

with **Norbert Weiss**  
**Frenco GmbH**



**GS:** *Frenco is known worldwide as a premium manufacturer of spline and gear inspection equipment. Could you tell us a little about the company's history?*

**NW:** Frenco was founded in 1978 by Rudolf Och, who is still the company's president, so we've been in business for 25 years now. It was a small shop then, with only five employees, but we now have around 43, and I was the eighth employee to be hired. We've worked primarily with the automotive industry from the start, with customers such as DaimlerChrysler, and probably the biggest step for the company came during its second or third year, when a customer wanted a gauge with an indicator that would allow him to measure the tooth thickness or spaces on the spline. We'd had a design shop from the beginning, so we made it for him, and that was our first patent. We call them the "AVM" and "IVM" gauges, and we now have about five additional patents.

**GS:** *How did you come to be Frenco's eighth employee?*

**NW:** Before joining the company, I was employed by Siemens, working on a lathe machine. When I started with Frenco I was working on the shop floor, on the lathe, milling, and grinding machines. Then I moved into the assembly area, and I later took on the organization of the shop floor before moving into quality assurance. At that point I started taking night classes, with four years of studying technical engineering, and when I graduated I moved into the design department. I then took an additional two years of classes in economics and moved into the sales department, where I've been for the past 10 or so years.

**GS:** *That's a very interesting background, with everything from hands-on experience to classroom training. You know the product inside and out, as well as the market for it.*

**NW:** Yes, and that's especially helpful with one aspect of the work I'm doing now, which involves training customers in all technical aspects of splines. This training is for operators, designers, and people working in quality assurance, and the topics include how to use the inspection equipment, how to read and work with standards, and how to make decisions regarding the acceptance or rejection of parts. I've probably trained nearly 1,000 people at many well-known companies in the U.S. over the last five years.

**GS:** *So you've moved from the student to the teacher. Tell us about these classes.*

**NW:** We do on-site training for customers who have purchased our equipment. They pull together

a group of 10 or 15 people, and I travel to their plant so we can use their drawings, their parts, and they can ask questions about their specific problems, which we work together to solve.

Sometimes we also rent a hotel conference room in a central location and invite companies that may only have one or two individuals in need of spline training. This is interesting because we can then bring experiences from several different companies into the same room. The sessions usually last about two days, and I spend around 40 or 50 days a year conducting them.

**GS:** *Where are these customers located?*

**NW:** All over the world, but I'm getting more involved with our customers in the United States since our business is growing so rapidly there. I work with Jerry Kowalsky, who is president of the Euro-Tech Corporation, which is our U.S. representative. Over the past decade, our business in the United States has grown every single year, and it now represents about 10 percent of our annual sales, so that's become a major focus for us.

**GS:** *What sets Frenco's product apart from other inspection equipment?*

**NW:** The major difference is that our machines are designed to be used on the shop floor, in the actual manufacturing environment instead of in a separate laboratory, and they can be operated by just about anyone, with a high degree of repeatability and reliability. We also place a great deal of emphasis on working directly with our customers so that we become more of a partner than a vendor.

**GS:** *I understand that you're also heavily involved in developing industry standards, both here and in Germany.*

**NW:** Yes, that's true. Rudolf Och and I help develop DIN standards here in Germany, but we are also members of the German delegation that helps craft ISO and ANSI standards in the United States. We have about six employees at Frenco who also help in this work, and we consider this time—including airline tickets and lodging, which we pay for ourselves—to be a good investment in raising technical knowledge around the world. We are attached to the committees who work in the area of splines, of course, but that's definitely in our interest, because that's what we do. Splines are how we make our living. We want to be competitive in the marketplace, as any business does, but providing technical solutions to our customers and to the industry at large is really much more important for us. □

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