

Making it in Leeds

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Made In Leeds - A Precision Hole For Off-roaders

Future owners of upmarket British four-wheel drive vehicles will be able to relax confident in the knowledge their luggage is secure, thanks to millions of precision holes, currently being engineered in Leeds.

With over a 140 years of skilled engineering under its belt, Meanwood-based Kingfisher (Lubrication) Limited has gained an opportunity to complete the sophisticated roof-rail bolts for future generations of vehicles. Chairman and managing director John Fisher says: "Basically, we will receive the unfinished parts from one of the UK's leading manufacturers of specialist fasteners - and engineer a hole with a

precision-finished thread into a cold-headed bolt. Our expertise in manufacturing millions of holes per week makes this collaboration a rare opportunity for both companies. Ten bolts are required on a single vehicle making this an annual estimated requirement of 700,000 holes - a substantial order!"

"It's also a good opportunity to use our specialist machine tools, designed and built in-house, in a novel way and a very welcome addition to our staple trade of grease nipples. We produce millions of lubricators per week, for many blue chip companies with household names such as JCB, Volvo and Scania Trucks, Caterpillar and John Deere. We're also proud to know that Kingfisher has lubricators on applications as diverse as the NASA shuttle transporter and the safety chute mechanism in the doors of the European Airbus."

Ian Williams, policy director at Leeds Chamber, said: "The last twelve months have been tough for manufacturers but there are signs that the worst may now be over. With a growing order book, Kingfisher look set to consolidate and begin growing the business into new markets."

John Fisher is the fourth generation at the helm of the long-established Leeds company, launched as an oil merchant and importer in 1867 by the recent arrival from Ireland – Henry Hillary Fisher. The company's first soap-based engineering grease – Acme was introduced in 1883 remained as a brand until the 1960's. Other engineering lubricants quickly followed.

A major step forward came around the turn of the century with the arrival of lubricators for applying the various greases and oils. And in the 1950's the ubiquitous grease nipple debuted in the USA.

John's father Adrian developed and patented a superior version and laid the foundations for the company's continued progress. Pioneering sophisticated engineering automation, he and his cousin Denys adapted existing machinery and created their own models for precision turning and high speed automated assembly– before Denys left to develop his brainchild – the hugely successful Spirograph toy.

Today 35 employees turn out millions of the gleaming and essential grease nipples, in over 350 different variations with annual sales value approaching £2 million. Kingfisher claims to be biggest multi-spindle machine shop in the UK and stands with the largest in the world; with the sophisticated complimentary CNC machines and tooling developed in-house.

John Fisher says: "We are very much about high volume automated mass production. Kingfisher is very good at it, although we must maintain a healthy respect for the competition from the emerging nations such as China and India – we must also recognise the opportunities that lie ahead.

Ends

Photography: Kingfisher's John Fisher with two products from the firm's vast range. The larger a high-pressure grease fitting, typically used in hydraulics on caterpillar tracked vehicles. The smaller, a hydraulic fitting in copper nickel alloy, ideal for extreme temperature situations such as aircraft undercarriages.

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