

Into the future with hydrogen instead of diesel

The company "Orten Electric-Trucks" specializes in electric transporters. Now the Wittlich-based company wants to put large trucks on the road without emissions. How this works and what two wishes company boss Robert E. Orten has for the future.

WITTLICH

With the technology to convert diesel commercial vehicles to an electric drive, Robert Erich Orten is already one of the pioneers in Germany. Now the man from the Mosel region wants to take the next step and have large commercial vehicles run on hydrogen fuel cells. The first vehicles of this type could be rolling on the region's roads as early as the end of the year. For example, for the regional logistics service provider Bucher, which mainly covers shorter distances and recently rented the former Aldi central warehouse.

In Germany, says Orten, "this technology is still in its infancy." Some well-known manufacturers such as Volvo, Daimler or Iveco are already working on it. "But the number is relatively small." With the new technology, Orten, supported by a strategic partner, primarily wants to "put large trucks on the road without emissions," which includes tractor units with semitrailers or heavy trucks with trailers in a weight class of 40 tons, with driving distances of more than 250 kilometres. A purely electric drive is not (yet) capable of this.

What Robert E. Orten needs to realise his company's goals are above all qualified employees and further expansion space, because the company is reaching its spatial limits at its regional locations. "We want to become more international, need expansion space and more staff," says Orten, for example software engineers, switchgear engineers or electrical specialists.

"We help save the climate, have a sense of purpose in our work," he says. There is passion, team spirit and enthusiasm.

When the first hydrogen fuel cell-powered trucks hit the road, Orten-Electric-Trucks says it will become "one of the few full-range suppliers with a complete line of zero-emission, quiet trucks and vans for short-haul distribution and mainline transport." The delivery of the hydrogen fuel cell powered trucks would also be accompanied by the installation of hydrogen charging stations at both sites in the region. Negotiations are already underway with several well-known suppliers.

In the electric segment, the customers for the electronically powered commercial vehicles are primarily municipalities such as Frankfurt am Main, the Berlin municipal cleaning service, Bochum, Lüneburg or Rheinberg in the Lower Rhine region. In their own region, the popularity is not yet so great, says Orten. "Bernkastel-Kues and Traben-Trarbach each have a light all-electric commercial vehicle from Orten in use," says the company boss. However, none of the other towns and municipalities in the region or the special-purpose associations have a vehicle from his company so far. "I would like to see more encouragement in the future."

The 67-year-old would also like to see more support from politicians, for example in promoting the zero-emission drive technologies that his company produces. "We are helping to make cities emission-free by making delivery traffic emission-free," Orten says. And quieter than before. His is particularly relevant in inner cities, he says, when goods are no longer delivered there by trucks with humming diesel engines. Perhaps a next step towards a more climate-friendly future.

INFO:

The Orten Group of Companies

The group was founded in 1925 as a metal smithy and is today run by Robert E. Orten, the third generation of the Orten family to do so. After its foundation, the company developed into a coach builder and later, under Robert J. Orten, into a vehicle and superstructure builder. Robert E. Orten specialised in superstructures for beverage logistics. In 2015, Orten-Electric-Trucks was founded as one of the few companies that convert trucks to electric drive. Orten Electric-Trucks is based in Wittlich. The headquarters of the group of companies is Bernkastel-Kues, and in addition to the two locations in the region, there is a third in Rothnaußlitz in Saxony. According to its own information, the group employs about 120 people and generates 30 million euros in turnover per year. According to the company, Orten-Electric-Trucks GmbH has been the only company in Rhineland-Palatinate to convert diesel commercial vehicles weighing between three and 26 tonnes to a 100 per cent e-drive since 2018. The Orten Group is one of the region's hidden champions: secret winners and unknown global market leaders. The term "hidden champions" was first introduced into the economics discussion as a research construct in 1990 by Hermann Simon, a native of Hasborn. Criteria: Number 1, 2 or 3 in their industry on the world market, annual turnover below three billion euros, owner-managed, not listed on the stock exchange, niche market.

INFO II:

Fuel cells for trucks

Electric drive for heavy trucks: This will not work so soon, because battery-electronic drives currently have too little range. That is why research is focusing on hydrogen or fuel. Hydrogen or fuel cell vehicles are also electric vehicles: a fuel cell with a hydrogen tank generates the electricity for the electric drive. Hydrogen (gaseous) and atmospheric oxygen react to form water, producing heat and electrical energy that feeds the engine. The exhaust gas is water vapour. It couldn't be any cleaner. From today's perspective, hydrogen offers two advantages over battery-electric drives for heavy commercial vehicles: Fuel-cell trucks can travel further on a tank of hydrogen than with electric drive, currently around 400 to 1000 kilometres. The range of electric trucks will presumably only come close to that of hydrogen trucks in the future due to the higher space requirements of the batteries.

And: an empty hydrogen tank can be recharged in a few minutes. Charging the battery, on the other hand, currently takes between three quarters of an hour and several hours.

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