

Press release/interview

Changes in the bearings market – How NKE meets future challenges

Steyr, Austria, February 2018. Based in the Austrian city of Steyr, bearing manufacturer NKE Austria GmbH has been part of the Fersa Group since January 2016. The group was established through the merger of Spanish company Fersa Bearings and NKE Austria. Both companies are internationally active in the development, production and sales of bearings for the global automotive and industrial markets, with Fersa covering the automotive and NKE the industrial sector.

Fersa Group is represented on all continents, with four production sites, six distribution centres as well as four research and development facilities, two of which are located in Europe and two in Asia. With its sales offices and trade partners, the group is active in more than 86 countries.

In this interview, Thomas Witzler, General Manager of NKE, talks about the strategic outlook and plans of the Austrian company in the coming years.

Two years have passed since the merger with Fersa Bearings. Can you already draw any conclusions? How will the cooperation develop in future?

Thomas Witzler: “In the near future, NKE and Fersa Bearings will move even closer together than we already have. In 2018, Fersa will exercise its purchasing option to acquire the remaining 51 percent of NKE, making the latter a full member of the Fersa Group. As a group we will be ideally positioned to extend our production capacities and jointly set up additional factories, as well as to utilise common resources in all business sectors. NKE will also increase its focus on its four strategic industries: mechanical drives, electrical drives, agri-tech and fluid technology. The group has the clear goal of achieving the turnover-milestone of 100 million euros by the year 2020.”

How does NKE see the development of the global bearings market over the next two years?

Thomas Witzler: “The future looks bright. 2017 was an excellent year for NKE: At 20 percent,

our growth in turnover exceeded the growth of the global bearing market by 13 percentage points. Our order intake in 2017 was also 50 percent up on the previous year, and we expect both our turnover and the overall market to continue its growth at a similar rate in 2018 and 2019.

The bearings market is facing a radical change in the next five to ten years. Especially the automotive market will come under pressure from the growing trend towards electric mobility and the reduced demand for conventional bearings this entails. We expect the capacities that will be freed up through this development to shift from the automotive to the industrial sector, which will result in additional cost pressure.

A further trend is that conventional automotive suppliers are increasingly transforming into system suppliers, as conventional mechanical components are increasingly being replaced by intelligent specialised systems.”

What steps does a medium-sized bearing manufacturer have to take to be able to profit from these trends and developments?

Thomas Witzler: “NKE is investing heavily in the technologies of tomorrow. Because conventional bearing technology is mostly at its limits, profitable growth will, in the long term, be possible only in niche markets. NKE is therefore focusing on the development of intelligent products, like our sensor bearing.”

What goals has the group set itself?

Thomas Witzler: “We are aiming for a profitability of at least ten percent. In addition to customer service, we will also further enhance our flexibility and speed, and aim to generate turnover of 200 million euros in the Fersa Group. In the medium term, this will be achieved both through organic and inorganic growth.”

Thomas Witzler has a degree in business administration and has been with NKE since 2009. Since July 2016, he is General Manager of NKE, which was established in 1996 by leading employees of the former company Steyr Wälzlager. NKE offers both standard and special bearings for all industrial applications. Engineering, product development, production and final processing of components, assembly, quality assurance, logistics, and sales and marketing are centralised at its Steyr headquarters.

Images:

Images 1 and 2: Thomas Witzler, General Manager of NKE Austria GmbH in Steyr, Austria

Image 3: Austrian-made cylindrical roller bearing from NKE and two taper roller bearings from Fersa

Company information:

NKE Austria GmbH is a bearing manufacturer with headquarters in Steyr, Austria. The company was founded in 1996 by a group of senior staff members of former company Steyr Wälzlager. Spanish bearing manufacturer Fersa Bearings, which is specialised in the automotive sector, acquired 49 percent in NKE in 2016. NKE offers both standard and special bearings for all industrial applications. Engineering, product development, production and final processing of components, assembly, quality assurance, logistics, and sales and marketing are centralised at its Steyr headquarters. The factory in Steyr is certified to ISO 9001:2008, ISO 14001:2004 and OHSAS 18001. A wide range of standard bearings is available from stock or at short production lead-times. NKE also provides customized products and solutions. In addition to product development and application engineering NKE provides a full range of technical services, consulting, documentation and training. NKE's products are distributed through 12 international offices and more than 240 distribution outlets in 60 countries.

Contact:

NKE AUSTRIA GmbH
Im Stadtgut C4
4407 Steyr, Austria
Tel.: +43 7252 86667
Fax: +43 7252 86667 59
E-mail: office@nke.at
Internet: www.nke.at

PR Contact:

TPR International
Christiane Tupac-Yupanqui
PO Box 11 40
82133 Olching, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)8142 44 82 301
E-mail: c.tupac@tradePressrelations.com
Internet: www.tradePressrelations.com

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