

Local maker a global winner for the long run



The modern economy might be alive with business ‘start-ups’, but one family-owned business has stayed the course for almost 60 years manufacturing enclosures for horse racing tracks from one plant just outside of Adelaide using Australian-made hollow sections to become the world’s foremost supplier of starting gates.

It was back in 1958 when **Lindsay Sims** was approached by the Murray Bridge Racing Club in South Australia as a manufacturer of steel enclosures for the rural community with an image of an American horse race starting stall and was asked if he thought he could reproduce something similar.

From that photo-start, word soon spread throughout the racing community about Sims and his locally-developed starting gate that within just three years, interest started to spike overseas. By 1980 it was the largest supplier of starting gates in the world with sales to over 60 countries. The business was so successful, it won the Australian National Small Business Award for outstanding export achievement in 1982.

In 2008/2009 the French racing association, France Gallop sought a manufacturer who could build and replace all the barriers used at its top racecourses. Upon seeing the Simtrack design, was amazed to see first-hand the multitude of improvements as well as the high level of quality materials in the company’s design and make.

Within weeks, France Gallop placed the single largest order for starting gates in the history or horse racing worldwide. Over 45 barriers were required within a three-year period with the first portion of the order requiring 26 units delivered within the first six months.

Although the Simtrack factory was very streamlined and built to produce starting gates quickly, handling 26 gates in just six months was a massive undertaking so while the global financial meltdown was impacting so many across Australia, Simtrack doubled its normal maximum capacity.

As the business has used Australia milled steel continually for close to 60 years and across three generations of the Sims family, it is in the saddle to commentate on just how the local steel supply customer experience has improved over that time.

“Although customer service has always been good, over time and in more recent years we have found the attention and technical expertise to be far greater and easily accessible,” current owner **Kieren Sims** said.

“Especially with some large tenders where material specification and certification has been required, Orrcon has been great to deal with. Whenever we have had issues, the response time is instant, and we are never second-guessed. If we are unhappy, the Orrcon response is fast and highly satisfactory.”

The supply chain has needed to as the company's workshop fabrication approach has evolved since it started all those years ago with its first product offering.

"These days we utilise computers to do all our design work from initial concept right through to working drawings. We have one of the latest CNC machining centres and lathes that make accuracy, speed and quality control far superior compared to the days of manually operated equipment," Mr Sims said.

"Training of staff is far more extensive than ever due to using this equipment and increasing occupational health and safety requirements.

"Gone are the days of simply agreeing to employ an unskilled labourer from off the street. All workers today must be trained in all aspects of the machinery they operate as well as being fully aware of safety and standards expected of both themselves, and us, the employers.

"Things were totally different when we first began. More material preparation was required and fabrication took a lot more time. And everything was in black steel, so we needed to hot-dip galvanize or red oxide materials in the shop, which added considerable time to the overall production.

"Although all race track locations do not demand it, every piece of steel Simtrack sends out its doors, be that to Royal Randwick in Sydney or Dushbane in Turkmenistan, must be of the highest quality and corrosion resistance."

He pointed out that some tracks are located very close to the sea, making it especially critical to have a product that will resist rust and stand the test of time.

"Our use of ALLGAL® electro galvanized steel hollow sections from Orrcon these days helps to further streamline the production process," he said.

"Having that zinc coating on the inside of the RHS as well gives us far greater peace of mind."

He said the typical design life of the company's starting gates is 30 years but that is probably a conservative estimate as its very first starting gate in Australia built by Kieren's father and grandfather is still in active service in regional NSW, whilst the quality of proprietary steel surface treatments has galloped forward, just like the Simtrack business itself.

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