



PRESS RELEASE

60 years of Eibach history – from the Sauerland to the big wide world

Congratulations Eibach! The German family company is celebrating its 60th anniversary. The 68-year “young” Senior & Majority Owner, Wilfried Eibach, has himself been working at the company for over 50 years. He explains first-hand the story of a modern and traditional company, about the exciting years of Eibach’s foundation, which were not always smooth, and about the in-house technical competence and motorsport.

?: This year Eibach is celebrating its 60th anniversary – a big event in our fast-moving times. What moved your father, Heinrich Eibach, to found his business and why did he decide to produce springs of all things?

Wilfried Eibach: Alongside blacksmiths, the production of wires and wire products has a long tradition in the lower Lennetal area, which runs roughly from Plettenberg to Hagen. This was helped by the local ore deposits as well as the water power present in all the neighbouring villages to drive wire cables, forging hammers and other simple machines. By the way, the open-air museum in Hagen provides an excellent overview of these first industries in the Sauerland. So it was no wonder that my father Heinrich, who was born in 1903 in Werdohl, Lennetal, took up a job as a spring maker and even worked in a springs factory in Dortmund during the war. During the war the Heinrich Eibach family lived in Hagen, where our rental apartment was destroyed in 1944 during a bombing raid. Thanks to a friend of my mother’s we moved to Rönkhausen, where for many years we were treated aloofly as newcomers. Despite these difficulties around the end of 1949 my father started up a tiny spring production in a small hut at the Rönkhausen train station.

?: Can you still remember the beginnings in Rönkhausen?

W. E.: I can still remember the beginnings well, at the start I was constantly involved one way or the other. For example I can still see in my mind when, in around 1949, my father rented the small hut from the landlord Robert Kirchhoff, who by the way went on to work for us many years later. In my grammar school days I helped out with production on many afternoons, before I joined full-time at the start of April 1959. I had to end my education after completing my secondary school leaving exams to help my father as I was the only son. Heinrich was 40 years older than me and his health was already deteriorating then. In 1960 there were four employees, including me, and we achieved an annual turnover of, believe it or not, nearly 200,000 D-Mark!

<<Photo: ALTES HAUS.tif | Old House.tif>>



“This was no time for visions”

? What type of entrepreneur was Heinrich Eibach? What visions did he have?

W. E.: This was no time for visions and the spirit of adventure, life was characterised by a fight for earning his living. Nevertheless I think my father wanted to be independent, as the jobs in the surrounding area didn't satisfy him. At the start we also didn't have a factory, it was more of a technical workshop.

? What products did you start with then? What customers did you approach?

W. E.: They were simple springs which we shaped according to customer specifications. In-house spring calculation and test equipment was only introduced many years later. Our first customers were industrial companies, which my father knew from his time at the spring factory in Dortmund. I can remember names like Stromag, Vahle and Söffge...

? What are the differences between the springs produced today and those from back then?

W. E.: What we “shaped” then were more like "wire moulded parts" compared to the high-quality springs we make today with clearly defined characteristics, forces, tolerances, cycles-to-failure, corrosion protection and extensive documentation. Contrary to back then, nowadays most of our products are designed in-house for specific demands or optimised in simultaneous engineering with the customer.

? Eibach produces products which meet the highest modern standards, but one machine from the "founding period" of the company still remains here in Finnentrop...

W. E.: Yes, there is actually still one little treasure and it even has a name - Franzfried. It is named after Franz Krosi, our artist on this machine, and me, as I developed our first springs in the USA on this machine.

“For modern ski lifts we are really reliant on Eibach”

? In the 60s industrial springs really took off – even today the sector is one of the core businesses of the company. Where else are Eibach springs used?

W. E.: They are used in applications ranging from children's' playgrounds to special suspension springs for special vehicles. We produce valve springs for the largest diesel ships in the world, as well as springs for the engine periphery. On modern, high-speed, coupleable ski lifts and gondolas we are really reliant on Eibach. We produce springs for vibration systems, oscillation insulation under platforms, bridges and other foundations, as well as for farm and construction machinery. Our products can be found in almost all processes where springs are required “as muscle”, i.e. to store energy and then to release it



again. We develop and produce springs for screening and vibration technology, plant engineering/capital goods, safety valves, cable car technology, sealing technology, high-voltage technology, railway technology and of course for the automobile industry.

<<Photo: Übersicht | Overview>>

?: What are the largest and smallest springs in your collection?

W. E.: The longest is 50 metres and is a spiral conveyer. The heaviest helical compression spring has a wire thickness of 56 millimetres and weighs a full 140kg. The smallest springs start with a wire diameter of around 0.2 millimetres and allow us to generate barometric pressure and other pressure through their use in compressor valves.

“Eibach gave springs a name”

?: Under your management Eibach also turned towards the automobile sector. How did that happen?

W. E.: At the start of the 70s we had grown to have a turnover of around six million D-Marks and around 70 employees, and had achieved a reputation in the industry for good quality, large industrial springs. Just at this time AMG was looking for a manufacturer who was able to flexibly produce high quality suspension springs in small quantities – and came across Eibach. The rest is history.

?: How did this result in a renowned brand?

W. E.: At the start I found out, to my surprise, that the shock absorber brands were all well-known, even famous. But no-one talked about springs, which are actually the heart of the suspension. I recognised this opportunity and straight away I began to “blow the trumpet for (Eibach) springs”. Nowadays you can often hear in the USA that “Eibach gave springs a name”.

?: Can you remember which vehicle you first produced springs for?

W. E.: Our very first customer for vehicle springs was Monteverdi in around 1965, a small Swiss sports car manufacturer. But for around a decade this remained a one-off – until AMG contacted us.



<<Photo: Eibach Gruppe weltweit | Eibach Group worldwide>>

?: *Your company is active internationally, has production sites in the USA and will soon set one up in China too, as well as subsidiaries in England, Japan, Australia and South Africa. Was it difficult to set up a medium-sized company globally?*

W. E.: No, not if you enjoy challenges and people and are restless. Work can be more fun than just fun! With regards to China – our expansion there is a consistent and logical step. We want to be present as early as possible in the largest automobile and industrial market in the world. In our anniversary year I am particularly pleased that our strategic partner Thyssen-Krupp Bilstein Tuning is moving its China Tech-Center into our building. Competencies for springs, shock absorbers and stabilisers all under one roof that can only lead to further success.

?: *Can you roughly say how many springs Eibach has produced to date.*

W. E.: No, it wouldn't be right to even attempt it. But let's put it this way: I would have preferred us to have made 20% less springs – with the same turnover mind you.

?: *How has the company developed in the last 60 years?*

W. E.: Over the years we have found our place, our niche, and continually developed – the development and production of high-quality products in small quantities and for small-scale series production. In addition to quality, flexibility and process reliability also have priority over productivity. We are more of a manufacturer than a high-volume supplier. Our brand has an almost mythical reputation in all “automobile-infected” companies.

“Tradition means keeping the flame alive”

?: *In what direction will the Eibach brand develop in the future, what are you going to pass on to your children for the business?*

W. E.: Tradition does not mean looking after ashes, but keeping the flame alive. As a medium-sized family company group with a very solid equity ratio we are not subject to the compulsion to make high dividend payouts. 60 years of continual reinvestment of almost all our profits is what has made the Eibach of 2011 possible. According to law the company is family-owned, but in reality the family is company-owned. And especially in this anniversary year the course has been set for the thriving development of the company within secured structures. After all, our company is not a cow to be milked. We also have social responsibility, especially for our region, the beautiful Sauerland.



?: Right from the beginning, Eibach has always focussed on well trained specialists. How important is education in general and training in particular for the continual development of your company?

W. E.: Almost 100 of our approx. 280 employees at the Finnentrop site are former or actual trainees – if that's not good then I don't know what is! We are extremely proud of our apprentices! It's not as if they don't care – they are all motivated and ready to shape their present, as well as their future with Eibach, which certainly means that some will travel the world with and for Eibach. Is there anything better than going into a partnership which can only have great benefits for both sides?
A real win-win situation.

?: Would it be possible to found a company like Eibach today? Which obstacles would have to be overcome?

W. E.: In my opinion it's impossible. In a group company the extensive but necessary stockholding of thousands of different products would be virtually impossible due to the infamous shareholder values. In addition around 4,000 products would have to be developed, produced and be available for delivery for the automobile sector alone, before you can start to build up a sales network. On top of that these sales partners would already be well supplied from trusted sources. In fact many smaller suppliers have already disappeared from the market, in particular those who had to rely on the production for re-packagers.

<<Photo: Eibach Firmengebäude Dämmerung oder Luftbildaufnahme | Eibach Headquarters Germany >>

“Once in the Sauerland, always in the Sauerland”

?: How important was having the company headquarters in the Sauerland and how important is it today? Could Eibach now be successful from any other location?

W. E.: First of all I have to say that at our site in California we have just as good a working atmosphere, even a family one, as here in the Sauerland. The products manufactured are of at least the same quality. We are sure that we will be able to achieve the same in China after a start-up period.

?: So are these locations interchangeable?

W. E.: No, our home is here – once in the Sauerland, always in the Sauerland. It's the special aura, the people, the countryside, the pride of the people in what they have done, the bond to their home, yes even to the company, the marksmanship festivals – all of this is only available in the Sauerland. If you work hard you can play hard!



<<Photo: Wilfried Eibach>>

?: *So what does Wilfried Eibach do in what little free time he has?*

W. E.: There were of course some periods where I worked 12 to 14 hours a day. Nowadays I can organise my time. Work does not have any negative connotations to me, I feel like a mountaineer, who sees each peak as a thrilling challenge. I really have a spirit of adventure! What is better than “sailing to new horizons” with a trusted friend or a dear colleague? For me that means entering new markets, winning new customers, developing interesting products or investing in highly-interesting production equipment. At the moment I get particular satisfaction from the fact that I have the right people around me, who I can pass on my legacy, experience, knowledge and ethical values to. Not bad, is it?

?: *Another reason to celebrate! But what about the “private” Wilfried Eibach?*

W. E.: So apart from all of that I have plenty of time for fun, for golf, some chess and tennis. I like cycling at the weekend around the Lake Bigge or the Back Bay in Newport Beach. And let’s not forget – I love classical music and nowadays have more time to go to concerts. I enjoy travelling to new places and meeting new, interesting people – and if they also need springs ... then wow!

?: *Can you also wind and coil springs yourself?*

W. E.: I’ve done it tens of thousands of times – it takes no time to understand! Come and visit us and I’ll show you how!

?: *Eibach products are used in premium motorsports, such as Formula 1, NASCAR and the DTM. Can you gain knowledge from this for springs which you can apply, for example, to the VW Golf or Audi A3?*

W. E.: Yes, for decades Eibach has been the leading springs partner in the world of high-performance motorsport. The requirements of special directives and performance parameters, the smallest tolerances, weight and size optimisation as well as reliability under extreme long-term stress while at the same time providing the maximum delivery flexibility makes motorsport an ideal test arena for us. This also in particular applies to the testing of new, innovative materials. A lot of experience we have gained in this way flows into series technology.

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