

'Small is powerful' for Thorp Arch firm

WHEN the champagne corks popped at a small factory on the Thorp Arch Trading Estate on Friday the toast might well have been "Small is Powerful."

As reported in the "News" last week in the face of competition from the likes of Kodak, Carnation Foods and Costain, the 29 employees of Bearings (Non-Lube) Ltd. had just lifted the most coveted prize in the British export field — the Queen's Award for Export Achievement.

It was back in 1970 that the managing director, 34-year-old Mr. David Garnett, who lives with his wife and two children at Marton-cum-Grafton, left his job in engineering to set up a one-man business on the Thorp Arch trading estate.

His idea, based on experience in manufacturing steel bearings, was to produce a plastic bearing which would be cheaper and in many ways more efficient than its steel counterpart.

From the beginning Mr. Garnett set his sights beyond the British Isles and when, five years ago, he took on the multi-lingual Mr. Ted Abbey as export

"Somehow we have managed to retain our workforce" he continued. "We're also very young. Although we employ two 65-year-olds the average age of the company is still only 29."

There are other reasons for the success. - Mr. Garnett himself spends some five months of the year seeking orders. In that time he travels some 70,000 miles around the world, visiting customers and agents from Atlanta, Georgia to Singapore.

He also places great faith in the abilities of the general manager,

Mr. Ken Pearson and the works manager, Mr. Michael Pearson.

They have only one competitor — a firm in Australia which ironically, stands just four miles away from one of Mr. Garnett's biggest customers who receive two million plastic bearings a year from that factory on the Thorp Arch trading estate.



TRIUMPHANTLY gathered around the flag which marks the Queen's Award for Export Achievement are some of the employees of Bearings (Non-Lube) Ltd. at Thorp Arch. The oldest employee, Mr. Joe Pearson, is third from the left and the youngest, Alan Taylor, is fourth from the right. The flag will be flown proudly over the Thorp Arch factory for five years.



Mr. David Garnett

manager the plastic bearings burst into the French, German, American and even Australian markets.

Today, the small factory nestled in the heartland of the trading estate which churns out plastic bearings 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Bank Holidays included, stands on the brink of its biggest success to date — Japan.

It is that kind of expansion (a sixfold increase in export trade over the past three years) which has brought the workforce, from the youngest, 16-year-old Alan Taylor of Grove Place, Boston Spa, to the oldest, Mr. Joe Pearson, the highest accolade in British exporting.

"We've got a kind of family atmosphere here" said Mr. Garnett. "Most of our employees come from the Harrogate and Knaresborough area and knew each other before starting here."