

Efforts of ZF Wind Power rewarded with Factory of the Future Award

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On 17 February, six companies received the title of Factory of the Future on the occasion of the eighth edition of the Factory of the Future Awards. It is the initiator's intention for the award to identify the most future-oriented manufacturing companies in Belgium. One of this year's winners is ZF Wind Power, a wind turbine gearbox producer from Lommel.

ZF Wind Power belongs to the ZF group. The company's origins can be traced back to Hansen Transmissions in Edegem. The headquarters and the plant itself are in Lommel, Limburg, where about 950 employees are employed. The manufacturer has an annual production volume of about 1,000 gearboxes for 3 MW to 6 MW wind turbines.

ZF Wind Power, one of the Flemish winners of the Award, is quite known to Sirris. ZF Wind Power was one of the founding members of OWI Lab and has a seat on its Industrial Advisory Board. For the past ten years, OWI Lab has been working together with this world leader in the development and production of high-tech gearboxes for wind turbines. Recently, components for 6 MW wind turbines were subjected to cold start tests in the large climatic chamber at the Sirris site in the port of Antwerp.

Future-oriented process revision

The solutions needed for the energy transition remain considerable. In order to make larger and more efficient wind turbines, ZF Wind Power revised a substantive part of its processes in recent years. The company’s main activity previously consisted of the production and assembly of gearboxes, which were fully subjected to an onsite end-of-life test before being shipped to the customer. Thanks to innovative collaboration with the customer, ZF managed to create an integrated product, where the gearbox is mounted against the main shaft and the generator. This means the manufacturer can now assemble a complete product, which can then be tested in its final setup to ensure it is ready for use. This obviously entails great advantages in terms of time and transport, and reduces the company’s transports, which in turn results in lower CO2 emissions.

This CO2 reduction must be seen in a much broader vision. As a supplier of gearboxes for wind turbines, sustainability is in the company’s corporate DNA. The sustainability policy is based on three pillars: the product, worked on every day by engineers to increase the energy-efficiency; cooperation with customers to reduce C02 emissions worldwide, including by supplying wind farms directly; and the plant in Lommel, where various energy-efficiency projects are underway.

People first

All the transformations this Factory of the Future underwent involved great consideration of the workforce. The role of all staff was thoroughly reviewed, while more opportunities were created for continued growth. The structure of the organisation, which is known for putting its people first, has increasingly come to the foreground at ZF Wind Power in recent years. For example, intensive work has been done to set up a job classification structure for administrative staff. This gives them the chance to grow into an expert, project-based or leadership role if that is what they want. Additionally, a cooperation project was set up with training experts, specifically for operators, so they can gradually acquire the skills of a maintenance technician. This allows the company to secure the in-house know-how for the future.

Importance of Factories of the Future in Belgium

The story of ZF seamlessly fits into the larger picture of Factories of the Future in Belgium, which was set up by Sirris and Agoria in 2015. One of Sirris and Agoria’s key objectives is indeed to ensure that the technology industry can make a maximum contribution to a prosperous and sustainable society. In order to achieve this, Sirris and Agoria, together with various partners, including essenscia, the Belgian federation of the chemical industry and life sciences, support manufacturing companies through initiatives like 'Factories of the Future'. A survey has shown that this has been a hit: the 48 titleholders have now achieved more growth in productivity, turnover and jobs between 2015 and 2020 than the rest of the manufacturing industry.

On 17 February 2022, six companies were granted the award for the first time. For Flanders, construction company Stas in Waregem, West-Flanders, Terumo Europe’s medical products production site of in Leuven, Limburg panel builder P&V Panels in Heusden-Zolder and ZF Wind Power in Lommel. Wine cork company Vinventions from Thimister-Clermont in Liège and pharmaceutical company Takeda Belgium from Lessen in Hainaut for Wallonia. The winners were handed their awards by the Flemish and Walloon vice-ministers Hilde Crevits and Willy Borsus.

Eight other manufacturing companies extended their titles: Lavetan and E.D.& A. in Turnhout, BMT Aerospace and TE Connectivity in Oostkamp, Duracell in Aarschot, Van Hoecke in Sint-Niklaas,

Stas in Doornik and AISIN Europe (previously AW Europe) in Saint-Ghislain. In total, the Factories of the Future group now consists of 48 companies.

Factory of the Future Roadshow 2022

What can you learn from a Factory of the Future like ZF Wind Power? A virtual visit to this manufacturer of high-tech gearboxes is sure to inspire you to make your own innovations! You can engage in an open and honest dialogue with the host company and an important partner of theirs which helps them to accomplish the transformations. Seize this opportunity and register for the virtual visit to ZF Wind Power on 21 April, from 13:00 to 16:00. You will receive a Team link a few days before the event.

Take a look inside ZF Wind Power:

Accept marketing-cookies to watch this video. For FireFox users, disable the 'Enhanced tracking protection' of your browser to view this video.

Click here for more information on the Award winners.

(Source picture: ZF Wind Power)

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