



Lukas Steiner, Wikov Group

## Wikov: A brand of renowned names

Wikov engineers and manufactures gearboxes for 13 different industries, including the global cement sector, at two key factories in the Czech Republic. In 2018 the company is owned by Martin Wichterle, the great grandson of Karel Wichterle, the co-owner and founder of the Wikov brand. Three parallel brands, Škoda, ČKD and Wichterle & Kovářik, grew together to form Wikov as we know it today. Here Lukas Steiner, Marketing Manager of Wikov Group, looks separately at the history of the three strands...

### History of Škoda

The history of Škoda, one of the largest European industrial conglomerates of the 20th Century, dates back to 1869 when it was founded by Czech engineer Emil Škoda. He took over a small engineering plant from Count Waldstein after working for three years at its 100-employee Pilsen production plant. Škoda's Pilsen plant was also the predecessor of the modern Škoda car manufacturer.

Škoda soon expanded the firm, and, in the 1880s, founded what was then a very modern steelworks capable of delivering castings weighing dozens of tons. Steel castings and, later, forgings for large passenger liners and warships went on to rank alongside the sugar mills as the top export sectors of the plant.

In 1899, the ever-expanding business was transformed into a joint-stock company, and, before the First World War, Škoda Works became the largest arms manufacturer in Austria-Hungary. It was a navy and army contractor, mainly supplying heavy guns and ammunition.

Exports included castings, such as parts of the piping for the Niagara Falls power plant and the Suez Canal sluices, as well as machinery for sugar mills in Turkey, breweries throughout Europe, and guns for the Far East and South America. The First World War brought a drop in the output of civilian products. Huge sums were invested to expand its weapons' capacities. By this time, Škoda Works already held majorities in a number of companies in Czechoslovakia and abroad that were not involved in arms manufacture. In 1917, the company had 35,000 employees in Pilsen alone.

Following the emergence of Czechoslovakia in 1918, in the complex economic conditions of post-war Europe the company was transformed from what was exclusively an arms manufacturer into a multi-sector concern. It was the year that Škoda Gear was founded to produce large gears and mechanical gearboxes.

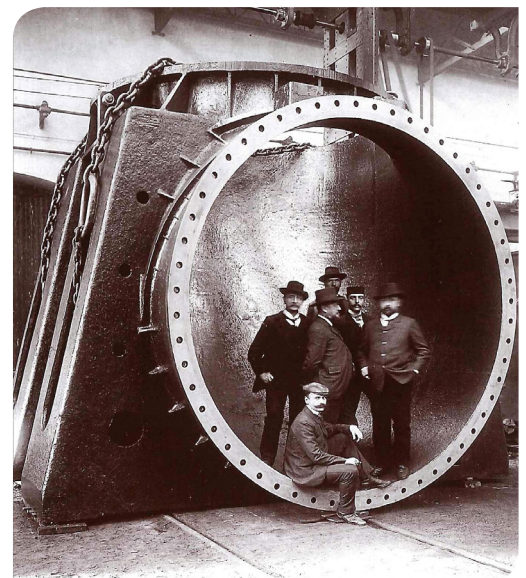
In 1923, the company's world-famous registered trademark - the winged arrow in a circle - was entered

at the Companies' Register. In 1924, Škoda Works acquired the Laurin-Klement car manufacturer, later known as Škoda Auto. The companies were separated after 1945, when the entire Czechoslovakian economy came under government control.

The cement history of Škoda Gear is tied to Přerovské strojírný, nowadays PSP Engineering, a company that supplies technological equipment for the treatment of minerals and production of building materials since the 1950s. Through the decades of cooperation the gearboxes with the winged arrow logo found their place in many cement plants around the world. Even the post-communist era did not leave its mark on the cooperation with PSP Engineering. Deliveries of gearboxes through this sales channel were able to continue with certain fluctuations.

A recent milestone for Wikov Gear was an order for the largest drive in its 100 year history. It was a complete horizontal ball mill drive consisting of two Side Drive gearboxes and a girth gear. The complete drive weighed 120t and it was 8m long, 5m high and over 2.5m wide.

**Right:** A 50t cast-steel piping branch for the hydroelectric power plant at Niagara Falls before it left the Škoda factory in 1905.





**Far left:** Making piston rods for marine diesel engines at ČKD Hronov in 1963.

**Left:** Part of a 120t ball mill drive that was supplied by Wikov Gear to Spassk Cement in Russia.

Wikov has since become a globally-recognised gearbox brand in the global cement sector. The people behind the success don't want to just 'live off' the history of the company but also adopt the creative mindset of the founders into its corporate culture. Wikov invests in progressive machinery to be at the cutting edge of its industry and thus deliver long-lasting products to its customers.

## History of Wikov

Wikov was established on 22 December 1918 by the merger of two companies – Wichterle and Kovářik. The merger of these two big firms, right after the First World War, made Wikov the largest manufacturer of agricultural machinery in the newly formed Czechoslovakia. The factory occupied an area of 250,000m<sup>2</sup> and employed 2000 workers and 150 clerks. The range of products offered by Wikov was extremely wide. Apart from agricultural machinery, it also made diesel, petrol and gas engines and generators to drive mills and other equipment.

In 1922, when the owners of Wikov visited an exhibition in Vienna and returned home with a car by Italian Ansaldo, an automobile became a new product line at Wikov. Although their production represented less than 10% of the total volume of production, most of the cars were originals tailored to the needs of the customer. The world renowned shoe maker Tomáš Baťa had a sleeping car for his journeys from Zlín to Prague manufactured by Wikov. In 1929, the company began to produce agricultural tractors. During the Second World War the production of agricultural machinery and equipment was limited and the company was forced to manufacture for the German war effort.

Wikov suffered a similar fate to other successful companies in post war Czechoslovakia, when it was nationalised in March 1946. It was renamed Agrozet, k.p. and later Agrostroj Prostějov, a state owned company. The Wikov brand disappeared for 58 years.

## Modern Wikov history

The brand was revived in 2004 by Martin Wichterle, when newly acquired companies ČKD Hronov and Škoda Gear in Pilsen were renamed Wikov MGI and Wikov Gear. The acquisition started a new era for both factories, which would not otherwise have survived much longer in the tough competitive conditions of the post communist-era. From Martin Wichterle they received much-needed investment and a new approach.

## History of ČKD

ČKD was one of the major Czechoslovakian engineering enterprises that emerged from the development of Austro-Hungarian industry in the second half of the 19th Century. Today, several smaller companies operate with the name ČKD in the Czech Republic.

However, the history of ČKD, one of the most important Czech engineering brands, goes deep into the past. It was founded by businessman and scientist Emil Kolben, who along with Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison, was one of the pioneers of the worldwide development of electrical engineering. At its height, ČKD had 12,000 employees and a very wide product line emphasised by its famous slogan, *'We make everything, from pin to locomotive.'*

ČKD Hronov's foundations were laid in 1884 by the entrepreneur Pazler. With 85 employees, the company began to produce bending and straightening machines, canning and tinsmith machines. Its first export order came in 1921. Following the communist nationalisation after the Second World War, the factory was merged into ČKD Group in 1965. The plant was reoriented to produce parts for heavy and medium-sized diesel engines. With the downturn in the diesel engine market in the 1980s, it was necessary to choose a new major product for the company. Marine and industrial gearboxes were selected.

ČKD Hronov was transformed into Wikov MGI through an acquisition by Martin Wichterle in 2004. The past decade has been dominated by its line of gearboxes for rail vehicles - Every third tram from the recent worldwide order book is fitted with a Wikov gearbox. 