

# Universal

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# Be different - or die

In 1969, Sennebogen was the first company in world to launch a fully hydraulically operated, lattice boom crawler crane and yet today, is probably the most traditional crane manufacturer still producing in Europe. Mark Darwin talks to Erich Sennebogen Jnr, son of the founder and head of the Straubing-based family company.

Sennebogen was founded in Pilling, Bavaria in 1952 by a 21 year old Erich Sennebogen and for the first few years the company produced machines for the agricultural sector. The lack of construction equipment in Germany at that time, however, meant that it was not long before the company changed direction to concentrate on excavators and then lattice boomed cranes. Today the range has grown to include crawler lattice and telescopic cranes, truck cranes and since 1996, its Green Line excavator-type materials grab handlers, Multihandlers and special crawler bases.

Still 'proud to be a family company', Sennebogen is now run by Erich Sennebogen Junior and his brother Walter. "I lived next to the factory for 30 years so naturally the company is my life," says Sennebogen. "My background is mechanical engineering so I am responsible for the design of the equipment but also product development and sales. There is always a too much work to do, if I had the time I would like to visit more customers and see our machines in action."

Sennebogen has two sons aged 20 and 21, one interested in mechanical engineering the other business economics and both are interested in joining the company at some stage.

## Built to order

Perhaps it is the wide product range with relatively low unit production runs, but Sennebogen is one of the few companies that is happy to produce 'customised machines' - and we are not just talking of re-routing an exhaust or adding on a few minor items.

"Our products use a modular design which allows a large degree of customisation," says Sennebogen. "About 30 percent of our products



Erich Sennebogen Jnr

are non-standard. It is our philosophy and a key feature of the company to give the customer exactly what he wants. Most other companies shy away from this because they concentrate on high numbers of standard products, but with the right attitude within the company and complete flexibility in the design, purchasing and production, we can provide additional benefits to customers' machines whether it is different power source or lengthening or shortening booms. Anything is possible, particularly as we know we have three production facilities in Bavaria."

## Growth in material handling

The growth of the material handling side of the business over the last 13 years has been huge and now accounts for about 60 percent of the company's €310 million revenues. As Sennebogen points out, the market for the Green Line machines is much larger than for cranes and the company claims to have moved from a being minor player in 12th to 15th place, to being one of the top three producers in the niche material handling sectors in which it operates.

"Yellow was the standard construction colour, but as we were new to the sector we took the philosophy of 'be different or die' and colour was one way of differentiating our products. Now, any green machine in a materials handling operation is a Sennebogen." Latest in the Green Line range is the recently launched 310 Multihandler - a heavy duty telehandler come crane - big brother to the 305 launched three years ago. The new 20 tonne



Sennebogen Plant 2



1991: The telescopic wheeled 613



2009: The new 690 HD launched at Intermat



1969: The world's first hydraulic rope crawler crane

machine - which completed its trials in the UK - can be fitted with a five cubic metre bucket, and lift up to 10 tonnes at a 9.3 metre outreach. An elevating cab gives the operator an optimal view, for greater efficiency and safety when loading/unloading over obstacles than a fixed cab. It is a sturdy machine built for specific arduous and continuous duties.

## Heavy Duty policy

Sennebogen says that all its products are heavy duty and built to last, none are over-complicated or over-engineered and all have the minimum of electronics making servicing and repair that much easier. "The best

compliment for one of our machines is that it we don't hear about it when it has been working five years," says Sennebogen. "We have cranes built in 1972 that are still working every day with no problems - not good for us - we know we will never make money out of spares - but great for the customer!"

The crane range currently runs from 30 to 200 tonnes, featuring engines up to 600kW, 30 tonne winches for single rope line pull and heavy-duty extendible undercarriages (all built by Sennebogen). Its latest crane, the 90 tonne 690 HD heavy duty crawler, unveiled at Intermat - fills

the gap in its range between the existing 80 and 100 tonne cranes. The unit is specifically aimed at tough applications such as foundation work, diaphragm walling, dragline, pile driving, demolition and grab work.

The design takes into account the type of work the crane is aimed at and so has many HD features that are 'standard' such as a large capacity hydraulic system to cope with the power of the engines - either 291kW or 447kW - and to power external equipment such as a casing oscillator. Two winches are standard, as are additional pumps and a stronger slew drive system. The boom is a specially designed HD version and not modified from another model, it has synchronised 16 tonne and 20 tonne main winches and a 25 tonne single line pull winch, all multi-disc and oil immersed units.

### Becoming global

In 2000, the company opened its first overseas sales and service operation, Sennebogen LLC, in Charlotte, USA and added Sennebogen Middle East in Dubai (UAE) a few years ago. It also has more than 70 sales and service partners around the world including UK distributor Hassell.

"We are now a global company with equipment working around the world and will soon open a new subsidiary in Asia," says Sennebogen. "With products working in extreme temperatures from the freezing Arctic, Siberia and Northern Canada to the heat of desert conditions, we modify the machines to cope with its environment, fitting pre-heating systems, special oils and greases for the low temperatures and equipment to keep oil temperatures at a healthy level thus avoiding leakages, failures and unreliability."

"I believe we are the last remaining traditional crane manufacturer in Europe," he adds. "Cranes have changed a lot over the years but the lattice boom crane, and particularly the HD machine, has a specific market and no other machine can go as deep or high, or has the radius with the tonnage. The market has shrunk over the past 30 years, but our total sales have increased 300 percent in just five years with crane sales more than doubling in that time."

### Local content

Sennebogen is wary of the growing threat of manufacturers from countries such as China, particularly

in the crawler crane market. "Yes, we are worried slightly, but the Chinese manufacturers are not yet into the specialised market, they are building for numbers and cannot survive on producing 10 to 20 units. We have the total package - a strong design, good after sales support including spare parts and technical support."

"We know we need to work hard to compete better on price and try to do this through design. But to achieve the performance and reliability of our cranes we have to use high quality components around 80 percent of the content on the 690HD is sourced in Germany, 90 percent within Europe. We choose the best component for the job, not the cheapest because if there is a weak link, this will let you down. A cheap component will always be more expensive in the long term. Some of our material handling equipment is working 24 hours a day, seven days a week or 6,700 hours per year. Normal machines are not built to cope with this workload, but a Sennebogen machine is."

Talking with Erich Sennebogen, his passion for the company, knowledge of the product and commitment to its long-term future is immediately obvious. As he says 'you have to be different or die'. By being a traditional specialised company, with the flexibility to offer customisation, the company is certainly different.

### Loves/Hates

**Music:** Jazz and Soul including Barry White and 70's and 80's disco

**Sport:** Riding mountain and road racing bikes

**Gadgets:** Not a big fan of computers or gadgets - used when necessary

**Other:** Loves gardening

1966: Rope excavator S833 in a dragline bucket application



1989: S1240R rope excavator



2009: The recently launched 310 Multihandler



1992: S655R rope excavator

## Sennebogen History

**1952** Erich Sennebogen, aged 21, founds his own company making agricultural machinery in Pilling near Straubing.

**1953** The first machines for agriculture are produced. The company has 13 members of staff.

**1957** The first rope excavators for the building industry are developed and produced.

**1959** The rapid growth of the company forces expansion. A new plant is opened in Straubing.

**1962** Alongside the traditional mechanical rope excavators, Sennebogen develops its first hydraulic excavators (SH40, SH50, SH60).

**1969** Sennebogen develops the world's first hydraulic rope crawler crane and produce a lattice boom truck crane.

**1972** First Sennebogen hydraulic excavator.

**1977** Introduces the 10 tonne TX10 wheeled industrial crane.

**1978** The first telescopic crawler crane launched.

**1979** Sennebogen introduces the telescopic truck crane.

**1980** Sennebogen develops the hydraulically adjusting articulated boom. It also develops the EVS-3

cycle hydraulic system, setting new standards in speed and efficiency.

**1984** Develops and produces its own special base carriers for use worldwide.

**1991** Production begins at the modern, 160,000 sqm Wackersdorf site.

**1993** Sennebogen develops telescopic boom cranes.

**1998** The 200 tonne 6180 HD Starlifter is launched.

**2000** An American sales and service operation is established in Charlotte, USA.

**2001** Presentation of a new generation of HD cranes at Bauma. 70th birthday of company founder and owner Erich Sennebogen.

**2003** Launch of the 305 Multihandler with elevating driver's cab - the first of its kind in the world.

**2006** The Multicrane 608 with elevating cab is launched.

**2007** Sennebogen Middle East, established in Dubai (UAE). Development and production of the Sennebogen material handling machines 880 EQ and 880 classic.

**2008** Erection of the additional works two in the industrial park Straubing-Sand with a total area of 125,000 sq m and an investment of more than €30 million.

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