

BY J. NEILAND PENNINGTON

**T**he month before the 9/11 terrorist attacks was not an auspicious time to launch a new business, but don't tell Pacific Toll Processing Inc. Although PTP opened its doors in Carson, Calif., in August 2001, four years later it is a thriving operation that recently expanded its facilities and embarked on a new enterprise.

PTP began, as its name indicates, strictly as a tolling house. Its specialty: Coil-to-coil slitting and inspection—coil mapping—of Class 1 exposed automotive body sheet. Its initial customer was Toyota Auto Body Corp. (TABC), located seven miles from Carson in Long Beach.

Tony Camasta, a veteran West Coast metals processor, is co-owner and president of PTP. His partner and executive vice

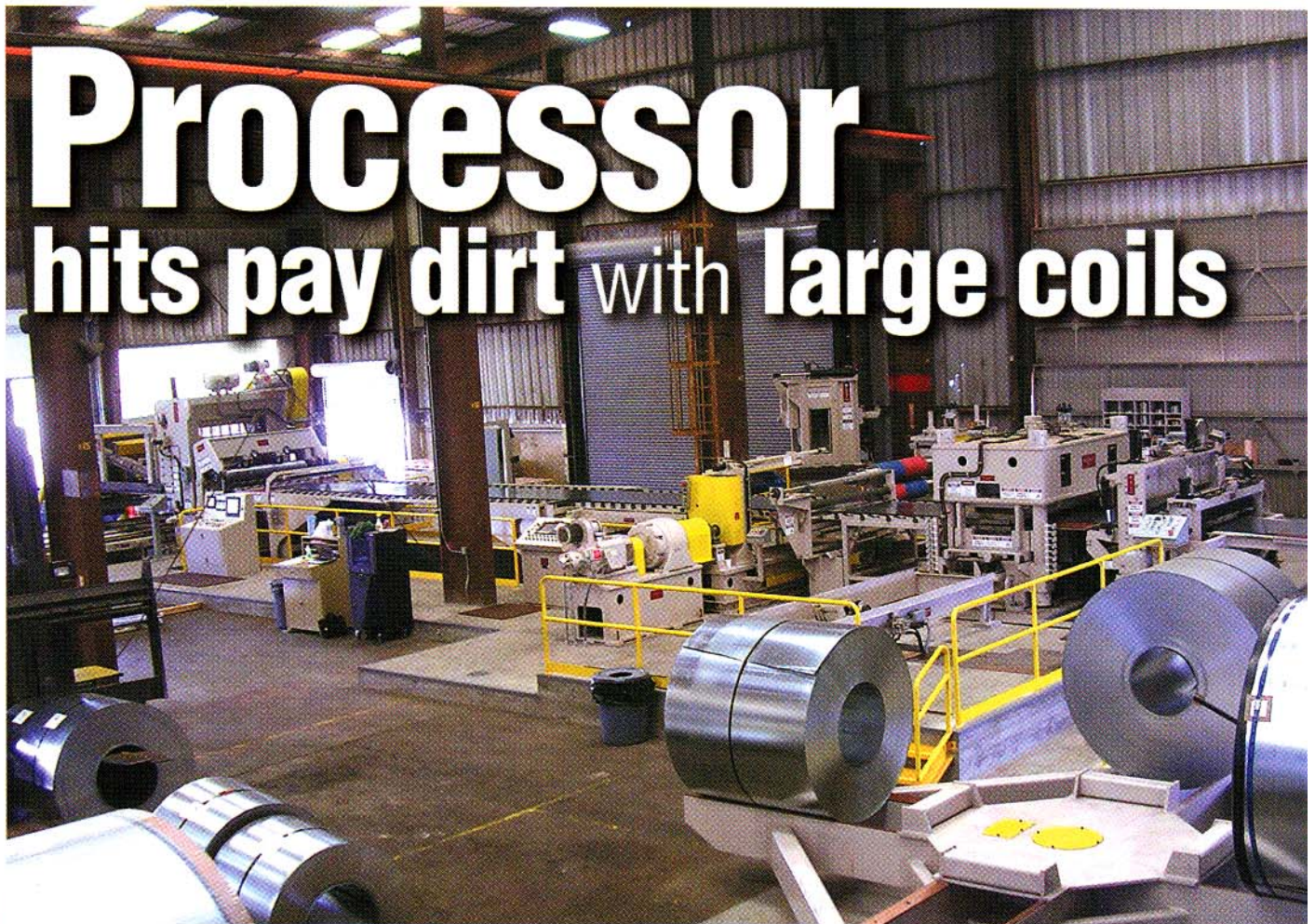
president is Mark Proner, who spent 15 years at Toyota Tsusho, the trading company that purchases materials and services for TABC. Add Proner's fluency in Japanese and the pair had just the qualifications for a supplier relationship with TABC.

The key word is "relationship"; Toyota doesn't award contracts. No business consultant recommends relying on a single customer, but Toyota provided the stability that saw the fledgling toll processor through the post-9/11 business downturn.

#### The automotive egg basket

That period was an admittedly anxious time for PTP, according to Camasta. "We had put all our eggs in the automotive basket," he acknowledges, "and we didn't know what

Pacific Toll Processing has progressed from tolling specialist to distributor and from a single account to diverse markets, all in four years



The uncoiler on Pacific Toll Processing's Braner multiple-cut blanking line has both top and bottom unwind to place the A-side of the strip either up or down. Leveler cassettes with 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch and 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch diameter work rolls cover Pacific's full thickness range.

would happen to the economy, the financial health of our region and of the United States.

"If the economy sours, people aren't going to buy cars, and buying cars is what our business is built on. Business went soft, but Toyota remained strong. In six months we had maxed out our slitting and inspection capacity, running two shifts."

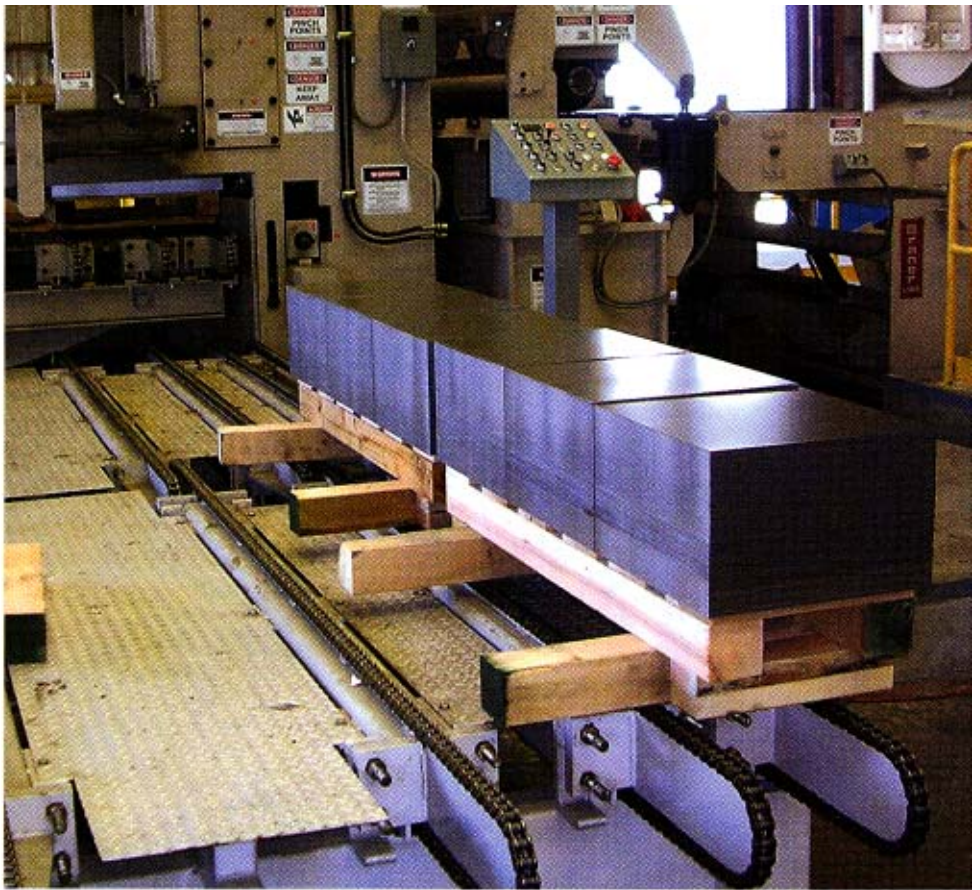
PTP's strategy was to build large-coil capabilities to meet the needs of both the auto industry and the steel mills and provide capacity that had been lacking in the Los Angeles area. It started with a 100,000-square-foot metal building on 10.6 acres that afforded rail access and proximity to both the Port of Long Beach and major freeways.

The structure is built with wide bays and has the capability of handling high-capacity overhead cranes, both necessary for processing heavyweight coils. That sort of building isn't readily available in Southern California, according to Camasta. Municipalities are generally not approving steel industrial structures, preferring tilt-up concrete construction. Tilt-ups may be considered aesthetically more pleasing, but they don't readily accommodate the needed bays and cranes.

Camasta sought the assistance of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, whose logistics staff and real estate people found the early 1970s steel building with an adjacent rail spur. Camasta extended the siding into the building for undercover loading and unloading of up to four cars at a time.

Two existing 10-ton cranes were removed, and six new Demag overheads were installed: one 40-ton mill-duty; two 32-ton; and one each 25-ton, 20-ton and 15-ton. Toyota wanted to ship coils weighing more than 50,000 pounds to maximize freight rates coming into California.

According to Camasta, Los Angeles-area processors generally work with coils no larger than 20,000 pounds. So Toyota's procedure had been to process coils in the Midwest, where higher capacities were available. PTP provides



**Separators on the multi-blank stacker are set up with a touch-screen PLC controlling servomotors, and the stacker has on-the-fly part rejection. A laminator applies protective PVC film or paper.**

Midwestern-scale capabilities, allowing master coils to be broken down locally to meet TABCO's weight limit of 5.2 metric tons.

#### **The wish-list line**

Camasta wanted his slitting and inspection line to be attractive to steel producers as well, so he enlisted the aid of a millman in specifying the equipment. "When we planned the line I got together with the technical staff of a Midwestern steel producer," Camasta says. "I asked them if they could have anything they wanted on a slitting line, what would they request. They made up a wish list, and we designed our line around it."

Getting high priority was large capacity. PTP's Brainer USA slitting line is 72-inches wide and has a weight limit of 70,000 pounds. The 84-inch high pass line provides a maximum coil OD of 90 inches and the thickness range is 0.010 inch to 0.250 inch.

The slitting line is a double-loop design but requires only one looping pit, between the slitter head and rewind tension stand. An electronic sensor

controlling a free loop replaces the pit that traditionally follows the uncoiler. The high pass line allows a larger loop at the unwind end and reduced the depth of the rewind pit by about 5 feet.

Double-loop slitting is ideal for surface-critical material, particularly if it's thin, says Douglas Matsunaga, president of Brainer USA. "With a double loop, the slitter isn't pulling the strip off the uncoiler. There's no tension on the strip as it passes through the slitter. When light-gauge material runs with a single loop, it's possible that the tension will cause the strip to pucker before it enters the knives. With a double loop there is no tension, so the material lies flat going into the slitter.

"A single loop is more efficient for material that isn't surface-critical," he continues. "With a single loop, we pull off the uncoiler with the slitter. The downside is that if the surface is oily, the slitter may skid on the strip. With the knives and stripper rings spinning on the material, it's possible to damage the surface."

Up to 90 percent of the metal PTP processes for Toyota is galvalume, and

all of TABC's material is considered surface-critical. So another idea from the mill engineers minimized roll contact with the strip. The high pass line places the guide rolls under the metal so they don't contact the exposed side of the strip.

The line also eliminates metal-to-metal contact with the drive. The tension rolls are 65-durometer polyurethane with a crepe finish that generates more grip on oily surfaces than smooth rolls.

The tension rolls are used only for Class 1 material. For metal that isn't surface-critical, drag pads provide rewind tension. Equipping the line with both devices was purely economic, according to Matsunaga. He notes that using pads where possible reduces wear on the tension rolls, whose cost is high compared to pads.

### A longer marketing reach

Toyota remains a major client, but PTP's toll processing has expanded into work for mills, service centers and trading companies—including recovery and salvage services for insurance claims on damaged coils. Camasta estimates that 50 percent of PTP's slitting is for Toyota and the mills. The balance is a mix of distributors and trading companies, along with the building products and appliance industries.

Tolling is no longer PTP's only business. Just two weeks before we interviewed Tony Camasta, he flipped the switch on a multi-cut blanking line that complements the capabilities of the slitting installation. The blanking line is also by Braner and has a 72-inch width capacity. The thickness range is somewhat narrower, from 0.015 inch to 0.135 inch, and the maximum coil weight is 60,000 pounds.

With the multi-blanking line comes PTP's debut as a distributor. It is now purchasing metal and stocking its own lines of blanks.

"We decided to go into a sales program for multi-blanking," Camasta explains. "We are doing some tolling on the new line, but it's primarily a sales tool.

"The market for blanks on the West Coast is quite large," he adds. "We're promoting the multi-blanking line to stampers and roll formers."

PTP is a service center for blanks but will remain exclusively a toll processor for slit coils. Camasta fears alienating his existing coil distributor clients by becoming a competitor. PTP has in the past sold master coils but not processed material.

Although the multi-blanking line was planned to diversify PTP and reduce its reliance on the auto industry, it was Toyota that spurred the project's completion. And Toyota was responsible for many of the features built into the line.

Just as plans for the multi-blanking line were being formulated, TABC's own blanking capability went down. Its management met with Camasta and requested that he consider an expansion into blanking so TABC would have backup capacity. As a result, PTP's line was built to meet Toyota's needs.

### Accuracy and speed combine

An obvious requirement is accuracy combined with speed. A microprocessor-controlled AC servo feed with a mechanical pull-down guillotine shear produce a length tolerance of  $\pm 0.005$  inch at 100 cycles per minute with the maximum 0.135-inch thickness. The slit width tolerance is  $\pm 0.002$  inch.

The line is engineered for the auto industry's high-strength steels. At 0.135-inch thickness, yield strengths up to 50 ksi can be run; it's 75 ksi for 0.075-inch.

Line setups are fast. The slitting section can be tooled in 15 minutes or less, using shimless knives with lightweight ( $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick wall) precision-ground spacers. Computer software provides the size and installation sequence for the knives and spacers, based on material gauge, width of each mult and the horizontal knife clearances.

The two-head turret slitter allows off-line setup while the line is working. Knives and spacers are locked onto the slitter arbors with an internal hydraulic clamp activated by a push-button

Camasta emphasizes that slitting heads in both the coil-to-coil and multi-blanking lines use what he terms "true slitting technology." Many of the other coil processors in the area run CNC slitters that don't have rubber stripper rings, he points out. "With lighter gauges, the unsupported strip tends to cup. Our heads hold the material flat."

### Keep it flat

Flatness is also a function of the line's cassette-type precision roll leveler that features automatic calibration. "Over time, resurfacing work rolls reduces their diameters," says Braner's Matsunaga. "As the rolls become smaller, the instruments that read roll penetration have to be recalibrated.

"Manual calibration can take two to three hours," he continues. "On our machine the operator presses the calibrate button to close the work rolls and read the roll diameters. The procedure takes about five minutes, and the readouts are zeroed so the rolls can be set at the correct starting point."

Tony Camasta tends to call his company PTP rather than Pacific Toll Processing, a reflection of the expanded capabilities and marketing strategy. And he makes no secret about his ambition for the firm.

"I believe we are by far the largest-capacity coil processor in the Los Angeles area in width, weight and OD," he states. "With our facilities we have raised the bar for coil processing on the West Coast, and anyone who wants to compete with us will have to match our equipment.

"Every penny this company has made in its first four years of existence has been plowed back into personnel and machinery. We're becoming a force to be reckoned with." ■

---

**Braner USA Inc.**, Schiller Park, IL  
Phone: 847/671-6210, Fax: 847/671-0537  
www.braner.com

**Pacific Toll Processing, Inc.**, Carson, CA  
Phone: 310/952-4992, Fax: 310/952-9221

Reprint of July 2005 "Modern Metals"  
magazine article