

# KVH has landed

German mills are hoping the UK market will warm to a finger-jointed structural timber product called KVH. Stephen Powney reports

## SUMMARY

- KVH has 40% of the domestic German structural timber market.
- Finger-jointing gives long length capabilities.
- The product has a uniform standard and is independently monitored.
- Several UK importers are trying KVH.

“It’s like changing from a colour TV to a plasma TV,” said Wolf-Christian Küspert, managing director of sawmiller GELO Holzwerke GmbH.

He was talking about KVH timber, the product which has taken the German construction timber industry by storm since the mid-1990s.

KVH – Konstruktionsvollholz – means “solid structural timber”. In a nutshell it is a value-added finger-jointed timber product designed to be more reliable and stable than normal sawn wood and particularly suited to long-length applications.

Its background stems from the German introduction of regulations focusing on kiln-dried wood and a desire by architects and carpenters for something more reliable than rough sawn wood.

The properties of KVH were defined in 1994 in a trade association agreement between the German Sawmill Federation and the Federation of German Master Carpenters, with mills combining their energies to market a range of products under one name – KVH.

Spruce, fir, pine, larch or Douglas fir is visually or mechanically sorted and cut either with separate hearts or heart-free, with planing after drying to ensure dimensional accuracy. The product is S10 graded (equivalent of C24) and must be dried to 15% (+/-3%) and true to size.

It is available in standard lengths of up to 13m due to the finger-jointing, as well as system lengths, while two different finishes are available – Si for visible elements and Nsi for hidden elements.

With such long lengths available, rafter and floor joists are typical applications.

DUO/TRIO laminated beams are a further development of KVH, featuring two or three individual lengths of wood glued together with fibres running parallel.

The KVH Monitoring Group and the Confederation of German Master Carpenters provide a clear product definition to users and regulate a uniform product specification independent of manufacturers.

The KVH Monitoring Group said the product now had 40% of the German structural timber market – and the product is being sold in sizeable quantities throughout Europe.

Some UK importers are trying the product, including MBM Timber, which has just taken delivery of 100m<sup>3</sup> of 47x150mm product, with similar quantity loads of 47x220mm and 47x225mm to follow. It turned to KVH after finding difficulties in sourcing 6m sawn lengths.

“As far as we’re concerned, there’s nothing wrong with this product,” said a spokesperson.

Although a bit more expensive than carcassing, he

## GERMANY & AUSTRIA



Various KVH products PHOTO: GERMAN TIMBER

did not think the price was a problem. More of an issue, he hinted, was UK customers’ wrong perception or fear of finger-jointing.

Lawrence Webster, UK representative of German timber export agency Kullik & Rullmann, agreed that this was a barrier, but said, “as soon as they see it they understand it’s a wonderful product”.

“I-beams have come into this market by storm and I think people want an alternative. Solid timber joists are not really the specification people want, so I think there is a future for something like KVH. But like anything in the timber trade, it’s all on the price,” he said.

Sawmiller GELO Holzwerke GmbH produces about 10,000-20,000m<sup>3</sup> of KVH annually, out of a total production of 140,000m<sup>3</sup>. It sells both a standardised KVH product and individual orders to meet customer needs.

Wolf-Christian Küspert has confidence that the quality, the supervision/accountability of the product and flexibility to deliver in individual orders and long lengths would appeal to UK buyers.

Gelo has sold several hundred cubic metres of KVH to the UK so far. “I think KVH is the correct product for the UK,” said Mr Küspert. “We are able to produce 12m lengths and easily put them into containers.”

But, he said, one obstacle for KVH penetration into the UK was the sizes – a standard KVH profile would be 100x140mm or 60x100mm. For smaller mills this means investment in grading and certification.

Ante-holz is a big KVH producer and has high hopes for it in the UK (see p28).

“We expect good business, not now, but in one to two years’ time,” said export manager Kai Oberlies. “In the future, I believe it will be coming into the market more and more.”

“The pricing is difficult because it’s a new product,” he said. “People have to see the advantages.” ■



A KVH end profile  
PHOTO: GERMAN TIMBER