

Undercar Digest

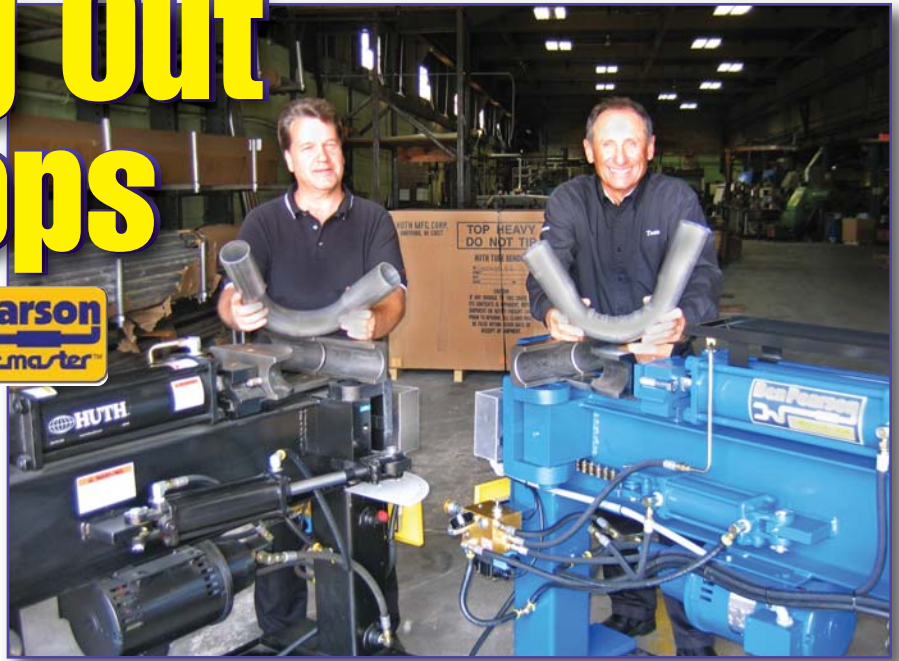
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Looking Out for Shops



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Looking Out for Shops



By Jim Wilder
Undercar Digest Editor

Hartford Benders Inc. owners Joe Becker (left) and Tom Hechimovich pose with the Huth HB-10 and Ben Pearson HB-09 tube benders. Those benders, as well as the Huth 2806 and the Ben Pearson MC59, are in stock and ready for shipping.

Joe Becker and Tom Hechimovich are looking out for shop operators who make a good part of their living by bending exhaust pipe. The two formed Hartford Benders Inc. in 2005 when they bought the Huth Bender Division from Midas and then bought the Ben Pearson Tubemaster Division from Quest Corp. in 2008.

Both have strong backgrounds in the bender industry and realize what a shop operator is looking for when buying a new bender or needing replacement parts.

Becker and Hechimovich estimate that 20,000 Huth and 20,000 Ben Pearson benders have been produced over the years, and a high percentage of them remain in use. One reason for their longevity is that all the benders and tooling are made in the USA, Becker said. He noted that he continues to get calls for parts for the

founder Gerry Huth still owned the company. The benders are now used all over the world. Becker recently received an e-mail from Saudi Arabia from a Huth bender user who needed to order a part.

Similar calls and e-mails are received about Ben Pearson units, according to sales veteran Marsha Blasengame, who was retained by Hartford Benders when it bought Ben Pearson. She still receives inquiries on parts for Ben Pearson benders produced shortly after their introduction in the mid-1970s. In recent years she has sold the blue-and-yellow benders to businesses in United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Europe, South America, Mexico, Africa and Australia.

The Hartford Benders manufacturing facility in

The company also can fill special tooling requests for owners of all Huth and Ben Pearson-model benders. Hechimovich noted that Hartford Benders now has its popular square-die tooling on the shelf for Huth and Ben Pearson units. Sizes include 1¹/₂-, 2- and 2¹/₂-inch, with other sizes available upon request.

Today, two models of Huth benders – the 2806 and the HB-10 – and two models of Ben Pearson benders – the MC59 and the HB-09 – are the most popular. These models are in stock for customers, and Hartford Benders still offers additional models that can be produced on request.

The Huth HB-10 bender was introduced several years ago as an entry-level unit that was great for someone just getting into the business or a shop that want-

Huth Model 2007, which was produced in the 1960s when Huth

Hartford, Wis., stocks 100% of tooling and accessories required by current models of both brands.



Marsha Blasengame continues her duties as a liaison for Ben Pearson distributors and shop operators who use the benders.



Mary Rusch (left), office manager, and Debbie Daley, accounting, usually are the first individuals to greet customers when they call.

ed an additional bender. It uses all the same dies as the earlier units. The HB-09 is its Ben Pearson equivalent.

"It's a lower-cost bender built to adapt to the Ben Pearson tooling," Becker said. "This will give a shop operator who has an existing Ben Pearson bender the ability to buy

controlled Ben Pearson HB-09 bender uses Ben Pearson dies and the traditional Huth I-beam frame, but it has the same clearances made popular by Ben Pearson, so the

shop can continue to use its Ben Pearson bend cards.

Becker has a long history with Huth. An engineer at Midas in 1974, he used the omega-orange bender to develop prototype pipe applications and bend-data cards. He became plant manager at

a lower-cost machine, and he can still use his existing tooling. We think it will be a real benefit to franchises and independents alike who have existing Ben Pearson benders and are ready to order another. Both the HB-10 and the HB-09 are popular models for general-repair shops just entering the pipe-bending market.

"The HB-09 will do anything the MC59 will do," Hechimovich said. "It's just a good machine. We also will continue to build the MC59, since so many shops are fans of it."

The knee-operated manually



The Huth HB-10 and the Ben Pearson HB-09 both use I-beam frame construction but differ in that the HB-10 uses traditional Huth dies and the HB-09 uses Ben Pearson dies. In addition, the Huth unit uses a hydraulic ram and the Ben Pearson uses a chain drive.



Jerry Geldnich completes the wiring on a Huth 2806 bender.



Joe Takacs completes the process by putting a Ben Pearson label on this MC59.



Bob Lechner checks the tolerances on a half-shoe die.

Huth in 1996, when it was still owned by Midas. Hechimovich owned his own tool-and-die company and had done contract work for Midas. He has since sold that business and now works at Hartford Benders designing prototype parts.

Regardless, the entire staff is equipped to handle customer inquiries. On the Ben Pearson side, Blasengame continues to work from Quest headquarters in Pine Bluff, Ark., as a liaison to shop operators and distributors who use or stock Ben Pearson benders. Sammy Heird, a familiar face at Ben Pearson over the years, still assists Hartford Benders on the technical side.

Customers can still call Blasengame toll free at 800-436-1327.

"It's been a very comfortable transition going to work for Hartford Benders," she said. "They have made me feel that I am part of their family. They are very knowledgeable, and they are very customer-service oriented, which makes it a pleasure to

work with them."

Neither Huth nor Ben Pearson has upgraded its bend-card decks to cover vehicles past 2002 model years, but new cards for both units will be available soon, and they will include bend data for popular late-model cars and light trucks. The existing card decks go back as far as the Model A Ford, with most following the bending contour of original equipment.

"That makes the decks ideal for someone just getting started or for a veteran mufflerman who is working on a restoration car for a customer and the OE system is no longer available," Becker said.

New on the Huth side is a vertical bender, Model 3002. Becker explained that this unit is designed for production bending.

"It's very accurate and uses existing Huth bending tooling. Several units are already in use at local trailer manufacturers as well as fabricators for lawn- and garden-equipment frames, satellite-dish frames and ice-fishing shelter frames. The unit also has caught the attention of some muffler warehouses that offer their own line of prebent pipes."

Hartford Benders continues to offer a number of accessories that have become valuable tools for shops performing exhaust work. Huth's hand-held, air-operated Model 1685 expander is making a comeback, especially for shops



Pete Held uses the company's CNC machine to make bender tooling.



The Huth Model 1685 expander is a popular item for shops that install exhaust but don't have a bender.



Mark Purman tests Huth's new Model 3002 vertical bender.



Other popular accessories include the bracket bender, the Grommet Grabber and end shapers.

that perform exhaust work but don't have a bender. The hand-held unit allows technicians to expand the ends of pipes, and the inlets and outlets on mufflers, to fit the application. Additional tooling



Muffer stands also are a handy tool for shops.

for the expander is now available to expand pipe up to 4 inches in diameter.

Other accessories still available include muffer stands, end shapers, rod-bracket benders and the Grommet Grabber.

"The Grommet Grabber is designed to remove hanger brackets from their rubber mounting grommets with a simple squeeze of the handle," Becker said. "The rod-bracket bender allows for an easy way to make custom brackets, and the end shaper is used to repair dented ends on pipe. These have become time-saving tools for shops." **UD**



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Circle No. **50** on Reader Card

'I Have Bender No. 1!'

Former California shop owner Gerry Huth invented the Huth bender in the late 1950s after tiring of large prebent pipe inventories or being forced to cut tubing at angles and then weld them together to fit the undercarriage of a vehicle.

Huth, who retired in 1965, recently called Joe Becker to congratulate him on the purchase of Ben Pearson Tubemaster. The two joked about all the shop operators who have called over the years claiming the bragging rights of owning the Huth bender with serial number 1.

In a 1995 interview with *Undercar Digest*, Huth and former employee Johnny Kopp noted that, in reality, bender No. 1 more than likely was scrapped years ago. They said it was used as a prototype and had been cut and welded on every time Huth came up with an idea to make it better. They believed they sold it to a scrap dealer early on. At the time of the interview, Kopp, who had bought Huth's muffler shop in Encino, Calif., still used the No. 3 bender as a backup to a newer model. His shop closed a few years after his death, and the whereabouts of that bender is unknown.

If your shop has one of the old benders with a serial number below 20, take a photo of the bender and a close-up of the serial number and send them to *Undercar Digest* Editor Jim Wilder at jwilder@undercardigest.com. We'll be glad to publish the results of our search.