

Post-Conference Interview... *The Sequel!* with John Towle, Executive Director of PWA

by Dick Van Cleve



(Editor's note: Once again, 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 please don't ask him.)

DVC: John, I would like to ask you a few questions about the 2009 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, like I said last year, 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. 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.

DVC: How do you think the 2009 Conference went?

JT: Everyone I spoke with during the week said the meetings were very positive. Everyone now knows where they stand and that in some cases business is still a bit soft. But I also heard many talking about the recent increase in sales. Sounds like good news to me.

DVC: Did the WD attendance drop off this year compared to 2008?

JT: Good question. I've heard from many of our participants that the Conference must be down 20% to 30% in company participation. Here are the real numbers. In 2008 we had 63 WD's (including teams) and in 2009 we had 60. So that's about a 5% drop. Not 20% or 30%. Not bad for the current state of the economy.

DVC: Then what about the manufacturers?

JT: In 2008 we had 164 mfg's and 146 in 2009. Again, an 11% drop.

DVC: What about total attendance then?

JT: In 2008, we had 688 people attend and the final count for 2009 had 535. This is the biggest drop, somewhere around the 22% mark. Reason: Many companies brought fewer people. Where four or five came last year, they were able to handle the meetings with two or three.

DVC: You said you were down in WD count. What is PWA doing to get more WDs to the Conference?

JT: I'm glad you asked. We have just announced the Expansion of the 2010 Conference to include Invited Distributors.

DVC: OK, this sounds great. What is an Invited Distributor?

JT: They are "real brick & mortar distributors" who already buy from at least three (3) PWA member Manufacturers OR they will qualify if they are a SEMA Distributor member AND they are a member of a SEMA Council. Maybe we will see some new faces next year.

DVC: Will this include companies like Summit Racing?

JT: Yes it will. It includes ALL distributors as long as they actually order and receive inventory at their place of business. It will also include Internet people. But not the ones that simply have a website and then ask the manufacturers to drop ship. Every Conference participant received a tri-fold brochure in their Conference packet and they need to review it as soon as possible. There is even a \$50.00 refund available for NEW (non-PWA member) distributors attending the 2010 Conference. In fact, I have already spoken with Frank Kramer at Summit and he said he is very interested in attending providing the Manufacturer mix fits their business model. PEP Boys, AutoZone and CSK should also be contacted. I'm 100% sure the Sales Reps will be all over this. *(Note to Manufacturers: The Invited Distributors will not be PWA members and we would suggest that you should you get a meeting with someone new, that you do not provide WD price sheets until you are doing business with them. The "screening" process you have come to know will not be performed on the "Invited Distributors" so please take extra precautions.)*

DVC: The Annual Golf Outing was cancelled. Do you plan to have one next year?

JT: YES! We will do something, even if it's not a full blown tournament. We will have tee times for Sunday September 26, 2010, so start planning your flights around this date.

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

JT: Yes we did. The orientation went very well and we had Distributors, Manufacturers and Reps attend the 'orientation and walkabout' which helps them to understand where we hold the breakfast and lunch.

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

JT: This was very "upbeat" and everyone had a great time and PWA thanks SEMA for their continued support

continued on page 6