

Genesis of Rail Wheel Factory

In early 1970s, Indian Railways were dependent on Tata Iron & Steel Co., and Hindustan Steel, Durgapur for supply of wheels. With Tata's plant being inadequate for Railways requirements, the Durgapur Wheel & Axle Plant was planned to supplement and fully meet Railways needs. However, supplies from these two units could not meet the requirements of railways and IR continued to depend on imports of wheels, axles and tyres to a great extent.

Apart from the drain of foreign exchange, the cost of imports was high and prices were also rising in world markets. At the same time, rolling stock holdings of railways were continuously increasing. Financing of wheel imports and delays in supplies from abroad adversely effected the wagon production and rolling stock maintenance.

It is in this context that Railway Board, in mid-1971 felt the necessity of seriously considering setting up of Wheel & Axle Plant.

Subsequently, the then Minister of Railways, Shri K.Hanumanthaiya, announced in his Budget Speech for 1972-73 that:

"Government of India has given a fresh impetus to the policy of self-sufficiency after the so-called foreign aid from certain powers stopped or threatened to be stopped. The Railways want to implement the policy in all earnestness. We propose to start two new projects to manufacture wheels and axles and traction gears. Our requirements of wheels and axles are only met in part by indigenous production and we were purchasing the rest from foreign countries costing Rs.5.8 crores a year. Requirement of wheels and axles is growing. The proposed Plant will be one more Railway Production Unit and will produce approximately 20,000 wheel-sets and 25,000 loose wheels per year making the Railways virtually self-sufficient".

A study was carried out by the then Dy.CME/NER Shri. H.S.Kapoor, wherein the need for a Wheel and Axle Plant with a capability to manufacture cast wheels, forged axles and assemble wheelsets was confirmed.

Further a detailed study was made considering various aspects like ease of transportation of scrap and raw materials, availability of blooms for forging axles, proximity to industrial areas for supply of requirements of tools and equipment, oxygen and acetylene gas, electrodes and graphite moulds, Electricity tariff etc.,

Various locations in the states of Punjab and Mysore(now Karnataka) where electricity tariff were the lowest was surveyed for setting up of the plant. Subsequently, Nagpur, Navalur, Papinayakanahalli, Yelahanka, Raichur and Mysore were places of choice. Finally Yelahanka, a suburb of Bangalore City, was adjudged as the best place which satisfied most of the conditions for setting up of Wheel and Axle Plant.

Later, a project team comprising of a Chief Project Officer and a Deputy Project Officer in the Board's office was setup to carryout detailed studies and initiate steps for the setting up of a plant in Yelahanka. Towards the end of 1972, a high level team, comprising of O.S.D. (Project & Production units) and Chief Project Officer(Wheel & Axle Plant), was deputed to Europe, USA and Canada for carrying out specific studies and evaluations of equipment and processes. The visits of this team have led to adaptation of ideas for cast wheel technology from Griffin Wheel Company, USA and forging of axles by GFM type Long Forging Machine from Austria. Financial assistance was sought from the World Bank.



Foundation Stone laying of Wheel Shop



Nominated place for Axle Shop



On 18th January 1980, Sri. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, the then President of India dedicated Wheel and Axle Plant (now Rail Wheel Factory) to the Nation to manufacture cast wheels, forged Axles and assemble wheelsets.

The first trial wheel was cast on 30th December 1983 and first axle was forged in March 1984. After successful trials, the Plant was formally inaugurated by the then Prime Minister late Smt. Indira Gandhi on 15th September 1984.



Starting with annual plant capacity of 56,700 cast wheels and 23,000 forged axles, RWF has grown to a capacity of 1,90,000 wheels and 70,000 axles and 48,000 wheelsets. RWF's annual production levels have been in excess of target set by the Railway Board every year since inception. Till date, RWF has manufactured more than 36 lakh wheels, 17 lakh axles and 12 lakh wheelsets.