

BIKE & E-BIKE MARKET

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▲ Humpert management team are happy to celebrate the company's 100th anniversary.

Humpert: Innovation for Generations

Text & Photos: Editorial Dept.

In 2018, German handlebar manufacturer, Wilhelm Humpert GmbH & Co. KG celebrated the 100th anniversary of its founding. From its original factory in the small town of Wickede established by Wilhelm Humpert I in 1918, the family-owned company has grown steadily in a century of successful innovation in the product areas of tube processing, surface technology and bicycle and motorcycle parts.



▲ Humpert President, Willi Humpert, is knowledgeable, forward-looking and courageous.

The Humpert Group is currently jointly-managed by the 4th generation of the Humpert family to be involved in the business, Wilhelm Humpert IV and Ralf Humpert. Today, the company is the largest handlebar manufacturer still located in Europe, and employs a total of over 125 people in four locations worldwide. With an annual turnover for the group of approximately €30 million, the company's main markets are its native Germany and the surrounding countries of Benelux, Poland, Bulgaria, Austria and Switzerland.

A large part of Humpert's longevity and success comes down to its family-orientated philosophy "We are really like a family." stressed current General Manager, Wilhelm Humpert IV, "We are very close to each other and very friendly. We try to be very social to our workers. I know every worker and they know me. There is no distance between the management and the worker. When a worker has a problem, we always try to help him solve it. Additionally, we try to be very innovative and to look five years ahead."

Company expansion

Humpert's main factory is still located in Wickede, Germany and produces about 1.5 million steel and alloy handlebars annually. In 2001, an R & D center was opened in Fellbach near Stuttgart to develop and

implement not only the company's own product ideas, but also external, third-party product development contracts to do with bicycles.

In 2002, Humpert Asia was founded in Taichung, Taiwan to coordinate purchasing activities and provide on-site quality monitoring for products purchased in Asia. And then, at the beginning of 2005, a new galvanizing plant was built and brought into operation in Iserlohn, Germany in order to expand the production capacities in the segment of surface finishing under contract. Crucially, these chrome-plating facilities give Humpert the advantage that they can produce items outside the bicycle industry, which can be very helpful in providing a source of revenue from other industries. "We make the chroming for the headrests for Porsche, Mercedes and Volkswagen. Everyday we make 30,000 headrests for automobiles. This is our insurance for the bike industry." Currently, one third of Humpert's sales are for products outside the bicycle industry.

Automated Production

Humpert has over 1000 different designs of handlebars, and this is the company's main



▲ Humpert President, Willi Humpert, gave a souvenir to the main shareholders of Humpert Asia. On the right is Accord President, Jeff Chang-Liaw and on the left is Humpert Asia General Manager, Jacky Wang.

sales item. The reason for such a large quantity of handlebar designs is that each OE customer has its own design with maybe one model being 1cm longer or a requiring a different color or a different bending. Humpert are able to keep costs relatively low for German production by making everything automatically. "The only production step where a worker puts a handlebar in his hand is to put it in the chrome-plating machine. Cutting, extruding, and bending are all completed 100% automatically. This has enabled Humpert to survive with small quantity (compared to Asian) quantities," explains Wilhelm Humpert IV, "We are still very happy to say that we are a producer and not only a trading company. We can say we have both 'Made in Germany' products, and 'German-Engineered' products."

Humpert Asia

In addition to its German production, Humpert also import products from Asia. This first

started in 1992 with the company importing some small parts such as nuts or standard stems. The slow start enabled the company to get a feel for doing business. When current Wilhelm Humpert IV took over in 1998, he decided to halt German manufacturing of stems and seatposts and instead bought all of this from Asia resulting in a dramatic increase in turnover in Asian business. By 2002, this had grown to such an extent that a decision was made to establish Humpert Asia under the management of Jackie Wang. "At that time we didn't know Jackie very well. However, when we met at Milan show, we connected straight away." notes Wilhelm Humpert "Later when we found out that Jackie had just left his old job, I had no hesitation in seeking him out to found and head up our Humpert Asia office."

The Ergotec brand

Since taking over the helm at Humpert 20 years ago, Wilhelm IV has brought many changes to the firm, not least of which was the introduction of the Ergotec brand 10 years ago. Ergotec was created to be a brand for the aftermarket sales market of the group's high end products, and focuses primarily on the three contact points between rider and bicycle – pedals, handlebars and seatposts. The Ergotec brand has rapidly gained popularity for its quality and innovation which has stood it in good stead as e-



▲ Humpert Germany.



▲ Automated tube-bending equipment.



▲ Testing equipment at Humpert's factory.

bikes have become more and more popular in Europe, and many e-bike manufacturers are choosing Humpert products for their e-bikes. Currently, Humpert works with nearly all of the 5000 dealers in Germany, either through wholesalers or through buying groups like ZEG or Biko.

Booming e-bike sales

This year sales have increased by 10% over last year, this is primarily due to increased e-bike sales. Wilhelm IV believes that about 50% of Humpert's handlebar are destined for e-bike use. In fact, the e-bike market has developed so rapidly in Europe that it as well as providing revenue, it also provides pressure for the company to develop and introduce new items quickly year-by-year. "The pressure to deliver in quick time is very hard, and as a small company we must learn to increase our R&D office step-by-step, to find the right suppliers for exclusive items in Asia,"

noted Wilhelm IV noted that "The biggest challenge right now is to have the right products, in the best quality, with a very quick delivery time, and for the best price."

An 11-year plan

Wilhelm Humpert IV is a firm believer in planning for the future. When he first started at the company he had a five-year-plan which involved stopping stem and seatpost production, opening an R&D office, open our own trading company. Year by year that plan has been put into action. With an eye on future retirement when he reaches the age of 66, the current general manager also has a vision for how he sees the company in 11 years from now. "By 2029, I think we will have our own production facilities in Asia, possibly in Vietnam, and that we will have a very big R&D office in Asia and one more in Germany. This is my vision and goal for what I'd like to achieve before retiring." 