

CLEANER RACING

Five years on from the NEC's first 'green' conference, the impact on the environment is a priority



DOLZLAT

Baretzky, Gow and Fishel (inset, l-r) outline the need to showcase cleaner motorsport

ENGINEERING INNOVATORS

ASI AWARD TO PIONEERS OF GREEN TECHNOLOGY

THE ENGINEERING section might not be the most visually exciting aspect of Autosport International, but it is one of the most important.

Development and the search for performance are what make our sport so dynamic, and the show is the place where many deals are done.

Almost 1000 exhibitors turned out this year, providing a good reminder of just how many specialist companies are crucial

to the motorsport world. From test-rig manufacturers to transmission specialists, via leading electronics firms, the breadth and depth of companies at the show was impressive. There were some big names too, including Cosworth and McLaren, but the star of the show was perhaps Flybrid Systems LLP.

Flybrid won the Best Technical Innovation award at the show for its Kinetic Energy Recovery

System (KERS). It uses a flywheel hybrid system to store energy under braking, which it then gives back under acceleration, boosting efficiency and performance. The device is eligible for the proposed Formula 1 regulations for 2009.

Flybrid's Jon Hilton says KERS could have uses beyond motorsport: "In F1 it will make the car faster, but in a road car it can be used to save petrol

because you use stored power to accelerate instead of petrol.

"In racing the driver activates the use of the energy by pressing a button, but in a road car it could be automatic."

KERS has yet to be tested on an F1 car, but Hilton says Flybrid has the support of an unnamed manufacturer-backed F1 team, which proves the significance of the technology that appeared at Autosport Engineering.

Back in 2003 the Motorsport Industry Association (MIA) hosted the first European Cleaner Racing Conference at Autosport International. This year, the conference was held for a second time against a vastly different backdrop, with the environment at the top of the worldwide agenda.

The four original speakers from that first conference – former Chevrolet motorsport boss Herb Fishel, MSA chairman Alan Gow, Audi engine wizard Ulrich Baretzky and MIA chief executive Chris Aylett – returned to take a look at what had happened over the past five years.

"The four of us who spoke at the last conference spent half an hour admitting what went wrong and what's gone right," says Aylett. "And we had the original recordings! On the face of it, motorsport has made progress and in a way you could say we had done quite well. But the negative is that the wider world has exploded its interest in terms of security, global warming, oil etc at a faster rate than motorsport, and the feeling is that we've not done enough."

It would be tempting to assume that the tone of the conference might be a little self-congratulatory, but that is far from the truth. And, with that approach, good progress was made during the day at a conference that had representatives from all over the motorsport world.

"It was a wake-up call for a lot of people," says Baretzky, who has been at the forefront of Audi's diesel Le Mans success and the development of the particle filter used in the engine. "I got a lot of response later on from people saying that we'd opened their eyes, and now they know how big the threat and the challenges are. We need to speed up our progress otherwise motorsport is dead. If motorsport is not ahead technologically, it has no right to be here."

And that's inevitably the most persuasive argument for the motorsport industry because, no matter what your perspective on environmental issues, if your lifeblood is threatened you need to take action. Even NASCAR, which was represented at the conference, is starting to realise the scale of the problem. And this is a series that has only recently switched to unleaded petrol!

"This is a problem the Americans are beginning to see," says Baretzky. "Until now they saw it as entertainment, but now it's socially relevant. That's why Audi went to Le Mans with a diesel and then transferred some of the technology to production cars."

Another major player in new technologies is Richard Karlstetter, Shell's global technology manager for racing fuels. Shell has introduced its experimental diesel-fuel technologies into Audi's sportscar campaign over the past two years. "We are focused on product technology and motorsport is one of the best platforms to demonstrate what will come to the road," he says. "We took the first drops of biomass to liquid fuel as a component for diesel and took it onto the racetrack. We proved its power and performance and took that to the road later."

So it seems motorsport does have a place in the future. But the overwhelming response to the conference is that motorsport needs to do better, and not be satisfied with the progress it has made over the past five years. ■

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