

Press release



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Longer range as standard: Bosch gives go-ahead for volume production of silicon carbide chips

- Harald Kroeger: "We want to become a global leader in the production of SiC chips for electromobility."
- Silicon carbide semiconductors enable longer ranges and faster recharging for electric cars.
- Volume production to begin in December 2021. Bosch has been producing SiC chips for customer validation since the beginning of 2021.
- Technology development funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi).

Reutlingen, Germany – They are small, powerful, and extremely efficient: semiconductors made of silicon carbide (SiC). After several years of development, Bosch is now starting volume production of power semiconductors made of this innovative material, supplying automotive manufacturers worldwide. In the future, more and more production vehicles will feature these chips. "The future for silicon carbide semiconductors is bright. We want to become a global leader in the production of SiC chips for electromobility," says Harald Kroeger, member of the board of management of Robert Bosch GmbH. Two years ago, the supplier of technology and services had announced that it would push ahead with the development of SiC chips and enter production. For this, Bosch has developed its own highly complex manufacturing processes, which it has been using to produce the special semiconductors since the beginning of 2021 – initially as samples for customer validation. "Our order books are full, thanks to the boom in electromobility," Kroeger says. In the future, Bosch intends to expand its production capacity for SiC power semiconductors to a unit volume running into the hundreds of millions. With this in mind, the company has already started expanding the clean-room space at its Reutlingen plant. In parallel, work is also being done on the second generation of SiC chips, which will be even more efficient and should be ready for volume production as of 2022. Bosch is

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receiving support for the development of these innovative manufacturing processes for SiC semiconductors from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) as part of the “Important Project of Common European Interest (IPCEI) Microelectronics” program. “For several years now, we have been providing support to help establish semiconductor production in Germany. Bosch’s highly innovative semiconductor production strengthens the microelectronics ecosystem in Europe and is a further step toward greater independence in this key field of digitalization,” says Peter Altmaier, Germany’s Federal Minister for Economic Affairs.

The stuff range dreams are made of

Around the world, demand for silicon carbide power semiconductors is rising. A forecast by the market research and consulting company Yole indicates that, between now and 2025, the SiC market as a whole will grow on average by 30 percent a year to over 2.5 billion dollars. At around 1.5 billion dollars, the SiC car market is expected to account for the lion’s share. “Silicon carbide power semiconductors make particularly efficient use of energy. This material’s advantages really come to the fore in energy-intensive applications such as electromobility,” Kroeger says. In the power electronics of electric vehicles, silicon carbide chips ensure that drivers can drive significantly further on one battery charge – on average around 6 percent further than with their pure silicon counterparts. In order to meet steadily increasing demand for these semiconductors, an extra 1,000 square meters were already added to the clean-room space at the Bosch wafer fab in Reutlingen in 2021. Another 3,000 square meters will be added by the end of 2023. The new space will house state-of-the-art production facilities for manufacturing silicon carbide semiconductors using processes developed in-house. To achieve this, Bosch’s semiconductor experts are building on their decades of expertise in chip manufacturing. In the future, the company – incidentally the only automotive supplier to produce its own silicon carbide chips – plans to manufacture the semiconductors on 200-millimeter wafers. Compared with today’s 150-millimeter wafers, this will deliver sizeable economies of scale. After all, it takes several months for a single wafer to pass through several hundred process steps in countless machines. “By producing on larger wafers, we can manufacture significantly more chips in one production run and thus supply more customers,” Kroeger says.

Small atom, big impact

The secret behind SiC chips’ impressive performance lies in a tiny carbon atom. Introducing it into the crystalline structure of the ultra-pure silicon generally used to manufacture semiconductors gives the raw material special physical properties: for example, silicon carbide semiconductors support higher switching frequencies than pure silicon chips. What’s more, they lose only half as much energy in the form of heat, thereby increasing the range of electric vehicles. The chips are also important for 800-volt systems, where they enable faster

recharging and better performance. Since the SiC chips also emit significantly less heat, the power electronics require less in the way of costly cooling. In addition to weight, this is another way to reduce the cost of electric vehicles. In the future, Bosch will supply silicon carbide power semiconductors to customers around the world – both as individual chips and installed in power electronics or complete solutions such as the e-axle. This combination of electric motor, gearbox, and power electronics achieves an efficiency of up to 96 percent thanks to the more efficient design of the overall system. This leaves more energy for the powertrain, which increases the range.

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Basic information:

Mobility Solutions is the largest Bosch Group business sector. In 2020, its sales came to 42.1 billion euros, or 59 percent of total group sales. This makes the Bosch Group one of the leading automotive suppliers. The Mobility Solutions business sector pursues a vision of mobility that is safe, sustainable, and exciting, and combines the group's expertise in the domains of personalization, automation, electrification, and connectivity. For its customers, the outcome is integrated mobility solutions. The business sector's main areas of activity are injection technology and powertrain peripherals for internal-combustion engines, diverse solutions for powertrain electrification, vehicle safety systems, driver-assistance and automated functions, technology for user-friendly infotainment as well as vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure communication, repair-shop concepts, and technology and services for the automotive aftermarket. Bosch is synonymous with important automotive innovations, such as electronic engine management, the ESP anti-skid system, and common-rail diesel technology.

The Bosch Group is a leading global supplier of technology and services. It employs roughly 395,000 associates worldwide (as of December 31, 2020). The company generated sales of 71.5 billion euros in 2020. Its operations are divided into four business sectors: Mobility Solutions, Industrial Technology, Consumer Goods, and Energy and Building Technology. As a leading IoT provider, Bosch offers innovative solutions for smart homes, Industry 4.0, and connected mobility. Bosch is pursuing a vision of mobility that is sustainable, safe, and exciting. It uses its expertise in sensor technology, software, and services, as well as its own IoT cloud, to offer its customers connected, cross-domain solutions from a single source. The Bosch Group's strategic objective is to facilitate connected living with products and solutions that either contain artificial intelligence (AI) or have been developed or manufactured with its help. Bosch improves quality of life worldwide with products and services that are innovative and spark enthusiasm. In short, Bosch creates technology that is "Invented for life." The Bosch Group comprises Robert Bosch GmbH and its roughly 440 subsidiary and regional companies in some 60 countries. Including sales and service partners, Bosch's global manufacturing, engineering, and sales network covers nearly every country in the world. With its more than 400 locations worldwide, the Bosch Group has been carbon neutral since the first quarter of 2020. The basis for the company's future growth is its innovative strength. At 129 locations across the globe, Bosch employs some 73,000 associates in research and development, of which nearly 34,000 are software engineers.

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