



Comfort, design & ergonomomy

Since its acquisition by AL-KO Vehicle Technology, Aguti has not given up on its basic philosophy and thanks to its new partners, it can now focus on what matters most: new ideas.

Words Paolo Galvani, photo Enrico Bona

With hours of travelling and hours of leisure often spent sitting in the same seat in an RV or motorhome, it is easy to understand the importance of a solution that guarantees maximum comfort in every situation.

Chassis manufacturers normally optimize their products for use on the road, but motorhome manufacturers have to think of a wider range of scenarios and even offer the best possible solution when stationary. So, for seats, it's not only the basic functions - such as height, inclination, rotation or armrests - that change, but also the structure of the product itself, and above all its materials and fabrics which must adapt perfectly to the environment they are in.

Aguti is the European market leader in seating systems for recreational vehicles. It also offers dinette benches, seatbelt frames, swivel plates, supports and more. At its Langenargen headquarters on Lake Constance (Bodensee) in southern Germany, we met Sebastian Janssen, who after a career of over 17 years in Toyota, has now been managing director of Aguti since last year. He shares with us some strategies and

information about the company.

At the end of 2019, Aguti joined the Dex-Ko Global group, where it works together with AL-KO Vehicle Technology to supply the world's leading motorhome manufacturers.

The name Aguti is actually that of a rodent that lives mainly in South America. It was chosen by Andreas Grieger, the company founder, in 1992. At that time he studied design, one subject was perceptual psychology, and when thinking of a company name he wanted to meet some universal criteria: the name should be very recognizable, ideally only have five letters with two to three consonants in it, had to sound a little bit Italian and everybody around the world should be able to pronounce it easily. In best case scenario, it would also give the possibility to assign a symbol used for marketing and design. "Andreas opened an encyclopedia and started with the 'A' letter", explains Janssen. "When he arrived at 'aguti', he found a name fulfilling all the criteria and a nice animal that can be used as a logo. It is a little funny story, but it's true."

No production "inhouse"

Today Aguti employs 43 people, nine of which are engaged in R&D. Turnover is around €45 million. Aguti supplies approximately 50,000 front seats per annum, which accounts for just over half of the revenues. The other half is done with belt frames, swivels, adaptations and so on. These high numbers with such a low number of employees is only possible because of the following concept. The company's core activities are design, development, prototyping, purchasing, logistics, sales and marketing, but not production: "We don't have production lines in-house", says Janssen, "but instead we have about 12 core con-



Sebastian Janssen



An exhibition of seats inside the Aguti headquarters

Company profile

Aguti's expertise is about the importance of ergonomic and healthy sitting and adapting to the individual needs of their customers. In order to meet this quality standard, Aguti supplies from Germany and attaches great importance to close cooperation with its clients. In-house designers and a powerful development department are researching innovative products and functional solutions day after day. This allows Aguti to react quickly and makes it a flexible and reliable partner in all areas where individual products are needed. Aguti seats are allrounders in terms of comfort, safety and ergonomics. Tailored specifically to the needs of motorhome travelers, they meet both, travelling and living requirements. The anatomically optimised contact surfaces for legs and back guarantee a healthy and body-supported sitting. There is hardly a seat manufacturer that has such a large selection of specifically designed variants of upholsteries. Furthermore, a variety of turnable and non-turnable adaptations and seat substructures allows convenient installation in all common vehicle types.

tracted partners. This means we can always design our product according to customer's needs, rather than needing to be limited by existing machinery or our own production facilities. There is no need to design the product in a particular way to load our machinery or to load our production capacity. We can always select the best possible manufacturing technology from our production partner portfolio. If one partner doesn't have a particular technology we need, we can choose another one of them."

The decision to outsource production was made in the early days of Aguti. "Andreas Grieger assembled the first Aguti products himself with a couple of employees in a very basic environment," Janssen continues. "He found out that he was spending most of the time only in production with repeatable processes rather than developing new products for his customers. Therefore, he made soon the decision that it was better to get production partners on board and to focus his energy and his design and development passion into the creation of new products."

This philosophy also allows Aguti to have great flexibility and speed-up its product development process so it can follow customer needs which usually vary continuously and are based on relatively small volumes, but with a significant number of variants. Aguti is considered as one partner for all aspects, from the initial idea, with

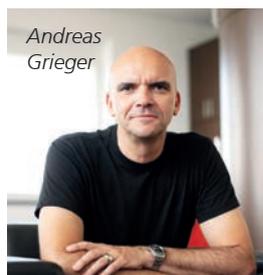
all the necessary briefings, to design, development, prototyping, testing and homologation.

The importance of quality

Despite having its production externally, quality control on the final product remains an important Aguti focus. "Apart from commercial conditions, we select our partners by making initial audits," claims Janssen. "We have a specific supplier management system and our Purchase & Logistics department controls these partners together with our Quality Engineers who analyse claims and any product issues. We take regularly samples out of production which are re-tested by us. All of our partners have their own quality management systems but they are connected to us, so we have a good integration with our system".

This re-testing is strongly supported by the company's own static testing rig. In 2012, Aguti invested in this testing facility that accelerates projects and enhances flexibility during design work – at the same time, the rig is used for re-testing of serial products.

"We test products according to European Regulations and customer specific requirements," says Janssen. "We need to do this to optimize our products. Having our own test bench helps us to keep the development times short".



Andreas Grieger

One million kilometres per year

Another Aguti specialty is its own logistics. "What we do internally is nowadays a bit exotic," confirms Janssen. "We satisfy approximately two third of our logistics demand with our own trucks which are constantly circulating between our different production partners and our customers. This is to meet the demand and flexibility our customers ask for," Janssen continued. Aguti has today five trucks which cover about one million kilometres per year to meet the demand in the most efficient way. It is like a milk-run and it is

optimized in terms of distance from customers and/or component suppliers.

The integration with AL-KO Vehicle Technology is the latest element that completes the strategy of the German company. "I believe this was a very good move for Aguti, because we are now part of a global company with a lot of vehicle know-how and a stable financial background," states Janssen. "We have access to further resources, if we require them, but we do our business here in the same way we did successfully in the past. Since we do a very special and customer focused business, this was a precondition from both sides for the deal between Andreas Grieger and AL-KO Vehicle Technology".

The two companies were competitors for seatbelt frames in the past but now they are able to find an optimized approach for both companies. It's important to minimize variants and product lines to improve competitiveness for our customers. The synergies available will create a big chance for making even better products. But this is just a part of the opportunities emerging by the agreement. "A lot of motorhomes are built on AL-KO sub frames and we need to adapt our seats to fit on those, so this will help us to improve exchange of information and deliver a hand in hand approach for our clients," claims Janssen. "AL-KO has a very wide area of engineering and development tools, so - if needed - we can easily get support from their R&D". The idea is that Aguti in Langenargen will be the Centre of excellence for seating within the group.

