



Measured growth

From the left: Mark Howlett and Gerhard Hundsberger

A long-term strategy calling for measured growth positions Truma to continue capturing share in the lucrative US market. Face to face with Gerhard Hundsberger and Mark Howlett - Truma North America

Words Craig Ritchie

Since 1949 Truma has enjoyed an enviable track record for measured and sustained international growth. It's a strategy that has served the company well, and nowhere more so than in the dynamic US market. Truma opened its US office in 2013, then moved into its own state-of-the-art, 4,459 sq m office, warehouse and service facility just six years later. Three employees became 25, then grew to 52 people today - with plans to add another 20 this year. Truma's disciplined approach to growth reflects the company's focus on providing its OEM partners with a level of service to match its distinctive product line. Aboutcamp BtoB spoke

with Truma North America president and CEO Gerhard Hundsberger, and COO of North American operations Mark Howlett about supply chain headwinds, covid market impacts and the next phase for Truma as it continues on its path to future expansion.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Truma has always focused on measured growth. How do you manage that in today's unpredictable supply chain environment?

Gerhard Hundsberger: Most of our products comes from Europe, and we have some product coming from Asia. Europe has been a bit easier to manage, where controlling supply

from southeast Asia has been more difficult. Lead times from Asia have effectively doubled, but we've been able to mitigate some of that by re-routing shipments. We've even had product come through the Panama Canal, which sounds extraordinary, but it allowed us to get the product to our customers more quickly. We strive to meet our delivery schedules, so we have increased inventory levels and added a second warehouse to allow for more inventory on the ground. This has allowed us to manage against those disruptions.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Has this approach allowed you to gain market share?



Mark Howlett: We currently supply over 100 companies, from smaller fabricators to major OEMs that are household names. But we're continually adding new clients as OEMs seek to differentiate with higher quality products and service.

From the beginning we have focused our business on operating as partners. It's not about making short-term gains, we are focused on building lasting relationships by adding value both for end-user customers, as well as for OEMs and the dealers who want to offer that superior experience.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Has the market growth associated with Covid-19 accelerated product development cycles?

Mark Howlett: It's probably just the opposite, since Covid ushered in the supply chain disruptions that have hindered the ability or willingness to develop new product. OEMs face constant and ever-changing shortages - they can't get a toilet one day, they can't get flooring the next, and the day after that it's windshields or fibreglass or who knows what. That's a very difficult environment to try and develop new product in.

Production backlogs are another factor, making it hard for an RV builder to focus on new prototypes when they already need every component they can get to complete units that people are waiting for. When a builder is already selling every unit they can produce, there's little urgency to disrupt production by introducing new models.

Coming out of the pandemic there is a desire for new product though, and that's why we're now seeing new units beginning to appear at shows. Even in the downtime, smart companies continue to invest and to grow their business. You never cut the R&D budget.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Have the supply and logistics situations accelerated any plans for Truma to manufacture product in North America?

Gerhard Hundesberger: Most of the products that we bring to market in North America are derivatives of European products. But we also need to satisfy North American requirements. The Aventa, for example, was developed specifically for the North American market, it was a new design just for us.

The Aventa launch has exceeded our original plans mainly due to the focus

on energy efficiency, which minimises power requirements and allows it to work with lithium-ion batteries instead of a generator for quieter, easier operation. That makes it a perfect fit for the high-end trailer market, where OEMs like Winnebago and Forest River are embracing the technology.

Comfort for the user was paramount in the design of the Aventa. The ability to get into the comfort zone as quickly as possible delivers an optimal level of humidity and temperature in the vehicle. This is what people feel on their skin. We do this while ensuring noise levels inside and outside are minimised, so the user can focus on having fun.

Mark Howlett: Manufacturing in North America has always been part of our long-term vision, but there are no immediate plans to build a new plant. There is so much more to that than simply buying some land and putting up a building. As a service-focused company, we also need to have the right people in place to ensure we can continue elevating our customer experience.

The Elkhart area is a major manufacturing hub, and there is a high level of competition for the best people. That will become more interesting in the near future, with Amazon about to open a new 18,850 square-metre fulfilment centre with 1,000 employees. In December 2021, the unemployment rate in Elkhart was 0.9%, the lowest in the nation.

So there are many factors involved in making the decision to manufacture locally. It is part of our long-term vision, and we will get there through deliberate, disciplined growth.

Aboutcamp BtoB: Truma is known for



Truma Aventa Eco

bringing its customers a high level of service, one that extends to actually auditing the clients to ensure they're installing the products correctly. Can you provide some detail on that?

Mark Howlett: Our OEM partners appreciate our extremely low warranty claim rate, and we work with them collaboratively to ensure that installations are done properly. All of our equipment, whether it's a furnace or a water heater or an air conditioner, all goes through an installation audit. The process ensures the highest possible level of customer satisfaction, and that's something that every RV builder strives for.

The process starts by meeting with the customer to better understand their objectives with that particular unit, who the buyer is, and what the key performance criteria might be. We then layout for the HVAC system, mapping ducting runs, outlets, all of it. Then, we test a unit in our state-of-the-art climate chamber under controlled conditions, where we can remove as many variables as possible. Thermal imaging cameras provide an extremely accurate performance evaluation, allowing us to tune the setup for optimal results. This is the kind of intelligence we can offer as a company that's been around for more than 70 years, doing this type of critical evaluation across Europe and all around the world.

