

Press release

The German Entrepreneur Special Award goes to Dr. Andreas Kaufmann of Leica Camera AG

Berlin, 21. June 2017 – Yesterday in Berlin Dr. Andreas Kaufmann was honoured with the German Entrepreneur 2017 Special Award. In a difficult environment he has scaled new heights, steering the cult brand Leica back on course and into the limelight.

Henry Cartier-Bresson had one, so did Robert Capa and just about every other self-respecting photographer of note: a Leica, synonymous with professionalism, quality and perfection. Striking images captured with a Leica have ingrained themselves in the collective memory of our time: the falling soldier, the Vietnamese girl fleeing napalm, legendary portraits of Che Guevara and James Dean. Then along came digital photography, and the lustre of the heritage brand faded. The inventor of the 35mm camera, so it seemed, had missed the boat. Not an isolated case.

“At that time Germany was deemed the sick man of Europe, although the numbers looked a lot better”, recalls entrepreneur Dr. Andreas Kaufmann. Which is why the Austrian-by-choice together with his brothers Christian and Michael set up a company to invest the family money specifically in German SMEs. From 2002 the brothers invested in a number of companies in Leica’s hometown Wetzlar, thereby establishing contact with the Leica management. In 2004 they themselves invested in the ailing camera manufacturer. “In the beginning we thought nothing much could go wrong.” At the end of the day there were other reputable shareholders on board, good people, a lot of expertise and the most iconic brand name in photography. But the reality was quite different. Some “uncomfortable truths” soon came to light: Leica was substantially underfunded, the management was in disarray and lacking strategic vision, and the industry itself was in a state of upheaval. “This led to discussions within the family”. Christian and Michael Kaufmann left the company. Andreas stayed and invested his inheritance. The panel of the German Entrepreneur Award were impressed: “Here best use was made of a private fortune for industry and society.” It is this very linking of entrepreneurial thinking with social awareness that is so typical in the life of Dr Andreas Kaufmann, and perhaps even the key to his success. Born in Mannheim and raised in an entrepreneurial family with an anthropomorphic orientation, Andreas

Kaufmann was influenced by the ideals of the sixties movement. "I wanted to change the world." So he studied Political Science and Literature, became a teacher at a private Waldorf Steiner School and in 1979 helped found the German Green Party, "a classic career path of my generation." Contrary to the anti-capitalist spirit of the times, however, he engaged in entrepreneurial activity. He worked on the boards of his family's capital management companies and founded small startups. "Not a contradiction", points out the lover of vintage cars, art and of course photography. "Some paths in life you follow, some you don't."

Under the guidance of Dr. Andreas Kaufmann Leica has been back in the black since 2009. In 2011 another strategic investor came on board. In 2016 alone sales rose by twelve percent to 365 million euros. How did he do it? "We're back on track with good people." Back on track with Leica's key areas of expertise: innovation, technical perfection and images of unprecedented quality and definition. Enthusiasts are prepared to pay more than 20,000 euros for some much sought-after models. Kaufmann now wants to "place Leica in an unassailable position." This also means collaboration with an established smartphone manufacturer. "We are the only ones involved in the technical development of the camera module." The panel were over the moon. "Dr Andreas Kaufmann has revived a heritage brand, thereby safeguarding German jobs and expertise." It has earned him the German Entrepreneur Special Award 2017. "This is a most important accolade", extolled Kaufmann. "Encouraging and fostering entrepreneurship is of the utmost importance for the future of Germany as a business centre."

In-depth company profiles, videos and photos of the award ceremony are available on the Internet from 21 June:

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Follow the ceremony live from 8 p.m. at www.deutscher-gruenderpreis.de Using the hashtags **#deutschergruenderpreis** and **#dgp2017** viewers can follow the proceedings at the ceremony itself or at home via Twitter.

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About the German Entrepreneur Award:

The German Entrepreneur Award is the country's most prestigious acknowledgement of entrepreneurial excellence and achievement. It aims to foster a positive entrepreneurial environment in Germany and encourage people to go into business. The award is conferred annually in the following categories: Student, StartUp, Rising Star and Lifetime Achievement. There is also a Special Award for exceptional business success. The German Entrepreneur Award is presented by the partners Stern magazine, Sparkassen, ZDF and Porsche, who have been actively fostering a culture of entrepreneurship since 1997. The German Entrepreneur Award is supported by a stellar advisory committee that is tasked with mentoring the nominees and award winners. The German Entrepreneur Award is sponsored by Bertelsmann SE, Gruner + Jahr GmbH & Co. KG, Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

Contact:

DSGV e. V.

Deutscher Gründerpreis

Simon Mennecke

Tel. (030) 2 02 25-51 54

Fax (030) 2 02 25-51 31

E-Mail simon.mennecke@dsgv.de

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