A CLOSE LOOK AT THE SIDECAST

Alvey reels have become a by-word amongst the Australian anglers who regularly fish our coastal, estuary and deep-sea venues. So, we decided to take 'OUTDOORS' behind the scenes to give our readers some idea of the history of this Company and their approach to the design and development of the reels they market.

Alvey reels had their humble beginning in 1920 when Charles Alvey, in persuit of a life long ambition, set up a "factory" 20ft. x 12ft. beside his home at St. Lucia, Brisbane. With the aid of only a basic treadle-lathe he virtually hand made every part he needed to assemble his 'radical' side-casting reels. Then he literally 'got on his bike' to present his products to the sports stores of Brisbane.

It wasn't long before the top fisherman of the day realised the benefits of his design concept and by 1923 the demand had become so great that Ken Alvey, Charles' son and a qualified pattern maker and draftsman, joined the business and a partnership was formed. Together they steered the Company through the '30's to the war years when aircraft and vehicle components took the place of reels on the assembly line.

After Charles passed away in 1945, grandson Jack Alvey who was already qualified as a fitter and turner (and a keen fisherman as well), joined the firm. During the next twenty five years, Ken and Jack poured every available dollar back into the business, buying new and more sophisticated machinery, developing and streamlining the range of products and seeking out new markets both at home and abroad.

Together they instituted many changes to the reels, for as fishing styles and attitudes developed, anglers became accutely selective toward the gear they used. Many of the refinements came indirectly from the competitive fishermen who were using the gear extensively, and even today some worthwhile modifications are brought about in this manner.

Such a case was the introduction of the model 651/C5 into the range. "When we were asked by a number of West Australian fishermen for a sidecast capable of holding 1,000 metres of 30lb. line, we thought they were joking. As it turned out though, these chaps were shark fishing from the beaches and their method involved 'swimming' a live bait out 500 metres or so from shore, and then waiting patiently for a strike. Of course, once a shark took the bait all hell broke lose and the fishermen needed all the help their tackle could offer". And so the 651 was designed and developed. Since it was brought into production, many other anglers have found this 'big gun' Alvey ideally suited to their needs and now the model enjoys popularity among heavy-line surf, rock and deep sea fishermen all around the country.

Alvey's Sales Manager Keith Peele reflects "I wonder how many people realise that the Alvey products on the market today have resulted from nearly sixty years experience in designing tackle for Australian fishermen and Australian fishing conditions".

Of course that sixty years has also meant a lot to the production methods employed by the company. Charles Alvey's treadle-lathe has given way to a host of labour and time saving machinery. Multi-spindle automatic lathes churn out finished parts in fractions of a second, while huge hydraulic presses and blanking presses form larger components such as spools and backing plates. The accompanying diagram shows very basically the sequence of events that occur during the production of a reel.

The spools for the Alvey are made from either a fibreglass reinforced polyester, or a phenolic moulding powder (Bakelite) and are formed in hydraulic presses that exert forces of approximately a toneper square inch at temperatures of 150°C.

This process transforms the raw materials into spools which possess great strength and durability, uniform free running balance and total freedom from the deteriorating effects of sun and salt water. Like all Alvey parts, spare spools are readily available through tackle stores, and many anglers carry one wound with a guage of line either heavier or lighter than the one on their reel. This allows them to quickly interchange the required spool and line to suit the fish and conditions as they encounter them.

It takes on average about three minutes to mould a spool, and once moulded they require only a minimal amount of "dressing" (where any flares from the moulding process are removed and the handles etc. are fitted) before being ready for the assembly line.

The metals used are purchased in two basic forms - BARSTOCK (Long hexagonal or cylindrical rods) and SHEET (Usually in huge rolls weighing around half a ton).

The bearstock is designed to feed directly into automatic lathes where as many as five bars are worked simultaneously against fixed tooling by the action of a rotating bar feed mechanism. It is as well to realise at this point that all this complex machinery has to be programmed by a sequence of specially designed rotating cams and fitted with the tooling necessary to perform the desired operations. Alveys employ a cross section of highly skilled setters and tool-makers so this work can be done by the company itself. Accuracy and quality control in this area is therefore assured so that the finished parts coming from the lathes are consistent in their quality and accuracy. Parts formed on the autos include spindles, friction tubes, base bolts, nuts, washers, grease caps, etc. and most come off the machines ready for assembly.

Before a roll of sheet metal can be worked it has to be sized, so strips are cut on a metal guillotine capable of slicing up to eight foot lengths of quarter inch mild steel. From here the strips are fed through blanking presses, some exerting pressures of up to 40 tons. These presses also are fitted with tooling designed and made in Alveys own workshop.

The parts are 'stamped' from the strips of sheet metal and then directed through a series of rumbling and vibrating machines which polish the parts amongst a mixture of chemical compounds, abrasive stones and water. This action prepares brass parts for nickel plating and removes any burrs that may occur during the stamping process. A huge purification plant reflects Alveys concern toward the enviroment and separates all toxic waste formed during manufacture. The only discharge from their factory is clean, purified water.

Once the parts reach the assembly, skilled hands quickly convert them to completed reels and check every detail of the performance and appearance of each individual reel along the way.

We weren't really surprised to find the accounting and stock recording of the company being handled by computer, but it was amazing (and refreshing) to find that Alveys go to the extent of taking stock of finished goods every week to cross check with computer records. It's no wonder their despatch department has such a good reputation.

September '78 saw another big step forward for Alvey reels. Because of increased production, the shortage of available space became so critical at the St. Lucia plant that a move to larger premises was necessary. A new factory was built in the Wacol Industrial Estate (near Brisbane's western suburbs) and the mammoth job of 'shifting house' was undertaken. The new premises represent another milestone in the progress of the Alvey company and will allow production expansion for many years to come.

Today, Jack and his son Bruce, who joined the firm after completing his engineering course in 1973, carry on the name that has lived with Australian fishermen for over half a centure.....ALVEY