

A look through the tube: More quality stainless steel hollow

Founded in Lahti, Finland in 1972, Stalutube OY is a manufacturer of diverse and highly developed stainless steel hollow sections. The company says their range of square and rectangular tubes is the largest in the world. Stalutube first began production as a manufacturer of fixed pieces of kitchen equipment. Starting with kitchen sinks, Stala began to see a need for industrial-size sinks for commercial kitchens. For the larger sinks, a stainless steel supporting structure was required. This led to the start of tube production in 1974.

"We started in kitchen equipment and began shortly after to specialize in tubing. The company quickly grew from kitchen equipment to a tube mill," said President of Stalutube Incorporated, David Stone.

This past December, the company celebrated its 40th anniversary of its mill in Finland.

By Steven Keddy

Beginnings

In 1998, Stalutube OY came overseas and opened its North American sales division, Stalutube Inc.

"Our main functions here at Stalutube Incorporated are as the sales arm of Stalutube OY for the United States and Canada," said President of Stalutube Inc., David Stone. "We handle the sales of everything from solicitations to handling the back and forth in negotiations, all facets of the sales and marketing for the U.S. and Canada."

The U.S. branch also handles the coordination of all the imports from Lahti, Finland, to every corner of the United States and Canada.

"Fundamentally, we are a seller to distributors and master distributors in this part of North America. Our customer base is distributors, we're not selling to the end-users or the manufacturers of product," said Stone. "Canada has been a nice market for us, although it's much smaller than the United States, we've found the same kind of following. I think that our forte and our niche are still very well appreciated north of the border here." A few years ago, Stalutube added a depot in New Jersey for existing customers who are already buying from the mill.

"If the customer needs something very quickly, we can't always predict what that may be," said Stone. "Hopefully the sizes here can hold customers over if they come up with an unexpected need that they didn't have placed with the mill."

This year, Stalutube Incorporated will hit its 15th anniversary in the U.S.

Stalutube specializes in square and rectangular welded stainless tubes in a wide range of sizes.

"Our size range is the most vast of any mill in the world making these two commodities; the square and rectangular tubes. Our size range now is by far and away the largest we've made, well over 1,000 sizes and it's still growing," said Stone. "We've added some sizes just in the last six months and we've started pretty small tubes: one-inch square 16-gauge and its rectangular equivalent, all the way up to, very large, 40-inch square or equivalent in rectangles with up to a 5/8-inch wall."

Stone says that Stalutube's niche has always been with the larger walls.



"When we came into the market back in the nineties, there was definitely a need for particularly high quality larger tubes, larger than the tubes that would be considered almost commodity tubes," he explained. "So when we made our name and our way in this market back then, our strengths were the larger tubes dimensionally and the thicker walls. That is what made us, and is what set us apart from our competitors."

Stalutube also produces smaller tubes with smaller dimensions and thinner walls, which are mostly sold for their high esthetic value.



"Architectural design engineers often really appreciate the physical quality of the material, but also the visual, cosmetic aspect," said Stone. "Even though these are structural tubes, the design

strength and high fire resistance also offers considerable advantages over carbon steel in all kinds of structures.

Ferritic stainless tubes have proven to be a good alternative to mild steel, as it has better strength properties, structural corrosion resistance, low need for maintenance and low life-cycle cost.

Stalutube also offers a large range of tailor-made tubes. The square and rectangular tubes are made of two welded U or J-profiles, which are pickled after manufacturing. The company also offers customized laser cutting, fast delivery and therefore easier assembly on site.

Cold formed and welded lean duplex tubes feature low nickel ratio and very high strength, which enables lighter constructions.

Lean duplex is ideal for construction, transportation, process machinery and applications, where high strength, corrosion resistance and low life cycle costs are needed.

engineers really appreciate what the tubes themselves look like."

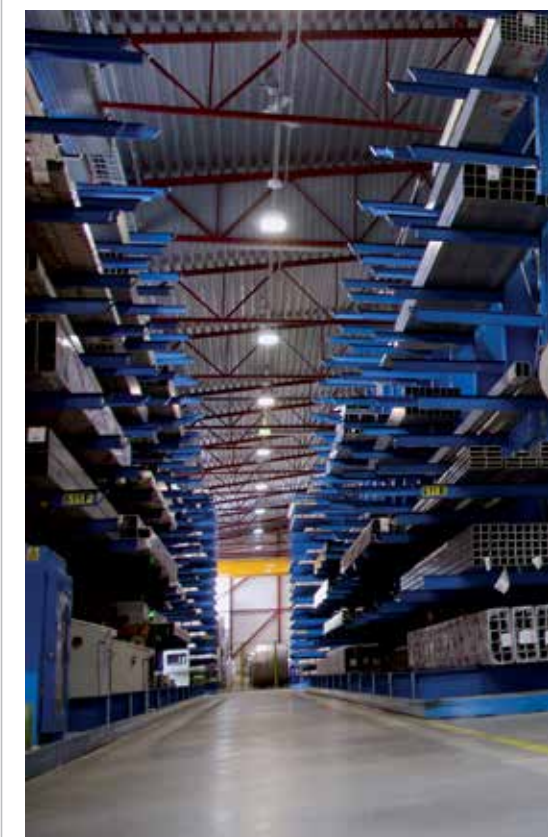
The industries that Stalutube typically sells to are in food processing, pharmaceuticals, energy, transport engineering and process machinery.

Grades

Stalutube offers its tubes in a wide selection of stainless steel grades including 304L, 316L and duplex grades.

"We're beginning to work with some ferritics in North America. Right now we're working on new grades and growth in these new grades, particularly duplex," said Stone. "We've been trying 316L ever since we were in the market, but we do see the need and the demand for 316L and duplex growing."

Stainless steel tubes are ideal for many applications because each industry has its own codes. Corrosion resistance is a priority in marine environments, the aesthetic and self-repairing properties are appreciated in architecture, and the hygienic advantages of stainless steel are vital in the food and beverage industry. The combination of



than 40 years making sections at Stalatable

Product range:

Square hollow section
1x1x0.060 – 12x12x0.500 inch,
20x20x1.2 – 300x300x12 mm
Rectangular hollow section
1.5x1x0.060 – 16x8x0.500 inch,
30x20x1.2 – 400x200x12 mm



"There's been interest in assembled products and semi-assembled products like chassis or coaches or joints. We see a lot more curiosity and inquiry on these types of things," said Stone. "Our mill is very keen on some new grades, potentially semi-produced, semi-assembled products and also custom sizes and custom shapes."

With Stalatable's mill being in Finland, they work in metric everyday and it's one of the reasons why their size range is so much larger than its competition.

"We absolutely are seeing the need for metric and we are perfectly positioned to



Quality & Speed

Stalatable ships from Finland to the United States in less than three months from order to delivery.

"We are considered to be the very top level of a package offered. We have very consistent prompt delivery and it's not so easy considering the mill is in Finland," said Stone. "We've managed to speed the lead-times up further and further. Typically, to many locations in the United States and Canada, lead-time is less than three months. As a matter of fact, our lead-time is sometimes a few weeks less than three months from order to delivery and Finland works on expediting these deliveries, making these lead-times even quicker."

Stalatable has a strong reputation for having consistently prompt delivery of high quality tubes to the tube market. Stalatable has never missed a month delivering to the United States since they first came into the market.

"It means the mill is on the ball, not missing shipments, not having any major

delays that would cause us to miss a month," explained Stone. "We've worked very hard on our delivery network. Once a customer places an order here in North America, they don't have to watch out for anything to happen, the order is on autopilot. After an order is placed, it's expedited automatically. We have a wonderful logistics team who've really worked hard and diligently year after year to see however they can to speed up these deliveries."

Expansion

Stalatable is a company that is constantly expanding. The tube mill in Lahti, Finland is continually growing. A couple of years ago, Stalatable bought a state of the art slitter and also bought Outokumpu's square and rectangular tube line. The machinery from that line has been moved from another part of Finland and has been incorporated into the facility in Lahti.

The company sees itself continuing to grow.

Challenges

Just like with most companies, Stone says that one of the main challenges for Stalatable is uncertain economic times.

"It's just like in any other business, if you're not so sure where the world is going to

be able to accommodate those needs," Stone concluded.

With over 40 years as a leader in the stainless steel tube industry, Stalatable will continue to grow and expand with prompt service, delivering high quality tubes all over the world.



be in 10 to 12 weeks, you may want to pay a little bit more to get something much quicker. We ran into this certainly back with the economic crisis a few years ago," he explains. "It is self evident that when people are feeling good about the economy, if they're sure countries are on a certain path, they're more confident with a lead-time from offshore."

Down the tube

Looking toward the future, Stone says that one thing that there is going to be a need for is metric tubing here in North America. "One or two years ago you might see one inquiry a year for metric. The need here in the U.S. was nearly non-existent. I would go out and solicit for metric tubing and their either wasn't the need or there wasn't the capability to buy full container loads of metric, or even close to that, but we're seeing metric inquiries maybe every week now," said Stone. "It has a lot to do with European parent companies whose subsidiaries are here in the U.S."

Facts

- The company still has a kitchen/sink equipment business called Stala.
- The name Stala is a combination of Stainless (Sta) and Lahti (la).
- Lahti is located about an hour north of Helsinki in Finland.
- The company has locations in Finland, Holland, India and the United States.
- Stalatable exports from Finland to over 40 countries.
- The company was founded by Reino Rajamäki.

