

PROFILE:

Germany's Lederinstitut Gerberschule Reutlingen

There are very few institutes which may claim to be unique in the world, but the Lederinstitut Gerberschule Reutlingen (LGR) is considered one of those. Not only is it recognised as a teaching institute offering a modern, solid foundation for next-generation tanners from around the world, but it acts internationally as a service provider in the field of testing and research. The amalgam of these strengths, in combination with a comprehensive tannery used both for training and production, only exists at LGR.

The Deutsche Gerberschule school of tanning was established in 1889 in Freiberg/Saxony, at a time when chemical engineering was making significant inroads in the field of leather manufacture. As this teaching centre was no longer available post-1945, the German Leather Industry Association founded the Westdeutsche Gerberschule school of tanning in Regensburg in 1950. In the autumn of 1954, the school moved to modern premises in Reutlingen, being purpose built in co-operation with the State of Baden-Wuerttemberg and the town of Reutlingen. Situated at the foot of the Swabian Jura Mountains, the centuries old tradition of tanning in Reutlingen can be found in street names and landmarks such as "The Tannery Fountains".

The services provided by the school enjoy international repute and public support. As a non-profit making association, members and patrons include Baden-Wuerttemberg's Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Financial Affairs, the city of Reutlingen, German and European Leather Industry Associations and the TEGEWA Association of the Chemical Industry. The interaction between field-education, research and materials testing, forms the foundation for the international acclaim accredited to LGR.

Careers worldwide

The technical development of any industrial sector is judged



Attention to spraying heads to ensure even finish application.



Emphasis on teamwork, as required when fleshing, trimming and handling whole green hides.

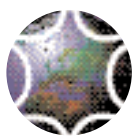
by the sound vocational training of the next generation. The ongoing process of streamlining and automation taking place throughout the industry, and the use of more complex and versatile chemical agents, all call for a pool of highly qualified specialists. The two-year course to become a state-recognised leather technical engineer provides the technical management of tomorrow's leather and chemical industry. Graduates obtain sound knowledge of the theoretical and technological fundamentals of leather manufacture. This is the base for responsible and independent positions in the fields of production, development and application engineering.

Other courses include a five-month compact study in leather technology held in English, and seminars and short courses on subject areas related to leather technology. It is noted that a high proportion of candidates completing these courses originates from the automotive engineering supply industry, where leather is used as a high-tech product.

The practical traineeship in tanning, dyeing and finishing offered is unique, as the facilities offered by an operational tannery are included within the framework of these courses. This tannery processes 100 hides per week as specialty and technical leathers for industry; moreover, a fully equipped pilot plant for small scale investigations is also available for student use.

International contacts and conferences

Almost half of the students who have graduated to date from the leather-engineering course have originated from a total of 70 different countries. Accordingly, these contacts are maintained as they carry the reputation of LGR around the world. Contacts are also maintained with the industry's most important institutes. These include cooperation with the Group of European Leather Research Institutes (GERIC), the Confederation of European Leather Tanners Associations (COTANCE), and international partners in Asia and Latin America. ➤



Small scale development work by students within the pilot plant.

The annual information and discussion conference for leather engineers has met with great acclaim both in Germany and abroad for many years. Attendance is established in excess of 100 participants, to date from 17 different countries. Alongside teaching staff from the school, speakers include industrial specialists. These presentations operate within the framework of a four-year cycle, covering the latest findings from the fields of raw hides and beamhouse, tannage, post-tannage and finishing.

Through in-depth discussions with fellow specialists, technicians and engineers working in industry can catch up with the latest developments on leather manufacturing issues. This event—at which all of the contributions are simultaneously, interpreted into English—provides an ideal addition to the study of specialist literature, and to attending trade fairs and congresses.

Testing for quality

The Materials Testing/Analysis Division has been accredited as a test laboratory by the German Accreditation Council (DAR). Accordingly, the division acts as a mediator between science and practical application in the field of leather technology. This department is commissioned by the leather industry, authorities and the supply industry, to perform physical and chemical tests, draw up quality assessments of finished products, and to advise in the prevention or remedy of production faults. Arbitration services are also provided for the measurement of leather surfaces, and the testing of effluents and by-products.

More than 100 different chemical, physical and mechanical tests can be performed on leather. Over and above this analysis, the institute performs testing for hazardous chemicals. This enables the institute to confer the test mark "Leather produced in an environmentally acceptable way and tested for hazardous substances." Objectivity is guaranteed to all clients, and absolute confidentiality of all test results and the documents that are the subject of evaluation.



Strong emphasis on the practicalities of leather making to gain understanding of the industrial environment.

There is considerable emphasis on fundamentals, forming a base for a wide understanding of leather manufacture. In this example white-tanned leathers are wet hand-stretched before being naturally frame dried. Traditional leathers are also made such as Dongola, aluminium tawed and oil-tanned and vegetable tanned. ▼



Practically orientated research

Practically orientated research and problem-solving form a focus for the work of the institute, where the research and development division holds a central role among the various departments. In effect, it creates an interface to the problems and innovations occurring in practice. With this aim in mind, it acts upon impetus from within the institute, monitors development tendencies around the world, and findings from fundamental research.

The link between the institute and industry is the research body Forschungsgemeinschaft Leder (FGL) e.V. All plans, findings and research results are discussed through consultation with this body.

Alongside modern laboratory facilities, the research and development department enjoys full use of pilot plant, and full-scale machinery and equipment set within the tannery. This combination of facilities allows contract research for both leather manufacturers and the chemical industry.

Research projects include process optimisation, process control, environmentally friendly manufacturing techniques, effluent treatment and by-product utilisation. Results are regularly published in both national and international specialist press, thus providing the industry with new impetus, and valuable pointers in the search for solutions.

By offering this broad range of services and educational needs—driven by close participation with the leather producers and users, and chemical providers—LGR continues to make its unique contribution as a major global player within these major industrial sectors. ●