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Asko Cylinda AB is known for its environmentally friendly washing machines, dishwashers and dryers under the ASKO brand. Abigail Saltmarsh reports on recent developments at the Swedish company

ENERGY-SAVING AND EFFICIENT



The first machine

Asko Cylinda's history goes back to 1950 when an innovative young farmer from Vastergotland named Karl-Erik Andersson built a washing machine for his mother. His idea was to create a machine that was both energy-saving and water efficient.

The model he came up with was a machine with superior cleaning power and reliability. It could heat water, spin and even boasted a durable, state-of-the-art stainless steel drum.

Andersson's results were so extraordinary that he soon built five other similar machines and found they were in dem- >

Today millions of people all over the world are doing their washing using environmentally friendly machines from Asko Cylinda AB. The Swedish company's washing machines, dishwashers and dryers are well known for their low consumption of both electricity and water.

Asko Cylinda AB is the largest production site for Asko Appliances. It exports to more than 30 countries (which accounts for a full 80 per cent of the company's total sales of SEK 1,200 million) and has a worldwide reputation for its energy-saving, efficient quality products.

Asko Appliances group was last year acquired by the Antonio Merloni group and today sales of its white goods are increasing as new European markets open up to it. The company has already been successful in Scandinavia, the US and Australia.

Now there are new opportunities for its products in Southern Europe, Belgium, Germany and UK where Antonio Merloni has strong sales and distribution networks.





***And who is doing
the work at home?***



It's us of course.

▷ It's a good thing to have them - the kitchen appliances, washing machines, electric power tools and many others. But the real heroes of labour are even more inconspicuous: the deep groove ball bearings, HUB Bearing Units and special bearings made by SKF. The world they work in is rough and brutal: dust, heat, water, steam, imbalance, enormous acceleration from zero to e.g. 8000 rpm in a few seconds. And of course, they have to run virtually without a sound.

▷ But there is worse to come: These machines we use at home go down in weight and size and gain in performance,

yet they must not go up in price. Therefore the SKF bearings must take over more and more tasks from other components, yet not increase in size.

▷ Improved materials, new designs within the bearing, sophisticated seal solutions, lubricating greases with enhanced performance are just some of the SKF responses to these challenges.

▷ It is the hidden qualities that count. It's a good thing that SKF comes in.

Make
the world

STAINLESS



and. The company was born and the business took off with steady growth and increasing volume over the years. Andersson then built a world-class engineering and manufacturing facility right on the family farm where it stands today. Over the years, new products were added to the line. These included dishwashers and dryers.

State-of-the-art production
Asko Appliances employs more than 1100 people from marketers, constructors, designers and engineers to assemblers and service technicians dealing with anything from interpreting market demands to constructing, manufacturing, marketing and maintaining household appliances. Asko Cylinda AB is located in Jung, outside Vara, in the province of Vastergotland in Sweden. The facility is 53,000 sq m and 600 people are employed there. All the ASKO appliances clean with a fraction of the water, electricity and detergent of ordinary machines. Every component is constructed of steel rather than plastic wherever possible. The efficient production line turns out 1200 machines daily – one machine is

completed every 30 seconds. More than 600 dishwashers, 400 washing machines and a few hundred dryers are manufactured every day. Asko Cylinda has invested in the latest state-of-the-art production equipment to reach optimal production volume. This included a new press line. ▶



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We are pleased to be associated with Asko Cylinda and would like to take this opportunity to wish them continued success for the future.

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Freek

The heaters for ASKO tumble dryers are German quality products supplied by FREEK for more than 15 years.

Founded in 1950, FREEK is a highly experienced and flexible heater manufacturer with a record of steady growth. In 1997 it formed its own co-operation platform, EUCOPET, by bringing together other SMEs, including competitors, as well as important customers such as ASKO.

The EUCOPET co-operation platform is modular in design and is made up of technological, organisational and, most importantly, human resources (qualification and motivation) 'bricks'. These bricks are not simply theoretical constructs but practical and verified tools for designing, operating and maintaining a co-operative relationship.

EUCOPET allows FREEK and ASKO to exploit the potential of common R&D as well as of close co-operation in many other areas. The platform enables the two companies to develop remarkable product innovations and to design optimal production and administration processes.

In the development of the latest ASKO tumble dryer heating element, for example, the platform enabled significant economies of scale to be realised, thereby cutting costs. This demonstrates that with intelligent design and value-adding concepts, 'low-tech' products can be manufactured profitably even in highly industrialised economies.



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A product is only as good as the service that goes with it. emz is a world-wide supplier for the appliances industry. Our products are customised for washing machines, dishwasher, dryers, etc. Our focus in the appliance industry are doorlocks and sensors, which we are supplying in millions of pieces. Staff with years of know-how look after our customers from the first inquiry to the final serial production.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

A strong team is responsible for looking for new production technologies, materials and test equipment. This team optimises and updates existing processes, tools and products so that they are in line with the latest state of technology.



Managing director Staffan Billinger says: "We have invested not just in a new press line but in a totally new production set-up for laundry products, washing machines and dryers, that included a transit press line and also production lines for the cylinder, the container and cabinet of the products and new assembly lines."

"The investment in a totally new platform in 97/98 with introduction in the market in late 98 has been very successful."

He adds: "I would say that productivity has improved significantly. It has also improved quality - we have never had better product quality."

Successful integration

One of the reasons Antonio Merloni bought Asko Appliances was to keep their foothold in Scandinavia, says Staffan Billinger.

"We had already sold about 100,000 units of Antonio Merloni appliances in Scandinavia under our own brands," he says. "The other purpose was to bring the ASKO brand into the Antonio Merloni group as it is a prestige brand at the top end of the market - which they have not got."

"I also think our know-how in marketing and market position were important, particularly in the US where we have been really successful. Another point was >





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technology. Our mutual R&D resources will of course be stronger.

Staffan Billinger says the current step is integration between Antonio Merloni and Asko Appliances. "We are looking into what market advantages this could give us," he says. "We are getting started with Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany. The second phase has been looking into the Scandinavian markets."

He goes on: "Setting up a brand portfolio for the Scandinavian markets now that we are a group together has been the most important thing and of course looking into the sourcing of raw material and components, to get the cost down."

"We are very interested in the Antonio Merloni distribution network. They are very strong in Eastern Europe and the UK is also a big market for them. We have been strong in Scandinavia and Australia and the US – so I think we complement each other."

"We have been a great success story in the US. Every fourth dishwasher sold in the US with a consumer price of more than \$700 is an ASKO".

Focusing on the future

Staffan Billinger's message is that the integration with Antonio Merloni is going well and the company is now looking towards a successful future.

"In the future we will have a strong marketing set-up in Scandinavia," he says. "We have made decisions on low, middle and

upper sector brands. We have factories now in Sweden, Finland and in Italy with product ranges supporting each brand."

He says the company now is launching an even stronger product range of laundry and adds, "I think in two years time we will also have significant growth in dishwashers". □

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