

David García: “The real heroes are in the hospitals; we just did what we do best”

Martorell, 22/04/2020. Interview with David García, head of Maintenance at SEAT Martorell.

At the height of the health crisis caused by COVID-19, a small team of 15 SEAT employees began to explore what materials and parts they could use to make emergency ventilators. Within a few days, 150 people from all areas of the company were producing emergency respirators for dozens of hospitals across Spain. David García, head of Maintenance at SEAT Martorell, who was involved in the project from the beginning, tells us about his experience.

How did the idea of making ventilators at SEAT come about?

SEAT Vice-president for Production and Logistics Christian Vollmer decided that we had to take advantage of SEAT's capacity and our experience to help in some way in this great health crisis. Seeing that hospitals were in great need of respirators, we joined the Protofy project, the Germans Trias i Pujol Hospital and the Hospital Clínic in Barcelona. Our mission was to manufacture the prototype of the automated ventilator.

What made you get involved in the project?

I'm not a doctor or a nurse, I'm an engineer. I could only help by making equipment for the people who save lives, and that's what we did. We all wanted to do our bit to help ease the effects of COVID-19. We were apprehensive at first because it was such a big challenge. We knew we could do it, but we were afraid we wouldn't be fast enough. The team went out of its way to come up with resourceful solutions such as using the windscreen wiper motor, which guaranteed 2,000 hours of respirator operation. They also adapted the assembly line for the subframe of the new SEAT Leon in just one week to manufacture them.

What's your personal takeaway?

I'm proud to have participated in this project, I'll never forget it. It's been an emotional merry-go-round. The night the first two trucks loaded with ventilators left, I felt happiness and joy, but also an enormous responsibility. But I don't feel like a hero; the real heroes are in the hospitals, we just did what we do best.

What conclusions can you draw from this enormous project?

We haven't had time yet to really process everything we've done, but we've come to realise that we have an extraordinarily talented team. The way we worked has been impressive. If we can match what we've done over the past few weeks, we can handle any other SEAT project that comes our way.

SEAT is the only company that designs, develops, manufactures and markets cars in Spain. A member of the Volkswagen Group, the multinational has its headquarters in Martorell (Barcelona), exports 81% of its vehicles, and is present in more than 75 countries. In 2019, SEAT sold 574.100 cars, the highest figure in its 70-year history, posted a profit after tax of 346 million euros and a record turnover of more than 11 billion euros.

In 2019, SEAT allocated 1.259 billion euros to accelerate its investment programme, mainly for the development of new electrified models. In addition, and as part of its commitment to decarbonisation, it invested 27 million euros in sustainable initiatives and is working on an ambitious environmental strategy, called Move to Zero, which aims to make Martorell a zero-carbon footprint plant by 2030.

SEAT employs over 15,000 professionals and has three production centres – Barcelona, El Prat de Llobregat and Martorell, where it manufactures the highly successful Ibiza, Arona and Leon. Additionally, the company produces the Ateca in the Czech Republic, the Tarraco in Germany, the Alhambra in Portugal and the Mii electric, SEAT's first 100% electric car, in Slovakia.

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