

# Interview

## Innovative Customized Blasting Technology Made In Germany

**MFN talks to Mr. Arnold Flothmann, Head of Sales for all blasting technology-related activities of German Plant Manufacturer SLF Oberflächentechnik GmbH. SLF offers high-end customized plants for surface treatment applications in many industries all around the globe.**

**(?) MFN:** Mr. Flothmann, thank you for taking the time for this interview. Would you, first of all, please quickly introduce SLF Oberflächentechnik and yourself to our readers?

**(!) A.F.:** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you. SLF is a medium-sized owner-managed German manufacturer of surface treatment plants. SLF stands for Strahlen (blasting) – Lackieren (painting) – Fördern (conveying) – which exactly defines the field of activity in which we are active. SLF covers the whole spectrum from preparation plants such as high-pressure cleaning cabins and blasting plants, over coating plants like open-space paint spraying systems, paint spraying and powder coating cabins up to paint drying cabins and enameling furnaces for powder coatings. Additionally, we offer our

prospects and clients a broad range of conveying technique – for work piece transport on the one hand, but more extensively, for personnel transport in the form of various types of lifting platforms that can be equipped into most of our plants. We mainly focus on applications for treatment of large components like rail coaches, special purpose and utility vehicles, wind power plants, steel construction and machine engineering components. Among our customers you'll find many well-known companies such as Siemens, Deutsche Bahn, Lufthansa, Daimler Benz and others. Besides plant engineering, SLF also runs a branch in Eastern Germany, close to Chemnitz, where we are active in the field of contract blasting and painting for either local or supraregional customers, mainly from the steel construction industry. In total, SLF employs a bit over 100 employees. As Head of Sales

of the blasting division I am responsible for the sale of all our blasting products and the internal and external coordination and execution of the projects together with my colleagues from other departments and the customer's personnel.

**(?) MFN:** Since when does SLF exist? What are the roots and what is the history of the company?

**(!) A.F.:** SLF was found in 1990 just after the reunion of Western and Eastern Germany – so next year, we will be celebrating the company's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in our new headquarters which are currently being built. If you would like to visit, you and your colleagues are wholeheartedly welcome. In the very beginning, SLF operated under the name of Schlick Chemnitz Engineering GmbH as a sales branch for former company Schlick that will surely be known to many of your readers. Three years later, the contract coating and blasting branch that still exists today was established. Since then SLF has grown steadily and has continuously enhanced its product and service portfolio. Today, our plants are running in more than 25 countries around the world – from Brazil over various countries in Europe to China.

**(?) MFN:** You said that SLF is about to move into a new headquarter building. That's interesting. Would you please explain a little?

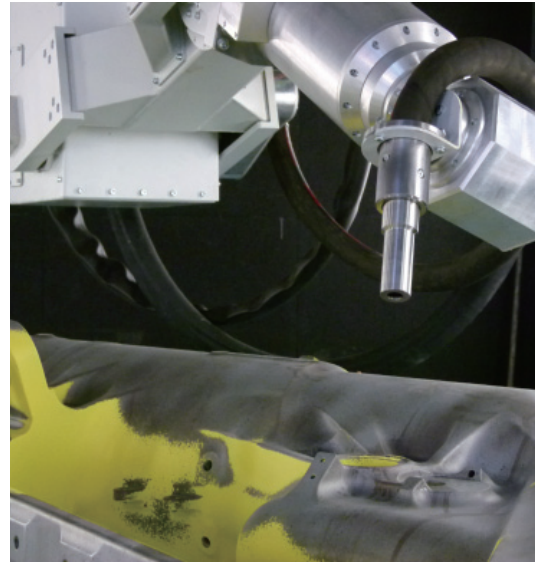
**(!) A.F.:** Well, after transferring the plant engineering division from Eastern to Western Germany, we first resided in Emsdetten – together with our sister company, AGTOS Gesellschaft für technische Oberflächensysteme mbH, manufacturer of shot blast machines. In 2006 we moved into the former Schlick building in Greven with a comparably small staff. Since then, SLF went through a period of dynamic growth which is why we are running out of production, storage and office capacity and why it has been decided to build a new factory. We are taking the right steps now to ensure and support an ongoing sustainable growth in the future. From the beginning of 2015 on SLF will be located in the very neighborhood of



**Mr. Arnold Flothmann is Head of Sales for all blasting technique-related activities of German plant manufacturer SLF Oberflächentechnik GmbH**



The "ReCo-Blaster"<sup>®</sup>, a development of SLF blasts large work pieces, in particular serial and small serial parts, in a very time-efficient manner



Here the ReCo-Blaster is used for paint-stripping processes on landing gears

AGTOS – a huge benefit for our joint customers. Right now, the factory hall is already under construction.

**(?) MFN:** That sounds great. We wish you and your management and colleagues all the best for this change and the future. Now let us talk about your blasting technology products. What kind of machines and plants are within SLF's range of blasting products?

**(!) A.F.:** In principle, the product range with regard to blasting technology can be split into three parts: First of all, as a logical consequence of the fact that many of our customers blast very large work pieces, our focus traditionally is on large blast rooms for manual blasting processes like cleaning, roughening, deburring and others. Due to the ever increasing demands for work safety, production process quality and cost effectiveness, we have developed a blasting robot called "ReCo-Blaster"<sup>®</sup> in 2010 that facilitates and improves the conventional blasting process massively. Robot-based blasting applications represent the second third. Finally, the third pillar comprises special automatic blasting installations, e.g. indexing table machines with either direct-pressure or suction-type system, robotic work piece handling and blast parameter control for cleaning or peening purposes of, for example, automotive components

or machines for blasting of drums or other work pieces.

**(?) MFN:** Would you please describe what is special about your blasting plants? What are your technology's Unique Selling Points?

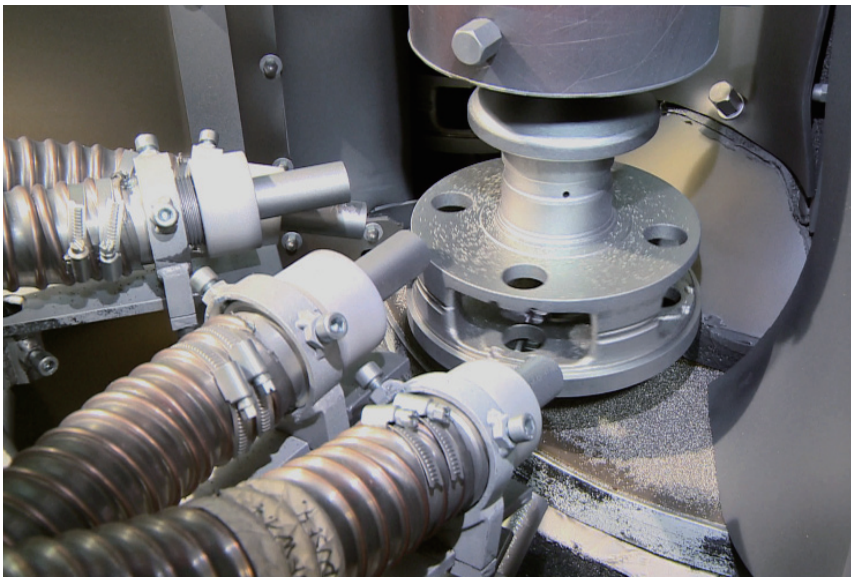
**(!) A.F.:** Basically, it can be said that SLF does not have such thing as a simple standard. Of course, plant components like the blast media recovery and reclamation system or the filter unit are not designed anew for every plant we sell – but the layout and construction differs considerably from project to project. We always strive to conceive of the most advanced and most suitable solution to fully meet the customer's requirements. This goes with regard to all aspects of work piece handling flexibility, work flow, spatial conditions at

the customer's site, safety regulations, employee health and environmental friendliness.

Coming back to the "ReCo-Blaster"<sup>®</sup>, we are one of very few companies in the world who offer design, construction, manufacturing and delivery of such product. When we decided to develop the robot we assumed that the demand for automation of such laborious and exhausting processes like blasting would increase in the future – and reality proved us right. Companies from many sectors, for example the rolling stock or steel construction industry, are showing huge interest in this technology and its applicability for their production processes. Already today, the "ReCo-Blaster"<sup>®</sup> blasts, among others, work pieces from the aviation or wind power industry at world-leading companies.

« **The broad technology spectrum we offer is something that distinguishes us positively from many competitors who are active either in the field of blasting or in the field of painting.** »

**Mr. Dipl.-Ing. Arnold Flothmann**  
Head of Sales Blasting Systems, SLF



**Blasting station with 4 pressure-blast nozzles directed at a gear component**

Furthermore, we have also designed and manufactured several automated blasting machines for cleaning or peening purposes of smaller work pieces, for example in the automotive industry. Typical work pieces from this industry that can be blasted or peened in SLF-plants are gear components like synchronizer rings or planetary-gears. For this purpose, we offer highly customized installations like automatic indexing table unit with direct suction system or pressure blast indexing table unit with automatic loading and unloading function. These solutions are especially designed for the customers' tasks and provide functions like automatic movement of work pieces inside the blast cabinet with very high positioning accuracy, dosing of abrasive quantity incl. monitoring and recording, reproducible blast nozzle adjustments and many others.

As said before, we also manufacture personnel lifting platforms. The competition for lifting platforms that can be applied in preparation or painting cabins is quite fierce but not many companies are capable to offer lifting platforms that can cope with the rough,

dusty and abrasive environmental conditions of a blast room. We offer such platforms – either with a swiveling platform cage or with telescopic scissors and contribute to improved working conditions and surface results when large components are blasted manually.

**(?) MFN:** How important is the blasting area for your company as a whole?

**(!) A.F.:** Right now, the mentioned activities cover a portion of approximately one third to 40 % of SLF's total business but the share is growing. It is very often the case that customers who have a demand for painting equipment also need to blast their products or vice versa. That is where we as a supplier and our customers as well are able to benefit from synergistic effects. Growth in the one field does not automatically influence growth in the other – but there is a certain influence.

**(?) MFN:** That's a quite comfortable situation for a company that is able to offer plants for either blasting and painting, I assume. What is special about SLF as a whole?

**(!) A.F.:** The broad technology spectrum we offer is something that distinguishes us positively from many competitors who are active either in the field of blasting or in the field of painting. Customers are more and more seeking for capable manufacturers who are able to offer the required solution from one source and on a turnkey basis. They don't want high involvement in interface coordination but an experienced and reliable partner who takes care of the project execution as a whole. No matter which of our core industry segments you investigate, we have delivered to the leading companies in each sector – and the said is one good reasons why this is the case.

**(?) MFN:** What are your experiences with customer demands in the field of blasting technology?

**(!) A.F.:** In general it can be said that the projects on which we work and the conditions under which they are initiated and executed are becoming more and more complex. Customers expect high personnel availability and competence as well as very short reaction times and short total project cycle time. The demand for first-class quality and highly innovative products at a very competitive price level definitely grows. The same goes for automation of processes and integration of the processes into existing production concepts, for example control and documentation of blasting parameters like blast media throughput, blast pressure and others.

**(?) MFN:** Mr. Flothmann, thank you for the interview!

For Information:  
SLF-Oberflächentechnik GmbH  
Grevener Landstraße 22-24  
48268 Greven, Germany  
Tel. +49.2575.97193-0  
Fax +49.2575.97193-19  
E-mail: info@slf.eu  
www.slf.eu