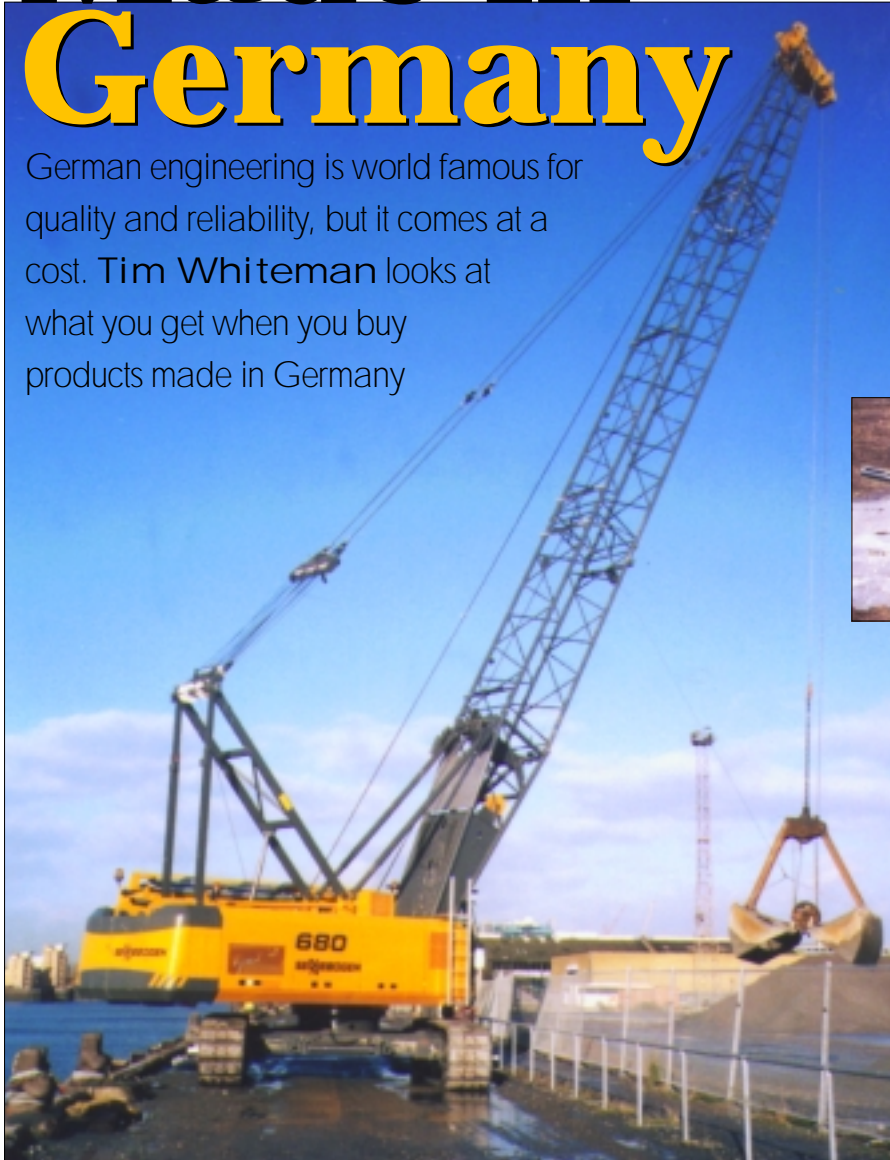


Made in Germany

German engineering is world famous for quality and reliability, but it comes at a cost. Tim Whiteman looks at what you get when you buy products made in Germany



Fil Filipov, boss of Terex Cranes, acknowledged this when he master-minded the purchase of companies like Atlas, Schaeff, and Fuchs last year before pulling off the *coup d'etat* by purchasing Demag this year. Two aspects of Demag are constantly emphasised by Filipov – the great after sales service and the engineering skills. Both are features that he intends to build on and stresses in any discussion of Demag.

AT dominance

Looking at the products that dominate German exports to our industry it is easy to see the emphasis on engineering skills coming through. The European mobile



The "go-anywhere" Leo from Teupen

crane industry is now dominated by four German crane factories although all but one of them have been bought by non-German crane manufacturers. The exception is Liebherr, also the largest, which likes to see itself as the Mercedes of the crane business. Its crane designers openly aspire to hi-tech solutions and have undoubtedly "pushed the envelope" in crane design. Ehingen's 70 metre booms are technological marvels and are backed by a worldwide net-



Virtually unknown outside Germany is PB's range of powered access

For a German-speaking Englishman who spends a lot of time in Germany, the research for this article was fascinating. What do people associate with products that are Made in Germany? And is there really any advantage in buying German built products – that's what I wanted to know.

The answer started to become clear with the first responses I got and might make interesting reading for Chancellor Schroeder as he tries to kick start the German economy. The first, almost immediate reaction from Brits and Germans was that German-made products are expensive. There is no getting away from the fact that German products of all kinds, whether

Hanson Aggregates' 680HD Sennebogen at Victoria Deep Dock

cranes or cars, are not the cheapest on offer.

But, and it is an important but, they hold their value. This is because they are seen to be well-engineered, well designed, and because people are confident that they will be able to get spare parts and after-sales service many years after the original guarantee has expired.

The result is that successful German companies tend to focus on excellence. They know that they cannot compete on cost because everything, from salaries to transport costs, is higher than in most neighbouring countries. They win by producing a premium product that people are willing to pay for.



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◀ work of dealers and after sales service that some car manufacturers might aspire to. But it comes at a cost. Like a Mercedes, Liebherr are not the cheapest and, if something does need fixing, you may not have much success if you call in

a local mechanic with a standard set of tools! But, they do hold their value and, like Mercedes in Germany, are often seen doing the bread and butter taxi work.

There are, of course, varying degrees of high tech. Tadano Faun believes it gets the balance right by offering customers a different level of technology, while at the same time ensuring that its cranes are still very much up to date. Its latest offering is the 60 tonne capacity ATF 60-3. This has a 5-section, 40.2 metre main boom that can be extended while under partial load. Set up is in about 90 seconds. Other features of the ATF 60-3 are the new Mercedes Benz 6-cylinder diesel engine type OM 926 LA which provides 240 kW (326 hp) at 2300 min⁻¹. This is reduced to 200 kW (272 hp) at 1500 min⁻¹ in the diesel saving “crane only” mode which does away with the need for a second motor on the crane. The German-built engine is, of course, fully compliant with Euromot 2/EPA 2 regulations and generates a maximum torque of about 1300 Nm. Looking at other principal components on the crane we find German-built ZF AS-Tronic mechanical transmission which gives fully automatic shifting for 12 forward and 2 reverse gears – although Faun consciously avoids anything that it considers over-sophisticated, the crane is certainly not low-tech.

Our fourth German mobile crane maker is the German arm of Grove. It is now nearly ten years since Grove bought the then Krupp factory in Wilhelmshaven, and it is worth remembering why it was considered such a treasure – because of the engineering skills and technology that it brought. Mega Track, for example, was at the cutting edge of crane design and, despite some teething troubles, won a lot of admirers. Still at the cutting edge of technology is CT Compact Truck which builds its hydrostatic cranes in Germany.

In the tower crane sector Liebherr leads the way in technology, but has had stiff competition from Peiner and Wolff. Potain also likes to point out that it has a German factory, the



German remote control systems are in use around the world.



Specialist cranes for fire brigades from Liebherr, in this case an LTM 1060/2



German mobile cranes are famous for their quality, here the new Terex Demag logo

former BKT factory, and that most of its large slewing cranes are “Made in Germany”.

In the crawler crane sector Sennebogen has just celebrated its 50th year of production. The family company is represented in the UK by EH Hassell & Sons and has recently delivered four cranes to Byzak in Manchester. This featured a 50 tonne conventional 640HD lattice boom crawler crane but also two telescopic boom crawler cranes and a 40 tonne telescopic truck crane on a Scania carrier.

Other well known German names in the crane sector include MKG and Atlas. Catering to the heavy transport sector is Goldhofer, specialist producer of counterweight carriers and ultra-heavy transporters. Langendorf is becoming known for its technically advanced solutions to transport problems in the powered access industry.

Truck mounted excellence

Turning to platforms we find that German companies excel in the truck mounted sector. Ruthmann and Wumag are two of the best known companies in the world and Bison is a newcomer that is rapidly establishing a name for itself on the international scene. Ruthmann, of course, is famous for having developed a 100 metre truck mounted boom, the largest in the world, but has so far sold just two of the giants. It also makes a full range of units suitable for everything from 3.5 tonne vans and ▶



Peter Plönes and Uwe Henn of Wumag (left) celebrate with Mark Carrington and Jim Longstaff (right) of Skyking

upwards. It is represented in the UK by ASI which is currently promoting its 7.5 tonne unit.

Wumag has meanwhile announced that it is now represented by Skyking in the UK. The announcement follows lengthy negotiations between the two companies but has delighted Mark Carrington, managing director of Skyking, who told *C&A* that the agreement focussed on Wumag's larger platforms where he expected to do good business.

Talking to a representative of one of the German boom manufacturers at a recent exhibition, I asked him what "Made In Germany" meant for him. Pointing to a nearby stand featuring a non-German product he said "well, we are more expensive than them, but we also offer a better product in terms of performance and build quality – look, for example, at all the external and trailing cables on that boom, something we would not do, and look at the weld quality, you will find a big difference".

German engineering skills also shine in some of the most technical areas such as control systems, remote control and remote monitoring. PAT dominates the market for hi-tec, in-cab crane control systems. Companies like HBC Radiomatic, which is represented by Crane Care in the UK, offers a full range of remote controls and



Crane Care's new HBV 'Crane-Scale' which allows up to 10 000 remote control systems to be operated per square kilometre without interference

can be unobtrusively mounted on a crane or platform and then remotely interrogated to see when, where and how the lifting equipment was used. The units are built at Butzbach and Darmstadt in Germany.

Germany does not have a true global player in the mass produced scissor or boom market, but Liftflux, now part of the Manitowoc Group, is well known for building some of the largest scissor lifts in the world but has recently embarked on an expansion program which is designed to move it into the opposite extreme, narrow scissors for industrial use. Liftflux's UK agent, Russon Access, has had some impressive successes in the UK where some competition comes from another German manufacturer, GSL, which is represented by PJ Allan.

Finally, if you are looking for hoists or mast climbing work platforms, you also have the option to choose a German made product. Geda has been one of the pioneers of the new generation of transport platforms (see News story this month) and has achieved considerable success with its sturdy range of products.

So it seems that Made In Germany does still have important associations. It means that there is a link with a highly experienced and educated engineering work force and that you are probably dealing with a company that will provide



Bison is winning growing recognition for its truck mounted platforms

remote weighing systems. Its latest generation of crane scales features DECT (Digital Enhanced Cordless Telecommunication) technology to allow as many as 10,000 remotely operated systems to work within one square kilometer without interfering with each other. Crane Care's John Collins describes the DECT equipped unit as "a breakthrough in radio control".

A relatively new company is Houmani Liftsystems which has developed a range of remotely accessed data monitoring systems for all types of lifting equipment. The Houmani minibox is a data recorder that



The Liftflux range is known throughout Europe



Ruthmann's new 3.5 tonne truckmount

after sales and back up. It is also likely to mean higher prices although the depressed state of the German economy means that prices are getting lower and German manufacturers will "cut a deal".

Perhaps the best recommendation for German lifting products is the number of German companies that have been bought by foreign companies (and you can expect some more soon). In the words of Fil Filipov, president of Terex Cranes (Demag's new owner): "German engineers are without doubt the best in the world – afterall, they build the best cars!" ■