

Worthy of the award: metal muscles

Actuator Solutions GmbH wins the German Innovation Award 2014 in the medium-sized enterprise category

Gunzenhausen, 9 April 2014. If intelligent wires - thinner than a human hair - automatically move micro-cameras silently and accurately in the smallest of spaces or open and close valves, then that is innovation. This is made technically possible because when subjected to heat, the metal always returns to its original predefined shape - as if it had a memory. Gunzenhausen-based Actuator Solutions GmbH (ASG) has developed such SMA actuators and SMA motors. The metal muscles have not only won over the customers of the technology company but have now also impressed the jury of the German Innovation Award, which is presented annually to companies whose innovations are visionary and who have a clear technological lead.

Originally developed for the aerospace industry, memory metals offer significant advantages compared to all other types of drive. "They do not generate electromagnetic interference, are tiny, lightweight and silent. Application possibilities are virtually limitless," explains Markus Köpfer, CEO of ASG. The jury, which included Roland Tichy, chief editor of "WirtschaftsWoche" and Prof. Dr. Matthias Kleiner, president of the German Research Foundation, has confirmed that ASG has a clear advantage when it comes to patents and development, and a unique level of technical knowhow to implement mass production. "ASG manages to transfer SMA actuator technology from the automotive industry to other sectors and as a result contributes to a better energy balance by saving weight and space," was the reason given for the awarding of the prize.

Six engineers from six countries

The entire workforce at the ASG headquarters in Gunzenhausen was delighted with the company's recognition. Joint venture partners SAES Getters and Alfmeier are both proud of their jointly-owned subsidiary. "When we met for the first time to discuss a possible technology joint venture for SMA actuators, it didn't take long to reach an agreement. We were impressed by the simplicity of the technology and the impact of the business model. We have seen a lot of customer interest from well-known technology companies right from the very start. The honour bestowed by the jury of the German Innovation Award gives SMA technology a better position in the industry which confirms that we are on the right track," explain the delighted CEOs Markus Gebhardt and Massimo della Porta who represent the parent companies Alfmeier Präzision and SAES Getters and came especially to attend the award ceremony. Founded in 2011 with six engineers from six different countries, ASG currently employs 25 staff in Germany and 15 in Taiwan.

The German Innovation Award was established on the initiative of "WirtschaftsWoche", Accenture, EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg and Evonik Industries. Only companies based in Germany are eligible to enter. The innovations must have been developed mainly in Germany. The new developments are evaluated in terms of scientific criteria. Financial viability, social and environmental benefits, market opportunities, the project concept and additional applications and synergies in particular play a decisive role.

Actuator Solutions GmbH

Hi-tech company Actuator Solutions GmbH is the only manufacturer in the world offering actuators based on innovative SMA technology (Shape Memory Alloys). It develops micro actuators for the automotive, medical and telecommunications sectors which are produced using patented manufacturing processes. Established in 2011, the innovator is a joint venture between Alfmeier Präzision AG and the Italian SMA wire specialist SAES Getters S.p.A.

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Group Portrait with a Lady: The winner of the German Innovation Prize in 2014 together with initiators; First row, third from left: Markus Köpfer, CEO Actuator Solutions GmbH; Front fifth from left: Francesco Butera, CCO Actuator Solutions GmbH; Second row from left: Markus Gebhardt, Executive Alfmeier Precision AG and Massimo della Porta, Chairman SAES Getters; Picture: Thorsten Jochim

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