

Where All Roads Converge

BY CANDACE MOONSHOWER



With Dyersburg's Boss Hoss Cycles, you can still have a V-8

When asked if he might ever move Boss Hoss Cycles, his now-global manufacturing concern, out of Dyer County, Tenn., owner Monte Warne says, "We don't plan on going anywhere. The bike was built here and grew up here." The "bike" Warne refers to is his product line of V8-powered motorcycles and three-wheeled cycles. And Warne has no good reason to move the company's base of operations, no matter how much it grows and expands—and one very sensible reason to stay put: Boss Hoss Cycles is operating on an international scale from Small Town, U.S.A.

"From our perspective," says Rad Hunsley, COO at Boss Hoss, "Dyer County is a perfect location. We're close to the big cities, but without the headaches and hassles. There are good, technically skilled people in the area, and Tennessee is a right-to-work state."

Boss Hoss employs 23 people in its 22,000-square-foot facility, producing seven units a week. Warne was the first to design a V8-powered motorcycle with a traditional

motorcycle cruiser look and style, but he hasn't rested on his laurels. In January 2006, Boss Hoss motorcycles and the manufacturing facility received the full vehicle-type approval from the European Commission (EC), making Boss Hoss Cycles the only globally approved V8 motorcycle manufacturer. Approximately 20% of the cycles are fabricated in the Dyersburg facility, and 80% of the parts used are outsourced, but 100% of the cycles are assembled on-site.

Boss Hoss began in an unassuming way in Warne's garage. After purchasing a large motorcycle—the cycle of his dreams—Warne was discouraged that it didn't meet his expectations with regard to power and performance. He took an old engine from a stock-car and, during the winter of 1989-1990, Warne built the first of what would become the trademark Boss Hoss motorcycle. He took it to a motorcycle show in Cincinnati and won "Best of Show" with the bike, and to Daytona Bike Week in 1991, generating enough interest in the bike to warrant building and selling a few

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BOSS HOSS CYCLES

kits. In 1993, Warne sold his agricultural spraying business and went full-throttle into the work of building motorcycles.

“Monte has been smart about building his business,” Hunsley says. “He perfected his product and pursued a conservative and steady growth plan over the years before pumping up the marketing.” In the last two to three years, after the company did “pump up the marketing,” Boss Hoss doubled its international sales in the process.

These days, Boss Hoss Cycles does about 20% of its business on an international scale, with dealers in Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A dealership will soon open in Dubai, and the company is also planning to expand before too long into South Korea and, hopefully, China.

Dyersburg and Dyer County have a disproportionately large percentage of manufacturing jobs when compared to the country as a whole. In the United States, 12% of non-farm jobs are in manufacturing. In Dyer County, 30% of non-farm jobs are in manufacturing. Location and transportation are what makes this micropolitan (a city with a population between 10,000 and 50,000) mini-hub so attractive to companies such as Boss Hoss and the nearly 20 other manufacturing concerns located in Dyer County.

“We’re sitting in almost the geographic center of the richest market in the world,” says Allen Hester, president and CEO of the Dyersburg/Dyer County Chamber of Commerce. “And we have a river, rail and highways system that all run vertically up and down the spine of the United States in the center of this rich market.”

Dyer County boasts the sole highway bridge that crosses the Mississippi River between Memphis and Cairo, Ill. The Canadian National Railroad (previously the Illinois Central) links both eastern and western Canada to the Gulf of Mexico—running straight through Dyersburg. A new river port is under construction nearby—the Port at Cates Landing—at the only developable site on the Mississippi River

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“My company is located near Boss Hoss,” says Carol Harris, owner of the Carol Harris Co. Location—and customers from all over the world—are the only similarities between the motorcycle manufacturer and Harris’ piece goods company. The Carol Harris Co. sells piece goods, smocking, fabric, lace and buttons for heirloom-style children’s clothing. Customers order from Harris—or visit the shop to attend workshops and schools—from around the globe.

Pennington Seed and Supply

www.penningtonseedandpecans.com

“We began as a lawn and garden company in downtown Dyersburg in 1972,” Mike Pennington says of his company. “In 1991, I began my pecan business, buying up processors and orchards.” Now the company sells 20 gourmet flavors of pecans nationwide through its Internet ordering system.

Rough Country Suspension Systems www.roughcountry.com

“We research, design and develop shocks and suspension systems for newer and older-model trucks,” says Davey Lee at Rough Country, a manufacturer of lift-kits owned by Michael and Patrick Heckethorn. Rough Country is a mail-order business with dealers worldwide.

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between Memphis and Cairo, adjacent to over 3,000 acres of land available for industrial use. The river port is a three-county collaborative effort between Lake, Obion and Dyer Counties. And it won't be long before I-69 will connect Port Huron, Mich., with Laredo, Texas, going straight through Dyersburg.

“It says something about our county that we are able to grow, attract and retain manufacturers in a time when so many companies are taking their production out of the country.”

—ALLEN HESTER
DYERSBURG/DYER COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Hester attributes the county's success in economic development to more than simply location, though. “The city, county and Chamber all work together, making investments to give Dyer County and Dyersburg a competitive advantage.” The county recently welcomed Japanese-owned NSK Steering Systems into the area, and other manufacturing concerns—like Boss Hoss—are doing both national and international business from Dyer and Dyersburg. “It says something about our county that we are able to grow, attract and retain manufacturers in a time when so many companies are taking their production out of the country,” Hester says. “The higher-skill, higher-paying jobs are here. The land is here. The facilities are here or can be built.”

As Warne and Boss Hoss Cycles prove, Dyersburg and Dyer County is where it can all come together—and take off. **tn**


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