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Tube laser helps company transition from distributor to fabricator

American Steel and Aluminum uses U.S.-built laser to sharpen focus



By [Lincoln Brunner](#) | August 20, 2025 | [Article](#) | [Tube and Pipe Fabrication](#)



(From left) CAD Specialist Garrett Boak and Machine Operator Russell Griffo check on the progress of a part in American Steel and Aluminum's latest TruLaser Tube 7000 tube laser, the first such unit manufactured in the U.S. *American Steel and Aluminum*

It may have taken a couple centuries, but Auburn, Mass.-based [American Steel and Aluminum](#) has now forged a new identity as a fabricator of steel rather than merely a distributor of it.

That evolution has been aided by several recent major capital expenditures, the latest of which put a patriotic exclamation point on those fabrication efforts: the purchase of a [TRUMPF](#) TruLaser Tube 7000 fiber laser cutting machine—the first machine in that line to be manufactured in the U.S.

The laser is available in multiple configurations, depending on need and available space. With the optional Spatter Guard (an antispatter spray misting system also is available), the laser is designed to produce clean parts that are ready for welding or painting. The infeed capacity is 21, 30, or 40 ft., with outfeed options from 15 to 40 ft.

The 6-kW TruFiber laser, the third TRUMPF tube laser that ASA has bought since 2018, has been operating at its plant in Syracuse, N.Y., since the spring and marks the full transition of TRUMPF's TruLaser Tube 7000 series production to U.S. shores.



From Moving Material to Transforming It

That transition coincided with ASA's desire to more fully expand its capabilities in the fabrication arena. It was a long time coming—one of the businesses that makes up the current version of ASA started in Portland, Maine, in 1806. The company was purchased by Quebec-based Nova Tube in 1996.

ASA President Sam Blatchford said he made the purchase both to continue that move away from pure distribution and to ensure that the Syracuse facility, under the leadership of General Manager Jon Baker, ASA vice president, served customers better than it could with the tube laser it had been using.

"Poor Jon has had nothing but headaches [with the old laser]," Blatchford said. "So that's when I said, 'You need more reliability if you're going to be in the tube laser business. Some of the contracts that we work on with this are for major companies that we can't fail. We do a lot of government work. So, we can't really have outage and machine downtime.'"

This latest purchase continues a steady parade of purchases the company has made over the past several years. The machines represent more than ASA's capabilities, though. They symbolize the future-minded mentality it is employing throughout the business.

"It's a much bigger picture than just this tube laser," Baker said. "This piece of equipment and everything we've done here—two flat lasers, robotic welding, plasma machines—we're no longer just ... entering orders on a day shift, pulling orders on a second shift, loading on a third, and shipping. We now have a full-scale engineering department, a CAD department. We have a planning department and a scheduling department.

"We do processing, yes, and we do raw material sales, but the majority of this tube laser work is scheduled to feed other workstations within our facility here."



The machine's generous load and unload capacity allows American Steel and Aluminum to accommodate a wide variety of tube shapes, sizes, and materials in bundles or individually. *American Steel and Aluminum*

Moving the focus of the business meant moving a mountain of steel off the Syracuse shop floor. But for this laser, Baker was all for it.

you have a facility that was originally geared for distribution, you have truckloads and truckloads of raw material to move out of the building.

"The pure distribution business is a tough business," he added. "Sam moved us in this direction and really, we've been at it solidly for about five years. But if you had walked into this facility last year, it would have been a totally different animal. It was just so full of raw material. Now it's full of processing equipment."

Eyes Toward Quality

To mitigate raw material flaws that may crop up, the laser offers a ScanLine system that uses three cameras and multiple sensors to measure tubes in milliseconds and compensate before any holes or ends are cut.

"Tubes are always accurate, right?" joked Adi Buerkler, who has been TRUMPF's TruLaser Tube product manager for seven years. "No, the complete opposite, unless they're extruded. That's why TRUMPF offers ScanLine—these cameras come in handy. We basically measure the tube and then we can place the features exactly where they need to be."

On that note, one of the key things ASA appreciated was the accuracy that the laser was able to deliver, especially with the U.S. military being one of its primary customers.

"As soon as the switch was turned on after install, we were making parts—and haven't stopped," Baker said. "It literally traces any inconsistencies with the material, allowing you to hold extremely tight tolerances. So, there's less adjustment, less waste, and less scrap. It's really a win for us. We can't let the Department of Defense down. And we can't let other key industries down—we're huge in data storage infrastructure. As you move these pieces and subcomponents down your line, the quality is so important when it goes into your next phase.

"We also manufacture construction equipment, which uses these [large] columns, and saw cutting requires tons of additional time to fit them and square them properly," he added. "When they come off this [laser], which now gives the capacity to do these larger pieces, they go right into welding."

Moving Closer to the Action

The move to manufacture these lasers in the U.S. marks a significant transition of its own for TRUMPF, which previously manufactured the bulk of its machines in Europe (though many of its machines sold in North America have been assembled at the company's Farmington, Conn., campus).

Though the decision to relocate manufacturing from Germany to New England coincides with a general reshoring push from many U.S. manufacturers, the company's move was based purely on proximity to a thriving North American market that now generates a significant portion of its total sales. While making machines in Germany and other European countries is the company's norm, shipping one tube laser across the Atlantic requires scheduling five to seven containers, allowing six to eight weeks of total transit time, and submitting to whatever mishaps or delays may occur en route.



Equipment Operator Matthew Speelman moves material onto the laser. *American Steel and Aluminum*

For that reason, the company is looking to produce machinery in North America, for North America.

"Our upper management, they are local-for-local," Buerkler said. "If we just sold five or 10 machines [in the U.S.], we probably wouldn't produce the machine in Farmington. But we sell 30 units or more here. So, it really makes sense to produce it in the U.S."

Blatchford noted that ASA has seen "an enormous amount" of reshoring activity lately as fabricators and manufacturers try to shorten their geographic supply chains and figure out how to get their subcomponents made in the U.S.

Data from the past few years confirms intention to bring manufacturing back to the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and away from Asian low-cost countries and regions. However, 2024 marked a reversal in the trend toward domestic manufacturing and away from importing from LCCRs (low-cost countries and regions) that began in 2022, according to research and consulting firm Kearney.

"The post-COVID urge to shorten supply chains drove back-to-back years of significant manufacturing gross output (MGO) growth," Kearney said in its "2025 Reshoring Index: The great reality check," a report on global manufacturing. "But once most of the latent U.S. manufacturing capacity was absorbed, the revamped U.S. manufacturing ecosystems struggled to scale quickly enough to keep up with the growth of domestic demand because, even though investments continued to climb at a decent clip, it takes time to convert that capital into capacity. And so the MGO slowdown was to be expected."

However, reality on the ground—also acknowledged in the Kearney report—is that North American CEOs still very much want to consolidate and expand domestic raw material and manufacturing capacity. In addition to TRUMPF's move, one domestic bit of evidence is ASA parent company Nova Steel's construction of a new 350,000-sq.-ft. tube mill in Delta, Ohio, which has now been in full production for a year and half.

"I think TRUMPF is a great example of [locating manufacturing here]," Blatchford said. "They kind of saw it coming a while ago and said, 'We've got a big market for tube lasers in the U.S., and we've got to start making them here.' They understand they've got to be serving the local market with locally built equipment. And we're doing the same thing. There's a lot of freight cost for carbon steel, so the closer you can fabricate and form and actually create the tube, the better off you are. So, we have our tube mill in Ohio now."

Changing Approach to Business

The acquisition of this and other tube lasers has not only helped ASA improve its part quality but also helped the company change the way it approaches its business altogether—in particular, how it proposes to design the parts that its customers are asking for.

Because tube lasers are not as widely used as flat lasers, many engineers still don't design parts around the machines' capabilities, specifically its ability to reduce part counts and weldments simply by including features like bent corners and tabs. But ASA's leaders are trying to change that at the earliest opportunity in the proposal process.

"When we got our first tube laser five years ago, you didn't walk in and say, 'What do you need off our tube laser?'" Blatchford quipped. "You had to walk in and say, 'Let us show you how you can manufacture this part differently.' We don't cut steel the way our grandfathers used to. They used to go out there with a saw [and] a machining center."



TRUMPF's TruLaser Tube 7000 is the company's latest tube laser and is now the first in company history to be completely manufactured in the U.S. **TRUMPF**

"Prior to our first tube laser, we were doing all the components for a lot of cabin enclosures. They would bend it on a mandrel and then weld it together. And we were doing so many parts. We had five machining centers. We would cut everything on a saw. With the first tube laser, I was able to get down to one machining center, just for maintenance."

Buerkler said he still views tube lasers as an emerging technology that a lot of people simply aren't aware of. He recalled traveling with a TRUMPF associate to a fabricator of slot machine frames for casinos. The business was cutting and bending C-channels, square tubes, and rectangular tubes and welding them together—a process that took 90 minutes per frame. Buerkler asked the shop to send him a STEP file of the frame. He and his design team then reengineered everything to be made exclusively of tubes cut on a tube laser, reducing the manufacturing time to 10 minutes.

"With the flexibility created by a tube laser is, you can redesign the parts to make them faster and more accurately," Buerkler said. "A tube laser really helps you to reimagine what's possible."

Baker added that the effort often begins with ASA's sales team and how they advise the customers on the laser's capabilities.

"We had a customer out here, and they were making frames. They were making complex fixtures to hold all their parts," Baker recalled. "And so with the help of the design team in Portland and the new tube laser, we almost eliminated those [fixtures] by making the frames so they all locked together. They can just go to welding—so, a huge savings."

"That's just the kind of thinking you have to have," he said. "You have to educate the customer. They have to have their processes in place and their staffing in place for it, but if we can make their job transition, we do."

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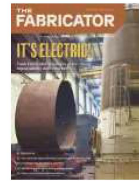

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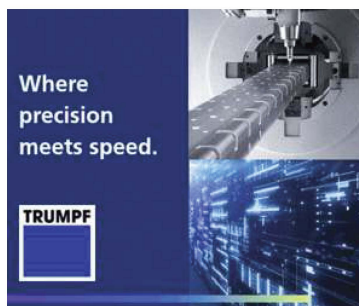
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