



ZONHOVEN, BELGIUM

1966

In 1966, the first Radson radiators come off the assembly line in Zonhoven

1975

In 1975, the R75 type comes off the assembly line. A brand new radiator with fins on the cold water channel shaped like an 'M' achieves +50% heat output over the basic type

1986

Introduction of the revolutionary Super 2 radiator. A so-called '2-on-1' principal on the hot water channel (2 A sheets) achieves +30% heat output over the R75

1989

Launch of the S3 Radiator. The '2-on-1' principal on the hot water channel (A+B sheets) with deeper profile fins and increased convection surface area +9% heat output

1990

Radson joins the Finnish Rettig Group

ZONHOVEN FACTORY, BE



Rettig ICC manufactures radiators in fifteen production facilities, located in eleven different countries. In each issue of *Clever* we highlight one of these factories. In this one, we turn the spotlight on the factory in Zonhoven, Belgium, the home of Radson.

The Factory, Zonhoven, Belgium

We are welcomed by Jos Bongers, who as Chief Operations Officer at Rettig ICC, is responsible for all production units within the group. The factory in Zonhoven, where about 12 percent of the total number of radiators of the Rettig Group are produced, is a special one. At least, it is to Jos Bongers. Not only did his career at the Finnish Rettig start here, but as the legal director he also holds the highest position here. Everything that happens in Zonhoven consequently falls under his direct responsibility.

► Jos Bongers, COO Rettig ICC



“Each year a total of about 1.1 million radiators find their way from our factory in Zonhoven to customers in 33 different countries,” Jos explains. “At the moment we have nearly 300 highly motivated experts working in our factory who are responsible on a daily basis for the production of about five to seven thousand radiators – depending on the type being produced. To accomplish that here in Zonhoven we have three modern, well-equipped and fully automated production lines.”

MORE THAN 10 HECTARES AS A BUFFER ZONE

“In 1966, Radson produced its first radiators in Zonhoven. Of course, much has changed since then. Over the years the factory – in part due to the merger in 1990 with the Finnish Rettig ICC Group – has grown enormously. And it has also been modernised, of course. The grounds of the Belgian production unit cover approximately 75,000 m², of which nearly 40,000 m² have been built-up. Since the factory is located near a nature conservation area, Rettig ICC has set up more than 10 hectares of its property as a buffer zone,” a visibly proud Jos tells us.

SUPER 2

“Zonhoven is the home of Radson. This is where it all began and where it is still happening,” Jos continues. “In 1986, for example, the first revolutionary ‘Super 2’ radiators came off the assembly line in Zonhoven. A product that signified an enormous step forward for Radson as a brand. Especially when it comes to the competition, because with this new principle Radson totally redefined the heating industry. The so-called ‘2-on-1’ principal, where two convector fins operate on each hot water channel, improved the heat output by more than 30%.”

INCREASED PROFITABILITY

“What applies to every factory is that we not only invest in innovation and quality, but also in the environment. In the last fifteen years we invested more than 50 million euros in the expansion and modernisation of the factory in Zonhoven, applying the BAT principle. In addition a total of over seven million euros were invested in water and air purification, noise control and heat recuperation. Measures that not only make this factory extremely sustainable, but that have amply surpassed our expectations and even increased the factory’s profitability. That is quite extraordinary,” Jos says with a smile.

SUSTAINABILITY HAS BEEN ON OUR AGENDA FOR QUITE SOME TIME

“Particularly our investments in processes that reduce the use of raw materials and energy to a minimum are pure profit makers. For us as well as the environment. Sustainability is a topic that has been on our agenda for quite some time. So it may come as no surprise that at the end of 2003 we were one of the first manufacturers in the region to receive the coveted ISO 14001 environmental certificate.”

WAREHOUSE

“To offer our customers a fast delivery, we always have nearly 100,000 radiators in stock in Zonhoven. From here we export radiators to 33 countries. That means we also go beyond European borders. Of course, that has consequences for the logistics. That is why we have built a warehouse of approximately 15,000 m² next to the factory. To be able to manage the production, the supply and all necessary transport, we also required a well-oiled logistics department in Zonhoven. Next to our high-quality production of radiators, that is perhaps one of our most important USPs,” Jos concludes before taking us to the factory.

*Radiators and
Zonhoven:
Rad&Zon is the
birth of Radson*

In the factory we have the opportunity to talk to the people on the floor. Because what is it that makes this Rettig ICC factory in Zonhoven, Belgium, so special? This factory that today still is the physical and spiritual home of the Radson brand.

CONTENTED PEOPLE, RELIABLE PRODUCTION

We met people like Kris Maes, who has been with the company for 25 years. “I work on the welding line,” says Kris. “Basically I make sure that everything is put together properly. I enjoy what I do, and it pays well, so what’s not to like?” One of the themes that we hear throughout the visit is something that Kris and all his colleagues mention. “The atmosphere – the people here are great to work with, and that makes a real difference,” says Kris.

Mechanic Jan Dewitte agrees. “The interaction between everyone here is fantastic,” he says. “That’s one of the reasons I wanted to work here in the beginning, back when I started more than 20 years ago. I had applied for 7 different jobs in the region, and as soon as I had the chance to see the Radson site, I made the decision that this was the place I wanted to work.”

As one of Rettig’s 15 production units spread over 11 countries, Zonhoven is a Belgian business with an international outlook and a local team that brings passion through the doors of this facility. It’s no coincidence that Radson is known for reliable products. The people who work here are a solid, close-knit community of colleagues, with many people learning the job from their fathers before them. “It began life as a family company,” explains Jan, “a lot of people from the same families worked here. So you find almost a family tradition here, a family atmosphere, which is why it’s so good to work here.” ►►



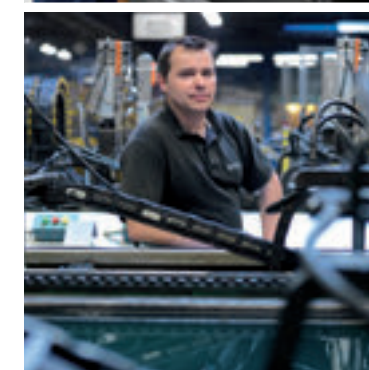
◀ **Kurt Vansnick**
To be successful as a company you must communicate. I think that in our case our management and our production people work excellently together. We really are a team

Ludo Welkenhuysen ►
Even after 12 years I still love my job at this factory



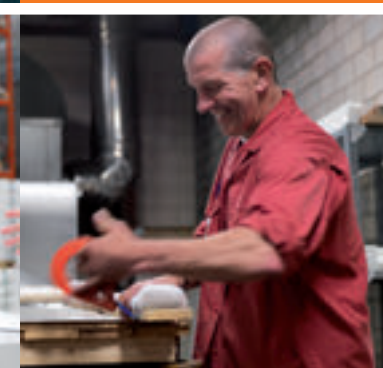
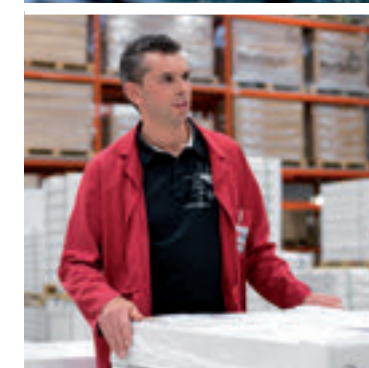
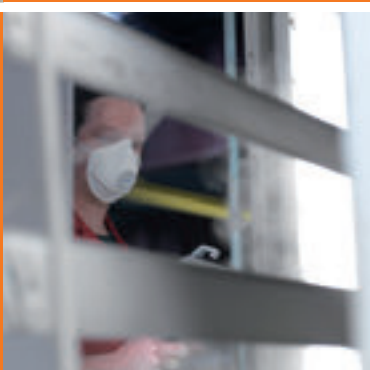
◀◀ **Michael Gielis**
Every day is a new day with new challenges. That’s what makes it interesting and fun

◀ **Stefan Martens**
Every day is different. And that makes it worthwhile. Next to that I love the fact that our management gives us the necessary responsibility to create the best possible product



◀ **Marco Schoofs**
It’s really important that we see and recognise small errors early in our production. That’s my task. Knowing that, you’ll understand that I’ve a responsible job within our team. But without the others I would not enjoy my job so much

David Bernaers ►
I have one of the finest jobs in the world!



◀◀ **Eddy Thijs**
I started here when I was 19 years old. In the past 25 years I got the chance to climb to the position of supervisor of the warehouse. Where else is this possible?

◀ **Ronny Vandebosch**
I’ve seen the factory expand and grow. Working here already 37 years, I think I can say that we have built one of the best performing teams in the world

Ben Mastroianni ►►
Our team is made up of 4 people. During the day we change shift every two hours, which means I have 4 different jobs. Something that keeps you focused

Kris Maes ►
We have an unbelievably good atmosphere that makes work a pleasure



This family welcome is extended even to those people relatively new to the job, like project engineer Johan Tielens. “When I started here three years ago, I really felt right at home,” says Johan. “We have a great way of staying connected here in Zonhoven. Every month we have a factory outing – go-karting, skiing, anything where we can all get together. It’s a fantastic way of seeing other sides of people, not just the ‘work mode’, and it means that we are basically all friends, family – not just colleagues.” This investment in people has certainly paid off for the Zonhoven site. The combination of pleasant atmosphere, good pay, job security and opportunities for internal variation and progression means that many workers see Zonhoven as a lifelong employer. Ronny Indeherberg is a ‘springer’ – a man whose job it is to have a lot of different jobs, working where he’s needed most.

“I like the variety,” explains Ronny. “Doing maybe five different jobs a week means I get to see all the sides of production, from start to finish, and I love being involved in all the parts that make up the production process.” For Ronny and his colleagues, there is also the added benefit of the internal promotion and job development philosophy at the site. “When a job comes up, we are all invited to apply if we want to,” says Ronny. “Good thing is, even if you don’t already know how to perform the job,

you get training. So you can always find something here that suits you, and you get the support you need to do it properly. It’s a really great sign that the company trusts us, this encouragement and training.” Incredibly low staff turnover is a sign that this trust is reciprocated, with people tending to stick with the company once they join.

KEEPING ZONHOVEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF TECHNOLOGY

As well as its investment in people, Zonhoven’s investment in its facilities is another major contributor to Radson’s ongoing success. “We continuously invest in our factory facilities. The recent introduction of an ultra-modern high-yield welding line, the ability to build new

radiator sizes and an automatic gluing process are just a few examples of how this factory has progressed over the years. Many new models and innovations have come out of here since 1966 and more will do so as the product range continues to modify and diversify,” Jos explains while we’re walking back to his office.

“Radson’s ability to evolve alongside the heating market’s changing demands will keep it at the forefront for a long time to come. Its loyal team are integral to this. Just as families build on their heritage by embracing new opportunities as each generation grows, Zonhoven’s longevity is made possible by the bonds it has with its people and their willingness to support progress,” adds Jos. ■



Investment is the key to longevity. Zonhoven invests in both technology and people. Quality technology combined with a contented workforce ensure Radson’s success well into the future