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AA Utility Arboriculture Group Quarterly Update

Thoughts from the UAG's Chair Paul Hornby on the AA's National Arboriculture Conference, University of Warwick, 2 – 5 September 2007 with a particular focus on the utility arboriculture technical session and associated skills competitions

By Paul Hornby

A first class venue and beautiful weather – what a combination! – and all for the 41st National Arboriculture Annual Conference at the University of Warwick.

Utility Arboriculture day was in the middle of the Conference: Tuesday 4 September, and lived up to its billing of best ever. Record numbers of delegates were treated to a full program of top class speakers and outdoor events.

All of the presentations were keenly anticipated and well attended; my personal favorite was Dr Richard Abel from the DTI. This presentation gave an unprecedented insight into to the internal workings of the DTI with some particularly good information as to the importance the government places on network resilience.

As an indication of the growing popularity of this Utility side of conference we were extremely pleased to be visited by celebrity delegate Dr Nelda Metheny (of Matheny and Clark fame: A Photographic Guide to the Evaluation of Hazard Trees) who came all the way from Canada to hear the presentation by John Abbot of ADAS on Hazard Tree Assessment in the Utility Environment.

Taking full advantage of the large competition area the outdoor events were played out against a background of wall to wall sunshine.

The AUS Utility Skills competition, now in its 8th Year, attracted 10 teams from across the UK. Seasoned competitors and novice teams all managed to somehow raise the bar again in terms of technique, safety awareness and competitiveness.

The eventful winners were fountains – well done Marc Fothergill, Chris Neviani and Scott Marshall. As always the teams were all very close with Tilhill 2nd and in a very close 3rd came Scottish & Southern Energy – well done one and all. Some particularly nasty “improvements” in the apparatus for the Rod Competition truly tested every team’s ingenuity.



CAPTION: Marc Fothergill, Chris Neviani and Scott Marshall of fountains, winners of the AUS Utility Skills competition 2007.

Special thanks must be given to the erstwhile judges led by Bill Kew-Winder, Kevin Wholey, Jason Dunn, John Dixon and Tony Parsons. Their attention to detail and technical abilities are what pushes the competition along year after year.

The Tilhill safety challenge was a great success; contributions by BTS and Oakwick made the real life scenarios really come alive. The eventful winner was Kevin Birchall of Tree Care Ireland.

The UAG discussion forum ended the day on a high note with some very important contributions from the floor on how the UAG might evolve and reach out to all sides of the utility industry.

Such was the radical and innovative qualities of the debate it was agreed to take suggestions forward to the September Core Group meeting. Expect some very good news soon.

So to sum up – the best utility day yet, the best conference yet – all the stronger for all sides of the industry working together.

I am looking forward to next year already.

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