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Automotive Experts Discuss ‘Surviving in a World of Change’ at GAAS 2007

Research Triangle Park, N.C. -- Automotive aftermarket leaders heard from peers and industry experts about “Survival in a Changing Aftermarket” at the 2007 Global Automotive Aftermarket Symposium (GAAS), held on May 8 and May 9 at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare, Chicago, Ill.

William A. Strauss, senior economist and economic advisor, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, opened the Symposium with a presentation titled, “Survival in a Global Economy... Winners and Losers.” In addition to providing an overview of the factors affecting the U.S. economy, he noted, “The light vehicle market is anticipated to be very similar to the last several years. Sales should be around the mid-16 million unit mark with challenges remaining for the more fuel-inefficient models.”

Nancy Fein, vice president of customer services, Lexus, discussed “What Can We Learn about Service from Lexus?” In her address she urged attendees to look outside the automotive industry for ways to innovate the customer experience. “By exceeding customer expectations from the beginning,” she stated, “you will create a competitive advantage, customer loyalty and engaged associates.”

Bob Lutz, vice chairman, global product development, General Motors gave a luncheon presentation where he discussed fuel efficiency and safety technology. He commented, “There is no one solution to ending the nation’s dependence on oil, but we at GM advocate for energy diversity, including diesel, hybrid and fuel cell technology.”

Dennis DesRosiers, DesRosiers Automotive Consultants, presented “It’s a New Ballgame: Which Team Is Winning the Service and Repair Battle?” In discussing the war taking place for consumer’s aftermarket dollars, said “the biggest threat to the traditional aftermarket today is the growth of import nameplate vehicles and the power of their dealer body.”

In “From 2 Wheels to 4 Wheels at Break Neck Speed... What’s Ahead from the Next generation of Customers,” Cynthia Cohen, founder and president, Strategic Mindshare

discussed the buying preferences and spending habits of tweens, the consumer group she named the “Speeders.”

John Nielsen, national director, Approved Auto Repair network, AAA, opened the GAAS program on May 9 with his presentation, “Meeting the Needs of Today’s Vehicle Owners.” Citing AAA’s extensive consumer research and focus groups, he emphasized open and honest communication as the key to building successful customer relationships.

Kelly McDonald, president, McDonald Marketing urged attendees in her presentation, “Relating, Not Translating: How to Market to U.S. Latinos,” to “learn about the Latino market today and get the competitive edge for tomorrow.”

Jay Burkhart, vice president of global marketing, Federal-Mogul, updated GAAS attendees on the “Be Car Care Aware” program by discussing the program management, consumer publicity, the “Car Care Guide” and the next steps for the program.

The two-day program also included panel discussions:

- Dave Caracci, chairman, University of the Aftermarket Foundation, moderated a panel discussion of “It’s A Global Aftermarket After All: A Multinational Perspective.” Panelists were: David Coolidge, president, Automotive Aftermarket Division Robert Bosch Corporation and Executive Vice President - North America, of the Global Automotive Aftermarket Division of the Bosch Group; Richard Shiozaki, senior vice president, DENSO Sales California; Ricardo Vidal, partner, Grupo Omigron, S.A. de C.V. Labour Consultants Group; and Wolfgang Winzer, vice president, Siemens VDO.
- Steve Handschuh, president and COO of the Automotive Aftermarket Suppliers Association (AASA), led a panel titled, “Do You Know Where You Are Going To?” Panelists included: Rusty Bishop, president, Federated Auto Parts; Larry Magee, CEO and president, BFS Retail & Commercial Operations LLC; Peter Morse, president, Morse Automotive; and Dave Mueller, executive vice president, merchandising and marketing, Advance Auto Parts.
- Ron Pyle, president, Automotive Service Association, moderated the panel discussion, “Changing the Culture in Aftermarket Training: Perspective of the Independent Repairer.” Panelists were: Douglass Kirchdorfer, AAM, DowningStreet Garage; Victor Tarasik, Vic’s Precision Automotive; Bill Tyson, Bill Tyson’s Auto Repair; and George Witt, AAM, George Witt Service Inc.
- Keith Pretty, president and CEO, Northwood University led a panel at discussed “Technology Standards for a Flat, Fast and Efficient Aftermarket.” Panelists were: Andreas Assmann, vice president information management/consulting, TecDoc Informations System GmbH; Jim Gerber, AP Exhaust Products; and Nick Porrini, president, Technologue Inc.
- The University of the Aftermarket Leadership 2.0 Team Competition presented two teams’ ideas for “How to Survive in the Changing Aftermarket.” Team G2 members were: Jeff Blocher, Affinia Group; Aaron Fisk, APH Warehouse; Don McEntee, SKF; and Michael Schwab, NGK. Team QUADRIVIUM members

were: Bryan Funke, R.L. Polk; Gerald Kottke, Delphi; Dan Rader, CARQUEST; David Redeker, Federal-Mogul; Tim Sturdevant, S.A.E. Warehouse
GAAS sponsor R.L. Polk & Co. presented its Aftermarket Inventory Efficiency Awards for excellence in two categories: Retailer/Distributor and Manufacturer. In the Retailer/Distributor category, NAPA was recognized for its achievements. In the Manufacturer category, Dayco received the honors.

The net proceeds from the event go toward funding industry scholarships. In 2007 the GAAS scholarship fund awarded a total of 154 students with scholarships, bringing the total number of recipients to more than 1,304 students, which represents over \$1.3 million in funding in its 13-year history. Details about the GAAS scholarship program are available at **www.automotivescholarships.com**.

The GAAS program is a joint professional education effort of the Alliance of State Automotive Aftermarket Associations (ASAAA), Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association (AAIA), Automotive Aftermarket Suppliers Association (AASA), Automotive Industries Association (AIA) of Canada, Automotive Parts Rebuilders Association (APRA), Automotive Service Association (ASA), Automotive Warehouse Distributors Association (AWDA), Motorist Assurance Program (MAP), Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA), Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA), Tire Industry Association (TIA) and University of the Aftermarket.

The 2008 GAAS is set for Tuesday and Wednesday, May 20 -21, at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare, Chicago, Ill. Details will be announced at the Web site, **www.globalsymposium.org**.

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