The Aermotor Windmill

In 1888, the start-up Aermotor Company of Chicago announced production of "a truly scientific steel windmill"[1] based on rigorous testing by an engineer. Most windmills of that era had a wooden base and blades. Critics scoffed at the new metal contraption, and only 45 sold the first year.[2]

Four years later Aermotor sold 20,000 units as the dominant supplier of windmills in the world.[3] Steel construction proved its superiority. Users were pleased to find that the automatic governor on an Aermotor kept it from flying apart in storms. By 1904 mass production had driven down the price of an eight-footer to $25.[4] Always receptive to new technology, Aermotor Company in 1915 introduced a self-oiling machine that required maintenance only once per year.

During the years 1920 to 1950, Aermotor expanded its product line to include transmission towers, electric water pumps, gasoline engines, and specialized lens mounts. After 1958 the company changed ownership several times, becoming part of Motor Products Corporation, Nautec, Valley Steel, and Mueller Pump. The windmill manufacturing operation moved from Chicago to Oklahoma to Argentina to Arkansas. Finally, in 1986, a group of investors bought the plant and brought it to San Angelo, Texas. It operates there today under its original name, the Aermotor Company.

Aermotor is the sole remaining manufacturer of water-pump windmills in the United States.[5] The firm refrains from experimenting with wind turbines that generate electricity. It proclaims in its website, "Water and electricity don't mix."[6]

Some 60,000 windmills are still in operation in the U.S.,[7] patiently drawing water from the ground. Most of these are Aermotor models. The company also sells abroad. In places far from an electrical grid, windmills provide water efficiently and economically.

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[1] Ken O'Brock, "History of the Aermotor Windmill Corporation," *Gas Engine Magazine*, Nov./Dec. 1989, http://gasengine.farmcollector.com/Farm-Life/History-Of-The-AERMOTOR-Windmill-Corporation.aspx (April 10, 2009).
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Aermotor Windmill Co., "Company-History," http://www.aermotorwindmill.com/Company/History.asp (April 9, 2009).
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Aermotor Windmill Co., "Can I generate electricity using an Aermotor windmill?" Common Questions, http://www.aermotorwindmill.com/Sales/CommonQuestions.asp (April 9, 2009).
[7] *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Windmill," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windmill (April 9, 2009).

I looked specifically for a tested proven concept with very low maintenance requirements on the long-term basis. A design out of the 1930s with people still making it (and smiling) looked like sufficient proof to me. – Dr. Michel Mulder, upon purchasing two Aermotor windmills for a remote fishing village in Tanzania.[8]

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[8] Quoted in "Harnessing the Wind in Africa," Aeromotor Windmill Co. News, http://www.aermotorwindmill.com/Company/News/Index.asp (April 9, 2009).