



# The heart of washer manufacturing

**Alex Rivers** visits **Stolle's** new UK site in Burnley and speaks to the company's vice president of operations, **Richard Mercer**, about future challenges and opportunities

**B**uilt to consolidate five previous Stolle UK locations, the equipment manufacturer's new Burnley site specialises in producing washers for the global can making market.

Visiting on a welcome sun-soaked day, I was able to appreciate the surrounding views of the Lancashire countryside, including Pendle Hill – all visible from Stolle's new office space. The open plan concept is modern, uncomplicated and fosters an air of collaboration – the latter being key for the team's move there, as Stolle's vice president of operations, Richard Mercer, explained.

"It was really all about bringing everyone under one roof and getting them connected. Up in the office, we have engineering, manufacturing, the electrical team, customer service and sales, quality planning and procurement," he said. Downstairs on the "shop floor, we've got metal preparation, which is converting the raw material, and then the pipework section, sub-assembly, fabrication and main build."

Streamlining operations was the main goal. After its acquisition of the old EMS business in 2016, which included two sites in Altham, Stolle had grown substantially. Additional sites nearby were then added in 2019, 2020 and 2021. "We ultimately ended up with five sites and a lot of duplication in processes between them all," Mercer said.

"To give an example, we had the metal preparation and final assembly on one site, and the pipework on a completely different site. We'd be preparing material which then had to be transported to another site. Our warehouse store was housed in one location all by itself. It was very fragmented and a lot of time was taken up managing the logistics of all the transportation of materials and parts between the five sites."

In July 2024, Stolle announced an investment into consolidating its operations with a new facility in Burnley and that building work was underway at the Frontier Park industrial site – just two miles from the previous five Altham locations. Constructed to a new-build specification, the 158,000 square-foot facility was opened in August 2025. It now houses all Stolle UK employees (with the exclusion of Stolle Europe's Carlisle site) and is set to reduce haulage and packing materials, as well as offer better recycling functions.

There are around 140 employees working on-site, with Stolle at the time of writing in the recruitment process for hiring additional skilled fabricators.

On the shop floor, Mercer explained, there is capacity for four production/build bays, with the initial goal of producing one washer per month for Stolle's global customers. At the time of *CanTech's*

Exterior of the Burnley site.  
Image: Stolle



visit, the shop floor included a washer bound for South America, one for Europe and another for North America, with an Asia build on the horizon soon after.

In terms of Mercer's role within Stolle's wider operations, he explained that his main focus is on customer specification and engineering, with a complex challenge ahead. "While we offer highly bespoke products for our customers, we also need to stay competitive in the market and balance that 'bespoke-ness' of our machines with standardisation, particularly regarding timings and deadlines. It's a significant challenge, meeting expectations and delivery dates, particularly with the significant ramping up of the industry as it recovers from the downturn seen over the last couple of years."

It's about bringing lead times for production back up to steady, successful standards even with a reduced labour force, Mercer noted – something that many businesses in the can manufacturing industry are facing.

"That will be the priority for the first half of this year, with my role playing an important part in strategic planning to overcome our current hurdles to protect the business for Q3 and Q4 of 2026," he said.

Considering the current volatile political climate of the world, I asked what other hurdles Mercer foresees. He said: "Shortage of materials is always a worry – we saw that through Covid and the Ukraine crisis. With the Middle East conflict now, some people are talking about a war risk

surcharge on shipping. There's always a balance between quality as well, when you are forced to consider cheaper imports."

He continued: "I think the biggest challenge for Stolle as a business regionally – not just in the UK but in Europe too – is legislation. For instance, with CBAM [the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism], we haven't seen any added costs yet, but whether that changes or not will be a concern.

"Employment is also a big challenge. We believe in apprenticeship programmes, but it is sometimes difficult getting the right people in with the right skillsets."

Mercer also added that, while the Burnley site specialises in washer builds, the engineering team there also provides support for all the ovens Stolle manufactures in Poland.

So, lots to consider, but for Mercer, the positives outweigh the potential negatives for Stolle's future in Burnley: "Where we are is a great space and location. There's a lot of industrial activity in Northwest England and we're surrounded by smaller businesses who can support our operations here.

"We've got a good workforce, with all teams eager to play a part in the future of Stolle's washer manufacture. In senior management, there's now a targeted focus on the strategic development of the business going forward, so we're excited for where we're heading," he concluded. [CT](#)

**Stolle's washer builds.**

*Image: AlexR | Bell Publishing*

**Meet the Stolle team at Metpack in Hall 3, at stand 3C47.**