

Keeping up with demand

Christoph Kleiner took over from Hans-Georg Frey as managing director of sales and marketing for Liebherr Echingen late last year. Cranes&Access' Alexander Ochs travelled to Echingen to meet and talk to the four man senior management team and see the new facility currently under construction.

Now in its fourth year of consecutive growth, Liebherr Echingen built more than 1,600 cranes last year and chalked up €1.3 billion of revenues. This year, the manufacturer is targeting an increase of 15 percent and will exceed 1,800 units. With compound annual growth averaging more than 15 percent over the past few years and lead times now extending into 2010 for particular models, Christoph Kleiner, the new managing director says he is very conscious of the need to expand the company's resources.

"I am the new one of the four here," he says with a laugh. The 42 year old joined Liebherr last November, replacing Hans-Georg Frey with responsibility for the sales and service of Liebherr Echingen products.

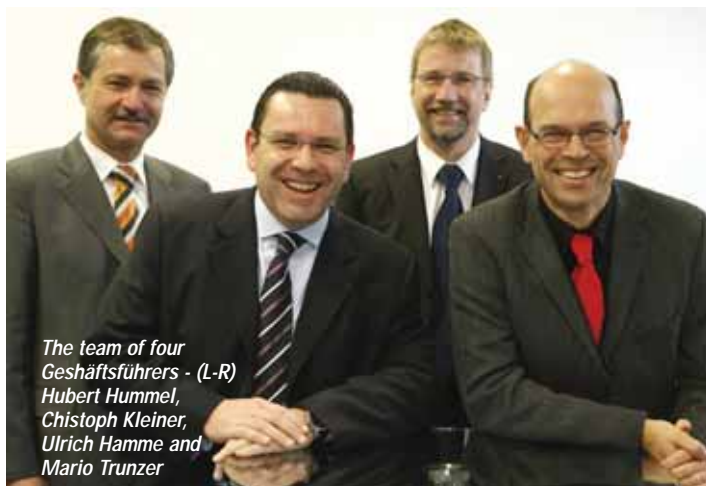
Liebherr claims a dominant position in the All Terrain market with a world market share of 43 percent. With major construction projects and investments in energy generation at all-time highs, demand for mobile cranes looks very positive well into the future.

So if the company is to maintain its market share, expansion is vital. Large cranes, particularly big crawlers are also benefiting from the same growth trends creating strong long-term demand.

"The level of our order backlog is exceptionally high with 2008 and 2009 almost completely full," said Mario Trunzer another of the four-man senior team, "and with delivery times of April 2010 for some crane models, that takes us up to the next Bauma show."

The Echingen team says that it is doing all it can to eliminate production bottlenecks. A new ultra-modern small-parts warehouse has been opened and 131 new employees in Echingen have been added to help staff it. Liebherr has also implemented a medium-term 24 month programme to expand the premises and production capacity.

At the end of the year a new production hall for crawler cranes will be finished. According to Hubert Hummel, managing director responsible for production, this will provide a production line manufacturing process for the big machines.



The team of four Geschäftsführers - (L-R) Hubert Hummel, Christoph Kleiner, Ulrich Hamme and Mario Trunzer

The new large crawler crane production line will be completed later this year



Liebherr's stand at Conexpo with the LR1300 and LR1600/2



The Echingen facility is one of the most modern crane plants in the world

In spite of capacity bottlenecks, Liebherr is continuing to expand its current, 35 model crane product line.

"The company is planning a significant expansion of its larger crane range," said Ulrich Hamme. "One such development is the matching of the superstructure from the 1,200 tonne LTM 11200 All Terrain crane with a narrow track crawler chassis. Another is the new 350 tonne, six axle All Terrain crane, the LTM 1350-6,1. The company is also introducing an MK 88, which is targeted to compete with the four-axle Spierings."

Liebherr has already shipped its first 600 tonne LR 1600/2 in narrow track format. The new model was one of the main attractions on the company's stand at Conexpo. The next big crane will extend the top end of the company's crawler crane

line, currently headed by the 1,350 tonne LR11350, with a maximum capacity in the 2,000 tonne plus range. The new LRXXL crawler, as it is dubbed, is likely to be an all-new conventional design with strong capacity charts, but is also likely to extend the current maximum boom/jib combinations for this size of crane. The plan is to unveil the massive machine at the next Bauma in April 2010.

"The crane business, has traditionally been cyclical, but it currently appears to have moved away from its traditional cycle," said Kleiner. "We currently cannot see any potential downturn in worldwide demand until at least well after 2010. There is only one thing that mars the current optimism and that is the fact that we are bound to disappoint customers with the current delivery times."

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