

BHTC – New Approaches in Design and Climate Comfort

Rapid growth in the internationalization of the company's operations

Interview with Norbert Gruber, Friedrich Waldeyer and Josef Schriek, Managing Directors of BHTC

How did you become the first supplier to introduce the energy-saving button for air-conditioning systems?

We simply took our climate comfort approach a logical step further with the intention to stimulate new concepts. We would like to see a change in thinking that will result in the performance of climate control systems in car tests not being judged primarily on how quickly they can cool an overheated car interior. Vehicle air-conditioning systems can also make a contribution to climate protection, and can do so without any loss in well being for the car's occupants – that was the challenge for our engineers. The energy required to establish the desired level of climate comfort should be delivered at just the right amount at the moment it is needed. And that's precisely what our new regulating software does: it saves energy without dispensing with the level of performance needed for safe driving and the comfort of a pleasant climate.

How will climate protection affect your future plans?

It will affect our climate control systems in a variety of ways. When manufacturers develop other energy sources for cars, then that will have an impact on us, too. Whether we're talking about hybrid or fuel cell, the coolant R744 or a different one – we at BHTC are already working with the manufacturers on developing prototypes and test programs with all versions.

What will be the key areas of focus in your portfolio in the years ahead?

The main area in the future will remain intuitive operation and surface design, in other words the further optimization of the human-machine interface. It's a field in which we work very closely with ergonomics and perception researchers and incorporate the results of their studies into our current product developments. This results in new visual forms, for example, to provide a simple presentation of climate control settings that provide the driver with the information he requires clearly and immediately, so that he can concentrate on driving the car. Equally as important is the customization of the user interface so that material, design, touch and acoustics optimally support the individual character of the specific model, and in some cases to a significant degree.

What kind of plans does BHTC have for the near future?

We are currently continuing our process of internationalization, which is already in a fairly advanced stage of development. In India and China, for example, we have set up our own production facilities. These markets are already developed to such an extent locally and regionally that it makes sense to produce on the spot. In a global context, the focus in India is on the experience available in the fields of components and mechanical engineering, whereas in China we are concentrating more on electrics and electronics, because China is technically already at a more advanced stage of development than India. We are moving forward with internationalization because we want to be close to our customers wherever they happen to be worldwide. This is also why we are in the process right now of founding a company in Japan.

Why Japan? How important is the country for BHTC in a global context?

We see our BHTC Japan KK development and sales office in Tokyo as an added strategic advantage: Japan will be our bridgehead for our Europe-Asia business and the Asian market. Many of the global car manufacturer partnerships, such as Nissan-Renault and Mazda-Ford, operate from Tokyo, and Toyota, ultimately the world's largest automotive group, is headquartered here, too. A local presence simplifies access to the market. However, we are not continuing our process of internationalization as a matter of principle, but only with our customers and/or partners. Internationalization makes our group of companies stronger and further optimizes our competition position. It is not an end in itself.

What does internationalization mean for the Lippstadt location?

First and foremost it means shared workload and job security. In Lippstadt, we will continue to concentrate on strategic and operational development work; this is where we develop the climate control concepts of tomorrow and the day after. In an international context, we are able to offer our customers low-cost locations in India and China, and at the same time our entire group of companies benefits from the engineering expertise available in Lippstadt, just as it does from the high-quality production. Lippstadt headquarters is also where we continue to improve our competence in the design of surfaces in terms of the interplay between material, ergonomics, design, touch, acoustics and intuitive operation combined with thermodynamic competence in climate comfort. Our customers benefit from the centrally controlled cooperation with global suppliers.

What corporate and market development do you expect?

There is no doubt that China and India are currently and also in the long term the most dynamic markets. They have enormous potential. In Eastern Europe, we also expect to see significant developments in the mid-term. BHTC continues to expect dynamic and above average growth, since climate control systems in the rapidly growing markets of Asia, but also in Europe and USA, remain in high demand. A car with no air conditioning is difficult to sell these days; on the other hand, the quality of the climate control system is increasingly a distinctive feature for OEMs. We therefore expect to see more orders in all areas.

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