



*The stress of daily operations takes its toll on aging ironing machines. Before making the decision to rebuild an ironer, the first step operators must take is to determine whether the ironer requires a wholesale rebuild, or if the machine just needs a few new parts, along with a renewed attention to maintenance and/or fresh textiles.*

# ‘Still Going’

## American Ironer Rebuilds—Better Than Ever

*With maintenance and upgrades, these small-roll workhorses continue to produce high-quality flatwork finishing*

**By Randy Vansparrentak**

**S**cott Burke has served as president of Loop Linen in Westwego, LA, for 22 years, but the flatwork ironers he uses have served for much longer. During the rebuilding of one of his four Super Sylon flatwork ironers from American Laundry Machinery, a stamp on the cast iron chest confirmed the ironer’s date of manufacture from the 1940s.

### **Built to last**

Surely no one at the time expected these eight-roll machines would remain in service well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, they continue to do just that day after day. In fact, the newest American flatwork ironers were installed more than 40 years ago and it’s not uncommon to happen across one of these machines that has operated continuously for 60 years or longer. “For hospitality work, you just can’t get a better finish than a Super Sylon—and they’ll last forever,” says Burke, who has had all four of his Super Sylons rebuilt over the





Scott Burke, president of Loop Linen in Westwego, LA, poses near an American Super Sylon that was rebuilt by Talley Machinery Corp. Many of these small-roll Sylons, Super Sylons and Hypro models remain in continuous operation in plants from 40 to 60 years, or longer.

course of his tenure. One was refurbished just last year. While new ironer styles make a splash every few years touting one advance after another, these small-roll Sylons, Super Sylons and Hypro models just keep going. Even 60-year industry veteran Roger Cocivera said during a tour of Burke's plant that, "The Super Sylon is the best-finishing ironer ever produced."

And as long as laundry managers focus their teams on diligently following a preventive-maintenance program, these stalwart machines likely will outlast the maintenance staffers themselves. "We're very careful about upkeep, but all we have to do is clean the chests every day, change the aprons, pads and covers once a year and keep moving parts greased," says Burke. "It's so simple, if I checked the order history, I'd bet we haven't had to replace more than a few parts over the course of two decades since the initial rebuilds. We're more likely to

offer our spares to other area laundries to help them out of a jam than to use them for our own ironers."

Before buying two rebuilt ironers and having two other ironers rebuilt from top to bottom, Burke wondered about the same issues any laundry owner would need to know before making such a decision. Certainly, the cost of a rebuild vs. that of a new ironer offers dramatic savings—often more than half the initial cost. But it's also important to weigh the merits of adding the latest computer controls, safety mechanisms and other features available to modernize these machines. Burke met with representatives of two companies that offer ironer rebuild services, and came away feeling ready to make an informed decision. "I couldn't believe the workmanship when I saw what Talley (Machinery) was doing," says Burke. "I was immediately taken with the quietness of the ironer and the finish on the linen was just unbelievable. Talley was way ahead of the curve." Talley Machinery has rebuilt more than 600 of these flatwork ironers since it joined Tingue, Brown & Co. in 1991, typically restoring the ironer to better-than-new condition. The Greensboro, NC, company founded in 1902 provides replacement parts for a wide range of laundry equipment in addition to providing repair services and complete rebuilds for flatwork ironers. It specializes in American small-roll ironers.

## Rebuild process

Performed at Talley's fully stocked facility, or on-site at the customer's location for even greater cost savings, these rebuilds entail the complete stripping down of the ironer to its frame and chests. Every system is dismantled, and literally every part from the largest rolls to the tiniest drive-train components are cleaned and

examined for signs of wear with sophisticated inspection equipment. Then they're either repaired, or replaced using computer-numerical controlled (CNC) machining centers and returned to service as good as, or better than, new. Chests are carefully sanded smooth and polished to ensure smooth linen travel and optimum finish quality.

The wholesale dismantling also offers an opportunity to upgrade the ironer with any of several advances. One example is a Right-Hand Drive Conversion, which eliminates the original left-hand drive along with its shafts, bushings, herringbone gears, clutches and other wear-prone components. It gradually increases ironer speed at startup to safeguard the drive system, reduce wear and save on electricity. A second example is a motorized raising rig that quickly raises the rolls to save jammed linens and safeguard workers against injury. An apron-tracking alarm also is available. It senses if the apron isn't tracking properly and automatically sounds an alarm alerting maintenance personnel to fix any trouble. If left unchecked, the apron could be ruined in minutes. When completed, the ironer is delivered, reinstalled, dressed with fresh aprons, pads and covers from Tingue, Brown and is thoroughly tested. "We have very little downtime now," says Burke. "We even have roll springs that have been in place for 20 years and are still going strong."

For ironers rebuilt on-site at the laundry, rather than at Talley's facility, the company may preposition parts packages that include the spare parts most likely to wear out, such as gears, sprockets and chains. Any parts that aren't needed are returned for full credit.

Before embarking on a rebuild, the first step is to determine whether the ironer truly requires a wholesale rebuild, or merely a few new parts, plus a renewed attention to maintenance and/or fresh textiles. Even in plants where staff routinely lubricate chains, grease bearings and check belts for wear before they tear, the stress of working two shifts per day nearly every day for decades takes its toll on an ironer. At some point, parts seem to wear out faster, maintenance logs fill up more rapidly and the ironer seems to be shut down and locked out for costly repair work as often as it's up and ready for flatwork. That's when many laundry managers consider replacing it with a new model. When Burke noticed a decline in efficiency and quality, he first contacted Scott Larkin, his representative from Talley Machinery's sister company, Tingue, Brown. "Scott has been a big resource for us over the years," says Burke. "Scott and his colleagues at Talley were very helpful in assessing when it's time to repair, rebuild or spend on a new ironer."



### Recognize signs of wear

The beginning of an assessment of a rebuild starts at the end of the line. In many cases, the production side of the house may notice unacceptable quality issues. Similarly, a member of the engineering team may notice an increase in downtime to replace worn parts. Or a manager tracking repairs and reviewing maintenance logs may see a trend involving quality, throughput and/or overtime. Regardless of who throws up the red flag, operators will see signs of ironer trouble reflected in product-quality issues. These may range from jams at

the feed roll and creased flatwork to linen discoloration from ingrained dirt, lint and grease. When product quality has deteriorated to the point that “go-backs” for reprocessing are a normal part of production, then the ironer is a likely candidate for a rebuild.

Some staffers with a keen ear for the rhythmic sounds of the ironer may notice changes in operational noise levels, even within the bustling environment of a commercial laundry. Although hearing the ironer day after day makes it especially challenging to notice a gradual rise in the noise level, the ear of a veteran often can detect

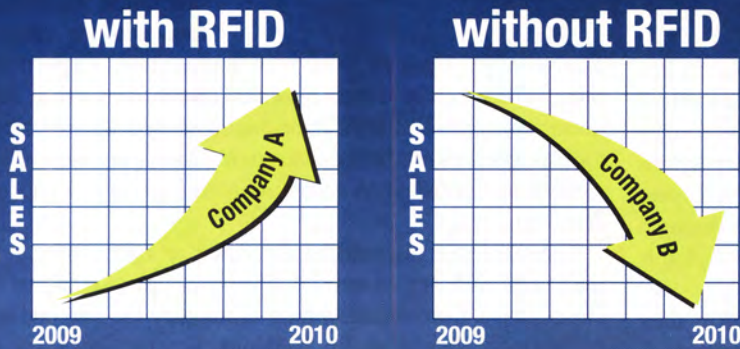
the wearing of gears, chains and other components by subtle—and occasionally abrupt—changes in their sounds. When these sounds continue to arise, despite frequent maintenance stops, and the culprit parts continue to wear out before their anticipated service life, then it may be time to investigate a rebuild. Before performing any work, a nonintrusive survey of the ironer is conducted. This entails checking all accessible systems and parts, reviewing product-quality issues that may point to equipment troubles and finding out exactly how the ironer is used. Then a recommendation is provided at no charge.

### Bottom-line comparison

The final decision between rebuilding an aging ironer, or spending for a new model, is nearly always a financial one. But according to Burke, the cost of a rebuilt American ironer compared to anything available new today is a valid point to weigh. Even when considering the computer controls and other enhancements available on new ironers, “There’s simply better value for the dollar in a rebuild than in a new machine, especially if it’s a rebuild from Talley,” says Burke. “Bells and whistles don’t impress me—if you can’t produce a good quality tablecloth or napkin then you won’t have any customers.” **TR**



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