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SEVEN MIDLANDS COMPANIES JOIN MAKERS OF WALLACE & GROMIT ON NATIONAL PROFITS LEAGUE TABLE

ROLLER COASTER GALVANISER B.E. WEDGE TAKES MIDLANDS TOP SPOT ON LEAGUE TABLE OF PRIVATE COMPANY STARS

Seven of Britain's 100 private companies with the fastest growing profits are based in the Midlands, making combined annual profits of £67m.

Together the seven Midlands companies employ 6,671 staff and have combined sales of £666m. They have created a total of 928 jobs, according to the last three years of available audited accounts.

The top-ranked company among them is Willenhall-based **B.E. Wedge**. The firm's galvanized steel and iron components are used to protect the Pepsi Max roller coaster in Blackpool from the elements as well as the gates at Ascot. Under owner Jeremy Woolridge, profits have grown an average 69% a year from £1.5m in 2003 to £7.1m in 2006.

The seven companies headquartered in the Midlands are featured in the eighth annual **Sunday Times PricewaterhouseCoopers Profit Track 100** league table, which ranks the country's 100 private companies with the fastest-growing profits over three years. This year's league table includes British success stories such as **Aardman**, the maker of Wallace & Gromit, and **Dyson**. Compiled by Oxford-based research and events company **Fast Track**, the league table will be published in **The Sunday Times** this weekend.

Midlands private companies with the fastest-growing profits

National rank	Company	Location of HQ	Annual profit growth over 3 yrs (%)	Latest profits† (£000)	Financial year end†	Staff	Comment
31	B.E. Wedge Holdings <i>Galvaniser</i>	Willenhall West Midlands	69.30	7,051	Mar 06	940	Galvanised parts for the Pepsi Max roller coaster in Blackpool
43	Mark Group <i>Insulation contractor</i>	Leicester	64.09	* 4,670	Mar 06	491	Says it has insulated more than a million British homes
46	NP Aerospace <i>Protective equipment maker</i>	Coventry	62.62	5,380	Dec 05	172	Keeps news crews safe in war zones with its protective materials
56	2 Sisters Food Group <i>Poultry processor</i>	Smethwick West Midlands	60.36	21,266	Jul 05	2,540	Processes free-range chicken at its state-of-the-art Scunthorpe plant
63	Keltruck <i>Truck dealer</i>	West Bromwich West Midlands	57.60	3,441	Dec 05	470	Claims to be Britain's largest independent Scania dealer
78	Senad Group <i>Special education provider</i>	Mickleover Derbyshire	52.88	6,716	Aug 06	956	Cares for children on behalf of 125 local authorities
87	Drive Assist <i>Car hirer, dealer</i>	Tamworth Staffordshire	47.85	18,699	May 06	1,102	Recently bought by Charterhouse for a reported £250m.

† Financial year end of latest available audited accounts
‡ Profits = operating profit with directors' remuneration added back
* Annualised figures

Keith Anderson, assurance partner in the Midlands region at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, commented:

"It is great to see local companies delivering sustained profit growth and making such a positive contribution to our economy. These seven companies have combined sales of £666m. The Midlands is offering a fine model of how private companies and dynamic owners can drive economic growth and development".

Top companies in the Midlands

Leicester-based domestic insulation company **Mark Group** is looking for further growth by expanding into small-scale sustainable power projects, such as installing wind turbines and solar heating. With the founder's son Lee Cottingham now at the helm, profits have grown on average 64% a year from £1.1m in 2003 to £4.7m in 2006.

Sauces and gravies are a new departure for Smethick-based poultry processing company **2 Sisters Food Group**. With the likes of Tesco and M&S selling the company's chicken under their own names, 2 Sisters also has its own Buxted and Hermanns brands. Owners Ranjit Boparan and his wife Baljinder have grown profits 60% a year on average from £5.2m in 2002 to £21.3m in 2005.

The national picture

The 100 companies on the latest **Sunday Times PricewaterhouseCoopers Profit Track 100** league table have achieved phenomenal growth in profits of between 147% and 43% a year over three years. Together they have generated profits of £1.16bn a year and sales of £11.3bn. They have created 41,867 jobs, according to their last three years of available audited accounts, and employ 91,264 staff between them.

Well-known names on the league table include coffee house operator **Caffè Nero**, fashion retailer **Fat Face**, health club operator **Virgin Active** and the organic yoghurt maker **Yeo Valley**.

The full findings are published in a special 20-page supplement with **The Sunday Times** business section on 22 April and on the internet at www.fasttrack.co.uk.

Ends

WHEN USING THIS INFORMATION PLEASE CREDIT:

THE SUNDAY TIMES PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS PROFIT TRACK 100

Notes for editors:

About the league table

Now in its eighth year, **The Sunday Times PricewaterhouseCoopers Profit Track 100** annual league table is compiled by Oxford-based research and events company Fast Track. The full findings will be published in a special 20-page colour supplement with **The Sunday Times** business section on 22 April and on the internet at www.fasttrack.co.uk.

In addition to title sponsor **PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP**, the league table is co-sponsored by **Bank of Scotland Corporate, Microsoft**, and **UBS Wealth Management**. The sponsors do not endorse, guarantee or recommend investment in any of the companies.

League table criteria

Companies must be unquoted, independent and registered in the UK.

Companies are ranked by their average annual growth rate in profits over the three years to their last available audited accounts (either 2002 to 2005 or 2003 to 2006). Profits are defined as operating profits with directors' remuneration added back.

The research was carried out by Fast Track between 15 October 2006 and 1 March 2007. Almost all of the companies were interviewed by telephone, and 80 of the 100 have been visited by the Fast Track research team.

About PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

The member firms of the PricewaterhouseCoopers network provide industry focused assurance, tax and advisory services to build public trust and enhance value for its clients and their stakeholders. More than 140,000 people in 149 countries across our network work collaboratively using connected thinking to develop fresh perspectives and practical advice.

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About Fast Track

Fast Track is a research and events company with 10 years experience publishing league tables ranking the UK's top-performing private companies, and bringing together their owners to network and meet our sponsors.

The company was founded and is run by Dr Hamish Stevenson, who is also an associate fellow of Templeton College, Oxford University.

www.fasttrack.co.uk

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