

# Warsaw's Hamelin at the top among plastic wheel makers

By **BOB KRONEMYER**  
Tribune Correspondent

**WARSAW** — Since setting up shop in Warsaw 15 years ago, Hamelin Industries has become the world's largest manufacturer of PVC tread cap wheel assemblies and semi-pneumatic PVC tires.

Last year the company produced 10 million wheels, ranging in diameter from 4 inches for a luggage cart to 20 inches for a yard cart.

Strongly positioned in the lawn and garden products industry, Hamelin introduced several new products in 1993, including 7- and 8-inch wheel assemblies for K-Mart lawnmowers that will debut at stores this spring.

"During the last several years we have added state-of-the-art equipment to help us become more competitive in our marketplace," Bruce Harrison, vice president and general manager, said.

The company, which began manufacturing with an extrusion process and added injection soon afterwards, is one of five subsidiaries of Hamelin Group in Montreal, Quebec. It is the group's only division in the United States and the only one that makes wheel assemblies. The 50,000-square-foot facility, with 50 employees, deals strictly in plastic.

"There's a lot of advantages to using plastic over rubber," explained Harrison. "First of all, plastic is recyclable.

**'T**here's a lot of advantages to using plastic over rubber. First of all, plastic is recyclable.'

**Bruce Harrison**  
Vice president and general manager, Hamelin Industries

"It is environmentally friendly," he said. "The hub can be reused. It's made out of high-density polyethylene (the same material used in many consumer-product containers). The PVC is also totally recyclable, which the tire is made of. The wheel assemblies are much lighter weight than conventional rubber tires and have better abrasion characteristics."

But what about price?

"It's very cost competitive," said Harrison.

Among the company's lawn and garden industry products, which constitute 60 percent of sales, are wheels for lawnmowers, edges, yard carts and wheelbarrels. The firm is also the largest domestic producer of wheels for the golf pull-cart market.

The juvenile toy market is another area where Hamelin has made a splash.

"The PVC tread cap on toys helps to deaden the sound of the standard mobile toy that has a

blow-molded wheel," said Harrison. "PVC also extends the life of the toy because the tread cap wears much better than a conventional blow-molded wheel."

Dealing in plastics also allows the firm to help customers realize market differential, especially with toys.

"The PVC vinyls that we use allow us to produce a rainbow of colors," said plant manager Gary Baldrige, who has been with the subsidiary since the beginning. "The juvenile toy market is very fashion-conscious.

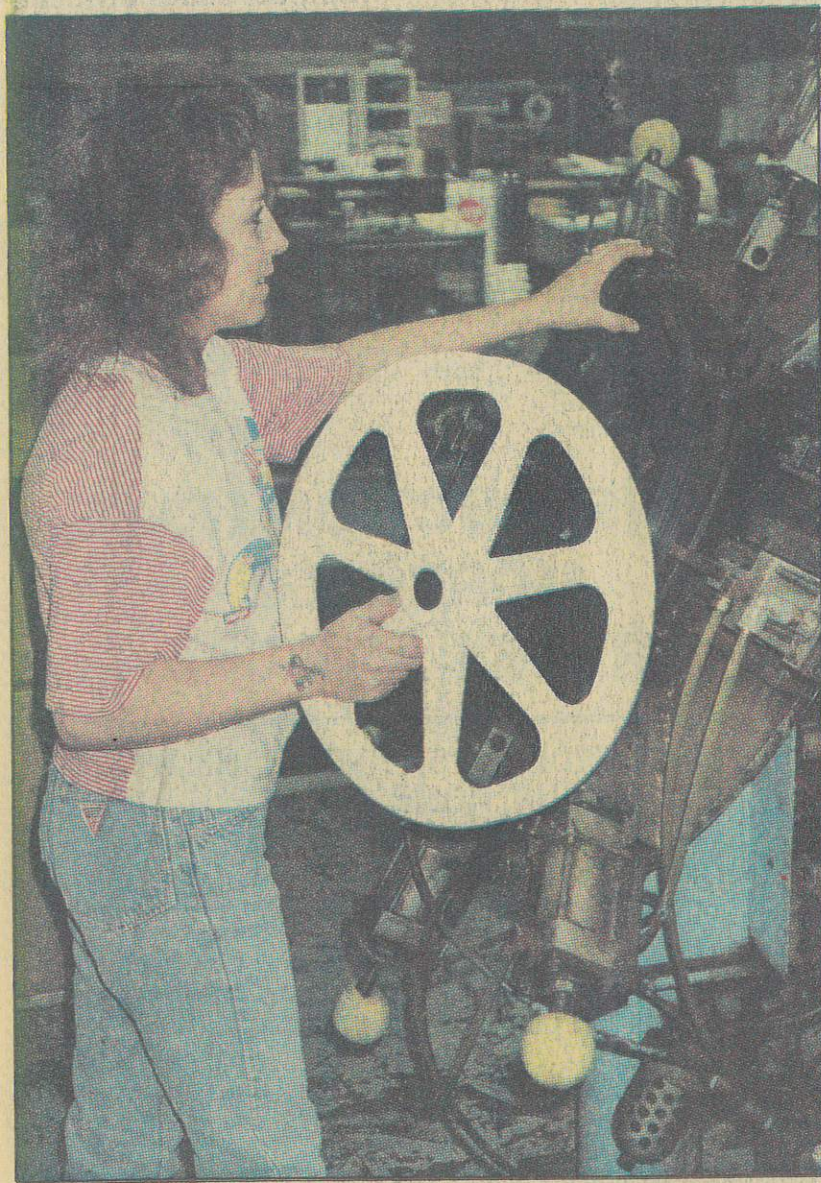
"Maybe they want red today, yellow tomorrow, maybe next month they want two different colors in the same product," he said. "This allows us to stay on top of our competition and makes Hamelin grow."

Continuous color changes also sparks interest in the workforce.

"It's exciting for everyone to see the new colors on the new products or new colors on old products," said Baldrige.

Hamelin Industries products are sold throughout North America. Customers include MTD (Cub Cadet, White), Noma, Murray and Step Two toys.

Said Harrison, "People say, 'Don't reinvent the wheel.'" But at Hamelin they're doing just that.



Tribune Photo/BOB KRONEMYER

Hamelin Industries employee Nancy Grinder completes a 20-inch wheel assembly.