



Edinburgh, 30 January 2009

Winners of 2008 Finmeccanica Innovation Awards chosen

The ceremony to present the 2008 Finmeccanica Innovation Awards took place at the SELEX GALILEO plant in Edinburgh today. Now in their fifth year, the awards were established to promote awareness of the value of research and innovation for all Group employees.

The Finmeccanica Innovation Awards were devised to generate new ideas and projects that would contribute to value creation within the Group. At Finmeccanica, product and process innovation and individual competencies are considered to be the determining factors of competitive advantage in the high technology sector. The awards are open not only to technical specialists, engineers or basic and applied research scientists, but to every employee working for a Group company – the conviction being that each individual is a fount of skills and knowledge from which innovative ideas may flow. Such ideas provide a resource available to the entire Group, and in many cases result in real industrial applications.

From more than 900 entries (and 72 that reached the final stage), three important innovations have been chosen for an award.

Alenia Aeronautica received an award for a project recycling the prepreg composite material scraps.

Composite materials offer major benefits in terms of finished products, but the production process previously left a large quantity of waste that was difficult to get rid of because of its environmental impact. In the recycling project, new composite material was produced from the waste, which can be used in a variety of ways. The new technique brings obvious cost savings and environmental advantages, as well as being a practical and efficient process that will benefit all Finmeccanica Group companies operating in the aeronautics sector.

SELEX GALILEO received an award for its participation in the UK MoD Grand Challenge – Team Stellar.

In 2006, the UK Minister of Defence Procurement Lord Drayson launched the “Grand Challenge” to seek out innovative approaches to tackling the potential threats in an urban environment. The prize was won by Team Stellar, with a combination of two small UAVs and an unmanned ground vehicle. SELEX GALILEO’s contribution to the multi-disciplinary team, which included academics and SMEs, involved overall integration and system communications.

Telespazio received an award for its Persistent Scatter Pairs, a system for measurements of millimetric terrain displacements by satellite radar interferometry.

This technology compares two satellite radar images so that movement on the Earth’s surface of only a few millimetres per year can be identified. The innovative element comes in the comparison of pairs of points in each image, thereby eliminating the effects of the atmosphere on the images. The technique has been used in a project on a national scale financed by the Italian Environment Ministry. It represents an innovation that will offer a wide variety of potential applications in Finmeccanica’s different businesses.

The Finmeccanica Group's "Patent of the Year" award went to Ansaldo Energia for its self-adaptive regulation apparatus, an innovative system for controlling the position of actuators in an actuation system.

Current energy requirements are often satisfied by a system that uses turbines to turn steam into electricity, for example. However, it is very difficult to control these complex machines so that they function at maximum efficiency. The patent describes a self-adaptive regulation system that optimises control parameters. Going forward, it has the potential to significantly improve the performance of turbo-machinery all over the world. This is an example of innovation at its best.

Ansaldo STS Italia also received a special mention for its Moving Shaft project, an innovative ventilation system for subway tunnels.

The project is still at the initial stages, but promises considerable financial potential and is likely to have a significant impact on overall safety. Once the system has been completed and rolled out it could make a major contribution to passenger safety. In addition, it may offer a further development opportunity for distributed sensing and actuation, revolutionising the design of rail tunnels.

Lastly, the "Best supplier 2008" award went to SEI – Servizi Elicotteristici Italiani SpA.

SEI has been a partner of AgustaWestland for many years, providing innovative solutions for equipping helicopter interiors and supporting the company at each stage of the production process, from design to roll out. In 2005 it built the Completion Centre at Vergiate, a 70-unit structure operating side by side with AgustaWestland and its final clients. Then in 2007 it established SEI of America Corp. to help meet the production requirements of Philadelphia-based Agusta Aerospace Corporation.

Chairman and CEO Finmeccanica Pier Francesco Guarguaglini, in reminding us how the awards have contributed to new ideas becoming real industrial applications, summed up the first five years of the awards: "One of the most important indicators of the success of this initiative is the quality of the patents generated by Finmeccanica companies. In 2005, over half the patents were lodged only in Italy, which provided a rather low level of protection for our intellectual property, but by the end of 2007, almost 85% were lodged internationally – representing a huge improvement in our level of protection. There has also been a major increase in the categories of patent lodged by Finmeccanica, from 25 in 2004 to 200 in 2007, which amply demonstrates the development of a new and more deep-rooted culture of innovation within the Group."

The selection of the three best projects was made in conjunction with a number of prestigious UK academic institutions: Edinburgh University, Glasgow University, Bristol University and Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh).

The choice of SELEX GALILEO's plant in Edinburgh to host the 2008 Innovation Awards was strongly symbolic as the UK now represents a "second domestic market" for Finmeccanica. The Group has a long-standing presence, via Finmeccanica UK, in the country, where it is accredited as the second largest supplier of the UK Ministry of Defence and biggest foreign investor in the key sectors of helicopters, avionics and defence and security communications. Moreover, Finmeccanica is the second-largest employer in its business sector in the UK with 10,200 employees, and is the country's third-largest exporter. In particular, SELEX GALILEO has entered into a fruitful partnership with Scottish academia over the years, with university lecturers visiting the company's premises, while its own staff have lectured at the universities. It has also cultivated the best talents coming out of the universities, offering them thousands of high technology jobs.

In the five years of the awards, some 3,000 proposals involving around 9,500 people have been submitted. The increase in the participation of employees based abroad has also been significant: from 10 projects in 2004 to 237 in 2008 – confirmation of the international nature of the initiative.