

Echo Precast Engineering NV, 3530 Houthalen, Belgium

Ergon expands hollow core production

Ergon, the well-known Belgian manufacturer of prestressed precast elements has decades of experience in the production of hollow core slabs. The company recently invested in two new extruders from Echo Precast Engineering. This has not only positioned the hollow core slab division strongly at the cutting edge of technology, it has also made it possible to expand the product portfolio. Ergon expresses the firm conviction that the attractiveness of these slabs will continue to increase. According to the company, its advantages cannot be ignored.

The Belgian precast concrete element manufacturer Ergon is a well-known name in the concrete industry. Founded in 1963 in Lier, not far from Antwerp, today the company is a full-range supplier of complete building systems constructed in prestressed concrete. Right from planning through production to construction itself, Ergon covers all the project stages. Not without reason the company, which has been part of the Irish CRH consortium since 2004, has undertaken countless projects in Belgium, as well as in Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Great Britain.

The product portfolio is correspondingly wide: in the factory area totalling 49,000 m² structural prestressed precast elements, such as columns and beams for structures, elements for structural works and bridges, wall elements and hollow core slabs are produced. Ergon's recent investment in two X-Liner FC extruders from Echo Precast Engineering shows just how important hollow core slab production is for the company.

Hollow core slabs extremely popular with customers

The manufacturing of hollow core slabs is by no means new territory for the Belgian manufacturer. They had already begun production of these prestressed elements in the 1970's. "Already at that time the market was demanding more flexible, thinner solutions for floor slabs," explains Pieter Camps, Marketing Manager for CRH Structural Concrete Belgium NV/SA. The attractiveness of hollow core slabs has significantly increased since then. "For us, the hollow core slab is one of the most significant developments in the prefabricated concrete sector," stresses Camps. The highly automated man-



Factory grounds totalling 49,000 m² structural precast concrete elements, wall elements and hollow core slabs are produced. The total works site of the company, founded in 1963, covers a surface of 240,000 m².

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For Ergon, the hollow core slab is "one of the most significant developments in the prefabricated concrete sector". Because of its many positive characteristics it is very popular in the construction industry.

ufacturing processes and reduced use of raw materials makes it exceptionally environmentally friendly. "In addition," says Camps "hollow core slabs have an incomparably high load capacity and because of their lack of height are structurally very efficient." The fire resistance is also a very important advantage for the owner of the building. In the company's target



Together with the height of the slabs, their low weight, their good fire resistance, the prices and short installation time contribute to make them extremely attractive.

markets hollow core slabs are extremely popular. "It is particularly suitable for constructing multi-storey buildings, but is also ideal for office and school building, light industrial loads, car parks and many other applications," adds Camps. "Doubtless the low costs and short installation time makes it even more attractive."



By means of two X-Liner FC extruders Ergon has modernised and expanded both production and its product portfolio.



As well as hollow core slabs with heights of 26.5 cm and 40 cm, it is now also possible to produce 50 cm high elements.

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Both extruders use the flow compaction method: this improves compaction, increases rate of production and flexibility and reduces wear and tear. In addition, the X-Liner is easy to use and to service.



Operational Director Theo Smeets expresses himself satisfied with the cooperation with Echo Precast Engineering and describes it as "a real partnership".

Modernisation and expansion of production a logical step

Therefore, it was a logical step for Ergon to modernise and expand its production of hollow core slabs. "Our experiences with the PROGRESS GROUP have been consistently good and this contributed to our decision to opt for a partnership with Echo Precast Engineering," explains Theo Smeets, Operational Director with CRH Structural Concrete Belgium NV/SA. The X-Liner FC extruders are used for the production of hollow core slabs with a width of 120 cm and a height of 26.5 cm, 40 cm and 50 cm. "Until now, our portfolio lacked elements with 50 cm height" explains Smeets. The extruder used for this has been supplied with additional conversion equipment for 40 cm elements. It takes very little time to make the conversion. The other X-Liner FC replaces an older machine.

FURTHER INFORMATION



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Innovative compaction method

Both the fully automatic extruders supplied to Ergon use the flow compaction method. This compaction method and a specially designed screw speed up the flow rate of the fresh concrete. This not only improves compaction itself, but also increases rates of production and simultaneously reduces wear and tear. Moreover, higher hollow core slabs can be produced and the cavities can be more flexibly shaped. "In addition to this flexibility, the X-Liner is extremely easy to use and service," adds Smeets.

Not a vendor-purchaser relationship, but a partnership

The Operational Director expresses himself satisfied with the cooperation with Echo Precast Engineering. "At no point did we have the typical vendor-purchaser relationship. On the contrary, I found the cooperation to be a real partnership, in which both parties were pursuing a common goal. The aim was to develop a machine, which would perfectly fulfil our requirements, both in terms of cost and also in terms of its characteristics." According to Smeets, this aim was achieved. ■