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"We know the nerve of the market": Manav Kapur, Steelbird International

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Manav Kapur, Executive Director, Steelbird International

Steelbird International, one of the leading Auto Component manufacturing companies in India has been driven with a penchant for achieving excellence in its domain of work for more than five decades. Diversifying from filters to rubber, Steelbird's saga of success continues unabated. Recently, the company has ventured into the field of two wheeler tyres and introduced innovative methods for the promotion of it. This tremendous growth and diversification of Steelbird International owes to Manav Kapur, Executive director the company. Being a professional engineer, Manav Kapur could make a perfect SWOT analysis of the company and his immaculate delegation skills brought the best from the organizational resources. Manav Kapur spoke to J Binduraj, Editor, Smartdrive auto-lifestyle magazine about how his determination proved fruitful and how the company is planning to expand its base in the years to come.

Q: Steelbird International is diversifying into various new ventures after you became the executive director of the company. Could you please explain how your long-planned strategies resulted in business expansion of the group and what are your future expansion plans?

A: When I joined the business, I realized the importance of diversification. It is the most important aspect and every successful business seems to follow the rule. Likewise, we invested heavily in non-auto sector such as hospitality and healthcare. Our long term strategy is to work as investors and get maximum return from these investments. We are also investing in our existing business as we can see a lot of growth opportunities here.



Air filter moulding unit of Steelbird International

Q: Your company has grown into one of the leading producers of automobile filters after you took charge as its executive director. What are the innovative changes that you introduced in Air filters, oil filters and fuel filters?

A: It is not only about bringing in the innovative products but also about doing business innovatively. We have always been in touch with the needs and demands of our customers. As we have been dealing in filters since 1964, we know the nerve of the market and this is the reason we have been able to live up to the expectations. We, of course, use latest technologies available in the market to maintain our brand value.

Q: Other than being the leader in automobile filter production, you have ventured into the production of several other auto component parts too. What are the prospects of growth in the automobile component industry in India and abroad in the next five years.

A: As we all know that the auto industry in the country is going through tough time, it will be premature to predict about the growth in near future. A lot of things have to fall in place for the market to become robust once again. Talking of abroad, I can say that the demand is consistent. In the next five years the Indian players should focus on exports as we have very little exposure to exports and with the ongoing US-China trade war, the scope of increasing the exports is very high.

Q: Recently Steelbird International had launched Steelbird tyres for two-wheelers. How was the response from the customers? What about the Puncture Doctor service started by the steelbird for its customers?

A: Puncture Doctor is a unique round-the-clock pan-India roadside service to fix flat tyres. The scheme, which is available to our customers, was started in Kerala and North East in December 2018 as a pilot project. We are the only tyre manufacturer in India that has started the toll-free helpline at pan-India level. It is radical new service intervention launched by Steelbird Tyres and showing great results since it was launched. Stemming from the consumer insight that 2-wheeler riders, ladies in particular face tremendous anxiety when suddenly confronted with a flat tyre problem. Other than wasting time looking for nearby help which often doesn't work out, the matter also involves personal safety. We have tie-ups with reliable shops in almost all locations. People never believed that this could have been done in India but we delivered it.

Q: Automobile Industry in India is fast moving towards electric solutions for transport. What are the new areas in electric vehicle component market that Steelbird International is planning to venture into?

A: As of now we are in tyres and have not zeroed down on any other specific product for electric vehicles.

Q: With the arrival of electric vehicles, the tyre industry will also witness several changes. Is Steelbird International prepared to face the new challenges?

A: We are constantly working on tyres for EVs as the specification may differ for different EV brands. Rubber compounds, sidewall design, construction methods, tread design, belt arrangement, groove width, etc, have to be taken into account.



The tyres will be according to the condition of roads in India and as Steelbird brand we will not compromise on the safety of our customers.

Q: Steelbird international is contributing to the success of several OEM clients through the years. Could you please elaborate a little on your association with automobile giants like Royal Enfield and Tata? What are your plans for future association with other companies?

A: We are talking to a lot of companies in the country, and some are already on board.

Q: What is the current status of import of automobile components manufactured by Steelbird International to other countries? What are the main challenges faced by the group? Is there a tight competition in auto components in the international market?

A: The demand has been good so far with good business being done in North America and Europe. In international market we are facing cost competition from China but then there are markets where Indian products are preferred over others



such as Latin America. So we are focusing more on markets that already have a good perception of Indian products.

Q: Chinese companies are exporting cheaper products to India as the labour and production cost is comparatively lesser in China when compared to India. Are you planning to start factory operations in China to have a competitive edge with other products?

A: It is a far-fetched idea and we are not thinking of any such move. Our focus is clear to increase exports to untapped markets and give competition to Chinese products in international markets on the basis of the quality of our products.

Q: Automobile Industry in India is going through a tough period. Do you think that this phenomenon is limited for a short time? In your opinion what are the main reasons for the automobile industry debacle?

A: There are multiple problems such as liquidity, missing rural demand, cash flow issues, banks not financing, etc. Every sector within the auto sector is having different challenges and these cannot be overcome in short time. It will take 6-8 months.

Q: What are your future expansion plans and investment in various new sectors?

A: Right now we are focusing on auto components sector.

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