

# The past meets the future

Interview with Norbert Jungreithmayr, Kenneth Sundberg & Günther Mayr

In the second part of our „History of WFL“ series, we take a look at how the MILLTURN was developed and what lies ahead for the complete machining concept. Together with senior WFL managers, we examine which technical developments have really paid off, how to interpret future trends in the machine tool market and what latent potential lies dormant in the MILLTURN.

**Are there any events from the early days of WFL and the development of the MILLTURN that have stuck in your mind?**

**N. Jungreithmayr:** We started in 1993 in a difficult economic environment – the machine tool industry was in crisis. But luckily, we found an owner – the Rothenberger family – who believed in us and gave us immense support as we developed. The things that stand out most in my mind are the team spirit and the dedicated team that set out on this road to success and is still exceptionally committed to this day. Everyone just got stuck in wherever necessary. This commitment and this morale were what got us off the ground. It goes without saying that we had this great

product, the MILLTURN, and a new idea: that of complete machining. This new idea and the superb product came from it, coupled with dedicated employees and our owner, allowed us to get off to a great start.

**G. Mayr:** I am still amazed by the vision that our colleagues from Linz had, having the foresight to develop such a product and get it ready for series production. The fact that the Rothenberger family and our predecessors had the entrepreneurial courage to found WFL during the crisis of a century in the machine tool market in 1992/93. A time when many renowned machine tool manufacturers either closed down or, at the very least, suffered long-

term damage, and then build it into the strong company that it is today, makes it all the more remarkable.

**Mr Sundberg, what do you know about WFL's beginnings?**

**K. Sundberg:** I now know a great deal, but even before I joined WFL, almost two years ago, I was aware that WFL Millturn Technologies was the leading machine manufacturer in complete machining. Today, I am more convinced than ever that WFL is truly leading the way.

**Do you remember any particular technical developments which were innovative at the time?**



## TOGETHER AND STRONG FOR AN INNOVATIVE FUTURE

The three heads of WFL are always focusing on various options and chances in the machine tool market.



#### COMMUNICATION

The management team is maintaining a steady dialogue with customers and employees.

“For WFL, I see opportunities rather than risks in structural change.”

Günther Mayr

**N. Jungreithmayer:** The turning-boring-milling unit forms the heart of our machine and is where breakthroughs can be most readily seen. Software also plays a key role and thanks to impressive innovations, we have also been able to successfully conquer this market. Even back then, our approach was to offer customers a production solution. Not just a machine, but machining processes, tools, programs and methods. This idea has been with us right from the start and provided the ideal basis for creating a successful company.

**What short and long-term trends do you see for the machine tool market in the future?**

**N. Jungreithmayer:** As a manufacturer of complete machining centres, we are following the trend of producing smaller batch sizes. Automation is on the rise and will continue to increase, including with respect to the shortage of skilled workers. The drive behind this pattern is less about autonomous factories and more

about being able to produce small batch sizes in the second and third shift. This is a decisive development. It's also worth mentioning digitalisation, data management and information gathering. Improving machine utilisation even further is crucial. Cutting times have been highly optimised, optimum machines and tools are being deployed. There is still potential with regard to idle times, set-up times and downtimes.

From my perspective, however, it is more important to anticipate trends in advance, identify them ahead of time so that we have the right product or the right development ready to hand. We develop our machines based on our customers' requirements. As a supplier of complete solutions, we stay in close contact with our customers throughout the entire order process and this helps us to identify trends early on.

**K. Sundberg:** What is currently happening in the automotive industry will definitely be a huge challenge for the industry over the short and medium-term. This

situation will have a significant impact on the entire machine building industry, either directly or indirectly.

Another aspect is the networking of machines, tools, robots, etc. in an entire system with complete transparency. There is strong growth in this area, which will continue to increase over the coming years. This is no longer simply a vision; it's happening every day and with great success. Demand for efficiency and expertise in production is also a hot topic. This is an area where WFL, as a production expert, can really support industry with products and services that help customers get the most out of their investment. The training that WFL offers also comes into play here. Our motto in After Market Sales is „Release Your Manufacturing Potential“ and we endeavour to achieve this by working closely with our customers. Retrofitting, modernisation and all kinds of production support are very important in ensuring the customer that we are extremely competitive.

**G. Mayr:** The world of machine tool man-

ufacturing is in a period of rapid change, I completely agree. In certain areas of machine tool manufacturing, order volumes have fallen by 30 to 50%. It is mainly companies that are overly dependent on the automotive sector that are affected by the developments in the automotive industry and its current strong trend toward electromobility. But we need to bear in mind that crisis is not actually the right word for this. We call it a structural change in drive technology. But change always brings opportunities for innovative companies. I regard this change as more of an opportunity than a risk for WFL. For example, many of our customers no longer buy special gear hobbing machines, but they value our expertise and knowledge in this area as a reason for buying a MILLTURN.

**What do you think the machine concept of the future will look like?**

**K. Sundberg:** It's difficult to predict the future, but aside from aspects such as digitalisation and automation, it will also be just as important to continue to work closely with customers in order to understand their challenges and develop and implement solutions. Complexity is increasing and so I consider efficient collaboration with customers and other partners as the key to success. I believe that WFL's specialisation and focus on the field of complete machining and on being a system partner with toptier manufacturing expertise will remain an attractive factor – regardless of what the market requires.

**N. Jungreithmayer:** From our perspective, the machine concept of the future is complete machining – with ongoing optimisation, additional processes, greater information processing and integration in higher-level systems.

**G. Mayr:** I believe that WFL's future lies in the concept of complete machining. There is a rapidly growing market for complete machining. Our customers come to us for solutions that don't exist yet. Some of the requirements include automation of a MILLTURN with heavy workpieces and production of a wide range of gear teeth. WFL is always able to find a solution for these requirements.

**What does WFL's strategic approach look like?**

**N. Jungreithmayer:** We have a clear aim – we want to grow faster than the mar-

ket. How do we intend to do this? With outstanding products from machines to software and from production solutions to customer services, we want to have a stronger presence in the markets, establish additional branches and look after national regions. We need highly motivated, committed and well trained employees to achieve our goals. We want to use the latest technology, not just in our machines but also in our processes and service support.

**G. Mayr:** The After Market Sales department and the expansion of our sales and service network (with 24/7) in the markets is a key strategic goal. Our customers also want automation right through to smaller turnkey projects, mainly those overseas. Of course, we need to build up our technology with the corresponding professional infrastructure for demon-

strating our machines, technology and test machining of customer's sample workpieces, which is essential for the company to evolve.

**K. Sundberg:** Our main goal is to strengthen our position as the number 1 in complete machining. New technology, products and machines are being developed and adapted to meet the needs of the future. WFL will increasingly evolve into a system partner. Good examples of this include the acquisition of automation experts FRAI Robotic Solutions in 2018 and the introduction of our own system tools for the most challenging production tasks. The new organisation that we are currently developing enables us to give our customers more comprehensive and sustainable support, throughout the entire life cycle of a MILLTURN.

“As complexity is increasing, I consider efficient collaboration with customers as well as other partners as the key to success.”

Kenneth Sundberg



#### UNITED STRENGTHS

Everyone contributes their knowledge and skills from different departments.