
This “thumb-nail sketch” of the history of GKN Rockford, Incorporated was originally compiled in February, 1988 from notes, sales publications, employee recollections, library archives, etc. (It was updated in July 1988.) The information and data contained in this history can be considered only as accurate as those recollections, notes and other sources from which the information was gathered. However, it is a fascinating account of one successful enterprise in Rockford, Illinois. Its growth and success are a tribute to the employees and management who have guided it through the years to its position today as a leader in both the Rockford community and the industries it serves.

- 1890 MECHANICS MACHINE CO. Founded as a machine shop by 4 employees of the W. F. & John Barnes Co.; C. J. Forsberg, Gustav Dalin, Ferdinand Lindgren and Levin Faust. The first location was in the basement of C. J. Forsberg’s house. The new company did repair work for the first three and a half years.
- May 1890 Mechanics Machine Co. moved into its first plant at 13th Street & 18th Avenue, Rockford, Illinois.
- 1891-1892 Mechanics Machine Co. invented first Bench-Type Friction Drill Press.
- 1899 October 1899, B. F. BARNES CO. founded by B. F. Barnes, H. C. March, and S. H. Reck. First location was on Catherine Street by the Rock River (Plant #1). They made drill presses and drilling machines.
- 1900 Mechanics relocated to a new building at Wyman & Mill Streets, Rockford, IL.
- 1906 Mechanics again outgrows Wyman at Mill Street facility and builds an L-shaped, 2-story building 250 feet by 64 feet at 19th Avenue and 9th Street Rockford, IL.
- 1907 B. F. Barnes Co. merged with Rockford Drill Press Co., and incorporated, and was renamed ROCKFORD DRILLING MACHINE CO.
- 1911 Mechanics Machine Company becomes involved with the Eagle Claw Wrench Company, and for financial reasons was forced to begin producing the “Eagle Claw” wrench. Incorporated, becoming MECHANICS MACHINE TOOL COMPANY. Made the wrenches in a new building erected at 9th Street and 20th Avenue.
- 1914 Mechanics Machine Tool Co. began producing transmissions for Chevrolet automobiles.
- 1914-1915 Mechanics designed the “Safe Universal Joint” for Chevrolet. (“Safe Universal Joint” was later called “Block Type”.)
- 1917 Rockford clutches introduced for automobiles (Maxwell, Oakland, Willis Overland) by Rockford Drilling Machine Co. (company was later named Rockford Clutch.)
- Early 1920’s Mechanics Machine Tool Co. built a plant about a half mile west of the 2020 Harrison Avenue location and began building a \$30,000 automobile called the “Tarkington” in limited quantities. Mechanics develops and sells “Oil-Tite” Universal Joint for Willis St. Clair automobile.
- 1926 Mechanics adds more space, buying a six-story building at 18th Avenue and 9th Street.
- June 1928 Borg Warner Corporation was formed by merger of Mechanics and three other companies (Marvel Carburetor Company, Borg and Beck Company and Warner Gear Company.) Name changed to MECHANICS UNIVERSAL JOINT DIVISION OF BORG-WARNER CORPORATION.
- 1929 Rockford Drilling Machine Company was acquired by Borg-Warner Corporation in March 1929. At that time, all automotive clutch production was transferred to Long and Borg and Beck Divisions in Detroit and Chicago. This left only agricultural, industrial and construction equipment at Rockford together with special way-type drilling machines. Pullmore clutches were gaining popularity in various kinds of industrial machines.



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- 1930's Rockford Drilling Machine Company went into manufacturing of corn husking and corn shelling machinery for corn canning industry.
- 1932 Mechanics designed "C" type roller bearing universal joint.
- 1936 Rockford Drilling Machine Company name change to ROCKFORD DRILLING MACHINES DIVISION OF BORG-WARNER CORPORATION.
- 1938 Mechanics builds new \$500,000 plant at 2020 Harrison Avenue, Rockford, IL. Original building was 600 feet. by 387 feet. (232,000 square feet.)
- Rockford Drilling Machine Division purchased buildings at 18th Avenue and 19th Avenue at 9th Street from Mechanics Division. These became Rockford Drilling Machine Division Plant #2 and #3.
- 1939 All machine tool production had been phased out by 1939 and the machine tool business was sold to Moline Tool Company.
- Rockford Drilling Machine Division purchased a cream separator factory in Buffalo, NY and moved the machinery to Rockford into the old Mechanics Division plant on 18th Avenue which they had then acquired.
- 1940 Rockford Drilling Machine Division began producing clutches for light and medium tanks.
- 1941 Rockford Power Take-Offs were first produced.
- World War II At the outbreak of World War II, all cream separator production was phased out and replaced with tank clutch production. Tank clutches were being produced for 7 tank manufacturers, 5 domestic, 2 foreign, for medium and heavy tanks.
- 1943 Rockford Gear Reductions were first sold.
- 1945 In May 1945, Rockford Drilling Machine Division was renamed ROCKFORD CLUTCH DIVISION, BORG-WARNER CORPORATION.
- Trademark "ROCKFORD" was copyrighted.
- World War II Ends By the end of the war, both Rockford Clutch Division and Mechanics Universal Joint Division were producing aircraft and anti-aircraft components.
- 1948 Mechanics opened a second plant in Memphis, TN. First 360 universal joint assemblies produced in Memphis were sold to Ford Motor plant in Robinson, MO.
- 1954 Mechanics added 33,000 square feet to Harrison Avenue facility.
- 1950's Rockford Haulmaster Powershift Transmission was developed and sold. Rockford Torque Converters introduced.
- 1961 Rockford Clutch builds new \$4,000,000 plant at 1200 Windsor Road, consolidating 4 separate buildings into one facility of 411,000 square feet.
- 1964 A 93,000 square feet (\$550,000) addition was added to the manufacturing facility.
- 1968 Memphis, TN plant closed. All activities were moved to Harrison Avenue facility.



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- 1971 Completed a new 29,000 square feet research and test facility. It has:
11 Dynamometer cells; 7 with diesel input and 4 with electric
2 Spare cells providing for large H.P. diesel, electric, or turbine installations.
- Five Specialized laboratories which consist of:
1. Fatigue-life testing
 2. Hydraulics Lab
 3. Mechanical Lab
 4. Burst Testing
 - a. 15,000 rpm
 - b. 40,000 rpm
 5. Test Equipment Fabrication
- Plus a test vehicle garage
Offices for Test Lab Supervisor, Engineers, and Technicians
- 1972 Rockford Clutch opened European Sales office in Brussels, Belgium.
- 1974 Rockford Variable Speed Fan Clutch for On-Highway Trucks introduced by Rockford Clutch. Rockford Clutch has 610,000 square feet on 50 acres of land. A European Sales Office is located in Brussels, Belgium, employing 4 Sales Engineers under the direction of a Sales Manager based in Rockford. There are approximately 900 employees; (650 shop, 250 office).
- 1977-1978 20,000 square feet added to offices at Windsor Road; combining Mechanics and Rockford Clutch divisions. This space provided for the consolidation of engineering, sales, accounting, and MIS services. Name of the combined operation is changed to ROCKFORD DIVISION OF BORG WARNER.
- 1981 Rockford Fan Clutch for large diesel engines in Off-Highway Mining Trucks introduced by Rockford Division.
- 1985 Name was changed to BORG WARNER AUTOMOTIVE, INCORPORATED OFF-HIGHWAY SYSTEMS.
- Borg Warner Automotive Off-Highway Systems introduced the permanently-lubed universal joint.
- 1987 Completed final consolidation of two plants under one roof, moving the driveline manufacturing and remaining support group to the Windsor Road facility. 350,600 square feet facility on Harrison Avenue officially closed.
- Feb. 1988 Off-Highway Systems has 621,000 square feet under 1 roof: 536,000 square feet of manufacturing space, 29,000 square feet of Test Lab facility, and 56,000 square feet of office area; 650 Employees, 425 shop and 225 office, plus a sales staff of two under European Sales Manager in the Brussels office.
- June 27, 1988 ROCKFORD POWERTRAIN, INCORPORATED purchases Borg Warner Automotive, Incorporated Off-Highway Systems. GKN Rockford, Incorporated is a privately-owned company. Principles of Rockford Powertrain, Incorporated. include:
- G.R. Harting-President**
Previously Vice President and General Manager of Off-Highway Systems
- Donald J. Ricken-Vice President and Chief Financial Officer**
Formerly Vice President of Finance for Borg-Warner Automotive, Incorporated
- W. David Wilfong-Director, Sales and Marketing**
Previously Manager, Sales and Marketing for Off-Highway Systems
- James E. Freed-Director, Manufacturing Operations**
Previously Mangers, Manufacturing Operations for Off-Highway Systems
- Stephen B. Marshall, Director, Engineering-Research and Development**
Previously Manager, Engineering for Off-Highway Systems
- William A. Callahan-Director, Human Resources**
Previously Manager, Human Resources for Off-Highway Systems
- Oct. 30, 1990 "Rockford Powertrain, Inc." new trademark registered in USA. Registered in Canada on Feb. 22, 1991.



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- March 2, 1992 New Sales and Technology group formed by combining Engineering Department with Sales and Marketing Department
- 1992-1994 Complete restructuring of Manufacturing Operations from batch manufacture to cellular manufacturing system. Shop floor “relocation” phase completed mid-1993. “Refinement” phase ongoing.
- 1995-1996 Development of in-house Distribution Warehouse Center. Introduction of five new products; Rockford TD-style PTO, Series 135 Fan Clutch, E-Series Hydraulic Powershift Clutch, Inverted Slip Driveline and Rockford Two-Stage Clutch. Major marketing effort focused on distributor channel and international arena.
- July 1998 Officers of Rockford Powertrain, Incorporated include:
Dan Czuba-President and Chief Executive Officer
Don Ricken-Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
Don Ferguson-Vice President, Operations
Ray Davidson-Vice President, Quality
Bill Callahan-Vice President, Human Resource
Dave Wilfong-Managing Director, OEM Products
John Phillips-Managing Director, World Wide Sales3
- Jan 1999 Rockford Powertrain sells Power Takeoff product line to Twin Disc
- July 1999 Board Director Tom Corcoran takes over control of Rockford Powertrain and puts in place new Management Team
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| Tom Corcoran: | President and CEO |
| Don Ricken: | Vice President and CFO |
| Steve Simpson: | Vice President Operations |
| Steve Marshall: | Vice President Sales and Technology |
| Ralph Anderson: | Vice President Human Resources |
- 2001 Rockford Powertrain complements its permanently lubed U Joints and introduces the permanently lubed driveshaft assembly.
- 2003 Rockford Powertrain develops the 370 Series off-highway fan clutch for the Detroit Diesel/MTU 20 cylinder engine used on large mining trucks
- October 2003 Wanxiang America buys a major interest in Rockford Powertrain, Inc
- 2004 Rockford Powertrain develops the 20C driveshaft for the Caterpillar Model 797B 400 ton rigid mining truck
- 2005 Rockford Powertrain sells the Mechanical Clutch product line to A & I Products.
- August 2006 Rockford Powertrain is purchased by GKN PLC and becomes part of the OffHighway division and the Driveline Systems Group (DLS). Name changed to GKN Rockford, Inc.