

Liquid Combustion Technology:

Manufacturing and importing utility engines through the Port of Charleston

BY BETSY HARTER

WITH EXPERTS FORECASTING AN “ACTIVE” HURRICANE SEASON this summer and fall, the market for backup generators is about to rise once again. Likewise, Liquid Combustion Technology (LCT), which makes small engines for equipment such as backup generators, is gearing up for another busy season.

Headquartered in Travelers Rest, SC, LCT manufactures and imports small air-cooled engines for related outdoor power equipment markets. It has sold hundreds of thousands of engines to national OEM and retailers in North America alone, including companies that make generators, pressure washers, water pumps, compressors, blowers and tillers.

Although LCT’s corporate headquarters, warehouse and distribution center are all right here in South Carolina, this growing company is active all over the world. LCT manufactures its engines at a company-owned facility near Shanghai, China; has sales offices in Sydney, Australia; and utilizes 100 service centers in Mexico, in addition to its 5,000 U.S. service centers.

“We chose South Carolina for our headquarters and distribution

center for several reasons,” noted Keith Giddens, LCT president. “The price of operation, overhead and land is very reasonable. It also offers close proximity to customers, a willing and educated labor force, and most importantly access via highways and the Port of Charleston.”

The company, which employs 300 people worldwide, currently imports

80% of its engines all water East Coast through the Port of Charleston from its manufacturing facility in China.

“Unfortunately, we have recently experienced a lot of destruction from hurricanes and ice storms,” said Julie Farmer, LCT logistics manager. “On the flip side, this means our business has been good. We expect production to increase, which means imports will increase. We have forecasted a 5% increase in container volume this year for contracts, and the majority of that traffic will come through the Port of Charleston.”

The small engine market is a tough nut to crack. Not only does LCT compete with big names such as Briggs & Stratton, Honda, and Tecumseh, but it also has to constantly fight the negative stigma associated with imported engines.

“Engines manufactured in China have been painted uniformly with negative broad-brush strokes in trade circles for the past few years,” Giddens explained. “The most common complaints revolve around lack of quality control, warranty, and service after the sale. Instead of decrying all engines made in China as inferior and problematic, savvy end-users must look beyond the labels to the real issues. It’s not the location of the plant, but the ownership that matters most.”

Giddens added that a great deal of small engines out of China are copied or cloned Honda products, and the companies cloning the engines have not respected Honda’s intellectual property rights. To fight the cloning battle, LCT is actively enforcing its own 14 patents and has made sure that 98% of its parts are not interchangeable with competing products.

Despite these challenges, LCT has remained at the forefront of the small engine market through innovation, customer service, and quality control. In January, LCT rolled out its newest line of gasoline and diesel powered utility engines, the MaXXPower Series. The first two engines in the series, a 208cc engine and a 414cc engine, are the most powerful in their respective classes and are compliant with all emissions standards.

“LCT’s MaXXPower series engines offer the largest displacement in their class for increased torque and horsepower, and LCT is the first engine manufacturer to boast a 1,000-hour qualified engine,” Giddens said. “With increased horse power, torque and durability, the MaXXPower series represents a new era in small engine performance.”

MaXXPower engines also feature a revolutionary design, including the signature hexagonal valve cover and recoil design, which has become the identifying feature of LCT engines, along with an automotive style fuel cap and high oil fill tube. Additional advantages that come standard on LCT MaxXXPower engines are dual ball bearings, forged crankshaft, and a cast iron sleeved cylinder to ensure high reliability to the end customer under the most rugged conditions.

LCT’s innovation has helped it obtain market share, but Farmer said it’s the company’s strong commitment to customer service and quality control that has helped it retain customers.

“We have terrific customer service, and we stand behind our product 100%,” she said.



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