

Power to Spare

By K. Schipper

AIMS Power boosts its inverter product presence in the RV market.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AIMS POWER



Reno, Nev.-based AIMS Power supplies more than 50 different inverter models to a variety of industries, including the RV market. The company has recently begun selling inverters to RV OEMs.

Bruce de Jong is an engineer with an entrepreneurial spirit. The president and founder of AIMS Power Corp. has parlayed his training in electrical engineering into a company offering one of the widest selections of power inverters in the United States.

While not all of them are designed for the RV market, since its beginning in 2001 the Reno, Nev.-based company has included RV owners among its customers. Today, much of the company's sales efforts in that market are directed at RV dealers and OEMs.

AIMS also offers other renewable solar, off-grid, mobile and emergency backup power systems, and the company's long-term goal is to help its customers efficiently run their deep-cycle battery banks to reduce the pollution, noise and cost of maintenance associated with using fuel-powered generators.

Technological Bent

Technology – and not necessarily for power inverters – is at the heart of de Jong's background. He explains that he began his career working first for Lockheed and later SynOptics in northern California. Eventually, however, the thought of owning his own business led him to launch a cellular importing business with his brother.

"That's where I first gained some importing and buying experience, as well as some ideas on how to run a company," de Jong says. "Later, we sold that business, and the company that bought us moved it here to Reno."

Under its new owner, the company ultimately went out of business, but de Jong was ready to move on. He started importing power inverters and selling them from his garage under the AIMS Power name.



Sean Nichols, AIMS Power vice president of sales, is pictured with several inverters in AIMS' warehouse facility.

Among his first buyers were RV owners who were purchasing replacement inverters directly from AIMS.

"My first customer had a catalog and there were a lot of RV owners who got the catalog and bought for their personal RVs," he explains. "Over time, we began to develop brand recognition from dealers. For the last 10 years or so we've been selling to dealers."

More recently, the company has started selling to RV OEMs both in the United States and Canada. One of the issues that's hindered AIMS' move into the OEM market, de Jong says, is that the units the company sells to them are still in the process of being certified by UL and UL-Canada.

"The listings are very similar, so it's not that difficult," he says.

Currently, the company is importing its power inverters from China, South Korea and Taiwan, but thanks to de Jong's technical expertise, they're anything but off-the-shelf items, according to Sean Nichols, AIMS' vice president of sales.

"We have our own line," Nichols says. "We do co-manufacturing in that we design the products, tell the manufacturers how to customize them and then have them manufactured."

"We've built an extensive line of inverters based on customer input and feedback," de Jong says. "We're at the point now where we can refer a customer to the exact product they need 99 percent of the time."

Nichols says the company has more than 50 different inverter models – not all of them directed at the RV market, of course – to meet customers' varying needs. And with more than 12,000 square feet of storage space at the company's facility, availability isn't typically an issue.

As for the company's Western location, de Jong admits things might be a little easier if AIMS was based some place in the Midwest, but he says Reno is centrally located for serving the firm's West Coast dealers and the ports where its products enter the U.S.

"It's really a good, low-cost area for distribution," de Jong says. "Even though most of our business is located on the East Coast and in the Southeast, shipping isn't a problem

with the power inverters. We ship nationwide, and we also ship internationally."

A Pure (Sine) Heart

The heart of the AIMS line for the RV market is the company's AIMS Power Corp. pure sine inverter, which has been on the market now for a couple years.

Within that line the breakthrough model is the AIMS Power 6,000-watt pure sine low-frequency inverter charger, which will work in every country in the world, regardless of its electrical system. The low-frequency inverters are available in 1,000-, 1,500-, 2,000-, 3,000-, 4,000-, 8,000-, 10,000-, and 12,000-watt models, as well as the 6,000-watt version.

AIMS executives say these low-frequency inverters feature a heavy-duty transformer allowing for a 300 percent surge capacity, and all of them are two – or even three – products in one: an inverter, an AC-to-DC battery charger and, in the 1,500- and 3,000-watt models, a solar charge controller.

"These are the types of features that give RV owners the freedom and versatility they



AIMS Power has its own in-house technical support and inverter repair team for warranty repairs and product exchanges.



need to live *off the grid* for an extended period of time,” says Nichols. “We work with RV owners almost every day and we always recommend our low-frequency models because that’s the reliability needed when you’re out in the boonies.”

“The real benefit of the low-frequency inverters is they’re very durable,” says de Jong. “They also have no high-frequency noise to interfere with the AM and CB radio bands, and they have a very high surge rating.”

The company also boasts a line of cost-effective modified sine inverters ranging from 75- to 12,000-watt AC outputs with 12-, 24-, 36- and 48-volt DC input options. While ideal for customers expecting to use an inverter less frequently, they remain AIMS’ leading product, and while also utilized by RV owners, they are particularly popular with another segment of the company’s market: emergency and utility vehicles.

Industrial-grade versions of the modified sine line also are available, and can provide an attractive option for RVers who prefer to travel rougher roads, while still providing a less costly option than the pure sine inverters.

In yet another effort to wean RV owners off their noisy generators, AIMS also offers solar panels, complemented by its solar charge controller capabilities on some of its inverters. The sale and installation of photovoltaic generating capacity is growing by leaps and bounds, and de Jong says he’s seeing it going on some RVs through the company’s dealer network.

"We hope that some of the OEMs will start including them on their products, although we aren't seeing that yet," he says. "We'd like to help get OEMs offering it straight off the factory floor, but we'll continue to offer it."

Still, he doesn't expect the solar panels to overtake or detract from what AIMS is primarily about.

"Our core business is power inverters," de Jong stresses.

Focus on RVs

Even a great product can only take a company so far without service to back it up, and that's where AIMS Power believes it can compete with other manufacturer/suppliers.

The company has its own in-house technical support and inverter repair team working out of AIMS' Reno facility, and Nichols says they do an excellent job of warranty repairs and product exchanges. However, he adds the inverters can often be fixed at the dealer level.

"If a dealer has a guy on his staff who knows about inverters, we can just send the dealer a board and it can be swapped out there," says Nichols. "Of course, if they need a quick turnaround they can send the inverter in and we'll send a new one."

He adds that in those cases, the inverters are then repaired and resold as refurbished units.

AIMS Power does offer a lifetime of free tech support – available during normal business hours Mondays through Fridays – and has its own YouTube, blog, Facebook, Google+, Twitter and Pinterest accounts to help keep its customers informed about the company and its products.

"We've put together countless instructional videos, informational blogs and interactive social networking posts that are all done as an effort to improve our customers' experiences," Nichols says.

Giving end users a great experience is possibly at least as important as providing the technology to transform direct current (DC) power into alternating current (AC) at AIMS.

"We're a small company, so someone can call here and talk to the president or

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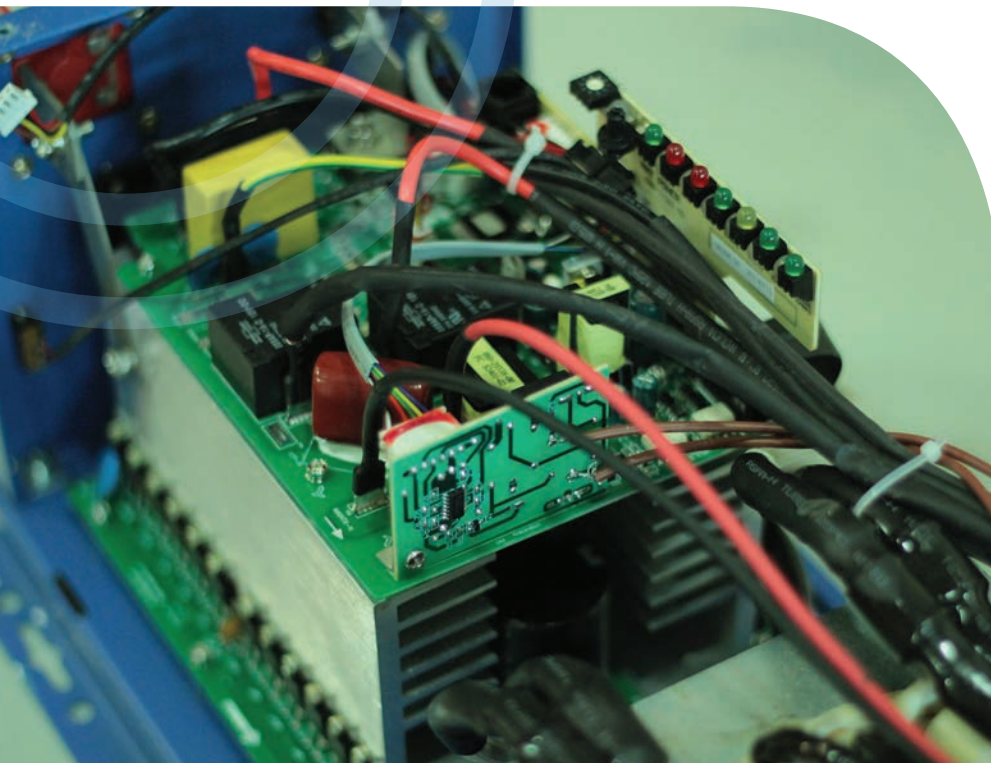
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The picture below shows highlights the “brain of the inverter” – a control PCB (printed circuit board). The unit is installed in a 4,000-watt low-frequency AIMS inverter charger.



the vice president,” says Nichols. “If people want to talk to us, we’ll talk to them. And, if they need something done specifically to a product, we can make it happen for them a lot faster than a bigger company can.”

Not that AIMS isn’t hoping to become one of those bigger companies. While the company has a five-person sales staff and is always on the lookout for more dealer/distributors across all its market areas, the end of 2013 has brought a new marketing approach.

“For years, we’ve focused mainly on the Internet,” says Nichols. “This year we’re making a big push to get out to trade shows, because we’re trying to grow the business by reaching different markets.”

After attending shows for utility vehicles and for emergency vehicles, the 2013 RV Industry Association (RVIA) show in Louisville, Ky., was the first RV show at which the company had a presence.



New ISR Series Products

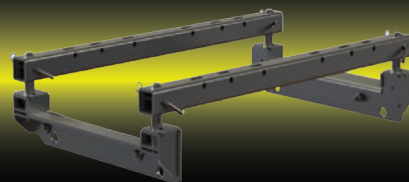
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2328	2011-2013 GM
2330	2003-2012 Dodge
2332	2013 Dodge 2500
2334	2013 Dodge 3500

See fit chart for more details

PROUDLY MADE IN USA



AIMS Power President and founder Bruce de Jong holds a copy of Inc. magazine, which highlighted his company as an Inc. 5000 fast-growing business.

"We're really doing a formal introduction to the AIMS product line," says Nichols. "We have a very diverse line of products that fits in many applications. We're trying to get out there and show people how many products we have, because, if they have a project, they can call us and we can give them something in-house."

And, he says, when people see the company's power inverters, they like what they see.

As company president, de Jong may be a bit more modest. He says he wants to see how his inverters stack up and are accepted compared with his competition.

"Obviously, there's some resistance with some accounts to switch product suppliers; a company might have been with someone a dozen years or more," de Jong acknowledges. "Our goal is to continue building the AIMS Power brand name, develop some new accounts and get some of our OEM accounts to specify our inverters in more of their models."

"Over this last year and this coming year, we're really focusing on the RV industry."

PRO

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