

Making it in Leeds

News from Leeds Manufacturing

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Barkston in fire engineering deal with John Dennis

Engineering specialists at a Leeds company are pioneering fabrication in a material new to the UK for the manufacture of fire engine bodies that are safer, lighter, stronger and more durable.

Barkston Plastics engineers were chosen by Guildford-based coach builders John Dennis to co-operate on the production of the bodies in the co-polymer Polybilt, in place of the traditional glass fibre and aluminium.

The Surrey company is the UK market leader in fire and rescue vehicle coach-building and also supplies fire services across the world. It has exclusive UK rights for the material that has been used by the US Fire Department for the past ten years.

Additional advantages of Polybilt include improved impact-resistance and ease of repair, compared with the traditional glass fibre and aluminium.

In the past 18 months Barkston has supplied some 80 fire engine bodies and the order book stretches ahead to put Polybilt fire engine bodies in towns across the nation.

Barkston Operations Director, Mark Carter said: "The co-polymer used in PolyBilt has a unique combination of compressive strength and flexibility giving it superb impact resistance. This translates in the field to little or no damage when impacting street furniture and walls. Even in a high speed collision, there is no shock transfer through the body, keeping damage to a minimum.

"It is also highly heat resistant, meaning vehicle paint will ignite and tyres melt before it is even affected. The design incorporates an integral water tank which delivers a host of operational and safety advantages for fire and rescue crews."

According to Mr Carter, financial advantages of the new body include lower running costs and a remarkably long operational life of up to 40 years, plus a re-mountable option for a "second life" and totally recyclable raw materials.

"John Dennis is the recognised leader in the field of fire and rescue vehicle coach-building and we're delighted to be co-operating on this exiting new development," said Mr. Carter.

Leeds City Council chief economic services officer Paul Stephens said: "This new venture with the UK's leading fire engine manufacturer is testimony to Barkston's impressive track record in developing new materials and uses for plastic fabrication. This is a highly innovative company and a great Leeds manufacturing success story."

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Photography: Barkston plastic welders David Davies (foreground) and Darren Redmond (background), working on a Polybilt fire engine body.