



Where in the World is Paul Nugent?

PAUL NUGENT | MNOP

NOTES FROM THE ROAD

I was passing by India the other day and decided to stop. 'Incredible India' they call it and not without reason: incredible sights, incredible traffic and incredible poverty. Unless you have been there, you don't really understand what it means to literally wade through a sea of humanity. The roads are chaotic, shared in turn by cars, bicycles, tuk-tuks (open 3-wheelers), people on foot, people living on the roadside, cows, camels and elephants. The airports are just as disorienting with what should be a streamlined security system replaced by massive repetition of inspections and checks which somehow, in the end, deposit you on the right aircraft. Yet at the heart of this kaleidoscope of disarray lie the Indian people, all 1.1 billion of them, many struggling just to survive but many striving to reach the world stage with their products and services. There is a common perception of 'Made-in-India' as low quality, just as Made-in-Japan and Made-in-Taiwan once were - and rightly so in many cases. However, change is evident and some molders and machine makers are working hard to raise their standards closer to international levels. As, the traditional low-cost advantage of Indian manufacture is being reduced



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by rising local costs and taxes and many components and raw materials are priced at international rates, manufacturers must compete on quality. The encouraging thing is that, while most recognize there is a gap and simply accept it as par for their local markets, some are actively seeking the information necessary to help make the transition to greater international acceptability. Better quality standards, better construction methods, better performance of machines, better control systems - all being addressed. I left India this time with three things: respect, guilt and optimism. Respect for the inventor of the seatbelt as I gathered more memories of the teeming life of



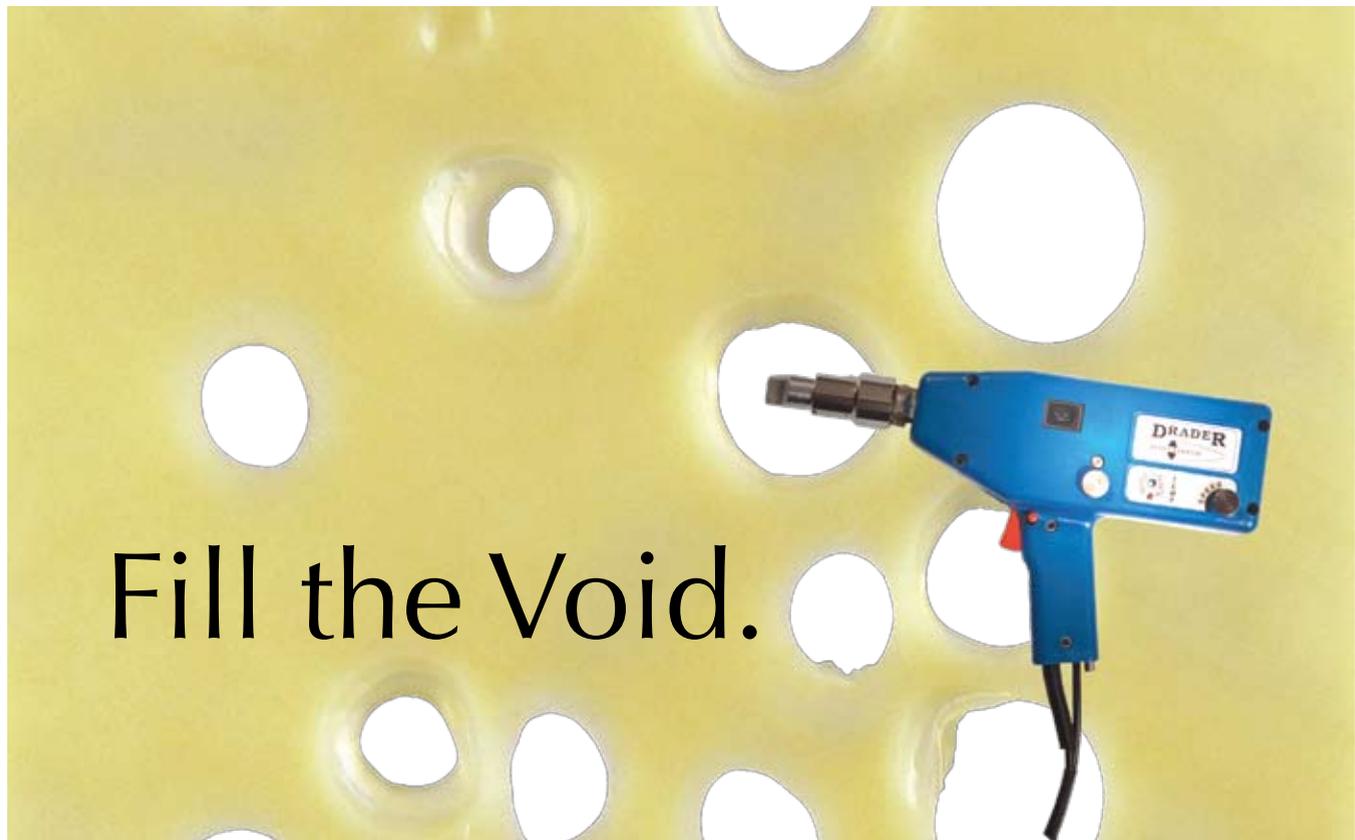
the sub-continent; guilt over why man can allow others to live in abject poverty by the side of the road and not knowing what, if anything, there is that an individual can do about it; and optimism that, at least in some companies, there is a drive to improve quality levels to reach new markets that can perhaps spread and improve things for the people in general. I'll be back.

And then I was passing by Colombia. Maybe it is that Latin American charm and maybe my European roots but Bogota felt very comfortable. Oh, I had all the warnings about cartels and watching my luggage and all the comments about 'What is it you really do for a living?' but in the end it was a very rewarding trip. However, it's not all plain sailing for the people there. They have survived dark times during the drug funded wars and even still live under a blanket of military control which keeps the insurgents at bay but brings with it a level of corruption that often stifles growth. In the evenings there are soldiers every 200 yards on the main roads - checking, just checking. And the roads in the city can be rough, literally, with many pot-holes, traffic jams and plenty of carts drawn by horses - signs that the economy is still transitioning from a rural basis. However, once again the push by industry to reach new levels is there. As in most countries, storage tanks are the mainstay of the rotomolding business and while there are fewer molders than I would expect for a country of 45 million, the company I visited

was far from typical. They have grown over many years from a simple operation based on open-flame machines to one with the latest tools from FEA to Rotolog to simulation software. Their recently installed machines are no longer homemade but made by international suppliers, there is even talk of buying another. This was no simple training and consulting visit, the questions and information that they were looking to answer were very relevant and are currently vexing the minds of some of the largest molders in the world. As is often the case with polyethylene (and rotomolding) there are no simple answers to their questions but the fact that they are asking and trying to solve them sets them apart from their peers. It was nice to be challenged once again and I'll continue to seek the answers to help solve their problems. Volveré.

So in the end folks, travel clearly expands the mind and I do more than my fair share (as my long-suffering wife, Orla, will attest to). I have my well-worn paths (and unfortunately well-worn perspectives in some cases) so it is good to sometimes take a slightly different route and see what is happening in new places. Be aware that people outside the Western world are working just as hard and smart and that there are a lot of hidden gems still waiting to be discovered - and be prepared for new ideas to come from unexpected quarters...

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