

CUSTOMER CASE

SFS intec



Mikron Multifactor



Mikron Multistar CX-24



Mikron VX-10



An enduring partnership

Precision formed components from SFS intec are in demand. Above all in the automotive industry. For braking systems for instance. The Swiss high-tech company uses Mikron transfer machines for its production operations. A visit to a long-standing customer.

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The municipality of Heerbrugg is located where the Rhine flows into Lake Constance and Switzerland shares a border with Austria and Germany. Industrial history was written here: In the 19th century, a local brickworks developed a pioneering new production process. At the beginning of the 20th century, Heerbrugg became known as home to companies in the precision mechanics and optics sectors. Heerbrugg is still well-known today. Largely thanks to one of the biggest employers in the region: SFS intec.

Steady growth

SFS intec is big, very big. This is confirmed not only by the headcount – more than 8,000 employees worldwide, including 1,400 in Heerbrugg – but also by taking an aerial view of the Heerbrugg site, the company headquarters. Standing on an area as large as eight soccer fields are various buildings of different ages and appearance, bearing witness to the steady growth enjoyed by the company since it was founded in 1928.

Under very high pressure

Meticulously arranged in rows and marked off by yellow lines on the floor, close on 100 machines in the pressing plant hall produce 80 to 400 components per minute and machine,

while creating an impressive volume of sound. In two to six stages, the machines form wires of 0.5 to 30 mm thickness into components – under very high pressure (up to 350 tonnes) and with no loss of material. The wire raw material is fed in at room temperature. This process is called cold forming. The formed components produced in this manner are then conveyed on for secondary machining.

“Versatility, very high cycle times and extreme reliability whatever material is being fed in: For me these are the advantages that Mikron machines offer.”

Roger Vauthier, Operator

Metal-cutting with Mikron

Things are much quieter here, and it smells of machine oil. The machines in the secondary machining operations hall are much more compact than the ones used for cold forming. The

arrangement of machines is no different: Everything is calculated down to the millimeter, and all small parts and tools have their own fixed place. “Here at SFS intec, when we talk of secondary machining operations, we mean all types of precision metal-cutting, such as milling, drilling and turning,” explains Harald Aspek. The 52-year-old operator is setting up a Mikron Multistar for the finishing of pressed blanks for the automotive industry. “We’ve had this Multistar for 13 years – I know it inside out,” adds Harald Aspek. SFS intec has been using Mikron machines (among others) for precision metal-cutting for over 30 years. Worldwide, there are currently a total of more than 30 machines in operation. Mechanical transfer machines – i.e. older Multifactor and Multistar models – account for the biggest share. The newest additions are CNC-controlled Mikron VX-10s.

Precise and fast

A journey by heavy load lift to the warehouse, where driverless forklifts are doing their rounds, and a short walk across the site road



“You can tell that Mikron’s machines and tools come from a single source,” says operator Peter Traovic.



SFS intec produces up to five million parts a year on a Mikron machine.



“The sales team at Mikron understands me”

Werner Ryser, head technician for secondary machining operations

Werner Ryser (51) is the head technician for secondary machining operations. He plays a key role when it comes to finding the right machine for the right product.

“I usually ask two or three suppliers for an offer,” explains Werner Ryser, who has been with SFS intec for 34 years. The fact that we have placed orders with Mikron so many times has not just to do with the quality of the machines. “When I call Mikron, I get to talk to someone who understands me, someone with a technical background,” says Werner Ryser. “Mikron is a one-stop shop company, offering me an ‘all-encompassing feel good package’ with machines plus cutting tools.” Mikron’s international presence is also a key factor. “If I’ve got a problem with a machine in Asia, say, Mikron will

be on site within a very short time,” comments Werner Ryser. Preparing offers is the only area where he sees room for improvement: “Mikron needs to respond faster here.”



Blank formed components (right) are processed into finished parts (left) on the Mikron VX-10.

to the neighboring building take Roger Vauthier to his workplace. This is in another of the total of three secondary machining operations halls. There are Mikron machines in this huge hall as far as the eye can see. On each machine, SFS intec produces up to five million components a year, mainly for the

automotive industry. "Versatility, very high cycle times and extreme reliability whatever material is being fed in: For me these are the advantages that Mikron machines offer," says the 44-year-old operator. "And with the new VX-10s we can work with even greater precision and have shorter changeover times than with the Multifactor," adds team leader Harald Niederer (50). He has been working with Mikron machines since he joined SFS intec 17 years ago. "Mikron machines have enjoyed an excellent reputation at our company for many years," Harald Niederer points out. "For instance, we also use them to train apprentices."

Gray not green

There are more Mikron machines in the third secondary machining operations hall. In addition to machines from other manufacturers, this hall also contains the latest Mikron VX-10s. It is striking

that the new machines are no longer green, but painted in their standard colors of gray and white. This makes the hall appear much brighter and friendlier. "We introduced a new color concept two years ago," clarifies Mile Veljaca. The 60-year-old team leader has been with SFS intec for 14 years. "The new Mikron machines remove the cuttings very effectively. They also run very stably once you have set them up correctly," stresses Mile Veljaca. "There's always room for improvement, but the people from Mikron fundamentally do a good job." •



About SFS intec

The SFS Group is a global market leader for mechanical fastening systems and precision formed components. Its headquarters are in Heerbrugg (Switzerland). SFS has more than 8,000 employees worldwide and over 70 sales offices and manufacturing sites in Europe, North America and Asia. The company generated sales of CHF 1.376 billion in 2015. The SFS story began in 1928 in the former Stadler hardware store in Altstätten

(Switzerland). The pressing plant Heerbrugg AG founded in 1960 laid the foundations for the international development of today's SFS Group. The SFS intec brand mainly manufactures customized solutions for the automotive industry. SFS intec supplies cold formed, deep drawn and plastic injection molded parts and complete assemblies, among other things, for airbags, passenger restraint systems and braking.

Year founded:

1928

Headquarters:

Heerbrugg

Number of employees:

8,000

Operating locations:

70

Regions:

Europe, North America, Asia

Sales in 2015:

CHF 1.376 billion

“Mikron thinks like us”

SFS intec produces components that are vital for car drivers. And it relies on Mikron. **Swen Hämmerle**, General Manager Production Division Automotive, and **Rico Bösch**, Head of the Secondary Machining Operations Department, have their reasons for doing so.

Rico Bösch, what do you use Mikron machines for?

Currently we have over 30 transfer machines from Mikron. We have a large number of Multifactor models in operation, but we also use Multistar and, increasingly, CNC-controlled VX-10s as well. We use the Mikron machines to finish formed pressed blanks. Since our parts are later used to control vital auto components such as seat-belt tensioners or ABS systems, we require maximum precision.

Swen Hämmerle, why did you choose Mikron as a supplier?

Mikron convinced us not only with the productivity and quality of their machines, value for money, a global service and the geographic proximity to the Swiss site in Agno, but also with the range of end-to-end solutions, machines and cutting tools from a single source. But first and foremost, in Mikron we have found a partner that thinks like us: We aim to continually improve and push each other to ultimately deliver only the very best to the customer.

What do you expect from Mikron going forward?

Swen Hämmerle: As I said, we aim to push each other. We expect the people at Mikron to observe the market, listen to us and bring us innovative proposals. I'm thinking here, for instance, of novel ways to harness digitization to enhance the automation and monitoring of machines.

Rico Bösch: Professional project management is also important. The organization has to gel. This is the only way

we can keep to the very tight deadlines our customers give us. There are frequently no more than eight months between the moment we receive an offer from Mikron and the time we deliver our components. The time pressure is enormous. Later, when the machine is up and running, I expect fast service above all.

How would you describe the collaboration with Mikron?

Swen Hämmerle: I think it's very good. Our contacts in Agno listen to us and provide input. Discussions are always frank, honest, fair and, above all, solution-based.

Rico Bösch: I greatly appreciate the fact that Mikron's salespeople are technically savvy. That makes it very pleasant to work with them.



Swen Hämmerle (right), General Manager Production Division Automotive, is 44 and has been with SFS intec for 23 years. After completing an apprenticeship as a multi-skilled mechanic, he went on to study mechanical engineering. Previous roles at SFS intec included toolmaking, tool design and project management. Before he assumed responsibility for production in Heerbrugg at the beginning of 2016, he liaised between headquarters and foreign plants in the USA, India and China.

Rico Bösch (left), Head of the Secondary Machining Operations Department, is 45 and joined SFS intec 29 years ago. Following his apprenticeship as a mechanic, he completed various continuing professional development programmes. After several years in toolmaking, the experienced metal-cutting specialist transferred to production, where he worked his way up from team leader to department head. He is currently responsible for metal-cutting, rolling and assembly processes and the more than 200 employees in his department.