

XRAY XB8'16

Exclusive Interview with Martin Bayer

Neo Buggy: What was the most difficult task for you as a designer while working on the new XB8?

Martin Bayer: Before I was directly involved with R&D I always thought that the most difficult part of a design process is to find the proper geometry of the car. Now I know that the most difficult challenge for a designer is to face the resources limitations and especially the deadline directly related to the production schedule. In the high competition racing the customers buy a car for a new season and missing the release on time automatically means less sales which means less resources available for the further development of the platform. So my biggest challenge was to find the moment when I had to stop testing and to provide the final specs of the car. If there was no deadline the development would be just infinite, I would just continue with another and another last small test here and there.

Neo Buggy: Does it mean that the finished design is not yet “perfect”?

Martin Bayer: The first thing that Juraj taught me was that you can never achieve an absolute perfection but of course you can never give up to try. So I had also myself to learn to accept that even when I still feel that we can improve this or that I need to face the reality and meet the deadlines. Of course it does not mean that I would ever turn into production a car that I would know had some faults, absolutely not. Coming to a certain point when I have to face the deadline I need to be sure that the car I turn into production is a definitive improvement over the previous one.

And of course I had to learn that even when I thought that now this is the perfect car the next day coming to another track or to get to different track conditions I will realize that still things can be better, this is a never ending development process.

So to answer the question, the 2016 version of the XB8 is definitely another major improvement in terms of performance and reliability. But like with all other platforms, we will be available the whole racing season at the tracks around the world and certainly will get new improvement ideas and plans.

Neo Buggy: What are the major improvements on the 2016 XB8?

Martin Bayer: In the recently published Making of story I have disclosed all the development goals and the steps I made to achieve them so you could see that the list of all the improvements is fairly extensive as we focused on plenty of areas. It is probably impossible to pick-up only certain changes or improvements because all of them were all made by purpose in order to make overall the car faster and most of the improvements are directly related and one would not work without the other.

Neo Buggy: So I will ask in other way. What was your primary focus when working on the new car?

Martin Bayer: The ultimate goal for all the changes was to make the car faster and easier to drive and we have especially focused on rough tracks which was the area where we certainly were missing the pace. With all the changes made including the change of the layout of the car, incorporating the conventional pivot ball suspension and completely changing the weight balance and flex of the car the XB8 2016 is now a significant improvement for rough tracks but also for sure is an improvement for any other track. But I am convinced that the major difference the customers will feel on rough tracks where the new XB8 has moved to completely new level comparing the previous car.

Neo Buggy: From looking at the car it seems to me that it would be the pivot ball suspension that is the most visible change.

Martin Bayer: Yes, along with the all-new body it would be certainly the pivot ball suspension that is most visible change. However it is not only the suspension but plenty of other related details that had to be changed and those details are not visible first sight like different Ackermann plate or different servo saver which are all results of change to the pivot ball suspension.

Neo Buggy: So why the pivot ball suspension?

Martin Bayer: Already the 2014 version of the XB8 used the unique pivot ball suspension with one horizontal and one vertical pivot ball, an idea used already by Juraj in 1986. So the change for 2016 for conventional pivot ball was not any fundamental but I understand that it looks all different. I really wanted to avoid the “copy jokes” and first tried to do all possible to cure the current suspension but all the solutions we tried to implement did not bring the desired result. So at the end I have simply decided that I will face the “copy comments” but was convinced that the reliability improvement in the dusty conditions and the performance improvement on the rough tracks using the conventional pivot ball suspension will be appreciated by the customers who are the judges of my work. So here I am ready to face the comments :)

Neo Buggy: Coming back to your work of a designer. Where do you test all the new parts?

Martin Bayer: On the tracks :) The 1/10 off-road platforms we run and test both on carpet and dirt tracks while the 1/8 off-road platforms we test exclusively on dirt tracks. Unfortunately there are not many permanent 1/8 off-road tracks around where I live so any tests I want to do I have to travel. Usually I travel either to Austria or to Italy which are the closest tracks and the season before I have actively run at various tracks in Germany. However just recently in the last week we build at my home city a new outdoor dirt off-road track which I will now use in summer for testing.

Neo Buggy: We have seen some photos from building the new off-road hall at Hudy Arena. Is this a running project?

Martin Bayer: Yes. We are fully aware of our disadvantage of not having any permanent covered dirt track at factory which has been also one of the obstacles with a faster and more flexible development. After some internal discussions about the future plans and strategy of the company as well after some financial analysis we came with a final decision to build own in-house indoor dirt off-road track. The building already started and the hall should be ready this summer. I just cannot wait to be ready because I know how much difference our indoor carpet off-road track has made with the development of both XB4 and XB2. As such I am absolutely sure that the development with own 1/8 off-road track will be much faster and more flexible. I am really excited.

Neo Buggy: So it seems XRAY gets more focused in off-road?

Martin Bayer: XRAY was already previously focused also in off-road but Juraj's responsibility for running the entire company did not allow him to fully focus on off-road and his limited time he had to spend on all classes both on-road and off-road including the nitro engine development for both on-road and off-road. So I would say that since I took over the responsibility for the off-road development XRAY is now certainly more serious and more dedicated also to off-road. You can notice that with the first serious achievements we start to collect worldwide including World Champion title, European Champion title as well the recent EOS season title. And we have still a large space to growth.

Neo Buggy: What are your plans with the XRAY off-road team? Will we see any big name addition to the team?

Martin Bayer: With our increased dedication and work in the off-road classes we have significantly improved the cars which has resulted in better results of the drivers and of course attracts more potential drivers. I am sure we will add several new drivers to the team but at this moment I do not expect any big name as you say. XRAY is still a family company which has a lot of responsibilities and must invest very wisely but especially XRAY is one of the very few true manufacturers and as such all resources are first invested into new projects, new technologies and machines and only what gets left can be spend on team and races. Therefore it has been XRAY's strategy to build the team and work on young and talented drivers and both driver and company push each other further. This would be a great example of Martin Wollanka taking the European Vice-Champion title or recently Bruno Coelho winning the World Championship title, both taking the racing scene by storm.

Neo Buggy: So you see the future of your team in the junior drivers?

Martin Bayer: Absolutely. We are really focused to follow and pick up the young talented drivers and support them and work with them up. This is also part of my job and I really like to work with these kids that one day may be the next European or World Champions. I am really proud for our European Junior team that includes: Malin Karlsen, Alexander Landen, Joel Valander, Jarno Pijpers, Ruben Perez, Max Gotzl, Milan Mudra, Kaja Novotny and many others like Kenny Bender, John Zubber and plenty of other talented kids. These are all the future drivers. With the very strong off-road platform line-up in all classes we will now be ready to build same strong junior teams in Asia and America. I am really positive about the future and our XRAY junior team.

Neo Buggy: Where do you see the development of the market nitro vs. electric?

Martin Bayer: Anyone who follows the racing scene understands and knows the trend is towards the electric. I really love the nitro racing as this is where I come from and the smell and noise of nitro engines is my music and I will continue to race nitro as long as the class will be supported. At the nitro races you will see usually the “old” faces but the “electric” races is where you see most of the newcomers and young kids coming. So being also responsible for commercial success of the platforms I will of course have to put our priority and my effort towards the classes that will see growth and popularity.

Neo Buggy: What is then XRAY’s priority class?

Martin Bayer: In off-road? There is no favorite class that would get special treatment but I would say that we put our priority depending how each of the platforms are standing against the competition in the moment. Two years ago we put a massive effort to improve XB4 which has worked out extremely successfully and the XB4 is probably some of the best performing 4WD 1/10 car in the market and as such at this moment does not require any significant input from our side just regular improvements and constant development. Last year we have released the XB2 platform which has right away picked up the momentum and works also very well and therefore again there is not much work to do but of course we already have some ideas but all being very small and tiny at this moment. Last year and this year we have heavily invested resources into the XB8 platform development based on which now the XB8E will be build followed with the XT8. So our priority right now will be with the next new projects.

Neo Buggy: So what is the next new project?

Martin Bayer: You know that I can not disclose anything but in this case I believe that anyone who follows us knows that we still miss a car in some of the classes. So it can be logically assumed what will be our next project, there will be no big surprise but I am excited that our off-road line will again get stronger and more attractive.

Neo Buggy: We have not seen any update on your truggy for a long time. Did you retire from this class?

Martin Bayer: No we did not retire but simply with the very busy schedule that Juraj has there was no time for him to make update of the truggy in the last years but now with my involvement we plan to make in short future an update. The new XT8 truggy will be based on the current XB8 to share the same platform.

Neo Buggy: Now to the racing. What is crucial to achieve the best racing results for the factory?

Martin Bayer: Plenty and plenty of work you have to do. The results will not come without a very hard and dedicated work no matter what talent you are. And of course you need to have a competitive package with a top level car, engine/electronics, tires, etc. but you also need to have good set-up knowledge, a lot of passion, a lot of patience and of course also a good luck. As a team we have in all the different classes a wise combination of experienced

drivers with a selection of the young talented drivers. As a team we work hard, support each other, help each other, push each other further but most importantly despite this is high competition racing we still take it easy. At the end of the day only one driver can win and when we are not the lucky one, there is no big deal, we continue our work with our focus and strategy and get back to the next race with even higher motivation. But of course we always try to keep maximum fun even if the adrenaline and excitement are there at the races.

Neo Buggy: How is your 2016 racing calendar looks like?

Martin Bayer: Of course extremely crowded with plenty of races but even more of private testing. This year our calendar for off-road races includes:

- DHI in Denmark
- XWS in various countries
- EOS in Germany
- Sin City in USA
- The Dirt in USA
- Neo in UK
- EOS in Germany
- Worlds Warm-up in USA
- Euros Warm-up in Spain
- Euros 1/8 in Spain
- Euros 1/10 in Spain
- Euros 1/8 electric in Spain
- Worlds in USA

Besides these major races and plenty of private testing I attend of course various races around for race practice. So most of the year I am on the way at some races.

Neo Buggy: What is your plan for the World Championship?

Martin Bayer: Of course we will do our very best. The competition is extremely high so of course our disadvantage will be limited practice time at the Worlds track. We still work to get maximum performance out of the new car so we stayed for couple of days after the Worlds warm-up for additional testing which helped us significantly to improve the performance. The track was very tricky and very demanding with the changing traction during the day so the race will be also very much about the tires and how fast everyone can quickly adapt to the changing conditions. Nevertheless we continue our work, we continue the practice and preparation and we will be ready for the race of the year where all other teams come also well prepared. I am really excited.

Neo Buggy: What is the main difference between racing and tracks in Europe and America?

Martin Bayer: The difference today is not that significant than it used to be. In the past the US tracks were huge both in size and with the jumps. Now that has also changed in both ways, we have in Europe more tracks which are now also larger and with jumps and the US tracks get now more flat and faster. The difference though is that at some US tracks they water jet the tracks before the race while in Europe I did not race yet at the track which was water jet before the run. So the differences are not anymore that significant. Maybe the traction is a little different because at the US tracks which I visited there many more racers on the track than we are used in Europe so the traction was different.

Neo Buggy: So when designing the car is there a different approach to have the car working at US or European tracks?

Martin Bayer: Not really. Maybe in the past it would make sense but nowadays not anymore. The more difference is for sure are the different traction conditions. The very slipper track may require some parts different than the car purposely designed for high traction track because already now you need a completely different set-up for such different track conditions. Maybe in future we will see cars specifically designed for low traction tracks and specifically for high traction tracks.

Neo Buggy: Why a customer should buy XRAY instead of some of many other brands available?

Martin Bayer: It will be the quality of the product, premium service, ongoing dedicated development and best performance of the cars. I am sure that over the years we have already convinced the customers that XRAY's quality is some of the best in the industry thanks to the complete in-house production in Europe using only the premium European materials and highest precision European machines. So there is no doubt about the outstanding quality. As a factory team we are available at all the major races around world with the service & support and the professional network of distributors provide the service at national level. With the ongoing development we ensure that the customers will always get for the new season a car that is fully competitive and ready to win any race.

Neo Buggy: What is on your schedule in the days?

Martin Bayer: There are big changes in my life. In the next days I will move from my city to Trencin where XRAY is located so I can be even closer to the factory and get more involved. With building the new track at the factory and myself leaving in Trencin the flexibility and speed of development will be again higher. I got engaged to my girlfriend and will get married this year. So plenty of personal changes in my life going all but everything looks great and I cannot wait.