

Fleischerei 7/8 2002: Field test

Compact automatic thermoforming machine for craft professions

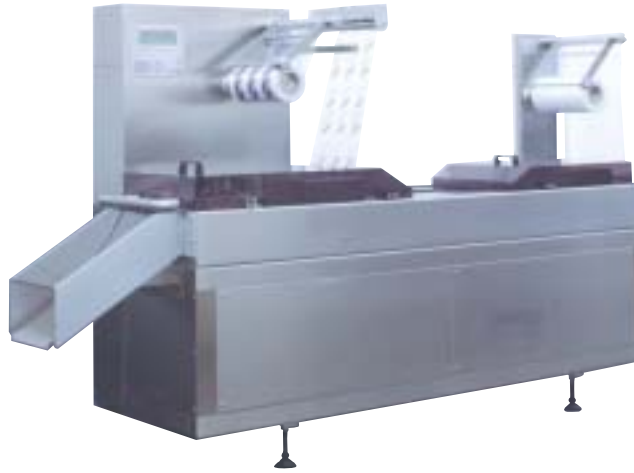
In the 'Fleischerei' field test:
the QuickVac 2000 automatic thermoforming machine from Komet

Country butchers Böckle in Probstried was the first specialist business to commission the QuickVac 2000 automatic thermoforming machine. Proprietor and master butcher Martin Böckle spoke to 'Fleischerei' about his experience.

The first thing you notice about Komet's QuickVac 2000 automatic thermoforming machine is its compact size. "We've been looking for a machine of this size for 15 years", says Martin Böckle in praise of the outstanding feature of the QuickVac 2000. A compact, flexible packaging system is particularly important for Böckle's business, because as well as vegetarian products for the trade and contract production for colleagues, its core business is determined first and foremost by mail order to the end consumer. Martin Böckle has been running his company very much against the trend of the last few years: he only handles beef and veal. The master butcher attaches particular importance to making sure that his product range is no smaller than that of other butchers. "We offer the whole range of meat you will find in a traditional butcher, bologna sausage, ham or boiling sausage, it's just that they're based on beef or veal." The product range is rounded off by fresh pasta and organic products right through to wellness & beauty tea.

A staff of eight on the 600 m² site see to production, packaging and dispatch of the goods, which are sent to customers all over Germany. Now 38 years old, Martin Böckle took over his parents' family business twelve years ago. The firm has always bought cattle from suppliers in the local area, had them slaughtered externally and then taken charge of further production from cutting. Böckle uses the prototype of the QuickVac 2000, which he chose primarily because it came in a compact design but delivered the performance of a large machine. The current

series has thus benefited accordingly from the numerous suggestions and detail improvements which Böckle generated through his practical work with the automatic thermoforming machine, for instance an improvement in the film edge extraction facility which Böckle found to be disproportionately loud in his machine, as well as greater stability in the cross cutters.



Easy handling, many options

It didn't take long for Martin Böckle and his team to become familiar with the many different options offered by the automatic thermoforming machine. "You don't have to be particularly highly trained to be able to operate the machine", he reports. But anyone who, given the slight dimensions of the machine, expects to find a simple control that treats every product the same will be very much mistaken. The machine actually comes equipped with a programmable PLC which can hold up to 99 programs. And a 4-line display makes the work here easier as well: feedback on operating status and any errors can be read in clear text. Böckle is also delighted at how easy it is to change format: a format set can be exchanged in a matter of minutes with almost no force being required. "Even my children could do it", he says with satisfaction. "In theory, of course, you could pack a large dish with it", he explains, "but we only bought the format sets for small to medium packaging sizes. Those are the types of packaging our customers expect from us." Here too, the trend towards small and single households is evident.

Adjustable working speed

To the question of time savings, Böckle has a precise answer ready: "We used to work with a dual-chamber machine, and we stopped the time a little while ago. Now we need only about one third of the time we needed before to pack the same quantity of goods. It's already almost by the by." To ensure that the speed of the packaging machine does not make things too hectic, the cycle time can be flexibly regulated to adapt to the requirements of the product and the efficiency of the operator. Speed is also the name of the game when exchanging format sets. It takes less than five minutes to convert the machine. But even cleaning can be completed in an astonishingly short time, because edges, corners, projecting bolts or external weld seams, in other words the typical dust traps, were deliberately avoided in the design, while a washing function switch ensures easy and reliable cleaning.

Flexibly expandable

Careful thought has to be given to any capital expenditure if the changing requirements of the market are not to turn a newly bought machine into an expensive mistake. Such shifts in the market are felt clearly by and particularly in the food industry. That's why the possibility of retrofitting existing capacities and expanding a machine with additional functions plays a critical role when it comes to capital expenditure. Martin Böckle has no worries on that score with the QuickVac 2000. "There are enormous expansion possibilities: an automatic labeller could be connected, a film scanner, or an additional outlet facility for the goods. We could even attach a slicer if we so wanted." In addition to these possibilities, the manufacturer Komet offers circulating water cooling, a gassing system for packagings with modified atmosphere and numerous other options through to the remote transmission of the operating data, as used in large, digitally organised factories. Thanks to these options, the machine can be tailored to the individual requirements of the customer before it is even bought.

No space wasted

The compact dimensions of the QuickVac 2000 were a major purchase criterion in Martin Böckle's thinking. The machine itself measures 2450 millimetres, while the discharge chute adds another 500 millimetres. In width the machine comes to less than 800 millimetres and, together with tooling, weighs about 1000 kilograms. "You really can put it in any corner you like", notes Böckle about the dimensions. "We had been loo-

king around for a suitable thermoforming machine for a long time and had inspected some of the smaller machines available from other manufacturers. But even they were still at least four metres long. We were delighted with its size right from the start."

Given its compact size, anyone not wanting to install the machine at a fixed location will welcome the special steel castors on which the machine can be delivered as an option. They make flexible use and transportation to different operating facilities no problem at all.

Safety and ergonomomy

When it comes to occupational safety, the compactness of the machine is a definite advantage because there is no longer a need for lengthy running during the packaging process. Martin Böckle is thus happy to give the safety aspect his best mark of "Excellent", explaining that a light barrier means that crushing and injury while working directly with the machine are as good as ruled out.

As for ergonomomy, the fast and uncomplicated format changes and the ideal working height of 950 millimetres are a big plus point. The only nuisance factor is the high level of noise produced in film edge extraction. It should be remembered, however, that the Böckle is using the very first QuickVac 2000 of them all. The experience gained by Böckle and his staff with the machine has been incorporated into further developments, so that the loudness of the current machines has since been reduced to a more pleasant level.

Servicing and maintenance

There is a distance of some 200 kilometres between Probstried, the registered office of Landmetzgerei Böckle GmbH, and Plochingen, where Komet Maschinenfabrik GmbH is based. That gave Martin Böckle cause to think about a service contract to cover any breakdowns that might occur, because the relationship between time and money is always particularly noticed when a machine suddenly goes down. "Our servicing and maintenance is handled by a dealer who specialises in machines for butchers and is only based ten kilometres away from us." This dealer carries out maintenance work such as adjustments of the conveyor chains. Whenever problems did occur, however, Komet always enabled us to deal with them ourselves. "We cleared most things up by telephone and we always got through quickly to the right person on the phone", reports Böckle. "We're butchers and not mechanics, but we were still able to handle a lot of things to do with the machine ourselves." Böckle describes access to the interior workings of the machine as also being

quick and uncomplicated; the machine housing could be opened completely, allowing access to the mechanism without too much trouble.

Compact time-saver

"We should have had it earlier", is how Martin Böckle sums up his experience with the QuickVac 2000.

The most important selection criterion for him was the low space requirement of the automatic thermoforming machine. But the time and energy-saving handling, the PLC control and the short conversion times when changing format are also quality features which make the thermoforming machine a recommended buy from his point of view.

Conclusion

So beurteilt Fleischermeister Martin Böckle den Tiefziehautomaten Quick Vac 2000 der Komet Maschinenfabrik GmbH:

Operation and handling	+
Working speed	++
Familiarisation	+
Versatility	++
Material	+
Processing	+
Space requirement	++
Hygiene	++
Noise level	0
Maintenance/cleaning	++

++ = very good, + = good, 0 = moderate, - = poor
(Source: Fleischerei 7/8 2002))

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