

Interview with Manfred Zoni

Manfred Zoni, Director TBR Sales at Hankook Reifen Deutschland GmbH

Mr. Zoni, Hankook has built a new production facility for retreaded tyres in Hammelburg.

What were the main reasons for this?

We are forecasting strong market growth for retreaded tyres in the commercial vehicle sector – especially for particularly high-quality hot retreads. This growth is being driven by increasing cost sensitivity and an increasing emphasis on sustainability in the transport industry. These developments prompted us to invest in the industrial production of Hankook's Alphatread hot retread brand. To this end, we have acquired an additional piece of land in Hammelburg, on which we have installed a completely new production facility with the appropriate machinery. In total we have invested a seven-digit amount here.

What USPs can Alphatread lay claim to?

We are focusing on three aspects: firstly, as with all Hankook products, we can confidently claim our Alphatread profiles are premium-quality products. This begins with the exclusive use of A carcasses, which are tested and classified in a complex process. In addition, Hankook commercial vehicle tyres have a thicker undertread than usual. This makes the tyres particularly suitable for regrooving and retreading.

The second aspect is our vision to always look ahead and launch new products that give our customers the opportunity to reduce their carbon footprint. Retreading plays a central role here and will become increasingly important.

Thirdly, we take partnership very seriously. With our comprehensive SmartLife range, which runs from new tyres through to regrooved Alphatread tyres, we are supporting both trade and end customers over the whole extended life cycle of a commercial vehicle tyre. In this way we offer the optimal solution in terms of costs and sustainability.

What characterises the production of Alphatread tyres in Hammelburg?

We retread there according to industrial standards. The delivered carcasses are dried and cleaned in our warehouse. Each carcass then goes through a visual inspection and laser shearography stage, during which we can also detect damage that is not visible. Only perfectly flawless carcasses get the A classification - the basic requirement for an Alphatread product. However, should a carcass be discarded during this first step because a production defect is detected, the Hankook carcass guarantee applies. We replace the damaged carcass with a new one. In the next step, the carcasses are roughened and covered with a new layer of base rubber from bead to bead. This ensures that it is almost impossible to distinguish the finished

Alphatread profiles from those for new tyres. The tread with the profile is then vulcanised onto the carcass in the mould. The finished tyre undergoes a test of up to 11 bar in a pressure chamber and is then subjected to another shearography - a special feature in our factory. Only if there are no irregularities here as well will the tyre be released for sale or returned to the customer who brought it to us for retreading.

How many tyres can you produce in Hammelburg in this way?

Since we are convinced there will be dynamic market growth, we have built up our capacity with a view to the future. At full capacity, we could produce 80 - 100,000 tyres per year with a three-shift operation using hot retreading. This doubles our total capacity for hot and cold retreading. We are starting the new manufacturing facility with a utilisation rate of about 25 percent, but this will increase rapidly. We have increased the workforce in Hammelburg by 15 percent.

Is Hammelburg the only production plant for the Alphatread products?

Logistics and efficient delivery routes play a major role in retreading. After all, the carcass has to travel from the customer to the retreading plant and back again. That's why we offer Alphatread in the same quality throughout Europe, but from different production sites. We currently supply Germany and the neighbouring countries from Hammelburg. We have a contractor in the UK for local needs, as well as plants in Italy, Spain and France covering the southern European market. Our goal is to offer Alphatread with the same quality in all European markets and to increase the product range.

Which sectors do you supply with Alphatread products?

We want to develop and grow niches such as passenger transport and heavy-duty transport through the premium quality of our products. Currently we have five moulds for different dimensions. With additional profiles and sizes, we want to cover about 80 percent of the hot retread market in the future. Our focus is on trailer tyres, tyres for classic construction site traffic and tyres for regional distribution transport - both for trucks and buses.

Sustainability is one of the main reasons for your positive expectations of the retreading market. How do you quantify this?

Hankook pursues a comprehensive and holistic sustainability concept for its commercial vehicle tyres: Hankook SmartLife. Our equation is: longer life means more sustainability. We're talking about the four lives of a commercial vehicle tyre. For the first life as a new tyre we equip it with a more voluminous undertread than usual. With this we enable the second life - the

regrooving of the profile. This alone extends the service life of a commercial vehicle tyre by around 25 percent. The Alphatread retread corresponds to the third life of a Hankook commercial vehicle tyre, which - in the fourth life - can be regrooved again. This also lengthens service life by 25 percent. All in all, we are talking about a service life - across all four lives - that is up to 250 percent longer than that of a standard tyre which is disposed of directly. In terms of carbon footprint, the benefits are evident: With our approach, fleet operators save up to 1.6 tonnes of CO₂ per vehicle per year. With a saving of around 70 kilograms of raw material per vehicle, we are also relieving the strain on natural resources. It would be extremely hard to operate commercial vehicle tyres more sustainably.

Do fleet operators also have other advantages when they opt for retreaded tyres?

They certainly do: the legislators have recognised that commercial vehicle tyres can make a key contribution to making freight transport more sustainable. That is why they are eligible for funding of up to 50 percent of the purchase, rental or leasing cost via the "De Minimis" funding programme of the Federal Office for Goods Transport. However, our commercial vehicle tyres are eligible two times over, for the hot-retreaded Alphatread profiles are eligible in themselves as they also meet the requirements.