

SEALED UNIT MANUFACTURING

A TOUR OF THE MODERN PRODUCTION FACILITY OF PROFILGLASS **THE SPACER SUCCESS STORY**

Thermoseal continues to improve year on year sales of spacer bar, working closely with its supplier of 15 years, Profilglass. **By Dominic Bentham**

A good distributor can make significant gains in market share, given the right product and supplier relationship. This has certainly been the case for **Thermoseal**, which for over 15 years has sourced its aluminium spacer bar, Georgian bar and accessories from the Italian manufacturer **Profilglass**.

Both operations have visibly grown over the years, and Profilglass is now making two deliveries per week to Thermoseal's new headquarters and distribution centre. The Birmingham based supplier of machinery and i.g. consumables now has branches in Leigh (near Manchester), Kent and Belfast.

Over to Italy

Profilglass, a €70 million turnover company, is an aluminium specialist, also producing aluminium tube and discs for cookware bases. This modern facility at Fano, near Rimini, boasts its own powder coating plant and aluminium melting furnace, for controllability over raw materials.

Thermoseal managing director Gwain Patterson, sales director Mark Hickox, and regional sales managers recently visited Profilglass in May to see the production processes for themselves. The two companies have worked together over many years to improve product quality, often looking at the minutest details.

Sales staff gained valuable product knowledge on this visit, which is one of the goals of the Investors in People Standard that Thermoseal gained two years ago.



The Thermoseal team at Profilglass, L-R: Phil Middleton, Debbie Cloake, Colin Cook, Susanna Omicioli (Profilglass), Mark Hickox, Fabiana Aiudi (Profilglass), Gwain Patterson, Alan Hyde, Steve Massey, and Norman Cameron



Above: Aluminium ingots are loaded into a moulding furnace and fed out as 4mm strip, kept in 2 metre diameter rolls. Pressed again to 3 microns thick, strips are made into spacer bar on nine-station forming machines, packed with care by hand and boxed in stillages ready for delivery

How do they do it?

Rolls of 4mm thick aluminium produced from ingots are pressed down to a thickness of 3 microns, then cut into strips. Spacer bar is made on a nine-step forming machine, which performs induced friction welding. A further three stations on the machine are for calibration, one of which passes an electric current through the bar to check the weld. Profilglass has 17 spacer forming lines.

Extensive tests are made to ensure traceability back to the production batch and raw material. Among these are tests for the right level of perforation, air pressure drop tests and a liquid spray test to check for points of microporosity. Consistency ensures dessicant life. Adhesion and ageing tests are also carried out with various sealants.

Spacer bar is made in standard or bendable versions, available mill finished, anodised or painted, in a selection of widths. 19.5mm is currently the most popular bar in the UK. Care in packing is crucial, to avoid scratched and bent bars. At

Profilglass, bar is packed manually with paper dividers into boxes, which are in turn stacked in stillages. Thermoseal splits its bulk deliveries to supply regional branches with its fleet of side-liner vehicles, eventually aiming to use a bar coding system to track stock nationwide.

Georgian bar

Profilglass has a separate factory on the same site for manufacturing Georgian bar, and corner keys and other accessories by injection moulding. This includes one of the world's largest vertical powder coating plants, and presses for moulding corner keys and accessories.

By working with Profilglass, Thermoseal aims to further improve the sales and market share of its spacer bar in the UK. Most importantly, customers are happy – Thermoseal more than doubled its deliveries of spacer bar in the first four months of 2002.

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