

FLO Components: Keeping the Wheels of Commerce Turning Since 1977

BY JAMES CARELESS

Lubrication is absolutely key to every transportation system on the planet. Without lubrication, nothing would move, and the economic world as we know it would stop.

As an automatic greasing systems specialist, FLO Components Ltd. knows all about “keeping the wheels of commerce turning.” Since 1977, this Mississauga company (with a sales office in Winnipeg) has been providing “Total Lube Solutions” to the transportation industry. This said, FLO Components’ contribution to the railway industry is different than one might think. Rather than greasing train wheels on their axles, FLO Components’ Lincoln wayside lubrication system greases the rails they run on.

Cutting Wear and Noise

Riding the rails is hard on train wheels. The constant grinding of metal against metal wears both down, while the friction of force of wheels pushing against rails as they navigate curves can generate ear-piercing squeals. Given that railroads run through cities and other built-up areas, this kind of noise can generate complaints from residents and headaches for railroad owners.

This is where FLO Components’ Lincoln wayside lubrication system (Lincoln system) comes to the rescue. Using a specialized wheel sensor that counts the number of train axles passing by its location, the Lincoln system uses this data to automatically pump and apply an exact amount of lubricant to the railway tracks in order to remedy both problems. The lubricant is drawn from reservoirs connected to the system.

To optimize performance and reliability, the Lincoln system pumps the lubricant onto specialized applicator bars mounted on the rails on curves and other high-wear areas. The lubricant is then caught by passing train wheels and spread onto the track surface. Again, this lubrication reduces friction between the wheels and track.

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The secret to the Lincoln system's success is its consistency.

"Our ability to precisely meter lubricant applications is what makes this system so consistent," said Mike Deckert, Vice President of FLO Components. "We achieve this by using a 12-port lubrication outlet to precisely pump the right amount of grease onto the applicator bars and ensure that the entire intended surface receives lubricant."

This contrasts with the "flood style" approach, which can result in uneven

coverage on the tracks due to imprecise dispensation and application.

"The biggest problem with lubrication flow is that the lubricant will follow the path of least resistance every time," said Deckert. "In a flood-style system that counts on simply soaking the rail, a blocked port can result in uneven coverage, and in some cases, messy pooling over the track and on the ground. With the Lincoln system, this doesn't happen because the lubricant is applied to the applicator bars first. Meanwhile, in the

unlikely case of one of our 12 ports getting blocked, there are visual indicators on the lube system to alert the railroad operator to the problem."

The Lincoln system comes in configurations capable of lubricating rail gauge face, the top of rail (friction modifier), and restraining rails that keep train wheels in full contact with tracks through corners. In all instances, the result is less wear-and-tear on all metal parts and substantially reduced noise for the community.

Protecting the Environment

The downside of track lubrication is that lubricant may end up leaking into the ground and the water table underground. To prevent this, FLO Components' sells HalenHardy Railroad Track Mats. Laid into tracks in areas where track lubrication occurs (as well areas prone to oil and fuel spills), the highly absorbent Spilltration material in these mats prevent grease and fuel from leeching into the soil and ballast.

"The Spilltration material is comprised of UV-resistant fibres that won't break down in sunlight," Deckert said. "Unless a large spill occurs in the area, they can last up to two years in constant service."

A Commitment to Corporate Values

Staying in business for 44 years is a rare accomplishment – and one that does not happen by accident.

FLO Components has not just survived but thrived and grown since 1977.

Vice-President Mike Deckert credits this success to the company's commitment to its corporate values, as encapsulated in FLO Component's corporate philosophy. 72

"A company is only as good as the people you surround yourself with," Deckert said. "This is why we seek out the best people to support our customers and give them the tools to do the job right."

» “We are a team of professionals using our collective expertise in automatic lubrication systems and fluid-handling applications to provide cost-effective solutions to our customers to improve their operating efficiencies and profitability,” he told *Inside Track*. “Our goal is to be the preferred partner of lubrication and fluid-handling equipment, systems and services to our customers by ensuring their machine reliability and productivity, improving their employees’ health and safety, and lower our customers’ impact on the environment by being a ‘one-stop’ provider of lubrication and fluid handling solutions.”

FLO Components’ sums up this philosophy in four words: “Meeting Customers’ Needs Better.” This motto reflects how the company partners with customers to find the most cost-effective solutions for their problems, by clearly defining these customers’ requirements first and then determining what products and services will fulfill these requirements successfully.

“Meeting Customers’ Needs Better means we are so much more than a supplier of systems and equipment,” said Deckert. “We are continually expanding our ability to provide help in areas such as in-house and on-site service, supplemental manpower and personnel training sessions, plus consulting on ‘Best Practices.’”

Making this possible is the quality of FLO Components’ employees. “A company is only as good as the people you surround yourself with,” Deckert said. “This is why we seek out the best people to support our customers and give them the tools to do the job right.”

This is also why FLO Components doesn’t have service trucks – it has “Mobile Workshops.” When its people visit a client’s location, they have the parts and tools at hand to complete on-site installations and repairs.

Looking to the future, FLO Components intends to further the advances it has already made in solar-powered wirelessly-connected modems to provide even more monitoring data to railroads, no matter where their Lincoln lubrication systems are installed. “We plan to bring wireless connectivity to all of our products, to maximize their accessibility and usefulness to our transportation customers,” Deckert concluded. “Again, it’s all about meeting customers’ needs better.” ■