

# THE HISTORY OF SERCK

1905-2007



## Peter Oscar Serck 1882 – 1924

Peter Oscar Serck was born in St. Petersburg, Russia on October 30th 1882. His parents were Norwegian, and his grandfather, Hans Smith was Norwegian Consul-General in St. Petersburg. He was also a ship owner with an extensive export and import trade. He had moved from Norway to St. Petersburg when he was young, with his close friend, Peter Serck, Peter Oscar's other grandfather. Peter Oscar Serck's father, Oscar Serck, was born in St. Petersburg and worked first as a stockbroker and then for Hans Smith. Under Russian law, foreigners retain their nationality and Peter Oscar Serck remained a Norwegian.

He was independent, and a great adventurer. After leaving school, he worked for two years for a large wire and nail manufacturing firm, first in St. Petersburg and then in Moscow. In 1902, when he was 20 years old, he went to America. His mother cabled him money as soon as she knew his address, but Peter Oscar Serck changed his address and from then on only sent her postcards without an address. Whilst in America he was often short of money and had to live rough. He had many adventures. In order to save train fares, he used to walk across the railway bridge to Brooklyn at night to go home, and on one occasion, when he was half-way across, a train approached. To avoid being run over, he hung between the sleepers by his hands, to allow the train to pass. On another occasion, he was held up at gunpoint, the man demanded money, Peter Oscar Serck grabbed the gun, which went off and his finger was damaged. He got the gun but his assailant escaped.

## The Development of the Honeycomb Radiator

It was by this engineering firm that the Honeycomb radiator was first developed and patented. In 1905, he came to London and set up his works in Bermondsey, but to go nearer the centre of the motor industry, he moved to Parkside, Coventry, in 1909, and to Greet, Birmingham, in 1911, where the main works still stand.

In 1913, the partnership was dissolved, the German partner retained the business in Germany, and Peter Serck became the sole owner of the business

in England. It was about this time, that he forced a subsidiary, "The Speciality Supply Company", to enable him to buy in an extensive field of various material parts, accessories and other goods at the keenest of prices. In 1913 he opened a branch, Serck Brothers, with his elder brother, Hans, in St. Petersburg and when war broke out, he obtained an agency for certain British motor cars and accessories and shipped these to Russia, doing a large amount of business with the Russian Government. "The Speciality Supply Company" proved very useful.

When the revolution broke out in 1917, he escaped at the last moment and went via Siberia and Japan to California. In order to enforce the last order he gave in his Russian works, he had to walk up and down the shop, a revolver in each hand, covering the workmen, who were in a dangerous state of revolt. In California, he bought a ranch which he ran on scientific lines, as a fruit and cattle farm. This ranch was called "The Beauty Spot of Somona Country", and is described in Jack London's Book, "Valley of the Moon".



Serck's first van, numbered 10 to impress customers

## 1919 - & Serck Radiators Ltd. is formed

After the Armistice, the factory at Greet was offered back to him and in 1919, he formed Serck Radiators Ltd., as a public company with £200,000 capital of which he personally held more than half the shares, and was the Managing Director.

By 1922, about 180 people were employed at Serck, the radiators being made by hand, a tinsmith only having six cases and the tubes per week. At that particular time, there were many firms starting up in the motor industry, and inevitably some firms were unsuccessful and going bankrupt. One firm which Serck were having difficulty in receiving payment from, was the "Bean Car Company", and Peter Serck decided that the only way of recovering the money was to visit them in the middle of the night and relieve them of half a dozen cars and sell them, which he did.



Tool room at the Birmingham site

## Serck Radiators expands into new markets

The Company continued to concentrate on motor vehicle radiators, introducing some new designs to supplement the honeycomb block, for example, the film-block and fin-tube block.

There was a growing requirement for quality heat exchangers in other industries, and the company extended its activities to include equipment for marine diesel engines, rail traction and other applications.

## Impressive war record establishes Serck's reputation

In the period of 1939 to 1945, over 65,000 aircraft radiators and 110,000 aircraft oil coolers were produced for use with Rolls Royce, Napier and Bristol Engines. Although the manufacture of radiators for private cars was suspended, many thousands of radiators were supplied for service vehicles, fire pumps,

engines and other essential transport. The normal output for the Serck organisation trebled for this period without a corresponding increase in personnel or factory space.

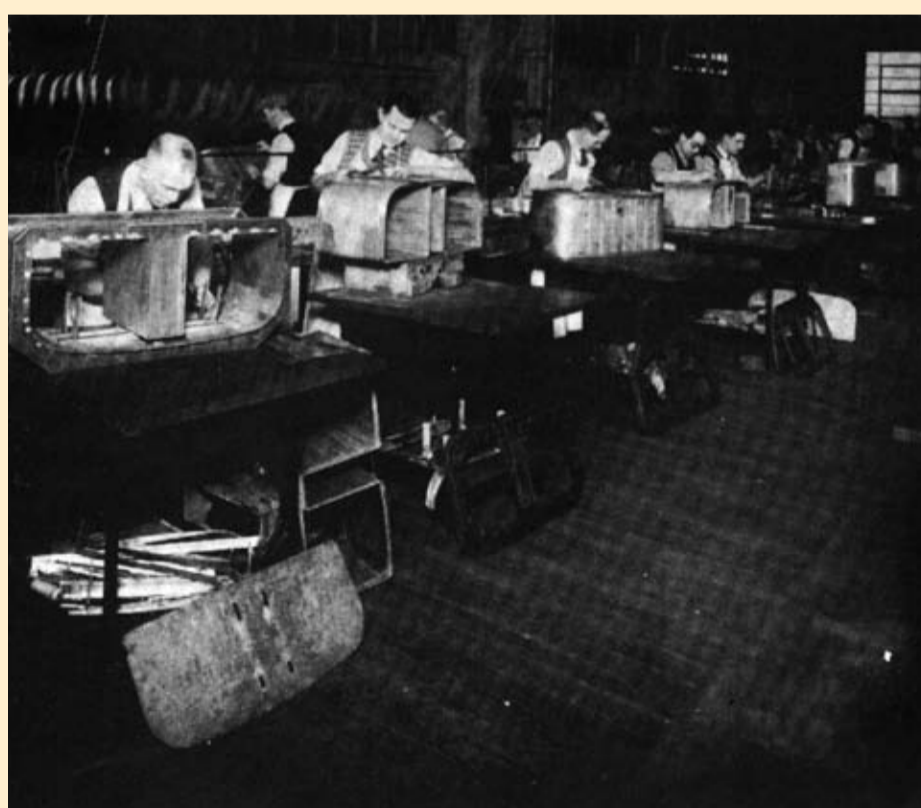
During the war, the quality and reliability of Serck products was established, and afterwards, because of increased demand, the Company were able to offer all its previous employees new work.

## The Formation of the Serck Group

In 1957 Serck Services were formed and in that year Serck Limited became the parent company of the Serck Group, with Serck Radiators becoming part of the group. Seeleys Road Works was completed in the same year.



Herman Oscar Serck, the brother of Peter Oscar Serck, had set up a business in Manchester in 1929 to manufacture and service radiators. The very profitable H.O. Serck was bought by the Serck Group in 1964 when Herman Oscar retired and in 1970, it became a division of Serck Heat Transfer.



Cast water box fettling in full progress

## Dawn of a new age

In 1968 the last car radiator was produced, ending over 60 years involvement in the industry that made the Serck name famous. To reflect its activities more accurately, the Company's name was changed from Serck Radiators to Serck Heat Transfer.

The Company later underwent significant divisionalisation. The seven divisions being: Tubular Cooler Division; Air Cooling Division; Aircraft Equipment Division and small Engine Cooler Division After Sales Division all based in Birmingham, H.O. Serck Division

based in Manchester and Serck GmbH, based in Hamburg, Germany.



With nearly seventy years experience behind it, at this point, Serck Heat Transfer offered complete heat transfer capability to all major industries, and a range of heat exchange equipment which is one of the most comprehensive in the World.

From this point onward Serck went through a number of buy outs and take overs as listed below, right up to the most recent acquisition of the Industrial Division by Therco in September 2005.

- 1982 – Acquired by BTR Industries.
- 1997 – MBO (Natwest Ventures).
- 2000 – Bought by Honeywell PLC.
- 2002 – Integrated into Garrett Thermal Systems.
- 2005 – Therco acquires the Serck Industrial business, IP rights and drawings of every Serck cooler built over the last decade.

