

L I F E T I M E A C H I

Irv Poston Receives SPE® Lifetime Achievement Award for Pioneering Work in Automotive Plastics, Composites Applications

Irvin E. (Irv) Poston, who had a long and distinguished career at then General Motors Corp. (GM) and was responsible for numerous automotive plastics “firsts,” is the 2009 recipient of the prestigious *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the SPE® Automotive Division. The award recognizes the technical achievements of automotive industry executives whose work – in research, design, and engineering, etc. – has led to significant integration of polymeric materials on vehicles.



Irv Poston retired in 1997 after 42 years with GM. When he left the company, he was head of Plastics (Composites) Development at GM’s Tech Center, a position he had held since 1968. Poston’s team was heavily involved in developing sheet-molding compound (SMC) and reaction-injection molding (RIM) equipment, processes, and applications for the automaker, but they also worked with injection-molded thermoplastics and thermosets. Other process technologies used by the group to develop new plastics applications for GM included thermoforming, rotational molding, and injection/compression molding. Poston guided the team to emphasize the importance of simultaneous development of materials, design, manufacturing, and testing. His (and his team’s) success is evident in the list of automotive-plastics firsts he was personally involved in launching, including the original use of:

- Injection-molded polypropylene fender liner/skirts (Oldsmobile®),
- RIM “friendly” fenders (SportOmega®),
- SMC tailgates (Fisher Body®),
- Polyurethane bumpers (for a fleet of taxi cabs – despite insistence by the design staff that chrome bumpers would never be replaced on production cars),
- The all-composite-bodied Fiero® sports car, and
- RIM and SMC body panels (APV® minivan).

Poston showed early interest in plastics and composites. He did a project on plastics molding for his Master’s degree while at Purdue University. Upon joining GM full time after college (Poston had worked at the automaker while still in college), he established the first plastics department at the Allison Division of GM during 1955-1957 and quickly became active on GM’s Plastics Committee, a group he went on to chair. In 1957, he transferred to GM’s Tech Center to establish the facility’s new Plastics Group in the center’s Process Development Section.

With a rich history of involvement with engineering societies, universities, and industry trade associations, Poston often served as GM’s representative. He encouraged GM to support polymer composites initiatives at both the University of Delaware and Michigan State University, and was GM’s representative on both universities’ steering committees. He represented the automaker at USCAR (the U.S. Council for Automotive Research) and on USCAR subcommittees including the Automotive Composites Consortium (ACC) and the Vehicle Recycling Partnership (VRP). Poston also has served as the president of the Oakland Chapter of the Michigan Society of Professional Engineers (MSPE), was GM’s representative in the Society of the

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Plastics Industry (SPI), an organization he convinced the automaker to join, eventually becoming chair of the Plastics Tooling Division of SPI. Additionally, he served as a board member for the University of Detroit's Polymer Institute and was the GM representative and ultimately president of the Michigan Materials and Processing Institute (MMPI). He actively participated in SPE's fledgling Plastics in Automotive group and became chair when that group officially became SPE's Automotive Division, an organization he also served as national councilor for 6 years. Poston was the technical-program coordinator for SPE's Annual Technical Conference (ANTEC) in 1992 when the event was held in Detroit. He is still active in SPE's Detroit Section in the capacity of *Director Emeritus* and as the group's e-communications chair.

Among the honors Poston has garnered over the years, in 1961 he was awarded the *Outstanding Leadership* award from SPI's Plastic Tooling Division, and eight years later was awarded SPI's *Man of the Year* award. In 1973, Poston was given the *Man of the Year* award from the Detroit Section of SPE, and in 1993 he was granted SPE International's *Distinguished Member* status. Next, he was honored with the *Distinguished Service* award by the Engineering Society of Detroit (ESD) in 1997, and in 1999 he was granted *Fellow* status by ESD. And in 2005, Poston was honored with the *Lifetime Achievement* award by the Detroit Section of SPE and was granted *Director Emeritus* status by SPE in 1997. Additionally, he was one of 10 nominees nationwide in *Design News* magazine's 1995 *Engineer of the Year* award and – although he did not win – was the only automotive or plastics engineer represented among nominees, which included Alan Mulally.

Poston grew up in Attica, Ind. near Purdue University where he received BSME (1954) and MSIE (1955) degrees. He was also a drummer in the school's Symphonic Band and All-American Marching Band for four years. In fact, Poston still returns to the school to play in its every-other-year alumni band at homecoming, and played percussion for the Pontiac and Rochester Civic Symphony Orchestras for 45 years. He is an elder and deacon in his church and a member of many church committees. Poston's hobbies include music, photography, audio/video systems, model electric trains, and magic. He has been married for 54 years, and has four children, 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

First given in the year 2000, past winners of the Lifetime Achievement award include:

- T. Battenberg III, former chairman and chief-executive officer of Delphi;
- Bernard Robertson, then executive vice-president of DaimlerChrysler;
- Robert Schaad, chairman of Husky;
- Tom Moore, retired vice-president, Liberty and Technical Affairs at DaimlerChrysler;
- Mr. Shigeki Suzuki, general manager - Materials Division at Toyota Motor Company;
- Barbara A. Sanders, director - Advanced Development & Engineering Processes at Delphi Thermal Systems;
- Josh Madden, retired General Motors Corp. & Volkswagen of America; and
- Frank Macher, formerly CEO of Collins & Aikman Corp., Federal Mogul Corp., and ITT Automotive, as well as spending 30 years at Ford Motor Co.