

FENCING TIMES

XL Edition

2024, Issue 20

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sliding gate lock

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Can we all retire
already?

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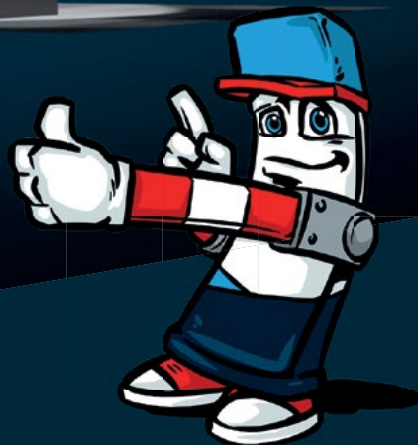


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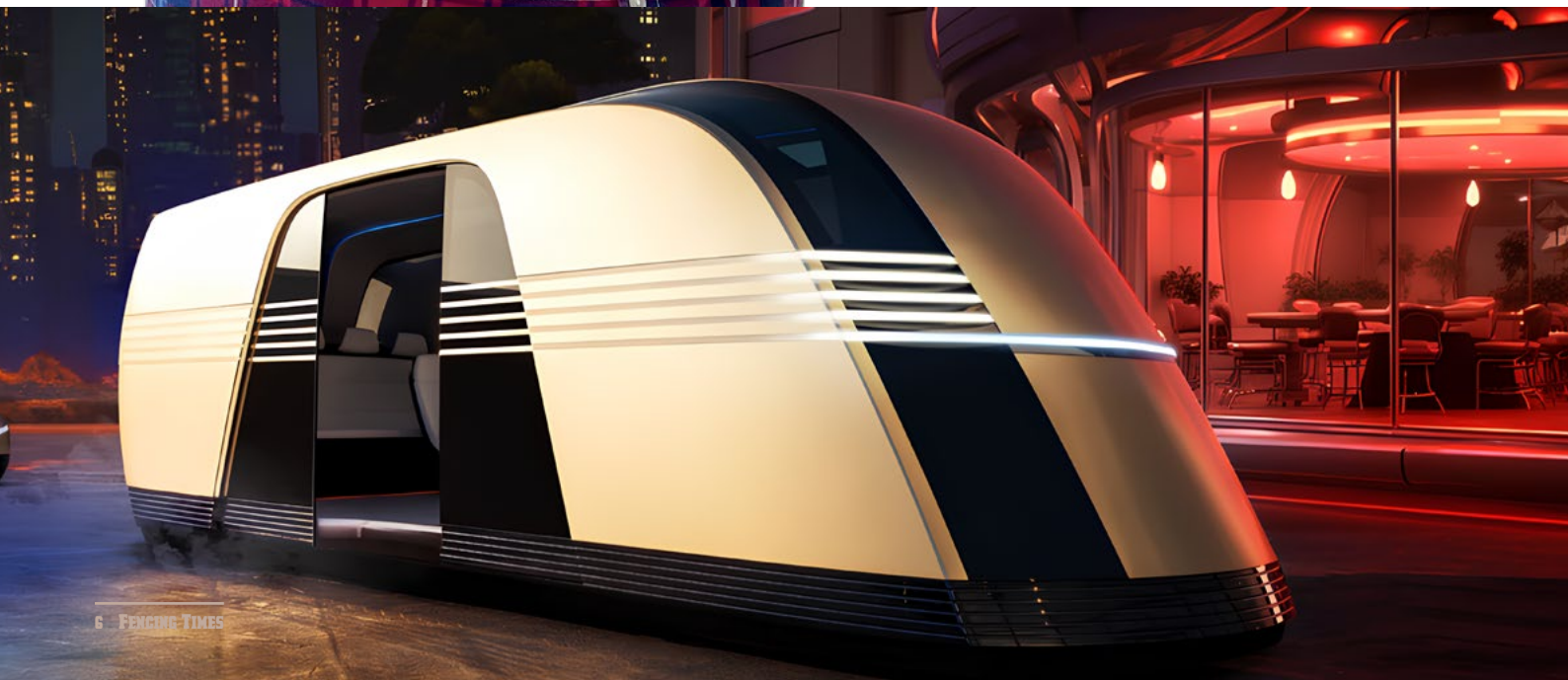
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Can we all retire already?

In a previous column, I wondered what the fences of the future will look like, once Elon Musk manages to colonise Mars. The occasion was that in October, the space company SpaceX (which is owned by Musk) managed to land the propulsion rocket of a spacecraft on Earth for the first time.

That same week, there was more news from Elon Musk. His company Tesla organised the 'We Robot' event, where the new generation of automobiles was presented: the Robotaxi and the Robovan, or taxis and taxi vans that no longer have a steering wheel because they are completely self-driving.





At the same event, Tesla's newest Optimus robots were presented as well: humanoids (human-like robots with arms and legs) that can talk and, in theory, perform the same actions as humans in the future.

Musk presented the Optimus as a companion that everyone in the world will soon be able to buy for 20 or 30 thousand Dollars¹. It will also be a robot that everyone will soon want to have because it makes your life easier.

Today, you are very modern if you have turned your house into a smart home, where you can order Siri to turn on the lights or lower the blinds. In a few years, you will be an old-fashioned dork: then your friends will have an Optimus to babysit the kids, walk the dog, put away groceries in the fridge, pour drinks for everyone and more of those types of things.

"That is all nice, Rembrandt, this modern robo-technology, but what are we fencer installers supposed to do with this? We use a shovel and pliers; they do not contain microchips and circuit boards."

¹ In Europe with all the duties and taxes, of course, that becomes at least 40 thousand euros, but it's the idea that counts.

My counter-question: what if, in the future, you no longer need to shovel yourself? What if Optimus can do that for you? Even better: with Optimus as the final link, soon the entire chain – from order placement to completed project – can be automated. Right now it still sounds ridiculous and unreal. But just imagine:

Customers will soon be able to determine online in a configurator exactly what their fence should look like. Using Virtual Reality, they can walk through the garden with their iPad and indicate exactly where that fence should be. The technology to make that possible already exists. They then press the order button, and the computers go to work.

At the wholesaler, an Optimus packages all the small material into a bag or box, while a self-driving forklift already starts loading the mesh panels mats and posts on a self-driving truck. Or at the manufacturer of ornamental fencing, an Optimus obtains all the box sections from a warehouse and brings them to a welding robot that turns them into an ornamental fence with ornaments.

A few days later, the customer looks out their window and sees a self-driving van of the fencing company arrive. Two Optimussen get out. One grabs a shovel from the flatbed, the other starts to unload the material, which is on the trailer.

In the afternoon, the fence is installed. One Optimus cleans up the last tools and takes a few photos, while the other rings the doorbell to tell the customer that the job is done, that the invoice will be mailed to him and that the Optimussen are going home.

Could it be like that, in the future? Or did I have too many mushrooms at lunch this afternoon?

Personally, I do not think this is a fantasy, or something that will be closer to reality for another hundred years. Besides Tesla, there are a few other big companies working hard on their own humanoids, such as Boston Dynamics and Agility Robotics and a string of others. In August, it was announced that



Apple is seriously thinking about producing its own humanoid. Tens of billions are being invested in humanoids, which is not because it is all just child's play.

The computing power that robots need is already here. The memory, the fast wireless internet, the brushless electric motors... all the technology needed to make humanoids that are actually useful is already here. Only the software still 'just' needs to be written.

And that is the biggest problem: that software is extremely complex. The robots must be able to deal with millions of different situations, and millions of safeguards against misuse and incorrect behaviour must also be built in.

But on the other hand, if you look at what all Tesla's software has learned in the past decade, and how Tesla's own cars can navigate through traffic – in America mostly, in Europe they can't drive themselves because of stupid rules – you will be amazed. And some of that software has written itself using AI, based on tens of thousands of real situations.

So I do not think you should be surprised if, in about 10 or 15 years' time, the first fence installing humanoids join your installers on the project, helping them with simple jobs like digging holes or carrying materials back and forth. After that, tasks like fetching fish and chips and whistling at women will probably follow. The latter will probably be allowed again by then, now that woke has been on the wane since Trump's election.

The big question that remains then, of course, is if those robots keep getting better: Then what will fence workers do? Can they lie on the beach on Aruba? Comfortably lie under a palm tree reading the Fencing Times² with a couple of mojitos on the side, snorkelling a bit and in-between checking on the iPad every now and then to see if Tesla-Bob and Apple-Jimmy have the fence in the ground yet? Of course, that would be the dream scenario.

We are not quite there yet. For now, it is Christmas first. In the absence of a humanoid, we still had to hang the decorations in the tree ourselves this year. From the editorial offices of the Fencing Times, we wish all readers a very merry Christmas, without robots but with the people around you who are dear to you. Arrive well at the New Year and if you come to Nuremberg in January, we will definitely see you there. Until next year! ■

² ...which will be written by ChatGPT by then, because I also want to lie under a palm tree



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content

2024

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FENCING TIMES

42

From the publisher

Can we all retire already? 06

Fence Post 11

Christmas Fence Art 17

Industry News

Gatemaster introduces digital sliding gate lock 20

Sommer presents new Gigaslide sliding gate drive 24

Hermo presents new insert lock 28

25 Years anniversary G&Z 33

ASO Safety Solutions Celebrates 40th Anniversary 39

Bam Bormet celebrates 50th anniversary 42

And also

Fences in the News 53



28



33



FENCE

Have you got a tip for us? Or taken part in something great that you want to share with the market? Spotted a beautiful fence or a beautiful gate? Or perhaps a really ugly fence, which you turned into a great photo? Let us know and share it with your colleagues in the sector.

FENCE POST



Photo of the Month
 August 2018

Some wonderful if vintage wrought iron gates have been found and are being sold for a very low price. The gates are made of cast iron and are very heavy. They are perfect for a large garden or a small one. The gates are made of cast iron and are very heavy. They are perfect for a large garden or a small one.

It is the other side of the coin. The gates are made of cast iron and are very heavy. They are perfect for a large garden or a small one. The gates are made of cast iron and are very heavy. They are perfect for a large garden or a small one.

POST

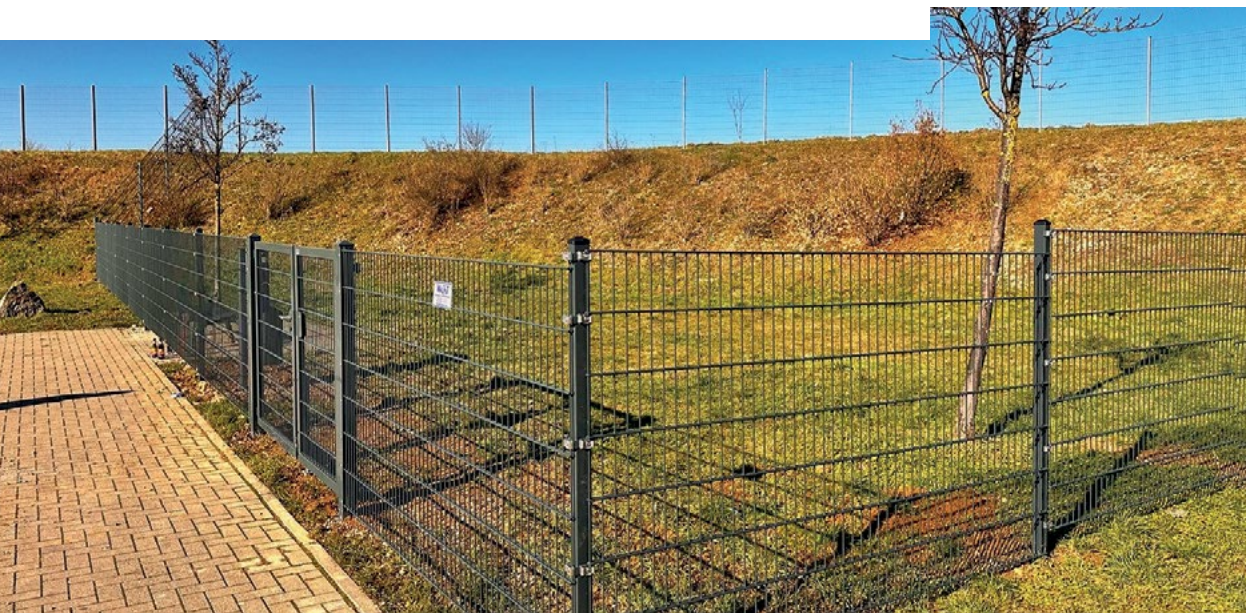
Truck Parking Fence

These beautiful photos come from Arjan Benschop of De Wit Hekwerken in Dodewaard. At De Wit they are good at great projects and great photos; not too long ago we also got a great photo from them, which was then the photo of the month and earned a Locinox construction radio for the team. This project is almost nicer. It is a double sliding gate for a Truck Park in Venlo. The gates appear to be made of Corten steel, but in this case it is 'just' a double layer of powder coating. Arjan, you have outdone yourself again. Thank you very much for submitting!



Dedicated dog park fence

This fence is also for a car park, but along the motorway. We got the picture from Denis Valput of Draht Walput in Rheinstetten. His guys put ten of these dedicated dog park fences in service areas along the A5, A6 and A8 in Baden-Württemberg. Ordinary twin wire mesh be quite nice too. Thanks for the photo, Denis!





Service unnecessary luxury

This photo comes from Stephan Ried of DE Zäune in Weeze. "The customer called, that his sliding gate was a bit difficult to open," he wrote to us. "The gate was from 2007. Why service and maintenance? Is that necessary?" For those not familiar with it: this wheel normally has a layer of rubber around it more than a centimetre thick. That layer is completely worn away here. Apparently you sell good gates Stephan, if they only need servicing once every 17 years. Thanks for the photo!

Buckingham Palace Fence

Eline Vandromme of Kopal came across this fence during a visit to Buckingham Palace in London. There are a number of such gateways there. It is the gate with the most ornaments – and the most gold leaf – we have ever seen. What a dream that must be, if you are an ornamental gate builder and you get a job making such a gate. Then your life is finished and complete, isn't it? Thanks for the photo, Eline!



Wall Fence

Thomas Edrich, a blacksmith from Rodalben in Saarland, was called to a customer who wanted a new palisade gate built into his wall. The customers were both hunters, perhaps he could integrate a wild boar and a roebuck into the gate? "When I went on site, I immediately saw that I could not make a standard gate with bar infill here," Edrich writes to us. "It would look like a prison on that wall. I sat down with the people and drew this gate for them. I immediately got the commission. The leaf is made from full material and the rosette of the lock is from special limestone here from the Palatinate." Nice little gate, Thomas. We do not often see them like this.

FENCE POST

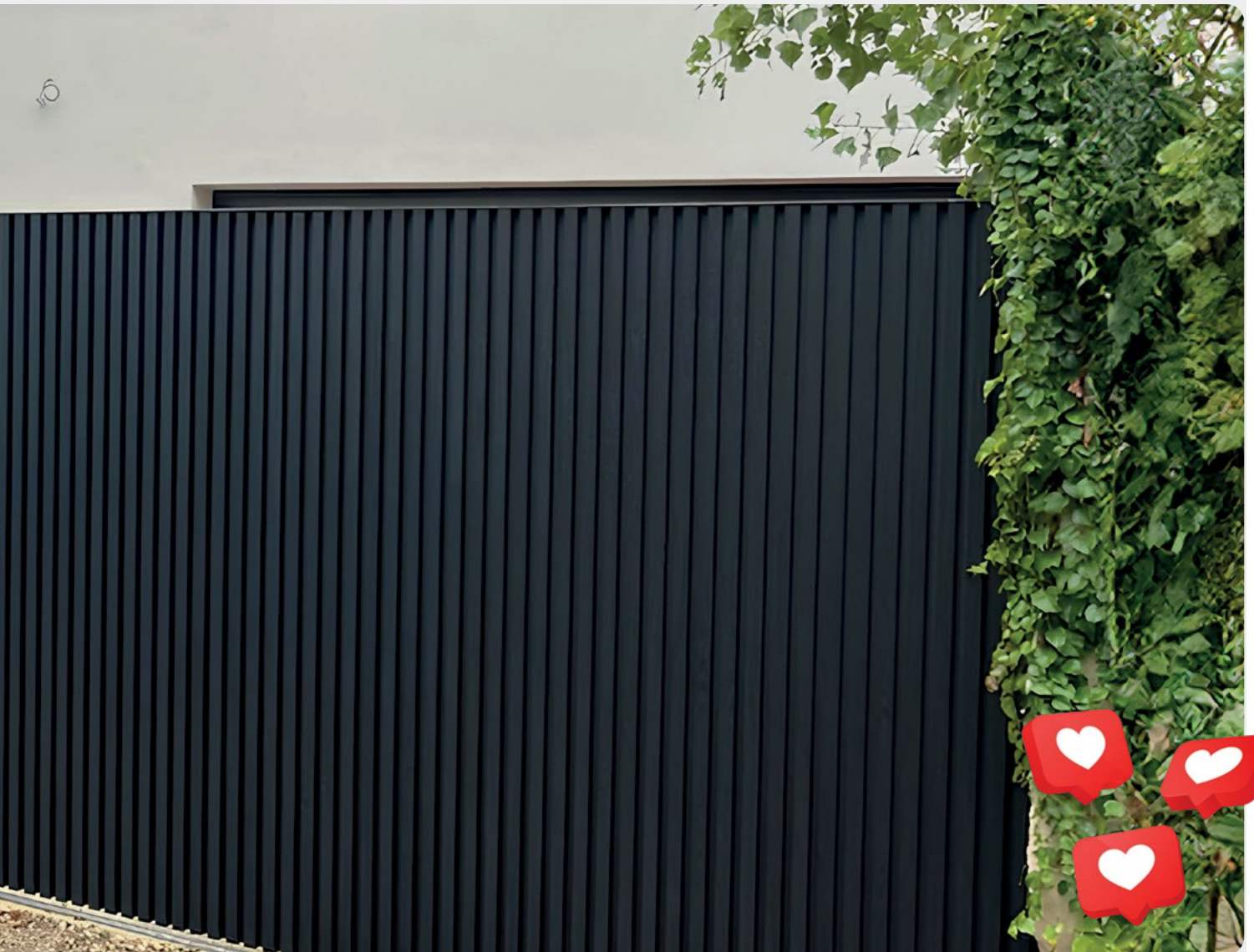


Photo of the Month

Aligned fence

Romain Wunschel of Grillages Wunschel from Châtenois, between Strasbourg and Colmar sent us this photo of this beautiful project: a pedestrian gate, a parcel box with letterbox and intercom and next to it a sliding gate on a rail. All made of aluminium. *"The customer wanted the gate*

in the colour of burnt wood," he wrote to us. "We took RAL 8019, Grey Brown. The special thing here is that everything is aligned, creating a flat facade. The gate closes against the catch post, instead of behind it, as is usually the case." Incredibly beautifully made, Romain. The Locinox Construction Radio is coming to Châtenois this month!



Would you also like to win a Locinox radio? Send us your most beautiful project! Do not be too modest, do not think your picture will never win anyway. Every project can be beautiful for its own reason, or a source of inspiration for fellow fencers. Send your photo to fencepost@fencingtimes.com

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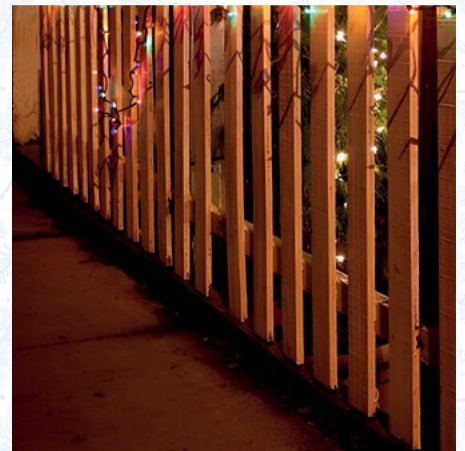
CHRISTMAS DECORATION

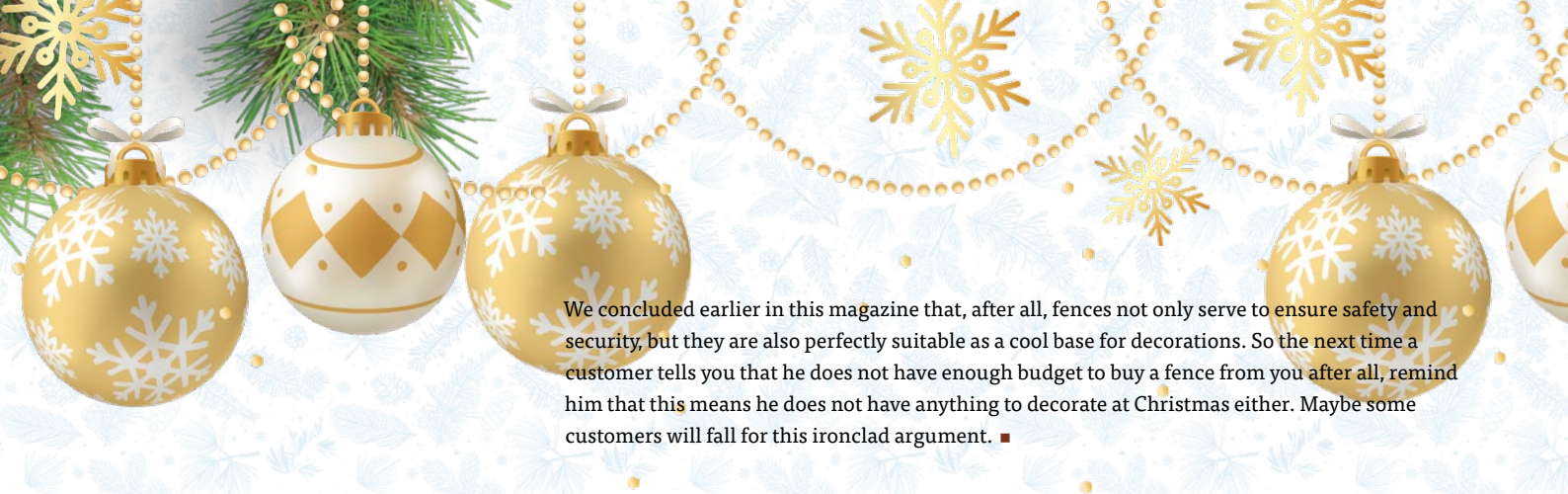
In the run-up to Christmas, everything around you is immersed in a fantastic atmosphere of magic. Everyone decorates their home and garden with Christmas garlands, lights and endless decorations, Christmas trees are decorated, and everyone is eagerly looking forward to the





holidays. Here at the editorial department, we wanted to share this atmosphere with you. We found a whole selection of Christmas decorations for fencing.





We concluded earlier in this magazine that, after all, fences not only serve to ensure safety and security, but they are also perfectly suitable as a cool base for decorations. So the next time a customer tells you that he does not have enough budget to buy a fence from you after all, remind him that this means he does not have anything to decorate at Christmas either. Maybe some customers will fall for this ironclad argument. ■



GATEMASTER INTRODUCES DIGITAL SLIDING GATE LOCK

Gatemaster, a lock manufacturer from Bognor Regis on England's south coast, launched a new lock this summer. The Digital Sliding Gate Lock is especially designed for manually operated sliding gates.



Jacob Napthine,
director

"Our mechanical digital locks remain popular," managing director Jacob Napthine says. "The customer doesn't need power to use them, so there's no wiring or batteries either. At the same time, it's easy to give visitors access by simply providing them with a code. But we didn't have that type of digital lock available for sliding gates, which is why we've made one now."





Lock

The new lock has a latch consisting of two flat strips of stainless steel, with one angled up and the other angled down. The strips are pointed at the ends and are hook-shaped, so they can slide into the opening in the lock catch (supplied) and automatically lock into place. When the user turns the knob on the lock, both strips move to a horizontal position and the gate can be opened. *"The simplicity of the design provides superior reliability and convenience for both residential and commercial gates,"* Napthine says.



Hold Back

The new digital sliding gate lock comes in both single and double versions. The single version has a Hold Back function: flipping a switch on the back of the lock keeps the lock in the unlocked position, so the gate can be opened with no need to enter a code. The single lock is available in two different versions, for left-opening and right-opening gates.

Bolt-on

Like the locks in the Superlock range, the Digital Sliding Gate lock is easily installed by drilling three holes and bolting it on to the gate. The lock casing is 70 millimetres wide and constructed from stainless steel. *"If you have 100 millimetres of space behind the front stile of the gate leaf, you can build it in,"* Napthine says. The lock is available in three different latch lengths, for stiles from 40 to 60 millimetres wide. The housing is also made of stainless steel and comes powder-coated in black as standard. ■

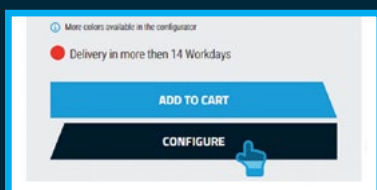


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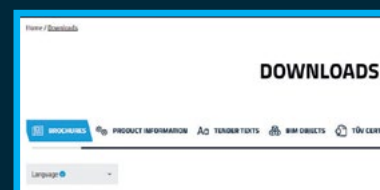
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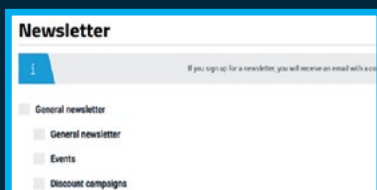
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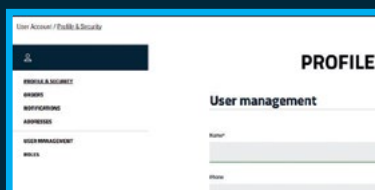
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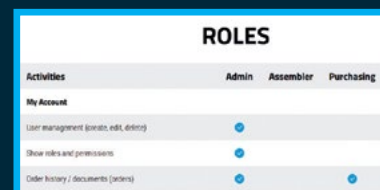
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SOMMER PRESENTS NEW GIGASLIDE SLIDING GATE DRIVE

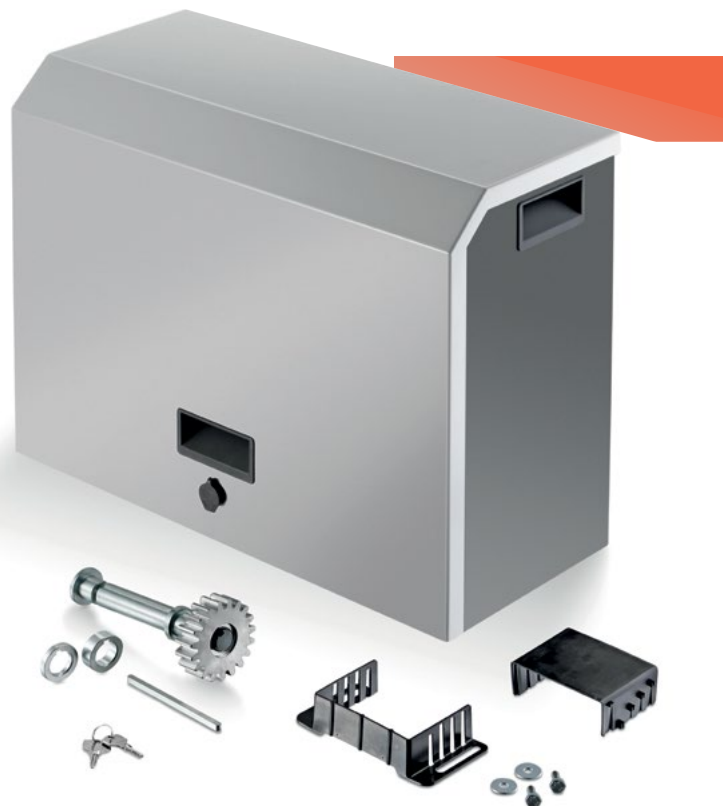


Drive manufacturer Sommer, from southern Germany, is releasing a new sliding gate drive. Known as the GigaSlide, it has been designed for gates with a passage width of up to 14 metres and a leaf weight of up to 1800 kilograms. It replaces the existing DS600 and DS1200 drives in Sommer's range.

"We still didn't have a drive with our own motor for gates with leaves of 800 kilos and up," product manager Stefan Matzke says. "To create the existing DS600 and 1200, we worked together with a fellow manufacturer. That made us dependent on them and limited progress, so two years ago we started work on the development of our own 230 volt drive with frequency converter, which operates with our own GigaControl A controls and our own hand-held transmitter system SomLoq2."

Somloq2

The GigaControl A controls (and therefore the GigaSlide) work with Sommer's own wireless transmitter and receiver system SomLoq2. It's a bidirectional system, meaning that the remote control receives feedback from the receiver as soon as the signal is received. The rolling code features 128-bit AES encryption.



Motor

The new GigaSlide is a drive for demanding applications. "Certainly when it comes to weight," Matzke says. "We used a motor that we use for our industrial door drives. It's a 230-volt motor with a frequency converter and 0.55 kilowatts with which we've had really good experiences. It's robust and extremely reliable. Thanks to the inverter we're able to reduce the speed over the last half a metre very smoothly, so the gate closes gently. It means that wear and tear is limited, and there's no rattling or other noise from the gate slamming shut. A special hinge is used to install the motor in the cabinet, allowing its height to be adjusted by up to 30 millimetres. You can adjust it precisely using a special M12 bolt, so it fits neatly into the rack. And finally, we've made the drive shaft adjustable too. It means that you can set the distance to the gate in four steps ranging from 40 to 60 millimetres. If the anchors in the foundation aren't quite right, or there's a cable in the way, you simply place the drive a few millimetres further out."

Giga-Control-A

The controls are also suitable for a wide range of applications. "We've used our Giga-Control-A," Matzke says. "It has a display in which you can set up a whole row of settings via the menu: the opening direction, limit switches, the end position, speed profiles, the functioning of the safety features, and also operational modes like automatic closing and so forth. It has a lot of connections too, for example for safety features like safety strips, photocells, or emergency stop switches. Signalling devices can also be connected to control the drive." The GigaControl A controls can easily be extended with optional modules, for example a traffic light module to control oncoming traffic, and an induction loop module.



Housing

The GigaSlide cabinet consists of a base element and a cover, both constructed from galvanised steel sheeting that's 2.5 millimetres thick. The motor, controls, and all other components are installed on the base element. The cabinet has a big gap for the gear, closed off with steel

brushes. "If a cabinet like that has been standing outside for ten years, it might turn out that it's not easy to remove the gear from the shaft," Matzke says. "That's the reason for the big gap: it makes it easy to remove the motor, with drive shaft, gear and all. We've also made the cabinet a decent size, so

there's room for additional built-in appliances. Alongside the controls, there's a built-in DIN rail so you can easily install some of the built-in appliances on it. And finally, we've made it easy to remove the controls, so you can angle it in front of you to make the connections." The cabinet has two handles so it's easy to lift.

The cover comes powder-coated in white aluminium as standard, and the cabinet in black. You can also have the cabinet components coated in the same colour as the gate if desired. "We presented a prototype of the GigaSlide at the R+T in Stuttgart, and everyone was enthusiastic about the cabinet."



Range

The GigaSlide joins the Starter and the Runner in Sommer's range of sliding gate drives. The other models have 24-volt motors, with the first suitable for gate leaves of up to 400 kilograms, and the second up to 800 kilograms. Now the new GigaSlide caters to the demand for drives for gate leaves weighing more than 800 kilos. The DS600 and the DS 1200, which Sommer has until now supplied for the biggest gates, will leave the range at the end of this year once existing stocks have been exhausted. The GigaSlide was launched on the market this summer. ■



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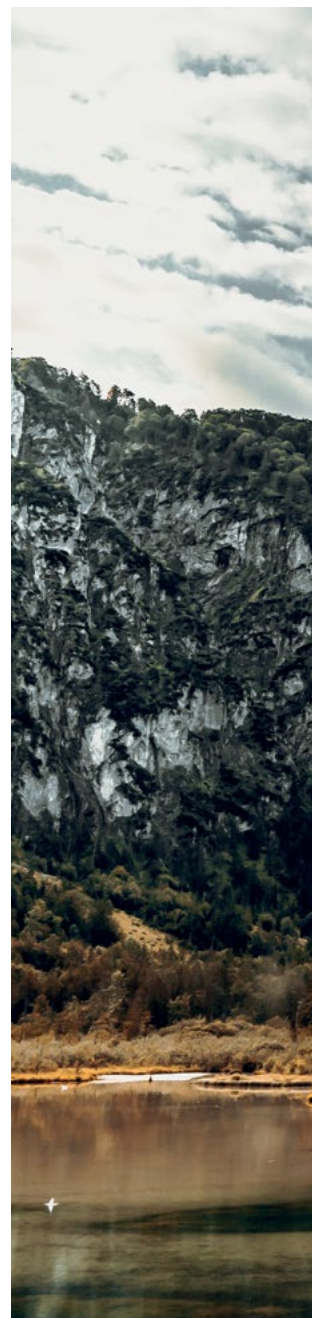
HERMO

PRESENTS NEW INSERT LOCK

Hermann Mohn, a gate hardware manufacturer from Velbert, between Essen and Wuppertal in Germany, is launching a new insert lock. Its standout features are its stainless steel scalp plate and a clamping system for easy installation.



“Installation isn’t always easy when it comes to the more inexpensive insert locks,” Hermo Director Marcel Vogel says. “First you have to drill holes for it, both above and below the opening cut in the tube profile. Then you need to tap threads into the holes. If you’re unlucky, you’ll have to retap the thread after galvanising. And then you can screw the lock into place – as long as you’ve drilled the holes at precisely the right distance apart, that is. And that distance is different for almost all of the competing manufacturers, which means that you can’t just exchange one lock for another. We figured that there had to be a better way.”



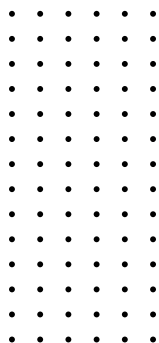


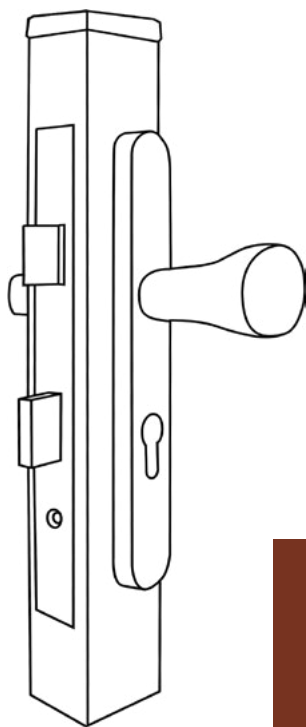
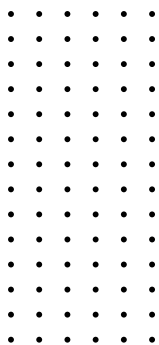
FUTURE

The new Future lock features a special clamping system that makes it easy to install. “If you tighten two screws in the scalp plate – that’s the front plate – then two steel flanges come out of the side,” Vogel explains. “These clamp the lock to the wall of the section. Then that’s it. There’s no hole-drilling or thread-tapping needed. You insert the lock into the profile, use the handle to set the height, and you tighten the screws. And you’re done. You might need to turn the latch bolt around, depending on the direction of opening, but you have to do that with other locks anyway. And with us you can do that even if the lock has already been installed.”

UNIVERSAL

Not only is the new lock easy to install, but it’s universal. “We wanted this lock to fit on as many gates as possible,” Vogel says. “It means that any manufacturer, big or small, is always able to install it – even if they still have a set of pre-lasered tube profiles lying around that was prepared for a different lock. Or if a student has cut holes out using the wrong template. And on top of that, we’re aiming for the replacement market. An installer who needs to replace a customer’s broken lock on-site doesn’t need to go out there first to see what type of lock it is, and then order another one somewhere. He just pops one of our locks in his toolbox and drives off to the customer. The Future lock almost always fits.”





SPECIFICATIONS

The Future lock has a galvanised steel chassis. The scalp plate, latch bolt and deadbolt are made from stainless steel. *"That was another area in which we wanted to stand out from the pack,"* Vogel says. *"A lot of other locks have an electrolytically galvanised scalp plate. It's actually not suitable for outdoor use."* The scalp plate is 260 millimetres long, making it one of the longest on the market. *"That was a deliberate choice. At the same time, we made the chassis as small as possible. These two factors together, like the clamping system, enable the Future lock to fit on as many different gates as possible."* With a 40-millimetre backset, the lock fits all box sections of 60 millimetres and wider. The latch can be adjusted by 10 millimetres and the deadbolt moves out 20 millimetres with a single turn of the key. Hermo will present the Future lock to the public at Perimeter Protection in January, and it will be available to order from then on. ■



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G&Z Alu

celebrates 25th anniversary

G&Z Alu-Systeme, an aluminium fencing and balustrade manufacturer from Steinach in southern Germany, is celebrating its 25th jubilee. Back in 1999, founder Carsten Richter built his first fence in a little workshop behind a petrol station.

"My father grew up with aluminium," says Carsten's son, Denny Richter. "His uncle had an extrusion business, and his father dealt in aluminium sections and profiles. He looked for a market where he could put his knowledge and experience to good use, and found it in the fencing world. There were hardly any high-quality system manufacturers at the time; it was somewhere he could add value."



SYSTEM

"My father developed a range that's designed so that all the components can be applied in different ways, so you can use them to build fences, or balustrades, or privacy fences, and as gate infill," Richter says. "His primary focus was on ease of installation, so that everyone can install their systems easily with a cordless drill and no need for special tools. That was how it started. He had sketches of his first models, and he used them to try to sell his first balustrades and fences – just here in the area. He'd rented a little workshop behind a petrol station in Biberach, the next town along. When he sold a fence, he manufactured it in his workshop and then installed it himself. It worked well, and the customers were enthusiastic. The new company, G&Z – which stands for Geländer & Zäune (Railings and Fences in English) – got lots of word-of-mouth advertising."



INSTALLERS

In the first ten years G&Z grew slowly but steadily to around 10 employees. In addition to the end customers, the company quickly developed relationships with fencing installers as well. "It happened in all sorts of different ways," Richter says. "Some installers only bought the profiles, in long lengths, and used them to make their own fences. Others purchased profiles that were cut and drilled to measure, while still others bought ready-made fence elements and then all they had to do on the project was install complete elements. We still work like that today. It means that our customers have maximum flexibility. Most installers alternate between the second and third options. When things are quiet – over winter – they order long profiles, and in the busy season they install complete elements from us."

NEW PREMISES

In 2010 business was going so well that G&Z was able to have new premises built on an industrial estate in the neighbouring town of Steinach, right on the B33 highway. "That was the best decision ever," Richter says. "The new location brought a lot of extra traffic, allowing us to grow from ten up to thirty staff within two years. We had room for a big display garden, and could install a streamlined production setup. We've grown to 50 employees in the years since. It's already too small for us again, of course."



RANGE

The range also grew as time went on. It now consists of more than a hundred different models of fencing, all of which are available both as fencing, balustrades and as gate infill. Most of them consist of elements made of horizontal or vertical profiles, but there are also completely closed models, models with a handrail, and models with glass elements. "We always sketch every project ourselves, in its entirety," Richter says. "We have a team of draughtsmen who do that. The fenceline is always neatly divided up into sections of equal width, so you never need an odd-sized one to fill a gap. For almost all our models, customers are able to choose their preferred distance between the horizontal or vertical infill profiles. And almost all the joints are screwed together, not welded. That's mainly so you don't see any welding seams – and obviously so that you can easily put it together yourself. As an added advantage we can make the elements multicoloured, because we screw the profiles together after coating."





MALLORCA

G&Z celebrated the jubilee earlier this year by taking the entire staff for a long weekend in Mallorca. *"It really was a cool event, more than anything for the team spirit,"* Richter says. As for the future, he hopes that the company can stay at its great location in Steinach for a long time to come. *"One of our most recent investments was a computer-controlled sawing and drilling machine, where we feed in long lengths on one side, and then ready-made cut and drilled profiles come out the other. Thanks to that machine, we have a little bit of capacity again for new customers and new orders. We want to use it to build our fencing installer dealer network up into a Germany-wide network in the coming years, and in our neighbouring countries France, Switzerland, and Austria there are still areas in which we're not yet represented. In any case there's still plenty for us to build on – and being able to do that with my father is amazing."* ■




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ASO Safety Solutions Celebrates 40th Anniversary

ASO Safety Solutions, a German manufacturer of safety edges and other safety sensors, celebrated its fortieth anniversary in October. The company launched its first product in 1984: the inductive signal transmission system Indus.

"Nowadays, you'd call us a start-up," says one of the founders and current owner, Helmut Friedrich. "At the beginning, we were four students. All of us had connections to the gate industry. Two of us came from what is now Perimeter Protection Germany. I completed an internship at a company now called Albany

Doors. At the time, safety edges already existed, but there were no effective systems to transmit signals from moving sliding gate leaves or overhead doors to the gate drive. Together, we developed a kit that included an electric safety edge, an induction signal transmission system, and a control unit. That's how it all started."





BEGINNINGS

"At the time, there was a German industry association for wire and fencing, called Draht und Zaun," Friedrich continues. "We presented our new product there. Seven or eight members were excited and placed orders immediately. Alongside our studies, we worked from home in the evenings and on weekends. After about eighteen months, most of us had finished our education, and we decided to take the leap. We set up a small workshop in Salzkotten and began actively targeting the market from there. Things went well right from the start. The potential for safety edges was huge, and I set myself the goal of making them the industrial standard for gates and industrial doors. We succeeded in doing so, ultimately becoming the global market leader."

LOCATIONS

Starting in 1987, ASO became profitable and in 1990 built an entirely new facility. "We were able to establish efficient production lines there, which further fueled our growth," says Friedrich. However, in the following years, it became clear that the four founders had different ambitions and grew apart. Between 1992 and 1997, Friedrich bought out their shares individually. "At the same time, the global market beckoned. We found reliable partners across Europe who achieved strong sales. There was also significant interest from the United States, especially from overhead door manufacturers. To serve this market, we first partnered with a distributor I had met at a trade show. Our product sold so well that in 2004 we opened our own branch with a small production line in Rockaway, New Jersey, just outside New York."

PORTFOLIO

As the sales market expanded, product development continued. In the 1990s, ASO developed a new co-extruded safety edge. "This edge integrated everything," says Friedrich. "The copper wire and all switching surfaces were fully embedded in the rubber. It was a major breakthrough. We held a patent on this strip for years." In addition to safety edges, ASO has developed contact bumpers for automated guided vehicles (AGVs), contact mats for dead-man operation of machines, as well as light curtains, control units, signal transmission systems and gate controllers.

ASO Owner Helmut Friedrich
with CEO Daniel Verhufen



GROWTH

By 2014, ASO had grown so much that its 1991 building in Salzkotten had become too small. A new headquarters was established in Lippstadt, featuring additional office and production spaces. This new building includes a large testing center where both in-house developments and customer-specific products undergo extensive testing. As demand for contact strips continued to rise, the main site received two brand-new extrusion lines in 2019, capable of producing over 1500 kilometers of safety edges strips annually.

CHINA

Also in 2019, ASO opened a sales office in Nanjing, China. “Usually, it’s the other way around,” says Friedrich. “Companies produce in China and sell to Europe and America. For us, the Chinese market is much more interesting as a sales location. While China doesn’t have the same strict regulations as Europe, it’s still in manufacturers’ interests to reduce or prevent accidents. Unfortunately, the China project was largely on hold for a while. Shortly after opening the branch, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and borders were closed for two years. We couldn’t do much there at the time. Over the past two years, we’ve resumed efforts and believe we can significantly increase revenue in China in the coming years.”

FUTURE

“Our goal is to continue growing in Europe and America,” says Friedrich. “For example, our new Lisens scan radar sensor, developed in recent years¹, is another major advancement. It makes gates significantly safer while simplifying installation — at the same or better price. It’s an example of how everything we develop aligns with our philosophy. We see ourselves as a high-performance partner for our customers: we strive to provide the best solution for every requirement. All ASO products are tailored precisely to their intended purpose. This ensures the success of our partners and ourselves. Bring on the next 40 years!” ■

1 Fencing Times wrote about it in Issue 19

Congratulations!

Bam Bormet celebrates 50th anniversary



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Bam Bormet turned 50 in October. The company was founded in 1974 by Father Michel Bormans and his friend André Metten, on Bormans' farm in Nieuwerkerken, near Hasselt. It started out offering electrically-powered gates. Over the past 50 years it has grown to become a manufacturer of gates, speed gates, barriers and turnstiles, with dealers across Europe.

The Bam Bormet story starts with Father Michel Bormans. As soon as he arrived home from his day job as a teacher of religion, he took off his cassock and changed into work shorts ready to enter a completely different world: the world of engineering. The priest had considerable technical ability, and an intellect that stretched far beyond the limits of his spiritual ministry. He exercised these skills every day in the workshop on his farm. His inexhaustible passion for mechanics and electronics was shared by André Metten and co-founder Cyriel Melotte, with whom in 1974 he set out on a remarkable industrial adventure: they founded Bormet, a developer, manufacturer and installer of gates, fences, barriers and automation systems.

THE BEGINNING

Shortly after the company began, co-founder André Metten suffered a tragic accident that cost him a hand. As a result, he left the company and Bormans' neighbour Ivan Schreurs came into the picture. Aged 21 and with a degree in electromechanics, Schreurs became an indispensable support to Bormans. Schreurs' father entrusted the pair with the task of installing their first automatic gate. Happily tinkering together, the founders dreamt of the possibilities presented by electronics. It took a long time before they made any money; Bormans continued to teach full-time and Schreurs was – as he himself put it – self-employed without income. Fortunately his wife Marleen was able to support the family until the first sales came in. Initially the men of Bormet worked from a small workshop at Bormans' home, where the air was often thick with cigar smoke. The empty cigar boxes turned out to be handy for storing components – state-of-the-art product recycling even back then. *"The memories of the scent of cigars, the sound of metal on metal, and the image of a priest in work shorts who was as skilled at developing a circuit board as he was at holding Sunday mass, still bring up strong emotions,"* Ivan Schreurs says, recalling those pioneering days.

"A golden jubilee often raises the question: where will we be in the coming 50 years? And what products will Bam Bormet manufacture once we've been around for 100 years?"

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BORMET

/ BAR



Michel
Bormans

BORMET'S FIRST SUCCESSES

Schreurs can still vividly recall one of the crucial moments that put Bormet on the map in the company's early years. "I remember that I had to go to Doctor Deconinck in Brasschaat; he wanted an automated gate. And even though I had no idea how I was going to make that gate, I sold it to him for 100,000 Belgian francs (2,500 euros). The bond with the customer was immediate. In the end I supplied not only the gate, but the electrics, the garden lighting, and even the fountain too. The step to barriers was just as spontaneous, this time with the director of psychiatric hospital Sancta Maria in Sint-Truiden behind it. He was looking for a system to manage access to the psychiatric care centre. I said the same thing I always said in response to new requests: 'We can do that'. But what followed was a period of blood, sweat and tears. We worked day and night: we sketched, calculated, discussed, and tested. After countless attempts and modifications, we finally constructed our first barrier. We took it back last year, as a reminder of that time."

AN ENORMOUS LOSS

Pastor Michel Bormans passed away in 1984. The spiritual father of the company, whose ingenuity – Schreurs emphasises – laid the foundations of their first successes, was no longer. Schreurs remembers his business partner as a genius: "He could do anything. Mechanics, turning, milling, measuring... You'd almost forget that he was a priest. I learnt absolutely everything from him. His death was a heavy blow, but we were determined to keep going, to carry on his legacy." The loss of the priest brought with it more than just emotional pain. When he

ascended to heaven, the company's financial resources went up in smoke. The priest had provided a steady income that funded many of Bormet's early experiments. His death forced Ivan and Marleen to take a much more calculated and businesslike approach to the company. "This was the point at which we really had to start doing our sums and making a profit. We needed to evolve from a hobby, driven by passion and enjoyment, into a real business."



Marleen Buntinx,
Ivan Schreurs



"I remember how our bike rides were often interrupted so Ivan could inspect yet another gate. He always wanted to know how everything worked."



THE BUSINESS DEVELOPS

And that they did. Over the years, Bormet transformed from a modest workshop into a thriving business. After Bormans' death, Marleen resigned from her job as a teacher and joined the business full-time. She took an evening class in bookkeeping and took charge of the company's administration. But her role in the company went far beyond administrative tasks. She soon became Ivan's greatest support, and later that of her sons Ruben and Dries as well – and even that of the rest of the staff. She was a sort of mother figure who was always there for everyone. *"If one of the staff wanted to get Ivan to do something, they came to me so I could gently work on him a bit,"* she says. Marleen, now retired, looks back on her time at the company with pride. *"It's wonderful to see how the company has grown, and how much we've achieved together. I'm so proud of my family and the Bam Bormet team. It's an amazing feeling to know that I'm part of something big and lasting."*

MORE SPACE

In the same year that Michel Bormet died and Marleen joined the business, the company took a major step forward with the construction of its first real workshop, measuring 170 square metres. Three years later, in 1987, Ivan and Marleen acquired the priest's house and increased the manufacturing space by a further 250 square metres. The following year there came an additional 250-square-metre extension, with a further 500 square metres added in 1992. In 1990 the Bormet team registered BAM – which stands for Belgian Access Management – as a brand. *"This gave us the opportunity to work on two different tracks," Ivan Schreurs says. "On one hand, we were able to market BAM products through various different parties – including Bormet's competitors – while on the other, we remained active in the full-service market under the Bormet name. It strengthened our position in the market."*

GROWING UP ON THE FARM

Ivan and Marleen Schreurs had four children: a daughter and three sons, including Ruben and Dries. They grew up literally amongst Bormet's barriers and gates. Ruben was still in his mother's belly when she helped with soldering. Dries still has vivid memories of playing hide-and-seek on the premises, while Ruben often reflects nostalgically on go-kart races there. *"Driving through a barrier as it was closing was our favourite thing to do,"* he says. *"Papa was always outside welding, so we turned the workshop into our playground. We used to ride our go-karts under the barriers. The last one to dare to go through got it on his head."* A few years later, during the school holidays, the boys did their first work for the company. Ruben sorted boxes of screws and went along with his father to do installations. Dries did the same, and was later regularly to be found doing turning and milling work.

DETERMINED FATHER

Dries left school shortly after the turn of the millennium, launching his career at another company. Until one morning, that is, when he wanted to go to work but his father stopped him. *"He said I had to come to Bormet with him,"* Dries says. *"I replied that I couldn't, because my boss was expecting me. It turned out that he'd already arranged everything with my employer. Yes, it would be fair to say that Papa is determined and decisive. At first we did the installations together, then before too long I was given full responsibility and went out on the road with Gert, the current production manager. During that time I learnt a lot about taking responsibility, solving problems on-site, and the importance of customer satisfaction."*

NO CHOICE

Ruben, too, considered building up experience at another company when he graduated as an engineer in 2004 – specialising in automation, of course. But he didn't get the chance. As soon as he graduated, his father said: *"It's time that you started working here."* Like his brother, before long Ruben was thrown in at the deep end. His first assignments covered the lot: from writing software for parking and access control systems, through to co-ordinating external subcontractors to get the applications into operation. *"I had a broad range of tasks, ranging from technical drawing to project management. Bormet was a company where you could learn a lot very quickly as a young engineer."*



AMBITION

It was soon clear that Ruben's ambition and technical skills were a major asset for the company. He was given responsibility for revamping existing product lines and introducing new manufacturing technologies. Reflecting on that period, he brings up a memorable project: redeveloping the barrier lines for manufacture on the welding robot. *"We made that purchase in the middle of the 2008 financial crisis. It was a gamble, but we were confident that it was going to work out. We wanted product improvement and efficiency, and we achieved it."*

THE NEW GENERATION

In the period from 2011 to 2014, Ruben and Dries Schreurs took over the company. This ushered in a new era for Bormet. *"We were ambitious, and determined to realise our vision,"* Ruben says. *"We wanted to keep growing Bormet, and give the company a new direction."* The brothers complemented each other in their roles. While Dries took responsibility for operational management, planning, and installation in Belgium, Ruben focused on sales, technical innovation, and product development. With the rise of the internet and the increasing transparency of the online world, it became more and more difficult to keep the Bormet and Bam brands separate. By changing the brand strategy to a single strong brand – Bam Bormet – Ruben and Dries opened the door to new opportunities. *"The new flagship combined the strengths of both names, benefitting from the brand value accrued by both Bam and Bormet."* The merger also brought a clear shift in focus. For both Ruben and Dries, the company's strength lay in designing and manufacturing high-quality products. *"We no longer wanted to do it all ourselves, but instead to focus on what we're good at. We went in search of partners to take care of sales to end customers, and the service. This change of focus resulted in a series of product improvements and innovations, including the revamped barrier lines and the implementation of 3D drawing software, which revolutionised our design process."*



THE MOVE

Until that time the company had operated from the farm of the late Father Bormans, which obviously wasn't on an industrial estate. Further expansion at that location was impossible. For Ruben and Dries, the space issue presented an opportunity to think beyond the present and make plans for the future. The brothers chose the largest plot of land they could get in the Nieuwerkerken area; it was three times as big as the farm. *"The new building needed to be a significant leap forward,"* Ruben explains. *"It gave us the space to increase our production capacity and strengthen our market position. When we showed the architect's plans to the team, we got a rather sceptical response: 'Woah, that means we have to walk such a long way to the other side'. But we were convinced we were right: our ambitious business plan was going to work."* In 2015 it was time to relocate to the new building. Dries remembers it as a suspenseful year, as there was not a single extra order on the books at the time. *"We invited people to visit and showed them around the company,"* he says. *"It gave us the boost we'd hoped for. The new building became a symbol of the new generation's ambition and of their confidence in Bam Bormet."*



Wim Deblauwe

INTERNATIONAL

Once everyone had got into the swing of things at the new site, the company's ambitions for expansion surfaced. Because in order to achieve the results they wanted, Bam Bormet quite simply had to go through a serious growth spurt. The global market beckoned. And for the new directors, further strengthening of their core competencies was a logical next step on the path to achieving the company's international ambitions. *"We established contacts in quite a few European countries,"* Ruben says. *"It was a learning process, but it has strengthened our company – and with the right people on board. Our strength is in manufacturing. We strove to produce as many high-quality products as possible, and to sell them worldwide. We built up an international partner network so that we could optimise sales to the end customer, and the associated service. There were major challenges in building up that network, but the fruits of those efforts were obvious."*

PICOT

In 2020 the company purchased the land to the left of the building in order to expand the assembly and storage facilities. The company began using this larger workshop in early 2021. In 2023 Dries decided to make a career change and sell his shares. Ruben reached out to the Picot Group, which had been 'sniffing around' a few years before. Within 90 minutes he received a reply to his message, and the very next week he sat down with Wim Deblauwe, Picot's CEO. Over the next six months they worked out a deal, and Picot became a co-shareholder of Bam Bormet. *"I visited Bam Bormet three years ago; it was a great company that was a good fit with our products and values,"* Wim Deblauwe says. *"When the opportunity to become a partner came up, we grabbed it with both hands. Bam Bormet has enormous growth potential within the group, in part due to the strong demand for their high-quality products. Our goal is to grow Bam Bormet further, along with the group. But just as important to us is retaining the soul of the company. The spirit, the 'family' feel, the agility, and the informal character are crucial to Bam Bormet's success. So as a 'big group' we absolutely want Bam Bormet to remain a separate company in its own right. And how will we make sure that happens? By not interfering too much, haha."*



Ruben Schreurs

CELEBRATION

Bam Bormet celebrated the anniversary on a Saturday in October with a big party for family, friends, staff, partners and suppliers. The day started with a tour of the company, giving everyone the opportunity to take a close-up look at how all the gates and barriers are manufactured and brought to market. Afterwards there was beer (the company's own) for the guests, food from various food trucks, and a DJ to create a party atmosphere. "Today I have the honour of working with a group of motivated colleagues who are always in search of new horizons," Ruben Schreurs says. "We make a lot of great memories at Bam Bormet and we manufacture our products with pride. Our staff have welcomed our recent entry into the Picot group because it offers a lot of new opportunities. In the short term it will mean good growth for our business, so that Bam Bormet is even better positioned as a reliable employer and supplier."

FUTURE

"A golden jubilee often raises the question: where will we be in the coming 50 years? And what products will Bam Bormet manufacture once we've been around for 100 years?" Schreurs says. "It's a difficult, thought-provoking question. Will we develop automatic barriers for use with flying cars? Whatever happens, it's crucial that we pay attention to the new technologies that are being developed each and every day. We will always have the goal of being the reference point in the market. In order to achieve this, we will constantly innovate and test new technologies, so that our customers will always have access to state-of-the-art perimeter security. We're proud of the fact that our products control access to large numbers of houses, businesses and buildings. Fifty years ago, in the priest's workshop, no one would have dared to dream of where we are today. And so I'm honoured that today, with our team, we're making an unimaginable dream come true. We're ready to build a great future for this company." ■

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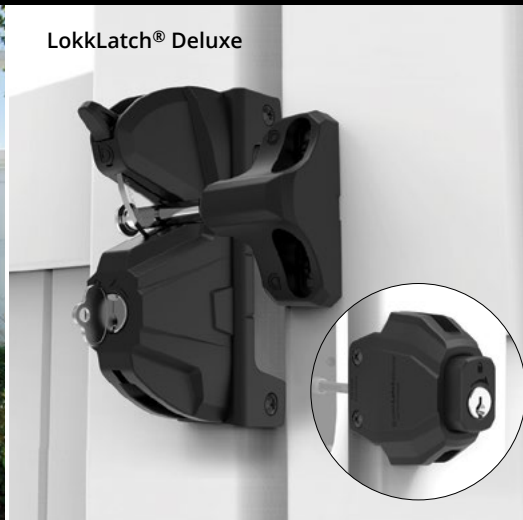
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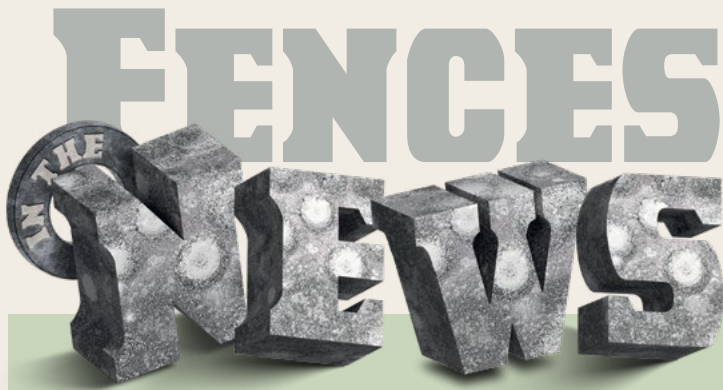
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18 DECEMBER 2024

FENCES IN THE NEWS

PAGE 1

NORWAY WANTS FENCE ON RUSSIAN BORDER

Oslo,
Noorwegen

Oslo, Norway – Border fences remain popular in Europe: this time it's Norway's turn again. Previously we reported that the country wants to build a fence on its border with Sweden, to keep wild boar out. At the end of September, the state-run Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) reported that the Norwegian government was thinking about following in Finland's footsteps by having a fence installed on the country's Russian border to keep migrants out. Norwegian justice minister Emilie Enger Mehl told the NRK that the government was looking at a number of

different measures, but that a fence was considered a very interesting option. *"Not only does a fence act as a deterrent, but it can incorporate sensors and technology that allow you to detect people approaching the border."* No further information was given on the plans, so we don't know whether Norway wants to fence off the entire border, or only certain parts of it. It would be a nice little job for the Norwegian installers among our readership, as the Russian-Norwegian border is over 200 kilometres long. We've got our fingers crossed for you, gjerde installers. ■





NEW FENCE DEMOLITION GROUP IN CALIFORNIA

Newcastle,
Californië, USA

Newcastle, California, USA – There's a new non-profit organisation in California. Founded by Irene and Roger Smith, Friends Aiding Wildlife in Nature is a new association dedicated to removing old, unused fences. By doing so, the members aim to make it easier for wildlife to move around as they search for food, water, shelter, and mates. The Smiths set up the association after seeing a photo on the front page of a local newspaper that

showed two reindeer caught in a barbed-wire fence. The pair are now looking for volunteers to help remove old fences. The Smiths are also creating a list of fences that – with the owners' permission, of course – can be removed. We're interested to see how it goes. As long as the association only works to remove old fences, and doesn't decide to start protesting against new ones being installed, we think it's a good initiative. ■

REPELLING ELEPHANTS WITH A STINK FENCE

Sydney,
Australië

Sydney, Australia – In a previous issue, we wrote about India's first elephant fence strong enough to stop elephants. All the other elephant fences we've written about haven't managed to do this. They mainly made the news because, after all the hard work put in to install them (usually by poor farmers), they collapsed again just as quickly, even before a single elephant got near them. Or they were simply trampled over. Or they were electrified with such a strong current that they killed other farmers or local children who made contact with them. That particular Indian fence didn't have those problems. It was strong enough, was fully equipped with detection equipment, and didn't have 220 volts running through it. But it was certainly the most expensive elephant fence we'd ever seen, which made its use unfeasible in many situations. Certainly when there are entire national parks to be fenced off, needing many dozens of kilometres of fencing. For this reason, researcher Patrick Finnerty of the University of Sydney wanted to try something new: a stink fence. It has been shown to work extremely well for kangaroos, somewhere

in the Outback. Finnerty wanted to know whether the same technique would work on elephants in South Africa. In that country, or actually across the whole of southern Africa, the savannah elephant population is seeing considerable growth. In particular, the elephants that are normally based in Kruger National Park have been leaving the park on a regular basis and trashing farmers' crops. Finnerty and his team used construction fencing to build Y-shaped mazes in an elephant reserve. Both arms of the Y contained bushes that elephants find delicious, but one of the arms also contained hidden bottles containing the scent of a bush that elephants dislike. Then elephants were repeatedly led in through the base of the Y, and all of them chose the arm without the hidden scent bottles. Finnerty now wants to conduct a more extensive field experiment, to see whether this type of stink fence will also work to keep elephants inside a particular area. For the sake of the South African fencing installers, we hope it won't; obviously for them it's better to have big orders of many kilometres of fencing coming in. ■



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