

WHERE SUSTAINABILITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

When it comes to high-quality precision engineering, BARTH Präzisionstechnik GmbH stands as a leader in European industry. The family business is deeply committed to the long-term when it comes to achieving success through innovation and sustainability. Andy Probert sat down with CEO Wolfram Barth to learn more.

AN inventive spirit continues to burn bright within BARTH Präzisionstechnik GmbH, owned by the third generation of the Barth family. That spirit springs from two sources: its founding father and the area where the company is based.

While Binzwangen, in southern Germany, is where the likes of notable pioneers Bosch, Mercedes and Einstein originated, the company can rightly point to its own visionary – Alfred Barth. In 1970, he turned a family smallholding into a metalworking company and masterminded its rise to become one of Europe's in-demand high-precision parts manufacturers. Its zero-defect philosophy and deadline reliability are intertwined with an unstinting approach to sustainability and decarbonisation.

The company has successfully transitioned towards bespoke processing of difficult-to-machine and heat-resistant materials. Another significant culture change has been to pivot from a historic dependence on the automotive industry – from 70% of business to around 20% – to becoming an established supplier of power engineering and large infrastructure hydrogen projects.

“Our inventive spirit and drive for perfection has fuelled our innovation potential,” said CEO Wolfram Barth. “Coupled with the courage to try something new, we want to contribute to technological progress and help shape our futures.”

Long-term view

The Barth family is in the grip of transition, with Wolfram having taken over the company from his father, Wolfgang, in 2023.

However, the same laser-focused vision remains in Wolfram's desire to see the company stay at the peak of its powers.

BARTH Präzisionstechnik's longevity is more than matched by the low turnover of its 80 employees. Many have long-service records, including several exceeding 40 years. Barth's family members also include Wolfram's father Wolfgang, wife Clara, mother Antonie, uncle Michael and cousin Pia.

The company expanded in 1993 to establish a factory in Timișoara, Romania, to manage the need for intensive machining production parts. Binzwangen's 10,000sqm machine park focused on small batch machine and industrial components. The Timișoara plant was sold to one of its partners in 2023, with BARTH Präzisionstechnik production now centred on Binzwangen.

With clients across Germany, Austria and Switzerland, BARTH still enjoys trade with customers from its founding era.

“Our business is based on strong and enduring partnerships that last,” commented Mr Barth.

While automotive represents 20% of its business with BARTH's focus on drive-independent parts, its strength comes from deriving complex parts for general mechanical and power engineering. This includes precision parts production for large European corporations to small-sized companies in industries as varied as construction, agricultural machinery, BIM-technology, pharma-devices and medical parts.

“Parts from our production are used wherever the greatest precision is required,” Mr Barth explained. “Whether in cars, ships, wind turbines or machines for food production, BARTH can manufacture parts weighing up to a tonne.

“Our transformation project to downscale dependency on automotive from 70 per cent to 20 per cent has enabled us to ➤

become an established supplier in power engineering and hydrogen projects. We are ramping up quantities and anticipate rapidly increasing turnover in the next two years.

"We are particularly proud of our holistic processes from raw parts to ready-to-install components, from complete machining to automated assembly processes."

Around 90% of BARTH's suppliers are from Germany, with half of these collaborations dating over ten years and a few exceeding 30 years. Established suppliers include Schunk SE, SMW and machining producers CHIRON Group, MATO and Nagel Werkzeugmaschinen.

"It is important to be accessible to suppliers, find and implement solutions quickly, and for them to have the same quality awareness," Mr Barth continued. "We want suppliers that share our long-term view and are not just chasing a quick profit."

Sustainably strong

Mr Barth highlighted how the company has a strong ethical approach to internal investment, aligned to achieving sustainable goals. It has installed 350kW of solar

power into its factory and is working on a decarbonisation project to decrease carbon emissions in a central workflow process by 36%.

Since 2017, when the automotive orders collapsed, the company has embarked on a gradual renewal of its machines. This culminated in a €2.5m investment in 2023 of a machine park extension for machine power engineering parts. The company also plans to install a hydrogen electrolyser with around 10MW to make it more independent. ▽



GREEN STEEL

SUSTAINABILITY

DECARBONIZATION

ELECTROLYZER

GREEN HYDROGEN

GREEN STEEL
SUPPLY CHAIN

OUR VISION IS TO COMPLETE THE GREEN STEEL SUPPLY CHAIN

BARTH Präzisionstechnik GmbH is a family business that supplies global customers with high-precision parts from 5 to 2.200mm or from 3g to over 1t. Our parts are used wherever the greatest precision is required, including cars, ships, wind turbines, IGT, Cellrings, BIM-technology, pharma-devices, medical parts.

Sustainability is a core value, with solar panels at the factory and an ongoing decarbonization project. Our plans include installing a hydrogen electrolyser and moving into the Green Steel space.

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"This is a big plan to set up an electrolyser, but we have a clear plan of where to store the hydrogen and what to do with it when needed," said Mr Barth. "These investments will enable us to grow turnover by 40 per cent in the power engineering and energy technology business. We want to successfully manage the business in the future despite all present uncertainties with shorter planning horizons.

"Sustainability has been a core value of our family business since we began. We are not simply aiming for the best financial results, instead we think decades in advance.

"Sustainability is important because we want to go forward to achieve our goals, even in the Green Steel space. We don't want it to be just a topic for the rest of the supply chain. It is vital to us to drive decarbonisation by optimising raw materials and work processes."

Wolfram Barth, CEO



Testing times

"While planning is tough, we have a clear picture about the company's future path and remain flexible to client demands, even if they insist on instant deliveries," Mr Barth explained. "Despite turnover remaining stable, our R&D and energy costs are higher than ever.

"As a family company, we buy electricity via a tranche procurement. Last year was a success, but in 2024, our energy costs will rise to €600,000 compared to an average €200,000."

Mr Barth was also keen to highlight another challenge - the need for more government support for its industry: "State funding grants in Germany seem to support the ones asking for or making billions, while the likes of our company

asking for a million euros, with a plan behind them, are left behind.

"I am blocked by increasing bureaucracy while the billion-euro guy is talking to our Federal Chancellery and receiving the go-ahead. The little guys like us in the supply chain who want to scale up are being forgotten.

"Sustainability is about running our company into a future that ensures that we, our families, our employees and their families are provided for," Mr Barth said, in conclusion. "You don't achieve this by squeezing the company to optimise the figures.

"What BARTH does is not rocket science, but by being intelligent, profitable and innovative, we can continue our drive to be a top supplier in the European market." ■