

THE ALVEY REEL - ITS HISTORY

The Alvey sidecast reel was first produced in 1920 when Charles Alvey, an English migrant, set up a "factory" beside his home at St. Lucia, on the banks of the Brisbane River. Being a keen fisherman himself he had realised the potential of the design concept, so with the aid of only a basic treadle lathe, he experimented with design and materials until he had assembled his "ultimate" fishing reel. A reel both extremely efficient and reliable because of the few wearing parts and sturdiness of construction.

Of course it wasn't long before other top fishermen of the day were placing orders with Charles, and what had begun as a personal ambition developed into a full time concern.

In 1923, Ken Alvey, Charles' son, a qualified pattern maker and draftsman gave up his job to assist his father in the business. By 1937, a partnership was formed in the firm (now Charles Alvey & Son) and with a staff of nine, the production had risen from an original 20 reels per week to approximately 20,000 per annum.

1939 brought the Second World War and an abrupt halt to Alvey production. Machinery was converted to produce aircraft parts and vehicle components, and it wasn't until 1945 that efforts could again be channelled into the production of fishing reels. It was in 1945 also that Charles Alvey passed away, leaving behind him a devoted and loyal family to carry on the dream he had lived for.

After becoming a qualified fitter and turner, grandson Jack Alvey joined the firm in 1946. During the next ten years, Jack and Ken drew plans and constructed new factory buildings,

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and by pouring every available dollar into new and more sophisticated machinery, had doubled production. The range of reels produced was both streamlined and developed, and by the late 1960's, overseas markets were also being sought.

Ken Alvey died in 1973 after leading a full and successful life and was spared the anguish and heartache when flood waters from the Brisbane River covered the Alvey factory in 1974. A courageous effort by staff and local residents alike put paid to the effects of the flood and by mid 1974 the "clean up" operation was complete and the factory once again in production.

September 1978 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 Alvey 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.

THE ALVEY REEL - ITS DEVELOPMENT

In 1920 when the Alvey sidecast reel was first produced, Australian anglers were using rangoon and split cane rods, unpolished gut and cord lines, and a variety of imported reels, most of which not particularly suited to their unique fishing needs.

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Alvey reels were then, and still are, constructed with the requirements of the Australian fishermen in mind. The reels have a minimum of wearing parts, ample line holding capacity, and are solidly constructed to withstand the effects of salt water corrosion and fine beach sand.

The principle of turning the retrieve spool to the side for casting originated in Scotland. The ease of use and distance obtained as the line stripped freely from the spool was a welcome innovation to the anglers and soon many designs for the casting turntable were effected. Three such designs were used extensively by Alveys in their early production.

The "GEM" patent turntable was released by lifting the line guide against a heavy coil spring. The "V" - SLOT turntable, had a heavy coil spring fitted to a centre bolt in the turntable to hold the reel in position, and the FERGUSON patent turntable pivoted around a centre base bolt to key against a flat base lock spring attached to the reel backing plate. The Ferguson patent proved to be the most successful from angles of wear and subsequent adjustment and although other designs were tried, it won through right till the present day where it can be seen in a modified form on current stock models.

The first spools off the production line were made almost entirely from wood. Rose mahogany, silky oak, camphorlaurel and red cedar was stored to season and then hand turned and finished by craftsmen to yield a most attractive article. By 1938, bakelite (a phenolic moulding powder) had been introduced for spool manufacture. The bakelite spools were lighter than the wood, hard and strong, and retained their finish and resistance to weathering for the lifetime of the unit.

The trend toward lighter tackle was becoming more and more evident after the war years, and the reel backing plates which were originally cast brass, and later nickle-plated sheet brass, were being produced from high grade stainless steel.

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Since the pre-war era, Alveys have also produced a large range of deep sea trolling reels. Similar in appearance to the side casters, these reels are also used under the rod but the line is allowed to feed out through the movement of the trolling vessel or simply dropped down by the weight of the rig when fishing at anchor. Because no casting lip is necessary on the spools, they are fashioned with a "U" shape line well and the remarkable line capacity attained is still an important feature of the models marketed today.

Drag (or friction clutch) mechanisms have been available as an option on most models since initial production and they too have seen a few developments over the years. Originally, the "B" pattern drag, the most simple of all, operated by sandwiching the handle plate between two large cork and fibre washers. This allowed the handle and spool to slip independently of each other once the adjustable preset tension was reached. This action averted the loss of fish through line break-offs. Today, the "C" type non-reversing drag action with its incorporated friction tube and multiplate system offers the refinement of this basic concept one would expect.

So, after nearly sixty years experience with tried and tested design, the Alvey reels now marketed with their super strength fibreglass spools, "C" pattern drags and non-corrosive metals reflect the changes in fishing tackle over the past half century without losing sight of their founders original concept "A reliable and efficient reel built to last a fishing lifetime!"

The '74 floods extensively damaged the company's stock of dried red cedar. This hastened the change in production of spools from timber to fibreglass. With rising labour costs in this era, the change to the stronger, cheaper to produce new generation spool became a must.

Now in 1986, after 13 years of fibreglass spools, we are entering a new era of space age plastics bringing with it a new spool, again lighter and stronger than before. With the advent of graphite fishing rods, again reel weights have become more critical. The designs are constantly being revised to reduce weight wherever possible.

Today, the Alvey range covers 29 models of side cast reels, 15 models of non casting boat and deep sea reels, 7 models of deep sea winches and other accessories such as bait pumps, tackle boxes etc.

The company's sole aim is to produce "reliable, efficient reels built to last a fishing lifetime" which is value for money in any language.