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A family business since 1898: BPW has been setting the transport sector in motion for 125 years

- From a blacksmith's forge to an innovator in the commercial vehicle industry
- "Axles and running gear systems made by BPW" are in use in millions of vehicles around the world
- Achim Kotz: "Our goal has always been the development of solutions that bring sustainable benefits to the players in the transport sector"

Wiehl, 15/7/2023 --- 125 years ago today, on 15th July 1898, Bergische

Patentachsenfabrik GmbH was founded in Wiehl (BPW). From its beginnings as a blacksmith's forge for carriage axles with 12 employees, the family-owned company is now one of the innovators in the commercial vehicle industry, successfully developing solutions for the efficient, safe and sustainable transport of goods by road.

As a typical "hidden champion" of the German SME sector, BPW is virtually unknown to the consumer – yet hardly anything in global transport logistics would run without the company from Wiehl in the Bergisches Land area of Germany. [Trailer axles and running gear systems](#) from BPW are in use in millions of vehicles around the world. Founded 125 years ago as a blacksmith's forge for carriage axles, the internationally active BPW Group has around 7,000 employees worldwide and achieves consolidated sales of 1.731 billion euros. Nowadays, BPW researches, develops and produces a comprehensive portfolio of products and services for the transport sector. In addition to trailer axles and running gear systems, this also includes brakes, lighting, fasteners / trailer superstructure technology and telematics. The BPW Group provides a comprehensive range of mobility services for transport businesses, ranging from a global service network to spare parts supply and intelligent networking of freight, drivers and vehicles.

Foundation of the company on July 15th 1898 marked the start of the success story of today's BPW Bergische Achsen KG, which was to have a profound influence on the world of transport:

"The invention of a self-lubricating carriage axle in the company's early years gave BPW vehicle operators more economy per mile by eliminating the need for time-consuming and cost-intensive lubrication. This is an early example of our commitment to the needs of vehicle operators, which we still express today with our mobility partnership. Since axles that offered such benefits also naturally sold well, at the same time this example is early proof of our system partnership with vehicle manufacturers," explains Achim Kotz, personally liable managing director of BPW, who manages the family business in the fourth generation as the parent company of the international BPW Group. "Then as now, BPW's goal is to develop cutting-edge products and solutions for commercial vehicles that offer sustainable advantages to vehicle manufacturers, fleet operators and specialist workshops – economically as well as ecologically."

Even after 125 years, the family-owned company from Wiehl is still

developing a lot of new ideas in its traditional business field of axles: [Generator axle ePower](#) will shortly be going into series production, it generates electricity while driving and braking and uses this to electrically power a refrigeration unit. This permits low-noise and low-emission cooling transport. And at the world's leading trade fair "transport logistic" in Munich in May, BPW presented the new generation of [iC Plus trailer running gear](#) for the first time. Together with its subsidiary idem telematics, BPW is thus paving the way for AI-supported maintenance management.

Picture caption: BPW's ePower axle recuperates energy during braking and driving to supply refrigeration units with electricity in a CO2-neutral and quiet manner during temperature-controlled transportation.

"There have been ups and downs throughout the company's 125 years of history. But BPW stands for durability. Because as a family business, we don't think and act in quarterly terms, but in terms of generations. Continuity, reliability and trust are values that shape our relationship with customers, partners and above all our employees. Ever since the company was founded, these have provided security and orientation – even through upheavals and crises," adds Achim Kotz.

Today you can still see the origins of the company and the 5,500-year history of axle, wheel and carriage in the eponymous [BPW Museum](#). BPW also highlights which BPW patents stand out in particular and have made a lasting difference to vehicle technology and vehicle operation in a series on the content portal www.motionist.com.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

Video: BPW company history

125 years of BPW – a journey through time:

Picture caption: the company founders with the first employees at Ohlerhammer in Wiehl, which remains the company's headquarters to this day.

In 1905, the first BPW in-house development was patented – the NOKO axle was named after Otto Nohl and Gustav Friedrich Kotz, who owned the company at the time. BPW revolutionised trailer construction with the development and market launch of the roller bearing axle for truck trailers in 1925, as this allowed a reduction in tractive force of 50 per cent, lubricant savings of 80 per cent and fuel savings of 10 per cent. This was followed a few years later by the development of a new type of tubular axle with swaged steering knuckles, which brought a significant reduction in weight compared to axles made of solid material and thus allowed a greater payload.

Picture caption: then as now, the BPW logo shows an axle with two wheels on the

road.

In 1929 BPW introduced the familiar trade mark for the first time: this showed an axle with two wheels on a paved road, combined with the letters BPW. This logo is still used in modified form today. The company was converted into a limited partnership in 1937, the company name was now Bergische Achsenfabrik Fr. Kotz & Söhne. BPW also opened its first sales outlets in the 1930s and took over the distribution of its products independently. From the first sales outlets in Germany, a worldwide distribution network with subsidiaries in 27 countries has developed today. The branch factory in Brüchermühle was set up in 1954 to increase production capacity.

BPW has produced another important innovation in truck trailer construction since 1958: the square hollow axle. Unlike axles with a solid cross-section, the hollow axles saved a lot of weight and also allowed a greater load capacity. In 1959, BPW presented the first [Air suspension axle for truck trailers](#). In the 1960s, production capacities were further expanded – and for the first time also internationally. The factory in South Africa started production in 1962. Three years later, the Hunsheim branch in the Bergisches Land area of Germany was commissioned and today specialises in the production of the [Trailer disc brake](#) ECO Disc, which was developed in-house. In 1968, BPW acquires the Danish-based company Transport-Teknik, which manufactures complete lighting and cable systems under the brand ERMAX.

Picture caption: the two millionth ECO Disc was produced in 2017, making it the most widely used trailer disc brake on the market. In 2018, BPW presented the further developed ECO Disc TS2 for the first time at the IAA.

HBN-Teknik, based in Denmark and a specialist in plastics technology for vehicle construction, has been part of the BPW Group since 1982. In 1983, BPW was the first company in the sector to introduce "documented production". In this way, BPW secured [Highest quality standards](#) for its products, because for the first time it was possible to track every manufacturing stage of the individual products. Six years later the [BPW ECO systems](#) was launched on the market as a unit consisting of a pre-assembled tapered roller bearing, thrust ring and axle nut. It is still used today. Further milestones in the company's development followed in the nineties with joint ventures in Hungary (BPW Hungária Kft.) and China (BPW Meizhou Axle Co.

Ltd.). In 1993, BPW acquires F. Hesterberg & Söhne GmbH & Co. KG, based in Ennepetal, which sells fasteners and trailer superstructure technology under the brand name Hestal.

Picture caption: the ECO system was bringing economic advantages to hauliers as early as the 1980s. The principle has been further developed right up to the present day.

Since 1994, BPW has been trading under the name BPW Bergische Achsen Kommanditgesellschaft. In 1998, the year of the company's 100th anniversary, the world's first KTL coating system for trailer axles was put into operation in Wiehl: the [Cathodic dip painting \(KTL\) with zinc phosphating](#) provides five times more corrosion protection than a conventional primer coat with top coat.

In 2012 BPW acquired a majority stake in idem GmbH, a market leader for telematics systems. Shortly afterwards, the BPW Group realigned itself as a mobility partner for vehicle operators and as a system partner for vehicle manufacturers. In 2014, BPW acquires the truck telematics provider Funkwerk eurotelematik GmbH. As a result of this merger with idem GmbH to form idem telematics GmbH, the BPW Group becomes the first provider of holistic telematics solutions for trucks and trailers. At the same time, with its motto "we think transport", the BPW Group formulates its desire to provide future-proof solutions for the transport industry in the shape of new technologies and user-friendly truck and trailer telematics. For the first time, BPW presents the electrically driven axle eTransport at the IAA in 2016.

Picture caption: the former blacksmith's forge at Ohlerhammer has now been turned into ultra-modern production halls.

About BPW Bergische Achsen Kommanditgesellschaft

BPW Bergische Achsen KG is the parent company of the BPW Group. With around 1,500 employees, including around 100 trainees, the family-run company has been developing and producing complete running gear systems for truck trailers

and semi-trailers at its headquarters in Wiehl since 1898. BPW's technologies include axle systems, brake technology, suspension and bearings. BPW's trailer axles and running gear systems are in use in millions of vehicles around the world. An extensive range of services also provides vehicle manufacturers and vehicle operators with the opportunity to increase economic efficiency in their production and transport processes. www.bpw.de/en

About the BPW Group

The BPW Group researches, develops and manufactures everything needed to ensure that transport keeps moving and is safe, illuminated, intelligent and digitally connected. With its brands [BPW](#), [Ermax](#), [HBN](#), [HESTAL](#) and [idem telematics](#), the company group is a preferred system partner of the commercial vehicle industry around the globe for running gear, brakes, lighting, fasteners and superstructure technology, telematics and other key components for trucks, trailers and buses. The BPW Group offers comprehensive mobility services for transport businesses, ranging from a global service network to spare parts supply and intelligent networking of vehicles, drivers and freight. The owner-operated company group currently employs around 7,000 staff in more than 50 countries and achieved consolidated sales of 1.731 billion euros in 2022. www.bpw.de/en

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