

ECA Moves Up the Leather Value Chain with Zero-Buffer Cutting

Seeking to increase their yield of leather cut parts while also reducing labor, the Belgian automotive supplier achieved hide efficiency of up to 80% following investment in Lectra's Versalis® cutting solution.

THE CHALLENGE

Automotive aftermarket re-upholsterer and car mat manufacturer ECA sought to adopt a more flexible and cost-effective leather cutting process.

LECTRA'S RESPONSE

Lectra's Versalis® leather cutting solution significantly optimized material usage and reduced manpower requirements, enabling ECA to make the leap from labor-intensive processes to technology-intensive automation.

RESULTS

Versalis' powerful nesting software and cutting precision enabled ECA to achieve zero-buffer cutting, resulting in hide efficiency of up to 80%.

LECTRA SOLUTIONS

Versalis®



A COMPETITIVE EDGE IN THE FACE OF AN EVOLVING SUPPLY CHAIN

A Lectra customer since 2006, ECA sought to shift from labor-intensive manual processes to automated leather cutting. The family-owned enterprise had long used die presses but needed greater flexibility to quickly meet changing consumer preferences.

The current surge in leather interiors has made original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) more demanding than ever before. Vehicle interiors have become a key differentiator among carmakers, offering consumers ever more styling options. Luxury content has also made its way into lower-priced vehicles, contributing to hide quality and scarcity issues.

Satisfying consumer preferences is now more critical to OEMs' success than getting a vehicle to production faster than the competition. For automotive suppliers, this growing emphasis on interior styling has created new challenges that are further compounded by increasing cost pressure along the entire supply chain.

To absorb variability in demand and meet new requirements faster, ECA turned to Lectra's industry-leading expertise for an automated leather cutting solution.

“When we were using the dies, we were at 60% of efficiency of hides,” recalls Garmyn. “Now we’ve increased that to 70% to 80%. On the manpower side, we see that Versalis allows for a higher output with the same personnel. ECA is now moving from labor-intensive to technology-intensive processes.”

Lode Garmyn
Business Manager,
ECA

BREAKING FREE FROM THE COSTS AND CONSTRAINTS OF DIE CUTTING

Faster start-up and ease of engineering changes were key considerations in making the switch from die cutting to automation. Die cutter blades take weeks to produce and must be changed for each new car program.

“Before working with Lectra, we used die cutters,” explains Lode Garmyn, Business Manager, ECA. “That was not so flexible because, for every model, you needed to have the right cutting knives.”

By adopting automated cutting, ECA significantly scaled back start-up time while also eliminating OEM tooling costs, making the firm more attractive to its customers. The automated Lectra leather cutting system also enabled ECA to implement automatic nesting enabling zero-buffer cutting.

“A worker cannot nest the knives as efficiently as a computer,” observes Garmyn. “Once we switched from die cutters to the first Lectra solution, we saw an improvement of 10%.”

MOVING UP THE VALUE CHAIN WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF VERSALIS

Over a period of five years, ECA continued to renew its installed base with Lectra leather- and textile-cutting solutions and prototyping software before finally investing in a Versalis leather-cutting solution.

Benchmark tests conducted at Lectra’s R&D center in Bordeaux convinced ECA of the company’s expertise and knowledge, as well as the exceptional performance of VersalisAuto. ECA reported material savings of 10% compared to their previous Lectra solution.

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MAXIMIZING BENEFITS WITH VALUE-ADDED PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

With the support of Lectra’s value-added Professional Services and cutting-room expertise, ECA has succeeded in deriving even more value from their technological investment. Field engineers make regular visits to the premises, while technical experts have improved overall efficiency by recommending training to develop proficiency in Lectra software usage and hide marking.

“Between the first Lectra solution and the Versalis, we saw another 4% to 6% improvement,” recalls Garmyn. “Once Lectra’s experts assessed our cutting room processes, we gained another 8% to 10% in material usage.”

About ECA

Founded in 1981, ECA NV is a family-run firm employing 130 people and specialized in aftermarket vehicle upholstery—especially leather—and the manufacturing of car mats for OEMs. Located in Assenede Belgium, the company is part of the ECA Group, which also includes Berco, I M Kelly, Tiscotex NV.



About Lectra

Lectra is the world leader in integrated technology solutions (software, automated cutting equipment, and associated services) specifically designed for industries using fabrics, leather, technical textiles, and composite materials to manufacture their products. It serves major world markets: fashion and apparel, automotive, and furniture as well as a broad array of other industries. Lectra’s solutions, specific to each market, enable customers to automate and optimize product design, development, and manufacturing. With more than 1,500 employees, Lectra has developed privileged relationships with prestigious customers in more than 100 countries, contributing to their operational excellence. The company is listed on Euronext. For more information, please visit www.lectra.com

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