

German die maker defies the crisis

The decision to expand its portfolio to include production and machining of prototypes was the right choice at the right time, say Schaufler Tooling

Like many others the German die maker says it was taken by surprise by the worldwide economic crisis. Companies with links to the automotive industry were hit particularly hard, the recession striking with such a magnitude that it was difficult to predict and prepare for.

Schaufler will therefore be increasingly tested for its capabilities, technological, personnel and organisational drive to get through this difficult time.

The crisis has arrived at Schaufler Tooling, despite the fact that the 130-employee company ranks in the top ten for diecasting dies used in the light-metal diecasting industry.

"We have to absorb the impact in the maintenance and service area in particular," said Siegfried Heinrich, president of Schaufler Tooling, "as in times like these customers can pull that work in-house to keep their own employees

working." At the same time he says, "Schaufler Tooling made the decision two years ago to expand the portfolio of services and that is going to help us through this time."

Expansion of the process chain

The company's range involves manufacturing diecasting dies for high-volume production, from engineering to sampling and casting of small production volumes in the in-house diecasting center. This has now been expanded to incorporate the capability of providing complete prototypes.

Schaufler Tooling delivers the initial complete milled aluminium prototypes, typically at first sand-cast at partner foundries. For the sand casting prototypes, the company takes over the complete machining and project management starting at CAD and going through each stage to customer delivery. Subsequently it builds the prototype dies for larger volume prototype parts, which are in turn produced in its in-house diecasting facility.

In the in-house Die Casting Center Laichingen, a joint venture between Schaufler Tooling and Bühler Druckguss AG in Uzwil, Switzerland, operates a diecasting

cell with a real-time controlled Bühler Evolution 420 D machine.

Over the years, Schaufler Tooling has expanded its prototype and machining knowledge and, according to Siegfried Heinrich, "we have emphasised this business segment through added investments."

Examples of projects include:

- A prototype instrument panel, the scope comprising building of a prototype die, the casting of two times 50 parts and complete machining of all parts.
- Two prototype dies for structural automotive parts, which was accomplished within a very short time frame.

Investing in the future

For the machining of prototypes, the company has invested in an additional 5-axis milling centre to support the short lead-time for producing the prototypes. In addition, a new gun-drilling machine has been added to support the manufacturing of large dies needed to produce body and structural parts for the automotive sector.

"We are seeing an increased trend that the debate and demand for greener cars is not going to be limited to luxury cars", says Siegfried Heinrich. "We are therefore now in the position to also offer customers new and innovative parts in stages from prototypes to production-ready dies."

The management of Schaufler Tooling says it is confident that the company will not only survive the crisis, but also emerge stronger than before.

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