

Behind The Scenes Fox International



The Carp-Trade team recently accompanied Fox International media and publicity manager Steve Cole on a visit to their European distribution centre in Belgium to find out more about the role it plays for the company.

Fox International has been trading for some 42 years and is currently the largest privately owned tackle manufacturer in the whole of Europe, a fact that the company is very proud of. The success of the company has been quite remarkable when you consider that the founder, Cliff Fox, started off by making rulers for measuring fish! Fast forward to 2009 and the company is now manufacturing over 3,500 individual products covering the carp, match, predator and sea disciplines.

We recently travelled to Belgium with Fox's media and publicity manager Steve Cole, who was keen for us to see Fox's European distribution centre, as well as a host of new products that the company has in store for the carp market over the coming months. Not knowing what to expect, as we turned into the industrial estate

that is home to the distribution centre, we were taken aback by just how large the building is. It looked very impressive and we hadn't even been inside yet! The Fox logo, which has become well associated with the production of quality products across a range of fishing spectrums, stands large and proud on the front of the building, and judging by the number of cars in the car park it was obvious that quite a number of people are employed at the centre.

During the course of the day we were given a guided tour of the operation and got to meet some of the Belgium team, including Fox's European director Andre Akkermans, who oversees the running of the whole distribution centre. Andre is a very personable guy who has a wealth of experience in the angling industry, and

who is also a very capable carp angler with his finger firmly on the pulse of the European angling scene. Having worked for Sensas in the past, Andre has been with Fox for the past eight years, and it is clear (from seeing how clean and well organised the centre is) that this is a man who runs a tight ship and knows exactly what he is doing. If you ever get the opportunity to visit the Belgian site you will no doubt meet Andre, who will ensure that you receive first-class service at all times, just as we did during our visit.

After we had received our tour of the centre we got the opportunity to sit down with Steve to question him in-depth to find out more about the Belgium site, such as the function it serves for Fox as a tackle manufacturer in 2009, and this is what we found out:



European director Andre Akkermans oversees operations in Belgium.



The centre has a pallet area, which can house 3,000 individual pallets and is 10m high!



Orders from across the globe are processed, picked and packed in Belgium.



Fox distribute all their goods from Belgium, including the hugely popular Predator range.



There is an impressive on-site showroom displaying new products for retailers and angling media to see when they visit.



Fox have some awesome new shelters for 2009 that are set to be hugely popular.

Carp-Trade: Hello Steve. Thank you for inviting us to the Belgian distribution centre; this is one seriously impressive setup! Can you start by telling us a little about the history and the size of the centre here?

Steve Cole: No problems, thanks for coming over. I think everyone who visits here has the same Wow! reaction as you. The centre opened in 2005 to service our customers better – both in the UK and throughout Europe. With regards to the actual size of the centre, as you can see, it is very big! To be precise it is 4,200 square metres with a further 500 square metres of mezzanine floor space. The pallet area has space for 3,000 individual pallets and is 10 metres high. There is a loading bay for six lorries, with a 400 square metres loading area, whilst the office area is a further 500 square metres. There are 37 permanent warehouse members of staff, plus a further 12 in the sales and accounts offices. The warehouse staff are split into four sections – goods in, replenish, dispatch, and customer care. However, we have a regular supply of temporary staff who we use in busy periods. We try to use the same people so that we know their training needs are already met; they can come into the warehouse and start working to our required standard instantly. This is really important in order to continue to meet our high standards at all times.

CT: Why did Fox feel it necessary to open the centre back in 2005, and what are the main advantages of such a site?

SC: Having one huge, centrally located distribution centre means we can get orders picked, packed and dispatched quicker than having numerous smaller warehouses dotted around Europe. We have over 3,500 individual products, so housing these in multiple locations would be a nightmare. It works perfectly too, as it takes two days from Belgium receiving the order to a UK shop getting it delivered, which is better than most companies who have products based in the UK! With regards to the advantage of the centre, it really is the speed aspect, as I have just mentioned. When a customer places an order we can get it all packed and dispatched, often in the same day, from one location.

CT: Would you say there are any disadvantages to having the distribution centre in Europe when Fox's HQ is in England?

SC: None at all. As previously mentioned, we can turn orders around quicker for our English customers than most companies who distribute from England. The distance really isn't a problem because technology nowadays makes it very simple for us to keep in regular contact with Andre and his team in Belgium.

CT: The speed of the turnaround of orders is obviously something Fox are extremely proud of. On average, how quickly are orders processed and dispatched from the site here in Belgium?

SC: As soon as an order arrives in Belgium the pickers and packers are on the case. Often we get the small products processed and dispatched as soon as possible, with the larger items such as rods, domes and luggage following a day later. This is purely to ensure we service as much of the order as quickly as is humanly possible. Most orders should

“Having one huge, centrally located distribution centre means we can get orders picked, packed and dispatched quicker than having numerous smaller warehouses dotted around Europe”

arrive with the customer 48 hours after the order arrives in Belgium. An extremely large order may take a day longer, but I'm sure you'll agree the turnaround is very speedy.

CT: And are all Fox's disciplines, i.e. match, predator, and carp, distributed from here?

SC: Yes. All Fox products covering each discipline – carp, match, predator and sea – are distributed from right here in Belgium.

CT: How many countries across the world does this distribution centre service?

SC: We sell to around 50 different countries worldwide. We sell directly to retailers in the UK, France, Benelux, Germany, Austria and Italy, where we use dedicated Fox sales representatives, with distributors and export customers further afield from Russia through to South Africa and America. So you can understand it's on a very large scale.

CT: The team in Belgium must be kept extremely busy with orders coming from

so many parts of the world. On average how many lorries will leave the centre in a day?

SC: On average around one and a halfartic lorries leave the distribution each day, filled to the brim with Fox gear for the UK and Europe. However, in peak times of the year, as many as three full lorries will be despatched each day.

CT: Well Steve, that's about all we have got time for this month. Thanks once again for taking the time to talk to us and for showing us the impressive distribution centre here in Belgium. Before we go, though, we'd like to give you the last word and ask you to reveal which new Fox product most excites you for the coming months.

SC: It's hard to pick one because we are launching over 160 individual new products in the carp section alone. The N Series Bite Alarms are arguably the most exciting, purely because the technology in them is unrivalled by anything else on the market. This is the perfect example of the 'new Fox' – a product where we haven't compromised on quality in a bid to create the best product of its type ever seen. The new Stratos 12000e reels are sure to be huge sellers, as will the Spring-Lok Hangers and new Ven-Tec domes – again, all products that are the result of many months of in-house CAD-engineering to produce something different to the norm. I can honestly say that all new Fox products for 2009 are a big improvement on anything we, or anyone else, has produced in the past.

Fox's media and publicity manager Steve Cole is predicting big things for the new N Series of Bite Alarms over the coming months.



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