

Adding Value Through Experience

December 2009

STAINLESS STEEL EXPO & CONFERENCE -REPORTBACK

Colleague Fiona Jacobs and I spent a very rewarding few days at a recent technical and trade expo in Europe. The objective of such a visit is keeping abreast of developments and contact with our suppliers. The snippets below are feedback - some observations which we believe are relevant



- 2 years ago there were a couple of mills promoting the 200 series because of the high nickel prices at the time. This year this feature was distinctly absent but the lean duplexes were prominent. And as we are discovering in South Africa there is more than 1!!

- Because it was of personal interest I looked for answers on the subtleties of the specifications for UNS S32750 and UNS S32760. A good insight was obtained. The battle of these super-duplexes continues.

- Watch out - the hyperduplexes are on the way!!! But as is often the case these developments take place selectively and thus most product forms in this class remain in the "UNOBTAINABLE" category.

- 2 comments on skills: From an American engineer "our piping designers either have less than 3 years experience or more than 20"; and from an Italian quality consultant "today's designers are IT specialists but lack knowledge of some of the engineering detail needed to ensure a successful project".

- One of the first questions asked of one after greeting a contact, old or new, was "....so how is business?". This was soon followed by ".... When do you think things will pick up?". In answer to this question the optimistic view seemed to be that the mechanical engineering market will improve from the latter part of 2010 but it will take a year and more for activity to reach 2007 levels.

- A lot of emphasis is being placed on high temperature alloys because of the trend towards higher operating temperatures in new fossil fuel power plants or the need to cope with severe corrosion conditions often present in co-generation or waste to energy plants.

- There was an interesting discussion on the use of the PRE number. A view expressed but not challenged by some of the mills who emphasise this measure, is that it is not meaningful to use PRE numbers to compare different classes of alloys. ie its usefulness is limited to comparisons of duplex alloys as a group or the austenitics as a group etc.

- Overall - it was pleasing to be well received by the range of partners we have in the supply chain; heartening to see that we as a company and the industry we are part of compares well with standards elsewhere in the world; but humbling to see that South Africa's role in the global stainless industry is minor.

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