

# Lightweights in the fast lane

RAPID Leichtbau GmbH from Ilsenburg in the Harz district is a specialist in the production of weight-reduced box bodies for vans and lorries. With its concept, the company has developed into the market leader in maximising vehicle load.

Vans and lorries are lined up next to each other on the company premises in Ilsenburg. Although the driving cab and frame are in place, the vehicle body is missing, making it impossible to transport even a flower pot. "That is our job", says Rainer Kramer, CEO of RAPID Leichtbau GmbH. "We manufacture box bodies and are thereby pursuing a different approach compared to our competitors. We focus on lightness. Less weight means greater vehicle load."

Behind the slogan "Nobody is Lighter" hides a comprehensible idea. The legislature stipulates exactly how much maximum weight a vehicle including its load can weigh. Reducing the weight of the lorry by using an extremely lightweight material to manufacture the box body means that one can then transport much more.

"We achieve a weight reduction of more than 500 kilograms in part due to our special vehicle bodies", explains Rainer Kramer. "Depending on the size and chassis, the potential vehicle load increases by up to 30 per cent. A company can therefore carry more cargo in the same amount of space." The advantages are clear: since a lorry with an optimised carrying capacity can deal with more cargo, fewer trips are required for transporting goods. This saves fuel, relieves the transport network and is better for the environment as less CO<sub>2</sub> is released.

However, the CEO of RAPID does not hide the disadvantages of the concept. "We use a high-quality synthetic material to replace the traditional, much heavier material. Unfortunately, this is more expensive", says Rainer Kramer. But the investment will pay off in the long run, since fewer trips are required.

An increasing number of companies have opted for the vehicle body from Ilsenburg in recent years. Customers include renowned vehicle manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz, MAN and Volkswagen. The rental car company Sixt, for example, uses commercial Peugeot vehicles with lightweight bodies made by RAPID. Industries such as courier services, furniture stores, laundries, bakeries or fruit and vegetable sellers can also benefit from the enhanced vehicle load.

A decisive advantage of the Ilsenburg company is the stability of the vehicle bodies. They are manufactured from sandwich panels that are made from a thermoplastic polypropylene polymer. These panels, which are produced in Thuringia, are made up of a honeycomb core and glass fibre reinforced cover sheets. The roof and walls are welded together to form a box body. "This complex process that we have developed is unique in Europe", explains the CEO.

This welding process creates a robust, firm and waterproof body. Large lorry manufacturers send their experts to Ilsenburg to ensure its strength and durability. "They look very closely at the plans and scrutinise everything before recommending us to their clients in the transport industry."

The testers are very satisfied and an increasing number of contracts are being signed. The medium-sized company with its 35 employees is growing. "Now we need to work on becoming better known. We put a lot of effort in marketing and attend many trade fairs", says Rainer Kramer. He sees potential in the neighbouring countries and wants to enter new markets in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria.

The CEO from North Rhine-Westphalia finds it a stroke of luck that the company's site is located in Ilsenburg. "It was a good decision. We are situated in the middle of Germany and have excellent transport links via the motorway B6n"

Rainer Kramer looks out the window to the outdoor area. The products manufactured here are not created on an assembly line. Some of the box bodies are painted, others laminated. They can have tail lifts, roller shutters, side doors, storage space heating or felt lining – the configuration can be customised to suit the customers' requirements. When the vans and lorries are driven across Germany, they will at least attract the attention of industry experts. The CEO is confident that the steady growth will continue in Ilsenburg: "With every vehicle that leaves our site, we have a new potential referral."

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