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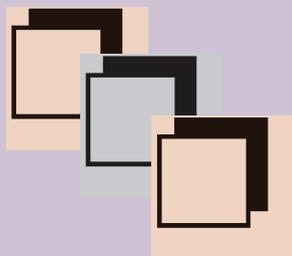
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Comment

Well it's November which means the Roto international press conference and the National Home Improvement Council awards.

Roto likes to hold this annual event at different locations. Often, but not always, there is a local connection, a factory to visit perhaps. This year we found ourselves in Stuttgart, Roto's HQ, and home also to Mercedes Benz. So the 'Hall of Legends' motor museum made a fitting venue for the conference.

As I have said before, if you want to know how the industry is doing ask a hardware manufacturer. Last year there was no good news, however 2017 has brought stability world wide. Roto's financial director was able to report that, while Roto did not achieve all of its goals, turnover for the year is up at \$630m euros.

The overall picture is a bit mixed but previous problems, such as in Russia, seem to have stabilised, construction in China is a main driver behind the economy and the USA market continues to grow. In Latin America Brazil is the main problem.

Closer to home European construction is mainly growing. But, as you might expect, everyone is worried about Brexit. A key speaker was Renalta Alt of the German FDP party. The FDPs' politics are regarded as liberal and she spoke about a two speed Europe which would allow struggling countries to leave the Eurozone – rather than the European Union – allowing them to set their own financial policies while they recover. And I got the impression that Brexit is a great concern to the Germans. It is clear that it is expected to have influence over the European economy as well as our own. (Good news for the hardcore Brexiteers who would like nothing more than the break-up of the EU.)

Later in the same week the NHIC held its annual awards. The shame about the NHIC is that it is not better known. It was set up to improve the British housing stock which, everyone acknowledges, is still in a bit of a state. The main problem these days is insulation and NHIC president Baroness Maddox expressed a great deal of concern about 'fuel poverty' which affects a lot of people. Of course, it might be argued that a major part of the problem is not so much energy efficiency as the price of fuel.

The main reason for being there was the awards which cover a spectrum of home improvement projects. It proved to be a good week for SEH BAC which won the Certass/QANW sponsored award for a community based project. The following night the company picked up two awards – installer of the year and retail promotion of the year – at G17



John Roper