

Fujichem Sonneborn Ltd



Fujichem Sonneborn's research & development laboratory – Hainault, Essex



Hiroya Dejima, Chief Executive of Fujichem Sonneborn Ltd

Fujichem Sonneborn Ltd began life as a producer of French polish for the Piano Industry. They were established in 1899 in North London with a small workforce who understood the need to create a modest portfolio of surface coating products to meet the demands of a growing market place which went on to include coatings for wooden television cabinets.

It is today firmly established as a market leader in surface coating technologies predominantly for plastics and other surfaces, but is perhaps best known for its coating technologies which are widely used within the global automotive market.

In 2010 it was acquired by the Tokyo based company Fujikura Kasei as part of an investment plan that would see the company benefit from some significant modernisation of its manufacturing and research & development facilities. This brought with it some efficiency and improvement initiatives that have allowed the company to excel in its chosen field.

What does it manufacture?

An exporter of over half of its production to over 30 countries, it remains proud of its association with other large established UK manufactures within the automotive market. This is a UK industry that was once thriving, went through a crisis, but is once again making a name for itself. Jaguar LandRover have made a significant contribution to its recovery and Fujichem Sonneborn's relationship with them has led to the development of coating technologies and special effect finishes that are both functional and eye catching.

ABOUT FUJICHEM SONNEBORN LTD

- » Research & Development Centre based in Hainault, Essex
- » Manufacturing facilities in Chesterfield Derbyshire
- » Customer Service / Distribution Operations in France & Germany
- » Employs 145 people across UK & Europe
- » Turnover £26 million
- » Exports to more than 30 countries
- » Operates in partnership with Japanese and US partners to support a global business network

“Investment in Fujichem Sonneborn’s youth policy ensures that the fabric of manufacturing principles will continue to be nurtured”

Its core specialities in chemistry and the science of coating technologies has naturally led it into diverse markets where there is a need for specialist coatings to meet very specific needs, some of which can be seen below:

- » Automotive Interior coatings
- » Automotive exterior coatings
- » Laser Etch Coatings
- » Special Effect Coatings
- » UV Curable scratch resistance lens coatings (used on vehicle headlamps)
- » Anti-fog coatings
- » Cosmetic packaging coatings
- » Coatings for wood
- » Coatings for metal
- » Coatings for glass
- » Water based coatings
- » Dual Cure technologies (utilises both UV and thermal drying methods)
- » PVD Coating Technologies

Manufacturing Excellence

The modest portfolio of products developed in North London over a century ago has now grown to more than 1500 manufactured at Fujichem Sonneborn’s manufacturing facility in Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

Fujichem Sonneborn’s manufacturing facility – Chesterfield, Derbyshire



The diverse range of technologies manufactured demands that raw materials are procured from as far afield as Europe, Asia and North America. This requires very precise planning of supply chain operations ensuring that raw materials with limited shelf life are carefully managed as part of a raw material management process.

For what might be stereotypically considered an archetypal manufacturing operation where cleanliness may be a desire rather than a reality, its manufacturing halls maintain an extremely high standard of presentation, organisation and efficiency. The application of the Japanese 5S philosophy to the manufacturing operation was developed over recent years. This leaves a lasting impression on those who care to visit the facility. Its manufacturing technicians offer a blend of experienced staff members employed by the company for over 30 years, and a younger generation; the result of the company’s investment in youth policy designed to ensure that the fabric of its manufacturing principles continues to be nurtured in the years that follow.

Leading Edge Technology

Its head office and research & development centre is based in Hainault, Essex where the focus is very much on the development of *tomorrow’s technology today*, and where a dedicated team of research chemists is committed to the creation of leading edge technology and the future growth of the company.

The research & development laboratory is considered to be the most modern facility providing inspiration for those who are fortunate to be able to work there. They were invited to offer their suggestions and ideas at the time when the laboratory was being designed which are reflected in the



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end result. As a consequence, there is a natural feeling of pride amongst the research chemists who made such valuable contributions.

The development of technologies that offer automotive manufactures design creativity and functionality, but also offer a solution to environmental concerns, remains a challenge for the research & development team. Last year its commitment to this challenge was rewarded as Fujichem Sonneborn received an award from the British Coatings Federation in the category of *Sustainable Innovation* in recognition of the development of a chrome effect coating technology as a cost effective environmentally friendly alternative to chrome plating.

Environmental Responsibility

With the growing need to protect our environment, and the planned EU directive to reduce the use of hexavalent chrome, widely used in chrome plating processes in Europe, there is now a need for alternative environmentally friendly coating technologies. Physical Vapour Deposition (PVD) offers one such alternative. A technology collaboration between Fujichem Sonneborn Ltd, and the Swiss company Oerlikon Balzers has led to an exciting innovation. The PVD metal layer, a fraction in

thickness of that of a chrome plated surface, is sandwiched between two layers of surface coatings designed to interact chemically with the metal layer. The result is a finished plastic component that looks identical in appearance when compared with a chrome plated component, but is a fraction of its weight, offers numerous colour and effect design opportunities to meet the same engineering standards, can be recycled, and eliminates the need to use hexavalent chrome. The development of this breakthrough technology is sufficiently advanced that it has already been selected for release within the European Automotive market.

A Modern Approach to a Bright Future

With well over a century of manufacturing excellence behind it Fujichem Sonneborn will continue to succeed in a UK industry that some suggest has lost its appeal to university graduates and school leavers. Those who share that opinion could do well to take a closer look at a company with a long history of manufacturing experience but with a refreshing modern day insight in to what today's manufacturing industry has to offer.

PVD components offering design versatility and an environmentally friendly alternative to chrome plating processes.



Fujichem Sonneborn team winning the British Coatings Federation award which features in the section "Leading Edge Technology"