

Does the ASME Turbo Expo really need the OEMs?

GET THOSE COMPANIES THAT WILL BENEFIT FROM THE CONFERENCE'S TECHNICAL DEPTH



The ASME Turbo Expo remains the pre-eminent scientific and engineering forum devoted to turbomachinery practice – from pure research to product design, development and application. Simply put, there is no other venue that attracts the caliber of attendees for such an extended period of time as does the Turbo Expo, and the industry must find a way to insure its growth.

In asking folks what they thought of this year's conference held in Vienna, July 14-17, the overwhelming response was that the technical presentations were first class. The panel sessions did draw some criticism as being more commercial than intended and lacking in the availability of presentation material. However, panels do serve the purpose of providing some timely commercial context on a broad range of topics, which is otherwise difficult to capture within the schedule and confines of a formal paper.

The other general observation from the Expo is the notion that technology has reached a temperature plateau and that we were either revisiting issues or were focused on relatively small incremental gain.

There were over 740 presentations made during the three-day event. So it is quite difficult to provide a broad range of commentary on "industry trends." But the most obvious change in content from years past was the substantially increased emphasis and awareness on CO₂ capture and sequestration, coupled with a number of discussions on the advanced cycles that are headed in that direction.

In addition, there appeared to be an added emphasis on durability, with the presentations showing condition monitoring and predictive methods being extended and calibrated with operational data. The Distributed Generation discussions did not offer much new technical content as the microturbine incumbents are clearly focused on demonstrating commercial viability of previous efforts.

There were two new entrants each with a unique cycle. Mitsui Engineering & Shipbuilding International presented an intercooled and recuperated cycle based upon a Russian helicopter engine. This cycle featured a counter-rotating axial turbine at 400kW with 36 percent efficiency. Hitachi presented a humid-air cycle at 150kW with a goal of 35 percent efficiency.

Fuel Cell hybrid concepts continued to attract attention. But the presentations were

largely analytical, rather than directed toward tangible product designs or demonstrations. Rolls-Royce did make a presentation on the status of its 1MW pressurized Solid Oxide Fuel Cell-Micro Turbine Hybrid, intended for demonstration in 2007.

Of continuing concern is the overall direction of the Turbo Expo and the declining OEM presence at the exposition itself. It is no secret that the exposition revenue has supported the conference. The reason for this decline is the obvious lack of end-user presence at the conference, which has been complicated by the industry consolidation. These combine to limit OEM presence and therefore the booth revenue. There is also a concern that the event has become too academic and lacking in focus on practical application.

News Flash!!! The OEMs are not coming back to the exposition! There are better venues for them and we all know that.

It is time to stop playing "woe is me!" and to focus the exposition on attracting companies for whom the interaction with key technical and scientific leaders in our industry is valuable. These would be the design services and component suppliers at a minimum, but there are others to be sure.

Granted, this will not generate the same level of revenue that the OEMs had provided. Expo costs will have to be brought in line with reduced revenue expectations and conference attendees may have to pick up the slack.

It is important to establish a "defensible perimeter" on conference content to insure enough scope to maintain interest and attendance levels. This perimeter has to be a renewed level of commitment to innovative and advanced concepts in the application of turbomachinery to the issues of strategic or world concern, without which the Turbo Expo runs the risk of a further decline in its relevance.

The 50th anniversary of the Turbo Expo and ASME's 125th year of existence will be celebrated at the conference in Reno, Nevada, next June. It would be a good idea to do a critical audit of the proposed program content to insure that the program is of greater interest in this area. **TI**

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