

Kiel Americas

80 Years of Rail Seating with Kiel



1945 Franz Kiel GmbH production building in Nördlingen, Germany

From its roots in post-war Germany to a global presence in the rail seating market, Kiel celebrates 80 years of engineering excellence, comfort and innovation.

When Franz Kiel founded his workshop in Nördlingen, Germany in 1945, he couldn't have imagined that eight decades later, the company bearing his name would be supplying rail seating solutions to operators around the world.

In the aftermath of World War II, Deutsche Bundesbahn – the German Federal Railway, faced a severe shortage of passenger coaches, with much of the fleet outdated or damaged. Restoring reliable public transport was

urgent, and seating design and production played a crucial role in shaping the passenger experience in post-war Germany – as well as setting the standard for the modern high-speed era.

Over the decades, Kiel has continuously adapted to new demands from post-war reconstruction through to today's high-speed, digitally connected railways, and today is trusted by leading OEMs and transport providers thanks to its blend of ergonomic design, durability and innovation.

1945

Franz Kiel GmbH is founded in Nördlingen, Germany, as a small metalworks company initially focusing on iron component construction.

1948

The company begins to specialise in passenger transportation, starting with bus seating and later adding rail solutions. Clients include Mercedes-Benz, MAN and Magirus Deutz. A new production facility is built to manufacture metal parts, furniture and vehicle equipment.

1965

Kiel upgrades its finishing capabilities, improving the quality and resilience of its seat components. The company opens a new powder-coating and wet-painting facility, also investing in durability-focused seating for long-distance travel and harsh use environments.

1975

Kiel receives its first major order from Deutsche Bundesbahn. This marks a pivotal expansion for Kiel's business in the rail sector.

1983

As seating components become more complex, Kiel begins developing and producing complete seats and seating systems. The company invests in a high-bay warehouse, painting and powder-coating facilities.

Late 1980s

By the end of the decade, Kiel begins to position itself as a serious competitor in the field of passenger seating for railways, starting initially with a focus on regional railways and trams. The company invests in robotic welding and CNC-controlled machines, boosting production capacity and quality. In 1989 it expands production further, with the opening of a new administration building, warehouse and stamping plant in Nördlingen.

1990s

By the start of the 1990s, the company has reached a magnitude which enables it to extend into the global market. The increasing concentration of buyers and sellers also contributes towards the development of an international group of companies. This includes the founding of the Kiel Oto Kiltuk subsidiary in Bursa, Turkey in 1996 and the launch of the Kiel Polska subsidiary in Nowy Tomysl, Poland in 1997.

1993

Kiel establishes a dedicated upholstery department and surface technology unit.



Kiel train seats from 1975

1997

The company heavily invests in product development to maintain its position as a leader in seating solutions. By the end of the decade, it's transformed from a component supplier to a full systems provider, offering development production, delivery and installation of complete seating systems. The development, production, delivery and assembly of complete seating systems for trams and trains becomes even more comprehensive.

2000s

Expansion continues with the acquisition of Deco Seating in the Netherlands, renamed Kiel B.V., and launches – including but not limited to Kiel France s.a.r.l and Kiel Seating in the UK.

A new production site is built in Turkey and sales activities expand to include Scandinavia, Greece, Israel, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia.

In addition to this global growth, Kiel introduces a rigorous quality management system to further optimise products and production.

2008

First delivery of the Match train seat for regional transportation – to date more than 500,000 have been produced. This model is valued for its adaptability, with options for headrest height, cushion size, backrest adjustment and add-ons such as tables or footrests. Its ergonomic design and tapering silhouette ensure long-journey comfort.

2009

Kiel N.A. LLC is founded, which opens the door to the North American market. Elkhart, Indiana was chosen as the production location due to its proximity to suppliers of key materials as well as potential customers. The same year, Kiel N.A. participates in, and ultimately wins, the tender for the largest project on the North American railway market at that time: the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) project. The company produced 775 carsets for this project.

2012

A new production hall for train seats in Nördlingen is constructed.

2014

Development and delivery of the first Comfortline seat for high-speed trains is completed. Designed for long-distance travel, this model features spring-core cushioning that absorbs movement, ergonomically shaped adjustable backrests, fold-out armrests and foot supports. A wide headrest with large sides enhances privacy, while options such as LED reading lamps, USB charging, centre consoles, foldable tables and storage details create a modern, high-comfort experience in every class.

2017

Kiel is the first to deliver workstation tables designed to meet the industry's latest crashworthiness standards. The same year saw the founding of Kiel Macedonia DOOEL, further increasing EU production capabilities.

2019

Kiel enters joint venture in China, launching the Jiangsu ARSALE Kiel Seat Co Ltd.

2025

Kiel marks its 80th anniversary with global operations, 1,500 employees and a footprint in Europe, North America, Australia, Asia and the Middle East. The



Kiel train seats today

company renews its contract with BART, providing a further extra carsets.

Looking to the Future

Kiel's journey from ironworks to international seat systems supplier has been defined by adaptability, craftsmanship and customer focus. Looking ahead it aims to strengthen its position as a leading seating manufacturer while continuing to grow internationally.

Several clear trends are shaping the future of rail seating. One of the most significant is the ongoing drive for safety. Since the first publication of APTA crashworthiness standards in 1999–2000, regulations have continued to evolve, and seating design has advanced in step with them.

There is also a stronger emphasis on accessibility, with clearer markings, signage and colour coding now used to prioritise seats for passengers with additional needs. At the same time, passenger expectations continue to shift. Where once seats were designed to be bulky, today lightweight designs are increasingly in demand, and modern passengers expect USB ports, cup holders and workstation tables.

Kiel covers the entire travel spectrum: from simple metro and tram seats to high-comfort models for regional, tourist and high-speed trains. With production sites spread across multiple continents, the company remains committed to combining ergonomics, safety and modern design to meet the evolving needs of rail passengers worldwide.



SEATING SOLUTIONS