

Ready for the all-electric future

Audi has started series production of its e-tron in Brussels. DB Cargo’s carbon-free transports for components and vehicles guarantee sustainability.

The e-tron is Audi’s first step towards the future of e-mobility. In September 2018, the carmaker launched series production of its first fully electric car. When Audi started manufacturing the e-tron, it also transformed the production processes at its Brussels plant: body shell construction, the paint shop and the assembly line all underwent substantial changes. Driverless transport systems ferry the electric cars’ batteries just-in-sequence to the assembly line, and the company has even created an in-house battery assembly facility. DB Cargo has created a Europe-wide, sustainable transport concept to serve the e-tron. The rail freight operator supplies the Brussels plant with vehicle components and then transports the finished cars ready for export. All on schedule and carbon-free. The challenges the company mastered when designing this transport service make it one of the most impressive rail freight operations in Europe.

Michael Gaschütz, head of the sales and operations centre for components at DB Cargo: “We supply the plant with all the components it needs to assemble a vehicle, including body panels and electric motors.” Audi expects high predictability, easy management and adherence to deadlines, so DB Cargo established a reliable rail-based transport system and used the ramping-up stage from October 2018 to January 2019 to test the concept.

cases via the single-wagonload network) to Heilbronn in southwest Germany. From this hub, they are loaded onto direct trains that take them to Brussels. Empty racks and pallets are returned to Heilbronn before being sent back to the various plants. Three weekly trains in each direction are planned for the future.

In Heilbronn, DB Cargo plays an important role that goes beyond merely transporting the parts: the company puts the components into the sequence that their assembly will follow later when they reach the plant. This is essential for the Brussels site to operate properly. “Things have to be perfect on arrival. The plant in

Deliveries to the city centre

Materials from Audi’s plants in Ingolstadt, Neckarsulm and the Hungarian city of Győr are all routed (in some

KEY

- Dispatching point
- Receiving point
- ⊙ Production (dispatching and receiving point)
- Hub
- Finished car transport
- ← Component transport





— The Brussels plant has an area of 540,000 m².

Brussels has no buffer that would to compensate for delays using its own warehouse stock,” says Gaschütz. DB Cargo’s trains replace hundreds of lorries and take the pressure off the nearby motorway ring road and the historic centre of Forest/Vorst – the home of Audi Brussels.

Transporting exports via Osnabrück

DB Cargo also handles the first link in the finished vehicles delivery chain. Since February 2019, the rail freight operator has been using type 560 wagons to bring the vehicles to export ports. Block trains carry the cars from Brussels to Osnabrück in Germany, and current plans envisage up to ten trains a week. The town in northwest Germany is a hub for all Volkswagen transports, and Audi’s products are forwarded primarily to Emden and Bremerhaven. Alexander Röcklein, head of the sales and operations centre for finished vehicles, says, “Thanks to a flexible, adaptable rail system, our operations can respond exactly as needed if volumes change.” Nathalie Verbrüggen from the sales and operations centre adds, “When handling these transports, we use the store of

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MICHAEL GASCHÜTZ

Head of the sales and operations centre for components, DB Cargo Logistics

experience we gathered from transporting the Audi A1.”

Carbon-free transport in Europe

For Audi, there is one factor that plays a crucial role in these transports: sustainability. Audi has a long-standing

business partnership with DB, and it was the first customer in the automotive sector to switch to the carbon-free transport service *DBecoplus*. Today, the Brussels e-tron plant is the first large-scale series production site for premium cars to have been certified as carbon-neutral. This means that Audi offsets all emissions generated during production and at the site by using renewable energy and supporting environmental projects.

DB Cargo’s sustainability-focused transport services are a crucial element of this. Since 1 April 2019, DB has ensured that Audi’s entire transport chain is either carbon-free or carbon-neutral: any CO₂ emissions generated by rail transport for Audi in Europe are offset elsewhere. ●



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