

AL-KO Kober's UK History (Originally B&B)

Now centred at a new purpose build factory on the outskirts of Southam, Warwickshire, AL-KO Kober Limited manufactures and assembles running gear, chassis and conversions for a wide variety of uses - caravans, light trailers, motorhomes, ambulances, plant and utility vehicles, minibuses, air compressors and trailer equipment. Automotive and Factored equipment completes the range and allows us to supply our customer base via a "one stop" type approach. As a worldwide organisation, we also supply a wide range of caravan accessories, including stabilisers, spare wheel carriers and safety devices to name but a few.

The Company also boasts an extensive selection of Garden Care products manufactured by our Group companies. Included in the range are Lawnmowers, Shredders, Brush Cutters and Composters. More details of these and other diverse products can be found in our Garden Care section.

1940

1946 The Company was started by Mr Bird and Mr Billington and was called B&B. Both were ex Automotive Products employees who started their own precision engineering company in Park Street, Leamington Spa - moving to Wood Street in 1948. See picture.

Early products included engineering components, chassis and gas cookers. The first major batch of caravan chassis was sold to Pearman Briggs who then became Safari Caravans who are now incorporated into the modern day Swift Caravans.

Turnover for the first year of trading to 30th September 1947 was £4,618-9s-6d.

1950

1954 The company moved to No.1 works at the Queensway site in Leamington Spa.

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1960

- **1960** The company was sold to Wright Ropes.
- **1962** No. 2 works at the Queensway site was acquired.
- **1963** Wright Ropes were taken over by British Rope.
- British Rope sold B&B to Bullough Securities Ltd for £410,000; a Manchester based Industrial Holding Company. John Whelan up until then Technical Director became Managing Director with Mr. Billington moving to vice Chairman's role in what was called "an exceptionally fine offer".
- 1965 The paint spray shop is burnt out in a fire and employees work all night to re-roof the building. The fire started in ventilation ducts and spread quickly to the roof.

1970

1974 No. 3 works at the Queensway site was acquired.

1980

- **1980** CKD (Complete Knock Down) Chassis introduced using bolts to fix together rather than welded complete.
- The Company was acquired by Alois Kober Gmbh (AL-KO) for £1.2m in March and became known as AL-KO B&B Trailers Limited. This involved a major shake-up at the top with some long standing members of the board leaving. Over £400,000 was injected to help with working capital as for the first time B&B had made a trading loss the previous year. Mr Herbert Kober, one of the three brothers who control the German based AL-KO Group, which was started by their father in 1931 said "The investment will enable us to regain the reputation that B&B had in the past and utilising the latest technology, which is used to test all our products at our purpose built test centre in Germany will enable us to sell a new generation of products in the U.K."
- **1984** The Company name was changed to AL-KO B&B Limited.
- 1989 AL-KO's new environmentally friendly water based paint plant was installed.

1990

- 1990 Saw the 2000th Automotive Chassis Conversion roll off the production line.
- **1990** AL-KO achieved the prestigious BS5750 quality standard.
- **1991** The Company name changed again to AL-KO Kober Limited to consolidate the fact that only AL-KO products were manufactured.
- 1995 AL-KO was awarded IIP (Investors in People) Accreditation for its commitment to personal development and training.

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AL-KO was awarded the Swift 95 Club award for continuing commitment to supplier excellence. Bob Locke was appointed Managing Director from his previous position as Plant Manager.

New Fully Integrated Manufacturing Control System introduced to reduce customer lead times, ensure data integrity and lead AL-KO Kober into the Millennium.

- 1997 Jan AL-KO Britain Limited (the Garden Care Division) moves premises from County Durham to AL-KO's site on the Queensway.
- **1997** Oct Mail Order System is initiated to enable consumers to purchase predesignated "kits" of accessories.

Nov sees the introduction of AL-KO's Web site to encompass the many diverse areas of the business.

- **1998** Oct The 1st sod of earth is dug for new factory premises in Southam, Warwickshire.
- **1999 Feb** New design of exhibition stand for AL-KO gets its first Airing at the Boat, Caravan & Leisure Show at the NEC.
 - **May** Website undergoes new revamp to encompass new Mail Order Products, Dealers and Technical Information. The site also includes new Gardening section.
 - **July** Trevor Wills retires as Company Secretary after 33 happy years.
 - **July/Aug** Relocation of machinery and workforce to new factory and office complex in Southam.
 - **Oct** The 5th of October sees AL-KO's official Open Day of new premises, attended by the Kober family, Southams' Mayor, Rev. Welby, Customers and employees.

The New Millennium and beyond **2000**

2000 Feb

Barry Sharratt takes over as new Managing Director from previous position as General Manager.

Master Dealer Network Association holds AGM in new Training Facility at AL-KO.

March The 1st batch of Chassis, built for Cosalt Holiday Homes leaves AL-KO for their facility in Hull.

June AL-KO Joins AVONDALE Caravans in celebrating their thirtieth Anniversary by presenting a gift to Avondale during a factory visit.

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July	New Project Manager for Garden Care is appointed. Shaun Cooper re-joins AL-KO after a successful career at Husqvana.
Aug	AL-KO donates T800 Lawntractor to Stuart Ross memorial fund.
Aug	AL-KO is awarded with the Swift as Gold Club Award for 5 years consecutive years of continuous on-time deliveries.
Sept	AL-KO attends GLEE 2000 Exhibition to present the new image of AL-KO to the Specialist Garden machinery dealers.
Oct	AL-KO exhibits at the Caravan & Outdoor Leisure Show at Earls Court. The major feature was to gain exposure for a new line of static holiday home chassis.

AL-KO spares & Aftersales Service is relocated from Co. Durham to

AL-KO Southam.

Nov

Nov Members of the Caravan Club visit AL-KO to view the facilities and

to hold their annual meeting. (AGM).

AL-KO UK currently employs over 90 employees and has a turnover of over 20 million. The AL-KO group currently employs some 4000 personnel on over 40 countries, primarily in Europe but also in the USA and China. Turnover exceeds £350m. Worldwide, the group has manufactured over 6 million axles to date.



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