

Unipart and partners to make high performance vehicle batteries in the UK

Unipart Group and a major consortium of industrial partners have won funding to build a high performance, low volume flexible battery manufacturing facility in the UK.

The consortium, which won the funding through a competition sponsored by The Advanced Propulsion Centre (APC), aims to address the pressing requirement to develop a UK battery supply chain for vehicle manufacturers.

The project will help to overcome existing gaps in the automotive industry supply chain as well as electric vehicle battery production. It will be able to offer support to UK companies that are researching and developing battery cell chemistry, and will offer services outside of the automotive sector.

The consortium includes Williams Advanced Engineering, Coventry University, Warwick Manufacturing Group, Productiv, MCT ReMan and The National Composites Centre. British marque Aston Martin is also part of the initiative having previously worked with Williams Advanced Engineering on a prototype battery for an electric vehicle, which will now go into production and act as the 'halo' project for the manufacturing facility.

Commenting on the award, Unipart Chairman and Group Chief Executive John Neill said that Unipart brought the project deep engineering expertise coupled with the potential to apply a wide range of digital technologies from across Unipart's group of companies.

"We're pleased to have won the competition and associated funding, and to work with such a strong consortium of partners to address a need that is critical to the UK automotive industry," said John Neill. "Unipart Group may be unique in the breadth of capability that we can bring to development projects such as this.

"Unipart's manufacturing group has led this initiative for our company and included the technical skills and facilities from the Institute of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering (AME), our partnership with Coventry University. The AME has delivered practical research and development projects to a wide range of companies, including developing a light weight exhaust system for Aston Martin.

Neill said that the plans to create a new manufacturing facility with partners in the consortium is an important addition to the developments that are taking place in Unipart to build "Industry 4.0" capabilities. This includes joint ventures like the Institute of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering as well as strategic acquisitions.

"Across Unipart Group there is a wide portfolio of technical capabilities that can accelerate this project and others. For example, MetLase, our joint venture with Rolls-Royce, has continued to innovate with their patented tooling techniques to create solutions to engineering problems. This has included creating "smart enabled tooling" showcasing their Industry 4.0 capability.

“We recently acquired a controlling stake in Instrumentel Ltd., a leader in the design and manufacture of telemetry systems. Instrumentel has successfully applied sensors in F1 and other combustion engines enabling accurate data collection at extreme temperatures. They are now transferring that digital capability into other sectors such as rail, literally applying F1 technology to trains,” he said.

“Combining our deep knowledge and expertise in continuous improvement with highly skilled, highly motivated people who have access to the world’s best digital technology, is a formula for making a strong contribution to this project and to the development of the UK’s battery manufacturing capability.”