

AL-KO embraces digital connectivity



As part of a strategy to give customers the best possible experience from its products AL-KO is turning increasingly to digital technology to report and control important parameters of its products. Aboutcamp BtoB caught up with AL-KO's Technical Development Director, Dr Frank Sager, to find out more.

Words Terry Owen



Dr Frank Sager

Aboutcamp BtoB: Can you explain what digitisation means for AL-KO Vehicle Technology?

Frank Sager: First, we must state that there is not one truth. Digitization affects many areas. What's up-to-date today can be a thing of the past tomorrow. Developments progress so fast that nobody can make a general statement. At AL-KO Vehicle Technology, we therefore focus on our core elements: comfort, safety and quality. For us, it's not about adding technology, it's about creating value. How can we help our customers? How can

we offer even more value through our components? Digitalization helps answer these questions. Through them, we gain knowledge of how to use our products in various environments and how they behave in different situations.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What does this look like?

Frank Sager: In short, we equip our products with sensors - both the safety-relevant ones, such as brakes or ball couplings, and the comfort-enhancing ones like air suspension systems. In addition, the end customers will be part of the "World of Experience AL-KO" through an app in which useful content is available to them. This could include the control of on-board equipment such as heating and light, the ability to retrieve individual tips or opening hours of attractions or to use offers from integrated service providers such as security services that guard the caravan via GPS.

Aboutcamp BtoB: How does it work?

Frank Sager: AL-KO has already created the "2LINK" platform accessible via a smartphone app. Introduced to the market from the start of the 2017 holiday season, it forms the basis of all communications between the vehicle and a smartphone. Signals are routed through the AL-KO 2LINK box, which can be conveniently mounted on the drawbar. Water-tight in accordance with IP65, this box uses Bluetooth to connect to the AL-KO 2LINK app for iOS or Android. It forms the heart of the system and the centre point for all future communications. With it, the user receives assistance in levelling the caravan, an ATC status check and information on nearby service points and workshops. In recent months we have been working hard to develop this further. In order to deal with the market demands when it comes to digitalization, we have founded a technology center in Kaunas, Lithuania. A team of highly specialized software and electronics engineers work on new solutions for us.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What can you tell us about these developments?

Frank Sager: AL-KO is now

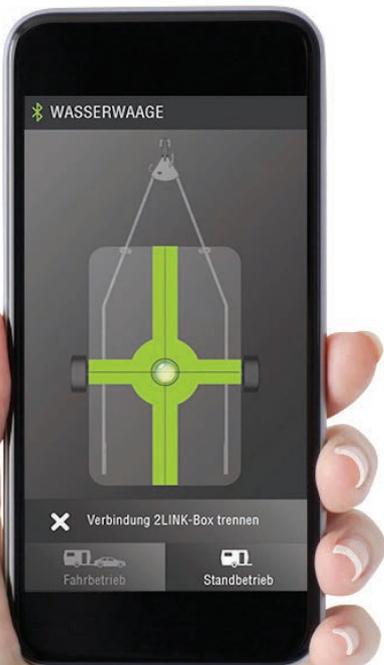
2LINK: start screen





rolling out a series of sensors, each designed to monitor a specific function from safety through to comfort. First of all, came a link to the ATC unit so that its status could be displayed via a smartphone. Next, an electronic level function, that displays the state of the caravan from both front to back and side to side. In 2018 we've seen the launch of tyre pressure monitoring whereby sensors at the base of replacement tyre valves transmit pressure information. This enables pressures to be checked on the move as well as when stationary. Also

2LINK: levelling app



planned is a sensor to measure brake lining wear. Previously this was only possible by removing the brake drum.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What is planned for the near future?

Frank Sager: Much more - I should point out that 2LINK is already suitable for use in commercial trailers and will soon be used in motorhomes. Additionally AL-KO is working on a status check of accessories mounted on the caravan, as a sort of 'Ready before departure check'. For example, sensors may be used to check whether the handbrake of the caravan is free and whether the nose wheel is turned upwards. Also, the control of AL-KO's MAMMUT manoeuvring system is planned via the 2LINK app. With this new creation, AL-KO Vehicle Technology is taking the next step towards an intelligent caravan chassis, but the vision goes much beyond that. AL-KO sees a further strengthening of cooperation with its partners and customers to offer optimal, personalized products that consider the privacy of the customer in compliance with data protection regulations. AL-KO increasingly sees itself becoming a technology company where it creates sensors and software that present information at an interface for others to access. In this way AL-KO and its components can become an integral part of the caravan's management system in the same way that heating, lighting and security are fast becoming at the moment.

Aboutcamp BtoB: How do you see the longer-term future?

Frank Sager: AL-KO sees its target group of



caravanning enthusiasts growing even more through 'baby boomers' continuing to retire and willing to invest in enhanced safety and comfort features. It believes the use of recreational vehicles will be influenced by increased connectivity and the trend of "leasing instead of buying". The key to success will be making caravanning even easier than it is now - in particular, maintenance, use and planning. Add to this the possibilities of individualisation and future opportunities look very bright indeed.

Tyre pressure monitoring

