

I have a dream

Alfons Thihatmer's dream is to create an access platform that has 30 metres working height, 30 metres outreach and is no bigger than a children's pram. Something to aim for then. C&A talks to Teupen's supremo and finds out if the dream is any closer to reality.



Machines are put through their paces at the factory's modern proving ground



One of Teupen's specials working alongside the trains in the Berlin's main railway station

Teupen Maschinenbau - based in Gronau, Westphalia, Germany close to the Dutch border, is known for building tracked spider platforms. Most would agree these are well designed, high quality platforms that lead the way in terms of features and performance.

However, the company is unusual in that it has a philosophy more like a specialist development arm of an aerospace company, constantly pushing the boundaries of design and use of materials combined with top quality manufacturing.

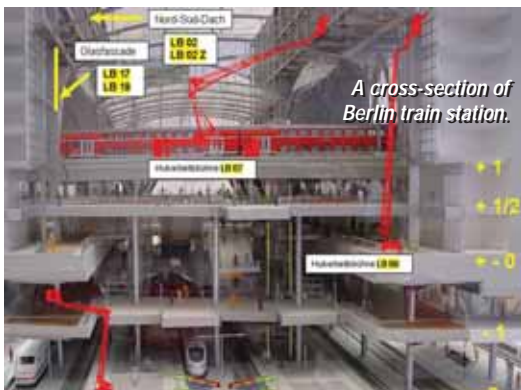
"It is no secret that Teupen has been in take-over discussions with some very big access related companies," said Thihatmer, "and whilst I would never say no, I will not say yes and lose the philosophy, company identity and staff that makes Teupen what it is today."

In fact the only benefit that Teupen would gain from being acquired by a global player is distribution, particularly in South America, India, Africa and Middle East - markets that Teupen has not yet accessed. Not yet!

Thihatmer appears a quiet but very

focussed individual with a goal that has to be met perfectly or not at all.

Its venture in China is aiming to start production in 2007, but it went through a stop start process before being sorted. "We established a joint venture with Wuhan Fachman in China, but when we became aware that they also had an agreement with Tanfield/Aerial Access we did not want any part of a three-way joint venture and withdrew," said Thihatmer.



A cross-section of Berlin train station.

"It was either Teupen and Wuhan or nothing. Wuhan decided to work with Teupen ending its Tanfield agreement."

Production of the 'China Town truck' will concentrate on a three section, 14 metre boom, mounted on a 3.5 tonne chassis with the possibility of trailer and spider variations. "We do not have the capacity for such a machine in Europe"

said Thihatmer, "We can and will expand our 42,000 sq metre factory in Hungary by an additional 7,000 sq metres soon. Our aim is to double our 500 units a year production over the next five years. The Chinese joint venture will not be huge, possibly 100-150 units per year over this period."

Teupen produces a 12 metre truck mounted machine in Hungary on the Toyota Dina 2.8 tonne chassis - "the

"There are instances in current buildings where it is impossible to access certain areas, meaning that there is no cleaning or maintenance work on sprinkler systems, smoke detectors or anti theft devices."

"You can't just expect to maintain and clean the top glass structure of a building such as Swiss Re's Gherkin (30 St Mary Axe) in London with off-the-shelf equipment. We have several specialist machines on the project which clean and maintain the floors from the 35th storey to the 590ft pinnacle. The unit to clean the inner windows is stored under the floor!"

The latest special's project is Berlins' main railway station, where one standard Teupen and three complete special design and build 'one-offs' are used. The main feature of the station is the 321 metre long glass hall, intersected by the 160 metre long, 40 metre wide station with five levels. Once in place, the specials use twist and lock fixings which 'bolt' the machine to the ground in pre-determined positions enabling the platforms to safely reach all areas of the roof and wall structures. One machine has 22 metres of outreach at 27 metres working height and with a footprint not too far from Thihatmer's dream configuration.

"We are continually pushing the boundaries of access platform performance," says Thihatmer. "New 'standard' machines to be launched at Bauma, include a lightweight trailer machine, the 1540kg Gepard 15GT, and a Leo 18GT. The Leo specification is not quite finalised but we are aiming at a 780mm wide, four metre long platform with 200kg capacity and seven metres outreach in all positions. But you will have to wait until Bauma to see if we succeeded."

Having seen some of the amazing machinery they have already produced, I get the feeling they will!



Alfons Thihatmer, managing director of Teupen

most popular small truck in the world," says Thihatmer. "We already have 10 machines working for the public electric company in Ukraine, the machine is small, simple and cheap."

These developments overseas are really an aside to Teupen's other main area of business - high access technology to repair and maintain the world's most spectacular 'designer' buildings. "The more outrageous the design, the greater the problem of maintaining and cleaning the building with conventional equipment," says Thihatmer. "That is why we have been working for the last 10 years with architects and engineers to make them understand that the equipment needed to carry out the maintenance and repair has to be specifically designed and built for each building. And most importantly, has to be designed into the scheme from the very beginning."