Right Trac

A product, sold across the world and dominates the US gas pipe market is making life easier – and more profitable – for installers here in the UK. *Installer* looks at why this is so.

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Arguably one of the best-kept secrets in the UK heating industry has to be TracPipe®– the stainless steel semi-rigid gas piping system that’s quickly becoming the recognised alternative to traditional rigid copper or steel pipework installed between the meter and an appliance.

While relatively new to the European market, stainless steel semi-rigid gas piping has a 30-year installation history, initially in Japan and then in North America, where the product has captured more than 50% of the US gas pipe market, with a very sound safety record.

Here in the UK, TracPipe semi-rigid gas piping is quickly winning friends as a viable alternative to copper and steel rigid gas pipework, but what really seems to attract UK installers is how easy it is to work with and how much time it saves on an installation.

Clear message

Oxfordshire-based manufacturer Omega Flex Limited says that TracPipe can typically save up to 75% of the time normally required for a steel or copper pipe installation – and that’s the clear message it wants to communicate to UK installers looking for a competitive advantage in a challenging marketplace.

“History has proven that once UK installers try the TracPipe system, they’ll immediately see the advantages both in terms of time saved and ease of installation,” said Omega Flex Sales and Marketing Director Tony Dark.

“Given the current market conditions, installers can gain a genuine competitive advantage when they use TracPipe. The time-saving benefit alone can enable an installer to quote more competitively and win more work as a result.”

So what exactly is TracPipe?

TracPipe is made of flexible Corrugated Stainless Steel Tube (CSST) with a smoke and fire retardant yellow polyethylene protective cover, in accordance with British Standard BS 7838.

The product comes in convenient reels for long continuous pipe runs, in diameters of 12, 15, 22, 28, 32, 40 and 50 mm. The recent introduction of TracPipe KITS in shorter lengths of 5, 10 and 15 metres are supplied with TracPipe self-amalgamating tape and available with or without AutoFlare® fittings – ideal for smaller installations, where domestic heating engineers run or replace, undersized lines between gas meter and an appliance.

“The key advantage that installers using TracPipe have when quoting to win business is the reduction in labour time and cost – resulting in being able to complete more profitable work in less time, due to the significant time-saving benefits of the product” said Tony Dark. “The corrugated design of the pipe allows it to be run quickly and safely in continuous lengths, bending easily by hand without altering its internal diameter. TracPipe can easily run the entire length of the installation with no fittings between either end and requires no special tools – there’s no need for time-consuming joining, soldering or welding.”

At the heart of TracPipe’s design is its patented AutoFlare fitting. AutoFlare male BSP taper threads link all the benefits of TracPipe to traditional pipe fittings – malleable iron, steel etc. – and does so with no special tools. Two spanners, a utility knife and a standard tube cutter suitable for stainless steel, are all you need to connect AutoFlare fittings (see panel). AutoFlare is self-flaring and easy to use. It is self-piloting and the joint seals with normal spanner torque for safe, leak-free connections – no paste or sealing compounds are required.

In addition, the new TracPipe-to-copper compression fitting allows it to be connected to existing copper pipework.

BSi Kitemarked to British Standard BS7838, TracPipe is suitable for natural gas, propane or butane, (1st 2nd and 3rd family gases), at working pressures to 75 mbar. For working pressures above 75 mbar reference should be made to The Institution of Gas Engineers Utilisation Procedures IGE/UP/2. Designing an installation using TracPipe stainless steel semirigid gas piping can be performed by reference to the design principles and flow tables included in TracPipe Design and Installation Specification, which is available from distributors or through the company’s website, www.omegaflex.co.uk. (See BS 6891 – *Specification for installation of low pressure gas pipework of up to 32mm (R1) in domestic premises (2nd family gas)*.)

Recent conversion

Lekan Shamu, Managing Director of LDS Heating, recently used TracPipe for the first time on a conversion of ten high-spec flats near the Oval Cricket Ground in London.

“Using TracPipe we were able to complete work on the flats’ boilers in just two days, despite the fact that some boiler locations changed during the project. If we had been using copper pipe it would have taken a week,” said Lekan.

While TracPipe costs a little more than copper, Lekan says that you more than make up for this in the significant amount of time it saves you.

“The other great thing about it is that it’s much safer to leave on site,” he said. “Copper pipe has a nasty habit of being stolen.”

As a first-time user, Lekan said he had excellent support from TracPipe during the build. “They visited the site and helped with the specification of material. The after-sales support was excellent, and we will definitely be using TracPipe in the future.”

Commercial and domestic

James Redman, Managing Director of R.A. Redman Plumbing and Heating based in Southampton, has been using TracPipe for some time now. “At first we only used it on light commercial projects, but since TracPipe kits were introduced we now use it on domestic installations as well.

“It’s so fast and easy to work with compared to copper which, in comparison, takes so long to install. Because you don’t need joints, you just roll it out, secure it in the same way as other materials and connect it.”

James says that TracPipe saves so much time it can make the difference between securing a job and losing it. “Sometimes with copper it is necessary to run the pipe on the outside of somebody’s home, and people don’t want to see a pipe. With TracPipe you can simply drill a hole, sleeve it through a wall and run it under the floor,” he said. “It’s great because it’s so much less disruptive.”

James has also found TracPipe’s flexibility very useful on larger properties where he is doing simple boiler changes from open-vented boilers to combi boilers, which require a greater flow gas rate from a larger diameter pipe.

“We’ve also used it on light commercial installations like nurseries and nursing homes, and it works perfectly.”

TracPipe® and AutoFlare® are registered trademarks of Omega Flex Limited.

A step-by-step guide shows how easy it is to use the TracPipe system.

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How to assemble fittings to TracPipe®

1. CUT TO LENGTH
TracPipe® is marked every meter as an installation aid. Use a wheeled tube cutter with a stainless steel blade. Cut through plastic cover and stainless steel pipe ensuring blade is centred between two corrugations. Use full circular strokes in one direction and tighten roller pressure slightly (a quarter turn) after each revolution. Ensure a clean cut with no tags.

2. STRIP COVER
Using a utility knife, strip back the plastic cover about 25 mm back from the cut end to allow assembly of fittings.

3. INSTALL BACK NUT
Slide the back nut over the cut end. Place the two split rings into the first corrugation next to the pipe cut. Slide the back nut forward to trap the rings.

4. FIT AUTOFLARE® FITTING
Place the AutoFlare fitting into the back nut and engage threads. Note that the AutoFlare fitting is designed to form a metal-on-metal leak-tight seat on the piping as you tighten the fitting. No paste should be used. Using appropriate wrenches, tighten the fitting until the resistance to wrenching increases greatly. The flare has now been created on the piping end.

5. FINAL TORQUE
Tighten nut and body as though you were making up a flared tubing joint. Note the relation between hex flats at this point and continue to tighten for two additional hex flats (one-third turn) to obtain required torque and final leak-tight seal. Ensure no more than two threads are on view when tightened.

6. TAPE WRAP
After gas tightness test.
Care must be taken after pressure test to ensure that no stainless steel pipe is visible. Any portions of exposed stainless steel behind the fitting nut shall be wrapped with TracPipe self-bonding silicone tape. This will reduce the possibility of later corrosive attack.