

WILSON GOLF BOOSTS PACKAGING VELOCITY WITH AXON® EQUIPMENT



Wilson Golf, an innovative leader of premium golf equipment, came up with a new marketing campaign for the year, **Velocity Matters**. At the Wilson golf ball factory in Humboldt, Tennessee, Velocity Matters has become the facility's packaging motto as well. Wilson is taking the definition of velocity and applying it to the way they run their division.

Wilson Golf is also using **Velocity Matters** in the way they ship their products with a Velocity 1-2-3 program. Stock orders that are received by noon will be shipped the same day. Wilson Golf is producing quick turnaround with logoed golf balls. To do that, Wilson golf has dramatically changed the way golf balls are packaged. So they asked a packaging supplier, Fort Dearborn Lithographical Company, to provide new, innovative packaging that would also be more cost effective than the paperboard container the company had always used.

What came out of the discussions was a completely new packaging concept; Wilson golf balls are now shrink-wrapped with a printed shrink sleeve. The change does away with paperboard sleeves with windows, using cartoners and storing packaging supplies. After switching over to shrink sleeve, Wilson discovered other advantages including quick changeover of printed films allowing the company to offer a variety of packages to their customers, including seasonal packaging, promotional packaging and event packaging, such as NFL and MLB team logos. In addition, the cost of packaging a single golf ball went from between 5 to 12 cents per ball, to one cent per ball materials was significantly reduced. And golfers are more enthusiastic about carrying the balls in their pockets with less waste. The film is easy to strip away and hold onto before finding a waste receptacle. Paperboard can be tricky as golfers don't always find a place for the waste.

The paperboard boxes the company had used for years had been pre-cut and prefolded, but prior to purchasing the Axon® EZ-100, a sleeving machine, the company had been buying pre-cut and pre-formed sleeves. When a supplier suggested the company try an Axon® EZ-100 as a labor and time saving step for sleeving, Doug Sellers, Senior Manufacturing Engineer, took them up on the offer. "It's great," Sellers says. "The EZ-100 sleever uses rolls of clear, 2-mil PETG print registered film which the machine cuts and perms each time, in addition to an already inserted tear strip in the film roll.



Now all that is required of the operator is to change the roll of film, and stocking a roll of 3,500 sleeves is a lot easier than stocking paperboard."

Wilson presently has two golf ball lines set up to handle specific applications. Line number one, the first line to receive the EZ-100 shrink wrap machine is dedicated primarily to custom logo products and also handles short-run promotions and seasonal promotions. The EZ-100 was integrated into the existing application with a racetrack conveyor-style configuration. The EZ-100 drops a plastic sleeve through into a fixture, and the fixture is then hand-loaded with four golf balls. Initially, golf balls were hand loaded into fixtures, sleeves applied by hand and the fixtures then passed through the heat tunnel. Testing determined

it is easier to load balls into the sleeve rather than tamping the sleeve over the balls in the fixture. The balls and sleeve then pass through a heat tunnel. The finished product exits the tunnel to a packout station, where the finished sleeve is removed. The fixture then travels back to the EZ-100 where the process is repeated.



The second line is also a hybrid line running production shrink sleeves for the retail Jack product line consisting of three golf balls/ packfive 3-ball sleeves per package. Manual transfer rollers transfer filled fixtures to the shrink tunnel and exit as finished products. Line two is producing approximately 25 sleeves/ minute, five days a week, two shifts per day. All of the components are independent and mounted on casters, making the entire system portable.

The newest line, which brings total automation to Wilson Golf and increased capacity, is designed using Axon® and Bosch equipment and is in the final stages of design. Line three will produce 3-ball sleeves that are part of the 15-ball Jack retail product line. This line will integrate an automatic ball loading system to the existing Axon® components. After reviewing several design options Wilson,

working with Industrial Design and Fabrication (McEwen, Tennessee) chose a Bosch re-circulating conveyor, another EZ-100 and an EZ-48-SR8 heat shrink tunnel.

For this golf ball line, an Axon® custom-manufactured, EZ-100 shrink-sleeve applicator accepts a fixture loaded with balls an empty pallet from a Bosch conveying system and positions them in the application station. Next, the shrink sleeve applicator applies cuts and drops the sleeves (registered film) into the pallet fixtures. supplied by Print Flex Above the application station, rollers advance flat, shrink-sleeve film downward to a bullet-shaped forming device. At this point, the forming mechanism forms the film into a tube so it can drape over the fixture waiting at the application station. As the label stock moves downward, rotating knives powered by a stepper motor cut each individual shrink sleeve. From there, a photo eye triggers high-speed wheels to transfer the sleeve from the machine to the exit conveyor. The pallet travels downstream where balls are automatically loaded into the pallet fixtures. The fixture, with balls and the plastic sleeve, are transferred to through a heat tunnel; balls are automatically removed from the fixtures by a pick-and-place actuator.



“We are all very excited about the new line,” says Sellers. “There are three main factors in our continuing use of Axon® equipment: ease of creating custom packaging using registered film, cost savings in reduced cardboard consumption and an excellent working relationship with Axon®. They are responsive, responsible, easy to get a hold of and easy to communicate with,” he continues.



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AXON® STYROTECH CORPORATION
 1341 Express Drive
 Raleigh, NC 27603
 Tel: 919-772-8383
 Fax: 919-772-5575
 Toll Free: 800-598-8601
 E-Mail: info@axoncorp.com
 Web: www.axoncorp.com