

Century Yuasa approaches a century of manufacturing

Shining a spotlight on Century Yuasa Batteries – the only Australian Made automotive battery manufacturer – **Alexandra Cooper** speaks exclusively with the general manager of operations, Matthieu Anquetil and discovered how the manufacturer has attained a steady stream of success for so many years.

ACCORDING to a recent report released by the Future Battery Industries Cooperative Research Centre (FBICRC), the independent not-for-profit's aim is to create a diversified battery industry in Australia worth \$7.4 billion in value annually, and support over 34,000 jobs by 2030.

"Australia has a strong value proposition in meeting the rapidly growing demand for batteries, and a desire to diversify supply chains and to demonstrate high standards of ESG performance," FBICRC chief executive officer, Stedman Ellis, said in the report.

Spanning a deep 93-year history, Century Yuasa Batteries is not only the oldest battery manufacturer

in Australia but also the only fully Australian Made automotive battery manufacturer.

From humble beginnings in Sydney in 1928, Century Yuasa Batteries has now expanded across Australia and into New Zealand. Its facility in Brisbane currently produces around 1.2 million vehicle batteries per year, which are both designed and manufactured for a range of applications – such as car, 4x4s, trucks, marine, caravans and defence – and tailored to the specific needs of the consumer and intended application.

This also means tailoring the batteries to harness diverging Australian climates.

"We design our products

to be especially tailored to the Australian market, inclusive of Australian conditions and Australian consumers," Century Yuasa general manager of operations, Matthieu Anquetil, said.

"We go from a temperate climate in Melbourne to a more tropical one in Darwin. Usually that's a different environment for the battery; and whether it's for a deep cycle application, marine application, your day-to-day metro run, or long-haul trucks around Australia, all these products require specific attention and a different mix of elements inside the batteries."

Beginning with raw materials sourced from around Australia, the batteries are produced by making plates that make up the anodes and cathodes. The plates are made of a mesh which is made from different types of lead alloys, where an active material is applied. This includes lead oxide, acid, and different elements depending on the intended application.

"If you think about what goes into manufacturing batteries, the key raw materials are lead, acid and polypropylene. On their own, they don't mean much. But by putting them through a range of processes, transforming them, mixing them with a range of additives, you end up after a week with a finished product which essentially is, electricity in a box. I find this pretty exciting!"

With different applications, Anquetil says it's all about what goes inside the box. This refinement has been achieved through decades of local product testing and development.

"It's a fine balance, because



The Century Yuasa facility in Brisbane produces 1.2 million vehicle batteries per year.



Century Yuasa general manager of operations, Matthieu Anquetil, with the new plate making machine.

ultimately, the end user would like everything – more cranking, more cycling, more vibration. But you can't have everything," he said.

"One will have to compromise the other and that's why it's all about fine tuning to get the best of all worlds for the end user, based on their application. That's why we have different types of batteries that we market for marine applications, truck applications, four-wheel drives or your normal day to day school runs."

Australian Made

In a celebration of their longstanding company values, Century Yuasa was



officially branded with the Australian Made logo this year in October. The Australian Made logo can only be used on products that are registered with the not-for-profit, Australian Made Campaign Ltd (AMCL). They also must meet the criteria set out in the Australian Consumer Law and the Australian Made, Australian Grown (AMAG) Logo Code of Practice.

The company is also recognised as an Australian Border Force Australian Trusted Trader. Century Yuasa works in partnership with Australian businesses to secure borders and supply chains, facilitate legitimate trade and accredit

Australian businesses with compliant trade practices.

Despite its challenges, Anquetil finds maintaining the reputation as an Australian Made manufacturer rewarding.

“All the lead we buy comes from Australia, primarily from South Australia and New South Wales. The plastic components come from a local supplier down the road in Logan, the acid is produced in Australia as well – all the core components are Australian.

“Our local sourcing policy and 93-year Australian heritage is what really made our partnership with the

Australian Made campaign such a great fit.”

A new production record

Anquetil is passionate about providing opportunities to the local community and maintaining a high standard with regard to internal responsibility, providing skilled labour employees with both a good work environment and a sustainable one.

“It’s not all about creating new jobs, which we have done a lot of in the past two years, but it’s also keeping them and making them sustainable in the long run – that’s

absolutely fundamental for us,” he said.

“This means always making sure we put a lot of effort into upskilling and training all the new recruits and making sure that we can keep them for the long run.”

Creating and preserving a safe work environment is a high priority for Century Yuasa.

“I think the regulations in Australia are probably some of the toughest in the world when it comes to the health, safety and environment,” Anquetil said. “And that’s a great thing, because it means that everything we’re doing has to

Manufacturer Focus

Century Yuasa Batteries marketing manager automotive (Australia & New Zealand), Andrew Bottoms, celebrating the made in Australia commitment.



be world class in terms of battery manufacturing.”

A focus on employee retention and looking after their skilled workers led to Century Yuasa hitting a production record in March this year around their rotary plate making line. The manufacturer began mass production with equipment commissioned through a \$7 million capital investment project focused on improving factory efficiencies, equipment utilisation and quality consistency.

This resulted in a 58 per cent growth in production.

“In October 2020, we added a night shift on one line in our assembly group that created about 11 new positions,” Anquetil said. “Then later on in February 2021, we added another night shift in our charging facility – and that was another seven people. On top of that, we had to increase our coverage in engineering, quality and maintenance.

“The record in March 21 was the result of a ramp up after commissioning our investment on the new line in July 20. We reached that maturity in March and were able to hit that all time high throughout the whole factory. Now it’s only onward and upward.”

From strength to strength

As many manufacturers experienced, COVID-19 continued to present

difficulties for businesses with regard to persistent lockdowns and supply chain issues. Century Yuasa Batteries was no exception.

“COVID-19 gave us a lot of challenges within the business and having to be responsive about what the regulators and government authorities wanted businesses to do,” Anquetil said.

“I’m extremely proud of the team I’m working with – everyone stepped up. We’ve put a lot of measures in place to protect the Century community and make sure they were working in a safe environment; that was number one. I think our biggest strength has been to really stick together with the executive team with daily calls and daily meetings, being responsive to anything coming our way.”

The battery manufacturer also had unforeseen reactions from the domestic market during 2021, where there was a sudden uptake in demand. Anquetil believes this may have come down to a combination of factors, including the global shortage of semiconductor chips and the impact that had on the automotive industry.

“All the car manufacturers around the world couldn’t produce enough for global demand, and we saw a lack of imports of new cars in Australia,” Anquetil said.

During lockdown people were

simply not using their cars as much and when they did it was for short journeys which meant the battery wasn’t being recharged sufficiently by the alternator, resulting in a surge in battery failures. On top of this COVID-19 brought about a major shift in peoples’ attitude towards public transport, creating strong demand for used cars and the flow on effect for batteries.

This increase in demand also highlighted some of the extremes that occurred in their global supply chain over the decades.

“It just highlighted that fragile balance that we’ve got in our global supply chain,” Anquetil said. “Hopefully that has triggered a lot of people to think a bit more carefully about the best way to do business and support manufacturing in Australia.

“We’ve got a team that is extremely strong on the fundamentals and allows us to react to anything – including a pandemic that no one could plan.”

Another strength that saw the Century Yuasa team through the challenges of the year was the ability to retain the vital connections with their customers and suppliers.

“Obviously, the face-to-face meetings were restricted for a couple of years. But in the end when you have a relationship which is so robust and goes so deep into the roots, you can tap into that and go through the

crisis together without having any face-to-face meetings,” Anquetil said.

“Historically, the distribution and sales network are so embedded in the whole Australian and New Zealand footprint, meaning we have a deep connection not only with customers but end users. To me, we have witnessed how critical it is to have strong partnerships with both customers and suppliers. We’ve had a fantastic team effort during this pandemic.”

Charging up for 2022

In preparation for the coming year, Century Yuasa has several projects on the horizon that will ensure sustained growth of the business for the long term.

One of these is centred on increasing manufacturing capabilities in the assembly area, having invested in a new intercell welder. Another project will focus on relocating equipment and creating new space with either building extensions or a new building that will facilitate expansion.

However, the chief of these is a pilot project that will help to define and design the next step for Century Yuasa.

“We already have a pilot project in the pipeline for next year, where we’ll invest around \$1 million on really focusing on the way we charge batteries. We want to bring that to a whole new level,” Anquetil said.

“That will include all the elements to experiment, trial and design Century Yuasa’s next large-scale project. We have some very ambitious plans, and this pilot project is the right first step to confirm our next moves.”

This will entail looking at the project from a high level to both increase the capacity and quality of the vehicle batteries, while aiming to insulate the business’ success for another 93 years and beyond.

“We always use these opportunities to increase the compliance aspect and make the whole factory absolutely fit for purpose for the long run,” Anquetil said. “There’s still a lot of aspects we can tap into to bring us to the next level in performance and quality.” **M**

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