

Schlüsselbauer Technology GmbH & Co KG, 4673 Gaspoltshofen, Austria

# Reliability and Trust, key to choosing a new Manhole Production System

■ Sophie Joan-Grangé, Schlüsselbauer Technology, Austria

Groupe Plattard is a mainstay in the French precast concrete parts industry and they can look back over a long and successful history in the industry. In an effort to solidify the company's future, however, and before handing over the company to his children, Jacques Plattard wanted to invest in an upgrade of the company's production systems at its plant in Villefranche-sur-Saône – starting with the pipe manufacturing plant a few years ago and now followed by an upgrade to their manhole production. Part of Jacques Plattard's success is that he expects a great deal from his partners, which he repays by displaying loyalty through his friendly business relationships. One of his long-standing partnerships is with Austrian manufacturer Schlüsselbauer Technology, which in turn ensures Plattard keeps its leading position for manhole components in the extensive area

of France's southeast market. Following a thorough examination of possible upgrade offers, the entire management team agreed the reliability of Schlüsselbauer machines, which has been fully demonstrated by 30 years of operation since the company installed its first Magic 1501, was indispensable. In light of this, Plattard opted for continuity in the new plant, with Schlüsselbauer Technology's modern Magic production system, which offers state-of-the-art technology, increased productivity, and the ability to produce a wider range of manhole components.

By car, Villefranche-sur-Saône is a half an hour drive north of Lyon, in the heart of an economically strong and dynamic region, and it has been the home for Plattard since 1885. The family-run company primarily has its hands in two key



*The new Magic 1501. Schlüsselbauer's Exact machine can be seen in the background.*

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*Anchors and step rungs are automatically positioned on the right of this photo, while the silo is offset behind the building wall. The Magic system was customized to fit the existing building.*

business areas: industry and trade. The Plattard Group is well known in France for the quality of its products, especially hollow concrete blocks and precast concrete parts for road construction and sewage disposal. Plattard also has a very efficient regional sales network for construction materials in the Rhône-Alpes region.

In the industrial sector, Plattard faces incredibly strong competition from the Alsace to Provence regions, from both independent companies and from those belonging to large groups which have dominated the French market for a long time. In order to remain productive and competitive in this challenging field, Plattard has always been committed to quality and service as well as offering a wide range of finished products.

The Magic 1501 manhole production system, which has been in use in Villefranche since 1992, has always stood out in general, and especially in terms of reliability. However, huge technological progress and IT developments in recent years have meant that corresponding adaptations to this machine would not have been economically practical. In particular, given the economic climate and the challenges of a rapidly changing French market, which is increasingly being split into high-quality products on one side and standard products that are easier to buy on the other, Plattard needed to expand its offer of manhole components. It now has a dual range, with each being based on the type of joint, with diameters of 1,000 and 800 mm. Another key objective for Plattard was to offer going forward all of its manhole risers with lifting anchors, something that is increasingly required on construction sites for safety reasons. A machine that is able to install the anchors automatically without cycle time losses was therefore required in order to prevent any production disruptions.

In partnership with Schlüsselbauer, the management of Plattard opted for a Magic system of the same overall size as the old one but with the benefits of a machine that meets current



*The multi-functional trolley makes daily tasks easier for operators.*



*View of the palletizing system in the extension building.*

technological standards – i.e. one that has been improved through continuous technological optimization by Schlüsselbauer and which has also been designed for automatic insertion of anchors and step rungs. There is also a device that assists in the insertion of reinforcements for certain products, such as cover plates, as well as a device for placing set rings. What's more, the machine also meets the goal of increasing productivity to 200 manhole components per shift—and sometimes even more for moderately sized products that are not overly complex, such as DN 1000 manhole risers with a product height of 600 mm, with two anchors and two step rungs.

The new Magic production machine was supplied simultaneously with a new palletizing system, which automatically demoulds products and subsequently cleans, oils, and stacks the bottom pallets, in addition to removing the concrete products from the plant to the yard. Cured products are individually transported out of the building or in stacks, with or without wooden pallets.

The production and palletizing system was equipped with two multi-functional electrical carts for transportation, which are an everyday essential for making work easier for the operators. The carts not only transport the fresh products in pairs from the production machine to the curing area and on to the palletizing system's infeed conveyor the next day, they also transport the bottom pallet stacks (there are more than 600 bottom pallets in total due to the variety of products, with two different joint types). They are also a welcome tool for handling the set rings, helping to place them on the products that come out of the production machine, as well as systematically retrieving them from the curing area about twenty minutes later, when the concrete has started to harden.

Both companies were able to use the time of the project planning and the system production in Austria to prepare a



*The pallet magazine is loaded from the outside, which is easy and safe.*

precise installation schedule, which was designed to keep production interruptions at Plattard to an absolute minimum. Upon placing the order in 2021, Jacques Plattard set the start date of the installation for August 1, 2022, so he could make use of the company's usual summer vacation period. Production also had to continue with the old Magic system



*Cover plate products that are increasingly in demand in France.*



*Transporting the finished products, stacked on a pallet. The conveyor is perfectly positioned along the side of the building, under a canopy in a protected area - next to the track and the external storage area.*

right up until the new machine was on site – both in the same building! This was a huge challenge the Plattard and Schlüsselbauer teams handled very well. The layout of the new system was designed with these requirements in mind, while, of course, taking into account the concrete supply and external storage areas for finished products too. The building was ready for the installation in the middle of July 2022, along with the new pit, which was installed just a few meters from the old one, and a small building extension to house the new palletizing system. This beautifully executed extension gives the building a clean and modern look, while offering more floor space for a larger curing area. Plattard then had the old

machine removed and its pit filled, just as the first trucks with the new machine arrived one after the other, with up to three deliveries per week. Schlüsselbauer's team of installers were on site as planned on August 1, and just three days later, the new Magic system was installed in the fully renovated industrial plant.

What followed was a well-executed routine on both sides, thanks to the team of young and dynamic Schlüsselbauer installers and the efficient support from Plattard with organizational skills needed for an installation of this size.

The Austrian manufacturer places particular value in having its machines installed and brought into service by in-house engineers who know the machines inside and out, and who were also involved in the machine's pre-assembly in Austria and its dry-run functional tests. This procedure is the best preparation for ensuring the on-site installation runs quickly and smoothly, and to the client's satisfaction. Production of manhole components on the new Magic system was therefore able to start in September and the planned cycle time was achieved as early as November. The targeted production volume was therefore easily achieved, and the quality of the products as well, now with or without anchors, was maintained.

Jacques Plattard and his right-hand man, Dominique Rosier, were delighted with this particular achievement. The following months of production bolstered their first impressions and certainty they had made the right decision to re-invest in Schlüsselbauer Technology, a manufacturer they trust. With their three manhole production systems, Perfect, Exact, and the new Magic, all from Schlüsselbauer, they now have a great deal of production potential for an extensive range of DN 800 and DN 1000 manhole components, including the small cover plate with a product height of 250 mm, manhole rings (for rainwater with or without drainage holes and for



*Cleaning station for bottom pallets, which is a key feature of Schlüsselbauer palletizing systems, along with spray-free oiling stations.*



*Optimum location of the curing area (here with manhole rings with drainage holes for rain water) in the hall between the production machine and palletizing system.*



Manhole risers for sewage, with step rungs and anchors

sewage), manhole bases (likewise blank or with standard channels), and tall conical manholes with heights up to 2400 mm. Most products are supplied with or without anchors, with or without step rungs, with or without reinforcements, and in two different designs, depending on the joint type. Not only has the installation of Schlüsselbauer's new Magic production system increased Plattard's capacity to produce, it has cemented the company's trust and reliability of its machines to meet its goals of providing quality and service to their market, and it makes Plattard better positioned to tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing and competitive manhole market. ■



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PLATTARD

Groupe Plattard  
414 avenue de la Plage  
69654 Villefranche-sur-Saône, France  
T +33 474 022006  
[contact@plattard.com](mailto:contact@plattard.com), [www.plattard.com](http://www.plattard.com)

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Schlüsselbauer Technology GmbH & Co. KG  
Hörbach 4, 4673 Gaspoltshofen, Austria  
T +43 7735 71440  
[sbm@sbm.at](mailto:sbm@sbm.at), [www.sbm.at](http://www.sbm.at)

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