

NEWSLETTER

For BILSTEIN GROUP partners and customers

Issue 1 – 2026



BILSTEIN | HUGO VOGELSANG | BILSTEIN CEE | BILSTEIN COLD ROLLED STEEL | SHEARLINE STEEL STRIP
BILSTEIN TRADING (SHANGHAI) | BILSTEIN SPECIALTY STEEL MEXICO | INAC | BILSTEIN STEEL FIBER | BILCUT

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Das Kaltband.

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BILSTEIN CEE anniversary celebrations

20 years as part of the BILSTEIN GROUP

The Czech cold-rolled strip specialist has been part of the BILSTEIN GROUP for 20 years. Customers and suppliers came together on 19 September 2025 for the official anniversary celebrations.

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**Blechexpo 2025 –
A hub for the steel industry**
"Infinite potential": at Blechexpo 2025 in Stuttgart, the BILSTEIN GROUP once again highlighted its market position as a one-stop provider.

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**Order Express –
"Your wish is our command!"**
Thanks to our new Order Express service, we are now able to accept around 90% of all one-off orders and requests.

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Marc T. Oehler
CEO
BILSTEIN GROUP

Dear Reader,

2025 was an extremely challenging year for all of us. Economic developments in Germany and Europe, the trade and tariff policies of the US administration under Donald Trump, the seemingly never-ending war in Ukraine ... these are all factors that are having a huge impact on market development and our business as a whole.

When the supply chain for the steel and automotive industries in Europe is under pressure, the prospects for the BILSTEIN GROUP are also very uncertain. In light of this, we have very deliberately reduced our production capacities in Germany in recent months. This doesn't mean that we aren't looking strategically at the road ahead – quite the opposite, in fact. There are lots of reasons I'm feeling optimistic about the future. These include the new sales structure and the successful execution of our ambitious sales strategy; the potential to exploit the opportunities offered by state-of-the-art plant technology and by the new BILCUT high-speed laser blanking procedure; as well as the potential we see in our steel fibre, STABILS.

I am sure that 2026 will also bring lots of challenges; it seems unlikely that the economic situation will improve any time soon. But the future is coming, and we are extremely focused on AI in particular. We have purchased a stake in the Berlin-based start-up Vanilla Steel so we can benefit from their expertise in AI, and we've already launched our first pilot projects together.

The range of topics covered in this newsletter reflects the volume and complexity of areas we're working in. Whatever happens, the coming year certainly won't be boring. I hope you enjoy the read.

And most importantly: remain confident!
All the best for 2026!

Kind regards,
Marc T. Oehler



BILSTEIN CEE anniversary celebrations

On 19 September 2025, customers, suppliers and partners celebrated 20 years since BILSTEIN CEE became part of the BILSTEIN GROUP, in a marquee on the company premises.

20 years as part of the BILSTEIN GROUP

In 2025, BILSTEIN CEE celebrated a milestone – the Czech cold-rolled strip specialist has been part of the BILSTEIN GROUP for 20 years. To mark the occasion, customers and suppliers were invited to an event at the company's headquarters in Králův Dvůr on 19 September 2025. And the next day, a special family-friendly event was held for employees and their relatives.

To help celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the company joining the BILSTEIN GROUP as fittingly as possible, customers, suppliers and partners were invited to an official event hosted in a marquee in the courtyard of the Czech plant in the early afternoon of 19 September 2025.

Consistent growth

Peter Uhrík, CEO at BILSTEIN CEE, opened the event with an informative talk about the impressive trajectory of BILSTEIN CEE over the last 20 years. Marc T. Oehler, Chief Executive Officer and managing partner of the BILSTEIN GROUP, also praised BILSTEIN CEE's positive development in his address, and took the opportunity to thank all employees for the successes, highlighting their exceptional commitment and entrepreneurial spirit.

The external guests and speakers were also keen to praise the company and its staff – for example, Tomasz Plaskura, Chief Marketing Officer East Europe at ArcelorMittal, reflected on the beginnings of the collaboration with the company back in 2009, and on the company's growth, which is reflected in the consistent increase in demand for hot-rolled strip.

A diverse programme of events

All the guests were then able to take a tour of the plant, to witness first-hand the various innovations and state-of-the-art manufacturing processes in use at BILSTEIN CEE. It was an impressive glimpse behind the scenes, as the attendees' feedback confirmed.

The official part of the celebrations then concluded with a cruise on the Vltava river, to which select customers and suppliers were invited.

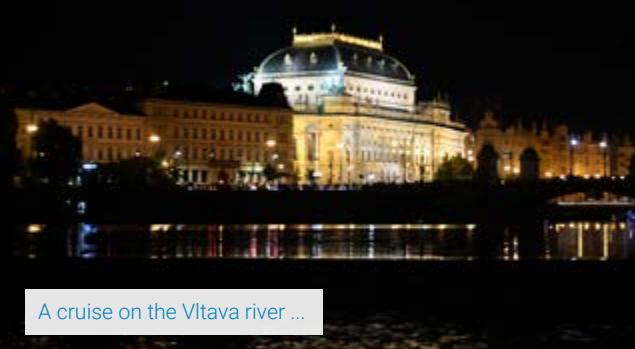
An anniversary family day

The following day was devoted to celebrating with employees and their families. "The celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of BILSTEIN CEE joining the BILSTEIN GROUP very clearly showed that we have a great atmosphere and upbeat team spirit among the staff," points out Marc T. Oehler, who was impressed by the employees' high level of motivation and commitment – and by their dedication to and identification with the company. Take Martin Hejny, for example, who also celebrated his wedding on 20 September 2025. He attended the event before the marriage ceremony, and then brought his wife along to the family day once it was over. ■





Antonín Foukal (centre), former Head of Investments, brought along an award from 1951, recognizing the cold-rolling mill as the best plant in the former ironworks. Marc T. Oehler (left), Chief Executive Officer and managing partner of the BILSTEIN GROUP, and Peter Uhrík, CEO of BILSTEIN CEE, were delighted to see this testament to the company's historical success.



A cruise on the Vltava river ...



Behind the scenes at a state-of-the-art production plant.



... wrapped up the official part of the celebrations.

The hot-rolled strip supplier Salzgitter Flachstahl GmbH gifted BILSTEIN CEE a fire pit to mark the anniversary: (left to right) Peter Uhrík, CEO of BILSTEIN CEE, Martin Scharf, team leader for cold-rolling, finishing and slabbing at Salzgitter, Friedrich Ellebrecht, sales manager for cold-rolling, finishing and slabbing at Salzgitter, and Marc T. Oehler.



Enjoying the evening cruise: (left to right) Soňa Houtová, HR manager, Drahuše Polášková, production manager, Monika Bačová, assistant/secretary, and Roman Jícha, process engineer, with his wife Anna.



A broad range of activities and gorgeous weather meant there was fun for everyone – even the youngest members of the BILSTEIN family.



An anniversary celebration and a wedding all in one day: Martin Hejny and his new wife Petra had two reasons to celebrate on 20 September 2025.



The foundation for steady growth

Future-proofing in a highly dynamic market environment: in 2025, the BILSTEIN GROUP laid solid foundations for the foreseeable future by restructuring according to the current and future demand on the market – both in terms of the size of our organization and also our capacities.

In these times of drastically declining demand, very few companies in the steel industry were able to avoid restructuring measures in 2025. "We can see that many of our customers have also made a certain amount of progress in this respect over the same period," explains Marc T. Oehler, Chief Executive Officer and managing partner of the BILSTEIN GROUP. The BILSTEIN GROUP is also in the final stages of its restructuring programme, with the alignment of capacities and production volumes to the "new normal" largely completed at both BILSTEIN and HUGO VOGELSANG. A key element was the adjustments made at Plant II. "We were able to implement these measures in a largely socially responsible way, avoiding any involuntary redundancies, through voluntary programmes and retirement solutions," Marc T. Oehler is relieved to say.

Top priority: maintaining the full product range ...

A key consideration when adjusting capacities was to continue offering thin gauges in the product portfolio, which had previously been produced mainly at BILSTEIN Plant II. Through vigorous testing, it proved possible to roll significantly thinner gauges than before on the wide rolling mill at BILSTEIN Plant I, and additional volumes will also be produced by HUGO VOGELSANG in future. What's more, the rolling stand in the Czech Republic has been upgraded to handle thin gauges.

... and even expanding it further

"Even in extremely challenging circumstances, we continue to push ahead with implementing our strategic agenda," empha-

sises Marc T. Oehler. As a result, even during the restructuring process, the focus was not solely on cutting costs; targeted investments were also made in key areas.

Last summer, the BILSTEIN GROUP acquired the quenching and tempering lines of competitor Stahlwerk Unna GmbH, which was a win-win-win situation for the entire group: HUGO VOGELSANG strengthens its market position in the area of tempered products, the BILSTEIN GROUP further expands its position as a one-stop, full-range provider, and acquiring the plant creates additional tempering capacity for the innovative steel fibre STABILS.

Replacing lead with hydrogen technology

With these new quenching and tempering lines, HUGO VOGELSANG is able to produce greater volumes of demanding products such as shock absorber strip, while also entering markets that require hydrogen technology to quench austenitized materials (H_2 quenching). From a sustainability perspective, replacing lead quenching with hydrogen technology is also fully in line with the BILSTEIN GROUP's objectives.

Leveraging the opportunities of digitalization and AI

As part of the restructuring process, the BILSTEIN GROUP also reviewed its administrative processes and plans to make substantial advances in digitalization and artificial intelligence, with the aim of simplifying tasks and streamlining workflows. ■

How can we benefit from ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

The BILSTEIN GROUP is increasingly focused on leveraging innovative AI solutions to streamline and optimize processes. We have various AI pilot projects underway in collaboration with AI partner Vanilla Steel, in which the BILSTEIN GROUP has held a stake since November 2025.

During extremely dynamic times, speed and flexibility are the currencies of success. Right now, AI often holds the answer to the key question of how we can further improve processes in terms of agility and adaptability, by enabling companies to use the various data held in their systems more efficiently.

The rapid evolution of AI

Artificial intelligence has been a part of our day-to-day life for some time now – especially since the rapid rise of generative AI, like ChatGPT by OpenAI. And there is intense public debate around the benefits and risks of this technology. "AI is still problematic in many ways," acknowledges Meik Forell, CFO of the BILSTEIN GROUP. "But it's clear that AI is developing extremely quickly. It's actually incredible how much progress there's been in the technology."

And it's an exciting area for the BILSTEIN GROUP too. How can we implement AI in a way that makes life easier for our employees and, at the same time, accelerates our processes?

Full focus on AI at the BILSTEIN GROUP

The company is already using AI for time-consuming, routine tasks – freeing up staff for tasks that add more value. Overall, IT has identified 15 potential applications for AI to support employees, including an intracompany ChatGPT-like tool that will be launched shortly. Thanks to the standard solutions that already exist, it is relatively straightforward to implement these applications in house.

Our investment in our AI partner Vanilla Steel

Some years ago, the BILSTEIN GROUP started working with the Berlin-based start-up Vanilla Steel on marketing A2 grade steel. This means that residues, surplus stock or non-conforming material can also be placed with customers, which makes a valuable contribution to sustainability. Since then, Vanilla Steel has developed into a digital steel distributor with in-depth AI expertise – and, in November 2025, the BILSTEIN GROUP took a stake in this extremely promising company. This means the BILSTEIN GROUP can have a hand in Vanilla Steel's business success and utilize the company's AI expertise in their shared projects. It goes without saying that Vanilla Steel will continue to market and sell the BILSTEIN GROUP's A2 material.

For more complex projects, the BILSTEIN GROUP is working with a new partner, since the rapid development of the technology and associated resources is almost impossible for a medium-sized company to keep up with. Vanilla Steel, a Berlin-based start-up, has been successfully selling the BILSTEIN GROUP's A2 steel for several years now. The company is using AI-driven solutions extensively to position itself as a digital steel distributor. And now the BILSTEIN GROUP and Vanilla Steel are working together on various AI pilot applications. ■

A hub for the STEEL INDUSTRY

"Infinite potential": at Blechexpo 2025 in Stuttgart, the BILSTEIN GROUP once again highlighted its market position as a one-stop provider, with highly innovative technologies and products like BILCUT and STABILS in the spotlight.

Nine full exhibition halls, 1,190 exhibitors from 41 countries and 40,072 visitors – the 17th Blechexpo in Stuttgart was once again a key hub for the steel industry. The BILSTEIN GROUP also attended the trade show, which took place from 21 to 24 October 2025 under the slogan "Infinite potential", where it showcased its entire product portfolio for the automotive and industry segments.

The trade show clearly highlighted that the BILSTEIN GROUP remains a one-stop, full-range provider that is raising the bar with innovations like BILCUT (see the article on page 9) and STABILS. The company's trade show presence was very well received by visitors.

A successful show

Overall, the trade show team can look back on a successful event, with lots of customer meetings, new contacts and satisfied guests. "Our booth was extremely well attended, with lots of interest from both existing customers and new

customers," says CSO Georgio Alexopoulos, pleased with how things went. In particular, the traditional "booth party" on the first evening of the show brought together a number of customers and suppliers at the BILSTEIN GROUP booth. This is a key event at the show for many of the attendees, and an important opportunity to meet and mingle with other stakeholders in the industry.

Positive signals

The relaxed atmosphere at the booth was further enhanced by a sense of cautious optimism among the BILSTEIN GROUP's customers: "We're seeing that our customers are under pressure when it comes to costs and liquidity – but we got some positive signals from the market," says Georgio Alexopoulos. "Right now no one dares predict what the future might hold – which is why the market is still so full of uncertainties – but many of our customers are already quite far down the road in terms of restructuring. And as a result there's a certain expectation that we will start to see some successes in 2026." ■



An industry hub: the BILSTEIN GROUP booth was well attended.



At a 250 m² booth, the BILSTEIN GROUP showcased its entire product portfolio for the automotive and industry segments.



Powerful, reliable and strong: Hannes the elephant served as the brand ambassador for the BILSTEIN GROUP in 2025. And with great success: "Our customers were very impressed," says Tina Prinz, Marketing & PR, happily.



Georgio Alexopoulos, CSO BILSTEIN GROUP; Michael Ullrich, CTO BILSTEIN GROUP; and Marc T. Oehler, Chief Executive Officer and managing partner BILSTEIN GROUP, were delighted the trade show went so well ...



BILCUT was a star attraction – at both the BILSTEIN GROUP and the booths of our partners EMW Stahl Service GmbH and DREHER Automation.



... for which Josef Matějček and Ladislav Mezenský from BILSTEIN CEE and Peter Uhrík, CEO at BILSTEIN CEE, travelled to Stuttgart.



The innovative steel fibre STABILS is opening up another market segment outside of automotive and industry.

An innovation GOES INTO PRODUCTION

High-speed laser-cut blanks for structural components "made by" the BILSTEIN GROUP: in April 2025, an investment in constructing the new BILCUT plant at the Berchum site was finally approved. It was the green light for the foundation of the sales company BILCUT GmbH, the new plant and the entire production line. The market is already eagerly anticipating this technology and production is scheduled to begin in early 2027.



A milestone: on 16 October, a long-standing cold-rolled strip customer of BILSTEIN joined Michael Ullrich, CTO BILSTEIN GROUP (right), and Jörg von Prondzinski, managing director at BILCUT and head of application engineering, BILSTEIN GROUP (second from right), in visiting the plant manufacturer to see the BILCUT prototype plant. The customer sees lots of benefits in procuring both cold-rolled strip and the blanks made from it from the BILSTEIN GROUP.

Conventional laser machines, which work directly on the coil, were designed more for large, exterior parts in the automotive industry and often are not optimal for making much smaller structural components. By offering high-speed laser-cut blanks for structural components, the BILSTEIN GROUP is therefore filling an important gap in the market. Word spread quickly that the BILSTEIN GROUP had approved the investment in BILCUT, and the first few customers expressed an interest in summer 2025.

Next steps

Within the next 12 months, the new production line for high-speed laser-cut blanks will be constructed on an area of around 3,000 m² in Berchum, including logistics routes and raw material and finished goods warehouses. The new plant is due to be installed from November 2025. It comprises a conveyor system, i.e. a coiler and levelling machine, the actual laser cell and the stacking machine, which picks up the blanks from the belt and stacks them on top of one another at high speed.

The sales campaign has begun: partners and collaborators

To bring high-speed laser-cut blanks to the market, the BILSTEIN GROUP is working with the EDAG Group, one of the largest independent engineering service providers in the automotive industry. EDAG supports OEMs and large suppliers with vehicle design, and is now offering BILCUT technology as an alternative to tool-based blanking via pressing. "It makes sense to do this now – because when there is a decision to invest in a technology, it's a multi-year commitment," says Jörg von Prondzinski, managing director at BILCUT GmbH and head of application engineering at the BILSTEIN GROUP.

The BILSTEIN GROUP is also working with EMW Stahl Service GmbH, based in Neunkirchen, North Rhine-Westphalia – the biggest non-affiliated steel service centre in Germany. "They have been active in the segment that we want to target with BILCUT for decades, and are supporting us with sales activities, in particular," explains Jörg von Prondzinski. The partnership is a win-win for our shared customers, who can enjoy reliable availability, the same high quality standards, and cost-efficient processes. ■



Breaking new ground with our partners:

We are committed to GREEN LOGISTICS

Since spring 2025, electric trucks operated by Rhenus Port Logistics Rhein-Ruhr GmbH have been transporting goods between the BILSTEIN GROUP's locations in Hagen.



Facts & figures:

The electric tractor unit

The Volvo FH Electric, in operation at Rhenus for around a year, features a 540 kWh battery, of which roughly 450 kWh is available for driving, providing a range of up to 300 km, or approximately 250 km in winter.

Rhenus Port Logistics Rhein-Ruhr GmbH – specifically the Hagen-based company formerly known as Robert Schmitz Spedition until 2023 and now part of the Rhenus Group – has for decades been one of several logistics providers transporting coils produced at BILSTEIN Plant I to the HUGO VOGELSANG and Berchum plants for further processing. "By using electric trucks for our factory transport, we are showing strong support for greater sustainability and modern logistics solutions," says Tobias Dahl, head of logistics at the order centre, BILSTEIN GROUP.

Significant CO₂ savings

By switching from diesel to electric trucks, both companies are able to make a significant contribution to reducing emissions. After all, an electric

truck can save around 104 kg of CO₂ per day compared to a diesel vehicle!

Several vehicles operate daily, transporting goods between BILSTEIN GROUP locations. Each truck completes around six trips per day, which adds up to roughly 60 short-distance journeys per week.

Much quieter

Another benefit: electric tractor units are much quieter than diesel trucks. "Plant I is located in a mixed residential area with fairly heavy traffic. The local residents are naturally pleased by the switch to nearly silent tractor units," explains Tobias Dahl.

Clear commitment to sustainability

"Our goal is to become carbon neutral in our internal processes by 2035, provided that sufficient CO₂-neutral energy sources are available by that point. In Rhenus, we are delighted to

have a logistics partner who shares the same vision," says Dahl. "Together, we demonstrate a clear commitment to sustainability."

A green supply chain: the Green Steel Logistics Hub in the Port of Dortmund

With over 200,000 m² of warehouse space in Hagen, its own rail connection and a modern fleet of vehicles, Rhenus Port Logistics Rhein-Ruhr GmbH is a strong partner for the industry – and one that now also demonstrates a clear focus on climate-friendly transport solutions. In September 2024, the Green Steel Logistics Hub was opened at the Dortmund site, representing a pioneering project for steel logistics with reduced CO₂. Here, the electric vehicles are charged using energy from a large-scale photovoltaic system, showcasing a prime example of a holistic approach to green supply chains.



Express service for one-off orders

"Your wish is OUR COMMAND!"

Thanks to our new Order Express service, the BILSTEIN GROUP is now able to accept around 90% of all one-off orders and requests. As a result, sales can usually confirm with customers within two days: "Your wish is our command!"

Within the BILSTEIN GROUP's processes, regular, recurring enquiries and orders provide a medium- to long-term planning horizon, which can be effectively coordinated using a standardized scheduling tool and aligned production planning. However, there are also spontaneous, one-off requests from customers who are looking for a supplier that can support them with a special requirement.

Order Express service: exploiting our strength in speed

Speed is essential when it comes to these new, one-off orders. For new enquiries that cannot be accommodated within the

standard review schedule, in February 2025, the BILSTEIN GROUP launched Order Express, a service that removes the scheduling of these requests from our standard processes so they can be dealt with separately. It gives these one-off requests an express journey through our systems and planning processes, enabling sales to find a binding delivery date for these individual cases as quickly as possible and share that with the customer.

Identifying cross-department solutions

Finding these special solutions requires the involvement of all teams and departments. Sales, order management,

The cross-department Order Express team at the BILSTEIN GROUP has been working together to find quick solutions since February 2025: (left to right) Tobias Kirch (scheduling), Yunus Cengiz (order management), Laura Schimmelpfennig (sales management), Vanessa Fiebig (application and materials technology), Marc Heda (production management), Katharina Maas (order management), Mert Köstereli (scheduling), Martina Cramer (scheduling), and Michelle Fischer (order management). Not pictured is Yvonne Terkelj (application and materials technology).



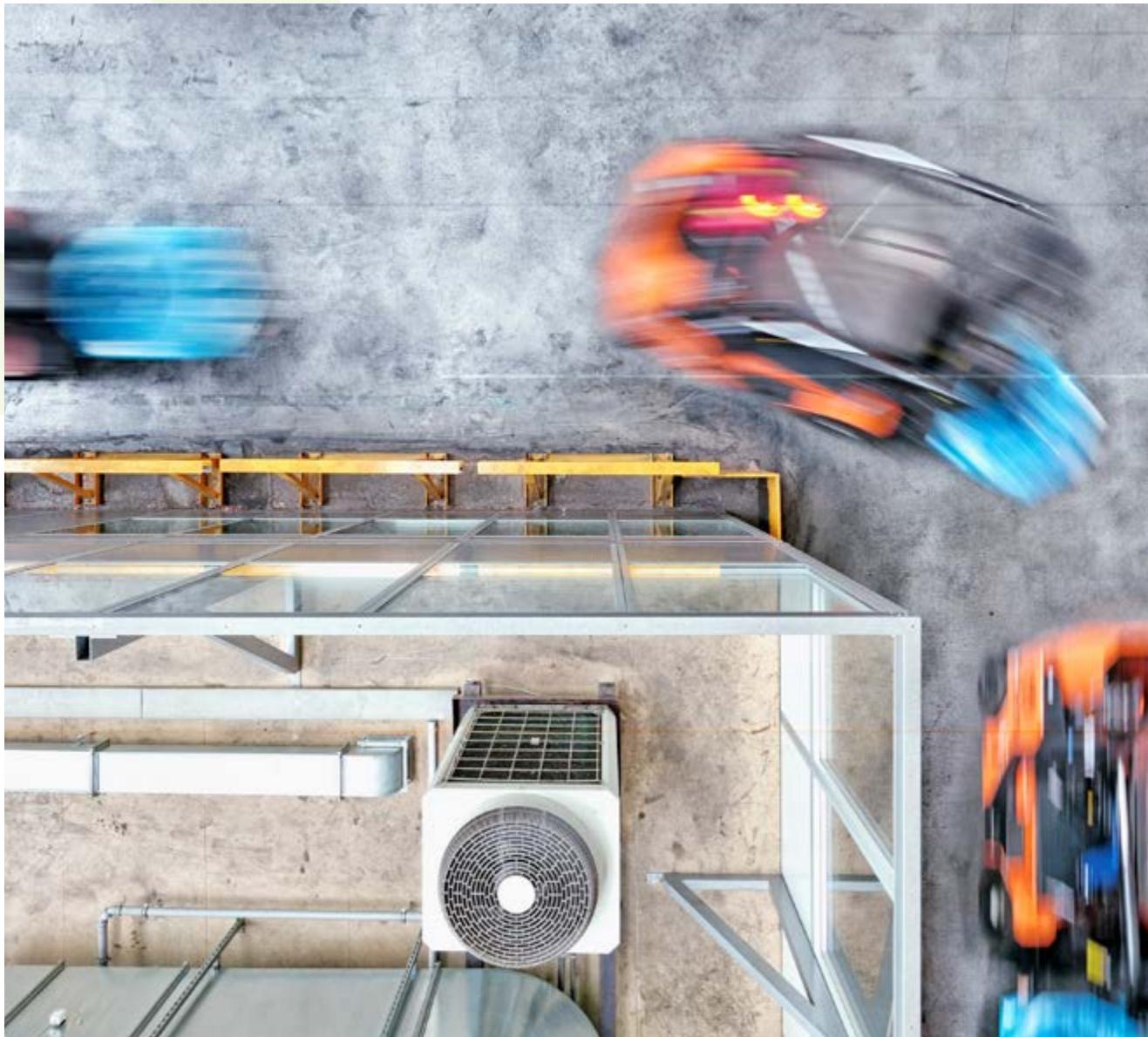
scheduling, production management, and application and hot-rolled strip technology must all work closely and coordinate. The cross-department, nine-person Order Express team holds overall responsibility for this. The team members still perform their roles in their own departments – but since February 2025, they have also taken over processing these one-off requests as part of the Order Express service.

"With the kinds of requests we get via Order Express, we don't usually have time to order material on a bespoke basis, so we almost always have to find alternative solutions," explains Tobias Kirch from the scheduling team. "That's why we have this team of experts; they study the request in-depth and have the technical knowledge needed to identify custom solutions." The major benefit of this is that coordination takes very little time, since the team meets in person on a daily basis and can discuss and agree on solutions then and there. "It's always

challenging to find the right material and the optimum production route in such a short amount of time," says Marc Heda of production management, BILSTEIN GROUP.

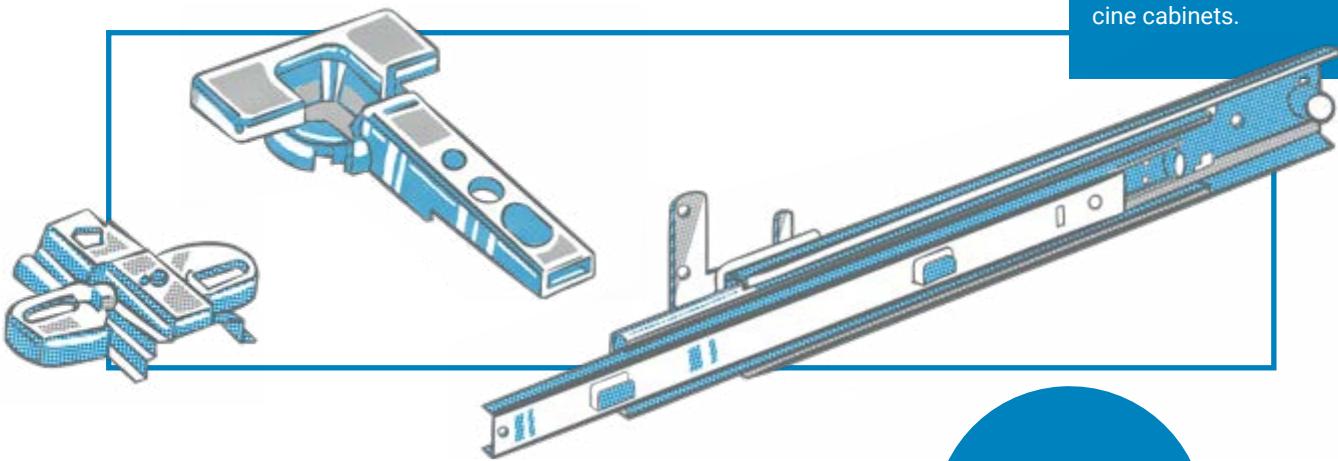
Work that pays off

The results of the new service speak for themselves: over 60 per cent of all orders and requests that go through Order Express are delivered exactly on the customer's preferred date, while a further 25 per cent are booked in for the best possible delivery date. With just a few exceptions, the team usually only needs one or two days to provide sales with reliable delivery dates. And the service is impressing both new and old customers of the BILSTEIN GROUP: "We have improved our numbers in both reliable delivery and speed. As a result, we've won some new customers – and won back old customers," says Thomas Schulz, head of the order centre at BILSTEIN GROUP, delighted with the outcomes. ■



What is cold-rolled strip used for?

Opening doors (and drawers): runners, hinges, locks and other fittings.



Runners, hinges, locks and other fittings for doors, cupboards, beds, tables and drawers are some of the items made from BILSTEIN cold-rolled steel and steel strip. Our high-precision manufacturing and rolling processes transform hot-rolled strip into high-quality cold-rolled strip for demanding applications. Once in the hands of a customer, and depending on their requirements, the material is often subject to further processing, maybe even tempering.

Application areas

Runners, hinges, locks and other fittings are primarily deployed in the woodworking and furniture industry, where they are used in kitchen and bedroom furniture, in beds and in wardrobe and drawer systems. But they are also deployed in the automotive sector, for example, in many central armrests or in the rails for front seats.

The material

The strips for runners, hinges, locks and other fittings are usually made from common steel grades that BILSTEIN cold works and refines. Depending on the application in question, these products are made from deep-drawing steel grades DC01–DC04, the tempered and case-hardened steels

C15, C55 and C60, or the high-strength, micro-alloyed steels like HC420LA.

The market

The market ranges from cold-rolled standard products to wound, jumbo-coiled speciality products. Globally, the market volume is approximately 200,000 tonnes per year. Any company that wants to be successful in this market segment must be able to deliver cold-rolled strip products with consistent properties across all strip lengths and widths, the tightest thickness tolerances and manufacturing possibilities with a high level of productivity.

The customers

BILSTEIN provides cold-rolled steel products like this to many large suppliers to the furniture and kitchen industries in Europe, as well as automotive OEMs.

The requirements

Because our customers process the material we deliver based on their specific needs and at high speeds, in addition to having the precise thicknesses, our cold-rolled strip must comply with extremely narrow margins in terms of mechanical and technological properties and offer a high degree of formability. ■

Did you know?

When it comes to the runners in drawer systems for kitchens, wardrobes and cabinets, customers expect consistently high material quality. That's no surprise – the runners are not only subject to frequent use over a number of years, they must also be able to withstand loads of up to 120 kilos, as in the case of medicine cabinets.

The "runners, hinges, locks and fittings" team



As an advisor to our technology customers and an applications expert, Holger Drueke is familiar with every technical detail.

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