



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (10/10/06)
SPE-ACCE-06-06

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EXPANDED PROGRAM LEADS TO RECORD-BREAKING ATTENDANCE AT SPE[®] AUTOMOTIVE COMPOSITES CONFERENCE

***6th-Annual ACCE Conference Featured More Papers, Keynote Presentations,
Networking Receptions, Sponsors, Exhibit Space, & Attendance***

TROY (DETROIT), MICH. – This year's **SPE[®] Automotive Composites Conference & Exhibition** (ACCE) – sponsored jointly by the SPE Automotive and Composites Divisions on September 12-14, here – featured a significantly expanded program, with more technical papers (60), keynote presentations (8), panel discussions (3), networking receptions (2), sponsors (50), and exhibit space (5 rooms, with overflow into the atrium) than any previous show in the event's 6-year history. The event also drew record attendance.

One factor that may have driven higher attendance at this year's conference was the strong showing by molders and materials suppliers of sheet-molding compound (SMC) composites. Although this thermoset technology was well represented in the ACCE's first few years – a time when there was much discussion about then-new tough-Class A grades that solved long-standing issues with paint defects – over the past few years, thermoplastic composite technologies such as long-fiber thermoplastics (LFT) and glass-mat thermoplastics (GMT) had been more prominent in the show's technical program and exhibition area.

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Despite its several-year absence, SMC was clearly the dominant composite technology at this year's ACCE, with a full day of technical papers, a panel discussion on the benefits and challenges of thermoset composites led by the Automotive Composite Alliance (ACA) President, Gary Lansettle (who also works for Ashland Chemical Company), and a keynote address from Dr. Jeff Helms at Ford Motor Company outlining the past, present, and future of thermoset automotive composites. The day was capped off by a networking reception hosted by the ACA. There were also 7 ACA-member companies – representing materials and molding technologies – exhibiting at the show in a special area: AOC LLC; Ashland Chemical Company; Bulk Molding Compounds, Inc.; Continental Structural Plastics; Meridian Automotive Systems; and Reichold Chemicals; as well as the ACA and its parent organization, the American Composites Manufacturers Association. Another SMC molder – Molded Fiber Glass Companies – was a sponsor (but not exhibitor) at the show. During the show's first day, additional SMC parts—some especially large – were on display in the conference center's atrium.

Another attraction at this year's conference that helped draw attendance was a particularly strong and varied program of keynote speakers. The conference began with an address by Dr. Michael Fisher of the American Plastics Council speaking about factors that will drive increased composites use in passenger vehicles. He noted that despite being light, safe, and economical, polymer composites will not achieve widespread penetration in vehicles without a broad collaboration between industry, governments, and universities. After lunch, Avinash Salelkar of TATA Consultancy Services Ltd. spoke about not only the benefits to manufacturers of outsourcing to India, but also just how attractive the burgeoning Indian market should be for those selling goods and services there. As previously noted, the day's last keynote was delivered by Helms who chronicled the evolution of thermoset composites (particularly SMC) in the automotive industry and what the future likely held for such materials.

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The conference's second day opened with an address by attorney William Abbatt of Brooks Kushman P.C. on the importance of protecting a company's intellectual property portfolio and some legal strategies that can be employed to achieve this. After lunch, Dr. Rob Backhouse of McLaren Automotive described the groundbreaking design and manufacture of the Mercedes Benz SLR McLaren supercar, a carbon-fiber-reinforced (CFR) composites-intensive vehicle that meets global crashworthiness standards. The late-afternoon keynote was given by Rogelio Sullivan of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) FreedomCAR Project. Sullivan described some of DOE's failed and successful programs to help drive the cost of carbon-fiber production down to facilitate its broader use in composite parts for the auto industry.

On the show's third day, Nobuya Kawamura of Toyota Motor Corporation talked about the challenges and opportunities offered by increasing the carbon-fiber content of passenger vehicles and some of the strategies what will need to be employed to do that. The day's last keynote was presented by Boeing Commercial Airplanes' James Griffing, who gave the audience a virtual tour of the CFR-composites-intensive 787 Dreamliner and spoke about some of the design, tooling, and production challenges of making such large composite parts.

Planning for next year's conference is already underway. The event is scheduled for September 11-13, 2007 and a call for papers has already been issued.

The mission of SPE is to promote scientific and engineering knowledge relating to plastics. SPE's Automotive and Composites Divisions work to advance plastics and plastic-based composites technologies worldwide and to educate industry, academia, and the public about these advances. Both divisions are dedicated to educating, promoting, recognizing, and communicating technical accomplishments for all phases of plastics and plastic based-composite developments, including applications, materials, processing, equipment, tooling, design, and development.

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For more information about the SPE Automotive Composites Conference, visit the Composites' Division website at www.4spe.org/communities/divisions/d39.php, or the Automotive Division's website at www.speautomotive.com, or contact the group at +1.248.244.8993, or write SPE Automotive Division, 1800 Crooks Road, Suite A, Troy, MI 48084, USA.

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