

Helix by Wayne - A dispenser with the feminine touch. erpecnews special feature, by Nick Needs



So much has been written about Wayne's new Helix dispenser family, that trying to find a new angle on this much publicised piece of high tech equipment, seemed extremely unlikely, until that is I was introduced to the Wayne Helix Product Manager and its Dispenser Product Manager, Annika Birkler and Lise-Lotte Nordholm. Following an hour long interview with them both, I concluded that if there is a slightly softer side to these modern looking pieces of hardware, it could just be because at the crucial design stage the input was not totally male dominated like it may have been in the past, or is that being sexist? I'm not sure. However, it was extremely interesting to listen and hear the views of both Annika and Lise-Lotte on the creation of Helix, helped along as usual with some excellent hospitality, on the Wayne stand at the Automechanika exhibition.

I asked Annika how long it had taken to design the Helix range and wondered at what point the powers above decided a new product range was needed. Was it because of marketing trends pointing to new ways in which customers would like their petrol to be served or more likely, new technology coming onto the market which could improve the performance of the existing Wayne dispenser line? She said, "At Wayne we always strive to provide state of the art equipment to our customers. The Helix innovation started over three years ago with an approach of being a global product line offering the same technology, high quality and design solutions to customers whoever or wherever they are in the world. The Helix range with a common iconic design is also about brand building for us and brand building for our customers. If you look at the Apple iPod and iPad you will see a common design language between them, a feature also shade in the car industry with BMW and Audi for example.

This was something we wanted to create for Wayne so that people can instantly recognise a Wayne product and know what the company and its products stand for. Our latest designs are there to impress our customers in ways they have never experienced before and as we are producing a global product range, we need solutions that can be adapted easily to suit any country".

I suggested to Annika that with all the hype and mystery surrounding the launch of the Helix, the iconic way in which it is being marketed and of course the product itself, one might be forgiven for thinking this is a mainstream consumer product we are talking about. It's almost suggesting that petrol retailers should think to themselves that one day; they too may have a Wayne pump on their forecourt. Possibly in the same way I might convince myself that one day I might have a Porsche in my garage. I don't even have a garage at the moment so there is not much chance of that. So what's behind all this, I asked her. "This is how we see it", she said. "We operate a back to back business, but the product is used by consumers, so that's why we felt it was very important to identify with this and make it not only appealing, but also extremely functional for customers on the petrol forecourt.

How do you know what customers filling up their cars want? Is it through your own personal experiences or did you do any research into the matter, seemed at the time like a clever question to ask her. I was extremely surprised when she said "That's exactly what we did. Before doing any sketching of the product, design concepts or engineering, we partnered up with IDEO, a well renowned industrial design firm, which helped us earlier with our US Ovation dispenser range. They are a global organisation and where we started was simply going out in many regions of the world, talking to every type of person who comes into contact with fuel dispensers, for example the user, the service technicians, station attendants and the retailers themselves, to ask what they do and don't like about them. We had IDEO to carry out the surveys, with no Wayne flavour added to make them as impartial as possible."

So what did you learn from this I asked her, not being able to think what I might reply if someone asked me what I expected from a petrol pump. I think, ideally I would like someone to serve me. Annika sat forward in her chair, seemingly delighted at the chance of being able to present these findings, which she says formed the backbone of their design work. "We discovered primarily that many people think putting petrol in a car is not a pleasant experience. You pay a lot of money, it's a dirty environment and people just want to get out of there as quickly as possible. Creating a better refueling experience is exactly what the Helix is all about although there is of course no pleasing everyone. In Sweden we researched a woman on a forecourt who wanted her children entertained and watched over, whilst she filled up her car". In Sweden? The land of the unmanned petrol station. Even less likely than anywhere else on the planet, depending on which planet you are on. Annika continued. "One of the strongest themes derived from the research, was that people do not want to handle dirty equipment. Standing in a pool of diesel in nice shoes and handling a smelly diesel nozzle were not appreciated by users from every country we worked in. South America, Europe and in the USA, they all said the same things. So styling the equipment to look good and making it easy to clean, using surface structures and materials that wipe off easily, is a simple design principle we were able

to build into the Helix range. There were even ways we discovered how to hide the dirt, rather than the customer see it".

Notwithstanding the technological features of the Helix range, all of which are well documented on the waynehelix.com, this did all seem to make a great deal of sense and it was now down to Lise-Lotte to talk through the features of the four different dispensers which were gleaming white, with a touch of blue, in front of us. Low cost, economy, business class and first class immediately came to my mind as I studied each of them carefully, asking myself if any of them, or indeed all of them would make me feel better about refueling my car. I decided that the 6000 model, First Class, was certainly the equivalent of the M series for BMW. Lise-Lotte, pointed to the chunky and almost robotic looking fuel dispenser I was standing next to and said "You can see that all the edges of the pump have been designed so they don't hold the dirt. As Annika mentioned earlier, the surface of these casings is easy to clean and most importantly many of the parts of the pump that pick up dirt normally have been hidden, like for example the hoses on the 6000 model, which are concealed in a casing when the pump is not in use. This also makes the unit visually more appealing. The large digital readout of fuel price and litres dispensed is purposely located close to the multimedia screen, to avoid customers forgetting that they are refueling their car whilst watching a trailer for the latest block buster movie".

I asked her which one of these dispensers I should choose if I was to open up a new petrol station requiring four pumps. Quick as a flash she said "The great thing about the Helix range is that you can start off with the more basic model and as circumstances change, you can bolt on all the special features, like a payment terminal or multimedia functions when the time is right to do so". Flexibility could be yet another strong feature of this inter-changeable product range but her answer did seem to suggest she had drawn a conclusion from looking at my suit, that I would not be able to afford the Helix 'M' edition straight away.

If I was buying petrol pumps I would certainly consider the Helix range as it looks stylish, robust, technologically advanced and welcoming. Wing mirrors on the side of dispensers is something Annika and Lise-Lotte might think about in the future, as a way of assisting some customers who experience parking difficulties. No genders mentioned. Apart from that though, everything else seems to have been thought about and it was indeed a very refreshing pleasure to meet two people who clearly have such a large part to play in Wayne's future success. As they told me on my way out, they are already working on their next big project. It would be interesting to see what they can do with a car wash.

More details about Wayne Helix Fuel Dispensers can be found at www.waynehelix.com.

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