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Filling up with high reliability

Environmental protection, health protection, safety concepts – hose assemblies play an important role in this. ELAFLEX and ContiTech Fluid have been co-operating in this field for 50 years.

Karlheinz Ehlers is one of the few people who stands to gain something when petrol prices go up. Once the oil companies announce increased prices, millions of people watching the news will usually see a motorist holding up a fuel-pump nozzle. And if viewers take a closer look they will see the prominent ZVA logo – free prime-time advertising for a product marketed by ELAFLEX.

Karlheinz Ehlers is a managing partner in this company, and hardly any pump in Germany dispenses fuel without using the technique pioneered in Hamburg. With quality and innovation, ELAFLEX has built up its leading position on the international marketplace. But a nozzle on its own doesn't make a complete refuelling system, so ELAFLEX combined it with hose assemblies. And in this activity the company puts its trust in a competent partner: ContiTech Fluid based in Korbach, Hessen.

A lot of people don't know that two hoses are attached to the nozzle, even if motorists only see one. Inside the black, blue or green hose, through which the carburettor fuel flows into the tank, there is a thin inner hose. Through this inner one, a vacuum pump sucks off the carcinogenic fuel vapours, that would otherwise escape when the tank is being filled up – an active contribution to environmental and health protection that has hence been a legal requirement in many European countries for the last ten years.

For a long time the developers puzzled over the best design, because the hose within a hose has to remain undamaged even when a car drives over it. Polyurethane, reinforced with steel, turned out to be the optimum solution. "ContiTech came up with this hose design based on my concept and manufactures it exclusively", says Ehlers with pride and refers to a co-operation that in 2001 will have lasted for 50 years. "The co-operation with ELAFLEX is invariably innovative", confirmed Willi Emde, Head of the Industrial Hoses product segment at ContiTech Fluid in Korbach. "Working together, ContiTech and ELAFLEX set new quality standards." Both companies have developed patented solutions involving conductive refuelling hoses that prevent electrostatic charging and make aircraft refuelling safer.

Safety aspects are also the reason why customers specify ELAFLEX and hence ContiTech products. "We supply a quality that is slightly more expensive than competitive products but that gives customers a maximum of safety", says ELAFLEX General Manager Dr. Harald Falkenberg. It's not uncommon for manufacturers to advertise the fact that their products comply with DIN standards, but these only require a minimum level. Tests have shown that even these requirements are not always met. "Our products surpass standard specifications. That's why we are able to give durability guaranties going well beyond minimum legal requirements", says Falkenberg.

Production in Korbach: ContiTech manufactures state-of-the-art hoses for ELAFLEX.

ELAFLEX supplies refuelling hoses for every application – from road transport tankers to aircraft. "A business that needs very intensive consulting", says Karsten Ehlers, responsible for marketing at the company. "Over the decades we have built up a wealth of expertise that probably no other company can match. With us talks do not focus on the price, but are directed at finding purpose-designed solutions."

The company's capability is undisputed among experts. The ELAFLEX colour marking system for hoses has been adopted as the standard for the industry. ELAFLEX is represented on numerous standardisation committees. And anyone who has watched a plane being refuelled in the dark could well have seen the new hoses with the yellow glowing neon rings – an ELAFLEX innovation that makes night-time refuelling safer.

BMW initiative for sulphur-free fuel for spark-ignition engines: Thanks to the COAX technique, jointly developed by ELAFLEX and ContiTech, the vapours are actively sucked off.

Developers in Hamburg and Korbach are currently working on the development of methanol refuelling hoses. Fuel-cell cars are powered with methanol, as recently demonstrated by DaimlerChrysler with its Necar 5.

"We successfully operate with a network of main dealers and our own distribution organisations in very specialised markets ", is how Karlheinz Ehlers summarises the company's strategy. "That makes us less vulnerable."

ELAFLEX is also active in the chemical hose segment. Currently the company is adding the POLYPAL CLEAN to its product range of PAL chemical hoses. It is light-coloured inside and outside so that, when in service in the pharmaceutical or clean chemical industry, it will not to stain the materials conveyed or the manufacturing facilities.

The innovation here is the combination of being light-coloured and OHM-conductive that is achieved by the use of continuous conductive strips. This patented principle improves the protection from electrostatic charging with a simplified assembly of the fittings and will find application with many hoses of the PAL and ELAFLEX product range. "With PAL and ELAFLEX we can supply two premium brands from a single company", says Ehlers.

But hose assemblies are only one speciality of the experts from the city on the Elbe: Flexible expansion joints (compensators) made by ContiTech Luftfedersysteme GmbH are completed in Hamburg. They connect pipes and enable hose assemblies to expand without any danger arising. Admittedly not quite such eye-catchers as petrol pump hoses, but nevertheless also top performers. ■

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