



MISTER SUN DRIVER

MICHAEL BEHLAU DISCOVERED THE SUN AS THE FIXED STAR IN HIS LIFE. IT ISN'T JUST HIM THAT FOLLOWS ITS PATH, BUT ALSO HIS PRODUCTS.

STRATEGIST

TEXT — EDWIN BAASKE

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is father was a milk inspector in the countryside. A Prussian who ended up in Westphalia due to the tribulations of world history. Each working day Michael Behlau's father visited the dairy farms around the town of Salzkotten, testing and assessing the quality of milk. "We lived in very humble circumstances and had to make do with very little, but my father never took anything from the farmers; the job is one of trust is what he used to say." If his father, the Prussian in Westphalia, had lived to see what has become of his son, he would have a hard time believing it. Michael Behlau is an entrepreneur and a visionary of his time. He's not a dreamer, but a doer. Michael Behlau (44) has a mission: the efficient use of solar energy. It's not just his thoughts that are following this goal. His product, the "Sun-Driver" does, too. The basic idea of his development is easily explained: "Every day the sun sends us a multiple of the energy that we humans require," says a man who has a hard time forcing himself to speak slowly. Michael Behlau radiates with a driving force. "Now, our task is to capture this energy as efficiently as possible with as little effort as possible.

This is the credo of the self-made man who knows precisely what using resources efficiently means. Behlau started at the bottom. Because sitting before us in his villa in Salzkotten is no grammar school graduate with top marks who then raced through a university education, but a man whose professional C.V. starts with an entry for "secondary modern school". Not how one would expect a career in pushing for securing the world's energy needs to begin. What followed were a qualification for technical college in the field of electrotechnology, then an apprenticeship as a factory fitter at Nixdorf, the computer pioneer. Behlau continued his education in the evenings and went on to study Management and Mechanical Engineering in Paderborn and then Energy and Environmental Management in Berlin. Behlau gathered speed. In 1995 he founded his "Engineering Office for Regenerative Energies". Its main offices have been located in Switzerland since 2006. Representative offices are currently being set up in Beijing, China and Perth, Australia and perhaps soon in the Gulf as well. An emir has announced his intention to pay a visit. The goal of the visit is to implement the first Sun-Driver solar park in the Arab world. It seems that the right time for an idea has come. For three years Behlau withdrew from day-to-day business in order to develop the Sun-Driver; the consequence of this preparation is now paying off. But how exactly does this Sun-Driver work? What makes it so special? In principle the concept of the Sun-Driver is as simple as all great ideas. Behlau's solar plant does not

stand rigid in a field, but follows the course of the sun, thus capturing a maximum of solar radiation. And Behlau's solar plant is gigantic. According to its father it's the largest solar power plant in the world, one not that doesn't just wait for its time in the sun, but instead follows the sun - "tracking", is what the engineer calls it. Behlau likes to use a striking comparison to point out the dimensions of the Sun-Driver. The size of the Sun-Driver is approximately that of the wing span of an Airbus A 320. However, at 34 metres the wing span is just a bit shorter than Behlau's solar power plant (35 metres). "If an A 320 were positioned behind the Sun-Driver you would only be able to see a bit of the steering gear," says Behlau, pride resonating in his voice, "of course only if the landing gear is deployed. Otherwise you wouldn't see any of it," he states more precisely, carefully considering accuracy. It is safe to assume that more of his solar power plants the size of a passenger jet will be seen in the future, because Behlau plans and develops his solar parks completely on his own. He leaves little to others and nothing to chance. "We incorporate considerable reserves for every component, if it doesn't already exist in duplicate." Currently 23 Sun-Driver plants are in operation, 170 are under construction. This is not yet sufficient to guarantee the world's energy supply, but anyone who has met Michael Behlau knows that he has just started to implement his vision. Mr Sun Driver from Salzkotten has found his fixed star and you can be certain that he'll be pursuing his goal with the maximum degree of efficiency.

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