

Opposites attract

Böllinghaus Steel manufactures stainless steel products in Portugal

Remscheid/Vieira de Leiria (hgd). With more than 120 years' experience in steel processing, Böllinghaus Steel manufactures top-quality stainless steel profiles in various grades. Its long products range includes proven forms and lengths of light and high-alloy steel profiles. The works are located in Vieira de Leiria, in Portugal.

■ Böllinghaus Steel, with an annual capacity of about 12,000 tonnes of stainless steel, serves well-known customers worldwide. Although the steel works is now located in Portugal, the company still provides services from Remscheid, Germany, where it was founded in 1889.

How the business started

The year 1889 saw the Eiffel Tower being built, and scientists and inventors such as Planck, Edison and Lilienthal surprised the world very nearly every day with their findings and fascinating deeds. This period of permanent industrial expansion must have inspired the regionally well-known master butcher Böllinghaus to make a bet at the regular's table in his pub, that he would soon be able to establish a rolling plant. With his entrepreneurship, his money

and the technical expertise of Johann Ludwig Härtel he won the bet and finally succeeded in building the rolling mill. The Härtel family took over the business in 1894 after the death of founder Böllinghaus. Today the fourth generation is at the helm of the family-owned business.

In 1990 the Härtel family was looking for premises suitable for the production of stainless steel goods. In June 1996 they found a rolling mill in Portugal (a former competitor), renovated and revamped it within just six months, and started production in January 1997. Some might say that German strength and Portuguese passion are not exactly the perfect pairing. But, as everyone knows, opposites attract – often with surprising success. This also applied to these two companies: one company's strength was the other's weakness, and vice versa. Before long,

two perfectly complementary operations advanced to become the first and foremost rolling mill in Portugal for high-alloy steel. In 2001 Hartwig Härtel, President of Böllinghaus Steel, ceased dual stainless steel production and closed the works in Remscheid so that, from then on, production would only take place in Portugal. Today Böllinghaus employs 130 personnel in Portugal and 10 in Remscheid. In 2010 Böllinghaus Steel added drawn flat bars, square bars and hexagonal bars to its existing product portfolio of rolled products.

Almost all the stainless steel produced is exported

As mentioned above, Böllinghaus produces about 12,000 tonnes of stainless steel per annum, 99 % of which is intended for export. The USA counts for approximately 30 % of total sales. The American east coast is just nine days away from Portugal by ship – a big advantage for Böllinghaus Steel. Another 50 % of production goes to Germany, Great Britain, France, Spain and Scandinavia. The rest is exported to Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Australia.

About 70 % of Böllinghaus Steel's production goes to steel traders, 20 % to steel processors and just 10 % to end-users.

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Interview

with Hartwig Härtel, President of Böllinghaus Steel

■ **Mr. Härtel, how did Böllinghaus Steel cope with the 2008/2009 crisis?**

■ As you can imagine, the crisis was extremely hard for us. Our turnover declined by 50 % to about 6,000 tonnes per annum. Nevertheless, we survived, and did not have to make anyone redundant.

■ **Looking back, how do you judge your business, and what do you expect in 2012?**

■ We are quite content and, despite all the problems, very optimistic for 2012. We see

a great advantage in our USA business. By the way, our entire sales staff has traditionally been trained within our company. This is also a very encouraging factor for the economic well-being of our company.

■ **Have you recently invested in your Portuguese premises?**

■ Yes indeed. Within the last three years we have invested about 4 million euros in a new annealing furnace and in optimising two rolling mills in Portugal.

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