



Post-Conference Interview with John Towle - Executive Director of PWA. *Uncensored!*

by Dick Van Cleve

(Editors note: John has asked me to run this interview without making it politically correct. He points out that he will not use any names, but if you recognize the comments, it mostly likely came from something involving you. He will not tell anyone the names so don't ask him.)

DVC: John, I would like to ask you a few questions about the 2008 PWA Conference and to get the "back story" on what went well and what did not go so well. Are you up for this?

JT: Sure Dick, our members need to know ALL of the details, good or bad.

DVC: I must have heard "Good job on the Conference John" a couple of dozen times so this must make you feel good.

JT: OK, let's put the record straight. Roxanne and Juanita did a GREAT job getting everything done. They handle everything from registration to room requests. My role is to handle the problems and to put out any fires and oversee the entire program. When we have an issue pop up, most of the time Roxanne can handle. But then there are those "special" moments, which require my participation. These moments are less every year. So the THANK YOU goes to Roxanne and Juanita. OK, let's continue.

DVC: How do you think the 2008 Conference went?

JT: According to everyone I spoke with during the week, the meetings were very positive. We have gone through tough times before like back in 1973 when OPEC cut oil production and the price of gas increased by 20 cents per gallon to put it at 42 cents... back in the early '80's when we had an oil supply problem and long gas lines at the pumps. But the "buzz" was very positive.

DVC: Did the WD attendance drop off this year compared to 2007?

JT: Interesting question, I've heard from many of our participants (mainly reps) that said to me the Conference must be down 20 to 30% in WD participation. Well here are the real numbers. In 2007 we had 46 WD companies attend and in 2008 we had 43. We would have had 44 but we have all heard about the last minute cancellation of one WD. So that makes it a 6.5% drop. Not 20% or 30%.

DVC: Then what about manufacturers?

JT: In 2007 we had 177 mfg's and 164 in 2008. A 7.4% drop. Not bad for the economic landscape we are in at this time.

DVC: What about total attendance then?

JT: In 2007, we had 748 people attend and the final count for 2008 we had 687. That's only a drop of 8.3%. Again, not the 20% - 30% you would hear in the walkways.

DVC: Seeing how the economy is at this time, these numbers actually show a positive picture for the Conference.

JT: Yes, with all of the exhibitors at the SEMA Show, it puts some pressure on the Conference. Many mfg's do not get the quality time with the buyers in Vegas so more are looking to have private meetings in Phoenix.

DVC: You said you were down in WD count, what is PWA doing to get more WD's to the Conference?

JT: We have just formed a "WD Task Force" who is charged with reviewing the membership criteria and to help find new REAL wd's who might want to attend. In fact, we are asking all of our member mfg's and rep's to send us a list of accounts that they feel we should talk with. Maybe we will see some new faces next year.

DVC: Did the Annual Golf Outing have a big drop off, and what about sponsors?

JT We had 100 golfers in 2007 and 92 in 2008, an 8% drop. Times are tough so we did not have any Goodie Bag sponsors and our Tee sponsors were down as well. PWA purchased extra door prizes and the good folks at Mahle Clevite gave away a \$900.00 Air Hockey Table. Jeff Bates won the Air Hockey Table and he is giving it to his church, I salute Jeff. Bushwacker sponsored the breakfast and TCI / Comp Cams sponsored the refreshments. Canton Racing gave away a \$25.00 gift certificate. Husky liners and G-Commerce added a dozen golf balls so all and all, we had some nice door prizes. We thank them all.

DVC: I see you held a first time orientation Sunday night. How did this go?

JT: Yes we did. In fact, this was the first time for this orientation and I thought we would have 3 or 4 people attend but we had over 40! I guess we will continue this next year.

DVC: Speaking of Sunday night, how was the Opening Reception?

JT: Well, I'm not sure. Roxanne and I are always working on room check-in problems and I have not been able to attend the SEMA sponsored event in years. From what I've heard, everyone had a great time and PWA

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