

Aluminothermic welding on ballast-less track



Rails are unloaded as part of the Process Chain Jointless Rail



In situ flash butt welding



Flash butt welding process



Aluminothermic welding process

Change of focus

Having taken great strides in its history, Klaus Thormählen GmbH is now concentrating on rail welding opportunities, both home and abroad

From its headquarters in Bad Oldesloe, Germany, Klaus Thormählen GmbH has spent the last 20 years as a leader in the field of rail welding. The company's heritage extends back somewhat further though, even beyond its formation in 1989. Prior to this date, company owner and managing director Klaus Thormählen worked for the German state railway, before using this experience as a basis for his new venture. From its inception, Klaus Thormählen thrived quickly with three additional branches founded in Berlin, Halle, and Cologne by 1992, and today is a successful, internationally active organisation.

One of the ways in which Klaus Thormählen

has differentiated itself amongst its competitors is its unique offering of all kinds of rail welding and grinding services. Whilst many companies specialise in standard rail welding technologies such as aluminothermic welding, and others offer flash butt welding processes, very few have the ability to provide both.

"We are very specialised within this niche part of the railway industry, and then in this niche itself we are highly qualified. We have a deep in-house knowledge of the rail welding business, and many of our executive personnel are former Deutsche Bahn (DB) employees. Furthermore, we have invested heavily in qualifying our welders so that we only have the best people working on the track. Presently we can deploy 35 welding teams with 1st class certification that allows them to provide welding services on tracks of all speed categories," describes director Steffen Ralfs.

Klaus Thormählen is also known for having led the industry in the field of mobile flash butt welding ever since it launched its first machine

in 1994. This made it possible to transport rail lengths from the mill directly to the site to be welded in-situ, as well as automatically aligning the rail. "We were the first to introduce that technology onto the German tracks," notes Steffen. "After a couple of years, the German railway declared that this would be the standard technology for welding on the high speed lines, and it has continued to grow from there. Whilst we have competitors in this area, we believe that our experience is an advantage, and with four mobile flash butt welding machines in-house, from a capacity perspective we are also still the market leader".

The company's portfolio even includes smaller and more specialist works such as electric joint welding, electric build-up welding, grinding and re-profiling of rails and switches, local production of MT-joints, and stress relief for continuous

Although the process of welding has remained fairly consistent over the years, Klaus Thormählen, alongside his team, has also been responsible for the development of mobile flash butt welding equipment – the 'Process of Mobile Rail'. Once again the rails are loaded, welded, unloaded, welded, and ground, as part of a single process. This is a key route to market for a rail welding company, Klaus Thormählen. The first market where the company works is Germany as owner of the German rail network. The second is as a sub-contractor for new track projects, where Klaus Thormählen supplies its services to the project contractor. "This year we were successful in winning a number of maintenance contracts for the German rail network, particularly in the northern part of the country. We will change our business focus over the next two to three years as

we will be working more in maintenance. We see this as very positive for the company to be working directly for the owner of the rail network," elaborates Steffen.


"We have a co-operation with one of the larger rail construction companies for Scandinavia, particularly Norway, so we expect some work from this market. We see that Norway and Sweden are very interesting markets for the future as there are plans to invest a lot of money in the rail infrastructure in these countries. Also on the international side

of the business, five years ago we established a subsidiary in Turkey, which is becoming more and more successful. This is therefore another market that we are looking at expanding in for the future," he continues.

Whilst internationally the situation looks positive, in its home market Klaus Thormählen has seen rail welding capacities grow beyond demand, creating a competitive marketplace. Contrary to this though, the German sector still accounts for around 70 per cent of the company's business, with the intention to grow even further. "Ten years ago we were in a very comfortable position with a much greater demand for rail welding than the market capacity at the time. As that capacity has outstripped demand so the rates for these services have dropped which has created much thinner profit margins. Whilst this situation has prompted other companies to try and reduce their welding capacities, we want to continue to increase ours in order to step-by-step grow the company at a rate of around ten per cent," concludes Steffen. ■

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For more than 20 years Elektro-Thermit and Klaus Thormählen GmbH have established a very stable and reliable business relationship. The trustful interaction with each other plays an important role in this partnership. Elektro-Thermit manufactures and delivers Thermit consumables and welding equipment as well as insulated steel fishplates for Klaus Thormählen GmbH for the German rail business and moreover for the international rail market.



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