At the onset of the 1990s, the camping tube industry had experienced a slowdown due to the encroaching competition from the East and the trend toward adopting fiberglass as the material of choice. As a result, TUBAZUR needed to branch out in order to remain in the business. Changing their core business to include being a subcontractor for other industrial sectors was not only risky, it also required a company-wide reorganization and sizeable investments.

Not only did TUBAZUR have to display substantial flexibility, the company also needed to divorce itself from the old notions of producing a unique product and relying on a limited number of core customers. In addition, major improvements in product quality were in store for them. Reshuffling internal roles, new employee education and active commercial approach were all part of the challenge. In 1998, Jean-Charles Barbier joined the company and followed in his father’s footsteps, who himself started out by buying out a former associate. Barbier started out as quality manager and worked his way up to the position of general manager in 2003.

The first Romer arm bought second-hand

The first foray into the articulated arm arena took place in 2002. TUBAZUR, along with two other regional companies, Société Aremeca in Vendôme and Fonderie Lajoinie in St. Firmin des Prés, purchased a legacy pre-owned System 6 Romer arm. The requirements placed on the metrology equipment included dimensional tool inspection, but the skepticism was high, especially due to the high price associated with metrology solutions. The management needed to justify such a substantial investment, especially whether it would offer the required flexibility and the ease of use. All three companies shared the same concerns. Consequently, all three decided to go with the pre-owned arm that was both portable and required only minimal installation. In doing so, they shared the investment and the risk burden.

The initial results and the degree of satisfactions differed among the three. For Société Aremeca, specializing in mechanical precision, the measurement results did not meet the...
accuracy requirements. On the other hand, Lajoinie, a foundry, immediately started reaping the benefits of articulated arm use. The company was conducting complex surface measurements and got proficient at using the Romer articulated arm quickly. Thanks to the G-Surf software, the foundry was now able to compare CAD data to actual measurements, analyze the discrepancies and implement corrections right there on the spot.

Barbier remembers the initial reservations about the articulated arm's utilization in tube measurement. At the beginning, measurements were made with a ball-point because of budgetary constraints preventing the acquisition of a non-touching probe. In addition, the arm they purchased back then had a limited radius and required frequent repositioning. Plus, there was the issue of shared ownership of the arm.

Looking back, this intermediate solution was beneficial for TUBAZUR because the company could get its feet wet in articulated arm use. Based on the many positive experiences amassed with the first Romer arm, the company decided in 2006 to purchase a modern, brand-new articulated arm from Romer.

Barbier explains: “Many of our clients own a Romer arm themselves, so the fact that we own one as well puts their fears about accuracy to rest. The articulated arm purchase has enabled us to expand into the growing automotive sector, offering more direct cooperation with our clients.” Nowadays, it is extremely important to always have the right tools that can be adapted swiftly to the clients’ ever-changing needs. In addition, Romer’s geographical proximity and the excellent after-sales service give both TUBAZUR and its customers a peace of mind.

All types of users—from the bending technician, workshop technician with a metrology background, all the way to the quality manager and the CAD technician—all appreciate the simplicity of using the Romer articulated arm, especially the G-PAD software and the associated multifunctionality. The arm is being used to check the control tools, the assembly and welding equipment and to validate externally acquired components. For the time being, TUBAZUR still uses a control model for large pieces. “The arm will soon become a pure control tool in the production, with its integration into the production being done gradually,” Barbier points out.

TUBAZUR’s product line is bound to get more complex in the future, integrating welded fobs as well as surface treatment into its standard offerings. The final product will be subassemblies ready for integration into more complex units, thanks to the trend toward outsourcing practiced by many TUBAZUR clients. Barbier continues: “Future partnerships or even company acquisitions both in France and abroad are a distinct possibility. TUBAZUR is a good example of a company that saw the wisdom of investing in cutting-edge technologies in order to survive and prosper in the ever-changing global marketplace.”