

ISMR SAYS:

"KOHLER displayed a new level profiler and edge protection system at Blechexpo, as well as a press feeding line that featured its new direct drive concept"

Part levelling: Left – unlevelled;
Right – levelled material

ON THE LEVEL



ISMR caught up with KOHLER's chief sales officer, Hans-Peter Laubscher, at Blechexpo in Stuttgart this November, where the company was showcasing new technology.

KOHLER
COMPETENCE CENTER
LEVELING



KOHLER's new press feeding line, with direct drive, at Blechexpo in Stuttgart

Leveling technology is KOHLER's core area of expertise. With almost six decades of experience, it supplies part levellers, feed levelling machines and camber levelling units designed to offer a high level of efficiency and productivity for sheet metal processes. It also develops, manufactures and sells strip feeding lines, all made in Germany.

ISMR caught up with its chief sales officer, Hans-Peter Laubscher, at Blechexpo in Stuttgart this November. KOHLER was showcasing a new level profiler and edge protection system at the exhibition as well as a press feeding line, with its new direct drive concept, on a separate booth.

Two years ago, we successfully launched a new part levelling machine, featuring a direct drive concept, and this has been a contributor to the successful year we have had. Customer feedback on the system has been excellent. This, in combination with the direct drive concept and the electromechanical GAP control system in our machines has really been a breakthrough for us and our customers. We are the only manufacturer offering this combination and it is reflected in the number of orders we are receiving.

We also started support, sales and service operations in the U.S. this year (our office is near Chicago). We are looking for good sales distributors in this region.

ISMR: Please outline any recent successes or achievements?

HPL: We are delighted to confirm that we received two major equipment orders from the UK automotive industry this year, for cut-to-length lines and press feeding lines. This is a key achievement as the automotive industry is slowing down, not picking up.

We sold a machine recently to the Liebherr Group – the construction industry is a key sector for us.

ISMR: What are you showcasing at Blechexpo in Stuttgart this year?

HPL: We have two booths at Blechexpo this year and are showcasing, in Hall 8, a press feeding line which is equipped with the direct-drive concept. This gives much higher torque, efficiency and quality.

Here on the booth you can see our new Kohler flatness measurement system which gives instant feedback to the operator on the levelling result (number and visual projected feedback). This is the first time that we have exhibited this profiler and feedback has been good.

We are also showcasing an edge protection system, EasyFeed, to feed the machine with thicker parts, but with very strong levelling parameters. It involves a step-by-step operation, lowering the roller frame to pre-set values. It also features quite an innovative return mode system.

ISMR: What are your views on the current global business climate for sheet metal stamping professionals?

HPL: Order intake has been good this year – we are on track for strong sales revenue this year. Next year, we think, will be more challenging but we continue to invest in new technology.

"We successfully launched a new part levelling machine, featuring a direct drive concept."

However, the economy in Europe and Germany is slowing down. We are still happy with the level of European orders that we have received and are expecting higher sales this year than last year (our revenue is already higher than last year). For next year, we expect a slight increase only as there are still uncertainties in the market, although we have increased our presence in more markets.

Typical customers range from smaller-medium-sized companies, where an owner is driving the company, to large OEMs with several thousand people. We use a combination of direct sales and distributors to cover the market.

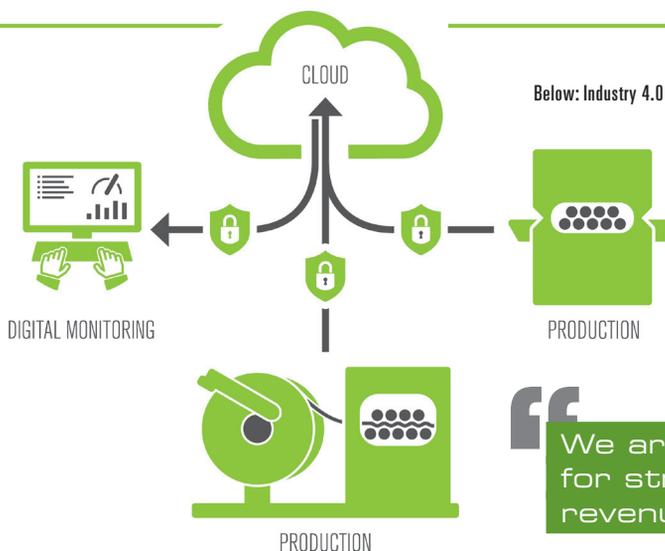
ISMR: Please explain your strategic and technical objectives?

HPL: One key strategic one is to roll-out our Industry 4.0 initiative. All our machines are equipped with an OPC-UA interface which allows us and our customers to gain access to all the machine's data. We can link our machines/systems to an overall information hub. This is all part of the networked production ideal.

On our booth here, we are showcasing our interpretation of Industry 4.0. We are making use of the machine data to the cloud – the user has access to it for analysis and to inform his production strategy etc. We are able to gain an understanding of the machine torque, temperature of drives etc. so that this feeds into the maintenance of the machine.

Another key strategic objective is our step into the U.S. market. We need to be seen as a global player, not just a European one. In 2018, we opened an office in Moscow (Russia). We have been active in China for a few years now.

Technically, we aim to make our machines more energy-efficient. We compared our part levelling machines to hydraulic-driven ones and found that we are consuming 60-75% less electrical power. That is a real saving for customers. I see this is an asset for future success. Offering efficient, information-driven and reduced maintenance machines is key for the future.



Below: Industry 4.0 - KOHLER machines support concepts

“ We are on track for strong sales revenue this year ”

ISMR: Which trends do you see developing in levelling and strip feeding markets?

HPL: There is still a tendency towards high-tensile strength yield, especially in the automotive supply industry. The rigidity of a machine must be greater to process high tensile material – we have sold quite a number of machines where users can exchange a levelling cassette to process a wider range of material. At the same time, more and more aluminium parts are being levelled. This option offers greater flexibility.

Levelling technology has largely been accepted by industry now and it is an appreciated technology. As a finishing technology, it can facilitate downstream processes such as bending and welding. I really believe that levelling technology has a much brighter future than in the past and complements technologies such as laser cutting, bending etc.

Industry 4.0 and predictive maintenance is also a trend, as is the move towards reduced energy consumption.

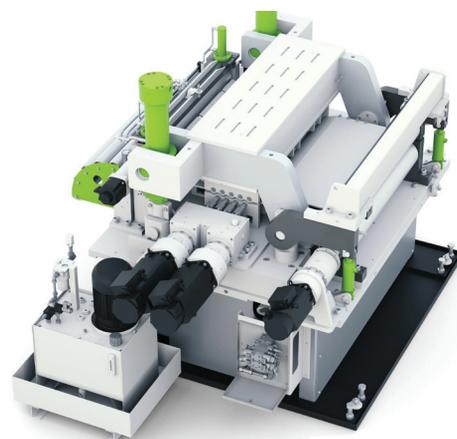
ISMR: Where do you see the greatest challenges and opportunities?

HPL: The greatest challenge is the economy. We also see industry challenges across Europe relating to the transition in the automotive industry to electric vehicle technology.

We see some hesitancy in investments as there are still uncertainties in the market, and we have to prepare for this by being more flexible (not only in the machines that we offer but also within our own company).

ISMR: Thank you for your time. ■

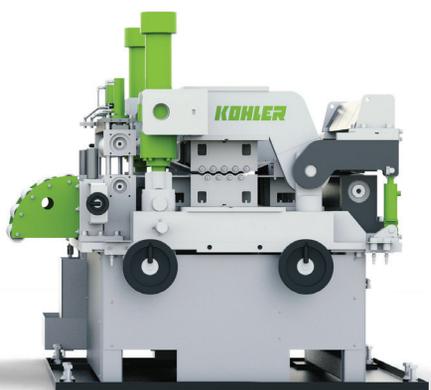
CONTACT
For further details, see www.kohler-germany.com



KOHLER's innovative direct-drive solution



KOHLER compact design: Precision levelling, even where space is limited



KOHLER Peak Performer, a hydraulic-free part levelling machine