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SPECIAL PRINT

Sustainable into the future

An interview with Stephan Berger and Henrik Schepler, managing directors of Carl Friederichs, Frankfurt, on the development of the company from a designer of horse-drawn carriages to becoming a renowned body maker and vehicle manufacturer.

Photos: Carl Friederichs



Stephan Berger (l.) and Henrik Schepler (r.), managing directors of Carl Friederichs.

Further details

The Ökoprofit programme for improving corporate environmental protection helps companies and municipalities to optimise their consumption of resources, increase their energy efficiency, and to reduce their operating costs.

Ökoprofit is a cooperation project involving the Frankfurt city authorities and the local economy, which is supported by, among other bodies, the Frankfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

www.frankfurt.de/ökoprofit

Mr. Schepler, the company originally made a name for itself building magnificent carriages, today you are one of the world's leading vehicle and body-making companies. How did it happen?

Schepler: The origins of our company date back to 1840, when Heinrich Friederichs established a workshop in Frankfurt's city centre specialising in building elaborately designed horse-drawn carriages. With the invention of the automobile, the company increasingly focused on constructing high-quality bodies for car makers such as Maybach and Packard. In the Twenties, due to the increasing adoption of production assembly lines the attention was switched to constructing and repairing commercial

and special vehicles. Today, we have two locations in Frankfurt, over 120 employees, and we export worldwide. We are well-known for our special armoured bodies, armoured trucks for transporting cash and valuable goods, as well as emergency vehicles.

Mr. Berger, how did you manage to navigate such a traditional company into the present?

Berger: Our unique selling point is the combination of the special vehicle construction and repair business sectors. This gives us two mainstays. We possess special know-how in the field of special protection, that is armouring, which puts us in a very good position.

A wealth of expertise and handicraft skills has been passed down over the generations. However, tradition alone is not enough. Listening to the market and keeping up with the times have also contributed to our company's success.

Schepler: Other crucial success factors are our size and social interaction. We are big enough to handle large orders, but not too big that we can't live from small orders. Most of our employees have been trained in-house, something we are particularly proud of.

How did Carl Friederichs survive the various crises and wars?



Schepler: We are fortunate that the Friederichs family has guided the company through all the crises with a watchful eye. This has been achieved through financial reserves and sustainable management.

Berger: To this day we pursue a conservative strategy in which steady growth is an important factor for us. Business deals don't have to be made at all costs. Nevertheless, crises are a good occasion to pause and rethink certain things.

And how is the Covid pandemic affecting you?

Schepler: Before the pandemic, we travelled a lot and there were many face-to-face meetings. It is now normal to hold video conferences. When the pandemic became serious last March, we quickly purchased laptops to enable many employees to work from home. A hygiene plan was developed for the employees on site and shift operations were introduced wherever possible. So far, we have come through the crisis quite well.

You play a pioneering role not only with your technical expertise, but also where the environment is concerned. What environmental protection activities do you carry out?

Berger: Sustainability has always been very important to the company. To-

day, we have ISO certification, participate on the City of Frankfurt's Öko-profit programme, and are a founding member of the Fechenheim-Nord/Seckbach Sustainable Industrial Park. Within the framework of these networks, we can discuss energy-saving measures with representatives from other companies. Since 2015, in total we have saved 255 tons of CO₂ by refurbishing rooftops, converting to LED lighting, and centralising the compressed air supply in the production halls. We also try to integrate our employees in the environmental protection measures by providing them with work bikes, for example.

What is the future course for Carl Friederichs?

Berger: Our goal is to remain economically successful, to secure jobs, and to satisfy our customers by developing state-of-the-art technology. We have not yet come to the end of our efforts where sustainability is concerned either. For example, we want to install more electrical charging points on the company premises. Additionally, we would like to build a new energy-efficient hall complex for the special vehicle construction division on the neighbouring site. We are not afraid to invest in the future. It is important for us to continue putting our foot down by identifying and serving market gaps.



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