

Hamburg Well Done



Filip Claus of Plastigi NV Demonstrating their Fully Automated Molding Operation

The weather was amazing, the attendance was great and the show was as punchy as ever. With more than 550 attendees treated to the sight of live rotomolding machines, multiple technical presentations and an expanded trade show, the Hamburg ARMO event lived up to billing as the main event of the year. The European style of conference is packed with talks (38 plus workshops) and a simultaneous trade show which provides a lot of information – the two days fly by while meeting old friends and hearing about the latest and greatest in the industry. It never seems enough though and I always leave with regrets about not having time to speak to more people for longer – you always seem to miss someone. You also have to decide whether to listen to the speakers or go to the tradeshow as the group is split between the two – perhaps future events can separate them for at least part of the time.

The over-riding theme was robotics and automation with no less than four companies presenting or demonstrating partially or fully automated molding system. There was a new system from Roto Evolution with molds mounted in steel cages shaped like balls so that they can be rotated in a compact heating/cooling unit and then be picked up using a robot to be moved to a demolding station. AMS Robotics demonstrated their five axis Robomould system with direct electrical heating. Persico and Hengelo also presented details of their direct heating systems for complex molds: there were even rumors of 3D printed molds but no details emerged. It is clear that there is a push for improving the labor component in rotomolding as the world faces dramatic changes in demographics, particularly in high-cost regions such as Europe. The good news attached to this is that these systems also improve the high-end image of the process with other molding

processes and potential discerning customers. It will be interesting, however, to see how much of it trickles down into mainstream rotomolding across the world.

A trip to Europe would not be complete without some sightseeing and visiting friends, so Orla and I had a quick tour of The Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal and Italy. We were fortunate enough to be able to visit with two 'A+' molders, namely Pentas Moulding BV and Plastigi NV, both of whom continue to push the boundaries of rotomolding. Pentas have approached the process from a high-quality perspective for many years and it is always pleasing to see the effect that technical minds can have on the process. Plastigi have invested a lot of time and effort in fully robotized systems for their proprietary products and have managed to overcome many hurdles on the way to a fully operational system – it's amazing what you can find at the end of a quiet lane in a sleepy village in Belgium...

Light Reading

Travelling allows for a lot of thinking and reading time. For those of you interested in ways to interpret our daily onslaught of information and turn it into useful ideas, two new books have recently inspired me: "Factfulness" by Hans Rosling and "Elastic" by Leonard Mlodinow.

Professor Rosling's book, Factfulness, is truly an eye-opener. His background as a global health educator is put to great use in presenting data on the human condition and state of the planet. The facts will surprise you as he has shown people all around the world for many years. He entertainingly shows why most people have a wrong view of the world and why things are actually much better than we think, condensing our presumptions into ten instincts. For example, he points out that we all suffer from gap instincts – we divide the world into extremes, them and us, incorrectly assuming that the world is

divided into Developed and Developing. We have negativity instincts – the human disposition assumes the worst, something that is often reinforced by the 24-hour news cycle. The complete list is highly informative and he ends by providing a toolbox to help people step back and understand data, news and reports in context, how to ask the right questions and never to take news and data at face-value. Highly recommended.

Elastic is a little more cerebral (pun intended). It deals with the latest brain science which is opening up our understanding of the complexity of brain structures and how we think. The old saying that we only use 10% of our brain is patently not true – the sub-conscious brain is always at work in the background (or below) the conscious brain. Part of our higher-level brain, the prefrontal cortex, exerts a cognitive grip and can inhibit free thought from flowing between them

based on our life experiences. As a child the prefrontal cortex is less developed and as a result, children have fewer inhibitions and hence have a freer flow of ideas. Stimulating the flow of ideas and returning to this child-like state can be helpful not only to the individual but to problem solving teams. Mlodinow offers some ideas to improve creative thinking: tiring the conscious mind through repetitive tasks, mind-altering drugs which weaken cognitive filters, a positive attitude to life and understanding how your brain works can help you select when best to apply yourself to free thinking. While most people have a peak period for work during the day (being a morning or evening person is real) – elastic thinking often peaks at the opposite end of the day. Spend time free-thinking when you least feel engaged to work – you may come up with something surprising!

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