

A review of the first National Road Traffic Accident Investigation & Reconstruction Conference:

Having been afforded the opportunity by the organizers, as a practitioner in the field, to assist in the staging of a simulated crash event, as well as to the presenting of a paper, it was with great enthusiasm that I left the confines of work to attend what was to be the first National Road Traffic Accident Investigation and Reconstruction Conference hosted by the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) in Johannesburg at the Emperors Palace between the 1-3 October. The conference was to be an excellent opportunity at allowing a collective gathering of the relevant role players and interested parties in this particular field of practice and much like the AIRIL conference held in 1999 in South Africa, at the Council for Scientific and Industrial research (CSIR), this event was sure to stimulate interest in the field.

The event was hosted at the Emperors Palace in Johannesburg, with the venue proving to be an excellent choice. The event started on Monday 1st October extending over a period of 3 days with various presentations, speeches and extensive networking being undertaken during this time. The first day saw much fanfare from dancers, singers and a pleasant breakfast followed by the Minister of Transport Mr Jeff Radebe, whom was some two hours late for the event, making the Key note opening address, see the following attachment for the full address: <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2007/07100115451002.htm>



The 1st day also saw the presentation of a “real” crash simulation, with the full effect right from the actual crash, through the entire process of medical assistance, traffic control, Incident Management Protocol, on scene investigation and finally the removal of the deceased and clearing of the crash scene and re-opening of the road being displayed just as the events of a real life crash scene would occur.

The simulation was undertaken on the first day, so as to include the Minister and other dignitaries and to allow the simulation to be analyzed, scrutinized and considered over the following days of the event. The simulation was an excellent event, serving well to display the correct procedures and professional, seamless and co-ordinated completion of tasks by the various role players at such a scene. The simulation also allowed a Pick and Pay – Arrive Alive documentary to be created from the filming of the event, contact Serendipity Blue at bengis@netactive.co.za for details, which has subsequently been aired on public television. The filming has also allowed a training and educational video to be created.



The organizers had secured presentations by various key note presenters, most notably was the inclusion Mr Daniel Melcher of www.armstrongforensic.com Inc of the USA, on the very relevant issue of “night time pedestrian collision reconstruction factors”, presenting both his professionally trained, experienced, personal guidance and outlook on the subject. Further papers presented were noted as follows:

Day two:

- 1 The accident investigator as an accident prevention road safety officer – Supt. R Askew (SAPS)
- 2 What every Policeman / traffic / metro officer should know when investigating and accident – Prof. E Baart
- 3 Forensics and the new technologies in accident reconstruction – Mr S Bezuidenhout
- 4 Influence of alcohol, drugs and illness on driver abilities – Dr Lawrence Barit
- 5 Smart sensor advance: Reducing intersection crash rates and red light violations by increasing driver reaction time - Mr J Joubert
- 6 Hit and run accidents – Mrs W Badenhorst

Day three:

- 1 Psychological influences on officials attending serious accident scenes – Cpt A VD Merwe (SAPS)
- 2 Compilation and presentation of reports – Mr C Proctor-parker
- 3 Disciplines working together at an accident scene – Mrs N Modise
- 4 Integration of various disciplines in accident investigation and reconstruction – Mr K Lotter
- 5 The role of the mechanical vehicle analysis within the SAPS – Inspector T Murphy

Various informative product and services displays were also catered for over the various days of the event and in specific attendees saw the display of services and products of:

- 1 M.Software – PhotoModeler / Cad Zone – crash zone – crime zone
- 2 I-Site 4400CR
- 3 ER 24
- 4 WABCO
- 5 Stromberg
- 6 Road traffic management technologies
- 7 Crimesight technologies – Spheron crime scene capture system



Although not always financially viable, it was with great interest that such specialized equipment as the total station, Spheron and I-Site 4400CR systems were not only on display but were effectively used on the crash simulation highlighting their



effectiveness. This also allowed interested attendees to view the crash scene simulation in their various formats, having been recorded by the equipment, over the following days of the conference.

It is however important to note that this equipment is the exception rather than the norm and although of excellent benefit where available, should not deter from the grass roots knowledge and requirements of having the basic training and knowledge of measuring and diagramming scenes accurately by the traditional tape measure method, incorporating such basic principals as fixed points and the base line or triangulation measuring principals.



The event also saw the Seatbelt Convincer being used to highlight the importance and effect of the use of seatbelts. The Skidmonster was also in attendance and likewise, allowed those willing participants to experience first hand the “out of control” feeling and spark an interest in them to learn just how to control their vehicles correctly.



An address by Mr Basil Mann a well know and successful racing driver perhaps most notably known in the Formula Ford ranks, was also given to all attendees covering the issue of safe and appropriate driving.



Perhaps one of the most interesting and relevant yet unofficial topics to arise was the somewhat in-depth and intense opinions and conversations informally held on the issue of accreditation for the field of traffic accident investigation and reconstruction in South Africa. Perhaps It is wise not to delve into this subject now as this is a topic in itself, suffice to say that the writer and those that the issue was canvassed with, were of the opinion that, much like the Accreditation Commission for Traffic Accident Reconstruction (ACTAR) system of accreditation in the USA (see www.actar.org) it is most definitely agreed by all that some accreditation is needed, with various levels of accreditation and that the establishment of such a body needs to be done by and independent facilitator so as to ensure the fair, correct and appropriate implementation.

It is somewhat difficult and perhaps most inappropriate to criticize the event on any level, or as a whole, as realizing that this was the 1st event and the writer having had 1st hand experience at staging a similar event, the extent of success attained by this event well offset any negativity that may have come to the fore during or post the event. This said, there was in the writer's opinion almost no criticism what so ever. It is none the less pertinent to honestly and constructively be analytical of the event in the attempt to assist the organizers and various role players associated in striving to ensure the regularity of the event, growth and professionalism of the event and make the event far more interesting successful and far reaching.



Hereto, it should be born in mind that the nature of the subject matter relating to the event has far reaching and extremely diverse influence, affect and effect on the public at large. As such it is most important that the event is held at least once every two years and if at all possible annually. Further, although it would not be feasible and somewhat daunting for the event organizers to open the event to absolutely every member of the public, every effort should be made to diversify the demographics of the attendees on a carefully considered basis. By this the writer refers to the greater inclusion of the middle management and grass roots level members of the various disciplines, so as to stimulate and guide their interest. Needless to say they are the future.

Although the event could not have come at a better time and has been long overdue. I am sure that the organizers and attendees will both agree that the event was largely a huge success. It is the writer's opinion and I am sure that of the majority of the attendees that, as has already been mentioned, this event should be staged on an annual basis and should progress to be an even more comprehensive event, covering all issues relating to Traffic Accident Investigation and Reconstruction, which in itself is an extremely diverse field.



We hope to see further backing by both the RTMC, National and Provincial departments of transport as well as other private companies such as those in the medical field and specialised fields such as equipment and service providers that have both a direct and indirect relation to this particular field, as without the concerted and joint co-operation of all role players it will be difficult to continue to sustain and grow such events so as to create an awareness and professional service within this industry.

Craig Proctor-Parker
Safe driving