

In Switzerland the cute hollow figures are mostly packaged in transparent film pouches, and not in aluminum foil.



Photos: db&Strubl

Bunnies with makeup

First plug & pack machine to package hollow chocolate items

The Swiss chocolate manufacturer Chocolats Halba is producing about 2 million chocolate Easter bunnies for next Easter. The company has invested into a custom packaging machine from Strubl KG in order to make packaging the bunnies in transparent film pouches more efficient.

■ In the Swiss town of Hinwil, ½ an hour by car from Zurich, preparations for the Easter business have been in full swing for quite some time already. Every year, Chocolats Halba, a subsidiary of Swiss Coop, produces

Easter bunnies made of chocolate and 120 million chocolate eggs. Production of Easter items winds down at the end of January; the bunnies then wait in Coop warehouses until retail sales start.

bunny family has grown to a respectable size, even including a hen and a duck.

Bunnies in OPP pouches

After the bunnies have cooled off, they are put into attractive sales packaging. While in Germany, they are wrapped in aluminum foil, they are mostly packaged in transparent film pouches in Switzerland.

For this purpose we only use OPP film pouches. Due to their high gloss and transparency, as well as their good mechanical characteristics, they represent the best packaging for our chocolate bunnies," says Rolf Reinle.

Consequently, the new plug & pack machine from Strubl KG shall also use OPP pouches. This was one of the requirements for the film specialist and machine manufacturer. "No problem for the machine; we simply replaced the gusseted square bottom pouches with folded bottom ones made of OPP," explains Otto Schuler, Plug & Pack Systems product manager at Strubl. The pouches also come from Strubl and are supplied as wicket containers.

Info

Strubl KG

This German family-owned and -operated SME produces approx. 8,000 metric tons of film annually with 90 employees at its two sites in Wendelstein nr. Nürnberg and Nabburg/Oberpfalz. The company's product portfolio includes 17 extruder systems, 3 flexo printers, laminating systems, reel slitters and 40 conversion machines, and Strubl also develops and builds its customized packaging machinery with the support of the company's internal fabrication department for tooling and machinery (Strubl at ProSweets 2012 in Cologne: Hall 10/1, Booth G 089.)

While the manufacture of chocolate Easter eggs is highly automated – here, an industrial robotic arm from ABB just recently began operating the spinning machine, loading and unloading its rotating drum automatically and precisely at the right time in any position, based on a complex system – the production of Easter bunnies still requires a lot of manual work. So for example, it takes 15 employees to manufacture and package the chocolate bunnies, which are made up and decorated with marzipan. But the process of putting on "make-up" is automated; eyes, ears and the long teeth made of white chocolate are first loaded into the die by the make-up robotic system; then the remaining chocolate is added and spun so that it is uniformly deposited on the interior walls of the die. A new set has 500 dies. "Each year, new ones are added," explains Rolf Reinle, manager of the Chocolats Halba Hinwil plant. Meanwhile Chocolats Halba's



The pouches are made of OPP film (left). If large chocolate bunnies weighing 500 g are packaged, the system can run at up to 18 cycles/min.

The new plug & pack packaging machine has two pouch magazines; as soon as one of them is empty, the machine automatically switches to the other one. "That's a very good solution; we can now operate entirely without any interruptions," explains Reinle.

At the second workstation, the pouches are then marked with the required data. The integrated thermal transfer printer can print in different widths (38 mm x 55 mm to 128 mm x 200 mm) and 360 dpi and if necessary, on the front and back. Then the pouches are opened pneumatically or with suction cups and handed off to the fill station.

If large chocolate bunnies weighing 500 g are packaged there, the system can be adapted individually – from manual to semi-automated to fully automated production. At the Hinwil plant, an employee takes the delicate hollow items from a feed conveyor and puts them into the pouch standing up. Then, the film pouch is sealed automatically.

The chocolate manufacturer puts a special emphasis on getting a visually perfect sealing seam. "Here, we are very happy with the results from the plug & pack machine," says Reinle. Finally, the system also prices the items individually. This modular packaging machine can put out about 900 completed retail packages per hour.

100 plug & pack machines in operation already

Film specialist Strubl has been developing and building special-purpose machinery for about ten years. The plug & pack machine for Chocolats Halba is the first system to be used in the confectionery industry. "Currently, we have a total of about 100 machines in the field – one of them even in New York, the others mainly in Germany and in European countries, including Eastern Europe and Russia," explains Otto Schuler. At this year's ProSweets, the international supplier trade fair for the confectionery industry, Strubl will present the new machine – and also bring chocolate bunnies from Hinwil to Cologne

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