

# GYS TAKES ON UK WITH PRICE PROMISE

Can the French market leader in battery charging and welding equipment make it in the UK? **Emma Butcher** asks Bruno Bouygues and Neil Pulsford about their plans



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**G**YS is the latest European company to make its way across the channel in a bid to capture a slice of the profitable UK aftermarket.

I met up with its CEO, Bruno Bouygues, at Equip Auto exhibition in Paris this autumn and found him brimming with enthusiasm for the company's latest venture.

Intense, measured and passionate about his company, which he runs with his father, Nicolas, he told me that GYS has enjoyed tremendous growth in France and in 2008 turned over an impressive 46 million euros, a 12 percent increase on 2007.

The GYS UK operation is still fledgling, opening as it did just 15 months ago. The subsidiary is based in Warwick where its warehouse, HQ and aftersales services are sited.

With just 3000 sq ft in warehouse space, Bouygues' strategy has been to start small and build up a solid base before expanding. "It is my motto that brands cannot swim," he says. "It will take time but it is important to start small, build a structure and then, when ready, to grow. Small is beautiful at the start."

The UK business is headed up by Neil Pulsford, a man many of CAT's readers will be familiar with, having been in the trade for 20 years and counting heavyweight companies,

including Euro Car Parts, Unipart and XPart among his previous employers.

So what is it that GYS is offering and what makes Bouygues and Pulsford believe that they can crack this competitive market?

A family-owned industrial group, GYS manufactures three portfolios of products, which at first glance seem incongruous: battery chargers, arc welding equipment and car body repair machines. But Bouygues explains that the concept behind the product mix is simple: "We take energy and convert it into

more space and facilities to support our growth. I can already tell you that we shall be moving during 2010."

GYS claims to be the market leader in France, with 75 percent market share across each product segment. In Germany the subsidiary has been able to take close to 20 percent market share, but can success on the continent be repeated here?

"I believe that GYS will bring a number of things to the UK aftermarket," says Pulsford. "Coming from the aftermarket sector, I was surprised to see that for a sector as large as battery

imported Chinese-made products. In the past, European products could justify a premium over a Chinese imported product but it has become harder for the distributor to sell this message. The current rule of the game for European manufacturers is that while we deliver European quality, we need to do so at a price that will sell. I think as a distributor it's a good focus for your supplier to have.

"When I was contacted by GYS to take the challenge to grow the company in the UK, it was too interesting to be missed. It is not often that a market leader in a sector that you know well contacts you to grow their business in your country. Now I have to deliver, wish me luck!"

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another form of energy."

The company was founded in 1964 but has been owned by the Bouygues family for the past 12 years. The pace of growth since then, says Bouygues, has been rapid.

"Twelve years ago, GYS employed 30 people. Now we employ 400 people and have a very large R&D spend with 30 people working in the department. The company has grown so fast — in 2008 alone we manufactured more than 250,000 machines."

You may already know the GYS brand — although the company has only had a physical presence here since October 2008, it has been selling product through importers for the last two years.

"With growing sales, it quickly became obvious that we needed a local presence to better commit to dealers and to provide local aftersales support and warehousing," says Pulsford.

"I joined the company during the spring of 2009 with an immediate priority to build a team and a strong infrastructure. We found very good premises in Warwick and have a team of nine people. We will soon need

chargers and starters and welding machines, the distributor had an unusually limited choice so I believe that the GYS proposition will be very appealing. Also, despite a tough economic environment, GYS as a group has been able to maintain its sales levels during 2009. As a subsidiary, it is great to know that I have the backing of an extremely strong company.

"I believe that the GYS culture is a strong asset for the aftermarket. It is very focussed — almost obsessed — on price and on how to stay competitive in very fast changing markets. This is very important for our distributors who need to be convinced that we give them a very competitive offer."

He continues: "In current markets, distributors need to be firmly convinced that new suppliers can help them win business by providing competitive products and maintaining their margin. This is important and we want to ensure that we do our utmost to engineer and manufacture products at the lowest price possible.

"Today much of our competition comes from

### AT A GLANCE GYS



**ESTABLISHED** 1964

**OWNERS** Father and son  
Nicolas and Bruno  
Bouygues

**UK MANAGER** Neil  
Pulsford (pictured)

**PRODUCTS** Battery  
chargers; arc welding  
equipment; car body repair  
machines

**HQ** Laval in France and  
Warwick in the UK

**T/OVER** £41m (approx)