

Strähle + Hess, Auburn, AL

I was excited to finally get to visit the German company Strähle + Hess in Auburn, AL. I was greeted by Josh Morton, COO; Thomas Klein, CFO and Tobias Kops, Head of Production.

The company started in Auburn in 2004. Equipment was set up late that year and production of two products for Mercedes-Benz M Class was started in 2005. Core technology was added later on. Strähle + Hess's two main product lines are piping and head liner application.

They prepare piping for car seats which previously was used as an elegant sporty element to emphasize seat contours. The trendy trim is having a comeback. Customers of the piping are GM, Chrysler, Ford, Kia, Mercedes-Benz and BMW to name a few. Piping comes in many colors and fashion styles. The textile for the head liner is made at the location on tube knitting machines. The knitting machines are German and top of the line. The finished textile gets sent off to be dyed. Frankly, I am not sure what was more fascinating – to see knitting machine with many big rolls of thread making textile or watching a machine glue textile and foam together for head liners. There are more than 25 different versions for just one Mercedes-Benz model!

Strähle + Hess have grown from 10,000 square feet to 23,500 square feet since 2004. They are adding two more programs in 2015 for MB and BMW so beyond 2015 there may be a need for expansion. Due to the highly automated process they get everything done with a staff of 30 people on 3 shifts/5 days. To have more flexibility they have started cross training staff, but the operators still have their certain experience. Strähle + Hess in Auburn have ISO TS16949 certification which is the highest level quality certification in the automotive industry.

Strähle + Hess were founded in 1926 in Althengstett making socks. In 1960 they started supplying Mercedes-Benz and is now specialized in textiles only for car interiors. Strähle + Hess have one location in USA (Auburn), two in Germany and the fourth location is starting up in Shanghai, China. They have 250 employees worldwide and approximately \$50-55 million in sales yearly.