

Thomas Kruse

This is VW's secret weapon against hacker attacks

Annemike Vierneisel is a cybersecurity expert at Cymotive, a partner company of VW in Wolfsburg.

Wolfsburg. At 26, Annemike Vierneisel protects a global corporation like Volkswagen from hacker attacks. She works for Cymotive.

Even as a teenager, she wanted to become an astronaut. But that can wait for a while now. Because Annemike Vierneisel is already moving in spheres that seem like distant galaxies or parallel worlds to normal people. And she has a mission. Not a space mission, but a cyber mission. The 26-year-old is an employee of Cymotive, a partner company of Volkswagen based in Wolfsburg. Sounds exciting? It is. And a bit shrouded in mystery.

Blue team fights against red team

The security expert with roots in Knesebeck is a "cyber security architect" and - that is fair to predict - is set for a fast and stellar career. Vierneisel and her female colleagues (there are three more women at the Cymotive branch in Wolfsburg) as well as her male colleagues protect the IT systems of the networked vehicles of the global corporation Volkswagen, among others, against hacker attacks and industrial espionage. Who or what is Cymotive Technologies? A look at the company's homepage helps with a self-assessment: "We believe that no cyber problems are the same and every security challenge requires its own tweaks and tricks. This is why we offer our clients tailor made problem solving strategies, fortified by our unique Purple approach. Both ensure that every problem is tackled hermetically and holistically. Comprised of some of the industry's sharpest cyber calibers working closely together across Israel and Germany, CYMOTIVE brings to OEMs and Tier-1s a holistic offensive(red)-defensive(blue) approach which has proven itself as the most effective in coping with the evolving threats of Automotive Cyber Security. Our Red and Blue security experts work hand in hand to secure your consumers, fleet and brand from cyber threats. "

An Israel Connection with Intelligence Background

That sounds dashing, self-confident and bold. The "sharpest cyber caliber" - these are also the three managers who founded the company together with Volkswagen. CYMOTIVE Technologies was co-founded in 2016 by Volkswagen Group and top-tier Israeli security experts (Yuval Diskin, Tsafirir Kats, and Dr. Tamir Bechor). The fusion of their expertise, knowledge, and experience is leveraged to address the increasing security needs of the automotive industry, in order to facilitate the advancement of disruptive technologies in the New Mobility arena.," according to the company's website. Volkswagen's partner company is headquartered in Israel, a nation that is a leader in data-based defense and infrastructure technology. Among the Red and Blue security experts (red are the bad attackers, blue are the good defenders) is Annemike Vierneisel. The young woman has already gained an astonishing amount of international experience. After studying Computer Sciences and IT Security at the Technical University of Darmstadt, she specialized for future work in the field of the new Smart Mobility. To this end, she received funding from Bosch, Continental,

Huawei, Deutsche Bahn and Ferchau Engineering, and was also involved as a female mentor in various programs. She was also a member of the board of the TU Darmstadt Racing Team e.V. Motorsport is her great passion. In passing, the security architect also mentions that she studied a bit of Chinese and that cryptography is not an empty concept for her.

"The standard is high and it's totally fun"

"We all basically work independently. My colleagues come from all around the world, the environment is international. The standard is high and it's totally fun," Vierneisel reports. If there is anything to criticize, it is the male bias in the industry. Cymotive is willing to change that - if suitable female candidates can be found. The collaboration with carmaker Volkswagen and other customers is intensive, so the cybersecurity specialists must and will be involved at an early stage. The more the Wolfsburg based company moves operationally into the area of autonomous driving, the more important is the expertise of Vierneisel and Co. "We have to understand the hazardous situation. That's very exciting," Vierneisel remains vague. No wonder: hackers could cause very significant economic damage and even endanger customers' lives if attacks are successful. It is much like the race between the hare and the tortoise that can determine the weal and woe of even very large corporations. Particularly in Wolfsburg, where the future of mobility should start with the new factory in Warmenau and the Trinity e-limousine geared to autonomous Level 4, the utmost importance will be attached to a strong "blue" defense team. Vierneisel is one of them. And for that, she'll gladly postpone her first trip into space by a few years.