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Autor: [s.n.]
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From small beginnings: The Bernina Sewing Machine

In 1890, Karl Friedrich Gegauf established an embroidery shop and a mechanical workshop for the production of a monogram embroidering machine in Feldbach Convent, Steckborn. In the embroidering section he had 4-6 machines in operation, and up to 10 skilled mechanics were employed in the workshop. The embroidery shop served mainly the purpose of testing his machines.

He soon developed a machine for hemstitching, which up to then had to be done by hand. In 1892 he was granted Swiss Patent No. 4670 for the world's first hemstitching machine. This machine, and the one he and his son improved later, were the main product of the Gegauf workshop for more than 30 years.

At the turn of the century, about 70 to 80 people were employed in the workshop - it had become a small factory. Karl Friedrich Gegauf was the technical director and his brother Georg looked after the commercial side. The hemstitch machines were also being exported until the outbreak of World War I.

In 1917, Georg Gegauf died and Karl Friedrich continued on his own. After the war connections with old customers were re-established.

However, new textiles such as rayon became fashionable, and these could not be hemstitched. A new product was urgently needed - but what? At that time, about 20,000 sewing machines were being imported annually, mainly from England and Germany.

With the support of Wilhelm Brüttsch, a sewing machine specialist, Fritz Gegauf decided to go into manufacturing domestic sewing machines; he would build a robust, solid, simple model; not in huge quantities, but a Swiss quality product that would be able to stand comparison with the well-known names already on the market.

In 1932 the first model of a domestic sewing machine was fully developed. It was given the trade-name Bernina and went into small-scale production. It received considerable attention, for it was a good machine, and it began to sell. Soon Bernina had established a place for itself among the very best of domestic sewing machines, but expansion was slowed down by the Depression and World War II. However, the Bernina sewing machine survived, and in 1954 the firm produced a first model that offered new decorative stitches and a button-hole device.

By the 1980s, Bernina produced 140,000 sewing machines a year, and the company had grown to around 1100 employees. In 1986, the Steckborn company introduced its first fully electronic sewing machine on to the market.

In 1990 Bernina established a factory for the production of sewing machine parts in Thailand.

from the internet

From trucks to textile machinery: Saurer

Adolph Saurer AG was an Arbon (TG) based manufacturer of trucks and buses, very well-known all around Europe in the years between World War I and World War II.

In the first half of the 20th century, Saurer ran subsidiary companies in Austria, France, the United Kingdom and in Germany.



Saurer Autobus with the typical snout of the '30s

In 1929 Saurer acquired its Swiss rival, Motorwagenfabrik Berna AG of Olten, but the Berna name was allowed to continue, badging the very same Saurer models.

From 1932 on, trolleybuses were a very significant segment of Saurer's production. Typically Saurer, or Berna, trolleybuses featured Brown, Boveri & Cie or Société Anonyme des Ateliers de Sécheron (SAAS) electric equipments and Carrosserie Hess bodies. Saurer trolleybuses operated in most Central Europe countries, and still do so in several of them.

Declining sales in the early 1980s saw the two leading Swiss truck makers, Saurer and FBW (Franz Brozincevic & Cie of Wetzikon, Switzerland), forming a joint organization called Nutzfahrzeuggesellschaft Arbon & Wetzikon, proceeding with motorbuses and trolleybuses production under the NAW brand, while the last Saurer-badged truck sold in the open market was delivered in 1983.

In 1982 Daimler-Benz had acquired a major shareholding in NAW and soon took full control; and in a short time dropped Saurer, Berna and FBW brands. Eventually NAW went into liquidation in early 2003.

Since 2007, the conglomerate Saurer AG, which meanwhile had reached a worldwide leading status in textile machinery, has been integrated into the Oerlikon Corporation.

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