

# Handle smarter

Faster, safer and greener handling were among the major themes in evidence at the recent **CeMAT 2008** fair in Hannover and as usual, *eureka* was there to see it all first hand...

**W**ith over 1,100 exhibitors from 35 different countries spread across 80,000 sq m of space, CeMAT is one of the biggest materials handling exhibitions in Europe and as always, this year's fair was full of innovations – innovations with the common theme of faster, safer and more fuel-efficient handling.

Automated solutions, in particular, seemed to proliferate across the fair, offering the twin benefits of greater productivity and higher safety compared to some manual alternatives.

Among many examples was the Layer Master modular palletising and depalletising robot developed by German firm FPT Robotik, based on a Kuka robot unit and a universal Schmalz vacuum gripping system. Suitable for use with both standard and custom pallets, the system can palletise/depalletise layers of identical products both speedily and efficiently, handling up to 1,000kg at a time.

Another good example was the Mustang high-speed stacker crane being shown by TGW, another German supplier. Designed for carton handling and featuring the Twister V handling device, which removes the need for cartons to be stored on a slave tray or pallet of some kind, it can handle payloads of up to 100kg to a maximum height of 18 m, accelerating at 4 m/second – comparable with some sports cars, according to its manufacturer.

Automated guided vehicles (AGVs), too, were prominent at the show, from Canadian company RMT Robotics' little ADAM (Autonomous Delivery and Manipulation) unit, which uses an onboard laser guidance system to learn and then navigate around an area instead of depending on wires, reflectors or magnets, to Demag's truly massive automatic container transport vehicle, designed for use in port applications. Sitting neatly between the two, meanwhile, was Belgian manufacturer Egemin's Automatic Trailer Loading (ATL) vehicle, which takes over all the functions of a conventional lift truck for trailer or container loading without the need for any modifications to the trailer or container or to any loading ramps being used.

## Traditional trucks

Lift trucks, of course, were also on display in every conceivable shape and size throughout the show, many with more emphasis than ever before on green issues. Among them were concept trucks powered by hydrogen engines and fuel cell technology, traditional internal combustion engined lift trucks with automatic start/stop systems on board to help cut fuel usage, and electric lift trucks in which certain components are switched off automatically when not in use, helping to cut energy consumption by a claimed 20%.

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Ancillary systems were also on show in huge numbers, from plastic pallets to racking systems and from warehouse management software to all the latest lift truck IT systems. One notable example in the latter category was the Safe-T-Lock from TVH, a programmable code switch that supports up to 99 different users per vehicle, allowing the last operator of a lift truck to be easily identified after an accident and also featuring an internal clock to record operating hours.

## Sturdy economy

Perhaps the most unexpected finding in Hannover, however, had little to do with any of the products on display. Before the event, you could easily be forgiven for assuming that CeMAT would reflect a general slowing-down in the market for materials handling systems across Europe, as purchasers hit by turbulent economies and the worldwide credit crunch put off investment in any new equipment. Instead, we found the halls packed with visitors and a highly upbeat mood among exhibitors about current trading conditions.

“We certainly aren't feeling any ill effects from the difficult economic situation just yet,” was the typical comment we got from one German exhibitor. “In fact if anything, we're probably getting more enquiries than usual at the moment.”

“Conventional wisdom may dictate that the materials handling sector reflects a depressed market more swiftly than most other industrial sectors... but judging by the turnout here and the number of enquiries we're getting from the market more generally, there is hardly any sign of this happening right now,” another exhibitor told us.

If our experience at CeMAT was anything to judge by, it looks like a downturn in the materials handling market is still some way off... ■



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1. This massive brute from Demag was undoubtedly the largest automated guided vehicle on show.  
2. Dinky it may be, but RMT Robotics' ADAM is a serious AGV.  
3. Egemin's Automatic Trailer Loading vehicle

made light work of filling this container.  
4. Drawing a crowd is always a challenge, but suspending a jazz band 100ft up in the air from the business end of a container handler, is probably taking things a little too far...

## Events calendar

Date, Event, Location, Website	Overview
9-11 September <b>Samara Logistics Expo</b> Samara, Russia <a href="http://www.samaratrans.rte-expo.ru">www.samaratrans.rte-expo.ru</a>	Sixth international exhibition on logistics, running concurrently with transport exhibition Samara Trans Expo.
11-12 September <b>BulkEurope 2008</b> Prague, Czech Republic <a href="http://www.bulkeurope2008.powderbulkchannel.com">www.bulkeurope2008.powderbulkchannel.com</a>	Conference dedicated to the handling of bulk solids, with particular emphasis on the environmental impacts of systems for the storage, handling and transport of bulk materials and focus on technologies, methods and processes to reduce the generation of dust, spillage and noise.
15-18 September <b>Taropak 2008</b> Poznan, Poland <a href="http://www.taropak.pl">www.taropak.pl</a>	Packaging technology and logistics exhibition featuring packaging materials, packaging equipment, on-site materials handling solutions and logistics services. This year's event will feature some 750 exhibitors from 30 countries.
16-18 September <b>Interstorage</b> Kiev, Ukraine <a href="http://www.autoexpo.ua">www.autoexpo.ua</a>	Warehousing and warehouse equipment exhibition. Runs alongside Transport + Logistics exhibition highlighting transport and distribution systems and services.
18-20 September <b>Fiera De La Logistica</b> Trieste, Italy <a href="http://www.fiera.trieste.it">www.fiera.trieste.it</a>	International fair highlighting a wide range of logistics and distribution solutions.
24-25 September <b>Prologistics</b> Brussels, Belgium <a href="http://www.easyfairs.com/shows/detail.aspx?ShowID=386">www.easyfairs.com/shows/detail.aspx?ShowID=386</a>	Logistics fair featuring a wide range of handling, storage, distribution and supply chain management solutions, from lift trucks to voice picking and from warehouse property to supply chain management software.
30 September - 3 October <b>Macropak</b> Utrecht, The Netherlands <a href="http://www.macropak.nl">www.macropak.nl</a>	Massive international exhibition of handling, storage and warehousing technologies. Preceded on 26 May by special CeMAT conference, Future of Logistics.