

A Cautionary Tale – Point of Origin

A machinist walked into one of the largest industrial tool distributor in Orange County, California, and said, “I want to buy an American ½" brazed carbide tool bit.”

The young clerk searched the storeroom and came back with a tool bit stamped ACT, for the American Cutting Tool Company. “This should do the trick,” the clerk said.

The machinist bought the tool and took it to his shop. Needing to cut some hot-rolled steel, he put the tool bit into a milling machine flycutter. Within minutes, the braze metal let loose and the carbide tip nearly ripped off, leaving the tool caddywhompus . . . and useless. Surprised that an American made tool would fail right from the get-go, the machinist took the tool back to the store. “Look at this,” he said to the clerk. “How can an American tool bit break the very first time I use it?”

The clerk shrugged, then punched a little data into his computer. “Ahh,” he said, scratching his goatee.

“Ahh, what?” the machinist asked.

“Well, it seems that this tool was made in China.”

The machinist was livid. “China! I distinctly asked for an American made tool.”

The clerk gave a smarty-pants smirk. “No, you didn’t. You asked for an American tool bit, and that’s what you got. A tool bit made by the American Cutting Tool Company in China.”

Moral: Check the specs before you buy. Just because the word *American* appears on a tool—don’t assume it was made in America. Most supplier have the country of origin on their computers, but you have to ask for it. This major industrial tool distributor has since left Orange County.

Blotto

A machinist walked into an industrial hardware supply company and said to the clerk, “I need a 7” surface-grinding wheel.”

The clerk pointed him to a box on a shelf. “They should be in there.”

The machinist pawed through the grinding wheels, but couldn’t find any of the paper blotters that come with the wheels. He went to the clerk and asked, “What happened to all the blotters?”

The clerk gave him a blank stare. “Blotters?”

“You know,” the machinist said, wondering why he had to explain this to someone who worked here. “Those paper discs that are used to distribute the force of the wheel flanges so the wheel doesn’t disintegrate.” The clerk still looked baffled. “They’re round with a hole in the middle, about 1/32 of an inch thick.”

“Oh,” the clerk said, sounding like the invisible light bulb above his head had just switched on. “That’s what those are for? I thought they were just packing material and I threw them away.”

Moral: A truly knowledgeable clerk is a rare and wonderful thing. So, when you buy supplies—Know what you need. Do not expect the people who serve you to know anything about the products they sell. They are visitors just passing through. Many of them sold shoes yesterday and will sell fries tomorrow.

Bottle, Bottle, Who's Got the Bottle?

A machinist walked into a welding supply store and bought a brand new, squeaky-clean cylinder of gas. A month later, when he ran out of gas in the middle of a job, he brought the cylinder back to be re-filled.

“Leave it here,” the clerk said. “It’ll be ready in two days.”

Two days later the machinist goes to pick up his re-filled bottle and is presented with an old, cruddy, beat-up bottle. “Hey, that’s not mine. Where’s the nice new bottle I brought in?”

“I don’t know,” the clerk said. “This is the one with your name on it.”

“Are you telling me you lost mine?”

“A bottle is a bottle,” the clerk said. “What’s the big deal?”

“The big deal,” the machinist said, his ball cap nearly blasting off his head, “is that my new bottle didn’t need to be hydro-tested again for seven years. This ugly old thing needs to be tested in less than two years.”

The clerk shrugged. “Well, do you want it or not?”

“I don’t want that one. I want the bottle I paid for.”

“I’ll have to talk to my supervisor,” the clerk said. “But he won’t be in till Friday.”

Grumbling, the machinist took the old, cruddy bottle, and regretted it. And he never bought gas from that distributor again.

Moral: Stand your ground. If they have lost your bottle, don’t accept an inferior replacement, demand a comparable bottle. These welding stores know what they’re doing, but are used to getting away with it.