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[Home](#) > New PVD finishes helping thermoset molder Mar-Bal add employees and orders

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Fifteen new players are expected to join the team at thermoset plastics compounder and molder Mar-Bal Inc., as the company seems to have hit a home run with its investment in new technology for adding a PVD finish to products made with thermoset plastics.

The company, based in Chagrin Falls, OH, has branded the plasma vapor deposition (PVD) technology Thermital and will use it to give its parts much improved surface finishes compared to those normal for such materials. "With its aesthetic, designer finishing options, Thermital really looks and feels like metal but it allows for geometric design freedoms where metals can be limiting," explained Ron Poff, new business development manager for Mar-Bal. "The heat resistance, corrosion resistance, and lighter part weight of composites are all technical advantages as compared to metal. The entire process also provides for a lower-cost option and quicker path to market than die cast metals."

The technology helps the molder offer its customers thermoset plastic parts with customizable colors of steel and unlimited glosses. Unlike some metal finishing operations, Mar-Bal says its Thermital process is environmentally friendly. Additional exterior coatings can be applied to provide for anti-fingerprinting, clean-ability and UV resistance.

Applications for parts coated via the process include appliance handles, control knobs for stoves, oven control panels, washer, dryer and dish washer components, counter top kitchen appliances, underhood automotive and heavy truck parts and others where OEM industrial designers and engineers are looking for an alternative to metals.

In answer to questions from MPW, Mar-Bal executives replied that the company utilized outside resources to work on the feasibility of the project; however, its own Engineering Equipment Rebuild Group did the heavy lifting for the PVD technology. The company

purchased commercially available equipment. The company is hiring 15 new workers and investing more than \$1.5 million in its Cuba, MO facility for the Thermital program, bringing total employment there up to about 100. Customers have already placed orders for parts with the PVD coatings and others are expected "in the immediate future."

The company has processing facilities in Ohio, Missouri, and in Dublin, VA. The company also recently reported it expects to see continued growth in sales in China, where it has been active since 2007 with project cooperation and authorized sales agents in Ningbo and Shenzhen.

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