



NEXEN WINGUARD SPORT 2 AND N´BLUE 4 SEASON

New tyres, new ETC

After introducing the new WINGUARD Sport 2 and the N´blue 4 Season the Korean tyre brand Nexen Tire now disposes of a completely renewed range of products for the European market. The plans for the construction of a Technical Center (ETC) in Kelkheim and a tyre factory in the Czech Republic illustrate how important Europe is for Nexen.

Ralf Flachbarth knows the mechanisms of the tyre industry: development, marketing, sales – successful players are good at harmonizing processes, increasing product quality and positioning new technology with market experts in the trade business. Korean tyre manufacturers often do not easily cope with European trade channels and customers. Both development and sales need personalities who are familiar with “European” processes and have earned the trust of people being responsible. The Nexen Tire Corporation seems to take decisive steps to increase the prospects of success here. When already some years ago offering the steering wheel of automotive engineering in the Europe Technical Center (ETC) to Flachbarth, the Koreans employed an expert whose activities have already left deep traces. After introducing the new WINGUARD Sport 2 and the N´blue 4 Season the Korean tyre brand Nexen Tire now disposes of a completely renewed range of products for the European market. Nonetheless, they will stick



Händler aus ganz Europa folgten der Nexen-Einladung an den Nürburgring.

to their guns: “A new ETC will be set up in Kelkheim. Development and production will be adapted to European requirements. We will develop and manufacture there, where the new products will be used. Thus, we will be able to serve European

push the original equipment market substantially. Furthermore, it will be important to offer new products in reliable intervals for the replacement market. “It will be our goal to realize product cycles of six years. There will be compound upgrades within these cycles”, Flachbarth illustrates. In February, the brand will be presenting two new tyres with the WINGUARD Sport 2 and the N´blue 4 Season, which are to be considered as proof of their European ambitions.

Directional WINGUARD Sport 2

The tread of the WINGUARD Sport 2 is a directional winter tyre, which is supposed to take over the role of the asymmetrical WINGUARD Sport in the winter changeover period. The tyre will start with 25 new dimensions between 17 and 19 inches in Germany in the winter season. The WINGUARD Sport 2 was developed with a focus on good balance between dry, wet and snow characteristics. The v-shaped, directional tread design is supposed to improve driving qualities of this tyre in wintry road conditions. The optimized number of 3d sipes and 5-pitch tread blocks is meant to stabilize handling and traction on snow and ice. According to responsible people, the increase in the number of tread blocks by 17 percent optimizes snow and ice characteristics. A new silica compound has an impact on the



Ralf Flachbarth explained the advantages of the new products.

Dealers from all over Europe followed the Nexen invitation to Nürburgring.



driving characteristics in all road conditions and on long mileage. "The compound technology is the crucial factor for winter tyres. It has to guarantee different driving characteristics within a wide range of temperatures", Flachbarth clarifies. Nevertheless, driving impressions at the Nürburgring have not been able to provide any real further information on the qualities of the new winter tyre in the Nexen catalogue. Flachbarth guarantees that the test against a further Korean rubber and a tyre in the highest price segment was quite reassuring so that the WINGUARD Sport 2 would convince European car drivers.

"One product launch per year"

"We would always like to offer something to trade". It is planned to guarantee at least one product launch per year", Flachbarth adds. The interest of trade in products of the middle and high-margin segment is definitely growing. Many well-known European dealers followed the invitation to Nürburgring. Nexen delivered of course a second convincing argument with the presentation of the N'blue 4Season. The segment of all-season tyres has tremendously been growing in the past two years. People responsible at Nexen estimate a Europe-wide market potential of 19 million tyres until 2018. Ralf Flachbarth defines the area of use: "We recommend an all-season tyre for vehicles in

the compact and middle class, which are not driven that frequently. The more powerful the vehicle the more recommendable is the use of seasonal experts." As a consequence, the directional N'blue 4Season will be offered in altogether 38 sizes from 13 to 17 inches for trade as of now. According to responsible people, the development focus was on wet and snow characteristics. "For us an all-season tyre is very close to a winter tyre", Flachbarth explains. A new rubber compound and the special 3d tread design with specific external area are to turn the N'blue 4Season into a true all-rounder. Optimized block rigidity provides safety in all road conditions and an improved driving comfort. Good winter characteristics are to be guaranteed by a high number of tread sipes. The Koreans particularly intend bridging the service gap in the area of wet characteristics with the N'blue 4Season. According to responsible people, wet and snow capacities were improved by 3 to 5 per cent compared with the N'Priz 4S. The launch of new products and the investment in new development and production possibilities help imagining a bigger importance of the brand Nexen in this country. It is quite obvious that this has parallels in another Korean manufacturer that has tremendously been increasing its relevance all over Europe during the past years. (kle)



A new option for changeover grouches: Nexen N'blue 4Season.



MICHELIN

Pilot Sport 4 S for exclusive super sport models

Michelin presented the new Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S to international press representatives in Palm Springs, California. The tyre was developed for super sport models and powerful saloons.

The product name “4 S” does not stand – as one could assume – for a four-season tyre but for the segment “sport”. Nevertheless, the tyre also showed good performance on wet and snowy roads, as invited guests had been able to experience on their tour through Joshua Tree National Park. For the first time in a hundred years, there was snow during the event days. A rather unusual situation in a normally sun rich California. The sporty summer tyre will be available in 42 variations for wheels with 19 and 20 inches on the German market. Furthermore, the ultra high performance tyre is already used as original equipment. Thus, Ferrari GTC4 Lusso, as well as Mercedes-AMG E 63 4MATIC+ and Mercedes-AMG E 43 4 MATIC are equipped with the new Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S ex factory. “We had a cooperation with Ferrari, Porsche and AMG for this tyre, and at the moment we are working on 60 further projects in original equipment. The OE business is extremely important as it is considered to be a royal road to the rest of the market, above all to the more advanced premium business”, explains Hermann Götz.

Improvements

The tyre manufacturer presented the Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S as successor of the Michelin Pilot Super Sport, which according to company information, has already been well established in the market. “Three main aspects were improved: faster lap time on dry roads, dry and wet braking and longevity, says Hermann Götz. Michelin organized tests against competitors’ products from the premium area in order to demonstrate the faster lap time of the tyre. In June and July 2016, TÜV Süd (the German independent test organisation) carried out tests on the test track of 2,600 metres using tyres like Continental SportContact 6, Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric 3, Dunlop Sport Maxx RT2, Bridgestone Potenza S001 and der Pirelli P Zero Nero GT in dimension 255/35-19 96Y XL.

“Many very different chemicals are used in a tyre. The art consists of finding the perfect mixture of them in order to achieve the desired performance.” Thus, it was a challenge to improve grip on dry roads and wet braking at the same time”, says Philippe Labrunie. “One of the used technologies is called Bi-Compound Technology. That means that the tread disposes of two different compounds for wet and dry conditions”, adds Labrunie.

Design characteristics

“A special vehicle does not only need a tyre with the best performance, the outward appearance is similarly important, explains Götz. “Thus, specialists work for us that only focus on the design of a tyre.” The design is supposed to reflect several aspects: motorsport DNA, speed, precision or premium”, clarifies Héloïse Debordeaux. “The Pilot Sport family is marked by a symbol for lightning at the tyre sidewall. Sharp sipes and tread pattern reveal that the driver will experience convincing handling”, illustrates the designer. There is the so-called Premium Touch design in the sidewall of the new tyre. It is as well used for e.g. the Pilot Sport Cup 2. Product name and a dimension indicator appear as kind of a velvet effect. “Until today, Michelin is the only tyre manufacturer that is able to create this effect”, demonstrates Debordeaux. A consistent use of this design feature is also visible concerning the Pilot Sport 4 S. In the future, Michelin will offer the Pilot Sport 4 S in a limited edition with an individual sidewall design. Michelin announces the market launch of tyres with a velvet effect for the complete sidewall. “This optical feature will go hand in hand with these special sporty vehicles”, adds Götz. (akl)



The new Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S was presented in California.

Driving with a Ferrari through Joshua Tree National Park was one of many highlights.



Our editors spoke with Hermann Götz, who is responsible for the product management of Sport and Super Sport tyres at Michelin worldwide, about the new Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S and future developments.

The tyre is produced in France and the USA. Was that an argument to organize the product presentation here in the USA?

Concerning the sport segment the world market is clearly subdivided: Based on 100 tyres, 40 are delivered to North America, 40 to Europe and the rest all over the world. Thus, a product launch could take place either in Europe or in America. This time we decided to invite our European guests to come to Palm Springs in America.

Will the Michelin Pilot Super Sport, the predecessor of the Michelin Pilot Sport 4 S, be completely taken out of the market?

The Pilot Super Sport will certainly be totally replaced in the near future. Nonetheless, as long as there are still tyres, which are categorized as OEM tyres, the predecessor will remain on the market. Tyres, however, which are without any responsibilities concerning original equipment, will be replaced by a new tyre if already available in the same size.

Could you explain the importance of the new tyre with regard to the Michelin portfolio?

When looking at the sport portfolio, the Pilot Sport tyre covers a relatively big area. The Pilot Sport4 is a tyre, which was a 100 per cent designed for the road, whereas the Pilot Sport 4S focuses with 80 per cent on the road and 20 per cent on the circuit, and the Pilot SportCup 2 even with 80 per cent on the circuit and 20 per cent on the road only. Customers moving around in the super sport area are considered to be a rather specific customer group. The tyres we present here combine the best features of the two other products. The PS4S is supposed to underline that we position ourselves in the sport area.

What sales volume do you calculate all over Europe?

We expect sales of between 200,000 and 300,000 tyres all over Europe. The German market is extremely important, especially concerning super sport and sport products. Furthermore, the UK, France and Benelux, Italy, Spain and then the eastern European countries follow.

Many technologies were taken over from predecessor models and were further developed. Where could we find improvement potential in spite of this?

The different rubber compounds were completely newly developed. Thanks to simulation tools, we are able to go more into detail and to determine and optimize the pressure and temperature distribution in the ground contact area. There are also changes with regard to rolling resistance. While the Pilot Super Sport was positioned with 80 per cent in the "E" area and 20 per cent in the "C" area, it is now just the other way round. The majority of our PS4S is labelled "C" for rolling resistance. Thus, there was a big improvement from one generation to the other. This is hugely impressive especially when the presented performance for lap times and mileage are considered.

What will the future bring?

As we intensively work in motorsport, the tyres have to offer even more performance, more grip on dry roads and less rolling resistance. This will as well become important in other areas: Concerning the design there will be new illustrations on the sidewalls. Moreover, a future trend will consist of different ways of communication between customer and tyre.

Could you describe the marketing strategy for the new tyre and how you intend to support trade?

We developed a comprehensive strategy, but more detailed information will follow later on. I just would like to let you know the following: We created special packages for trade, which are meant to accompany the



Hermann Götz spoke with our editors – among others about the placement of the new tyre in the portfolio.

product. At the moment we are distributing everything, especially for the German market, which normally has a rather late start for the summer tyre business. Everything is supposed to be available until March.

Michelin has been paying a lot of attention to the topic lifestyle for some time. The tyre is usually regarded as a low-interest product. Do you think that there will be a trend so that tyre manufacturers will have to move more towards lifestyle?

It is extraordinarily important for us to clarify – and thus we called this event "Pilot Experience" – that Michelin has more to offer than "only" tyres. When talking with customers about the trip and restaurant guide, many start realizing only then that they deal with the same company. The idea consists of bringing together the topics lifestyle and tyres. As a consequence, we cooperated with star chefs for this event in order to be able to offer the complete "experience", thus, surpassing the mere tyre and being fuelled by the passion joining all of us. The topic lifestyle will be further developed in the future. (aki)

