

Not often you see this on your in-flight monitor!

Top of the World

I did try to take a picture out of the window. But there really is no marker at the North Pole: no flag, no Superman hideaway, no Santa's workshop. The only way to prove I was there (fleeting) was to capture the moment on-screen. Pilots do it every day, of course, and I've passed this way a number of times shuttling between continents and clients but it made me marvel at the trust we place in our modern machines. After all, what separated us at that moment from a long, cold trek home (assuming we could survive the drop) were basically two engines and a large aluminum tube. Their reliability and performance comes down to good design and quality of execution.

And while sitting momentarily at the top of the world reflecting on where I am heading for the next few years, it is clear that the same applies to anyone working

in rotomolding. Survival and growth is easiest for those rotomolders who have set up high quality, reliable production operations. They perform above the rest and many are currently enjoying a surge in orders, which has not been seen for some time. Some are fortunate to simply have the right products in strong markets but some have developed their capabilities over the last few years in preparation for this resurgence in demand. Some of the key areas that they have focused on include:

Process Understanding – developing someone on staff who understands what goes on in a mold during the cycle and I don't mean someone that can recite the settings on the machine control panel. A form of temperature measuring system is available. They can make correlations between cook time and strength, the effect of demolding temperature on part size and



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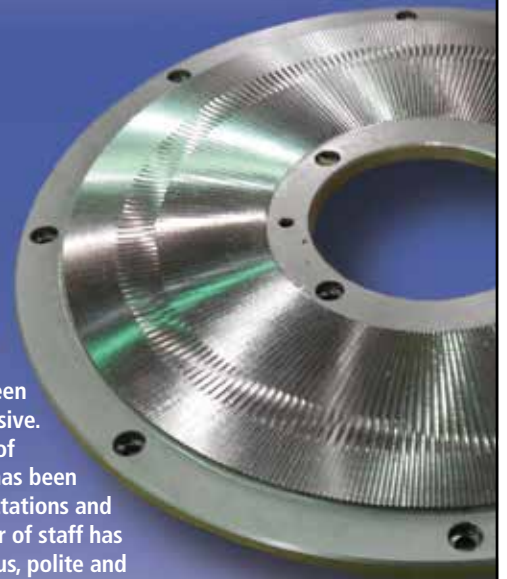
properties, the proper use of release agent and so on.

Quality Understanding – someone on staff who actually understands what the final requirements of a product should be in terms of performance, finish, color, etc. they work hard to establish go-no-go points in the process to prevent defects from passing down the production line. They make sure that everyone is involved.

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Material Understanding – someone on staff who knows the meaning of material properties and which variables affect the choice of grade for a particular product based on processability and long term performance. They conduct in-house capability studies for parameters such as optimum molding cycles, shrinkage and strength factors.

Design Understanding – someone on staff who can connect the worlds of processing and design to prevent difficult molds from reaching operators. They understand not only form but also the effects of creep, UV and chemical exposure on materials.

And their work pays off as the customers who need this quality and reliability are the ones most willing to pay for it. It may seem obvious but it is still amazing to see the gap between the molders who have been working on these resources and those who stick to the 'bucket and chuck-it' approach.

Get Your Hands-On Advanced Materials

This year's Hands-On rotomolding seminar at Pennsylvania College in Williamsport is all set for May 19-20. The course content builds on the successful format of the last six years which is designed to demonstrate the importance of material preparation, proper process control and part testing with a new additional workshop and classroom session focused on advanced materials. This additional workshop will demonstrate multi-layer systems including two layer solid and two layer foamed cross-sections. The additional class work will look at materials beyond the normal polyethylene palette including new biopolymers, flexible grades and clear polypropylene. Expanding the range of possibilities for molders is a key factor in raising the profile of rotomolding and opening up new opportunities so it should be of interest to all molders. Space on the course is limited and the event sold out quickly last year – find out more at www.ptc.edu/pirc/workshops.asp.

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This is the 42nd article in this series that I have written for *RotoWorld*® Magazine over the last seven years. It's a significant number. Not least because it is the answer to "Life, the Universe and Everything" (only Hitchhiker fans are with me at this point – of course, they never did find out what the actual question was although my favorite from those put forth by aficionados is, "What is the answer to 9 x 6?"). More so because much of what I work on is confidential and the pool of available new topics dwindles accordingly (along with the old gray matter). I love to tell a story but it is becoming harder to write them and I am forever late. Susan ranks as the most patient publishers on the planet and I must drive her mad with last minute submissions – I am indebted to her forbearance! 