

Stimulating growth in the tractor business

CLAAS launches the “Future Factory” in Le Mans

The CLAAS tractor factory in Le Mans, France – the “Future Factory” – has officially started operations following three years of modernisation. Drawing on state-of-the-art digital technologies, the production facilities set new standards.

CLAAS gave the go-ahead for its latest major investment in Le Mans back in 2017. Investments totalling €40 million were primarily spent on a complete renewal of assembly equipment and digital transformation of the plant. This brings the total investment in Le Mans, the development centre in Vélizy and the test and validation centre in Trangé to around €80 million since the acquisition of Renault Agriculture in 2003.

“Our completely refurbished plant in Le Mans raises the bar for the production of premium and connected agricultural tractors”, says Thomas Böck, Chair of the CLAAS Group Executive Board. “We have therefore opened a new chapter in the continued growth of our global business.”

Back in 2019, the modernisation efforts were identified as a lighthouse project in France and labelled a “Showcase for the Industry of the Future”.



Heralding the digital age

Modernisation of the plant creates entirely new opportunities for the manufacture of increasingly complex and individually configured tractors. This involved a complete rethink of many complex processes – especially in the area of in-house logistics. The use of cutting-edge virtual reality technologies enabled digital simulation of all processes during the factory planning stage, even for tractor models that have not yet entered production. Innumerable options were acted out using 3D animations and VR goggles in order to play through all stages of assembly, from the powertrain to the finished and tested tractor. Any necessary structural changes were therefore identified early on.

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The introduction of automated guided vehicles (AGV) made a significant contribution to the automation of production. 40 of these driverless and fully automatic carrier vehicles transport the tractors from the first to the last assembly station and are capable of moving up to 20 tonnes at a time. This means that they provide sufficient load capacity for all current series, as well as for future higher performance models. In future, daily production will therefore be increased to as many as 60 tractors a day. Projected to the full year, this can lead to an annual production capacity of more than 13,000 tractors compared to around 10,000 units today.



State-of-the-art workstations

Employees are the main beneficiaries of the completely modernised plant. The new logistics infrastructure means employees have significantly more space at their ergonomically designed workplaces, as only parts that are immediately needed are delivered to the assembly line. Some of the workstations are even equipped with headsets so that employees can benefit from easier communication. In addition, bright colours and state-of-the-art LED lighting technology ensure a concentrated and pleasant working atmosphere that resembles natural lighting conditions.



“Besides efficiency, the work conditions were our main priority in designing the new manufacturing facility”, explains Dr Martin von Hoyningen-Huene, Head of the CLAAS Tractor Unit and Member of the Group Executive Board. “We have achieved a substantial improvement in workflows and ergonomics, which will help to increase the concentration and motivation of our staff. Like the new logistics, this is a fundamental ingredient for the production of tractors according to the most rigorous quality standards.”

At present, five tractor model series from 75 to 460 hp are produced in Le Mans. Together with the development centre in Vélizy near Paris and the test and validation centre in Trangé, around 1,000 people are employed in Le Mans. The locations cooperate closely with other development centres and plants, such as in Germany with CLAAS E-Systems in Dissen or with CLAAS Industrietechnik in Paderborn, where the TERRA TRAC crawler track units for the AXION 900 TERRA TRAC and the continuously variable power split transmissions for the ARION 500 and ARION 600 model series are built.

Opened at the same time, the new technology centre in Ymeray close to Chartres means that CLAAS is continuing to strengthen its presence in France, the largest producer of agricultural technology in the European Union. CLAAS has been producing agricultural balers in Metz since 1958 and now employs over 2,200 people in the country.

Digital countdown campaign for Le Mans

A video campaign was launched on social media in March to herald the inauguration of the Le Mans plant. The history of the factory, the most important milestones and the key innovations were portrayed in 12 video clips using the slogan "Countdown Le Mans". They impressively demonstrated how the innovative force has been leveraged even more since the takeover by CLAAS in 2003.

In addition, a dedicated page on the CLAAS website has showcased the tractor factory in Le Mans in the run-up to its official reopening. Visitors to excellence-lemans.claas.com will find information, data and facts about the plant, Le Mans itself and the historical background, rounded off by an overview of the most important technical milestones and innovations. A 360-degree factory tour, image galleries and numerous videos also give interested persons a more detailed introduction to the plant and its employees.