

Anniversary year 2012

50 years of car washes – a success story “Made in Augsburg”

Augsburg, 11 January 2012 – Be honest: Do the names Gebhard Weigele and Johann Sulzberger still mean anything to you? If not, here’s a clue: Weigele and Sulzberger are the founders of the German company WESUMAT Autowaschanlagen GmbH, namely the manufacturers of the world’s first “automatic car wash”. On 8 August 1962, i.e. precisely 50 years ago, these two entrepreneurs from Augsburg applied for a patent for their invention and, in doing so, laid the foundation for a service industry, which in Germany alone generates an annual turnover of over 1.3 billion euros. At the same time, the entrepreneurial success story of the two car wash pioneers has continued over the years through to this very day. Following the merger of WESUMAT in 2000 with the car wash manufacturer California Kleindienst to form WashTec AG, Weigele’s and Sulzberger’s original company is today a fundamental part of the world’s leading full-range supplier for vehicle washing technology.

The world’s first automatic car wash from the year 1962 did however look somewhat different to today’s systems. This was a two-brush system that circled around the stationary vehicle on rails during the washing process. However, the next evolutionary stage was not long in coming: As early as 1963, Kleindienst developed its first electrically powered three-brush gantry car wash, whose basic design in principle defines the way car washes look to this day. Two other forms of automatic car washes that are common to this day were incidentally also launched onto the market in the 60s. In 1964, Kleindienst presented its first conveyor tunnel system – three years later, the team from Augsburg presented its first automatic washing bay for commercial vehicles.

In the years that follow, optimised features in gantry car washes primarily come in the form of system equipment. By way of example, car washes soon become available with an integral drier, followed shortly afterwards by such innovations as wheel washers and underbody washes and the first paintwork protection options.

Ever since, it has tended to be specific refinements in terms of the detail, which, in some cases, ensure significant enhancements in the washing and drying results achieved by modern-day gantry car washes. With SofTecs[®], for example, WashTec developed a washing material from foamed polyethylene at the start of the new millennium, which, compared with conventional PE brushes, signifies a true quantum leap in terms of paintwork protection. In 2010, Weigele's and Sulzberger's heirs presented (under the WashTec umbrella, leading chemical washing products are now developed) with ShineTecs[®], the world's first washing chemical with a 'repair effect', which treats vehicle paintwork during the wash, achieving entirely new results in terms of vehicle shine.

The evolution of the car wash that was first invented 50 years ago has by no means reached its end, as WashTec will also be proving this year. On the occasion of the company anniversary, the team from Augsburg have declared 2012 the "car wash year of innovations" and will be presenting a new development every month in the run-up to the industry's leading trade fair "Automechanika", which will ensure even more thorough and profitable results in the professional vehicle washing business.

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Photo gallery with download:

<http://www.jensen-media.de/webgalerie/washtec/50jahre.html>

Graphical material on this topic:



Captions:

Washtec_50_01.jpg

How it all started: The first fully automatic car wash from Wesumat still circled around the vehicle.
Photo: WashTec

Washtec_50_02.jpg

In 1963, Kleindienst develops its first 3-brush system, whose basic design has been retained through to today. Photo: WashTec

Washtec_50_03.jpg

At the Interbrau trade fair, a real 'head-turner': Kleindienst's first wash system for commercial vehicles. Photo: WashTec

gebhard_weigele.jpg – inventor of the world's first "automatic car wash". Photo: WashTec