

## **Upgrading to Horizontal Promises “No-Limit” Future For Virginia Panel**

Virginia Panel Corp. (Waynesboro, VA) came into existence along with the electronics age. Established in 1959 as the second-ever licensee of IBM, the company started out making electrical control panels. Now with 143 employees, VPC makes a sophisticated line of electrical components, including Mass Power Interconnects that allow customers to connect equipment such as computers or complex aerospace modules to test equipment. VPC interface products are standard for the testing programs of many major commercial and military equipment suppliers.

When, due to growth, the company began looking outside for contract manufacturing help, Ronnie Martin, director of mechanical products, knew it was time for a change. “I’ve been running vertical machining centers for 30 years,” he says. “Every tool show I would look at horizontal machining centers, but the sticker price made it out of the question.”

Eventually, the company’s manufacturing team came to understand the cost-saving benefits of advanced horizontal machining center technology. “It’s a team effort for this company to look at different and better ways of doing things,” says Rick Ebinger, manufacturing manager. “Our components command a premium price in the marketplace, so the only way we’re going to protect our margins is to lower costs in

production. Where we can better control our quality through our process, programming, and equipment, we save money in the long run.”

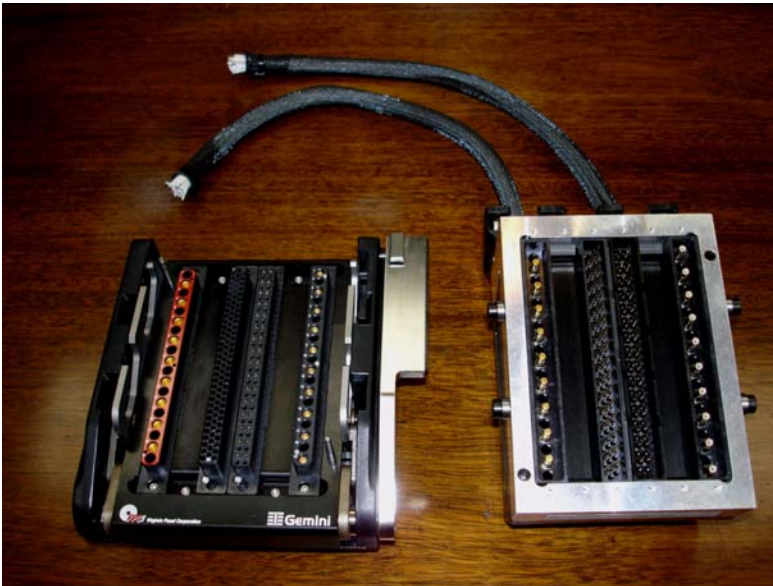
Since installing its PFH-5800 horizontal machining center from Mazak, VPC has realized numerous productivity benefits. Setups take 75% less time compared to the company’s AJV vertical machining center, and cycle times are down an average of 50% per part. “Roughly 25% of our parts have migrated to the PFH from our verticals,” Martin says. “That will grow.”

In the meantime, VPC continues to explore new ways to save process time and money on its PFH-5800. The company redesigned aluminum base plates to function as mini-pallets for VPC parts. Together with the standard 2-pallet changer on the PFH-5800, setups are quick and easy.

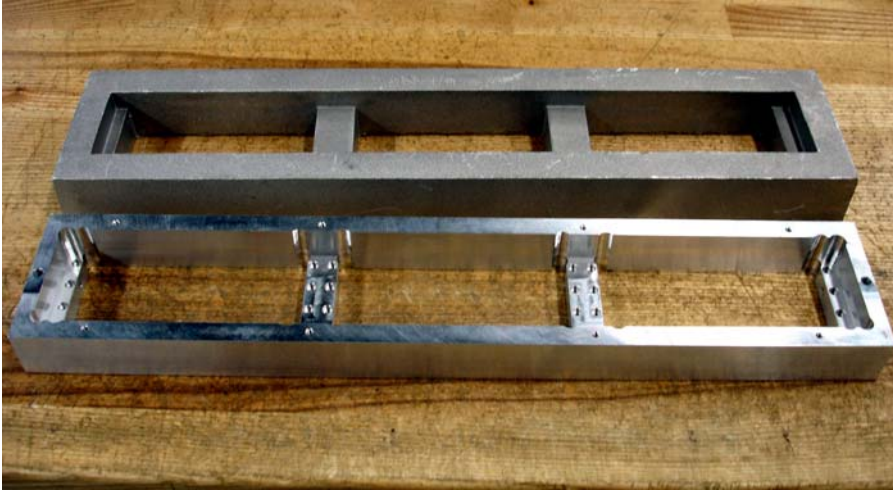
“Changing to the horizontal put us in a position to protect our business by better controlling our process,” Ebinger says. “Now, our only limitation is the size of our building.” Fittingly, expansion plans are under way.



Ronnie Martin, director of mechanical products, and Virginia Panel Corp.'s PFH-5800 from Mazak.



A sample VPC Mass Power Interconnect component.



Moving this cast aluminum part from a vertical machining center to the PFH-5800 horizontal cut processing time from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 35 minutes, plus the horizontal could accommodate end-hole operations the vertical could not.