An electric century: The evolution of postal vehicles in Germany

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Deutsche Post and DHL reflect on 100 years of progress in electromobility.

Bonn - No other logistics company operates as many electric vehicles worldwide as the DHL Group. The company's electric fleet consists of over 42,000 electric vehicles for the collection and delivery of shipments. Deutsche Post and DHL reflect on 100 years of progress in electromobility. As early as the 1910s, the former "Reichspost" utilized electric tricycles for deliveries. This development continued over the decades, reaching a peak in the 2010s with the StreetScooter; thanks to innovation, electric delivery vehicles now define regular operations.

1910s: The B.E.F. tricycle

The tricycle produced by the "Berliner Elektromobil-Fabrik" and known as the "B.E.F. Dreirad" vehicle, had a mere 1.5 horsepower. The Reichspost began using it around 1910. At that time, terms like registered mail or express shipments were not yet in use. Shipments were still sent in "letter bags," and there was also a service called "priority package delivery." Electric vehicles had advantages, especially on short distances and with light loads. The maximum speed was a modest 18 km/h, with a range of about 50 kilometers. Nevertheless, the tricycles proved effective: by the 1920s, around 200 units were already on the road.

1920s: Model BEL 2500

The electrically powered delivery vehicle of the Bergmann brand, model BEL 2500, was at least 2 km/h faster. It reached a top speed of 20 km/h and had a range of up to 60 km with a full battery charge, boasting a motor power of about 25 horsepower. This electric vehicle was specifically designed for urban use, where daily travel distances are generally short, and maximum speed is less critical. The model designation "BEL 2500" is derived from its payload capacity, which was around 2,500 kg.

1950s: EL2500 E

In the 1950s, the postal service primarily used its electric vehicles for local and suburban traffic. The postal vehicle from Maschinenfabrik Esslingen, model EL2500 E, is another example of vehicle evolution: the average daily travel distance was 18 km, while the top speed had risen to 28 km/h. The EL2500 E was mainly used in the Freiburg region. Efforts for environmentally friendly transport were high in post-war Germany, and the EL2500 E represented this commitment. Electromobility aimed to ensure cleaner air in urban delivery traffic.

2010s: Pioneering Work with StreetScooter

A significant step in the electrification of Deutsche Post and DHL's fleet in Germany was marked by the StreetScooter Work. The company was a pioneer in developing its own electric vehicle in collaboration with StreetScooter GmbH and RWTH Aachen University, tailored to the needs of letter and

package delivery. The first prototype appeared in 2012 and passed testing. With around 65 horsepower and a top speed of 85 km/h, the StreetScooter Work was faster than previous electric postal vehicles. From 2014 onwards, it was widely used on German roads. Further models followed, including the larger StreetScooter Work L and XL, as well as right-hand drive versions for safer entry and exit on the sidewalk side. Today, DHL Group no longer manufactures its own vehicles.

Today: Ford E-Transit

For several years, DHL Group has relied on established partnerships to further electrify its fleet and decarbonize logistics. An example is the Ford E-Transit - a modern electric transporter that demonstrates how powerful and practical electromobility can be today: With a range of up to 317 kilometers and 184 to 269 horsepower, it provides the endurance and power needed for last-mile collection and delivery. These vehicles are primarily used where quiet and locally emission-free driving is particularly in demand. Most electric commercial vehicles are sourced globally by DHL from Ford and Mercedes. The latest innovation for long-distance transport is an electric truck with a "Range Extender" (EREV = Extended Range Electric Vehicle), developed by DHL in collaboration with Scania. This truck primarily runs on electricity but also has a diesel engine that serves as a generator to charge the battery when needed. Horsepower: up to 400.

Source: DHL Group