



Grant Douglas



AL-KO's Enduro X clamshell suspension

Focus on AL-KO Vehicle Technology Australia

Aboutcamp BtoB: COVID has had a huge impact on the RV industry. What's it been like here in Australasia?

Grant Douglas: Melbourne, where our main manufacturing plants are for the ANZ business, experienced the greatest number of locked-down days in the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic - 6 lockdown periods covering 262 days between March 2020 and October 2021.

Fortunately, metal fabrication businesses were deemed to be "essential" to the Victorian economy and AL-KO

Despite the Covid pandemic and global supply chain issues, AL-KO's operation in Australasia continues to grow from strength to strength. The company's achievements were highlighted during a recent visit by Harald Hiller, President & CEO of AL-KO Vehicle Technology, the parent company. Local MD Grant Douglas told us more

Words Terry Owen

was able to continue its onsite operations (with all non-production roles working from home). Less fortunately, much of the RV industry was deemed non-essential, and the vast majority of Australia's RV manufacturing is located in Victoria. This meant the majority of our customers were closed for some of the lockdown periods. During this time, we were able to focus

on our commercial trailer, agriculture, and mining customers, whilst manufacturing components ready for the huge influx of orders anticipated at the end of lockdown.

Since the end of lockdowns, the ANZ RV industry is experiencing a boom like no other in its history; however, supply chain disruptions, significant cost increases, ongoing skilled labour



Harald Hiller addresses employees at AL-KO's Dandenong site in Melbourne



shortages and COVID-related absences continue to challenge our business and the broader industry.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Now we have global supply chain issues. How are they affecting you?

Grant Douglas: AL-KO products have seen a huge growth in demand since the COVID pandemic reached Australian shores. We have experienced enormous supply chain challenges over the past two years just like many other businesses, however we have been able to maintain high levels of service to our customers by having a diverse range of both onshore and overseas suppliers across the globe. In partnership with our global procurement team, we are constantly developing new local and international supply partners.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Australia has its own steel industry. Has this been a benefit to you?

Grant Douglas: Yes, having extremely supportive local steel suppliers with on-shore mills has been essential to AL-KO's ability to maintain high production output, at no time have we been unable to source local steel. Price pressure has been constant throughout the pandemic and whilst the Australian steel industry is not directly linked to either major metal indices LME or MEPS, it is influenced by them and tends to lag by up to 3-6 months.

Aboutcamp BtoB: What percentage of the components you supply are made locally compared to those imported?

Grant Douglas: Overall, about 50% of

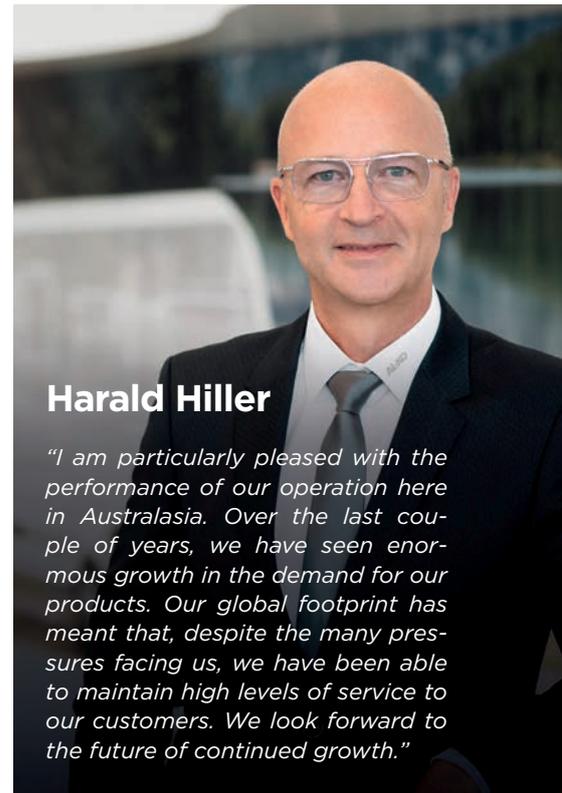
our products are produced or sourced in Australia. 100% of our Axles, Chassis, Suspension & Anti-Sway systems are Australian made. To be competitive in our marketplace, we do import some products such as our Jockey Wheels, Couplings, Winches & Corner Steadies which are produced exclusively for AL-KO to our design and engineering specifications.

Aboutcamp BtoB: In Europe weight reduction is a major driver behind many of the initiatives we see. How important is it in Australasia?

Grant Douglas: Weight reduction in Australia is a big driver of innovation. At this stage the weight saving is used to increase the products and offerings inside the caravan to improve the functionality. Functionality improvements include solar panels, water tanks and appliances which improve the "off grid" functions of the caravan, a big trend in the Australian market. As electric vehicles become more common, we believe these weight savings will help the range of these new vehicles. Weight reduction will always be a big part of our future innovations.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Can you tell us about any future products you plan on bringing to the market?

Grant Douglas: One of our current focuses is trailing arm suspension. Our Enduro X uses a clam shell construction to reduce weight at the same time keeping the strength, which makes it perfect for our offroad conditions. It is finished in an automotive e-coat for longevity and corrosion resistance. Enduro X is available in drum and disc brake solutions. It comes in coil and airbag suspensions. Its modular design



Harald Hiller

"I am particularly pleased with the performance of our operation here in Australasia. Over the last couple of years, we have seen enormous growth in the demand for our products. Our global footprint has meant that, despite the many pressures facing us, we have been able to maintain high levels of service to our customers. We look forward to the future of continued growth."

allows for two ride heights and three stub axle lengths to cater for most wheel offsets.

We have also introduced the AL-KO Tow Assist, which is an ABS system for electric brakes. It also incorporates sway mitigation and lane change control in the same unit and the ability to have an odometer reading to monitor the caravans mileage. This is the first of its kind worldwide and improves the safety while towing, which is a real technological advancement in this area.

AL-KO International Pty Ltd

Local capability inside a global footprint

The RV market in Australasia is like nowhere else on earth. A fantastic climate combined with miles of open, rugged roads and low population densities, provide phenomenal opportunities for both on-grid and off-grid camping. Those wide-open spaces also encourage a healthy commercial trailer market, driven by the need for strength and reliability.

This has made for something of a unique market with an off-road, off-grid, focus. In this part of the world towable products tend to be larger and heavier than their European counterparts, with an emphasis of durability in rugged environments. These requirements, combined with the remoteness of the location, have encouraged the growth of locally manufactured products to meet the needs of the market.

AL-KO became involved in 1988 with the acquisition of Gir-

lock Caravan and Trailer Parts – the largest supplier to the market. The move signalled the start of a new era of international involvement in Australasia for AL-KO. Since then, AL-KO Vehicle Technology Australia (as it is best known) has advanced beyond recognition. The company's strong growth over the last decade has been driven by both product range expansion and innovation. As a result, AL-KO has further enhanced its position as the market leader in its field.

Today the company employs some 240 personnel in four manufacturing and six distribution facilities across Australia and New Zealand. AL-KO's Australian head office and main manufacturing facility is located in Melbourne.

Leading the team is managing director, Grant Douglas, appointed in December 2020, with a background in transport and manufacturing.