



PROFILE: TFL AT 10



The TFL production site in Huninge, France

Building on a long tradition

It started life as “Together for Leather”, which was soon contracted to TFL. Launched as a proactive, innovative, and international company totally focused on leather, and now celebrating its tenth anniversary, it has remained true to its mission statement. In the context of the leather industry, 10 years is not that long, certainly not usually considered sufficient time to have gained the worldwide reputation and acceptance of the industry in the way TFL has. The secret behind its success could, of course, be attributed to its parents. In the parlance of today, one could say that the leather industry was in its genetic make-up.

The flying start that TFL has enjoyed was the result of three, very well-established, chemical companies deciding to combine all of their various divisions serving the leather industry into a single, cohesive unit. The parents of TFL were Ciba-Geigy and Röhm/Stockhausen, parts of Hüls, all with a long tradition in leather chemicals. Stockhausen in Krefeld, Germany, had been founded in 1912, based on “Crefelder Seifenfabrik Müller & Traiser” which itself had been formed as far back as 1879. The company was a pioneer in the production of sulphated fishoil and the first producer in 1930 of sulphated fatliquors which were stable to electrolytes and designed for the leather and fur industry. It was also active in chemicals for textiles, water treatment and the industrial skin protection sectors. Then, in 1991, Hüls AG in Marl, Germany, acquired Stockhausen.

Röhm, later to become Röhm & Haas in 1907, was founded by Otto Röhm (1876-1939), who mastered the use of pancreatic enzymes as the active substance for bates in the early 1900s; up until then dog excrement had been used for the purpose. It was a giant step forward and introduced the internationally recognised trade name of Oropo, still considered as a leading product in the field. Röhm and Haas in Europe survived through to 1971 when Haas left the company while Röhm GmbH stayed in Darmstadt until 1980, when Hüls took over. The company developed other enzyme-based products for textiles, detergents and an extremely successful process for synthetic glass using methacrylic resins.

The other parent, Ciba-Geigy, was itself the result of a merger of Ciba and Geigy in 1970, both of which had leather departments. Established in 1859 and 1884 respectively the name was an acronym for Chemische Industrie Basel. As early as the 1920s, Ciba had already introduced leather dyes, pigments and finishing products as well as auxiliary products for leather dyeing.

Geigy, one of the oldest chemical companies, goes back to 1758. At the outset it traded in drugs, vegetable extracts for tanning agents, and natural dyes, first for textiles and later for use with leather.

The rapid development of the world population in the last 100 or 150 years forced the pace of industrialisation including the tanning industry and accordingly the demand for



TFL's joint presidents from the outset, Dr. Heider Krenz and Peter Schaller, now taking the company into its second decade, seen cutting the ribbon at the opening of TFL's Basel offices in 1996.



products which were no longer available in sufficient quantities from purely natural resources.

In 1856 the first synthetic dyestuff was invented by the British chemist Perkin, and soon after that Geigy also began producing synthetic dyes. Those for wool were shortly afterwards found to be frequently suitable for leather.

The first resin from phenol and formaldehyde was Bakelite, invented by L.H. Baekeland in 1910, and the leather scientist Edmund Stiasny received the first patent in 1911 for a syntan (Neradol D), which was followed up by BASF. But for quite some time only as an auxiliary product and not as a real replacement tannins. There would have been a need for syntans during World War I because of the lack of vegetable extracts such as Quebracho or wattle but, as soon as the war was over, these extracts were available again. Only the economic crisis of the early 1920s created the demand for real replacement syntans. It coincided with growing gas production from coal which provided tar and therefore phenol as a major by-product and resource for syntans.

By fortunate coincidence, Geigy at the time had employed a qualified chemist in this field, Josef Schäfer, who synthesised one of the first replacement syntans. These products were competitive against natural products, even when they were available in sufficient quantities because of their bright colours, their dispersing effect and other special properties. The first chrome containing syntan was developed for very soft leathers



Entrance hall of the TFL headquarters in Weil am Rhein, Germany

(Tannesco) and one of the best white syntans (Irgatan LV) based on dioxydiphenylsulfone, still on the market today and maintaining the link with J. R. Geigy AG's name in TFL syntans of today.

It is now easy to appreciate just what a flying start TFL was able to enjoy when it hit the market back in 1995. With parent companies such as Geigy, Ciba, Röhm and Stockhausen, covering the entire spectrum of leather chemicals and benefiting from the knowledge, experience and people well-versed in all aspects of production and R&D, this was one 'baby' which had a secure vision of the future. 🌐



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