

A visit to the Volkswagen factory

Five brands under one roof.

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Photo credits: Volkswagen Slovakia

The Slovak automotive industry has developed rapidly over the past 25 years. Today it produces over one million cars a year, representing 1.4% of the world production. This is greatly supported by the Volkswagen factory, which we have visited as part of the Bratislava Motor City fam trip in September 2018. In addition to the central factory in Bratislava, VW also has factories in Košice, in the eastern part of Slovakia, in Martin, where they produce engines and transmissions, and in Stupava.

The factory in Bratislava is located in the suburbs, at the same location where once the Škoda car production took place, in Bratislavské Automobilové Závody (BAZ). In 1991, Volkswagen bought the factory and started to produce the VW Passat there to a smaller extent. Today, the factory extends over nearly 2 million m² and represents a factory to the size of a small city with its own public transport and arrangement, it even has its own fire brigade and a rescue station.

The factory has been operating by the name of VW Slovakia since 1999. At the factory, eight models of cars are produced; smaller family cars VW Up, Škoda Citigo and Seat Mii and three SUVs: VW Touareg, Audi Q7 and Porsche Cayenne.



Photo credits: Volkswagen Slovakia

There are security measures present during the visit of the factory that prevents visitors from photographing parts of production that are considered to be business secrets. Industrial spies are a fact, and in the factory, they must prevent such actions.

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The tour started the tour at the entrance area of the Audi Forum, where Martin Jesny got us acquainted with the history and the future of the Slovak automotive industry. Slovakia is not only a production center, it is increasingly recognized as a center of development and the homeland of many innovations. This was illustrated by the case of the Matador factory, which developed from a small manufacturer to a leading partner in the field of robotics of industry. The story was rounded off in a picturesque way by Padraic Gilligan, who designed the Bratislava Motor City Campaign with his agency Soolnua and attracted the attention of the international professional public. He linked the story of the success of the automotive industry with organizing meetings and events.

The tour of the factory followed, starting at Hall H4, where they produce the car bodies. Before this, a guide explained the factory's layout and the entire production process. We were fascinated by giant presses which automatically produce parts of the bodies. It is an extremely precise and pedantically planned part of the production, where we first learned about the power of robotization and industrial logistics.

The H8 hall consists of drive sets and combines them into chassis. Component parts are supplied by robotized trolleys, and the entire production process is based on the principle of just-in-time. This means that each car is manufactured to order. At the same time, there are Touaregs, Porsches and Audi Q7s on the production line. At the end of the line, the finished chassis is driven

by elevators to hall H3, where the assembly of the cars takes place. The employees wisely call it the wedding. All halls are interconnected with large underground tunnels.

Photo credit: Volkswagen Slovakia

There are employees work in three shifts and the production line stops only in the middle of summer, when maintenance work is carried out or in case of difficulties in the delivery of individual components. An average of 2000 vehicles per day are finished in the production line. Most of the vehicles travel with a special 425-meter long cableway to the test site and after a detailed review, the vehicles are distributed by trains to customers around the world.

Finally, the participants of the fam trip were able to go on a test drive on the Off-Road polygon, which is open from April to October. Touaregs have been tested in extreme conditions and have proven to be exceptional.

The visit to the factory is a look at the industrial production of the future. Smart factories and smart specialization in Slovakia are a fact. It is driven by digitization of business processes, robotization, and automatization of production and highly qualified personnel. It is therefore not surprising that in Central Europe an automotive cluster was created that produces 21% of all cars in Europe. The 25-year long history of the factory, therefore, illustrates the transition of a Slovak company from an extremely analogous one to a highly digital one. According to the above, Slovakia has successfully completed the transformation of companies and society and is, therefore, able to host car events at the highest level.

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Some interesting figures from the factory:

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- The number of employees at VW factories in Slovakia is 13,700, and more than 7,550 contracted carriers work for the factory, and a lot more people depend on the factory.
- In June 2017, the production line produced the 5 millionth vehicle.
- On average, one vehicle per minute leaves the production line, and last year they produced 361,776 vehicles.
- Over 1000 robots currently operate in the factory. The number is increasing from year to year.
- The largest Hall H3 is larger than 21 football fields. The final assembly line of SUVs is 1.3 kilometers long.
- A 452-meter long cable car takes the finished vehicles to a 2.8 km long test track where the vehicles are tested on 8 different surfaces.
- The Bratislava factory is the only VW factory outside of Germany (Stuttgart and Leipzig are fully produced by Porsche Cayenne). Production started at the end of 2017.
- The average gross salary in the Bratislava factory is EUR 1,854 (not including management).

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