

Who is proseat?

There are two powerful partners behind the proseat company: Recticel, which has excellent local presence with over 100 companies in 20 countries, and Woodbridge, the global market leader in automotive polyurethane technology, with sites in North and South America, Australia and Asia.

With around 2000 members of staff, spread over eleven sites in eight countries, proseat is one of the major producers of automotive seating foam in all of Europe. Apart from seating foam components proseat's expertise lies in the production of finished components, such as headrests, armrests or side trim panels for seats.

Proseat takes the challenge of "location policy" into account

As the automotive industry has been undergoing a phase of far-reaching and radical changes since the 1990s, the markets in North America, Japan and Western Europe are more or less saturated. New value chains and changes in the location policy have become the crucial challenges that suppliers have had to face over the past few years.

Proseat has taken the issue of location policy into account. In the last two years the company has made the European orientation of its business activities a priority and at the same time has promoted its new developments in the area of seating components. By scaling down excess capacities and expanding production activity in Eastern Europe the European company has created a network of factories, which with the exception of Scandinavia is now represented everywhere in Europe where vehicles are manufactured.

The central location in immediate proximity to the customer not only results in the advantage of being able to deliver 'just in time', but helps cut logistics operations vastly. For proseat's management is convinced it can contribute substantially to a reduction in CO2 with this "global" location strategy. "It is our declared objective not to deliver from low wage countries to Western Europe, hence supporting tourism for component parts, as is regrettably common nowadays. Production should take place there where the customer needs the product" to quote Raphael Thienpont, the President and CEO of the company.

Consistent pursuit of this strategy is therefore what made proseat also commit to a production joint venture with the Johnson Controls company early this year. With two shared factories in Poland and Slovakia it was possible to exploit common resources for local production.

Development as a milestone for the supplier of automotive components

Apart from the location strategy there is a further priority that is written large in the policy followed by the manufacturer of seating components—development. At proseat this is predominantly concentrated on two areas:

1. comfort and
2. weight reduction

It is more or less the nature of things that a producer of seating foam should concentrate on production of comfortable foam components. But the increasing pressure from the OEMs to cut down on weight needs to be taken into consideration here too.

For this reason two things should be mentioned in particular with regard to comfort:

PROSEAT COMPACT.FOAM

20 % decrease in cushion height

With the new compact.foam we have achieved a significantly lower-height cushion compared to conventional foams with the same weight per volume and upholstery properties. This means customer requirements for the greatest headroom possible and variability in the vehicle interior can be satisfied.

COMFORT.SENSE

Appreciably softer surfaces

The special structure of the surface of moulded part provides amazingly comfortable seats. The conventional use of additional layers of soft upholstery on top of the moulded part is dispensed with. In addition this surface structure contributes significantly in optimising the breathability. The surface structure is designed in such a way that it can accommodate functional components such as heating for seats for instance.

The weight of the individual components has gained in importance more than ever thanks to the need for a reduction in CO₂. Which is why proseat is proud of the latest additions to its product portfolio:

PUR/EPP modules for rear seats

When it comes to the design of rear seats there are increasing efforts to replace heavy metal components with lightweight plastic components. What this involves in practice are structural parts made of EPP, which are attached with metal frames. Apart from considerable savings in weight it is possible to achieve a so-called anti-submarine effect, which prevents passengers from slipping out from under their seatbelts in the event of a collision.

With its experience in polyurethane and EPP, which likewise belongs to the product portfolio, proseat has created a product mix that can make the company stand out from its rivals. In mid-2007 proseat forged a strategic alliance with Storopack in order to provide the ideal supplement in scope to PUR and EPP. The family-managed company, which was founded in 1874 by the Swabian Johannes Reichenecker as a tannery and employs 2632 people, is today one of the leading producers worldwide of custom-made technical moulded parts made of expandable foams. With sites in Belgium, China, Germany, England, France, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, the Czech Republic, Turkey and the USA Storopack is also right there where the customer needs his goods, and hence fits in perfectly with proseat's location strategy..

CompoLite

This new development from the company involves a composite material consisting of 100% polyurethane which has very high rigidity combined with an extremely low weight.

This product consists of open-cell PU flexible foam that can be optionally bonded with a type of fibreglass fleece and combined with PU rigid foam using spray technology, and can be formed in a device to a three-dimensional part.

This very thin material can thus be used for the seating area as a structural component in very diverse applications. In combination with textiles, foils, leather or polyurethane elastomers it can be used not only in functional but also in optical trim parts.