

A short process: supplier, service and customer

The added-value project

German cars enjoy global success – but the auto industry is also securing jobs and income in many other countries. One of the factors behind this success is the close, highly efficient collaboration between all the players in the process chain. A project by our partner the Schaeffler Group, the renowned manufacturer of clutch and gearbox systems, which uses the ThyssenKrupp Steel Service Center and ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe as a supplier of its raw materials, shows just how closely interwoven these processes have now become.

Steel in cars. The Schaeffler Group works closely with the ThyssenKrupp Steel Service Center and ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe for the production of clutch and gearbox systems.



“The dual-clutch gearbox certainly makes auto fans sit up and pay attention because it takes fast, convenient and energy-saving gearshifts to a new level,” says Gerd Reit, Manager Central Purchasing Production Material Flat Products at the Schaeffler Group, by way of introduction to his company’s range of services. “But it’s not just for these star technical products that we need good quality materials. Put bluntly, components, modules and systems from Schaeffler are used in one out of every three automobiles in the world.” It is easy to imagine that in view of these production figures, a massive volume of steel is required. The main plant in Bühl in Baden – where the clutch for the VW Beetle was created decades ago – purchases several hundred tons of flat steel every working day, equivalent on average to around 30 truckloads.

High-quality strip steel from ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe is needed for a wide range of applications. Reither: “We live the zero defects philosophy. That means that every single product we supply has precisely the defined quality that the automotive manufacturers demand from us. But that also means that our suppliers have exactly the same demands. We issue our own specifications that they must satisfy.” But is not just for that reason that hot strip from Duisburg is in demand. One of the main quality criteria is also having a reliable supply chain. After all, not all steel is the same and everyday production requires a wide range of different grades and thicknesses. “Overall, we supply around 200 product versions to Schaeffler, including material thicknesses of up to 9 millimeters, which is unusual for hot strip. This full range has made us a partner who is providing more and more support for Schaeffler to pursue its successful formula,” is how Guido Arimont, the Key Account Manager at the ThyssenKrupp Steel Service Center in

Krefeld, describes the collaborative relationship that has been developing over a number of years.

Flexibility and fail-safe service are particularly in demand. The punching operation alone at Schaeffler LuK at the Bühl site covers an enormous production area of more than 21,000 square meters. And the production lines for punching and forming must operate efficiently and smoothly, since costs are an increasingly critical focal point, and the company has to ensure that it runs a competitive site. With this in mind, the partners are trying a new approach together. With the name “Vendor Managed Inventory”, responsibility for material management has been shifted away somewhat from the manufacturer and onto the supplier. The focal point of this is a joint, SAP-based system that knows the demands of LuK production and tailors supplies precisely to them. “That means that we immediately know what is required, in what quantities and when. On the basis of a range of parameters, we fill our local warehouse of our own accord. LuK does not have to place a purchase order, but simply has to take what is needed,” says David Christian Heck from the Sales Team at the Steel Service Center describes this individual service.

This consignment warehouse is stocked by our forwarding partner Hartmann and is located near Bühl. Thanks to this supply chain, LuK can use the warehousing space that is freed up for other purposes – a particular advantage because the company is expanding. Thomas Wölk, responsible for Business Development at the Steel Service Center explains: “The whole thing creates a clear picture of how our added-value services work. Simply by reducing stock volumes, we can reduce costs. We no longer need a certain buffer because the supplier and consignee normally make plans to-

gether to rule out the possibility of bottlenecks.” At the raw material manufacturer, ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe in Duisburg, the improved processes have also been embraced. Technical Customer Adviser Carsten Jansen explains, “We also want to be able to plan and control our production as far ahead as possible. You have to remember that each type of steel must be produced in batches weighing 250 tons or more. That imposes limits on our flexibility. So, the sooner we know which type is required, the better for us.” This has meant that the good relations between the long-term partners have improved even more. “From our point of view it is more than just a regional logistics concept. We need materials globally, in Europe as well as at our other sites around the world, for example, in South Africa and China. We need the materials to be supplied reliably and in the high uniform quality we require. And for an innovative company like ours, innovative expertise is always welcome. ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe knows its material and its development status better than others,” continues Gerd Reither in describing the effects of the deepening customer ties.

There is one more thing that both partners are delighted with. “You could say it is a win-win situation,” says Reither, “because what benefits the Schaeffler Group and its partners at ThyssenKrupp also benefits the environment. In fact, this concept saves enormous quantities of CO₂.” In the past, the flexibility of truck freight was essential for ensuring continuous supplies, but now it is possible to use railway freight. Gerd Reither continues, “We are consciously switching traffic from road to rail.”

Wolfgang Kessler, freelance journalist

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