

# Fuelling change

Jon DeLine, president of aviation fuel systems provider Beta Fueling Systems, tells *Airside* about the radical changes being introduced at the North Carolina-headquartered company

**B**eta Fueling Systems has gone through a lot of change over the last decade or so. The aviation fuelling equipment supplier, in business since 1972, was purchased in 2006 by Australian equity investors (the owners of fluid transfer specialist Liquep), but it wasn't the start of especially good times for Beta, explains the company's current president Jon DeLine. In fact, by 2011, when DeLine was brought to the company to, he says, "turn it around", it was very much "a broken situation" that he faced.

The new owners had wanted primarily to expand their aviation fuelling business in North America, DeLine explains, and aggressively sold Beta's capabilities in that market. However, he continues, for various reasons the relationship was not a success, and DeLine – together with a German family-owned company active in fuel and chemicals storage and transport systems called Alfons Haar – acquired Beta last year in what was effectively a management buy-out.

DeLine began by building a new management team, bringing in people with extensive experience of the aviation fuelling business, and getting back to the nitty gritty of the industry. He particularly wanted to go back to the earlier days of the business, when it was a small company focusing closely on the needs of its customers. He thus spent a good few months travelling around the world to see many key accounts, particularly the big, international oil companies with which Beta collaborates, talking with them about their needs and their wishes.

In meeting customers, "I sensed a single common theme," DeLine remarks; there was a common feeling among those in the industry that companies supplying the aviation fuelling segment were not always able to keep their promises. There was thus a trust issue, he suggests, one that drove him to the foci around which he was to build the new Beta – reliability, support and delivery.

The emphasis on these three pillars is the essence of what he calls "the Beta way". The company's mission is to provide products and systems that are backed up by effective and prompt support services. In so doing, trust has been developed and the relationship with customers has become one more akin to a partnership, he insists.

In emphasising the value of support, the aim is to answer any requests for repair or maintenance within a day and to have any customer equipment back working within seven days. Those are good figures, DeLine believes – as good as or better than anything else available in this sector. The company is ensuring full 24-hour-a-day customer service, taking time zone issues out of the equation. Having access to Alfons Haar's numerous (18) locations – many of them close to airports served by Beta equipment – also helps in this regard. Meanwhile, reliability is built into product design, while the global reputation that DeLine says is associated with Alfons Haar has also been beneficial in this respect.

#### BRIGHT FUTURE

Already, a turnaround of sorts has been achieved, he notes. Beta has now been making money for the last three years, and it is winning some good new airport business. It is also now investing in new products and the company is looking to a "really bright future".



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Jon DeLine

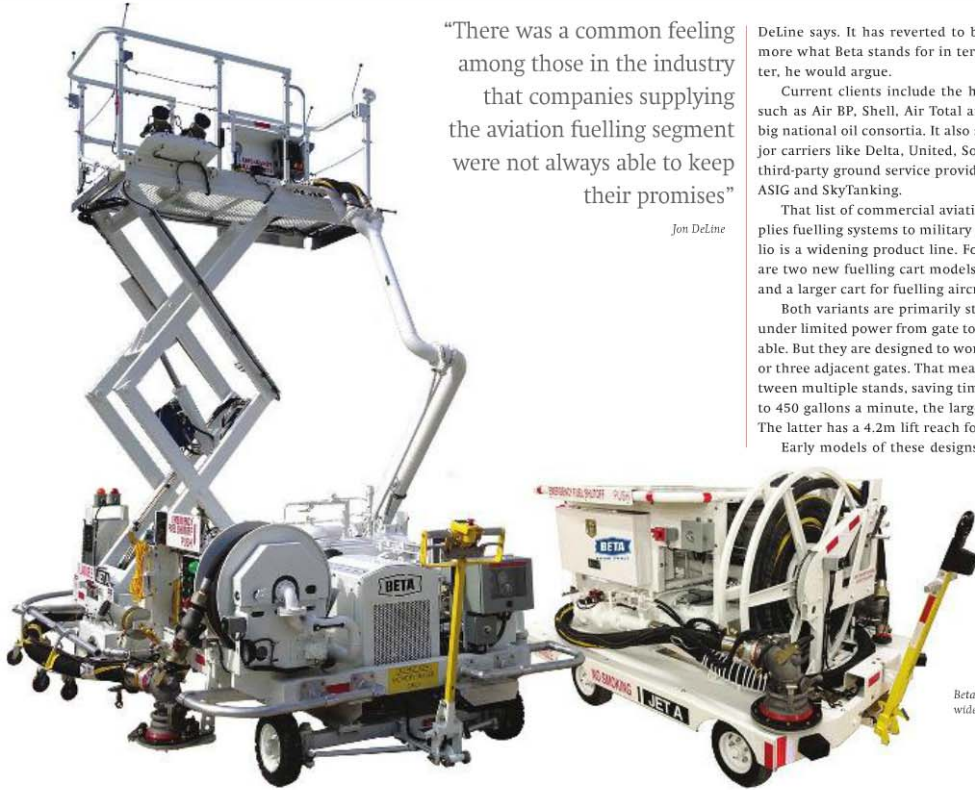
DeLine says. It has reverted to being a small business, one that is much more what Beta stands for in terms of its tradition and history – only better, he would argue.

Current clients include the huge multinational aviation fuel suppliers such as Air BP, Shell, Air Total and Petronas in South-east Asia, as well as big national oil consortia. It also serves airlines, its client list including major carriers like Delta, United, Southwest Airlines, JetBlue and Asiana, and third-party ground service providers that handle refuelling, like Swissport, ASIG and SkyTanking.

That list of commercial aviation clients is growing, while Beta also supplies fuelling systems to military customers. Alongside that growing portfolio is a widening product line. For example, currently in the testing phase are two new fuelling cart models, a smaller type for narrowbodied aircraft and a larger cart for fuelling aircraft as massive as the A380.

Both variants are primarily static in nature, though they can be moved under limited power from gate to gate at about a walking pace, and are towable. But they are designed to work mainly on a single stand, or at most two or three adjacent gates. That means no need for a big fuel truck to move between multiple stands, saving time and money. The smaller unit fuels at up to 450 gallons a minute, the larger variant up to 1,000 gallons per minute. The latter has a 4.2m lift reach for serving the A380 super jumbo.

Early models of these designs have been widely accepted across major



Beta is currently testing two new widebody and narrowbody cart models



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North American airport hubs. Newer models are currently being tested in Europe and, says DeLine, the results up to now have been very favourable.

Another product newly available under the Alfons Haar tie-up is the German manufacturer's PreciFUEL system that allows customers to configure their fuelling units quickly and easily according to their needs via a ready drag-and-drop interface. As such, the user is no longer beholden to the manufacturer's designs and preferred set-up.

The PreciFUEL offering is one of several fuelling vehicle control systems within Beta's PreciCONTROL family of systems. Other optional features that can be integrated as add-ons include RFID (radio frequency identification) tracking and recording fuelling performance across individual units. The system is extremely flexible and easy to use, DeLine says, and is being added to many of Beta's fuelling systems.

Other new developments being introduced include equipment features that improve safety and minimise Beta fuelling systems' own fuel costs (by judicious use of solar power, for example). With an extensive product portfolio that incorporates hydrant dispenser trucks, carts of all shapes and sizes and aviation fuelling modules that can be integrated locally for the client, there's no shortage of units on which to make ongoing improvements.

But all changes are going to be based on those pillars of reliability, support and delivery. There's been plenty of change of late at Beta... and there will be more to come. ■

Jon DeLine, president of Beta Fueling Systems



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