

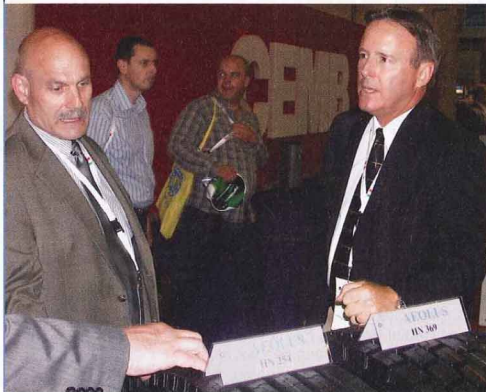
Open for business

Despite tough economy, Autopromotec brings buyers and sellers together

By Mike Manges

Despite being held during a particularly intense global economic recession, the 2009 edition of Autopromotec drew a record number of attendees (101,620), 2.4% more than the last edition of the show, which was held in 2007.

This year's edition of Autopromotec — which was staged in Bologna, Italy — also boasted 1,443 exhibitors, 2.8% more than 2007 and another record for the event, which bills itself as the premier business-to-business automotive trade show in the world.



American visitors Randy Groh of U.S. AutoForce (left) and Michael Cox of the Independent Tire Dealers Group LLC talk business during Autopromotec 2009.

Broken down further, approximately 16,689 attendees came from outside Italy, while more than 460 exhibitors were from abroad.

"In a period of crisis, this exhibition has better figures than it generated during boom periods," Renzo Servadei, Autopromotec's managing director, told attendees.

Foreign visitors included several American tire dealers, such as Bob Purcell, chairman of Purcell Tire & Rubber Co.; Randy Groh, vice president of product marketing for Combined Locks, Wis.-based U.S. AutoForce; and Michael Cox, CEO and president of the Independent Tire Dealers Group LLC (ITDG). Groh and Cox were part of a special

delegation sponsored by the Italian Trade Commission. The businessmen used the show as an opportunity to make new business contacts and in some cases, wheel and deal.

More than 25 tire companies from around the globe — plus numerous tire and garage equipment, retread equipment, and garage tool manufacturers and marketers — displayed their wares during Autopromotec.

Tire brands on display included labels that currently are marketed in the U.S. — such as Federal, Kenda, Vredestein, Nokian and Wanli — plus lesser-known brands like Sacco, an OTR line made in Italy, and Radburg, a consumer tire line built in Romania.

From Italy to you

More than 50% of all tire changers, balancers and alignment machines sold worldwide are manufactured in "The Italian Motor Valley," which encompasses Bologna and several other cities in the northern part of the country, according to Autopromotec officials.



Corgi displayed tire changers, balancers, alignment machines and other equipment at the event. The company plans to bring its aligners to the North American market in 2010.

Forty-three percent of all replacement tires sold in Europe, whether passenger or medium truck, are retreads, according to Bipaver, the association for the European Union's retread industry. Some 7.5 million retreads are produced in Europe each year, roughly half the size of the U.S. retread market.

During Autopromotec, Claudio Spiritelli, Corgi's director of U.S. operations, shared Corgi's plans for the North American market with *Modern Tire Dealer*.

"We are not limiting ourselves at all" in terms of new product introductions, said Spiritelli. Corgi currently sells tire changers and balancers in North America and will bring its alignment machines to the domestic market in 2010. "We know aligners are an important part of the North American market."

He also discussed training programs at Corgi's Hamilton, Ohio, facility, which opened in mid-May. The company offers training for both Corgi equipment end users and technicians who service its machines. "We can train up to 30 people at the same time."

Corgi will inventory 5,000 spare parts in Hamilton with same-day shipping to service centers. "We also are directly linked to Italy" and can source and deliver products from its home office within 48 hours.

Spiritelli said Corgi will continue to sell through its current network of distributors in the U.S., including Myers Tire Supply and other companies.

Companies that supply ancillary tire shop products had their day in the sun, as well. One of them was Parker Filtration and Separation B.V., which displayed its new Mobile TyreSaver nitrogen inflation "gun."