



THE Sleep CRAFTERS

A brand synonymous with luxury, comfort, and quality, Hästens understands the importance of a good night's rest.

Images courtesy of Hästens

For more than 160 years, Hästens has been dedicated to crafting the best sleep. Specialising in superior beds, the company has skilled crafters who make each mattress by hand using only the finest natural materials.

Robert Carlén is the current CEO and believes the future is looking brighter than ever for the luxury label which has a presence in 40 countries around the world. "I think there is a growing concern in societies about sleep and the lack of sleep and what it causes," he says. "Many studies show that sleep deprivation and troubles have doubled over the past 25 years, especially in developed countries. It has become a big health factor.

"We find that people are stopping to talk about this more and more and the insights into sleeping well with a good product are increasing. We believe that quality producers like Hästens will benefit from this increased awareness about the importance of sleeping well."

Robert has been leading the Hästens team since December 2013, a role he took on to coordinate the global management team and start a three-year strategy phase which included growth and expansion. Prior to that he was the chief financial officer for the company.

Robert's background in business and finance has served him well as he focuses on accelerating sustainable growth. His mandate

has always been to stabilise the business and turn sales around, especially following on from the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

"When I joined together with my colleagues in the management team we worked a lot on instilling trust—trust in our business, in the supplier chain, and also amongst partners. This was being worked on long before I even joined, to make sure that our suppliers, our partners, and our employees are trusting us at Hästens. This is all so we can become what we want to be, which is being the number-one player in the premium bedding industry in the world.

"We want to make sure that we have a competitive range of >

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products on offer and also to focus on the consumer experience. A lot of clients today are demanding, and rightfully so. It's important that we continue to deliver the best beds in the world and that they get the best service from us."

Robert says his greatest achievement so far during his time with Hästens has been instilling in staff and partners the belief that everything is possible with the right mindset. "Obviously this is a journey but this is something we have started, and it is something that we are working on and talking about. It is something that we can achieve if we all really believe in it. I have lately been driving this notion and I will continue to drive it because the key battles are always inside our own heads."

The customer experience is paramount to the long-term success of Hästens and developing good relationships with suppliers, and aligning with other businesses is an important component of this. The company is fifth-generation family owned, which means some of its collaborations have been honed over many years.

"It is important to have partnerships with the people who are representing us around the world. Most of the Hästens stores that you will find are owned by an independent entrepreneur who really believes in us and wants to sell and represent us in the best possible way locally. We are of course extremely dependent on them and make sure they are representing us in the way that we are certain the consumers like. That is very important to us.

"When it comes to suppliers, they are the ones that are supporting us in driving the development of our beds. We are producing iconic products and to do this a lot of work goes into it. It's the components and the configuration of that which is creating the ultimate comfort for consumers. We often do a lot of our work

ourselves but we also need to partner up with key suppliers."

Hästens' beds are all made by hand with pride and care in Köping, Sweden. It's the way it's been done since the brand was established and is a philosophy that has been handed down to each generation of owners. According to the company, sleep in a Hästens product is more restorative and rejuvenating, bringing natural energy, an improved mood, greater health and happiness, and a more youthful appearance.

All customers are given a 25-year warranty on the key components of the beds. "We can only do that if we are certain that we have constructed them well and that we have built them using the highest quality standards," Robert says. "We have been doing that for many generations and that is really the key.

"I think what makes us unique is a couple of things. We are really trying hard to build the best beds in the world, making sure that they are put together in the best possible way. That, of course, has created an increasingly satisfied customer base and we are getting more and more referrals for our products.

"We have many people that can testify that the product has helped them to perform better. We have a lot of film stars in Beverly Hills who are happily sleeping in a Hästens bed, and we have a lot of pop stars around Europe that are happily sleeping in our products. They do it because they know they have to perform—either they have to look healthy or perform well, and that is really what we are trying to help them do."

Hästens has experienced significant change and growth over its existence. "This company is in its fifth generation of ownership and the previous four generations have had ups and downs," Robert says. "The first generation saddle makers became quite well known

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in their local area and expanded into neighboring major cities like Stockholm. Already then the first mattresses were made. They strived very hard to make sure that they delivered the best products possible. The second generation did very much the same.

"The third generation struggled a little bit more because horses went out of fashion and the saddle makers started to look at new businesses. Even though beds of some kind have been part of the Hästens range since the beginning, the third generation really started to focus on the bedding industry. The fourth generation contributed with the blue check pattern and our most comfortable and iconic product—the 2000T bed model.

"Jan Ryde, who is the current owner, really revolutionised the way Hästens was looked at on the Swedish market to start with. He took the company from a very small company to becoming the number one at the top of mind amongst buyers of beds. That of course was a significant journey to make and that was up until, you could say, about 2008.

"Then we had the financial crisis and Hästens was also hit by this. A lot of our independent entrepreneurs got into financial troubles and that resulted in people going out of business either voluntarily or forced. The banks didn't freely and happily provide finances anymore. Of course, it did impact our business and we actually lost 40 per cent of our revenue in that year. The company has struggled for quite some time to come back from that.

"It was actually only by the end of 2012 that we had firmly found the ground we're on now. We are into a positive streak, having been profitable every month since around August 2012. So we are firmly back into the territory where we should be and we are now looking forward to a good growth rate and good profitability levels." •