

South African Recharge

After a seven-year absence, Orla needed her safari fix, so we took the opportunity while attending the ARMSA event near Johannesburg in March. If ever there is a bucket list item, then tracking through the African bush in search of the Big Five is a must. As you can see, the experience can be breath-takingly close. We've had leopard, lion, rhino, elephant and buffalo all within a few feet of us on an open top jeep on numerous occasions, sometimes close enough to touch – if you wanted to lose a hand or arm that is! The environment is wild and the animals live uninterrupted with all their natural interactions.

Except that is for the rhino. You know the situation is precarious when the guide asks that you don't take pictures with your cellphone for fear of geo-positioning data on the image being posted online. More than 1000 per year are slaughtered for their horns for the imagined effects that are claimed for their properties – there are only 5000 black rhino and 20,000 white rhino left. The other species are so low that they are on the brink of extinction. If conservation and consumer demand do not change rapidly, it will not be long before we no longer see these lumbering giants roaming free. The good news is that the Chinese government is making moves to ban animal parts – the hardest part will be to change deeply ingrained culture.

Amazing wildlife experiences notwithstanding, the ARMSA annual Rotation event attracted a very healthy attendance of 87 molders and suppliers. This remote outpost of the rotomolding

world is very congenial with an almost family atmosphere. The industry is small with around 40-50 molders in the South African region but growing due to an unprecedented drought which has been on-going for the last three years. The effect has placed restrictions on usage to just 50 litres/day (13 US gallons) which has driven a huge demand for water tanks. The situation is reminiscent of the Australian boom and bust in the late 00s but without government incentives for



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buying tanks, molders are hopeful that the demand will not dry up suddenly when the rain does eventually come.

We took the opportunity to visit with some local companies and stopped to see local material supplier Clive Robertson of ACD Rotoflo and his well-designed compounding operation. According to Clive, there are also a number of molders in every country in the sub-Saharan region using a total of around 55,000 tons per year. We also visited with leading

molder Pioneer Plastics with their huge range of custom molded parts. The Wiid family has been running their operation for over 30 years and the new generation of management has brought experience from local automotive companies to bear: CNC molds and sophisticated scheduling software are some of the more obvious improvements. Rod Cairns of JoJo tanks was kind enough to give us a tour of their new super-plant for making water tanks. They have their own approach to the process and designed an operation to suit their demand – I hope it kicks into gear as planned. Best of luck to all in SA!


Norwegian Chill-Out

I've said it before but I'll say it again, I remain convinced that Ronny Ervik and his team at Nordic ARM compete to see where the coldest place and time can possibly be for their annual event. When you spend as much time in the tropics as we do, the transition from +34°C (93°F) to -17°C (1°F) can be quite brisk! However, it didn't put the Viking die-hards off and there was a record attendance of over 120 from all over Scandinavia and beyond at their meeting in Oslo in February.

Set in a luxurious hotel close to Oslo airport, the event was very informative with several

mind-stretching presentations on a new design of an electrical oven from Norway and new simulation software being developed in Germany among others. There was also a push for an industry wide recycling initiative to help support molders for both in-process and end-of-life reprocessing of materials and parts. It will be interesting to see where this goes – I think the community feel of the Scandinavian group may well help the drive. Overall the market seems to

be quite healthy with fish tubs, boats and water treatment/recycling systems continuing to be strong, although some OEM sectors were reported to be slower. CIPAX AS is one of the largest molders in the region with several facilities and a long history dating back to the earliest days of rotomolding; they were kind enough to allow a tour of their facilities for the conference attendees. It is always good to see molding operations and theirs did not disappoint – they have some impressive sizes of boats in production.

The close of the event had an emotional tinge as Ronny Ervik announced his retirement as President of the Nordic group. He has been a beacon for the industry for many years and it will be hard to find a successor. Good luck Ronny but don't go too far away, we'll miss your entertaining quizzes if you do! Day 9788. 



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