

BILSTEIN | THE SHOCK ABSORBER



If you say “car”, you mean “Bilstein” as well. When August Bilstein laid the foundations for the Bilstein innovation incubator in Altenvoerde in Westphalia in 1873, nobody suspected what a huge influence Bilstein products would one day have on the driving comfort and safety of cars. Instead, it was window fittings sold under the catchy name of AUBI – derived from August Bilstein – for which the company first became famous both nationally and internationally.

What followed was a series of technical innovations which were patented and which formed a solid basis for the future success of what was still a young company. In order to meet the exacting demands in terms of quality as early as the preliminary stages of fitting manufacturing, the company, now led by Hans Bilstein, set up its own strip iron rolling mill in 1919. In accordance with the motto “A rolling stone gathers no moss”, Hans Bilstein incorporated suggestions from the USA – which, in the 1920s, was still a long way away – into his nickel and chrome-plating processes at his works in Westphalia.

Hans Bilstein made the first step towards the automotive accessories industry in 1927 when he entered into a cooperation agreement with Berlin-based lifting gear company Levator-Hebezeug-Fabrik. He did not have to wait long for his ventures to bear fruit. Four years before the opening of the first motorway between Cologne and Bonn in 1928, Bilstein delivered the first chrome-plated shock absorber for mass car production. Just one year later, the company began producing jacks. In typical Bilstein form, the company entered the market with a technical “sensation”: the first usable side jack. But the real global sensation was still to come.

In 1954, the decision was reached at Bilstein to use their existing know-how to diversify still further into shock absorber technology. Bilstein had recognised the potential in an idea from French vibration researcher Prof. Bourcier de Carbon. The aim was to overcome the physical disadvantages of conventional

telescopic shock absorbers at the same time as making the dampers lighter and able to be fitted in any position. The company put extensive development work and considerable investment into production systems in order to meet this ambitious target. It was worth it. Even now, the introduction of the first single-pipe gas pressure shock absorber in a production vehicle from Mercedes Benz AG in 1957 by what was then “Beschlag- und Wagenheber-Hersteller Bilstein” is seen as a major contribution to active vehicle safety.

Gas pressure technology is now used in all types of telescopic shock absorbers which are developed for use in high-end performance cars. The latest highlight is the development of the air spring module, which Bilstein supplies “just-in-sequence” to the Mercedes S-Class production line. Bilstein’s development and innovation is driven both by the requirements of its customers in the automotive and tuning industries and by its commitment to motor sport. More than half of all the teams in the Nürburgring 24-hour race go to the starting line fitted with Bilsteins.

This is why car enthusiasts still associate high-tech suspension engineering, driving comfort and safety with the name Bilstein. To ensure that this stays the same in the future, Bilstein is now a 100 per cent subsidiary of ThyssenKrupp Automotive AG. The synergy effects resulting from the partnership and cooperation within the group will continue to produce innovations in the traditional Bilstein sense.



Company name
ThyssenKrupp
Bilstein GmbH

Classic product
Bilstein single-pipe gas
pressure shock absorber

Established
1873 in Altenvoerde/
Germany

Employees
2,000 worldwide

Distribution
worldwide

Annual sales
more than
9 million pieces