

1991

FORTEC TIMES

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All I want is a Jeep!



Viele Grüße. My name is Andreas Ulber, President and Founder of FORTEC, Inc., and this is my story.

Like many of you, my love of Jeeps began at a young age. I remember being fascinated with Jeeps as a boy growing up in Hamburg, Germany, especially the old CJ5 and CJ7 models. Even as a kid, I was struck by the elegance, style and symmetry of the Jeep design. Of course, being able to quickly jump in and out of the vehicle only helped to spur my young imagination about the types of adventures I'd one day have driving my Jeep. While many fascinations from childhood eventually fade, my passion for Jeeps continued to grow over the years. But it wasn't until college that I had my first opportunity to turn my dream of owning a Jeep into a reality.



At the time, I was working for an auto importer based in the U.S. who was paying me to find high end cars in Germany before shipping them to Atlanta.



The typical export model in the 80's

It wasn't long before I began thinking about reversing the process and having a CJ Jeep imported from the U.S. to Germany. Unfortunately, I didn't have the money to import and keep a CJ, but after talking with my father, I decided it was possible to cover the cost of importing a Jeep by selling the vehicle shortly after it arrived in Hamburg.

I'm happy to say my plan was a success. Not only did I cover the cost of importing CJs to Germany, I even got to drive them for a while before finding a buyer. While it was difficult saying

goodbye so soon after acquiring each new CJ, I enjoyed every minute I spent behind the wheel. Shortly before graduation, a friend expanded on my idea by starting his own Jeep importing business. Working together, he and I made several trips from Hamburg to Atlanta in search of the finest CJs we could find. Little did I know that my parttime job working with my friend would be the start of a lifetime commitment to the Jeep brand and everything it stands for.



The automotive love of my life.



It all started in Hamburg, Germany during the early 90s

During these early days, we could only afford to buy a few CJs at a time.

However, the demand for Jeeps was high in Germany, and we easily made enough money selling the CJs we imported to travel back to the U.S. each summer to do it all over again.

Of course, we all know CJs need a lot of care and attention, which translated into a demand for parts and accessories for the Jeeps we'd been importing.

So in 1991, I moved into a friend's apartment with the idea of starting a parts and accessories company, and FORTEC was born.

Those days of running FORTEC out of our living room were a lot of fun. I still can't believe we actually sold 35" tires out of a fourth floor apartment in a building without an elevator!



1991: Our first business location on the 4th floor in an apartment building in Hamburg, Germany

As we looked to expand FORTEC beyond our apartment, we began contacting U.S. manufacturers and distributors with outstanding reputations. Most of them had never considered shipping to Europe, and even fewer had ever heard of FORTEC.

However, our hard work and determination eventually paid off when we were named an authorized RANCHO Suspension distributor. Back then RANCHO was considered "the" name in suspension components.

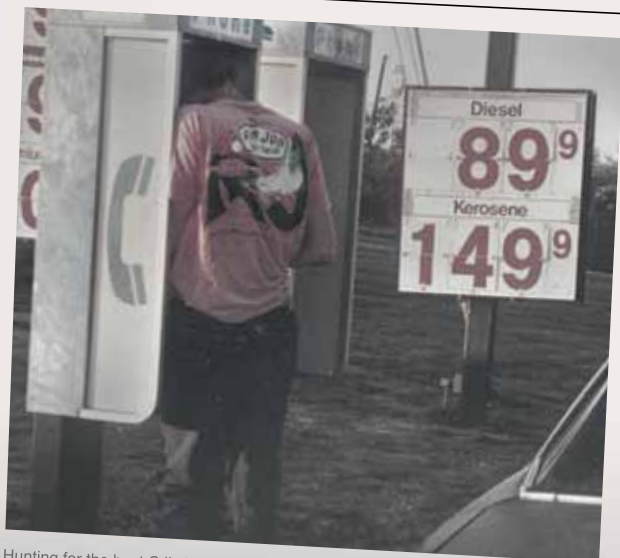
In our first year we sold 2,000 shocks. Not bad for two young guys just starting out, but a modest number when compared to the major distributors in the U.S., most of which did that kind of volume in a single month.

While FORTEC didn't start off competing with the big boys, the principles we used then are the same as we use now when selecting which suppliers to work with.

It has always remained our commitment at FORTEC to only sell the best, most trusted parts and accessories in the industry. We only work with the top brands on the market that we have painstakingly selected using our years of experience.

From the beginning, we decided that if we wouldn't consider using a particular part or accessory on our own Jeeps, then FORTEC would never sell it to the public.

With our commitment to quality firmly in place, we decided the time had come to make FORTEC a multinational company.



Hunting for the best CJ's I could find. Gas prices were low.



1994. Loading Jeep parts for export to Germany.

FORTEC, U.S.A.

Running a small import business overseas before the inception of the Internet was a challenging and expensive proposition. To grow our company even larger, the time had come to establish a foothold for FORTEC in the U.S. While the idea of having a U.S. office was "way cool," we ran into one small problem.

No one who worked at FORTEC, Inc. at the time actually lived in the U.S. Fortunately, a solution to our problem came from one of the pillars upon which FORTEC has always been founded – family. My father, Gerd, was retired and looking for a new challenge after my mother had recently passed.



1993: My dear father was the first employee at Fortec, Inc. USA

He agreed to move to Atlanta and help get FORTEC up and running in the U.S.

During those first few years, we only bought Jeep parts and accessories for export to Germany, which was great for Jeep lovers in Europe and for the U.S. economy.

After several years of expertly running our U.S. office, my father decided the time had come for him to step aside so I could run the company by myself.

After running FORTEC for four years in Hamburg, I was ready and eager for the opportunity to move to the U.S. and continue what my father had started.

FORTEC, Atlanta



1994. Loading Jeep parts for export to Germany.

For the first couple of months, I worked from my father's basement using an old Costco PingPong table as a desk.

It quickly became obvious that the business would never survive by only selling parts and accessories to our own company in Germany. To solidify FORTEC's place in the U.S., we had to find more export customers around the world, while also developing some domestic business.

Once again our hard work and determination paid off, as we were able to find several more export clients to add to what FORTEC, Hamburg was purchasing. But it wasn't until we closed our first domestic deal that we really thought we had it made.

Our first domestic sale was to a local Jeep dealer for 400 rear seats and 200 carpet kits for their new 1994 Wranglers. In our minds we had finally done it. We had reached the Big Leagues.

Buoyed by our success, I decided to open FORTEC's first retail space by renting a small storefront to sell Jeep accessories. The business actually did pretty well, and we managed to sell a bunch of Jeep accessories and perform a few custom installations in the parking lot.

To continue building off our success, I decided to expand once again. However, selling accessories and installing lift kits in the parking lot is far different than having your own showroom floor and shop.

I made a few mistakes over the next couple of years, but the one thing I got right was agreeing to let my cousin Matt intern at the shop for a summer. What started off as a few months of free labor transformed into a budding partnership that lasts to this day.

Matt never left FORTEC after his internship ended, and he now currently runs both our Fort Lauderdale and Miami locations while serving as a full partner in the business.



1997. Real Estate lesson in life; read your leases carefully.



1996 Andreas with cousin Matt

FORTEC, Transformed

Before FORTEC became the thriving business it is today, the company nearly collapsed in 2000. Poor investment choices had left the on the brink and we were desperate. We began restoring old CJs, sold used parts, repurposed old parts left over from customizations, built custom Jeeps; we tried everything we could think of to keep FORTEC solvent. After a few harrowing months, FORTEC finally started turning a profit again. They say that necessity is the mother of all inventions, and from our need to expand the scope of the business we discovered the incredible

demand people had for customized Jeeps. Building custom Jeeps turned out to be hugely successful, and quickly became one of our focal points for FORTEC going forward. Back in the black and focused on building custom Jeeps, in addition to selling parts and accessories, we decided to expand FORTEC into the Miami market.

Led by cousin Matt, the Miami office quickly established partnerships with local dealerships to sell Jeeps customized by FORTEC.



2001 One of our Florida dealerships showing customized Jeeps from FORTEC®.

The future of FORTEC looks bright

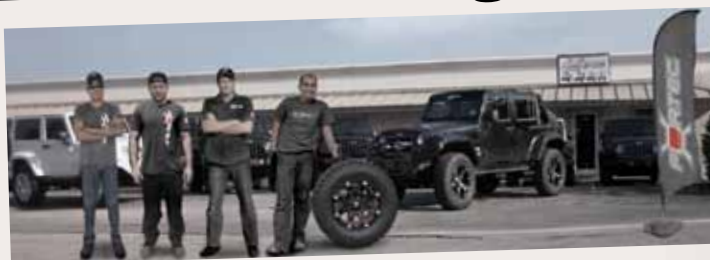


Fortec in Roswell, Georgia

With locations in both Georgia and Florida and plans on further expansion, the health of FORTEC has never been better. We have a truly exceptional staff of employees and technicians, many of which have been with the company for many years. We pride ourselves at having the most skilled, experienced, and highly trained technicians in the industry, so we can deliver the best experience and products to our customers. We have even partnered with a local college and the SEMA to enable our technicians to participate in the latest, most advanced continuing education possible.

As FORTEC continues to grow, my hope is to provide my more senior staff members the opportunity to run their own FORTEC locations in the future. I've been lucky enough to live my dream of working with Jeeps for most of my life, and I would feel incredibly honored and privileged to offer that same opportunity to some of the men and women who have helped me build this company into what it is today.

As for me, I have no plans on slowing down when it comes to building FORTEC into an industry leading



Fortec in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

business. Our in the meantime 25 year old family business has been built on strength, honor and commitment that carries through in everything we do. I am excited to see what adventures we are going to experience in the years to come.

Finally, I'd like to thank you, knowing you have a lot of options when selecting Jeep parts and accessory retailers. I truly appreciate that you are taking the time to read my story and for your business. Like you, I have a love for Jeeps that will last a lifetime, and want

every FORTEC customer to know that we share your passion. That's why at FORTEC, we promise only to offer the very best parts, the very best service, and the very best people. After all, Jeeps, the Jeep brand, and Jeep lovers deserve nothing less.