



Concrete Plant International
North America Edition



1 | 2023

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The Perfect Mix - 50th Anniversary



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TEKA North America, Inc., Chesapeake, VA 23323, USA

The Perfect Mix – 50th Anniversary

Today's manufactured concrete plants are high-volume operations. Whether producing pavers, pipe, precast or block, high output is critical to success. At the core of every plant is the mixer. And over the last 50 years in North America, Teka mixers have forged a loyal following based on durability, speed, serviceability and customer service.

Established in 1961 in Germany by Alfred Gartner, Teka has grown into one of the leading manufacturers of high-performance mixers and batch plants for the concrete products, glass and refractory industries, with more than 18,000 mixers and thousands of batch plants in service worldwide.

The company's history in North America dates to 1972, when Alfred Gartner came to the U.S. and together with his brother-in-law Helmut Lorenz set up shop on Long Island, New York, with a goal to expand Teka to the U.S. and Canada. Alfred, eventually returned to Germany to run the parent company. Now, more than 50 years later, Teka is still a family business run by Alfred's children - Markus Gartner, Thomas Gartner and Gabi Gartner. A third generation is also on deck for Teka.

Teka Grows in North America

In North America, it didn't take long for Teka to get established. One of the first customers was Joe Wieser, an early precast concrete entrepreneur whose company was growing

rapidly in Wisconsin and the upper Midwest. Like Teka and the Gartner family, Wieser Concrete is still a family-run business. Andy Wieser, president, said that Wieser Concrete has remained loyal since Joe Wieser purchased their first Teka mixer nearly 50 years ago.

"Dad bought the first Teka mixer in 1973," Wieser said. "And the main reason we've stayed with them all these years is that we've just had very little trouble with Teka mixers."

Wieser Concrete runs six Teka mixers at various locations. Several other plants also connected with the extended Wieser family also run Teka mixers.

Teka's durability has been the key for the Wieser family. "There are not a lot of things that can go wrong with them. They're well-built," Wieser said. "All mixers have wear parts, such as liners. We like the way the liner goes in. It's a relatively easy process that makes it a bit easier for maintenance." Speed is another consideration, Wieser said. "We're able to mix fast. It gives us a good consistent mix time after time. In our operations, we run relatively small mixers for the amount of yardage we produce, so we're cycling 70, 80, 100 batches in a day, and that mixer has to work with every batch. So it's very critical. If you can't mix concrete, you can't pour anything. You're shut down."



Teka THT 1500 planetary mixer allows producers to run small, partial batches without sacrificing mix quality.



The THT planetary mixer features Teka's patented Mixing Turbine Technology. The turbine is seen at the left of the photo.

Tradition of Customer Service

Mike Mueller, Teka North America general manager since 2000, understands that well and has continued the customer service tradition started in North America by the previous generation.

"We're just super-committed to our customers," Mueller said. "And number one, nearest and dearest to their hearts is spare parts availability. So we maintain an extensive parts warehouse at our headquarters in Chesapeake, Virginia. We feel an obligation to have parts here in stock stateside. We don't have every last nut and bolt. And sometimes we do have to fly things in, but it's our goal to have just about everything that somebody might need here."

Parts availability is especially critical in the paving stone sector, Mueller said, where companies are running continuously every day.

"In the old days, you could have a maintenance day on Wednesday and make up for it by working Saturday. Now they're already working Saturday and Sunday. So the way they look at it is that every hour of downtime is revenue that can never be made up because you're running flat out."

Charles Gamarekian Jr., vice president of manufacturing at Cambridge Paving Stones, confirmed that. Gamarekian, the second-generation leader of the family business, oversees an operation that distributes paving stones and retaining walls in 22 states that span the Eastern Seaboard and extend to Ohio and Colorado. Cambridge manufactures concrete face mix paving stones under the brand name ArmorTec. Parts availability and customer service are key for Cambridge plants.

"Whenever there's an issue or if we get into a jam, it doesn't matter - Monday through Sunday, 24/7 - we have a direct line

to Teka North America," Gamarekian said. "If we need a part, or if we have a service question, we get service right away."

When it opens its new plant later this year, Cambridge will have three plants running 19 Teka mixers - both Teka pan mixers and planetary mixers.

In addition to customer service, it is the reliability of the mixers that keep Cambridge connected with Teka. "We put millions of cycles on our machines each year," Gamarekian said. "We depend on those mixers to keep running 24/7 for 11 months out of the year. And we've had great success with Teka North America. We started Cambridge in 1994, and we've been 100% loyal to Teka ever since."

The Teka Mixer Portfolio

The Teka portfolio of mixers includes high-performance TPZ Planetary Mixers, THZ Pan Mixers and THT Planetary Mixers with patented Mixing Turbine Technology. A variety of options can be added depending on the specific needs of the producer. Output capacity ranges from one-quarter cubic yard for the THZ 250 up to 7.5 cubic yards for the THZ 7500. Picking the right mixer for the job is, of course, critical, because it's going to last a long time. The ongoing research and development at Teka headquarters over the years has led to continuous improvement that enables Teka mixers to perform for the long haul.

The engineers at Teka's headquarters in Germany are continually tweaking, always searching for ways to enhance the product, Mueller said. The THT Planetary Mixer, for example, allows producers to run extremely small, partial batches in their mixers without suffering reduced mix quality. Doing so may not be important for everyone, but for those that need that option, they now have a mixer that can do that for them, according to Mueller.



Teka's THZ pan mixer sizes range in output capacity from one-quarter cubic yard up to 7.5 cubic yards.



The Teka THZ pan mixer features spring-loaded mixing arms that are adjustable to compensate for wear.



The Teka TPZ 3000 high performance planetary mixer.

"It's hard to make year-over-year improvements, but our engineering department constantly strives to find technical advancements to satisfy the ever-increasing complexities of modern concrete mix designs. Not all mixers are ideally suited for the production of UHPC, fiber-, foam-, or self-compacting concrete. At Teka, with our various mixer models and options, we can offer our customers the correct mixer for their specific requirements," Mueller said. "The goal is always to achieve the best possible mix effect, so that you're blending all the various materials in the shortest possible time, but extremely thoroughly and completely," he said.

"The cement has to interact with the sand and the aggregate, and in the paving stone industry with the pigment and the admixtures. So you have to blend all those things. You want to, obviously, be extremely thorough, but you want to do it in the shortest possible time," Mueller added. "And so, the pursuit from the engineering department is, what can we do in the mixer in terms of the geometry of the mixing arms, the shape of the mixing paddles, or the rotational speed of the mixer? What can we do to shorten the cycle time without sacrificing mix quality?"

According to Gamarekian, mix quality is especially essential in the paving stone business, where quality pavers like the ArmorTec line from Cambridge incorporate a face mix to ensure a blemish-free surface. The face mix, typically the top 1 centimeter of the paving stone, is compressed atop a base mix of about 5 centimeters in most residential applications. The base contains coarser aggregates to provide strength. The beauty comes from the face mix. That's where the mixer plays an integral role.

"The appearance of the paving stone is critical," Mueller said. "There should be no blemishes. You don't want any unmixed cement balls because eventually they'll crumble and you'll have a hole. You don't want any unmixed pigment balls. You need a smooth, consistent surface. And to accomplish that, you need a mixer that has the right mixing action. The mixing arm and blades have to generate the right amount of shear to break apart everything in the mix so that it is perfectly blended."

An Easy Relationship

For Kendall Anderegg, president of Mutual Materials, the reliability and durability of Teka, combined with customer support, has kept the company coming back for new mixers as it continues to grow. With 10 production facilities in the Pacific Northwest and Western Canada, Mutual Materials is in its fifth



Inside view of the TPZ planetary mixer.

generation of family ownership and is the largest supplier of masonry and hardscape products in the Northwest. The company traces its roots to 1900 when it was founded as a brick producer and based in Seattle. Mutual Materials expanded into concrete block and pavers in 1980, and now manufactures a comprehensive line of masonry and hardscape products that are distributed throughout the region and across the country.

The company runs six Teka mixers, including the original mixer at its Lakewood Tacoma plant, which is still in service after 24 years. Mutual Materials' location nearly 3,000 miles from Teka's parts warehouse in Chesapeake, VA, hasn't been an issue over the years in keeping those mixers running, Anderegg said.

"The maintenance has always been easy. Sales and parts support has been amazing. If they have questions, the Teka staff is always able to troubleshoot the issue," she said. "They have stock parts available, and they're shipped out in a timely manner. So, the supply chain issues that we've all been hearing about - I didn't hear any reports of that with Teka. It's just been a very easy relationship."

That's the type of response that Teka's founders would have envisioned when they expanded to North America 50 years ago. It's a simple formula: the combination of well-made equipment that performs, backed by customer support that helps producers provide excellent products to their customers.

"We're pleased with the mixers that we have," Anderegg said. "They have been low maintenance and keep our plants running, which is ultimately what you want a manufacturing facility to do. Mike and his team have always been supportive, responsive and have helped us with our ultimate goal of creating great finished products." ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

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