



No job too big or small

If Juho or Mikko Helminen were anyone other than who they are, customers might think twice before accepting their offer of cranes for construction sites and special road transportation services.

But they are Helminens. And they're from Pori. There in lies the difference.

The name is familiar to almost any Finn who has ever had to consider something like moving a melting pot that weighs 1,600,000 kg, i.e. the weight of 1,300 passenger cars, and then installing it in an off-ground location. These kinds of jobs call for heavyweights and first-rate equipment and know-how. Sometimes the jobs are so difficult that they call for "the crazy guys from Pori".

Oy Helminen Engineering Ltd is one of the leading companies in its sector in Finland. Liftings, offloadings, loadings, moves and mountings, skid-dings, jackings, and the most challenging special transportations form the core of the Pori-based business. The bold slogan advertises the Helminen expertise: "From door to door - all over the world".

This is no advertising exaggeration, the company lives by its slogan. The Helminens have been called to jobs in places like the Caribbean, Greece, Kenya and Cameroon.

The Helminen name alone is usually enough to assure customers of the expertise; the company has



Mechanical engineer Juho Helminen was interested in heavy transportation equipment even as a child. The world looked even more exciting standing on the bumper of a Scania 76 Super tractor-trailer.

earned its spurs through demonstrations, past and present. Today's entrepreneurial spirit is carried on by brothers Juho and Mikko, who are very grateful to their father Mikko, the founder of the Pori-based transportation company over 40 years ago.

An interesting mysticism shrouds the date the company was established. Mikko Senior founded the heavy-duty transportation company Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen Ky on 1 September 1962, exactly one year after Juho Helminen was born. Precisely seven years later, on 1 September 1969, Mikko Helminen was born.

The famous family from Pori

The past three generations of Helminens have been entrepreneurs. Uno Helminen (1897-1972), a real old-time captain of the industry, set the stage for the success story. The legend lives on - and for good reason; during his lifetime, he was one of the most famous people in Pori.

"My grandfather started out as a mason and then studied to be a master builder - quite impressive back then. The Helminen construction company he established earned its reputation after building the Pori



Driver Pentti Viitanen kept his Magirus Deutz V12 tractor-trailer squarely on the road in 1970 when Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen delivered a huge tank to Sköldvik.

airport and an entire district in Pori, e.g. The entrepreneurial spirit runs in the family: Uno's sister Impi established a bakery and confectionery," entrepreneurial brothers Juho and Mikko Helminen proudly report their impressive family history.

Uno was a steadfast and successful entrepreneur, who eventually retired from the construction business and then worked in the family's bakery business. The same traits were passed on also to his son, Mikko Helminen (1934-2000). But times had changed, and Mikko Helminen took advantage of the integrating world.

"Father had a master's degree in mining. Back then, having an education and being multilingual were huge. He understood that things can't be handled from the grease pit, you have to be assertive and enjoy life", Juho Helminen characterises his father.

Mikko Helminen dared to go international right from the start of his career; he gained a competitive advantage for Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen Ky by acquiring equipment from abroad. Juho Helminen recalls that the company bought trailers in the 1970s, decades ahead of some of the others in the business.

The company's brochures were published in English and Finnish, and the company even had a bilingual customer magazine called The Hook. The name of the publication came from the company's

logo, and from the fact that in most cases the hook was in fact the most important link between the customer's products and Helminen's operations.

"My father was an old-fashioned man, yet ahead of his time in many ways", Juho's brother Mikko Helminen says, admiring the company's 15th anniversary issue of The Hook, published in 1977.

Mikko Helminen was busy during his career. He continued running the family's bakery business while maintaining the heavy transportation business. In addition to the bakery-confectionery, they also ran a cafe-style restaurant called Liikebaari, an oasis in downtown Pori, where the locals enjoyed delicious, freshly baked pastries and other tasty dishes.



A group photo at the inauguration of the new site. From left, Mikko and Maija Helminen, Pentti Pihl, Pentti Viitanen, Jouko Mäkelä, Veikko Kivi, Tauno Seppälä and Seppo Rossi.



The Helminens are also familiar with publishing. Articles about employees and the company have been featured in the company's magazine.



The demand for heavy transports started growing when industry began using increasingly bigger components. Helminen's Scania transported huge beams back in the 1960s..

Hard-working "Natikka"

The transportation business came about when Uno Helminen's construction business had an excavator but no means to transport it from one job site to another. The purchase of the first tractor-trailer, nicknamed "Natikka", signified an entry into heavy transportation and later to the new company that Mikko Helminen established in Karjaranta.

Counterparts to "Natikka" were soon acquired, but it performed many honourable jobs before being retired. One assignment probably still remembered by the older people in Pori is when the truck transported the Finish Air Force's heavy helicopters to the Satakunta Air Command hangars. The helicopters had been railed in from the Soviet Union to Rosenlew's railway yard.

Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen entered the market at an interesting time, because industry's use of increasingly bigger components was becoming more common. This not only increased the demand for heavy-load transportation, but also for hoisting services; accordingly, operations were expanded to meet the customers' changing needs. The city's heavy industrial roots made Pori a good place to operate from.

"Competitiveness was strengthened through equipment offerings; cranes, for example, were acquired from the United States. In the early 1970s, the company purchased Finland's first hydraulic

crane. In the 1970s, it was also realised that Helminen had the biggest fleet of special transportation equipment in the Nordic countries", Juho and Mikko Helminen remark.

Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen's first actual employee was Pentti Pihl, who started as a repair shop manager back in 1959. Meticulous and reliable "Pena" kept the wheels and hundreds of tonnes in motion.

The successful company soon needed better facilities, so in 1971 it moved to the Uusiniitty industrial area. It was an ideal location - ten kilometres from the city centre and the same to the harbour. As Pentti Pihl notes, the company started gaining wide respect, thanks in part to the competent and hard-working employees.

"Good, long-time employees built the company. Helminen had good reputation and we wanted to serve. The company became well-known throughout Finland, especially among big industry", Pihl confirms.

The company's cranes became a concept woven in to the daily lexicon: Whenever something really heavy needed to be moved, the people would say, "We need Helminen". Pihl, who has been with the company for 27 years, says that Mikko Helminen had a whole lot of entrepreneurial spirit and it has been passed on to his sons.

"Mikko was very modern in his ways. He learned all kinds of things by visiting exhibitions and tal-

king with people - and he always had a camera with him. His sons, too, have been on the right path and have been building the company. They've dared to take risks when appropriate, and I tip my hat to them. Mikko would definitely be proud", Pihl reflects.

Stories for journalists and photographers

Helminen's assignments were often the equivalent of invitations for radio and press reporters to come along. There certainly wasn't a shortage of press written about Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen's transport of Strömberg's 430-tonne transformer from Vaasa to the Olkiluoto nuclear power plant in the 1970s.

Mikko Helminen was a known boating enthusiast. So it's no wonder that the company took on some maritime-related operations, like transporting King Hussein of Jordan's luxury yacht from Pietarsaari to Kotka. The Helminen signs were also proudly displayed in 1987 when circumnavigator Harry "Hjallis" Harkimo returned to his home port, and the sailboat that had sailed the seas with him was paraded through the streets of Helsinki - by Helminen, of course.

The cameras were equally focused on the heavy transportation equipment in 1984 when three Pori-based trucks moved Pasila's old railway station 200 meters to its new site. And municipal newspapers have always attracted readers whenever the Helminens have transported a big Yankee, i.e. the gigantic paper-machine cylinder weighing hundreds of tonnes.

Of course not all loads have been the biggest and heaviest and magnets for journalists and photographers; most of the special transportation work is just another job. Whether the transport distance is long or short, heavy or just a bit lighter, it requires solid transportation engineering know-how to be successful. No job is too big or too small.

Crane operator Aimo Mäkelä has worked for three generations of Helminens. He admits that sometimes you really start thinking about just how valuable the load is that's hanging on the hook of the crane. But this seasoned veteran's hand doesn't shake; loads are hoisted into place with precision and reliability.

"Success requires creativity and an eye for the game. There are many job sites where there isn't even



Expertise in just one narrow sector has never been enough for the Helminens; jobs like heavy transports always need lifting services. Part of Rosenlew's boiler was handled in 1966.

enough room for the crane. That's when you resort to creativity, like doing the job through a big window, for example", Mäkelä says.

The company is used to working on land, at sea, and even underground. For example, Helsinki Energy hired the Helminen 'cavemen' to install huge equipment for processing and transporting coal.

"It was dark and cramped one hundred meters underground, and the rock didn't give way at all", Mäkelä recalls the demanding work site.

But one of his most memorable assignments was the trip to Greece in the late 1990s.

"We spent six months working on five islands. During the last month, the company paid for all



Mikko Helminen, founder of the heavy transport business in 1962, was an international man right from the start. He relied on education, open-mindedness, and hard work.



Aimo Mäkelä has been employed by three generations of Helminens. Operating cranes has taken him to damp caves and to the sun in Greece. "Can't complain about those kinds of assignments", Aimo smiles.

the wives to join us for fun in the sun. Can't complain about those kinds of assignments", Mäkelä grins.

Comprehensive logistics chain

Juho, born in 1961 and the eldest of the siblings (Elina, b. 1963, Jaakko, b. 1964, and Mikko, b. 1969), joined the family business in 1980, but he didn't settle down right away. During his younger years, he spent time as an exchange student in the United States, he worked in the engineering in-

dustry in Germany, and he carried out his military service in the Finnish Navy.

Juho has worked continuously in the family business since 1983. He earned a degree in mechanical engineering while working at his job and, like his father, has a good command of foreign languages: This managing director has no problem chatting with customers in Finnish, Swedish, English, or German.

Mikko entered the family business first by working in the bakery. He went full-time in 1992 when the bakery operations were discontinued and Oy Helminen Engineering Ltd was established to carry on the work of Raskaskuljetus M. Helminen. The brothers are 50/50 partners in the successful company and rely on the smooth-flowing division of labour: Managing director Juho primarily handles the technical side, and Mikko is responsible for the financial side, the personnel, and the real estate. An engineer and a BBA, now that's a partnership that works.

Depending on the season, the company employs 12-15 people. The employees are typical all-around men, meaning they can handle virtually any task in the company. The company has more than 3,000 square meters of facilities, and the utilisation rate is high because today the facilities are also used as terminals for storing other companies' machines, for instance.

Oy Helminen Engineering Ltd's net sales are growing quickly, and the company has made some ma-



Skidders and 400-tonne mast jacks were used to safely offload a 280-tonne diesel engine from a special ship in March 2000. That time the job site was in the sunny Greek Islands. As usual, the work also included installation of the diesel engine.

jor investments. Virtually the entire customer base comes from industry. Mikko Helminen notes that the company wants to continue streamlining unnecessary operations and improving its network of subcontractors. Offering comprehensive service is the key.

"Surely there are a lot of good crane, transport, and installation companies, but few of them do everything. Our strength is in the entire logistics chain we offer - from transportation and hoisting to installation and mounting", Mikko Helminen emphasises.

Employee loyalty is excellent at Helminen because employees are held in such high regard: Among other things, the company employees are given massage therapy and vouchers for the gym and swimming pool. Because the company works in a very demanding and safety-conscious sector, occupational safety is a continuous focus of development. The Helminens even have a training program specifically designed to develop safety.

Reliable, thorough, and diverse

Learning is a big part of competence - especially when there's something the customer wants and you don't know how to do it. Business has been conducted on the customer's terms particularly in harbour conditions when we were forced to learn the tricks of pontoon transportation. The work requires all kinds of equipment: the company has various jacks, rollers, air modules, mast jacks, tractor-trailers, forklifts, extenders, industrial cranes, passenger hoists, and loading cranes.

"Everyone should focus on their own expertise and let us worry about the rest. If something massive needs to be moved, we can handle it", Juho Helminen assures.

"Competence is also cost-efficiency. We really scope out the lifting site in advance and do the job right the first time. We survey the ground stability and how and where the piece can be lifted. We come up with strength calculations, moving plans, and risk analyses. We give customers a 20-page lifting plan. It is thorough and reliable; it is engineering know-how. Reliability is the cornerstone of the transportation company's operations.

Helminen primarily sells sweat and know-how, and today's generation of entrepreneurs ranks right up there with their father when it comes to internationalism. Helminen has many partners throughout the world, and customer contacts are also made through some Finnish companies like Wärtsilä. They also have a relatively active global marketing program, and business has been good.

"A tight Finnish community forms even on the foreign assignments. For example, a wood-fired sauna heater was shipped to Cameroon, and the men built a sauna there", Mikko Helminen chuckles.

Oy Helminen Engineering Ltd has dared to venture abroad, but first and foremost it is a Pori-based company. And proud of it. The Helminens are strong advocates of Pori people supporting local businesses. And they believe the business world should do the same.

"Being from Pori leaves its mark on everything. With common will, strength and skill, and with Pori lunacy, we forge ahead into the future", Juho and Mikko Helminen encourage.



In November 2000, the Helminen expertise was requested in Mombassa, Africa. The power plant-bound generators were brought to the country by ship and transported to their final destination by road. Juho Helminen supervised the progression of the shipment.