

STRAEHLE+HESS USA Inc.



I met Corinna Luz for the first time when I visited STRAEHLE+HESS back in September 2019. At that time she was the Director of Sales as well as member of the STRAEHLE+HESS International (a group that includes the HQ and all subsidiaries) management team. The headquarter is located in Althengstett, Germany, close to Stuttgart. Corinna Luz has been with the company for 16 years when she took over the position as the CEO of STRAEHLE+HESS USA Inc. in July 2020. She is a German native, and moved to the US in 2016 as a sales person for STRAEHLE+HESS. She first spent 2 years in Michigan building up the network with the automotive companies in the Detroit area, and starting new projects with US manufacturers. In July 2018 she moved to Auburn to support the team onsite as a link to the HQ, to implement a lot of new processes especially Quality, Logistics, Product and Process Development as well to launch the new projects with the team in Auburn.

2018 was also the year for another German native to arrive in Auburn, Denis Haehn, who is the Quality Manager. Denis graduated from Reutlingen University as a Textile Engineer, Bachelor of Engineering and Master of Science in 2017. To build up his Quality knowledge and specifically the company's products and processes, he started in the German Headquarter as a Quality Engineer before he relocated to the US. Denis says "I really enjoy working with STRAEHLE+HESS and the US customers and suppliers as well my coworkers and the Management in Auburn. It is a great opportunity for me to gain a lot of experience with a leading international supplier of special textiles in the automotive industry as well to grow with the company in a leadership position."

STRAEHLE+HESS opened their first facility in the US, 2004, in Auburn. Equipment was set up later that year and production of two products, headliner application and piping products for Mercedes-Benz U.S.

International, was started in 2005. Both products are still the main products with headliners as their core product.

The company grew from 10,000 square feet to 23,500 square feet from 2004 to 2015. In 2015 they added two more programs and ended up needing more space. They moved into a new 58,000 square feet location in Auburn in 2016. Customers keep increasing their demands and new opportunities had been added to the portfolio. Their product is special textiles mainly for the automotive industry. Tailor-made for interiors, like surface fabrics (headliners, pillars, sun roof etc.), trims like piping (design accents in seats) which have gained in popularity. They also produce products that are more “solution oriented” and that might not be visible like fastening systems for seats, (woven and knitted hoses) and tensioning straps, elastic tapes. Since the company is growing, the company started end of 2020 to work on plans for an expansion of the current building in Auburn to double capacity and space. Corinna Luz says “We have outgrown a building in Auburn for the 3rd time now, that’s something we call happy growing pain and we are actually really more than happy to see such a great development of our location in the US!” She also says “We are really grateful to be in Auburn, the City of Auburn, especially the Industrial Development Board with Arndt Siepman, are always very supportive.”

As customers have increased their demands, so have the number of employees and shifts. The company has grown from 5 employees in the beginning, to 85 today and will add even more jobs over the next years. The production part is running 3 shifts 5 days per week. The company has a strong focus on their employees. “It is an investment” says Corinna Luz and continued “we focus a lot on extensive training, so our employees understand the expectations of the quality of our products; and give them tools so they can make good decisions”. Also over the last couple months, the company has implemented not only new company policies but a lot of new benefits and employee engagement opportunities. Corinna Luz says “We really care about our employees and want to make sure they are not only safe and get paid but also happy to work for us and want to stay with us long term, in an environment they feel appreciated”. The company is also increasing the performance by involving the employees in ideas and decision making processes as part of the team. The company is not only a production facility they start with design ideas with the customers and their design teams as well product development and engineering to customize for each project and program. Corinna Luz and her Sales and Development team get involved in figuring out how to create special samples for customers and incorporate their Design and Quality demands. She gets very excited when she talks about the innovations STRAEHLE+HESS has developed and launched, Design oriented products as well application and solution oriented. Examples: 2D/3D knitting of parts for the interior of vehicles, Airbag and safety parts incl. machines and production processes at the customer plants. Solutions for customized products in short notice after SOP of programs, when all of a sudden major issues need to be solved asap, STRAEHLE+HESS has the ability to create new products in no time and help the customers in emergency situations.

As we step onto the production floor there is a humming from all the knitting machines. The amount of knitting machines has more than doubled in the newer location. 85% of the machines are from German suppliers. All the machines have been modified in one way or another by the company. STRAEHLE+HESS own team will build tools which takes a lot of knowledge. Some of the machines are even build at the Headquarters in Germany.

It is truly fascinating to watch all the knitting machines going. There are two different kind of knits for the headliners which is circular knitting and warp knitting. The circular knitting – is literary knitting in a circle – like a hose. This is done on smaller machines and with less yardage. This form of knitting will give more options for pattern even more 3D looking structure.



The finished product will elongate in both directions. The machine is in the middle connected to 12 lbs. rolls of 68 to 84 threads that is standing in a big circle around the knitting machine. It truly looks like a spiderweb. The warp knitting is more cost effective as you can do larger production. The finished product will only have elongation in one direction. After the knitting is done, the material will be dyed and finished or just washed and finished, depending on the product and yarn. After that, laminated with different backings like foam or non-woven depending on the application. STRAEHLE+HESS can also offer cut to size sheets for their customers production to reduce their change over times and handling as well reduce scrap throughout the whole process in the customer production lines.

Their customers include many of the OEM's like BMW, Daimler, Ford, VW-Group, GM and Stellantis but also Tier 1,2 and 3 suppliers. Their biggest customer in Alabama is Mercedes-Benz U.S. International.

Next time you get into your car – look up at the headliner, the pillars on the side and piping in the seats and know that this came most likely from STRAEHLE+HESS. Learn more at: www.straehle-hess.de