

ESSENTIALS

The customer magazine of EschmannStahl GmbH & Co. KG

2018

FACTORY ROBOTS



Dear readers,

EschmannStahl is celebrating its 65th anniversary this year. So you might think that as far as steel is concerned we have seen everything and exhausted all product development and market possibilities – but that is way off the mark.

As a company we have always looked and moved forward. That's because steel is adaptable. That pays dividends when globalised market conditions are posing a greater challenge in terms of meeting requirements. For that reason our own R&D team headed up by Uwe Feldhoff is working day in day out to create innovative solutions, like a new grade of steel or new technologies, as in the case of Moldadur surface coating to enable you as a tool- or mouldmaker to enhance your performance. At this year's Fakuma in Friedrichshafen one of the solutions we will be showcasing is Moldadur - the go-to technology for injection moulding. You can obtain a brief insight into the work done by the EschmannStahl's R&D team in the interview starting on page 12.

But enhancing our steel-related service package spurs us on just as much. We are responding to your increasing demand for steel-related services by, for example, gradually expanding our machining capacities. More and more companies are recognising the benefits of EschmannStahl's services and relieving the burden on their production facilities in having to perform these operations. In this issue you will therefore be introduced to Martin Müller, the head of our 6-sided machining department.


At the same time EschmannStahl has become more digital. Are you already using our new webshop to place your orders? Costing, ordering and managing – all on one platform. Why not try it out! We explain to you step by step how it works, starting on page 14.

I wish you an informative read. If you have any questions, you are welcome to get in touch with me!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Maubach'.

Yours sincerely Jörg Maubach (Head of Sales)

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Is change irreversible? Digital Transformation

How is digitisation changing our workplace?



It has been one of those enduringly hot topics of the last few years - digitisation. After all, 92.1 percent of steel companies have already invested in digitisation projects, according to a 2017 survey by Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln Consult GmbH. 80.2 percent of these companies expect to increase their competitiveness by undertaking these projects. 92.3 percent even regard digital transformation in their own companies as vital to prevent them losing competitiveness. These are figures that are quite clearly setting the agenda - digital transformation is a fact.

The long-established steel industry is also set to play much more of a leading role in this industrial revolution than you might imagine - just as it did

during the process of industrialisation in the mid-19th century. That's because steel is positioned at the beginning of a very long value chain. It is therefore automatically tasked with having a key influence on this transformation to Industry 4.0. That because many steel-intensive industries like vehicle manufacturing or mechanical engineering are already highly automated sectors of the economy. That also requires a clear commitment to digital transformation from subcontracting industries. That's because right now cost pressures on the global market are gradually eating away at Germany's USP - that combination of innovation and high quality. A wide range of different digitisation instruments provides those that don't want to get caught up in this downward cost spiral



with a tool for achieving greater efficiency. There is an opportunity to reach this new level of industrialisation by applying smart technology when humans are of themselves barely able to increase productivity. What could this scenario look like?

"Digital Factory" - a vision of the future

Ideally the "cognitive or digital factory" is where the digital future all comes together. The continuous gathering, storage and analysis of process parameters and data is the key to smart production. Processes therefore self-adjust during ongoing operations, if, for example, it turns out that a component required for assembly purposes is missing, but in the meantime another component can be produced

instead. Diagnosis and action recommendation are generated within a very short space of time.

In a sense many companies have already undertaken this step, by employing systems or system components with a predictive maintenance function that even know when maintenance action is required and can therefore prevent a product shortage or even unexpected system malfunctions. Accordingly the system knows more about itself than any human, and the technician's maintenance manual has been digitised and functions independently by applying sensor technology and artificial intelligence. At the same time such an early stage of automatic quality control is added to the production process. ➔

85%

of German companies will increase their investments in Industry 4.0

50%

of German companies expect an increase in competitiveness through Industry 4.0

Source: Handelsblatt Media Group

Professions in transition

Yet what appears as a mere footnote in the many studies about digital growth potential and networking technology are the effects on actual workplaces, employees and their areas of responsibility. Entitled "Brave New World of Work 4.0", Boston Consulting Group last year published a study of this kind about the changes that employees are set to face. That's because the main demands made on the employees of tomorrow will to a large extent no longer be of a physical nature.

So-called cobots (co-worker robots) could be a solution in environments where things are too heavy, loud, confined, monotonous or even dangerous for people. These are already a standard in the vehicle manufacturing industry. Cobots even steadily perform precision tasks at a consistent level of accuracy and at speeds that humans clearly can't compete with. Industry and the economy will in future increasingly require qualified professionals to implement, manage and maintain this sophisticated technology. Generally speaking, the employee of the future will be required to think in terms of integration and networks and to have an interdisciplinary mindset. If employees are relieved of rather more simple work, then there is time to focus on actual process enhancement - which is often neglected in many companies during the course of day-to-day business. In this respect there continues to be no substitute - other than process data gathering - for human experience.

Young employees promote digital thinking

Educational institutions as well as companies face a real challenge in the near future in training employees to enable them to acquire the necessary digital skills. In many companies this generation of "digital natives", who have an intuitive affinity with digital technology, has not yet gained a foothold firm enough to have a major impact on the working environment. As far as this aspect of Human Resources policy is concerned, the steel industry can support transformation by creating more training opportunities - young people bring digitisation with them almost automatically.

This already begins in quite elementary areas - editing, securing/backing up and providing knowledge within the company. This is where problems already start to arise in long-established corporate structures. An example of this are blueprints or structural designs. When in paper format, there is a risk of details compiled during production or assembly getting lost. Clear, unambiguous documentation pays dividends in terms of the quality and efficiency of follow-up orders. Tablets, on which notes can be digitised and made available for future projects, are increasingly gaining acceptance as an effective substitute for engineering and design drawings. It is the small-scale adjustables that turn the abstract term "digitisation" into tangibly profitable changes within the company.

Helping to shape digital transformation

EschmannStahl is a company that lives off its spirit of innovation, so to speak, and is therefore closely associated with technological evolution. Digitisation is therefore gaining a foothold in our company through selected projects - in Production, Business Management and Sales, as recently happened with the new online shop. This illustrates very well how digital and analogue can work in tandem in the future - the simplest ordering processes coupled with the familiar option of personal advice. That's because EschmannStahl remains a company that is characterised and shaped by people, despite digitisation. In the future we will also be reporting on our journey to digitisation here in ESSENTIALS. ■



ESCHMANNSTAHL STARTER

YES - we train!

The wide range of career opportunities and an intensive mentoring programme during the training period are two reasons to become an EschmannStahl STARTER.

"On the one hand we keep on hearing the criticism that we have too few university graduates. That certainly applies to many technical professions too. However industry also requires a bedrock of commercial and technical employees that we are keen to train ourselves", says HR Business Partner Petra Krämer in summary. Every year EschmannStahl offers traineeships in Wholesaling/Export, Materials Testing and Warehouse Logistics. Potential technical/commercial employees also have the option of a dual training programme including an accompanying Bachelor degree course in Business Administration at FOM University of Applied Sciences in Cologne.

Moaning does not deliver trainees

"Of course it is not easy getting on schoolleavers' lists of possible employers. Many young people are attracted to the big cities, while here in Reichshof-Wehnrath you need a car to drive to work. And then what about steel? It's not really an instantly self-explanatory topic. Many companies are only slowly realising that it's no good moaning about a lack of trainees. They have to seize the initiative themselves, provide information in the right places and promote their businesses. That also means finding the right way to approach potential trainees", Petra Krämer explains.

To this end EschmannStahl has also been gradually "rejuvenating" its information material - because not

everything that is successfully targeted at customers will appeal to this young target audience. Furthermore the company regularly reaches out directly to young people at regional vocational training fairs. "We discovered that many people don't even know that EschmannStahl provides vocational training. So what do you do? Place advertisements or online banners? We opted to go down a more creative route. Soon a frequently used scheduled bus emblazoned with our traineeship advertising will be driving the highways and byways of the Bergisches Land", reveals Ulrike Geschwinde, who is also responsible for commercial training at EschmannStahl.

Long-term employment relationships are key

Its attachment to a rural region is definitely an advantage for EschmannStahl, because this generates a particular atmosphere of familiarity among the staff: a key argument for becoming a long-term employer - preferably from the first year of training all the way to retirement. "We are committed to training young people, in order to cover our own human resources needs. That's because we as a company need employees with real practical experience. It's always exciting to see how young people grow. Here we can offer trainees fertile ground and the potential to be able to make a difference. That's because EschmannStahl is not one of those companies where the saying is 'things have always been done that way'", Ulrike Geschwinde explains. "If anybody lags behind at school, they are helped by their training supervisor as well. ➔



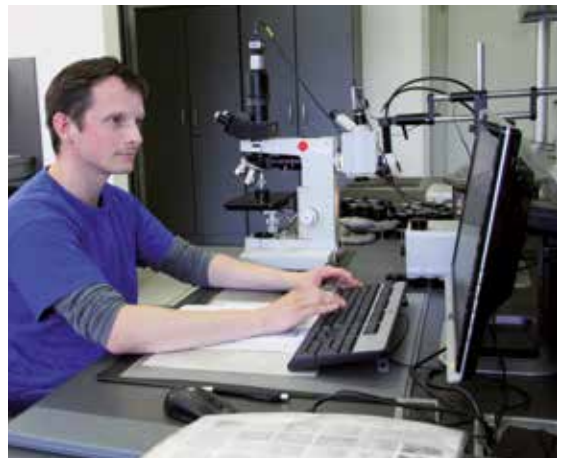
Rejuvenation – trainees bring fresh ideas into the company.



He manages the flow – the warehouse logistics specialist.



She keeps an eye on everything – the export specialist.



Quality is his top priority – the materials tester.

In times such as these, the benefits of personally mentoring just a chosen few trainees are especially apparent”, Petra Krämer adds.

The international structure of a major corporation like the voestalpine Group, the global player that owns EschmannStahl, also has its appeal. “Our Trainee Day in Linz is always one of the highlights for trainees in their third year. Furthermore we want to continue fostering communication and synergies with the group and therefore enable these young colleagues to see the bigger picture”, says Ulrike Geschwinde. That’s because anybody who once started off as a trainee often progresses during the course of their career to become a manager or even becomes a training supervisor – that comes from somebody who knows what they are talking about. “Pitching in yourself and not just issuing instructions – to this day that has been the way to earn respect from the young generation”, says Simone Milizia, warehouse logistics training supervisor.

Helping to shape digital transformation

Nowadays training also involves finding one’s own niche within the digital transformation process and often proactively helping to shape it within one’s own company. “Digitisation is very much on our minds in many areas within EschmannStahl. We are proud of frequently being able to conduct pilot projects within the voestalpine Group. For example, we were the first to operate an online shop. Production is also being gradually changed by interlinked automation. The new generation of employees has the opportunity to help shape this fourth industrial revolution”, Petra Krämer promises. These young colleagues often have an innately rather different, much greater affinity with these technologies. “We “old stagers” can learn plenty more ourselves. And the topic of training in turn reflects positively on the existing company staff – you just have to display a sense of open-mindedness. At any rate this is now our firm belief at EschmannStahl”, says Ulrike Geschwinde. ■

Training delivers future prospects

It doesn't always have to be a full-time degree course in a big city. Kathrin Schlagheck's career path is a good example of how dual training can be the more appropriate way to go.



Kathrin Schlagheck, Marketing Assistant

Her father worked at EschmannStahl for more than 30 years, most recently as Head of the IT & Organisation department. When the question of what she wanted to do after her 'Abitur' arose, Kathrin Schlagheck's went with her positive gut instinct about EschmannStahl. "I had an office-based organisational role in mind, something practical. That's why I did not consider a full-time degree course", the 22-year-old relates. She therefore commenced her dual training course to qualify as a Wholesaling/Export Professional at EschmannStahl in the summer of 2015 and completed the course at the beginning of 2018.

Good care makes the difference

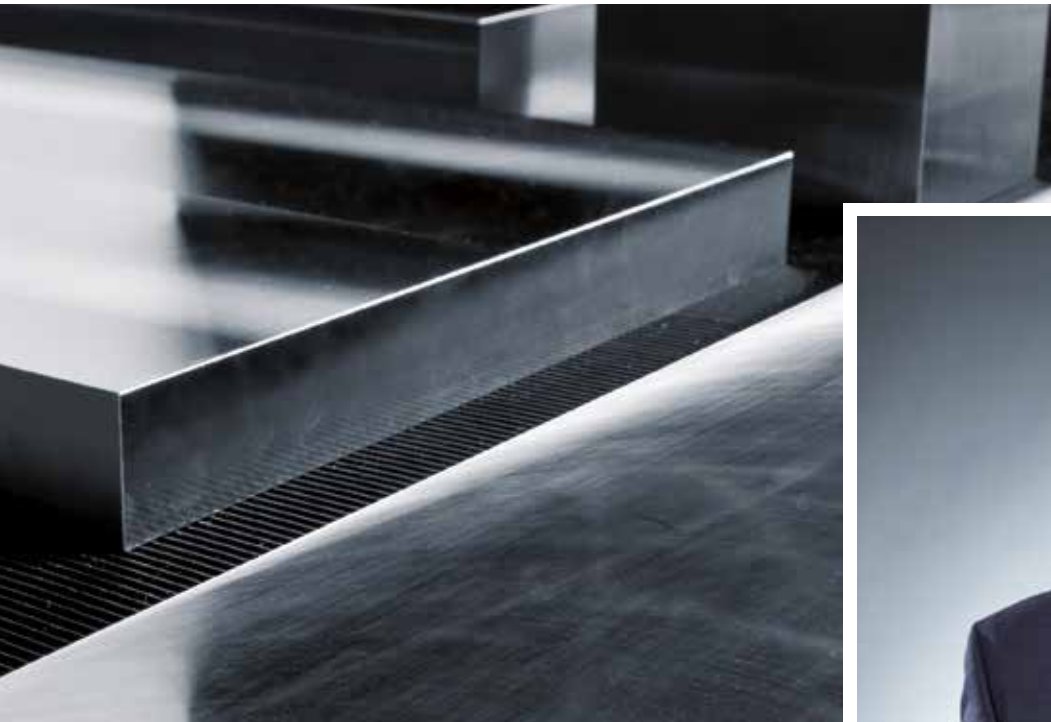
The company's diversity and versatility, its being part of an international group and its friendly/informal working atmosphere in particular continue to appeal to Kathrin Schlagheck. "The mentoring and support provided during training clearly differs from other companies. Our trainee excursions and the Group Apprentice Day event in Linz stick most vividly in my memory. You really do feel part of the bigger picture, yet still receive very specific support", the now marketing assistant recalls. "Surprisingly the training period in Quality Management

turned out to be particularly fascinating – a completely different world compared to my office job", Kathrin Schlagheck adds.

Better understanding for daily business

Her job at EschmannStahl has remained varied, even after completion of her training, and at the same time her area of responsibility is growing. For example, she is now responsible for the redesigned online shop and for website content and helps with organising and exhibiting at trade fairs – all tasks where her broad knowledge of the company and its products is paying dividends. She also commenced an evening Bachelor of Business Administration degree course at FOM University of Applied Sciences in Cologne in the summer of 2016. "The background knowledge that this degree course provides is of course very interesting and is to some extent useful in my day-to-day work in understanding processes better. Nevertheless I admittedly find practice more fun than pure theory. For that reason alone the decision in favour of this form of training was the right one."

Kathrin Schlagheck will have completed her evening degree course in 2020. And then what's next? "At any rate I am looking forward to having a bit more free time", she finally explains with a smile. ■



Precision groundwork performed by experts

No more reworking of raw materials needed, you can get started with production straightaway. EschmannStahl's product range includes not just premium steel grades for a wide range of applications, but also convenient steel and steel processing services. Machining is a key component of EschmannStahl's catalogue of services - and is becoming increasingly popular.

"Many of our customers want to cut this additional operation out of their production processes and prefer to focus their machine and staff capacities on their core business. Generally speaking, that is also much more cost-effective. That's because space in production facilities is a particularly critical issue for nearly all manufacturers. Added to that is investment in milling machines, their maintenance and training staff how to operate them. That only makes commercial sense if very large quantities are involved. That's why there is an increasing trend away from the raw material towards the machined plate", Stefan Urbaniak, Head of Machining Sales at EschmannStahl, explains. Some 500 steel plates a day are custom-machined by qualified staff at the Reichshof-Wehnrath plant. Rel-

evant sizes range from smartphone dimensions to 15-tonne plates, each with an individual choice of tolerances.

The plates can be either just milled or milled and ground. Delivery lead times range from two to eight working days, dependent on job size and the extent of machining required. Steel plates with maximum dimensions of 200 x 800 x 800 millimetres are also available on request for express delivery the next working day. "We can thus offer just-in-time manufacturers in particular some tangible relief on their resources during peak times and short-notice projects", states Stefan Urbaniak from experience. ■



Year in year out

Following its 25th anniversary last year, Fakuma is well and truly the annual key event for the plastics processing industry.

If you want to obtain a reliable overview of the current state of plastics technology, then the Friedrichshafen Exhibition Centre is exactly the right place to be. Experts from EschmannStahl will provide you at Fakuma with advice on which are the right materials for each requirement, especially where injection moulding – a particular Fakuma focus – is involved. Special grades **ESAKTUELL 1200** and **ESATLAS 42**, an innovation from last year, both provide a performance boost in terms of manufacturing plastic components. Enhanced grainability as well as particularly long service lives at maximum process reliability are just some of the arguments in favour of using these special alloys. Its higher wear resistance makes **ESAKTUELL 1200** particularly interesting for companies involved in large-scale mouldmaking. **ESATLAS 42** stands out not only on account of its versatility but also its excellent polishability up to a grain size of 1000.

The surface is what matters

It is worthwhile in plastics processing terms not just considering the service lives of the moulds, but also the desired surface quality of the end product. One solution is using a special grade. Another option is Moldadur surface technology, which will be one of the solutions that Sales Manager Jörn Maubach and his team will be showcasing in greater detail at the 2018 edition of the show to an interested professional audience. Moldadur serves as a protective coating for highly sensitive surfaces and delivers excellent polishing results as well as exact texture replication. The EschmannStahl Sales team is delighted to provide on-site advice to all those who can't make it to this annual industry gathering in October at Lake Constance. ■



Always listening to customers

EschmannStahl not only sells standard tool steel but also a wide range of special grades that are custom-developed for specific applications. Uwe Feldhoff heads up the company's own R&D department.

ESSENTIALS: Mr. Feldhoff, as Head of the Research & Development department we actually thought we would find you in a white coat in the laboratory and not in the office. Uwe Feldhoff: You are indeed not likely to find me there that often, because my area of responsibility incorporates very much more. Basically I am the interface with nearly all the other departments in the company, including Production, Quality Control and Sales. I ensure that we are developing the right products for our customers' applications and train colleagues to enable them to provide professional advice.

ESSENTIALS: How do you know what are the right products? Uwe Feldhoff: The development process generally begins at a meeting with the customer. I am also somebody that our customers can contact alongside my Sales and Quality Assurance colleagues. I get involved when a creative material solution needs to be developed for a new project with quite specific requirements.

ESSENTIALS: What's that like in reality? Uwe Feldhoff: To start with, we sound out all the parameters that need to be taken into account, like the subsequent manufacturing process and the demands that process makes. Are we talking injection moulding or die casting? How durable and stable does the tool have to be? How complex are the planned geometries? How high are the demands made on the surface finish? Over the years we have of course come up with proven material solutions for a very wide range of applications and are always pleased to advise customers on selecting the ideal steel grades for their projects from our portfolio. To this end we also provide on-site training at customers' premises.

ESSENTIALS: Nevertheless, are there not cases when you have to develop something entirely new? Uwe Feldhoff: We always keep both ears to the ground, on the one hand listening to what customers are telling us and on the other gauging what technological progress is being made, in order to identify market

needs in good time and then meet them. Sometimes a coincidence is all it takes, if we “divert a material from its intended use”, so to speak, and give it an entirely new application.

ESSENTIALS: *How does that work out in practice?*

Uwe Feldhoff: **ESATLAS 42** is a very good example of that. Actually designed for plastic mould making, we discovered that it is also very suitable for die-casting prototype making. Given its specific properties, such as high thermal conductivity at satisfactory toughness and wear resistance, it is often superior to competitive products in terms of quality and cost effectiveness.

ESSENTIALS: *Many customers are likely to sit up and take notice of the term cost effectiveness.*

Uwe Feldhoff: Of course. Cost effectiveness is the overriding factor - industry is depressing prices in a big way. It is therefore important that R&D develops new materials to meet increasing market requirements whilst still keeping an eye on costs. Of importance to customers are not only low steel buying prices, but also all the quality factors that influence the service lives of the tools.

ESSENTIALS: *Roughly how long do you need to develop a completely new material?*

Uwe Feldhoff: From the initial idea to final inclusion in the EschmannStahl product range is a multistage process involving several hurdles that need to be overcome. First of all to develop a new product we need a good steel producer to partner with us and help us combine quality-relevant properties. Fine-tuning the material is then done in our laboratory. Once we are satisfied with the results, these materials are then trialled in a range of applications. It generally takes 18 months to 2 years to launch a new material on the market.

ESSENTIALS: *That nevertheless sounds like an exciting challenge.*

Uwe Feldhoff: It definitely is! It doesn't always have to be about developing a new material. For example, we recently added copper and bronze alloys to our portfolio. Amongst other things, these

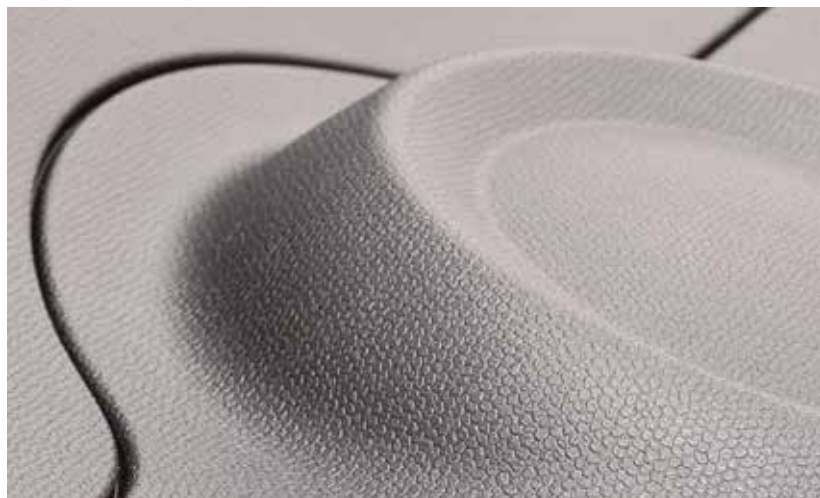
alloys enable us to significantly improve heat dissipation and therefore thermal distribution. The same applies to Moldadur surface technology. This protective coating for highly sensitive surfaces is particularly suitable for polished and textured plastic moulds.

ESSENTIALS: *Then maybe it's time for some of your customers to reconsider their choice of material?*

Uwe Feldhoff: I believe we can always find enhancement potential when we talk to our customers. That's what motivates me and my colleagues every day in particular. ■



Uwe Feldhoff also provides materials training for colleague and customers.



Custom product development: Moldadur surface protection.

Purchasing steel is so easy

Last minute order at the departure gate? By launching its new webshop last year, EschmannStahl has enabled its customers to purchase steel anytime, anywhere.

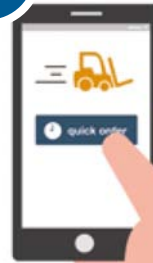
Many of EschmannStahl's customers already use this online tool, for example, to price offers as well as place and track orders. You therefore not only save time and are not tied to hours of business, but also keep long-term track of your orders. Purchase steel in just a few clicks – this is how it works!





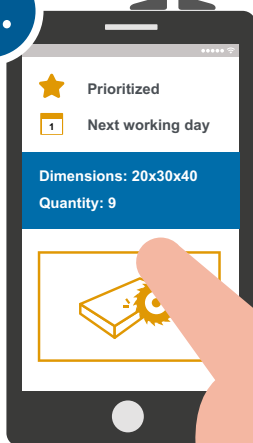
Is everything you require in the shopping cart? You check your order on the well-structured summary page once more before sending. Your order is then sent directly to our manufacturing facility.

6.



Do you require portions of your order particularly quickly? No problem. The familiar Express Delivery option is also available in our online shop.

7.



We prioritise cut-to-size steel plates that have been tagged as "Express" and deliver as early as the next working day.

8.



We will continue to provide you with personal advice should you ever require help with your order. You can contact your customer advisor either direct in the webshop or using the method you normally use.

9.

Last orders

9

By having an account, you never lose track of your orders. You will find your ordering history, certificates and the processing status of your current purchases in one central location within the webshop - all this information can be accessed at any time without involving extra effort.



That vital one percent

DMF Werkzeugbau specialises in making die-casting and injection moulding tools for automotive subcontractors. The choice of source material is also a critical factor for these technically sophisticated moulds. Many years ago the Thuringia-based company found the right partner - EschmannStahl.

The access road leading to the company site in Nohra in the Weimarer Land, which has a touch of the romantic about it in the early autumn, is a poplar-lined cobblestone avenue that is typical of this region. First signs of the large factory buildings, where to some extent thoroughly filigree tools for the automotive industry are made from heavy steel blocks, appear much further inside the U.N.O. Industrial Park. DMF Werkzeugbau specialises in developing and producing injection moulding and die-casting moulds. Vast numbers of the aluminium and plastic components that you find in engine compartments have their origins in this company employing 50 people.

Mould construction needs experts

DMF makes tools weighing up to a maximum of eight tonnes and featuring a body diagonal of 1,500 millimetres to produce components ranging from simple cable ducts and engine covers to safety-relevant bodywork components. "In the automotive industry no two plugs or jacks are alike. Air conditioning uses different ones compared to navigation systems or powered windows. And they in turn are nearly all vehicle-brand-specific. So toolmakers have enough work to be getting on with", Markus Reichardt relates with a smile. The graduate engineer heads up Product Development and Sales at DMF. "Every design engineering process begins of course with the customer enquiry. However buyers are often unfamiliar with all the key project parameters. So our job is to guide them through the development process by providing the appropriate advice. That is why we have established very close customer relationships over the years, in particular because we maintain the detailed documentation about tool specifications that our customers often lack. Our accumulated know-how gives us an important edge in the competitive global market", says Markus Reichardt.

Four experienced employees create design models and 3D drawings in the company's in-house Product Development department. Once a design has been agreed with the customer, the buyer orders the project-related cut-to-size materials from EschmannStahl. DMF was one of the first customers to use EschmannStahl's online shop straight after it was launched in June 2017. "We order almost our entire tool steel requirements via this web tool. The process is simply very practical and quick to complete", Peter Partschefeld relates. The buyer is also pleased with EschmannStahl's express service option, which delivers blanks ordered to the company in the Weimarer Land the next working day. "We too have to handle some tight timelines, for example if a prototype mould has to be developed at short notice. If anything were to go wrong during that process, we can't afford to wait too long for a replacement", Peter Partschefeld adds.

Industry 4.0 changes work processes

The production facility is structured according to individual operations. So each project-tagged steel block initially passes through the milling shop, which is equipped with state-of-the-art 3-axle and 5-axle machining centres. This is followed by precision work/application of the finishing touches all the way to assembling the moulds. "We still have several manual workstations to polish very delicate surfaces. That will of course change in the next few years as technology makes further advances, because Industry 4.0 is also gaining a foothold in our business with increasing automation and interlinkage of machinery", states Markus Reichardt during the tour of the factory. Evidence of this is the brand new automatic eroding system with robot gripper. ➔

DMF Werkzeugbau GmbH

ESTABLISHED IN:
1990

PRODUCTION SPACE:
1,300 square metres

ANNUAL SALES 2017:
4 Million Euros

HEADCOUNT:
approx. 50

CEO:
Jens Märker



• The company building of DMF
• Werkzeugbau GmbH



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Steinbrüchenstraße 10
99428 Nohra
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www.dmf-werkzeugbau.de



Precision down to the tiniest detail.

Nevertheless toolmaking still remains a craft that requires skilled, experienced engineers and focuses on reliable supplier partnerships. Premium tool steel quality is an absolute imperative for mouldmakers and has always been a key argument for staying loyal to EschmannStahl for so many years. "We require a steel that exhibits consistency. That is why EschmannStahl's **ESPRIMUS** SL special grade, which is ideal for thoroughly quenching/tempering, is of such value to us", Markus Reichardt relates. Demands made on tools used in the automotive industry have steadily increased in the past ten years. Geometries are becoming more and more complex and filigree, while accuracy requirements are increasing. Just a few percent now determine whether a component fits or has to be reworked.

Efficient steel grades are required

That doesn't always make technical implementation easy. "At the same time long service lives and a high degree of repeat accuracy at as little postprocessing requirement as possible are expected. Burrs or not easily removable sprue are both major problems for





Markus Reichardt knows what's important in mouldmaking.

subcontractors", the Head of Product Development adds. The preliminary work performed by our design engineering and production teams therefore needs to be all the more precise. And the tool steel used also needs to be all the more effective. That begins with optimum mouldability and ends with an equally high degree of polishability for even or textured surfaces of visible plastic components. "In addition to steel blocks machined on 6 sides, DMF also makes use of the vacuum-heat treatment service provided by our heat treatment shop for special tools with extremely stringent hardness requirements", says Peter Möhring, Regional Sales Manager East at EschmannStahl. Despite DMF using the online shop, the relationship with supplier EschmannStahl has still remained very personal. "I know exactly whom I need to call if I have another special case. I also obtain the in-depth advice from EschmannStahl that we in turn need to offer our customers. That's the only way it works", Peter Partschefeld emphasises as a last point. ■

A DAY WITH ...



Martin Müller: precision is his specialism

In 2014 Martin Müller took over as head of the 6-sided machining department. Here he manages and controls the work done by up to 80 employees.

When Martin Müller started in 2005 as a foreman in the non-standard steel plate manufacturing section at EschmannStahl, it machined 20 to 30 plate a day. The acquisition of new plant and equipment, such as double-headed milling machines, which facilitated simultaneous machining on two sides, caused daily output to increase eighteenfold to 450 plates a day. That was the first major change that Martin Müller got to experience and helped to shape. "When I started my training many years ago, CNC-machining was regarded as the major innovation in the industry. We now know that it was only a small step towards a much bigger and more profound revolution – Industry 4.0", Martin Müller recalls.

Coordination work is still analogue-based

He starts his day, like many heads of department at EschmannStahl by switching on his PC and catching up on what capacities have been booked for the day. Hanging opposite Müller's desk are two large flatscreens, on which he can closely monitor the current order intake situation in his department. Armed with this information, he goes to the foremen's office to coordinate orders, as well as possible bottlenecks, overbookings or specific occurrences with his colleagues. This allows circumstances that arise to be reacted to in a targeted way. ➔



Outsourcing production stages – demand for pre-machined steel is growing steadily.



The required parameter settings are keyed into the milling machines per touchscreen.



Martin Müller obtains his overview of what's happening not just at the computer but down on the shop floor direct.

Müller regards a consistent flow of information to his own team as particularly important. That's why a tour of the manufacturing facility is on the agenda after the meeting, to get an actual overview of what is happening, not just in digital format but on-site too. For example, he also shares the department's monthly performance figures with his team. "Transparent communication has gone down really well with the team. Everybody thus clearly sees from the figures that they can actively help the company to be successful. That motivates everybody, because we are after all producing something tangible and not developing something abstract in an office. Motivating my team is just as much a part of my job as costing or managing the

deployment of staff in the event of seasonally fluctuating capacity utilisation."

Customers value the preliminary work

Like many of his head-of-department colleagues at EschmannStahl, this passionate whodunnit reader has "worked his way up" from foreman and is now in charge of a fast-growing production unit. His responsibilities have for a long time not just included departmental organisation and process optimisation, but have extended way beyond these issues.

Martin Müller also got involved in creating a system of values aimed at continuously improving the working atmosphere. He regards respect and honesty towards

employees and at managerial level as absolutely key. "That's the only way to ensure that the value-adding activities that we perform here every day have the impact they are supposed to – be just as reliable as EschmannStahl customers have come to expect from us." Explicit structures and effective departmental organisation are other components of his work that he rates highly. "That's because automation notwithstanding, what ultimately matters are the people behind it", says the head of department in summary and says goodbye as he heads for a coordination meeting with foreman Alexander Arendt. ■

IN BRIEF

Assuming social responsibility



The Landschaftsverband Rheinland (LVR) honours EschmannStahl for its exemplary company (re)integration management system.

Giving employees on long-term sick leave and people with disabilities career perspectives again - Eschmann Stahl as an employer also looks after people, who quickly get left behind on the employment market. In June Angelika Korff, EschmannStahl's BEM Officer, accepted the Landschaftsverband Rheinland's (LVR) Sponsorship Award worth 10,000 Euros for its exemplary company (re)integration management system (German acronym: BEM) on behalf of the entire BEM team.

Transparency of the (re)integration process and internal communication were particularly commended by the jury.

"Assuming responsibility is part of our corporate culture and by that we also mean social responsibility. We are very grateful to our BEM Officer and her team and are really delighted to win the award. The prize money will of course be used for a specific purpose and help us to establish our health management system", Markus Krepschik,

CEO of EschmannStahl, promises. The work done by the BEM team makes reintegrating employees on long-term sick leave back into regular work processes considerably easier. That is also a reason why the proportion of employees with severe disabilities at EschmannStahl clearly exceeds statutory requirements. ■

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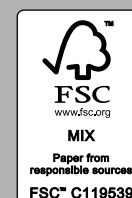
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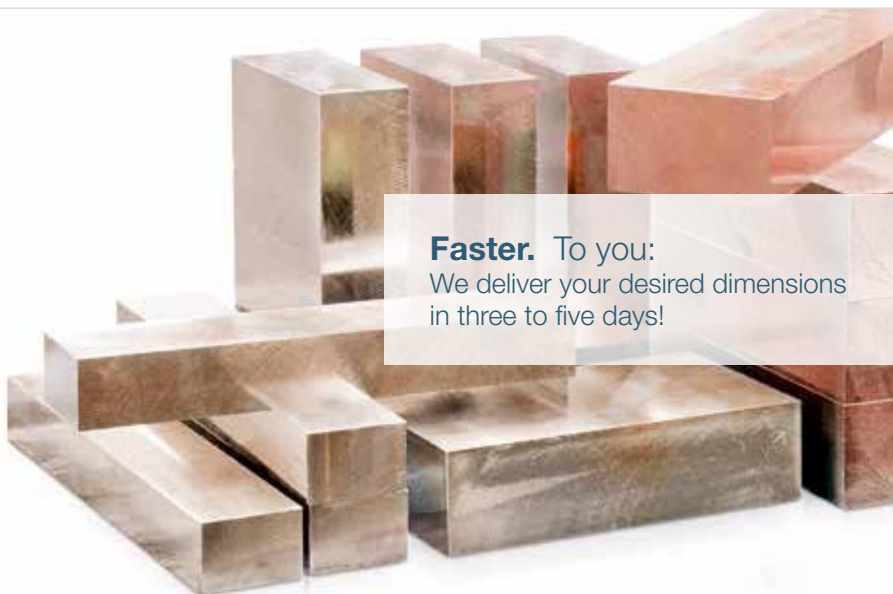
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