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GOING & GOING...

Reprint Edition



THEN & NOW



**Huth
Manufacturing:**

'THEN'

*By Jim Wilder
Undercar Digest Editor*

From the time he was in high school until he retired, Gerry Huth, inventor of the Huth bender, was always in the pipe business.

He took welding and mechanic's classes in high school and opened his first shop in 1938 in a garage behind his Burbank, CA, home.

"Before too long, I had more people than you could shake a stick at waiting for a 25-cent welding job or muffler to be put on," Huth said. "This was in a residential area, so the police would come by to segregate all the bad guys who were spinning around with their cars. And one of the cops said, 'Why don't you move down the street. There's a place for \$15 a month.' So I went down and lasted about four months there until the same thing happened. So the police said, 'Why don't you move down to Magnolia where you can raise all the hell you want.' And that's where it all started."

Huth's entrepreneurship was interrupted as a result of World War II. He designed his first mobile tube bender while serving

as a sergeant in the Army Engineering Corp in Burma. It was not small by any means. This bender was a TD18 bulldozer.

"We were laying six-inch water pipe from Calcutta, India, to Kunming, China," Huth said.

The bulldozer would run over a section of the 20- to 30-foot lengths of tubing, then the soldiers would place two custom-made shoes where they wanted the bend to start and pull the exposed section of the pipe upward with a winch that normally was used to lift the bulldozer blade.

"We could put a 20° to 30° bend on a pipe," Huth said. "That's all that was really needed. I did a lot of designing over there on futuristic benders."

When he got back to the states, he went to work on a mandrel bender using a variable pitch landing gear motor from a B-25 bomber, which was run from an arc welding machine. It was very limited, but it did make the job easier, Huth said.

By the mid '50s, dual exhaust was the rage and parts proliferation had finally hit the aftermarket.

"We could never get the correct pipes, head pipes or even the muffler," Huth said. "Every time some-

thing new would come on the road it meant a bigger warehouse. By 1956 or '57 we finally ended up with 5,000 square feet of warehouse, and I said, 'Boy, this has got to end.' That's when I really started thinking hard about the tube bender. I got a hold of a bunch of hydraulic parts and, boy, what a mishmash I made. But when I made the first bend, you could hear me yell all the way to San Fernando Road, which is about a mile off.

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"The first one I sold was to a fellow down on Lakewood. He had a shop where he worked on engines. I asked him what color I should paint it, and he said 'omega orange,' and, so help me, it's still omega orange."



They wouldn't even ask how much; they would just say, 'Build it.' We had a small manufacturing plant for other things. Finally we threw them all out and just started making benders.

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One of the earliest Huth bender purchases was made by Bud Jones of Bud's Muffler in Denver. As Huth recalls, he and his brother, Bill, were going on a hunting trip

but had to deliver a bender first.

"I go into this gas station in Denver, and the guy asks 'What is that?'" Huth explained it was a tube bender for bending tailpipes. Bud pointed to a '56 or '57 Chevrolet and said, "'Do you mean to tell me you can bend that pipe? I've had that car for four days waiting for a tailpipe.' I said, 'No problem' and I didn't even make a mock-up because it was an easy pipe to bend. Bud said, 'Gosh, I've got to have one of these.' And I said, 'Sign here.'"

"My brother is listening to this, and he said, 'You can have the hunting trip. I'm taking this

bender on the road.' He was in the spring business so he went right down the road selling them like hotcakes."

Although early bender marketing consisted of shop-to-shop sales, the first big break was an automotive trade show at Chicago's McCormick Place in 1959.

"That was the big kickoff," Huth said. "I had more benders to make than I could get parts for." Bender sales at that show exceeded \$46,000, and the Huth bender soon was on the "wanted list" of shop operators throughout the country.

'Now'

By Gary Sifford
Undercar Digest Associate Editor

Since its purchase in 1966 by Midas International, Huth Manufacturing Corp. has shipped more than 10,000 tube benders to customers in at least 65 countries.

And although the Huth bender's basic function hasn't changed much during that time, innovations in recent years have made it easier to use and more versatile.

"We've come up with different tooling like, for example, the rod bracket bender, the Grommet Grabber, different end-finishing tools and different collet systems," noted Roger Klink, manager of the Huth Manufacturing plant in Hartford, WI.

Adds Mike Reynolds, Huth's national sales manager: "Over the past five years, we've refined the



Huth Manufacturing Plant Manager Roger Klink

capacity to bend three-inch tubing, and it's taken a lot of work to develop the three-inch tooling. Roger's done an excellent job on that, and we take great pride in being able to do three-inch, which is a growing segment of the market."

To assist owners of Huth benders, the company offers services like Bender Mender, a program-card system and an inventory of replacement parts that offers coverage all the way back to benders made in the late 1950s - of which hundreds are still in use.

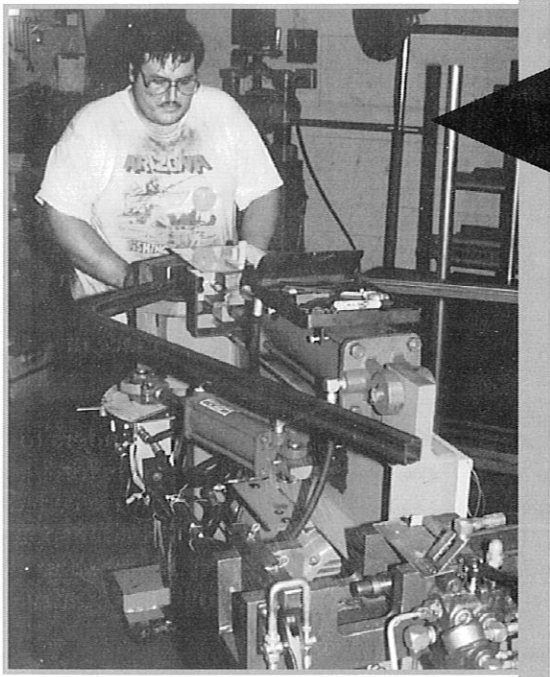
Through the Bender Mender program, Huth distributors sell and

repair benders and take trade-ins.

"By implementing a very successful trade-in program, it has really helped us increase our business," Reynolds said.

"We're also very proud of our program-card system, which has more program cards for tailpipes and exhaust pipes than anybody else's," Klink said. Huth offers cards for more than 7,000 applications.

"The program cards are as important a part of Huth's success as our tooling is," Reynolds noted. Subscribers to the card program receive annual updates containing the latest applications.



Production/assembly worker Kevin Yunto uses a Huth bender to bend legs for an oil-filter crusher made in the plant.

parts sales, which has helped our customers and certainly helped us from a sales standpoint."

During the past few years, Huth has expanded its product line with an oil-filter crusher and a muffler stand that it manufactures in the Hartford plant. A Huth bender is

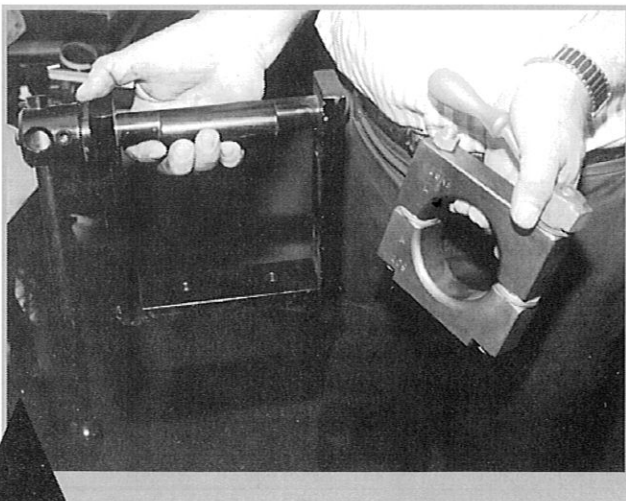
used to make the stand for the filter crusher, Klink pointed out, and the rod bracket bender is used to make the Grommet Grabber, a specially designed pliers for changing rubber grommets in exhaust-system hangers.

About 85% to 90% of the bender tooling is done at the plant, giving Huth more control over quality and inventory, he said.

"Besides making our bender better and easier to use," Reynolds said, "we're also looking to be able to utilize a lot of the equipment we have in

Because identifying parts often is difficult for owners of older benders, Klink said, "we'll normally get a conversation going and by the time the conversation is finished, we'll know what the part numbers are." Many times, a replacement part enables the customer to update an old bender.

"I think we're the only one in the industry that has a parts picture catalog, which we introduced to the market five years ago," Reynolds said. "We're in the process of redoing it because we've added so many different parts. But it's really increased our



Among the plant's bender parts inventory are a cam collet holder (left) for an early model and an updated screw-down collet holder.

Company At A Glance

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place and make other products. We have a lot of ideas, a lot of things we're working on right now to make our bender easier to use and at the same time continue the quality.

"We're also looking at a lot of other products and even other markets to go into so we can continue being the leader in pipe bending." **UD**

CNC setup/operator Scott Metternich mills the flats on a bender arbor. Unfinished arbors waiting to be machined sit on the table beside him.

