

# British love affair with baguettes

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND BRITISH PEOPLE HAS NEVER BEEN EASY. HOWEVER, THEY ARE UNITED IN THEIR LOVE OF CRUNCHY BAGUETTES WITH OPEN PORES



**+** These baguettes are the basis of success for “Le Pain Croustillant”, genuine French products made in Britain.

Le Pain Croustillant is located in the industrial area of Southall, Middlesex near London. Pain rustique, baguettes and speciality bread products are produced here. The recipes and processes are of French origin. The products sold to major retailers and food service companies are then baked-off for the final consumer. The company was founded more than



20 years ago by Richard Vanbergen. Today, it belongs to the Premier Foods Group who acquired it in March 2007 from the milling and baking ingredients group RHM (Rank-Hovis-McDougall). At the same time, Premier Foods also took over several cake and toast bread producers and brands such as Hovis, Mother’s Pride, Mr. Kipling, Cadbury’s and Lyons. Premier is now the largest food group in the UK, with a turnover, in 2006 of GBP 959.4m

The latest investment at Le Pain Croustillant is a Crustica by WP-Haton. Predominantly so-called artisan baguettes are produced on this line. This is a premium variant of the “French stick bread” with a dough hydration of 75% and a batch proofing time of up to 24 hours. Almost all ingredients, mainly all types of flour processed in Southall, are imported from France.

Le Pain Croustillant is the largest supplier of part-baked goods in the UK.

When the decision was made in favor of Crustica in 2005, several criteria were decisive.

First of all, the new equipment had to be highly flexible in terms of weight ranges and types of dough. All baguettes, breads and rolls are produced according to customer specifications (recipes, weight, and shape). The doughs are made with sponge or sour dough, with added rye flours and grain kernel seeds. The customers demand a large variety of shapes. Some require the baguettes to be long and thin, for others they need to be shorter or thicker, with or without thicker ends – but all the time they must look like hand-made artisan products that stand out against the standard baguettes. This broad spectrum of requests cannot be fulfilled with a fully automatic machine – this became clear and the decision was made for semi-automatic equipment. The employees use the freedom that the machine offers in order to finish off the baguettes before they are baked in a stone-plate oven. The combination of raw materials, processes and technology had been thoroughly tested in the test bakeries at WP-Haton before the layout and performance of the Crustica for Le Pain Croustillant were finally defined. The equipment which today processes baguettes with a dough hydration of 75% and a batch proofing time of 1 – 1.5 hours consists of a movable dough hopper which feeds the V500-2 dough divider. A conical rounder produces dough balls which are stored for 15 minutes in an intermediate proofer before they are formed into strands by a second conical rounder and Combi-U-Moulder. The pieces of dough are ▶



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positioned in the middle of the machine via a conveyor belt and two vertical centering rollers and then conveyed to the first pair of degassing and sheeting rollers. These rollers can also function as transportation rollers (for round dough and dough not made from wheat) by opening them. Directly after this, there are two flattening rollers on the moulding belt positioned one behind the other. By means of this new construction – driven centering rollers, one set of degassing rollers to sheet the dough and two sequentially arranged flattening rollers on the moulding belt – a large variety of doughs can be treated gently and perfectly. For the production of seam controlled pieces, a specially constructed curl-

ing net station folds the pieces of dough, checking the final position. The pressure board, the height of which can be set at the front and the back, creates the required length of the dough.

At the end of the line, an employee grabs the strands and places them on baguette trays. Two other employees stretch the extremely soft dough to its final length. Here a gentle lifting of the dough is sufficient for shaping.

In the supermarkets where the baguettes are sold, there are predominately the company's own display cases with the Premium name and the information that these products are baked on stone plates. +++

