

Heberlein... : one name, a hundred different activities

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Heberlein... one name, a hundred different activities

The name of Heberlein & Co. Ltd., at Wattwil, is famous in textile circles both at home and abroad, where it is well known that this firm goes in for the finishing of textiles and in particular the printing of fabrics as well as the manufacture of the famous synthetic textured yarns «Helanca»®. What are less well known however, even in Switzerland, are the countless other activities of this very big concern founded 130 years ago in the Toggenburg, a verdant valley in the St. Gall fore-Alps, by a humble journeyman dyer. But we have no intention here of giving a chronological summary of the various stages in its extraordinary development; we wish to limit ourselves to the main points, naturally giving greater importance to those directly concerning the textile industry.

At the start, the firm went in for the dyeing and bleaching of textiles. In time however, it became a huge textile finishing and processing concern, also carrying out printing and the various treatments required to make fabrics shrink-resistant («Sanfor»®), water-repellent, crease-resistant, etc.

These are the new processes which have completely revolutionized the old «dressing» of fabrics. This evolution, which started at the time of the birth of textile chemistry, that is to say when the first synthetic organic dyestuffs were discovered, speeded up considerably after

the first world war, when the first chemical fibres (rayon, known at the time as artificial silk) made their appearance on the market.

Textile chemistry is a speciality closely bound up with applied scientific research, in which the continual improvement of processes and products is the main concern. (Here let us just mention in parentheses the important part played by the Swiss chemical industry in this field). It is not surprising therefore that, during the 30's, the Wattwil concern became interested in a new process designed to give the smooth cold fibres of rayon a crimp which made it soft and velvety to the touch and rendered it suitable for purposes previously reserved uniquely for wool. The crimped yarn «Helanca»® in its original form was born. During the war it was used as a substitute for wool, which had grown scarce in Switzerland, but it was the application of the process to synthetic fibres, starting with nylon, that gave this product its exceptional qualities and its tremendous popularity.

Subsequently, the machine section of Heberlein & Co. Ltd., which was originally responsible for repairing the machines and at the same time produced a number of original machines of its own for the treatment of textiles, concentrated on the problem of producing «Helanca» and designed machines, the latest of which, known as

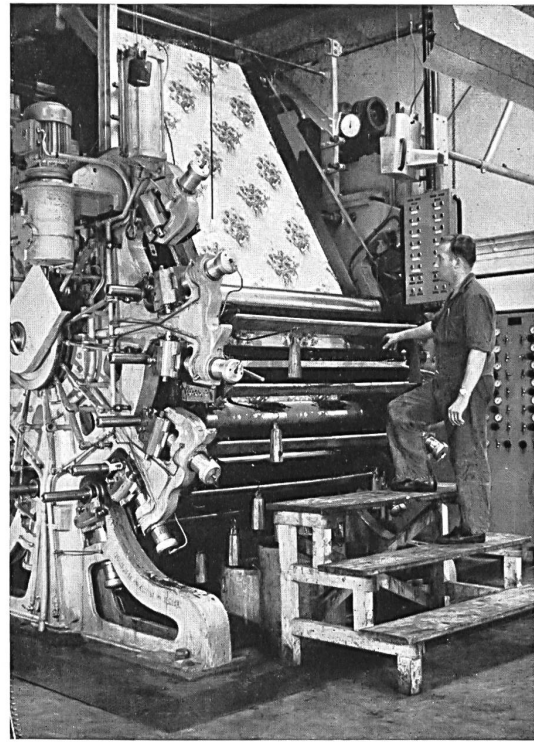


Piece dyeing on an automatic jigger

Roller printing on a machine printing ten colours at one go

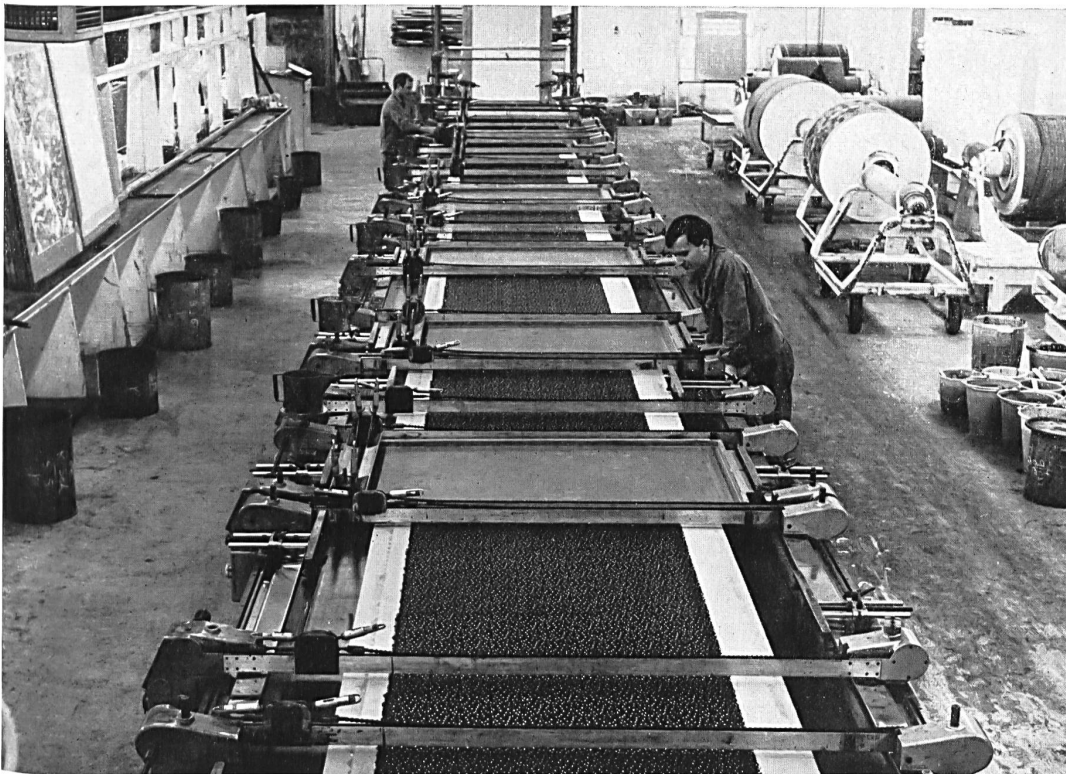
false twist looms, are real marvels of precision engineering.

At the same time, the firm granted manufacturing licences for its textured yarn, which led to the creation of a licensing department, also responsible for the protection of the registered trade mark «Helanca» and for checking the quality of the products manufactured by the licensees, in order to safeguard the good name of the mark. Gradually the engineering department — which recently started producing auxiliary electronic appliances for industry — has become a veritable textile machinery factory, making false twist looms for the firms manufacturing «Helanca» yarns under licence. If we finally mention, in addition to the research laboratories devoted exclusively to textiles, the firm of Inrescor at Schwerzenbach (Zurich), which carries out research work more nearly related to fundamental research, the Gummiwerke Richterswil A.G. (Gurit), which manufactures plastic sheets, fabrics and foam, and the Heberlein Holding Co. Ltd., which embraces all the Heberlein firms at home and abroad, in particular the licensing organizations in the United States and in Canada, we shall have sketched, in very broad outlines, the activity of Heberlein & Co. Ltd. Without going into details of organization, it may be said that the firm rests on four pillars: the printing of fabrics, the manufacture of



« Helanca » yarns, the manufacture of machinery and the licensing department.

If we consider more especially the textile side of the firm, we should glance first of all at textile finishing, which is an advanced form of « dressing », and is repre-



Automatic screen printing machine

sented at Heberlein mainly by the roller and screen printing of fabrics, preceded of course by the classical operations of singeing and degumming, bleaching and washing (carried out on « Rotowa »® continuous process machines invented and made in the firm's own workshops), mercerization and dyeing.

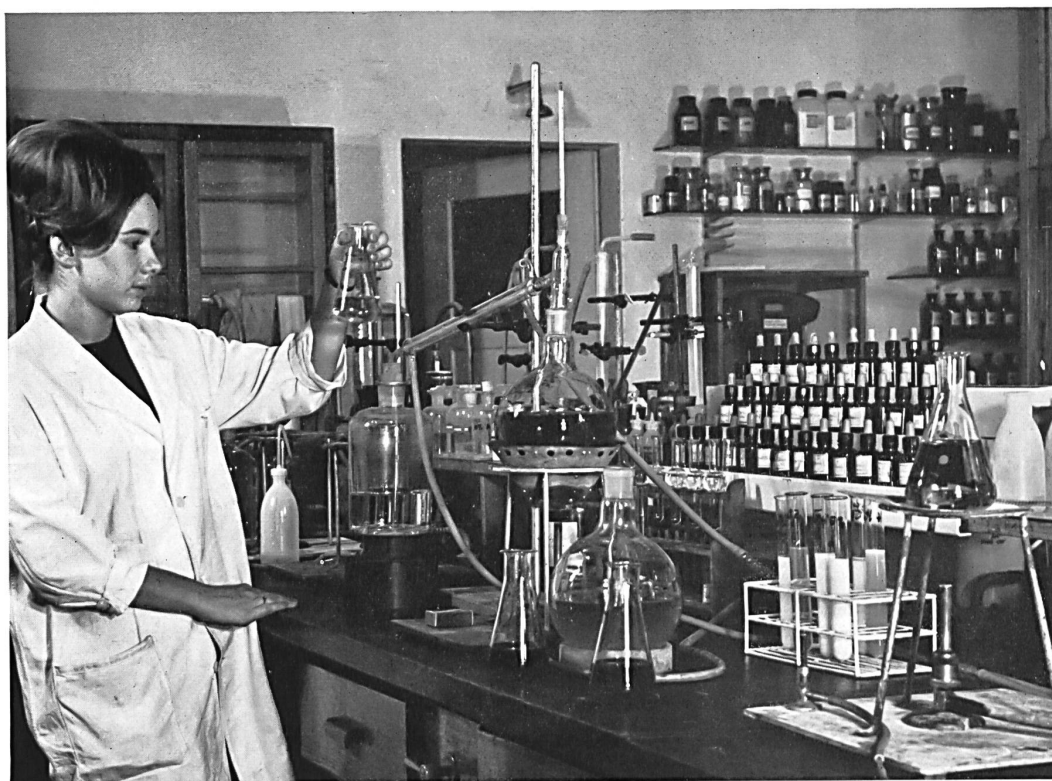
Printing is carried out therefore at Wattwil on high-speed machines using engraved copper rollers, which can print as many as 10 colours in a single passage and are suitable only for handling large quantities of fabrics, and also according to the screen process, which has become widespread during the last few years. The success of the latter is due to the possibility it gives of printing smaller quantities of fabrics under economic conditions and at the same time its greater possibilities with regard to the reproduction of designs. Wattwil possesses 8 hand screen-printing tables each 65 yards long, for the production of special articles and designs which cannot be produced on rotary printing machines because of the very large number of colours required, and 4 automatic screen printing machines. Apart from printing, we must also mention, among the finishing operations, various impregnation processes making fabrics crease-resistant, water-repellent, more resistant to dirt, etc. It should be mentioned that the firm recently completely gave up working with plain fabrics, in the framework of a general reorganization and rationalization of its manufacturing processes.

It is of course the « Helanca » yarns, which we have already briefly mentioned, that have made the name Heberlein famous all over the world; at the end of December 1964, there were 130 firms manufacturing « Helanca » under licence in 26 countries. Today this textured yarn is made mainly on the false twist loom, whose spindle, which is only a few inches long and



Fabric starting off in a dressing machine

revolves at the incredible speed of up to 400,000 r.p.m., twists the tiny fibres of the yarn in one direction, fixes them under heat and then untwists them. The textured yarn « Helanca » made from polyamide and polyester yarns has become extremely popular in present-day fashions, where it is used either alone or in combination with other fibres, in the form of knitwear or fabrics, for the manufacture of swimsuits, hosiery and knitted garments such as stockings, socks, tights, pullovers and cardigans,



In the research laboratory



Production of Heberlein magnetic spindles

anoraks and ski trousers, as well as for attractive dresses not to mention, of course, lingerie.

« Helanca » yarns are at present available in the following various types: HE (high elasticity) for stockings, socks, swimsuits, etc.; NT (non-twist), a single yarn with no tendency to twist, for the manufacture of stockings; Sp (Sport), a twist yarn for use in the warp, for sports fabrics; and « Helanca-Set »[®], a low elasticity and high bulk yarn suitable for hosiery and knitwear for

both outer and undergarments and for use in the weft of certain fabrics. Finally « Helanca-Blend »[®] is a mixture of « Helanca » yarns and wool for the manufacture of stockings, socks and lingerie. Naturally « Helanca » yarns can be delivered both white and in an incredible number of shades.

The same false twist machines used for the manufacture of « Helanca » are used for the production of crimped acetate yarns, as a general rule strengthened with a nylon yarn, and used under the name of « Heconda »[®] for the manufacture of pullovers and outer-garments.

The fame of a brand depends on and is closely bound up with the quality of the products bearing the mark. That is why Heberlein & Co. Ltd.'s licensing department has its own laboratory keeping a close watch on the quality of the products manufactured under licence and sold under the « Helanca » label, in order to make sure that they are always up to the very high minimum standards of quality, as well as a team of specialists whose main job is to advise users of « Helanca » yarns.

All these details were supplied to members of the press at a special press day organized at Wattwil this autumn, during which a documentary film was shown in which the story of « Helanca » yarns is explained in an amusing manner, in conjunction with choreographic performances. This film, produced by Condor Film Co. Ltd. of Zurich, will be shown in the main countries of the world in English, French, Spanish and German versions on behalf of the Heberlein organization.

The press day at Wattwil naturally included a luncheon given by the firm and closed with a fashion parade enabling those attending to realize the tremendous scope of « Helanca » yarns in all fields of men's and women's wear, as readers of « Textiles Suisses » well know.

[®] = reg. Trademark



Winding of « Helanca »[®]