



# AUTO FOCUSED

After the independence of Lithuania in 1990, Edvardas Radzevičius began his own business in car security systems and within ten years was one of the biggest operators in the Baltic region. More opportunities appeared when that country joined the EU and Edvardas began a new business, Altas Auto, which today is one of Europe's leading bodybuilders of mini and midibuses.

**EDVARDAS RADZEVIČIUS** / CEO Altas Auto

**L**ithuania gained independence in 1990 but, according to Edvardas Radzevičius, the corporate climate remained somewhat unstable due to a lack of organisation and unethical business practices.

“Let’s just say that many businesses were based on doing things illegally, and it was all rather wild west in those days,” reminisces Edvardas. “At that time security was an issue, so in 1992 I started a company selling car alarms and security systems that later progressed to car audio and video. By 2002 we had become one of the biggest companies for this kind of product in the Baltic region and things were going extremely well.”

However, things soon began to change and, as new cars started to come factory fitted with alarms as standard, the business became less financially viable. Edvardas was, once again, quick to look for other avenues of opportunity and hit upon a new business idea.

“Because we installed stereos, we were used



to modifying car interiors and I thought this could be the best way to go. So, we formed a new company, Altas Auto, with the idea of converting commercial vehicles, such as police cars, ambulances and prison transports, etc.”

Edvardas’ new company quickly proved a success, but more challenges soon arrived when Lithuania joined the European Union, in 2004, when new rules and regulations regarding the registration of vehicles were introduced. “We had to change our structure again,” says Edvardas, “as we were unable to offer such a wide product range because of these limitations. At this point we started to specialise in minibuses and ambulances, and today we are one of the biggest operators in Eastern Europe.”

It was after recovering from the recession of 2009 that Altas Auto properly started on this upward trajectory. At that time the company had just 40 employees, whereas today they have circa 250 working at their 8000 square metre premises in Vilnius. Edvardas admits that having been both the owner and driving force behind all his ventures, this success offered him many new challenges, as it was not easy to let go of control and then find the staff to take over his old responsibilities. →





“Since the company had experienced very little time operating in a proper corporate structure, this became a big challenge for us,” he says. “Before, I was the only one responsible for management, sales and development, so the big question was, should I look outside the company or employ from within. Because we are such a niche market and have a very specific non-standard production, I believed it was best to recruit from within the company. Before, when anybody needed anything, they always came to me, but the culture needed to change, and I had to start delegating more. It’s been difficult and has taken a while, but I feel that we have a great team in place today – and almost all of my managers are Altas Auto long-term employees.”

Success at Altas Auto has invariably led to closer ties with some major manufacturers.

Mercedes-Benz was the primary partner at the beginning, where Altas Auto would convert their panel vans into passenger carriers or commercial vehicles.

Today, these direct relationships have grown to include both Volkswagen and MAN vehicles

*“ In the seating sector, Inova is a market leader providing the highest quality safety, comfort and ergonomic design. We have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with Altas Auto since 2011. They are just one of the many leading companies, based in over 25 countries, that we currently export to. “*

Zülker Kavalcı, CEO of Inova Automotive

and, as Edvardas pointed out, this has opened up tremendous opportunities.

“Although Volkswagen produce their own panel vans in Poland, we have an agreement with them where they recommend our services to their customers, so we are basically a certified partner. With MAN, we have an even better connection. We have secured a project agreement where we build products already agreed with them, and MAN then sell those vehicles through their own sales network. We are looking to expand on all of these services and will continue to form strong bonds with other manufacturers in the future.”

**Expansion**

Unsurprisingly, Edvardas has even bigger plans ahead and, as of last year, Altas Auto started to develop their own chassis. They begin by taking only a frame, wheels and engine direct from a manufacturer (IVECO), and then designing and building a complete body over the framework. This practice initially began with the smaller and middle size vans but there are plans to expand



the scheme to include the bigger heavier vehicles and soon Edvardas believes this service will be available across their market.

There is no doubt that individual relationships with suppliers have been an integral part of the

Altas Auto success story but, as Edvardas points out, when it comes to parts, they have not always enjoyed such a close bond, mainly due to the number of orders.

“Since we are so specialised and design →



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bespoke chassis, we don't actually have a high demand for spare parts and components. We may be a leader in our field but last year we produced just 800 vehicles, so you can see that, compared to a large car manufacturer, we do not require great volumes and therefore the big suppliers have, understandably, not always been so interested in forming relationships with us."

Edvardas has counteracted this by building up a close network of, local, small suppliers. With it being too expensive to import items from abroad, Altas Auto integrates these smaller suppliers into their production processes and provides them with detailed drawings and design specifications for what they need. This way they can meet all the quality requirements, as Edvardas explained.

#### Strong partnerships

"We make the most of our 20 engineers, so we can easily manage that side of the R&D and then our suppliers can, whether it be a frame or a small plastic part, create precisely what we need."

Regularly visiting these suppliers, in the hope of strengthening relationships, is how Edvardas hopes to converge all their processes together in one production line.

"They appreciate our businesses because they

are given the opportunity to grow with us, so it really works out well for all parties," he believes.

Edvardas has proven himself to be an incredibly determined CEO, who never seems to stop looking for new opportunities.

Since 2016, his company has been the number one supplier in Scandinavia and one of the leaders in Europe in minibus sales. They currently operate in 18 European markets and have developed a reliable network of dealers and service points.

Over the past five years, Altas Auto has been growing 30-40 per cent each year, and as much as Edvardas is keen for things to continue on that path, he is wary of expanding too quickly.

"It has taken us a long time to get where we are so I don't want to start branching out into other sectors too quickly, as that can be somewhat risky. We are specialists in what we do, and I like being in that position in our individual market."

The slogan at Altas Auto is 'Never Stop Moving,' which seems a suitable line for a bespoke vehicle manufacturer. But the truth is that those words could not sum up Edvardas Radzevičius any better. He has always been the driving force behind his companies and while he is behind the wheel at Altas Auto, the road ahead looks full of opportunities. 🌐

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Mishi Hurwitz CEO of Alex Original



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