



Vehicle Systems & Subsystems

Rowe Hankins

Onwards and Upwards – Rowe Hankins Marks Four Decades in Rail

As Rowe Hankins marks its 40th anniversary, we trace the journey from distribution agency to global design partner.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of [Rowe Hankins Components](#)' incorporation: four decades in which a small electromechanical components agency has grown into a globally recognised [designer and manufacturer](#), earning a reputation for technical expertise, engineering quality and a willingness to take on the most challenging of problems.

The company began as a distribution agency for Heinemann electromechanical products, but its founding conviction that real value lies in solving problems, not stocking shelves, pointed it in a different direction.

The Early Years

Co-founders Roger Rowe and Toni Hankins, both electrical engineers, first met in the early eighties when they began working together at electromechanical components manufacturer Electromatch.

Recognising a shared vision and commercial opportunity, the pair left to establish independent sales agencies – Roger founding R C Rowe Consultants, Toni establishing T Hankins Components – both representing Heinemann electromechanical products. Working in close collaboration, the two agencies effectively operated as a single business throughout 1985, laying the foundations for what would become Rowe Hankins the following year.



Some of the company's initial stock was financed by a £12,000 personal overdraft, but almost all of that first shipment was sold within days, putting the bank account into the black, where it remained for the next 25 years. 'Onwards and upwards' became the founders' informal guiding principle during those early years, and from rented premises in Bury, they built the business through direct selling, long hours and a growth plan centred on product diversification and organic growth without borrowing.

The company exceeded £1 million turnover in its second year and has never looked back, reinvesting rather than withdrawing profits in order to expand its premises and workforce. Today Rowe Hankins operates from its own 25,000 sq. ft combined office, store and production space, and has a total of 33 staff. This is expected to grow during 2026 with the opening of a new factory in China to support the ever-growing Asian market.



From Distributor to Designer

The establishment of an in-house R&D function in 1998 marked a major turning point for Rowe Hankins, as it was then that the company began designing its own product ranges rather than representing others. It began to develop the [speed sensors](#), [current monitoring devices](#), lubrication systems and detection units that now form its core offering, with each born out of a specific customer need.

Today's CEO, David Owen, believes that one of the reasons Rowe Hankins remains a trusted partner in the sector is down to its dedication to both innovation and customer service.

"Over the years we've developed components and solutions alike, from [intelligent wheel flange lubrication \(iWFL\)](#) and tram [overspeed protection](#) through to [LiDAR detection and safety solutions](#), and our continued support of these highlights that we're not all about selling," he notes. "We often [refurbish and support our systems](#) well beyond normal end-of-life, and always provide customers with updates and upgrades."

Industry recognition backs up the company's credentials. This includes quality and environmental accreditations to ISO Standards and being awarded 2015's Modern Railway Innovations and Light Rail Best Supplier accolade, as well as major contracts including a Network Rail supply ahead of the London 2012 Olympics.

A Different Kind of Company

The company has also changed structurally over the years. Since Rodger Rowe and Toni Hankins retired, the business transitioned to an employee ownership trust. This is a shift that David describes as fundamental to how the business now operates.

"We're all invested in our future," he says. "It's a model that carries the values of the founding years – resilience, long-term thinking, doing right by the customer – into the next chapter."

Looking Ahead

As Rowe Hankins marks 40 years, the focus is firmly forward. Expansion into project-based work, new technology partnerships and emerging areas such as LiDAR-based detection systems point to a business that has no intention of standing still.

"The dedication of the team drives the business forward, continually evolving to meet the needs of customers and the industry alike," says David. "As we enter our next chapter we're looking to diversify into new solutions, markets and products that will secure the business growth and the future beyond. Whether you're an existing customer or exploring what Rowe Hankins can offer for the first time, we'd love you to be part of that journey."

Find out more about Rowe Hankins by visiting www.rowehankins.com or emailing sales@rowehankins.com

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Rowe Hankins Milestones

- **1986** – Rowe Hankins Components formerly established distributing Heinemann products
- **1988** – achieved BS 5750 accreditation
- **1990** – constructed a new factory
- **1992** – awarded the Weber franchise
- **1993** – awarded Marquardt distributorship
- **1995** – achieved BS EN ISO 9002:1994
- **1996** – awarded Schrack distributorship
- **1997** – awarded AI-TEC Instruments distributorship
- **1998** – established the company's research and development department and awarded Eaton distributorship
- **2001** – achieved BS EN ISO 9001:2000 certification and awarded Sécheron distributorship
- **2002** – established the Sécheron Service and Maintenance Centre and awarded LEM agency
- **2004** – opened a new service centre for Sécheron / Hasler equipment and appointed European specialist for traction – Eaton Heinemann
- **2005** – appointed Bombardier agent for the USA and Canada and supplied runback units to Metronet BCV
- **2008** – introduced lean manufacturing principles, completed intelligent wheel flange lubrication (iWFL) trial with Merseyrail and successfully passed the Bombardier Safety Critical Audit
- **2009** – achieved IRIS accreditation
- **2011** – awarded major Network Rail contract to supply NICs for improved asset monitoring in advance of the London 2012 Olympics
- **2014** – expanded facility to 25000 sq. ft to meet increasing production demand
- **2015** – awarded Modern Railway Innovations Award and Light Rail Best Supplier
- **2018** – expanded factory by a further 4000 sq. ft to support future growth and achieved BS EN ISO 9001:2015 and BS EN 14001:2015 accreditation
- **2021** – Rowe Hankins EOT Trustee Limited is setup, purchasing 95% of Rowe Hankins Shares
- **2023** – won the Sheffield Supertram Overspeed protection contract
- **2025** – won the Manchester Metrolink Lidar Detection contract, appointed sales and support agents for McLaren Applied (now rebranded as Motion Applied) and appointed sales, installation and maintenance support partner for ZTR Canada; David Owen joins as the company as CEO
- **2026** – celebrates 40 years of trading

