

# ON THE UP



**W**hether you are a competitor in the Olympic ski jump or an automotive industry supplier trying to stay ahead in the face of rapid change, it takes a lot of preparation to achieve the perfect take-off, maintain your balance, outdistance your opponents, and then make a safe landing. ElringKlinger CEO Dr. Stefan Wolf met ski jump legend Martin Schmitt at Hinterzarten skiing museum in the Black Forest to discuss the matter.



**WOLF** — As a professional, does fear still play a part when you're standing at the top of the ramp waiting for a really important jump?

**SCHMITT** — Over time it becomes a routine, but even after all those years you still ask yourself if you really want to do this. If you look at it objectively, you are not putting your body under that much physical strain at that moment, but even so your heart rate can go up to 150 bpm.

**WOLF** — Do you manage to keep that fear under control?

**SCHMITT** — Yes. Ultimately, you have to feel that you are on top of the situation. When you are preparing yourself mentally for a jump, you have to ask yourself whether your fear is justified. That's when it can help to look back at key situations

in the past. Every victory is a confidence booster. Of course, those kinds of situation don't just apply to ski jumping. You find them at work, too. Again, the first thing is to check carefully that you have put everything in place that needs to be there for you to succeed. I'm sure that must be the case at ElringKlinger, too.

**WOLF** — Absolutely! With the advent of electromobility, the automotive industry faces some huge changes, and many are afraid of that. The key factor here, too, is preparation. We commenced with the development of fuel cell components 15 years ago. Eight years ago, we began designing cell connectors for lithium-ion batteries, and we now supply complete battery modules. We have also added lightweight bodywork components to our portfolio. The lower your weight, the more energy-efficient you are, whether you are

driving a car fitted with a combustion engine or an electric vehicle. That's why I am not afraid of the transition that lies ahead, even if it is coming a lot faster than we anticipated just three years ago.

**SCHMITT** — Weight is a crucial factor in our sport, too. The rules state that lighter skiers have to use shorter skis. This leaves them with a smaller surface to generate lift. Even so, there is an advantage. Newly developed ski bindings have made a difference, as they allow the jumper to assume flight positions that are more favorable in aerodynamic terms. Overall, however, the rules have become much stricter over the last few decades and there is less regulatory leeway.

**WOLF** — That applies to us, too. Stricter limits on average fleet CO<sub>2</sub> emissions put car makers under greater pressure to sell as many electric vehicles as possible very quickly, especially given that the market share of diesels is still declining. The limits currently being discussed for 2025 and 2030 cannot be achieved without a significant proportion of CO<sub>2</sub>-free drive concepts.

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Dr. Stefan Wolf,  
CEO of ElringKlinger AG

**SCHMITT** — Is everyone aware of the implications of the jump you are making?

**WOLF** — Yes. The real challenge lies in preparing a company that has a very successful history as a supplier for combustion engines so that it is ready to embrace those changes in good time. Of course, you also have to take your workforce with you. We have managed to do that at ElringKlinger, not only through technical training but also by communicating openly and highlighting the opportunities that new vehicle drive systems offer us.

**SCHMITT** — If you want to succeed, you just have to adapt to conditions that you cannot change. For instance, every ski jumper develops his or her own style over the years. If your particular style benefits from a strong front wind, you still have to be able to deliver a great performance with the wind behind you. The main thing is, when you are jumping you have to be able to respond to the specific situation. Sometimes you jump, and you don't know exactly what to expect when you are in the air. That's also an essential element of good preparation. You need to weigh up the risks in advance.

**WOLF** — So what role does the team play during the preparatory phase?

**SCHMITT** — If you look at the top of the global rankings, you can see that the best performances often come from certain teams, even though it is an individual sport. That is because ski jumpers train as part of a team throughout the year. To give you an example, for many years I used to spend every day on the ski jumps here in Hinterzarten with fellow ski jumper Sven Hannawald. We pushed each other to perform at our very best.







**WOLF** — You're right, and of course when you put a team together you benefit from their combined know-how. At the end of last year, for example, we concluded a cooperation agreement with Chengfei Integration Technology, an experienced Chinese manufacturer of battery cells. As a result, we can now offer our customers in China complete battery modules. Electromobility will evolve faster in China – the biggest car market in the world by a long way – than anywhere else. Together with our partner, we are ready for that impending jump – and in China it won't be long – into a new world of vehicle drive systems.

**SCHMITT** — The jump really is the crucial moment. In our case, we have to switch within 250 milliseconds from the downhill position that you adopt on the ramp to pick up as much speed as possible into the ideal flight position. To do that, you need supreme concentration and body control. While you can make some adjustments during the jump, they have to be really fast and intuitive. After all, one has to bear in mind that the jump is judged not only on your distance. Almost half the marks go for your position during flight and landing.

**WOLF** — Position is not really relevant in our case, but distance is certainly crucial. If you land short, you won't survive very long in the automotive industry, given the current pace of change. The pressures on us are enormous. At the moment, the

**Y**ou have to check carefully that you have put everything in place that needs to be there for you to succeed. That goes for ski jumping or the world of business.«

Martin Schmitt,  
Former international ski jumper



market share of electric vehicles is quite low, but it is climbing rapidly. The most important thing is that our customers are now developing cars for large-scale production from 2020 onwards, and we have already been designated as a supplier for some of the platforms. Our aim is to generate up to 25% of our sales from the promising fields of structural lightweighting and e-mobility over the next decade. If we land short of our target, we won't be able to achieve that.

**SCHMITT** — While you're in the air, you don't know exactly where you are going to land, especially on the large ramps, and a lot can happen over the last third of your jump. The trick is to find the right moment and to keep your balance.

**WOLF** — We will certainly try to do that. In any case, we have made all the preparations we can to make sure the jump comes off. Thanks for the chat, Martin.

#### MARTIN SCHMITT

One Olympic Gold Medal, two Silver, and countless world championship victories. Martin Schmitt has an impressive record as a ski jumper. In 1991, at the age of 13, he joined the youth division of the German Skiing Association and quickly worked his way up into the ranks of international elite jumpers. Although he has now retired from active competition, he still knocks out top performances, completing a degree in sports science at the University of Leipzig with the best grades in his entire year. Martin now works in television and runs his own sports marketing agency.