

Allied Has Recipe for Success

Over its 45-year history, family-run Allied Tooling has navigated its route to success with a reputation for quality and innovation that has foundations built by longstanding staff with unsurpassed expertise – and of course, industry-leading technology from Vollmer UK. This bedrock of expertise, innovation and cutting-edge machine tools is now being driven forward by the next generation, and the future has never been brighter.

The foundation blocks have been laid for more than a generation, but in the last six years, the Poole-based company has more than doubled turnover to over £7m – and growth is destined to continue at pace. Central to this expansion has been a company re-branding, the introduction of PCD round tools and saw blades, becoming the UK's exclusive AKE saw blade partner, and also a rapid expansion of available product lines. This has all culminated in the Dorset manufacturer winning long-term supply contracts with prestigious brands such as Princess Yachts and Wren Kitchens to name just two.

With an increasing demand for its expanding product line-up, the ISO:9001 manufacturer now has nine drivers conducting daily deliveries the length and breadth of the UK whilst more clients are also signing up for consignment stock contracts. Consignment stock simplifies and expedites the supply chain that now sees Allied supply and service over 6,000 tools and saw blades each month. To accommodate this, the 60+ employee manufacturer for the woodworking and kitchen, marine, construction, composite, aerospace, automotive and motorsport sectors has ramped up its investment in grinding and erosion machines from Vollmer.

The first Vollmer machine arrived in the 1990s and the company has purchased more than 20 Vollmer machines over the years. In the last six years, the company's entry into PCD tool production has seen it acquire two Vollmer QXD250 6-axis disc erosion EDM machines with H5 loading stations, a CHD270 8-axis TCT circular saw blade sharpening machine, a VPulse 500 wire EDM with 5-axis simultaneous interpolation, a QR270 erosion machine for finishing the tooth tops of saw blades, and the most recent installation, the Vollmer QM ECO Select. This investment adds to Vollmer machines that already include Loroach KBN and KSC HSS saw blade machines, a CHHF 21H TCT saw blade repair machine, TCT saw blade machines such as the Vollmer CHD250R2, CHD251 and CHD270 with ND340 automated loading, a CHX840 HS and a CP200. These machines manufacture everything from solid carbide and PCD tooling, TCT and HSS saw blades, bandsaw blades, drills, endmills and many more products.

Commenting upon the business growth, Allied Tooling Managing Director, Mr Wes Hacker says: “We have always endeavoured to cater for the diverse demands of the industry whilst building a high-quality brand with sustainable growth. This has seen Allied move away from ‘cottage-industry’ work like hand tools, planer knives, lawn mower blades - stepping into more complex, higher value and higher volume solutions. This has seen us fill our factory with state-of-the-art machines to adopt greater levels of automation and technology. In the last five years, TCT saw blade servicing and sales are up 100%, carbide round tooling sales are up 100% and our diamond tooling that was once outsourced is now produced in-house with growth beyond 400%.”

It's not a coincidence that Allied has been the exclusive UK dealer for AKE since 2019, or that it has won major contracts with multinational companies – it's the propensity to work tirelessly to deliver on its promises, pivot and invest when required. Take industry-leading German brand AKE identifying Allied Tool as its UK partner – a factor not based on sales volume, but the desire to deliver the same level of quality and service that AKE is committed to internationally. AKE saw blades are manufactured on Vollmer machines in Germany, so in true partnership fashion, Allied invested in the same Vollmer machines, adopted the same saw blade programs and also apply the same grinding wheels and erosion discs. The result is that more than 1500 AKE saw blades are supplied, serviced, repaired and returned to customers every week to OEM specifications and quality. Furthermore, by adopting the same Vollmer technology, complex new saw blade geometries developed by AKE are available for complete service and repair in the UK.

The Vollmer Journey

The 16,000sq/ft Allied facility is crammed with Vollmer machines, so Allied is adopting a ‘one-in and one-out’ policy until it finds a suitable facility for expansion in the North East to service Wren Kitchens. The latest tranche of Vollmer machines commenced when PCD tooling went from being an outsourced solution to a serious addition to the product range. Identifying the industry trend at an early stage, Allied invested in two Vollmer QXD250's with the H5 28-tool automation solution in June 2018 and a VPulse 500 in March 2023.

Alluding to this, Wes says: “The QXD 250 is perfect for TCT saws up to 320mm diameter, but it also has the flexibility to process all our PCD end mills, drills and cutters. With our in-house brazing facility, the QXD250 may be a machine designed for manufacturing new tools, but we also take advantage of its flexibility to service tools. With the 28-tool chain magazine, we can set the QXD250 to run around the clock, giving us a combination of lights-out productivity with flexibility. The arrival of the QXD for PCD tools certainly enhanced our reputation as a serious player in this niche and the lights-out automation reduced our lead times by more than 2 weeks on bespoke tool solutions.”

The same HC5 28 tool external workpiece storage system is also on the VPulse 500 machine that arrived in March 2023. Discussing this, Wes adds: “We purchased the

VPulse 500 for its flexibility. The simultaneous 5-axis kinematics and polymer concrete base deliver unsurpassed precision with astounding flexibility. This flexibility is derived from an EDM wire that can access areas of a tool that a disc erosion machine cannot. Furthermore, the new VPulse EDM generator significantly improves productivity and this means that we can run a batch of 20+ tools lights-out with exceptional efficiency – further supporting our ambition to compress lead times.”

Best-in-Class Saw Service

Allied Tooling has been supplying and servicing saw blades for more than a generation. However, the partnership with AKE has ramped up production and servicing for the South Coast company. With a selection of reliable and productive Vollmer and Lorocho machines that are still in operation after more than 20 years of service, the saw blade division has undergone modernisation to embrace automation and increase throughput.

In October 2021, a Vollmer CHD270 sharpening machine with a four-station ND340 automation system was installed. Adding to their CHD251 and CHD250, the new arrival increased productivity by more than 30%.

Discussing this installation, Wes adds: “The CHD270 instantly gave us more capacity and much higher levels of productivity. This was credit to faster processing speeds and automation. From an automation standpoint, it wasn’t just the high-capacity ND340 loader for 24/7 production, it was also features like the acoustic sensors and probing cube for in-cycle inspection and re-calibration. Additionally, with new drive systems and a new software interface, the CHD270 enables us to apply multi-path programmes and undertake more complex saw blade designs such as multi-facet saws. The machine really can take on anything. Previously, some of these challenging saws would have required multiple machines or manual operation – it is all now done lights-out on the Vollmer.”

The success of the CHD270 was followed in January 2023 with a QR270 erosion machine for processing the tooth tops of PCD circular saw blades. Discussing this machine, Wes says: “HSS and TCT saw blades are long established, but like the uptake in PCD shank tools, PCD saw blades are now becoming a growth market as the industry recognises the benefits of PCD on particular materials and applications. As this market shift develops, Allied will be well positioned to service customers.”

It is this strategic foresight that led Allied to bolster its PCD saw sharpening technology with a Vollmer QM ECO Select machine that was installed in January 2024. Whilst capable of processing PCD round shank and circular saw blades, this most recent arrival was acquired for saw blade servicing. As Wes says: “The QM ECO Select was bought for its flexibility, replacing an older machine for large saw blades. The QM ECO can do anything with diamond tooling up to 600mm diameter and it’s this flexibility that appealed to us. We didn’t opt for automation as this machine is primarily for special PCD tools we produce. It can process the tops and

sides of our saw blades and also manufacture a lot of our other core product lines – this flexibility will be invaluable with many pockets of industry in a transition between TCT and PCD tools.”

The future

Concluding on the growth trajectory of Allied Tool, Wes says: “As a company, our growth is derived from our ability to deliver innovative high-quality products to the industry. Our position as the exclusive UK AKE tooling partner and more recently becoming a strategic tooling partner to Wren Kitchens is recognition of our service, support and creative approach to exceeding the expectations of our clients. The cornerstone of such partnerships is our longstanding team of expert staff and the technology we adopt – and Vollmer is a key partner in providing the machine tool solutions that affirm our position as a market leader.”

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