

„We are the Valve Experts – since 150 Years“

VAG GmbH is one of the world's leading manufacturers and suppliers of valves, which are primarily used in the water and wastewater sector. This year, the company is celebrating its 150th anniversary. The world's leading trade fair for the industry, IFAT, which takes place in Munich from May 30 to June 3, is of course a fitting prelude to the celebrations planned by the Mannheim-based company. The trade journal *Industriearmaturen* spoke to Marcel Ern , Head of Global Marketing and Pricing, about the recipe for success for the company's long history and the trade fair highlights that will be on show in Munich.

Mr. Ern , VAG is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. I was recently able to admire VAG valves in the Hagen Open-Air Museum that were manufactured almost 100 years ago and are still in use. Isn't it a model that is damaging to business to manufacture products that don't break?

Marcel Ern : That's what you may think. However, we are operating in an absolutely sensitive area when it comes to water supply. Because what flows through our valves? Water,

especially drinking water, the number one resource we all need to live. Therefore, the quality of the products used here cannot be high enough. And that is also our aim, to satisfy the customer, and we do this by fulfilling their main desire for reliability.

Added value for customers is also essential:

Our valves are often installed underground, and who wants to excavate the major road junction to just service a valve?

Doesn't that contradict the idea of developing products further and striving for innovation?

Marcel Ern : No, absolutely not. The valves in your example certainly don't look like our current products, which can do much more today than their predecessors. The fact that we have supplied the customer with reliable and safe products means that we also have a mandate to continue to do so and to do so with constantly improving products. So it may well be that a young person uses one of our valves at the start of their career in a waterworks and it is still working reliably when they retire. However, this is only possible because we are constantly developing without compromising the core function, indeed the main task, of the valve.

Can you explain this process to us a little?

Marcel Ern : With pleasure. Take the issue of avoiding cavitation, for example. A valve, regardless of whether it is used for control or shut-off, only works properly if it is optimally designed. However, the instructions that help us do this today are much faster and more accurate than those of the past. This includes state-of-the-art simulation software and the use of sensor data. We want to support our customers as true experts in the field of valves. So we are not just manufacturers, but above all valve experts. You can see this very clearly in our trade fair innovation, the VAG NOVA NIRO 365 above-ground hydrant...



...how?

Marcel Erné: Well, first and foremost, the NOVA NIRO 365 is a hydrant that does what it is supposed to do: Namely to provide water quickly and reliably when needed. But now the innovation is here, and hence the not entirely unimportant addition 365 in the product name: thanks to a genuine innovation in the design, our hydrant is absolutely maintenance-free. After all, if a hydrant that is closed for 99 percent of its life fails to supply water in an emergency, it can cost lives. That won't happen to you with the NOVA NIRO 365. The product therefore underlines our claim to reliability.

Your second message, which you also want to proclaim in Munich, is not only reliability but also sustainability. What ideas or even products are coming from VAG in this regard?

Marcel Erné: Here, too, I can give you a good example, which is also a trade fair highlight: our EKN® butterfly valve from the H series, which has a CO₂ saving potential of up to 59 percent compared to a conventional butterfly valve thanks to its special and patented geometry. Assuming the butterfly valve is used for 30 years, this would mean saving the amount of CO₂ that a diesel car would consume if it were to drive 3.3 times from the earth to the moon. However, such further developments of our products are only possible because we never neglect the basic function of our products. The EKN® H is therefore our new standard in this segment.



Picture: Large butterfly valve being transported to the site

ABOUT THE COMPANY

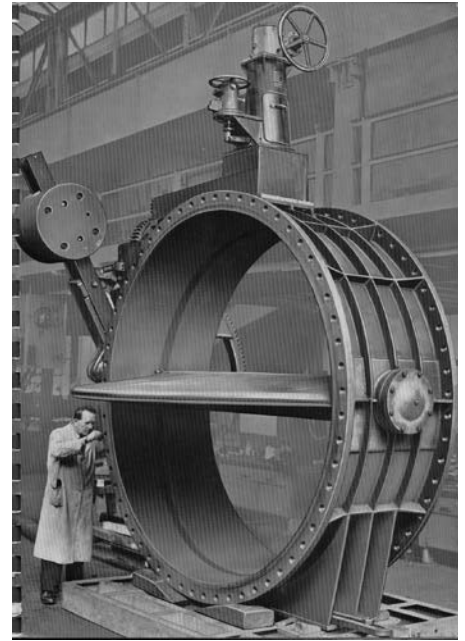
VAG is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. In 1872, Carl Reuther and Carl Bopp founded the company Bopp & Reuther oHG, Maschinenfabrik, Eisen- und Messinggießerei for the production of valves for water, gas, steam and the manufacture of pumps. The first workshop was built in Mannheim's Neckarstadt district and equipped with machines from the Boehringer machine tool factory around 1890 when Carl Reuther's son-in-law, Otto Boehringer, joined the company.

In 1925, Bopp & Reuther and other companies became a joint sales company, the "Vereinigte Armaturen Gesellschaft mbH" (United Valve Corporation) - VAG.

Gradually, the portfolio developed into a comprehensive range of valves for pumping, treating, storing and distributing water. The specialist factory for pumps and heavy-duty valves founded in the industrial city of Mannheim in 1872 had become a globally active company with over 1,200 employees worldwide. VAG valves are used in dams, reservoirs, waterworks, drinking water networks and sewage systems - wherever reliable and durable operating and regulating mechanisms are essential. VAG has six production sites on four continents and numerous foreign representatives around the world.



Picture: Butterfly valves in the factory hall, today...



... and in the past.

Nowadays, many manufacturers are trying to offer their customers added value, which they want to achieve with the help of digitalization. How do you see this development?

Marcel Ern : We at VAG are also working on the topic of digitalization. For example, our intelligent DUOJET®-I air valve uses wireless technology to monitor, assess and transmit all operating states of a pipeline, which can provide information about the entire pipeline network. The corresponding software platform then helps to locate possible leaks more quickly and precisely. We recently installed over 300 of these smart valves for the Winter Olympics in China. Against the current context of climate change, water shortages and therefore leaks are also a serious problem in some regions of Germany, and our products can help.

That sounds like a kind of triad of the keywords safety/reliability, sustainability and smart, digital solutions?

Marcel Ern : That's right. You can also find this triad of our topics on our brand new, specially created anniversary website at www.vag-150.com. We are constantly developing and working on new products and solutions, including in the field of digitalization, such as pipe network monitoring using ultrasound or in our own test laboratories, where we work on new ideas together with our customers.

In general, however, it should also be noted that the demand for such "smart" solutions is still very unspecific and that there are very different local requirements. After all, our products are used in everything from small, Bavarian municipal water management associations to mega dams in South America with butterfly valves up to DN 4000.

A wide range. At what point do you start using your products? That doesn't sound like a pure catalog business...

Marcel Ern : That's right. I would say the ratio is about the same. Of course, there are valves that are just to find in the catalog and can be delivered quickly and easily. For example, when the municipal utility company has to excavate the street and a new valve needs to be installed. On the other hand, there are also a large number of projects where we get involved in the planning at an extremely early stage because they are truly custom-made products. Thanks to our extensive experience, we have a large and close network of planners, engineering offices and other decision-makers with whom we always work closely. And that is very helpful, because in principle every valve has to be designed differently, depending on the application. But that's been our daily business for 150 years (laughs).

A long time: from the founding of the company in Mannheim in 1872, a few years later the invention of the car, also in

Mannheim, through two world wars, not to forget the invention of the Internet. And VAG still builds products and is still represented on the market.

Marcel Ern : You've forgotten the corona pandemic. No, seriously: We are rightly proud of our company's history and are pleased that we are still able to supply our products after such a long time and are part of our customers' success. And when could be a better time to celebrate with our customers and partners than at IFAT, which in a way is also the first trade fair since coronavirus.

What activities have you planned for this?

Marcel Ern : Of course, we will be presenting our new products, which have a completely different effect at a trade fair stand in physical form than in a video call. We

also want to celebrate our anniversary with all our customers. We have planned some activities for this, but they will remain a surprise. So you can look forward to seeing us at our stand 451/550 in hall C2. We look forward to welcoming all visitors.

Thank you for the interview.



The headquarters of VAG GmbH at Carl-Reuther-Str. 1 today and the view of the Bopp & Reuther factory premises around 1892.

