



Innovating for ideas

The AL-KO Vehicle Technology Group, specialists in high-quality chassis and suspension components for motorhomes, caravans and recreational vehicles, is putting its faith in its workforce with innovations to encourage homegrown ideas to optimise processes and achieve greater efficiency

Words Editorial Staff

With around 3,500 employees at more than 40 locations worldwide, AL-KO has a wide range of experience and knowledge within its organisation, and a new ideas management project will further exploit that in-house potential to strengthen the company in the long term. As experts in their field, each employee is recognised by AL-KO not only as an important part of its wide-ranging business, but also as a source of inspiration to improve all aspects of company operations. Too often, great ideas remain in the back of an employee's mind, or if they are expressed, can get lost within the everyday stresses and strains of a large organisation. Encouraging ideas to be shared and providing a streamlined pathway for them to navigate through the company is the key element of AL-KO's ideas management philosophy. It aims to make submitting, evaluating,



Alexander Kneer

and implementing ideas easier, more transparent and faster by eliminating unnecessary stumbling blocks.

Alexander Kneer, Environment, Health and Safety Manager and part of the project team, explains: *"For me, idea management is a really clever business strategy: profitability through commitment. After all, the multi-purpose tool of idea management is about improving products, optimising processes, making progress in working methods and procedures, increasing occupational safety and strengthening environmental and health protection as well as promoting cooperation throughout the company."*

By encouraging employees to contribute ideas via a new streamlined process, AL-KO believes it can unlock a range of benefits, including design improvements, optimised processes, cost reductions, a safer working environment and greater employee motivation. The proj-

ect to merge and enhance existing processes, alongside software support, has been rolled out at the AL-KO facilities in Kötzt and Ettenbeuren. The company's site in Vintl, northern Italy, is already adapting its processes to the new approach, which will be expanded to other AL-KO locations in the future. First results from the implementation Kötzt and Ettenbeuren are positive, according to Kneer: *"The increase in effi-*





ciency of the new tool is enormous, we move completely within one system without communication gaps. This drastically reduces throughput times. We are therefore currently examining with R&D how innovation management can also be controlled via this platform. In order to think of things that don't yet exist, we need a transparently functioning knowledge management system."

The ideas management tool expands and enhances AL-KO's existing commitment in this area. Since 2019, Jasmin Strobel has drawn on her 25-year experience



Jasmin Strobel

of working at the company in a role as Ideas Management Officer, which includes processing suggestions for improvement, moderating meetings with a view to a productive outcome and helping guide ideas through the various hurdles. Strobel leads the project as part of a team effort alongside Kneer and Plant Manager JJ Canteli.

Through regular exchanges with con-

temporaries at the Centre for Ideas Management, the Swabian Ideas Circle and the Bavarian Network Meeting, Strobel brings new concepts and impetus to AL-KO's support for productive new ideas. "Above all, I can help employees to improve structures, processes and products," she says. "It's a great feeling when we implement new ideas together and the improvements become effective. Every little cog in the wheel can have an impact on the big picture and is appreciated."

Canteli, as plant manager, explains how the cumulative effect of small improvements can make a major difference to the bottom line, and therefore to the company and the customer. "Every day we have to look at how we can improve and reduce production costs," he says. "How can we do things more effectively and efficiently? All the small projects together quickly add up to real savings. We all win if we look for such ideas every day at all levels of the organisation. I would therefore be delighted if we could use this tool to create a standard for the entire company."

By putting a priority on ideas and creating a smooth path through the company, AL-KO is drawing on its most valuable resource - its employees across Europe - to sharpen its competitive edge and deliver better value for customers.

AL-KO's latest product ideas

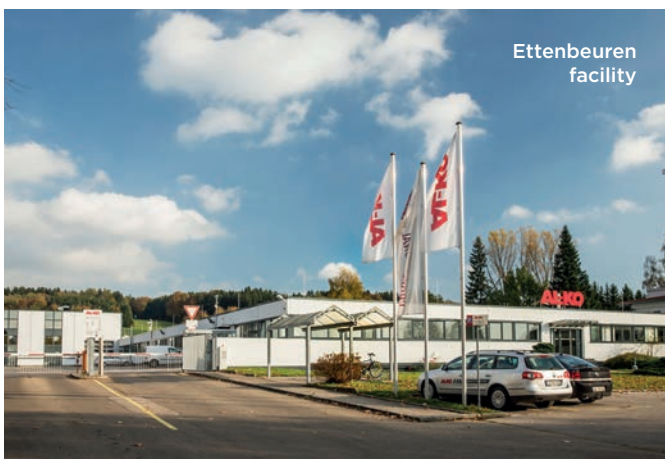
AL-KO recently boosted its product line-up for the motorhome and caravanning world with two new additions. The LevelM Pro levelling system, introduced by AL-KO subsidiary E&P, reaches new standards in terms of weight and ease of use. By reducing the weight of a single sub-system by 16%, it sets a new standard in the motorhome sector thanks to the unique material mix in the hydraulic cylinders. A new control system offers smooth alignment, while brushless actuators allow unprecedented precision, with no jerking or no coasting. A touch control panel that can be installed at the owner's chosen location in the interior. Newly designed installation aids are an advantage for vehicle manufacturers; only one person is now needed to install components.

Another innovation, the AL-KO PROSAFE wheel clamp, delivers exceptional anti-theft protection. Specially designed for caravans and other trailers, it is suitable for 13- to 17-inch

wheels with standard steel or aluminium rims. It features a unique multi-layer structure made from a resistant mix of materials and locking cylinder with anti-drill protection. Installing the AL-KO PROSAFE is easy and done in a few simple steps, while wheel rims are safe thanks to scratch and wear protection.



Above: AL-KO PROSAFE
Right and below: LevelM Pro



Ettenbeuren facility

