



A Hidden Champion Celebrates its Anniversary: Kiel Seats from Nördlingen Move Millions of People Worldwide Every Day

Nördlingen, September 3, 2025 – In 1945, Franz Kiel founded a small metalworking company in Nördlingen, Bavaria – today, the Kiel Group is a globally active corporate group and leading manufacturer of seating systems for buses and trains. Whether in New York, Hong Kong, Sydney, London, Paris, Vienna, or Berlin – millions of people worldwide take their seats every day in public transport on seats made by Kiel. Despite its strong international orientation, the company remains firmly rooted in Nördlingen: The headquarters is located here, employing around 250 people in key functions such as product development, IT, purchasing, and sales, as well as in a significant part of production.

Production in Nördlingen: Rail Seats and Special Solutions

Today, production at the Nördlingen site focuses on seats for regional trains, subways, and long-distance travel. The level of vertical integration is high: every step – from punching, bending, and laser cutting of metal parts to powder coating, sewing, upholstering, and final assembly – is carried out on site. This high degree of value creation is a clear advantage, especially for technically demanding products such as seating systems.

Internationalization since the 1990s

Over the past decades, the Kiel Group has consistently pursued internationalization, evolving into a globally operating company. Unlike many competitors, Kiel has followed this path through cooperation and organic growth. Today, subsidiaries exist in North Macedonia, Turkey, Spain, the USA, Poland, France, and the Netherlands. There is also a joint venture in China. The international structure follows a clear principle: Kiel aims to produce and develop as close to the customer as possible in each country. This applies particularly to the bus seating division, which has been fully relocated to international sites. Coordination and management of the entire international network are handled centrally from Nördlingen.

Current Market Situation and Projects

In the past three years, the Kiel Group has achieved economic stability and slight revenue growth. This positive trend is continuing in 2025. In 2023, the Group generated consolidated revenue of around €180 million. Current orders include projects for Deutsche Bahn and various regional train operators, the Austrian Federal Railways, as well as international projects in cooperation with Siemens Mobility, for example in Egypt. New markets such as India, China, and Central America are currently being developed. The goal is to respond flexibly to the diverse requirements of regional markets with both standard products and tailor-made seating systems.

Products in Transition: Actively Shaping Mobility Trends

Seating systems in public transport face entirely new demands compared to just a few years ago. Particularly in long-distance travel, comfort functions for individual adjustment, features that enhance passenger privacy, as well as power supplies and integrated USB ports are becoming increasingly important. Demand is also rising for flexible seating solutions that allow optimal use of space in vehicles, as well as wheelchair restraints and other solutions for passengers with reduced mobility.

For reasons of climate protection, reducing fuel consumption is becoming ever more important. Seats should therefore be as lightweight as possible, while also offering long

service life and easy repairability. Kiel addresses these requirements through the use of especially robust materials and a modular design in many models. In close collaboration with vehicle manufacturers and transport companies, Kiel develops solutions that meet all these technical, economic, and design requirements. Findings from research into ergonomics, material behavior, and product design – often in cooperation with renowned industrial designers – are continuously incorporated into product development. The company also works with universities and innovative development clusters to take into account the perspectives of future passenger generations at an early stage. The goal is not only to observe technological trends, but to actively shape them.

Passenger Transport as a Crisis-Resistant Industry

We live in a highly mobile society. However, the costs of individual car travel – from fuel to parking fees to maintenance – are continuously rising. Public transport, particularly in urban areas, is therefore becoming not only more attractive but also more crisis-resistant. This increases the demands placed on seating systems in public transport – driven by technological progress, changing mobility behaviors, and sustainability requirements. At the same time, passenger seats are components that are always required, regardless of vehicle propulsion – be it diesel, hybrid, hydrogen, or electric.

Kiel is already excellently positioned in this future-oriented market of bus and rail seating and aims to further strengthen and expand its market position. The company is continuously opening up new areas of application for its products, such as M2 vehicles, Sprinters, and high-speed trains, thereby expanding its product portfolio. Recently, Kiel has also begun working on concepts and designs for vehicle interiors, such as partitions or modular equipment systems, which enhance the travel experience and meet the requirements of modern mobility concepts.

Sustainability as a Guiding Principle

Kiel places great emphasis on sustainability in both production and product design: seating systems are built in modular fashion to simplify repairs and recycling and to avoid waste. Materials used are as lightweight as possible to reduce fuel consumption, durable, and recyclable.

As an ISO 14001:2015 certified company, Kiel operates a comprehensive environmental management system. Each year, the company prepares an environmental report covering energy and water consumption as well as waste volumes. Based on this, reduction targets are set and consistently achieved. Although production increased by around 20 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, Kiel still achieved significant reductions. Natural gas consumption was reduced by 17.58 percent, district heating by 28 percent, electricity by 9.21 percent, and water consumption by 6.95 percent.

Training and Skilled Workforce Development in Nördlingen

As one of the largest employers in Nördlingen, Kiel provides training in various technical and commercial professions. This is supplemented by dual study programs in cooperation with regional universities. New apprentices are supported by mentorships, while additional benefits such as bonuses for good final grades or financial support for learning materials foster motivation and long-term commitment.

Securing and developing skilled workers at the Nördlingen site will remain a central issue in the future. To this end, the company positions itself as an attractive employer for well-trained professionals who already have international experience or who wish to work in a highly international environment.

Anniversary Celebration in Nördlingen at the End of July

On July 26, 2025, the company celebrated its major anniversary in Nördlingen with 308 guests, including 70 Kiel employees from 14 countries, 186 employees from the Nördlingen site (many accompanied by their partners), and 52 former employees now retired, who helped shape the company's history. Transportation for the group – and an attraction in its own right – was the team bus of FC Bayern Munich, fitted with Kiel seats. The entire

weekend offered a supporting program, particularly for international guests, with Nördlingen itself clearly at the center: activities included various themed city tours, a night hike with a climb to the top of the Daniel, and a visit to the Bavarian Railway Museum.

About the Kiel Group

The Kiel Group is a leading manufacturer of passenger seating systems for commercial vehicles and public transport in local, regional, and long-distance travel by bus or rail. Kiel offers both complete seating systems and individual customer-oriented solutions for specific requirements. The Kiel brand stands for the combination of tradition and technical expertise with innovation and creativity. Kiel seats are characterized by premium quality, sophisticated technology, and modern design, meeting the highest standards of safety and passenger comfort. The company's goal is to further enhance passenger safety with top-class products, while also ensuring comfort and convenience in travel. Kiel also meets its environmental responsibility through innovative developments and efficient production processes. Founded in 1945, the company is headquartered in Nördlingen, Bavaria, and operates worldwide with sites in France, Poland, the Netherlands, Turkey, Spain, North Macedonia, and two sites in the USA. Across all sites, Kiel employs around 1,500 people. Franz Kiel GmbH is certified according to DIN EN ISO 9001:2015 and ISO/TS 22163:2017. More information can be found at www.kiel-seating.com.

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