

Shield fully charged at 100



Battery manufacturer at Shield's Bishop's Stortford facility

In today's corporate world, finding thriving family businesses is becoming harder and harder. Finding one that can trace its roots back 100 years is almost an impossibility. Unless, of course, you visit Bishop's Stortford-based manufacturer and distributor Shield Batteries, the UK's only remaining independent battery manufacturer.

The company was started in 1910, by William Hubert Butterfield - the great grandfather of current managing director Neil Butterfield - manufacturing accumulator batteries in glass jars from its premises in Milton Road, North London. In those days, the batteries were sold under the brand name Milton Accumulators.

Production continued through the First World War before advancing into hard rubber-cased batteries. During the Second World War, the company moved premises to nearby Denmark Road, and William's son William Arthur joined the company to further develop the business. It was 1966 (a few years after 3rd generation David - Neil's father) - joined the company) that the 'Shield' brand was launched, aimed primarily at the starter battery market.

Two years later it relocated to Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire, its current head office and



A Crown Deep Cycle battery

manufacturing facility. The fourth generation and current Butterfield, Neil joined the company in 1988 after a few years in the automotive sector, today he heads three Shield group companies which employ a total of 39 staff and generate revenues of £6 million.

The last 10 years have seen considerable growth, primarily through acquisitions and associations. "In 1999 we formed an association with Reem Batteries in Oman and over the last five years acquired Battery Services in Leicester, formed a technical and trade agreement with Crown Batteries - now the fourth largest industrial battery producer in the USA and a specialist in the deep cycle batteries used in access equipment - acquired the brand and technical rights for Sterling high integrity valve regulated batteries and last year acquired Manchester-based Shepherd & Co Batteries, formed in 1928, primarily to improve distribution and service in the North," says Butterfield.

The small site at Bishop's Stortford is supplanted by a local storage facility located nearby. Sales and distribution tend to be dealt with direct but distributors are used in certain parts of the UK (the South West, Ireland and Scotland for example) where there are logistical problems or lower product volumes. "We are heavily involved in the rail and bus industries either with our own designed and manufactured products or via Reem Batteries that

does some of the bus-type batteries for us. All the rail batteries are 100 percent produced here," says Butterfield. "We also still supply the niche but sizeable vintage car battery sector, as well as gel batteries."

However it is the Crown deep cycle batteries, targeted at the powered access industry, that the company is hoping will provide its next growth spurt. It estimates that more than 100,000 deep cycle batteries are sold each year in the UK. "We have supplied deep cell batteries since 2005," says Butterfield. "Many companies have tried this market before but it was always difficult with a dominant market leader (Trojan). Now more and more people see the strength of our company and the quality of the Crown product and are accepting us as their main supplier."

The price comparable Crown battery has a number of unique features and benefits such as a watering eye - allowing quick visual checks of electrolyte levels, more water space on top of the batteries so the time between topping-up is extended, cast-on strap technology and solid precast cold-forged, corrosion-proof terminals.

"Deep cycle battery technology has many challenges - long machine running times, very high power demands, preventative maintenance being the exception, incorrect machine use and charging equipment not up to the job," he says. "If similar batteries are cheaper, there is usually a reason. Batteries with a lower performance come from all over the world - China, Mexico, India, El Salvador. Some of these products perform at well under 50 percent of quoted figures. Cheaper batteries have less material (lead) in them and less features. Of course they will be cheaper."



Crown uses the latest manufacturing techniques.

A measure of a battery is its cycle life. Independent tests in the USA tested four manufacturers' similar batteries to 100 percent depth of discharge (1.75 vpc - volts per cell). An America-only distributed battery managed 281 cycles, a US Batteries achieved 522, the Trojan managed 751 and the Crown 822 cycles.

"All batteries have their strengths and weaknesses but customers should be aware that there is a choice of good batteries available in the UK," says Butterfield. "We have excellent product and a vastly experienced sales, technical and customer service team - ideal for a demanding clientele."

Just what you would expect from a company in its 100th year.



MEC is one OEM using Crown Batteries.