



# Change journey

**After a major transformation to its operations—moving from being a rubber producer to an automotive metal business—Matador Group has found itself in an enviable market position.**

IMAGES PATRIK MAURIC

**F**or Stefan Rosina, the President of Matador Group, innovation is the key to success. “Innovation is our life at Matador,” he states. “It is the main thing we are constantly focusing on. Over the next two years our target is to grow our R&D department considerably so that we can keep supplying parts to the world’s top automobile manufacturers. This in turn will add value to our production line and deliver more to our customers.”

Matador Group has been around for more than 111 years and throughout its existence it has experienced considerable change, triggered by both internal and external factors. Its origins, in the early 1900s, were in the manufacture of rubber products, but it wasn’t until the 50s that people really began to sit up and take notice of what the business was doing. Operating from a tyre production plant in Púchov, Slovak Republic, Matador steadily grew to become one of the largest and most innovative tyre companies in central and eastern Europe. An important milestone occurred in 2007 when the rubber division was sold off to Continental AG, thus closing a door on Matador’s most important and successful chapter. >>



**Name** Stefan Rosina  
**Company** Matador Group  
**Position** President  
**HQ** Bratislava, Slovak Republic  
**Employees** 2,485

But this meant that it could start to write a new story in its history and this ultimately led to the decision to transform the former rubber manufacturer into a top Tier 1 supplier for the automotive industry. Matador had already been running an automotive division for a couple of years, so it decided to hone in on this area as its core focus. The company teamed up with Aufeer Design to enrich its competencies and portfolio of design and development, and over the next decade worked its way up to become the largest privately owned Tier 1 supplier in Slovakia. Today, it has diversified its product and service portfolio considerably and prides itself on having a strong focus on innovative engineering services, design of automotive components, design and assembly of automation lines, stamping tool production, and serial production for the leading European original equipment manufacturers.

Throughout much of Matador's long history Stefan Rosina has been involved, and he has played an instrumental role in many of the changes that have taken place. He first joined the company in the 80s working his way up the ranks to become General Manager, and then President, which is the position he holds today. Stefan recalls that another big change for Matador came in 1989 when the 'Velvet Revolution' took place. This was when the Communist rule of what was then-Czechoslovakia was overturned after 41 years.

"It meant a dramatic change in management style and also a dramatic change in market situation" he says. "Then in 1993 my father, who also worked at Matador, got together with his colleagues to privatise the company and become wholly owned by the management as shareholders. That was



a very important milestone for me, for my family, and for the company. In my eyes this privatisation showed that the people who had been working for the company for many years under Communist rule had such a good relationship with it that they wanted to independently own it. I believe this was the best kind of privatisation that could have ever happened.

"Everyone was adapting to this new way of life, trying to progress from the old style of management that had dominated business for so many years due to the Communist party being in government. We had lost a lot of hard markets because there were not adequate levels of innovation taking place and many companies were

struggling to survive. We needed to make dramatic changes to guarantee Matador's longevity."

By 2000 Stefan had taken it upon himself to direct this transformation at Matador. He had implemented new systems and instilled a core set of corporate values amongst staff. "It was difficult because unfortunately the older generation were quite resistant; however, if we didn't do something straight away we would have been bankrupt by 2001. I tried to really bolster up my young colleagues and we created a new strategic direction. We started to divest many of the companies we had acquired after becoming privatised and we invested huge amounts of money into new

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products. We completely restructured our finances, HR division, and controls."

Stefan admits that during this journey the biggest challenge was getting his people on board with the many huge changes. "In the past we had been lacking a management team that was educated and motivated," he explains. "I think this was a key problem not just for us but for many companies across the region. I don't know any manager who says: 'I am a skilled manager, I don't

*"Our partnership with Matador Group has been professional and easy from the beginning. Their technical staff have an in-depth knowledge of processes and technologies, and are great collaborators, while their financial department is equally capable and reliable."* - Javier Martínez-Aldama, CEO, ARISA

need any further development'. There is always room for growth and I think we have reached a place now where everybody, including our management team, is on the same page."

Now that Matador has successfully navigated through this somewhat tumultuous period, Stefan says his current ambition is to further cement the company's position within the European marketplace—indeed, the company's 2020 goal is to introduce a fully functional car prototype.

"We are in the process of defining our long-term strategy. Right now our vision is to become the leading privately-owned industrial group.



We are asking questions about how we can diversify for the future and grow sustainably. We want to be the top innovator and partner for the world's leading automobile manufacturers." ■

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