

Official opening of Combilift Global Headquarters

Photos: Combilift

A curtain lifted on Monaghan

by Agnieszka Pacholczyk

Forklift manufacturer and material handling solutions provider, Combilift, officially opened its brand new doors to the public on 26 April. The 46.5k sq. m factory, built at a cost of 50m across a 100-acre site, will allow the company to double its production and provide more than 200 jobs.

While celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, the company welcomed thousands of dealers, customers and suppliers, as well as friends and the media, to the official opening of its new manufacturing plant and global headquarters in Monaghan, Ireland. The spectacular event was initiated by speeches delivered by Leo Varadkar, the Irish Prime Minister (Taoiseach), Heather Humphreys, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and Martin McVicar, Managing Director, Combilift. Needless to say, none of it could have happened without the ceremonial ribbon cutting.

From handicraft to global exports

“Combilift is an incredible home-grown Monaghan success story. When the company was founded 20 years ago, it had three employees, a brilliant concept, and the ambition to make it a reality. Combilift is playing a significant role in Monaghan’s success, and I would like to congratulate Robert Moffett and Martin McVicar and everyone at Combilift on their achievements to date and wish them every success for the future,” Leo Varadkar said.

Martin McVicar, Robert Moffett

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Leo Varadkar
the Irish Prime Minister

“Combilift is an incredible home-grown Monaghan success story. When the company was founded 20 years ago, it had three employees, a brilliant concept, and the ambition to make it a reality.

The spanking new facility will allow Combilift to realise its ambitious growth plans. “We have employed an additional 230 people since we announced our plans for this factory in 2015, and the combination of this state of the art production plant and the growing skilled workforce will allow us to double production within the next 5 years,” McVicar commented.

Currently, Combilift exports 98% of its products to 85 countries through its international network of 250 dealers. It also offers a free logistic and warehouse design service, where engineers use material flow analysis and 3D animations to design, plan, and produce solutions in collaboration with their customers. The new manufacturing facility incorporates several green features. The roof consists of 23% skylights, includes solar panels producing 185kW, and harvests 30k gallons of rainwater.

Combilift was established by McVicar and Robert Moffett, technical director, in 1998. That same year, the company developed the world’s first multi-directional

all-wheel drive IC engine-powered forklift. In its first year of operations, the company produced 18 units, 17 of which were exported. Globally, there are now more than 40k Combilift units in use.

From the chassis to remote controls, each customized lift truck is assembled – primarily manually – in seven days, from fabrication to final product. Employing more than 550 people locally, the new facility will allow Combilift to double production within the next five years.

The enterprise is also investing in its workforce, adding a number of high-level employment opportunities for skilled technicians, design engineers, logistics and supply chain specialists and those with mechanical and electrical mechatronics skills.

Variety and customization

After the official introductions and speeches, all guests had an opportunity to take part in a factory tour, starting from the designers’ office, through the production lines, to the final shipment



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division. The plant produces 110 units per week, with plans to grow to 140 by end-year. Each of the four existing production lines have the potential to produce 45-50 units weekly and there is space for two more lines. The Combilift multi-directional forklift revolutionized the handling of long materials as it made possible to move long products in less space and more safely. The product portfolio has expanded way beyond its first offer, with innovative product development and customization being a cornerstone of the company's ethos.

Within the last decade, the company diversified its product range by developing a number of innovative space-saving warehouse solutions and heavy load handling products - the Aisle Master articulated truck and the Straddle Carrier (Combi-SC), respectively. Combilift entered the pedestrian forklift market introducing a number of products with the patented multi-positional operator tiller arm technology (Combi-WR and Combi-CS).

“We're not trying to be high-volume,” McVicar said. He continued, “Mass customization is the new frontier for both the customer and the manufacturer. Combilift offers the mass production of tailored products, with new products each year. We have several niches where we have no real competition, and there are still more niches to serve. We want to be the number one player in any market segment we enter.”

A bit of Irishness

The evening of the big opening day was very cheerful, very tasty, and very Irish. The visitors gathered in a huge tent pitched beside the factory and enjoyed professionally poured pints of Guinness, live music as well as a performance of Irish step dancers. The emerald green light illuminating the interior was both the colour of Ireland and the brand colour of Combilift. But symbolically it could also stand for hope, prosperity, freshness, and progress, which augurs well for the new facility. ■