

Tridon auto products thrive overseas

Donald Green, chairman and owner of the Tridon Companies of Hamilton, Ontario, describes the automotive turn signal flasher pioneered by his company as "a little piece of black magic".

Twenty years have not brought Tridon's competitors in the auto parts industry any closer to duplicating the secret design that now flashes from Scandinavian snow plows, Hong Kong buses and transport trucks in France.

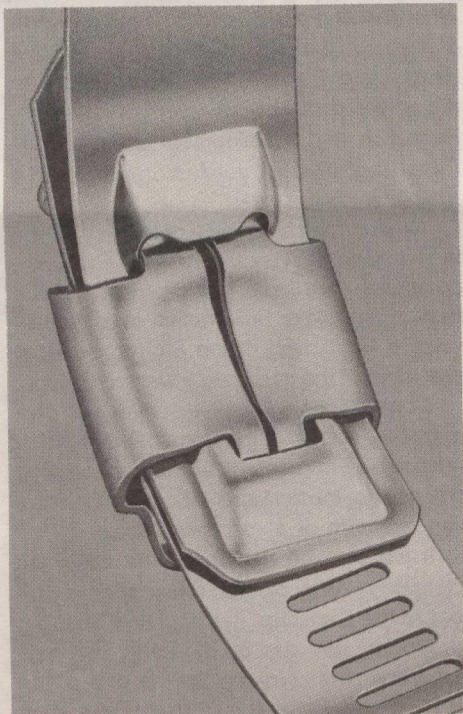
But Mr. Green makes no secret of the success formula that has enabled his small company to get the revolutionary flasher into those vehicles.

The same combination of driving ambition, patience and pure stubbornness has put Tridon's all-plastic windshield wipers as original equipment on one-third of all cars and light trucks in North America, and its hose clamps into outer space.

Mounting sales

The company that was called Hamilton Clamp and Stampings Ltd. when Mr. Green took it over from his father 30 years ago had sales of more than \$100 million in 1983 and expects sales of \$120 million in the current year. Mr. Green wants the company to grow by an average of 20 per cent annually, with a target of \$500 million in sales by the end of the decade.

Most remarkable, however, is the fact



All Tridon full size gear clamps feature a unique interlocking design between the one-piece housing and the band.



Chairman Donald Green says Tridon windshield wipers are on one-third of North American cars and light trucks.

that the company exports 80 per cent of its Canadian production. At last count, Tridon was selling a wide variety of wiper, clamp and flasher products — most of which are made in Oakville and Burlington, Ontario oriented toward automotive markets in 60 countries.

Although many Canadian auto parts makers export to the United States, Tridon is unique, according to an official at the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion. "They're active in international markets such as Europe and Japan, and have been unusually successful there."

Overseas offices

It has established sales offices and warehouses in locations as distant as Singapore. Subsidiaries in Nashville, Tennessee and Australia manufacture Tridon hose clamps, and two more in France make them under the HB and Serflex brand names.

It operates the largest auto parts distributing company in Denmark, and is now negotiating for sales and possible joint ventures in Japan, South Korea, China, India and Latin America.

Gradual process

Tridon's entry into international trade was a gradual process that started in the tariff-sheltered days of the mid-1950s. Although the years before the 1965 auto free-trade agreement were comfortable for even small manufacturers of parts for the auto industry, Mr. Green realized that "if we didn't have a presence in world markets, we would be very vulnerable to foreign

competition" when tariffs came off.

He began by tailoring the product line so that it could be widely marketed to a number of different industries. He replaced the custom stamping work done by his father and grandfather with proprietary products and the tiny metal shop in the east end of Hamilton gave way to a modern plant that was dubbed by area residents "the Taj Mahal of Burlington".

Eight years ago, Tridon did not think it had a chance with Nissan Motor Co. Ltd. of Japan, but refused to give up. Every three or four months, the company would make another call saying, "here we are and this is what we've got that's new", until Nissan finally placed an order. Today, Tridon wipers are standard equipment on Nissan vehicles built in North America.

"We didn't get that business by knocking on the door in Smyrna, Tennessee," Mr. Green said. Instead, the company has worked very hard in Japan: Brian Glynn, director of corporate development for Japan, estimates that he has visited the country 60 times in the past ten years.

But "once you win the confidence of the Japanese they do a lot for you", Mr. Green said. Tridon has been contracted to provide wipers for the light trucks Nissan is assembling in the United States, and expects to clean the windows on the sub-compact cars that will start rolling off that production line next year. Tridon is also pursuing what business it can get from Nissan's expansions into Western Europe and around the world, he said.



Tridon conceived and developed the first non-metallic wiper blade ever used as original equipment.

Although a number of cars imported or built in North America, including Mazda, Toyota and Volkswagen use Tridon wipers, Mr. Green plans to become more aggressive in marketing his wipers to European manufacturers, as well as getting the company's turn signal flashers installed as original equipment.