

Schagerl Brass Instrument Manufacturing

I wasn't about to turn down an invitation to tour the Schagerl manufacturing premises whilst visiting Melk for the Schagerl Brass Festival at the beginning of June. So with James Morrison, Schagerl Instrumentalist and clinician in the driving seat we set off to Mank where the Schagerl factory is located. I feel particularly safe with James as the brand new Audi A6 hugs the corners of the narrow twisting roads. James has considerable experience as a racing and rally driver, not to mention being a pilot and sailor. In a flash we are driving down what appears to be a farm track to the Schagerl manufacturing plant.

This year Schagerl are celebrating 50 years of brass instrument manufacture and of course the Festival is very much part of those celebrations. Karl Schagerl senior started the company in 1961, and he and his wife live next door to the plant. Karl and his brother Robert run the company now; Karl is CEO and his brother Robert is Head of Design. I'm sure Karl senior still takes a keen interest in the ongoing expansion and development of the company he started - and of course Karl and Robert still have his wise advice easily available. The company has grown considerably in recent years, with 30 people employed and some 550 instruments manufactured annually. Karl estimates that some 70% of the instruments are exported.

Karl took over the running of the business in 1989, having always been immersed in his father's company. He tells me that he 'learned by doing': "I was always in the factory as a boy, doing all sorts of work from machining parts to testing the instruments." Karl shows me new CNC machines which have recently been purchased to help increase valve production. He's very pleased and proud of how the company has developed in recent years and the fact that the level of exports has increased to a ratio of



Karl Schagerl - CEO of Schagerl Brass Manufacturing.

around two to one - this he sees as one indicator of the company being on the world stage. Another massive factor Karl points to is the top professional instrumentalists Schagerl have on board both playing and helping to design the instruments. These include Hans Gansch, Thomas Gansch, Mnozil Brass and, as Karl puts it: "It was a major coup when James Morrison came over and started working with us just over a year ago. This has already built into an incredible partnership."

Speaking to Robert Schagerl, he sees the size of the company as one of the keys to success. "Things can happen quickly with a company of thirty people, decisions taken and implemented quickly - that's how we do it here." Robert also points to the fact that Schagerl have now built up a formidable worldwide distribution network and plans are well advanced to export to every country in the world. For the United Kingdom distribution, both Robert and Karl spoke so highly of

Will and Tom Watson of Prozone, as they did of Lee Walkowich of Chuck Levin's Washington Music Store in the United States.

It's off to the testing room now to see how James Morrison is getting on with the new trombone prototype which has been built to his spec and design. The verdict is a thumbs up. "This little beauty is extremely free blowing

and does the job very nicely," James tells me. Now, here is something that I took more than a little interest in the previous day when a gig bag was passed to James in the café just down the road from Stiff Melk. It appears at first look to be a cornet with piston valves; it's actually a trumpet with rotary valves. James did a road test on this brand new style trumpet the evening before in the rehearsal for the opening festival concert and felt it needed brightening a little. He sits down and discusses his ideas with Robert who listens attentively then disappears into his workshop with the new prototype trumpet. James has time on his hands, which is used to give a virtuoso rendition on a soprano sax. Robert returns with a smile on his face and James puts down the saxophone and gives a lot of serious time to putting this new style trumpet through its paces. He looks very pleased with what he's hearing and his verdict is - perfect! "I'll be playing it this evening," he says. James asks Robert what he did. "What did I do? I used a wooden hammer on certain parts of the instrument." "A hammer?" James questions. "Yes, a hammer. I know where to hit!" Robert quips.



Karl Schagerl and James Morrison.

Now all that's needed is a name for this wonderful looking and sounding trumpet. A trornet? A crumpet? No, after much discussion in the local café over lunch, the name is fixed. A Raven - and James will announce it to the world this evening. Robert is right when he says that things can happen quickly at Schagerl.

I was hugely impressed with the Schagerl plant and operation. It's very clear that Karl and Robert Schagerl have a well mapped out vision for the company which was started by their father, Karl Senior. Schagerl are big players on the world stage - look out for more innovation, enterprise and development in years to come.

Philip Biggs



Schagerl Brass Works.