

Hardly anything is too heavy for the transporter: sofas, flat-screen TVs or washing machines are carried by Hermes Einrichtungs Service employees to the desired location and, if necessary, assembled



A CASE FOR TWO

The two-man handling of large items of equipment and furniture creates heavy work for the employees of the Hermes Einrichtungs Service (HES). The company is the market leader for deliveries to private customers



How many elephants have already been moved this year? Actually, Werner Krause has never thought about it. But he doesn't have to. After all, the 7.5-tonne transporter he drives through Hamburg with his colleague Helge Schulz is not loaded with thick-skinned animals but with washing machines, furniture and TVs. The average load weighs 1,200 kg, there are around 220 working days in a year, and an elephant weighs around four tonnes. Werner Krause therefore carries the equivalent of 66 elephants to the homes of Hamburg residents who order goods online or from a catalogue.

But fortunately he is not on his own: Krause and Schulz make up a two-man team and deliver anything that is too large or heavy for an individual delivery driver of the parcel segment of Hermes' business.

The figures makes one thing clear: the work of HES is not light. In particular, its two-man delivery teams have heavy work on their hands – in the truest sense. It is essentially thanks to their work that HES has become the market leader for this segment of deliveries to private customers, and one in two items of furniture or large equipment bought through distance selling in Germany are currently delivered by HES. Around 2,000 employees each year deliver to more than three million customers, including in Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

But as is often the case with success stories, HES' beginnings were modest. In the 1950s, cooperation began between the Sanger haulage company from Lohne in Westphalia and the young OTTO mail order company. The very first items of furniture which could be ordered by catalogue were delivered to the final customer by Sanger and its network of regional partners. This

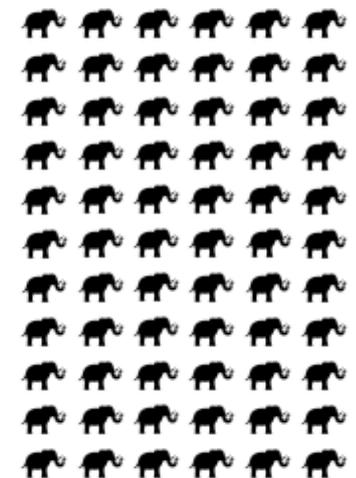
long-standing and close cooperation led to the founding of the company Hermes Einrichtungs Service GmbH & Co. KG in 2004 as a joint venture with Sanger but managed by Hermes. This new company started to focus more on the market outside the Otto Group. Business has grown significantly ever since. Numerous customers, particularly from the steadily growing e-commerce sector, have been added to the mail order companies of the Otto Group. They today form the second pillar of HES.

24 households daily

Unusually for a Hermes company, the head office is not located in Hamburg but in Lohne. "That's where our roots and know-how are," says Carsten Meinders, Commercial Managing Director of HES. "Many of our staff have been with the company for 20 or 30 years and feel a strong attachment to Lohne. This has led to our own corporate culture being established; it would not make sense to move to Hamburg."

There are 41 HES depots in Germany, with a further six in neighbouring countries, and they are managed by independent operators. On average, Hermes has been working with these companies for around 25 years, and for as long as 40 years with some of them. These partners have their roots in the removal business or in logistics for the furniture industry. Germany is divided into 41 regions, of which the Greater Hamburg area is one. It is served by the Herbert Becker haulage company. Around 160,000 consignments are handled each year by a staff of 110.

Two of them are Werner Krause and Helge Schulz, who have formed a delivery team this particular morning. They have loaded electric cookers,



66 elephants weigh approximately 264 tonnes. That is the weight that an HES two-man-team moves each year



“Our delivery men and customer teams are not only representatives of Hermes, but also of the mail order companies.”

CARSTEN MEINDERS



dishwashers and upholstered furniture as well as a few flat-pack cupboards in cardboard boxes. Their daily round normally covers 24 households.

The order of calls to customers is determined by software designed specifically for Hermes, as is the optimal route taken in terms of time and mileage, which Krause reads off the navigation device. 34 minutes until the next customer, the computer reports. Schulz grabs his mobile phone: “We’ll be with you in about 40 minutes.” Everything’s OK, the customer is at home. If she wasn’t, that wouldn’t be a problem either. Sometimes customers are unable to meet the agreed delivery time. The men from Hermes will then come on another day. Three delivery attempts are included in the price. They reach their destination and are both in luck. The dishwasher only has to go up to the first floor. A few hours later, they will carry an electric stove to the fifth floor. “No problem”, says Schulz.

It’s all part of the Hermes service. All deliveries are taken to where the customer decides. If requested, the cooker or TV will then be expertly connected and every cupboard assembled. When they leave, the men from Hermes take all packaging material with them and even the old sofa or broken washing machine so it can be disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner. The customer can book each of these additional services from the mail order company at a reasonable price. These additional services complement those provided by HES. Even repairs to upholstered or wooden furniture are carried out in the customer’s home or in the workshop at the depot.

A short time later Krause and Schulz are in the transporter again. Removing the defective dishwasher from the kitchen unit and installing the new one was a routine job. But the assembly of a complete set of bedroom furniture or attaching a 55-inch TV to the wall is no problem either. They are well prepared thanks to good initial and regular ongoing training.

Its own training centres

In Löhne HES operates its own training and continuing training centres. Here its staff are trained to assemble furniture and kitchens and also how to deal with customers professionally on the phone. In another course – this time held at the premises of the relevant trade guild – HES drivers obtain the required authorisation for connecting cookers to the mains.

Alongside technical skills, however, what matters above all when it comes to contact with the customer is an appropriate, friendly manner. “Our delivery men and customer teams are generally the only ones to have direct contact with the final customer. They not only represent Hermes, but also the mail order companies from which the customer has bought the product,” says Carsten Meinders. “We want them to give a good impression not just in technical terms but also in their personal contact.”

Werner Krause and Helge Schulz have now delivered the last sofa and are making their way back to the depot – it’s time to call it a day! At home a little exercise and then a beer await. Tomorrow morning it all starts again, with heavy washing machines and wall units. The next elephants are already waiting. ■



Hermes Einrichtung Service

Founded as a result of cooperation between the Sanger haulage company and Otto Versand, the Hermes Einrichtung Service (HES) now delivers 3.5 million large items each year, 50% of which are items of furniture and 40% are large domestic appliances. Alongside its 41 depots in Germany, the company also operates branches in Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands. HES has already received a "very good" appraisal from the TUV (the German Technical Inspection Service) twice in a row, receiving praise for its flexible delivery times and keeping to them, its careful handling of goods and the friendliness and the skill of its delivery men.
