KERN – 1844 to today

KERN & SOHN, Manufacturer of Precision Balances – a company makes history.
Success has history – for 170 years, KERN & SOHN has been a symbol of precise weighing

Come with us on a short journey through our company history. This year we are celebrating a very special birthday – 170 years of KERN and 7 generations of the Sauter family owners. And this makes us the oldest manufacturer of precision balances in the world. Since the beginning of industrialisation in Germany, we have been there.

So far so good, but for us it is much more important to have close ties with our customers. A few customers have been loyal to us for over 100 years, and we are pretty proud of that.

We want to repay this trust to our customers on a daily basis, because we are committed to keeping with tradition. And in the future we will still be at your side as a company which has been certified and accredited many times over. KERN is an independent company managed by its owners, the Sauter family. On a daily basis, several thousand customers rely on the weighing results of our products.

Our commitment to satisfy our customers never stops. Continuity and reliability are more important to us than a quick sale.

Martin Sauter
Albert Sauter
Pastor Philipp Matthäus Hahn on new paths

The starting signal for balance manufacturing in the Swabian mountains was provided by Pastor Philipp Matthäus Hahn from Württemberg who was technically gifted, and who was the community pastor in the small village of Onstmettingen (Albstadt-Onstmettingen today) for 6 years from 1764.

One of the iron wall scales he developed for businessmen and tradesmen was the first in Germany to operate automatically – that is without using weights –.

A few years later he succeeded in creating a precision balance with an accuracy close to a thousandth of a gram.

These two basic developments were to become the basis of the future “balance industry” in South Württemberg.
around the year 1770
Hahn’s balance,
built by Johann Jakob Sauter

The Sauter family enters the balance business

The village blacksmith in Onstmettingen, Johann Jakob Sauter, saw his chance and from 1770 he built the Hahn’s balance for the regional market. That is how the Sauter family got into the world of balance manufacturing.

His son Simon expands the balance business and manufactures precision balances, like the pharmaceutical balance shown here, which dates back to the second balance development of Pastor Hahn.

The production of precision balances has become a bit of a family speciality, all subsequent generations continue this success story, right up to today – that’s over 240 years.

around the year 1825
Hand-held precision balance, built by Simon Sauter
Gottlieb Kern’s balance workshop

After the early death of the sons of Simon Sauter, mechanical specialist Gottlieb Kern married into the Sauter family. The balance workshop is named after him.

With a team of 9 machinists KERN is already a large company in the former state of Württemberg. As early as 1867, 2000 balances a year are being manufactured.

1863  Gottlieb Kern (sitting at the front) with his mechanics

around the year 1860  Analytical balance for the most accurate weighings

21 May 1844  Gottlieb Kern at the opening of the business,
Newspaper advert from 21 May 1844
The influence from the Kern workshop is far-reaching. It was the beginning of a completely new industrial sector. Five apprentices later went on to start their own companies. Balance manufacturing moved to Ebingen, Balingen and other places in the region. For a long time it was the largest centre for precision balances in Germany.
During the foundation of the German Reich in 1870/71, today’s modern system of measurement with metres and kilograms was introduced. To meet the large demand, Gottlieb Kern and also his (step) son Albert Sauter purchased the latest machines. 1873 KERN is one of the largest manufacturers of precision balances in Germany. Annual production increases to 10,000 balances.

From workshop to machine shop

Around the year 1890
Albert Sauter, Kommerzienrat
(Councillor of Commerce)
There has been a railway in Ebingen (today Albstadt-Ebingen) since 1878. Albert Sauter erected a complete new building, right next to the railway station, which his son Gustav extended considerably.

Fortunately, the international markets at the time are liberalised and the export ratio was over 50%.

Precision balances from Southern Germany are in demand all over the world.
Extensive international connections are part of the very foundations of KERN. Even in the 1860's – so still in the time of the stagecoaches – we were at global exhibitions in London and Paris. 130 years ago we published our first catalogue in English.
The First World War and the years afterwards are turbulent times. As the war started, production dropped to 70%. Work was cut to just 3 days a week. 1923 inflation reached its peak. Gustav Sauter printed his own money – on newspaper and all quite legal. It was the only way that the wages could be paid.

Women started to work in the balance industry as adjusters and office clerks.
Between the World Wars

Extraordinary – Balance manufacturers sought their salvation in offering as many balance models as possible. KERN holds the record with over 500 product versions. Of course this is not efficient, by any means.
An air raid in July 1944 hit KERN hard. The only two sons of Gustav Sauter, Paul and Walter, were killed during the raid. The company nearly ground to a halt.

Of necessity, Else Sauter, the sister of the two who died, stepped into the breach, with the firm intention of saving the business for the next generation. A courageous deed – which also succeeded with the help of the management board – we are therefore extremely grateful to her.
Early post-war period

With the manufacture of tool kits for plasterers the company fought its way through the first years after the war.

KERN also seized the spirit of optimism of the early 50’s. They had a go at manufacturing kitchen scales, but the new venture failed.

1946  KERN employees kept the company afloat by manufacturing tool kits for plasterers

1954  Diet and baking balance for Dr. Oetker

from 1960  Re-orientation of the production program of analytical balances and precision balances by Martin Sauter
We, and other balance manufacturers, just didn’t want to believe it. The traditional mechanical balance had had its day. At the beginning of the 1970’s electronic systems were starting to become more wide-spread. In response to the upheavals across the whole weighing industry, KERN also underwent a painstaking process of restructuring.
The electronic age has arrived

But the first steps are always the hardest. At the beginning of the 1970’s, the first semi-automatic balances with hybrid technology were developed. These were a combination of the proven mechanical systems with the new electronic systems. It wasn’t until the end of the 1970’s that the electronic systems were fully accepted.
The significance for Onstmettingen of the industrial pioneer Gottlieb Kern was acknowledged in 1996 when Gottlieb-Kern square in front of the Town Hall was named in his honour.

The Philipp-Matthäus-Hahn Museum clearly shows that Onstmettingen was a nucleus of Southern German balance manufacturing. Astronomical clocks and calculating machines from Hahn are shown, in addition to the balances.
Over our long history we have moved about a bit. First more than 100 years in Onstmettingen, then a similar time in Ebingen and now since 2000 in Balingen.

Altogether that is just over 240 of balance manufacture in the Sauter family.

In the first decade after the move to Balingen, KERN & SOHN sold a million balances in total.
Quality, precision and speed are all features which we at KERN take care to cultivate, and they should also come with us into the future. They are the building blocks which have carried us successfully through the decades.

With the addition of our extensive service and maintenance program, we are looking forward to the challenges of the future.

- **www.kern-sohn.com:** complete product and information platform all about weighing technology – Quick as a flash, find the product you want
- **Quick delivery:** ordered today, on its way tomorrow
- **Sales and Service Hotline** from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm
Thank you

Our thanks go out to you, our dear colleagues!

With your diligence and commitment, your reliability and friendliness, you are the true heart of the company and we are proud of that. We’re counting on you.

Our thanks go out to you, our dear customers!

Your orders show us your appreciation time and time again and your preference for quality, precision and speed. And today, that continues to spur us on, just as it has done for decades. Your word carries weight with us.
“We don’t see our traditions as a burden, more as a strength.”

“Quality is also attention to detail – even the smallest things are important to us.”

“Keep things simple, even if they are complicated.”

“We serve our customers and learn from them.”

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