REVIMAC recollections: foray into the legacy paraphernalia of glass

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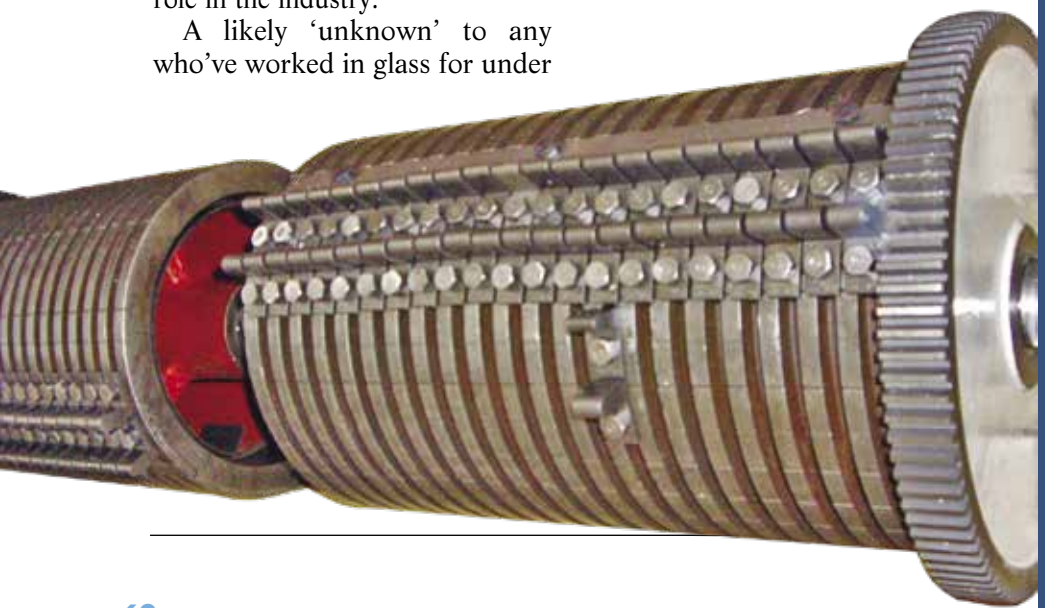
For the record: the 'Unidentified Mechanical Object', of worthy memory, is hardly a matter of fantasy or unlikely speculation. Instead, it refers to something that actually existed for decades - even playing an obscure, albeit crucial, role in the industry.

A likely 'unknown' to any who've worked in glass for under 30 years, the UMO is nothing less than the much-dreaded Mechanical Timing Drum of the IS glass-forming machine, a.k.a. tambour, trommel, barabàn, tambor - here our list of identifiers is endless and will doubtless depend upon your geographic latitude or country jargon.

Granted. A cursory glance at the static picture above will prob-



With "UFO-logy" back in fashion, I must shamelessly confess my lifelong passion for relic hunting - a pastime so close to my heart that it has me borrowing the same trope to retrieve from various memories of REVIMAC what I might best call 'the UMO' or 'Unidentified Mechanical Object'.

ably leave you impervious to its appearance. Admittedly it resembles some innocuous, oversized version of a musical carillon. But here's the thing: See our UMO revolving at high speed on its drive shaft, and with dozens of protruding sharp steel lugs (also known as buttons), and you'll find it a lot less friendly-looking. Not surprisingly, it used to be among the most dangerous moving devices installed onto the IS glass container forming machine.

Be not fooled here - for the eyes of the beholder can indeed deceive. The truth is, this UMO was quite indispensable, being our sole means of setting those on-off angles to activate and mechanically synchronise every pneumatically-operated function of the entire machine.

Setting 'only the brave' aside now as a popular quiz show, the title also perfectly captures the working spirit of so many IS machine operators, who needed no small courage to brave the task of manually-handling the special socket wrench for "on the fly" relocation of lugs into the drum slots.

Originally those slots numbered nineteen. They sufficed for several years until the last version arrived in the late 60s, which featured twenty-one lines - corresponding to the increased number of required activations.

Check out the picture below, which shows a six section, drum-timed IS machine - all neatly refurbished, of course, and functioning with the precision of a Swiss watch. Being something of a globetrotter, I managed to sell it overseas in the 80s, just as I did with the last piece, which is why I can now display it here proudly as a nostalgic image of industrial archaeology.

Decades on, the UMO is now decidedly obsolete, along with the purely mechanical IS machine upon completing its venerable career and having been replaced by the so-called EPVB - today's electro-pneumatic valve block that's controlled by the electronic timing system. Very few UMOs are still up and running nowadays, given that they got banned in many countries for being no longer compliant with safety rules.

That said, various stationary specimens can still be spotted in REVIMAC's IS building workshop where, cut into slices and squeezed to the ground, the last UMOs can be seen playing the humble role of spacers beneath the machine bed - there to lift it from the floor and so eventually ease the job of pipe fitters. Sic transit gloria mundi! ■