

Peter Cooke: a love affair with the automotive industry

Professor Peter Cooke who died last week will be a sad and significant loss to the automotive community.

Although the last few years saw Peter elevated to the position of Emeritus Professor of Automotive Management at the University of Buckingham, he was always the last person to classify himself as an “academic”.

Even the highly-successful Buckingham Auto Forum, which he ran under the university auspices for several years, swiftly evolved into a topical, cutting-edge debating chamber where members always came away with more industry knowledge than when they arrived.

Peter’s background was actually in marketing and strategy; and he spent some 20 years in industry, working for Ford Motor Company, in the oil industry, in automotive components and high technology. His last job in industry was as commercial marketing director, Allen-Bradley International, with EMEA responsibilities.

Latterly he spent over 20 years in management education – at Henley Management College where he was director of automotive management, at Nottingham Business School where he was KPMG Professor of Automotive Industries Management, and, from August 2007 to April 2013, as the KPMG Professor of Automotive Management and Head of Centre at Buckingham – later becoming Emeritus Professor.

Peter’s special interests were wide ranging and covered motor industry strategy, the automotive components industry, vehicle distribution, fleet management and vehicle finance and the used vehicle industry. He was the author of 10 books in English, Polish and Russian and wrote frequently for the specialist press in the UK and Europe. He also appeared regularly on radio and television. Over his career he undertook business, teaching and consultancy in more than 50 countries.

Colin Tourick is currently Professor of Automotive Management at the University of Buckingham and co-founder of International Auto Finance Network (IAFN). He told Asset Finance International: “I first met Peter when I chaired the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) Training Committee and worked with him to develop the BVRLA MBA.

“That triggered off a close working friendship that has lasted for 20 years, during which time he drew me into the academic world. Peter was a remarkable man: wise, thoughtful, knowledgeable and kind. I will remember him fondly, particularly his sense of humour and winning smile. He is a great loss.”

Peter was proud of his work with Motability, the charity which oversees the provision of mobility – cars and powered wheelchairs - for people with disabilities as well as providing specialist, often highly adapted cars. Operating since 1977 it oversees provision of close to 600,000 cars which represents more than 6% of new cars registered in the United Kingdom.

In 2011 Peter, who had been a governor of the Motability charity for two years, and as a wheelchair user himself, met the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh at an event at Westminster Hall in front of five hundred people.



Motability had just provided its three millionth new car to one of its users and as Patron, Her Majesty the Queen, handed over the keys. At the time Peter said: “well with that number of cars one is not quite sure which is the exact three millionth so she handed over the keys to several cars”.

He added: “I’m not sure what I said to the Queen, but I was presented. Prince Philip was a different matter; he talked for several minutes, and commented on my well-used wheelchair. He was amused by the story that I had half-jokingly promised my wife a new hat for the occasion if I had a new wheelchair. It cost me a whole new outfit for her, and I’m still waiting for my new chair”.

Peter was always one to downplay a high-status event and he did so on this occasion. But to those of us who knew him well – you could tell that he was rather chuffed!



In 2014 Peter was named as the first recipient of the IAFN Lifetime Achievement Award given in recognition of his substantial professional contribution to the industry.

Presenting the award at the inaugural IAFN conference Ed White, chairman of the White Clarke Group, paid tribute to Peter Cooke's work in the automotive field over many years.

He said: "Peter is someone who has made an enormous contribution to the industry, enabling us to think about marketing and strategy in completely new ways. He is someone who's worked in every sector – automotive strategy, components, vehicle distribution, fleet management and vehicle finance – across the world."

Although at this time Peter has theoretically retired from full time work he remained closely involved with the auto finance industry, contributing articles for Asset Finance International, and research for Experteye.

But his skills lay not only in researching the automotive industry. This writer frequently recalls him adopting an impish delight in taking a polemic approach to the way the industry viewed itself. At times like these he would become what he termed "the grit in the oyster" and present an article that served to make editors swallow hard before publishing.

But his heart was unfailingly on the side of those striving to make the automotive industry a success. In recent months, with the onset of illness, he adopted a reflective and paternal view towards the industry.

Earlier this year he wrote a piece for Asset Finance International in response to his eight-year-old grandson asking "Grandad, will I be able to work in the motor industry just like you – will the jobs be the same as now?"

The article, replicated here, gives testament not to Peter Cooke the polemicist or the industry guru, but to a man writing a tender letter to his grandson – and to the industry he loved.
<http://www.assetfinanceinternational.com/index.php/people/members-blogs/members-blogs/leasing-professionals/13627-professor-peter-cooke-forecasts-radical-changes-in-auto-industry-employment-for-the-future>

Rick Yarrow, Experteye's managing director summed it up for many when he said: "I worked with Peter for over 20 years on many projects. He always brought a fresh (and sometimes irreverent!) perspective to everything we worked on and his insight and knowledge on the automotive industry was unrivalled. He will be very sorely missed."