

Looking forward



JAMES CLARK, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF BITA SHARES HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEW-LOOK BITA AGM, INCLUDING THE 2016 FORKLIFT TRUCK MARKET OUTLOOK, THE WIT AND WISDOM OF HENRY BLOFELD, AND THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW PRESIDENT.

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This year's BITA AGM took on a new format, at a new venue, alongside a lunch featuring as guest speaker the cricket legend and raconteur Henry Blofeld, who gave a very entertaining speech outlining his many years associated with the game.

Taking place at the Committee Room of the Royal Automobile Club on Pall Mall, London, one of the highlights was the Forklift Truck Market Outlook 2016. Produced by Oxford Economics, a leading global company providing independent analysis for decision-makers seeking external opinions and evidence-based research, the full report is supplied exclusively to BITA members.

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The Outlook was presented by Jeremy Leonard, Oxford Economics' head of industry services, and the forecasts contained good news for BITA members, with the UK economy's performance broadly remaining on a positive path, but uncertainty around the EU referendum vote looms large.

Reflecting this uncertainty, and as companies push back expansion plans waiting for the result, UK GDP growth is seen as 2% for 2016, compared to 2.3% in 2015. The UK economy continues to grow, but consumer spending is due to slow.

Industrial production continues to struggle, with a contraction of 0.2% predicted for this year, hit by recent poor performance from the construction

sector. Overall, industrial activity as well as economy-wide investment is expected to remain weak, with investment growth forecast to grow 2.9% this year, compared to 4.1% in 2015.

"Regarding orders and shipments for counterbalance and warehouse trucks, most prominently 2015 was the year which finally had orders and shipments returning to pre-recession levels, with shipments for counterbalance soaring to 15,170 units", commented Leonard. For 2016 orders for counterbalance trucks are forecast to grow to 16,171.

The warehouse segment was also strong, with the 2015 growth in orders being 14.1%, coming in at 17,500 units for the year, and shipments up at 15,605 units. The forecast here remains strong reflecting the shift towards more online purchasing. However again the uncertainty around a possible Brexit and stalling global economic growth is a factor.

BITA MEMBERS' SURVEY

The Oxford Economics report also includes a bi-annual survey of BITA members themselves, which revealed a broadly optimistic outlook among members continuing from the autumn survey.

Just under 40% of members identified themselves as more optimistic about general prospects in the coming 12 months, but there were fewer who felt the same about general prospects for 2016 compared to those surveyed in 2015. There was also a small increase in those saying they were less optimistic.

But taken on balance there is a broadly optimistic outlook, but with less consensus than in 2015.

Around 30% expected their company's sales to fall modestly, but almost the exact same figure expected their sales to rise significantly.

When it comes to future growth, the retail and distribution sectors are viewed as having the most potential, with nearly 50% of respondents predicting the most sales growth in one of these sectors in 2016. This is reflected in a stronger outlook for warehouse truck orders, although there are strong orders too on the counterbalance side consistent with a transition from extending leases to actually ordering new trucks.

There were also excellent presentations from Karl Baum, who gave a detailed picture of BITA Academy apprenticeship developments, President David Rowell, presenting world statistics on the forklift market and sales, and Rob Fisher who outlined what is to come at IMHX 2016 in September.

In last month's column we said farewell to our outgoing president – and now we welcome his successor, Tim Waples.

Tim is no stranger to BITA, having previously been President from 2010-12; he is a major figure in our industry and brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the role. With 30 years' experience he has seen every aspect of the business. Beginning his career as a mechanical engineering apprentice, Tim has risen to become vice president and CEO of Doosan Industrial Vehicle UK Group Companies, where he has overseen the acquisition of Rushlift Ltd.

Tim is a prime example of how, for anyone committed and prepared to work hard, a career in the materials handling industry can provide a pathway to senior management. I personally would like to welcome him as president and say how much I am looking forward to working with him again. ■

2015 WAS THE YEAR WHICH FINALLY HAD TRUCK ORDERS AND SHIPMENTS RETURNING TO PRE-RECESSION LEVELS

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE UK ECONOMY AND TRUCK MARKET REMAINS OPTIMISTIC, BUT WITH LESS BROAD CONSENSUS THAN IN 2015

UNCERTAINTY AROUND THE EU REFERENDUM VOTE IS AFFECTING INVESTMENT DECISIONS AND POTENTIALLY IMPACTING ON GDP GROWTH

TIM WAPLES IS THE NEW BITA PRESIDENT, SET TO SERVE HIS SECOND TERM IN OFFICE

