

Lola Composites rises to global challenges

A rapidly-expanding supplier of advanced composites, the UK's Lola Composites, based in Cambridgeshire, is involved with some of the world's most challenging automotive, aerospace, defence, communications and space projects – and with ambitious plans to become the hub of an international network of composite partners.

With a heritage encompassing race car manufacture, Lola Composites has a new vision led by businessman and entrepreneur Martin Birrane. It is not surprising that Lola Composites can count major automotive players and supercar manufacturers such as McLaren among its customers. Currently contributing to next-generation high performance models, its technology is developing the latest racing cars for the A1 Grand Prix Formula, concept cars for us all to dream of, and the world's highest volume production of carbon fibre Class A body panels. For this project, a unique low-cost liquid resin infusion process was developed by McLaren and Lola. It is enabling the production of 12,000 panels a year.

Lola Composites has also taken its advanced materials and processes into other demanding industries, establishing a reputation for rapid, reliable solutions that push technology to new levels.

Demonstrating this capability, the radome Lola has built for the Royal Navy's type 45 destroyer was designed using the Formula 1 technique of finite element analysis to calculate the shock loads arising from direct hits to the mast and translate these into the design loads. The result is a highly optimised

structure compliant with stringent radio frequency and structural performance criteria. The company has also had a hand in pioneering projects like unmanned aerial vehicle Voodoo, the Atlas experiment at CERN, KTV satellites and the Astra 2b spacecraft.

'Space is the hothouse of innovation for the composites industry' says Dave Skertchly, Technical Manager of Lola Composites, explaining the Lola enthusiasm for working with the British National Space Centre to maintain the lead which the UK has in spacecraft composites manufacturing. Mr Skertchly displays similar zeal when discussing the company's globalisation plans. 'The idea is that we would put together an international partnership from our quality controlled global network for each project'.

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Dave Skertchly, Technical Manager, Lola Composites

'We want the UK to become the technological and marketing centre for a worldwide network of companies. The performance advantages of carbon fibre are so great that they will become ever more in demand to make the lightweight structures such as aeroplanes and cars which we will need as fossil fuels increase in price. Production demand for parts made from advanced composites will soon outstrip the UK's capacity and we see ourselves working with partners throughout the world to satisfy this growing market.'

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