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Producing for the future: Volkswagen Toolmaking opens highly advanced 3-D printing center

- Innovative binder jetting process sets new standards for speed, flexibility and automation
- New printer generation can print production parts in addition to prototypes in future
- Dr. Andreas Tostmann: "The 3-D printing center takes Volkswagen's additive manufacturing activities to a new level."

Wolfsburg – The Volkswagen brand's Toolmaking unit is adding a highly advanced 3-D printing center to its facilities in Wolfsburg. With the opening of the center, the unit is bringing the most highly advanced generation of 3-D printers to the Volkswagen Group, which will allow the production of complex vehicle parts in the future. In addition, with the new center, Toolmaking is implementing a key point of the pact for the future concluded in 2016 and expanding its production competences with subsidies from the Innovation Fund II.



Official opening with 3-D scissors: (from left to right) Oliver Schauerte, Head of Research, Materials and Production Processes, Eckhard Ritz, Head of Toolmaking, Volkswagen brand, and Uwe Schwartz, Head of Planning, Volkswagen brand, together open the 3-D printing center.

A tour of the 3-D printing center: in the presence of the management and Works Council, Oliver Pohl, Head of Additive Manufacturing at Volkswagen (third from left), presents the new printers, production technologies and workplaces.

"The 3-D printing center takes Volkswagen's additive manufacturing activities to a new level," said Dr. Andreas Tostmann, Board Member for Production of the Volkswagen brand. "In two to three years' time, three-dimensional printing will also become interesting for the first production parts. In the future, we may be able to use 3-D printers directly on the production line for vehicle production," Tostmann added.

Press contact

Volkswagen Communications
Torsten Cramm
Spokesperson Volkswagen Wolfsburg
Phone: +49 5361 9-22880
torsten.cramm@volkswagen.de

Volkswagen Communications
Leslie Bothge
Spokesperson Procurement and Production
Phone: +49-5361-9-21549
leslie.bothge@volkswagen.de



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The new generation of 3-D printers developed in cooperation with the US manufacturer HP is the most modern within the Volkswagen Group and is based on the binder jetting process, which supplements the previous selective laser melting (SLM) process. Binder jetting not only makes metallic 3-D printing considerably easier but also faster. In future, it will be possible to manufacture production parts in addition to prototypes. At the 3-D printing center, which has a floor space of 3,100 m², toolmakers, planners and research team members cooperate closely on the development of new products and processes. Within the framework of the pact for the future, a new additive manufacturing unit providing 11 future-oriented jobs has been established.

At the opening ceremony, the Head of Additive Manufacturing, Oliver Pohl, especially underlined the performance of the entire team which has recorded outstanding achievements for the future since the start of conversion work a year ago. "Here, we have created an innovative center which will be of tremendous strategic importance for Volkswagen in the future."

"The inauguration of the 3-D printing center underlines the importance of Innovation Fund II, which makes investments like this possible," said Works Council member Susanne Preuk. "The Works Council welcomes the fact that the company is opening up to new technologies and shaping them in a future-oriented way in the interest of the employees."

To date, the Volkswagen Group has mainly used the SLM process for 3-D printing with metals. In this process, the material used, such as steel, is applied to a base plate in a thin layer. A laser beam then melts the powder at the points where the component is to be created. The molten powder hardens, forming a solid material layer. The new printers at the center will now allow the use of other 3-D printing processes such as binder jetting. In this additive process, components are manufactured using a metal powder and a binder applied in layers. The metal part which has been printed is then "baked" in a sintering process. In future, the various processes, which each have specific applications, will supplement each other in an ideal way.

About the Volkswagen brand: "We make the future real"

The Volkswagen Passenger Cars brand is present in more than 150 markets throughout the world and produces vehicles at over 50 locations in 14 countries. In 2017, Volkswagen delivered 6.23 million vehicles including bestselling models such as the Golf, Tiguan, Jetta or Passat. Currently, 198,000 people work for Volkswagen across the globe. The brand also has 7,700 dealerships with 74,000 employees. Volkswagen is forging ahead consistently with the further development of automobile production. E-mobility, smart mobility and the digital transformation of the brand are the key strategic topics for the future.
