions.

Holland's previous experience with rental generators led it to Robinson. "The Holland Mobile Rail Welder was definitely an interesting project," said Oshefsky. "The entire package needed to be built very robust in order to handle rail transportation, yet be light enough to meet the stringent weight requirements of the highways.

"This combination usually doesn't mix well, especially when you add in the height requirements of the European tunnels, both on the rail and the highways."

Robinson engineered an enclosure constructed of $\frac{1}{8}$ in. aluminum with formed, seam-sealed panels to prevent leakage, as well as allow the unit to fit into the tight rail tunnels. While the goal was to manufacture a vehicle weighing less than 30 tons, the lightweight enclosure helped it come in at 25 tons. In addition, the unit is sound attenuated, helping the machine reduce noise emissions by some 20 dB(A).

"Robinson met all of our demands without question," said Dennis E. Gibbs, senior mechanical engineer at Holland. "They came through on their promise to deliver, from time-frame to budget."

Robinson's enclosure design also managed to reduce assembly time, Gibbs added. In most cases, assembly



The core of Robinson Custom Enclosures' business includes small trailers and sound-attenuated weather protection enclosures, drop-over or skid-mounted generator set housings, with aluminum, stainless-steel or galvanealed construction. Custom turnkey packages can be skid- or trailer-mounted, with or without accessories enclosed.

of a custom enclosure on a custom chassis can take as long as three weeks. In this case, the union took just three days.

"All they really had to do was set the container over the locks and attach the fuel lines," said Gibbs. "In a matter of three days, it went from a stack of several parts to one unit that was very functional. They picked it up, put it on

the truck and it fit.

"It was a job well done on Robinson's part — everything was custom made, fit together and complete."

That kind of versatility could be expected from a company with Robinson's heritage. The company was founded in the mid-1970s as Robinson Metal and Roofing, a specialist in roofing, sheet metal fabrication and



Robinson's enclosures are built at its 125,000 sq.ft. manufacturing facility in DePere, Wis., and the company has invested heavily in machining and fabrication technology and equipment.

heating and cooling. In time, the roofing business was sold off and the company evolved into Robinson Metal, Inc. consisting of four divisions, one of which is Robinson Custom Enclosures. The other four business activities are metal fabrication, machining and heating and cooling.

The Custom Enclosures business grew to encompass small trailers and sound-attenuated weather protection enclosures as well. The company's product line includes drop-over or skid-mounted generator set housing styles, with aluminum, stainless-steel or galvanealed construction. Custom turnkey packages can be skid- or trailer-mounted, with or without accessories enclosed.

The custom packaging activities can incorporate complete design, wiring and mounting sub-base tanks, exhaust systems, switchgear, etc. "We've got customers who will provide us with the engine-generator package, with radiator and everything on it and we'll work from that," said Oshefsky. "We have other customers that will give us the engine and generator on the frame rail and then we'll provide the radiator, the silencer, the isolators, the breakers, everything and we'll integrate that all into the package. It's whatever works for the customer."

The company can also conduct comprehensive testing including full load, customer witness tests, transfer switch and switchgear testing of virtually any sized system.

Those capabilities are supported by Robinson's investment in manufacturing and fabrication equipment. The facility incorporated two CNC lasers, five CNC machining centers, a waterjet cutting machine, along with a range of turning centers, punches, press brakes and finishing equipment.

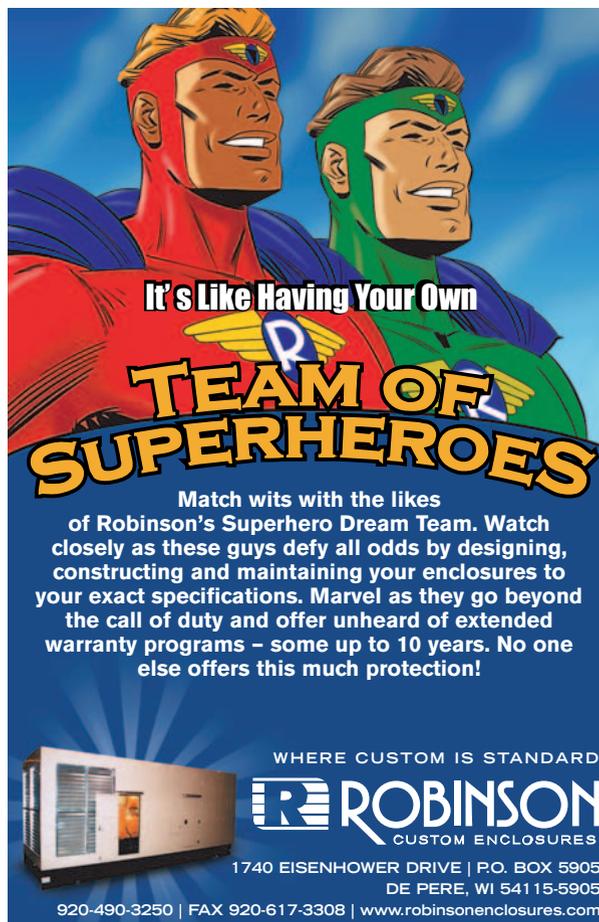
Robinson's facilities were expanded and updated in 2000 and currently cover 125,000 sq.ft., of which approximately 40,000 sq.ft. is dedicated toward the Custom Enclosure business. "We have four acres of adjacent property for expansion as our business grows," said Verboncouer.

There is no fixed timetable for that expansion as yet, but Verboncouer was confident that the company's growth would make it a reality sooner rather than later.

"There are a lot of manufacturers out there with a lot of products," said Verboncouer. "But one of the things we do

that a lot of them don't is just to do what we say we're going to do. That's hard sometimes, but it's how we operate.

"With our talent pool, we're usually not the least expensive. And the world has become so Wal-Martized. A lot of people want to get it tomorrow and they also want the lowest price and the highest quality. As we continue to grow, we've found customers that, after working with us, see the value in what we bring to their job and understand that value doesn't have the lowest price tag." ★



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