

Stant Manufacturing Company

Founded: 1898

Location: Fourth Street and Western Avenue (1900–24); 1620 Columbia Avenue (1925–)

In 1898 George Stant opened a bicycle repair shop in a small garage behind his home. Two years later he set up a small blacksmith shop on Western Avenue and began making parts for buggies and wagons. After another move across the street two years later, he built a small brass foundry that made castings for local industries. The company built its success on the development of automatic machinery for producing piano tuning pins, becoming the largest producer of piano tuning pins in the nation.

During World War I Stant's company received a contract for submarine engine bedplates. While working on submarine engines and piano pins, company personnel became experts in copper, nickel, and silver plating, the very expertise needed for creating automobile parts. The company expanded and began to create original equipment parts for various automobile manufacturers.

The 1920s proved to be a prosperous time for the young company. When the Ford Motor Company made cars affordable for the middle class and demand rose for automobile parts, Stant developed a locking device for radiators. The two-piece cap guaranteed proper alignment and acted as a theft-deterrent of the "moto-meter" gauge, a popular temperature gauge visible to the driver. The ornaments produced by the Stant company became elaborate and finely crafted, and Henry Ford asked Stant to design and manufacture the radiator ornament for the Model A. Later Ford cars were topped with the flying quail introduced by Stant in 1928. Lincoln, Pierce-Arrow, Packard, Cadillac, and others also used Stant ornaments. To keep up with demand during the Roaring Twenties the company moved to spacious quarters on Columbia Avenue.

Kyle Stant caught some of his father's flair for invention. In 1932 Kyle developed a locking gas cap, named the Stant Dual-Loc. The company continued to make original equipment parts such as headlight rims, door handles, taillights, and fender ornaments but added plating to the objects. During World War II the company received contracts to make caps for gasoline and water containers. By 1945 the company produced three different types of locking caps, five varieties of replacement gas caps, and eleven radiator caps.

The 1950s remained productive and profitable for the car parts company. Greater demands for luxury items, the expansion of suburbs, and more two-car families assured the Stant Manufacturing Company of steady gains. Radiators remained somewhat dangerous. Pressure-release valves were unknown. Public pressure to create safer radiator caps led the company to create the Lev-R-Vent safety radiator cap. Although Kyle and his brother Ivan sold the company to Purolator Incorporated in 1965, the company continued operations in Connersville.

Stant Manufacturing expanded in the 1970s by increasing production of locking gas caps and by supplying parts that could meet the new Environmental Protection Agency standards for emissions. Stant mechanics introduced vacuum valves for the emission control system in the early 1970s, and to keep up with technology the company began to incorporate plastic in the manufacture of its products. Throughout this period heater cores, defroster hoses, and radiator fan motors remained profitable products.

In the 1980s and 1990s the company had to change to meet the new challenges facing the automobile market from Asia. In 1987 David Paridy, leader of a management group, bought Stant from Purolator. The company became publicly traded for the first time in the early 1990s only to return to private ownership later in the decade. In the early 1990s the company began acquiring other auto parts manufacturers as a general consolidation trend hit the industry. As

with many other successful corporations during the decade Stant terminated some of its more inefficient production lines while strengthening and expanding others. By 1996 sales reached \$612 million, with profits accounting for more than \$21 million.

In 1998 Stant Manufacturing employed four hundred people and expected sales of over \$50 million. It is a subsidiary of Gates Rubber Company of Denver, Colorado. John P. Reilly has served as president and chief executive officer since January 1997.