

With the help of new machinery from direct soling technology developer Desma, German safety shoe manufacturer Atlas Schuhfabrik is stepping up its efforts to expand its production capacity.

A perfect partnership

Dortmund-based safety shoe maker Atlas Schuhfabrik and fellow German company Desma, developer of direct soling technology, have been partners for more than 40 years. They first cooperated at the end of the 1970s and now, in 2018, this partnership is again proving crucial as Atlas seeks to meet rising demand for its products.

The company was founded in 1910 in the town of Unna, just east of Dortmund, by Johannes Schabsky. Fourth and fifth generation members of this family still run it. Back in 1910, when it was known as Unnaer Schuhfabrik, the business occupied three floors of a factory and employed 16 people. All aspects of manufacturing took place there, from the cutting and stitching of the leather to lasting and adding the steel toecaps. Production capacity was around 80 pairs of shoes each day. By 1960, the year of its 50th anniversary, Atlas had 63 employees and daily output had increased to 400 pairs. It relocated its manufacturing facility to nearby Dortmund in 1974, where it remains to this day.

Atlas is now among the leading European safety footwear manufacturers, producing around 12,000 pairs per day, roughly 2.4 million pairs per year. It has a global workforce of more than 1,500 people; product assembly takes place in Dortmund, but the leather uppers are produced at company-owned facilities in Brazil. It only uses high-quality leathers from South American hides in order to ensure the quality of the final product. Atlas has been part of the Leather Working Group since the start of 2016 and sources all its leather from tanneries that have been audited by this organisation. Once the uppers have been made in Brazil they are shipped back to Germany for final assembly.

The company's diverse product catalogue includes women's footwear with a steel toecap, boots with a heatproof outsole for welders, and smart everyday shoes with pierce-resistant soles. All models satisfy standards for non-slip properties, resistance to oil and chemicals, anti-static qualities and pierce-resistance. It uses Desma's direct soling technology to create polyurethane soles that are comfortable, lightweight, elastic and ergonomically shaped.

Precise production

At the start of 2018, Desma delivered its seventh machine to Atlas, a new rotary table it describes as "the largest and most modern direct soling machine" it offers. It has 36 stations, a

The relationship between Atlas and Desma dates back to the end of the 1970s. CREDIT: ATLAS



Atlas has had to install new machinery as it seeks to keep up with growing demand for its safety shoes. CREDIT: EMANUEL BLOEDT.DE



The new rotary table from Desma has 36 stations; Atlas has been used to employing rotary tables with only 30. CREDIT: ATLAS

highly-automated production line and a total of seven robots. Prior to the installation of this latest machine, Atlas had primarily employed rotary tables with up to 30 stations.

According to Klaus Freese, Desma managing director, this machine "allows the customer to produce even more quickly and flexibly and also less expensively." He adds that these three factors are key to the "long-term success" of local manufacturing.

The robots perform individual steps such as roughening the upper, placing steel soles, applying release agents, trimming sole edges and picking and placing. An amir system (amir stands for automated material supply with integrated robots) automatically brings parts to and from the rotary table as required. This reduces the workload of employees.

"The new machine will make our traditional production methods more flexible; the individual work stages are more precise and the production process as a whole is more efficient," says Dieter Bade, Desma's regional sales manager in charge of the German market, among others.

Atlas installed this new rotary table in response to growing demand for its products, as Werner Schabsky, great-grandson of the company's founder, explains: "Demand for comfortable and ergonomic safety shoes and work footwear has soared in recent years. Firstly, this is because customers are now looking for shoes that offer similar features to sports shoes. Secondly, health and safety is becoming an increasingly important issue for employers."

Werner Schabsky is responsible Atlas' upper production facility in Brazil, while his son, Hendrik, oversees the company's sales and marketing operations.

Atlas is also one of the first companies to use Desma's internet-based "Smart Shopfloor" system, which continually

collects all machine and operating data and stores it in a database. This information can be accessed at any time via a smartphone, enabling customers to obtain information about their order at any time.

It is also very useful for the company itself, allowing it to view ongoing production data online. "The machine allows us to optimise production in terms of quality, productivity and ecology. That is both our target and our claim. Because we make everything ourselves, from the sole to the uppers, we can also cope with peak order volumes and deliver to the exact day," says Hendrik Schabsky.

New dimension

Following the installation of this new rotary table, Atlas "has entered a new dimension", according to Desma. With its eyes firmly set on further growth, the shoe manufacturer is preparing to take delivery of an eighth machine from its German counterpart.

Over the past 10 years, Atlas has doubled its sales volume and increased the share of its products that go for export to 25%. It is present in the majority of European markets and exhibits at important safety clothing, footwear and equipment trade shows such as the biennial A+A exhibition in Düsseldorf. The next edition of this show takes place in November 2019.

Desma is looking forward to supporting Atlas as it continues to grow. "Atlas is one of the few customers that are located in the immediate vicinity as 95 per cent of our rotary tables are delivered to other countries," says managing director Klaus Freese. "Because of this proximity, we are able to cooperate particularly closely and have already solved many a challenge together. That is something that makes us proud and is also an incentive for the future." 🏆