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JCB's ambitious move into diesel engine manufacturing was honoured today by HRH The Duke of York when he officially opened the factory producing the technologically-advanced engines.

In 2004, JCB became the first company in the UK for 60 years to begin diesel engine manufacture using a state-of-the-art design.

Now, just 15 months after the first JCB444 engine was made at the plant at Dove Valley Park, Foston, Derbyshire following an £80 million investment, daily production has hit 100 units – and the engine is powering more than half the machines made by JCB each year.

The JCB444 engine has been designed to meet all the forthcoming emission and noise legislation with the minimum of design changes – a major benefit as most current engines will need significant adaptation in order to comply.

During the visit JCB Chairman Sir Anthony Bamford praised the team behind the production of "this superb British engine."

"The JCB diesel engine is a project very close to my heart", Sir Anthony said. "My father always wanted to manufacture his own engine and he developed a number of prototypes. However, the high costs ruled it out – until now.

"Using the latest design and manufacturing technology, we have developed the most modern diesel engine by far for use in off-highway machines.

"JCB is a technology-driven company and I am hugely proud of what we have achieved. If observers have any doubts about the excellence of British engineering, they shouldn't have. Just look at this superb British engine.

"The success of any new product can only be judged by our customers. They are very impressed. Already, more than half the machines we manufacture are powered by the JCB engine. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the whole team at JCB Power Systems for doing a great job".

During his visit The Duke was briefed on the advanced engine design, saw the production processes first hand and met some of the 100-plus employees at the plant. Before departing he also unveiled a plaque to commemorate his visit.

The £80 million cost of the JCB444 engine is the biggest single investment made by JCB in its 60-year history.

Before going into production it underwent a five-year development programme, which included more than 100,000 hours of pre-launch testing. Today the engine is fitted into the company's world-leading range of backhoe loaders as well as Loadall telescopic handlers.

Turner Powersystems has already supplied engines into pump units and marine applications.

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