Installation phase for Washington Post’s keyless offset presses

In April 1996, the Washington Post, considered by many outwith the U.S. to be the “Voice of America”, signed a contract for the installation of eight Mitsubishi Newspaper Offset Presses – four at its Springfield, Va., printing plant and four at a new complex under construction in suburban Maryland. The first of these presses was shipped from Mihara, near Hiroshima in Japan, to Springfield via the Panama Canal in February.

The Washington Post, established in 1877, is a morning broadsheet newspaper to which more than 50 percent of the Washington, D.C., area residents subscribe, the highest penetration rate in the U.S. for a newspaper serving a metropolitan area. It circulates circa 800,000 copies on weekdays and more than a million on Sundays.

Over the years, the paper’s writers have won many Pulitzer prizes (the highest accolade for journalists in the U.S.) and one of its most famous exposés was of the Watergate scandal, which was subsequently made into an award-winning film.

The Washington Post company also owns Newsweek magazine and has a half ownership of the International Herald Tribune, which is published in Paris. In addition, it has interests in cable television properties throughout the U.S. and publishes a daily electronic newspaper called WashingtonPost.com, which enables computer users to call to their screens any item that appears in the printed paper (and many which do not).

At present, three printing plants – one in central Washington (Downtown), one in the District of Columbia (Southeast), and one in Springfield, Va., produce the paper’s zoned editions on Goss (U.S.) and TKS (Japan) presses of varying ages employing letterpress as well as offset printing processes. The age of the presses - some more than 40 years old – the desire to include colour on the front pages of sections, to attract more colour advertising, and to improve print quality, decreed that new presses be purchased.

As long ago as the mid-eighties, Washington Post management had flirted with the idea of flexographic printing for the newspaper. However, running tests of the newspaper flexo process and the fact that it had not found acceptance with the mainstream industry led to the abandonment of the project. Consequently, the Washington Post started to look hard at offset printing in general and keyless inking in particular.

After extensive investigations and consultations with the major press manufacturers, the Washington Post decided in favour of Mitsubishi Lithographic Presses (MLP), a division of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI),
for the provision of eight 96-page, 45-couple keyless offset presses with two 3:2 rotary folders, a PC-based colour control system and Ryco spray damping.

This is the first U.S. keyless order for the press manufacturer and is the largest capital investment made by the Washington Post in its 120-year history. Initially, the Post’s presses in the Downtown and Southeast plants will continue to operate in conjunction with the new presses at the other plants. New presses will replace the old presses at the newspaper’s Springfield facility in Virginia and be shipped there and to the new Maryland plant.

The ordered Mitsubishi colour keyless press, consisting of nine Tower Series printing units with General Electric drives, 12 core-driven two-arm reelstands (full and half-web), and two folders is capable of printing 96-pages with 28 pages of colour in straight production and 160 pages with 56 pages of colour in double production. The machine is rated at a maximum speed of 75,000 impressions/h; cut-off is 560 mm. Web widths of 1270 mm with a maximum paper roll diameter of 1270 mm can be accommodated and 12 webs run simultaneously. The 50 m long press stands 16 m high from reelstand floor to the top of the superstructure.

Among factors which swung the Washington Post in favour of keyless inking was the simplicity of operation and the expectation of lower paper waste figures for cold starts and re-starts than those obtained from conventional offset inking systems. Despite this, Washington has not ignored the fact that spot-on prepress techniques will be essential.

The Mitsubishi inking system, unlike anilox offset, does not include an anilox roller, and the lower part is built like a conventional system. It comprises a fountain roller driven at variable speed (to control density), a conventional ink knife (without adjusting screws/zonal division), and a rubber-coated transfer roller that, other than the doctor roller, rotates at press speed. In order to avoid ghosting (a considerable problem in the early days of keyless inking technology), a doctor blade is thrown-on to the oscillator roller that continually wipes off emulsified ink and returns
it to the ink fountain. High viscosity conventional inks can be used, thereby helping to keep down costs.

More so than in Europe or the U.S.A., keyless inking has found fairly wide acceptance among newspaper printers in Japan. The first keyless press manufactured by Mitsubishi was installed in 1986 in the Yomiuri Shimbun’s Fukushima plant and according to Mitsubishi’s Tadashi Ono, keyless offset is considered in Japan to be a part of the total press automation concept.

**Mitsubishi press for the Canary Islands**

Slightly smaller, but employing the same keyless technology is the Mitsubishi Euro-M keyless web offset press destined for Artes Graficas del Atlantico, in Gran Canaria, the Spanish island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa. The press comprises a full 4/4 tower unit, stacked two-unit mono tower – which can be converted to full colour in future – a 2:3.3 jaw folder and three core-driven two-arm reelstands.

The press is capable of printing 96 pages tabloid, with 32 pages in colour, in collect production and is rated at 60,000 impressions/h with a 578 mm cut-off and 1280 mm web width. The inking units are identical to the keyless units used on The Washington Post presses.

In addition to printing three regional titles, the press will be used to print one national daily and one national daily sports paper for Atlantico’s parent company, Editorial Prensa Ibérica, of Barcelona. Installation is due to take place this summer.

--George B. Smith

**Jomac announces new disposable pressroom glove**

Jomac, from Warrington, Pa., U.S.A., has announced the availability of a medium size, disposable green vinyl glove especially for pressroom use. The glove is particularly suited for use by personnel with smaller hands, or those who prefer a smaller glove fit than available with the standard large Jomac glove. Jomac medium disposable green vinyl gloves are available in boxes of 100 and bulk packs of 300 from graphic arts dealers and industrial suppliers everywhere. In 1936, Jomac created the first seamless dampening cover for offset presses.