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# What's in a name?

Lifting group Böcker is celebrating 50 years in business this September, over that time the company has seen many changes, the most recent - the bringing together all of its 11 companies under a single brand image is probably its biggest. Mark Darwin visited the company's facilities in Werne, Germany to find out more.



Ir Jens te Kaat, Carsten Spiegel and Robert Böcker

"We first realised we had a problem at Bauma last year when visitors came onto the stand and were confused by so many brands," says Böcker sales and marketing director Michael Sendermann. "We do have a wide range of products from trailer and truck cranes to hoists and all manner of vertical lifts - and because of its history, each has its own brand image. We needed to simplify matters and create one Böcker brand, the decision has been taken and are now well down the process of implementing it."

The company was founded by Albert Böcker in 1958 as a producer of trailer cranes. Robert Böcker GmbH (his son) was formed in 1986 producing vertical lift products such as hoists, material lifts and ladder lifts. Steinweg was acquired in 2003 adding an extensive range of hoists and lifts.



An AHK 30.1400 trailer crane

"We now have one new brand logo under 'The Lifting Group' which hopefully is much easier for customers to understand," said Sendermann. "Everything is now part of Böcker AG - the holding company - and three

main divisions - Albert Böcker, Robert Böcker and Steinweg Böcker."

The company is still a private 'family' company with son Robert Böcker as managing director assisted by Carsten Spiegel in charge of finance and administration and Jens te Kaat

This type of lift is still unpopular in the UK



overseeing production and manufacturing. Third generation Alexander Böcker is also now part of the company.

Albert Böcker's original philosophy was very employee orientated and in particular, give young people a chance. This continues to this day. The 50th anniversary celebrations illustrate this well and will include three parties - one for its domestic clients, one for its international clients and one - probably the most important - for its staff and families who have made it all possible.

"We believe that every person in the company plays a vital role in its development and performance, from the senior management to the maintenance and cleaning staff,"



A Giant-Lift construction hoist

says Senderman. Michael himself joined the company as an apprentice in 1987 and has worked in most departments on his way up to his current position.

Of the 330 employees currently with the company, 30 are apprentices - a very high percentage and an easy reminder of the company's philosophy. It also has 24 employed in the design department showing its emphasis on new product innovation and development.

"Since 2004 we have achieved a 25 percent annual growth with revenues increasing from 30 million to almost 60 million. Last year we manufactured 2,200 machines which is almost full capacity," says Sendermann. "As well as investing in people, the company has also spent a lot on the latest production machinery and this should enable about 2,400 machines to be built this year of which 69 percent will be exported."

Böcker now has six product lines: truck and trailer cranes; inclined construction and furniture lifts; construction hoists; brick laying and clamps; mobile material lifts and a metal division.

The first machines Böcker produced were aluminium trailer cranes followed by truck mounted cranes in 1989. These products now offer capacities of up to six tonnes and tip heights of 41 metres. These cranes have grown in popularity and performance

over the years the first unit mounted on a 7.5 tonne chassis had a 650kg capacity and 25 metre reach. Our current crane on a 7.5 tonne chassis has a three tonne capacity and can lift to 35 metres, which shows the continual development in the product," says Sendermann. "I think the limit on this chassis is four tonnes to about 38 metres but we will have to see."

Last year the company produced 200 cranes - 150 trailer and 50 truck mounted. Due to the demand it is hoping to increase this to 180 trailers and 70 truck mounts this year.

The Böcker Agilo furniture elevator consists of a range of models mounted on vehicles with GVW between 2.5 to 8.5 tonnes, capable of lifting 300/400kg to a height between 26 to 55 metres. Not a very common sight in the UK, they are growing in popularity particularly in the bigger cities where they are often the only safe and efficient way of moving large or heavy items of furniture. The trailer mounted Arriva elevators - mounted on GVW of between 1.8 - 2.24 tonnes - also have a standard/maximum capacity of 300/400kg



A Superlift MX 1524 transport platform Model



*A Böcker Toplift Ladder-Lift*

but with heights from 26-37 metres. A Junior furniture lift, capable of being towed by the smallest of cars is also available with a 250kg maximum capacity and lift heights from 15-24 metres.

The Junior construction lift is a very similar unit which can also go through standard doorways and can lift up to 250kg. However it has the option of a mechanical knee joint which allows materials to be lifted over guttering level and onto roofs.

Böcker's Alp-Lift range of push around aluminium aerial lifts and material lifts were originally based on Genie designs but modified in 2000.



*Böcker ALP-Cinema Lift*

An interesting variation is the Kinolift PHC 1000S which can be set up in about 10 minutes to straddling rows of seats and slopes such as in a cinema or theatre.

With the acquisition of Steinweg a few years ago this has also added passenger and material hoists and



*A Model MK 400 Mini-Crane*

service lifts from the compact rack and pinion Superlift materials hoist for building and renovation through to the Giant-Lift with a lift height of 400 metres and capacity of 3.2 tonnes.

"The Böcker Steinweg range now covers most applications for both materials and people," says Sendermann. "Together with the 500kg lift capacity Mini crane - ideal for lifting large concrete blocks - the block platform lift and brick/block grab attachments and you can see why there was so much customer confusion. All are now marketed under the Böcker brand."

To increase production dramatically is difficult as its 64,000 sq ft facility at Werne is expensive to expand. Current expansion uses space at the old Steinweg facility located just 3km away. This includes a new dedicated training room, essential for the development of the company.

"Currently we sell through 50 agents in 30 countries, mainly in Europe," says Sendermann. "We will concentrate of increasing sales into Europe - particularly Poland and Russia - and then look further a field. We currently sell 350 furniture lifts per year to countries such as France, Belgium, Spain and Italy but there is huge potential in other European countries such as the UK. Rental companies do not currently look seriously at Böcker and this is something we need to rectify."

"In emerging markets such as Russia - we need to start selling the smaller construction and ladder lifts as a way into the market," he adds. "A 3,500 ladder lift may lead to a trailer crane and on to other equipment."

Selling equipment further a field also means that backup and service must match acknowledges Sendermann: "Service is very important to the success of the company. We now have our service centre manned by experienced people from 7am to 7.30pm Monday to Friday and 7am till noon on Saturday. These hours have been extended to cater for countries such as Italy and Spain that tend to work later in the day. The last problem we had in the UK we had a specialist engineer on a plane that evening to ensure that it was sorted. This is the level of service we give. We also employ an English language teacher to improve communications."

"We are a family company where everyone is important, as a result staff turnover is very low, this is also the case with our dealers.

For example our partner in Austria has been with us for 25 years. We try to support and develop our dealers by supporting them with demonstration machines as well as helping with exhibitions and shows."

The company appears to be getting behind the new 'one brand, one team, one target' philosophy. Growth over the past three years has averaged

25 percent a year with a further 15 to 18 percent forecast for 2008.

Böcker is certainly becoming more organised, bringing all its products under the one umbrella, it certainly appears more focused. However if it is to make progress with some of its niche products it needs to change the way construction companies work - particularly in the UK. Its first truck mounted crane is due for delivery to Towcester-based Berry Cranes in September while sales and rental of trailer cranes is on the increase, perhaps the UK is becoming more open to new ideas and methods after all?



*An AK 35.3000 truck crane*



*A Superlift MX 2024*