

FLUENT® Provides Heat For Supercharging Stations

The purchase of a single FLUENT in-line heater knocked over the first of a series of dominoes that led to a larger sale and the latest example of Watlow's growing business relationship with the electric carmaker.

Earlier this year, the company purchased and tested standard FLUENT in-line heater after reviewing its specifications on Watlow's website. A sales lead was generated and forwarded to the inside sales team. Sensing that a larger sale could be possible, it was forwarded to Steve Ornellas, outside sales engineer. He followed up with the company and started looking into the sales opportunity.

The company was looking for a heater to incorporate into the company's growing network of Supercharger stations. The cars generally have a range of 200-300 miles on a full battery. To enable using the cars for long road trips, the company is building a network of fast charging stations across the U.S. and Canada. The stations can charge a battery 50 percent in about 20 minutes and 100 percent in a little more than an hour.

To maximize the performance of the charging stations, the company was looking for an efficient way to keep the charging equipment at a constant temperature. A coolant in the handle needs to be heated or cooled — depending on weather conditions.

For heating, the company had the challenge to find a solution which could fit in a very small footprint but could also meet the very demanding hipot test required as part of the high voltage charging process. After validating thermal performance with the standard product, Watlow proposed a solution which would meet the stringent electrical requirements and easily integrate in the system fluid path. The company purchased 60 prototypes of this FLUENT heater for system validation.

“We tested them all and they passed 100 percent. We even showed the customer our meter and images of the heaters being tested,” Steve said. “We demonstrated that we were truly listening to them, taking their specifications seriously and being transparent. They really appreciated that attention and it helped the project move along.”

Previously, Watlow worked with the company as a supplier for a Japanese company that installed equipment in a very large manufacturing facility. And about two years ago, the company's engineers had questions about a FIREROD they had purchased.

“They reached out to us and asked us to do some computer modeling, so we helped them do analysis on the heater without it being part of a sale,” Steve said. “Giving world class service creates goodwill, but it also has built a good name for us within the company, and now they turn to us when they have thermal needs.”