



On the Road

“There was nowhere to go but everywhere, so just keep on rolling under the stars.”—Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

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As I write this, I am surrounded by boxes, about to head out across the country with my wife Camilla and our two dogs Zeus and Bob Fosse. Packing a home for a move like this turns out to be a fair way to think about an industry deciding what to carry forward, especially as a lot of companies are having discussions about what to pack, old and new alike, and display at IMTS this September in Chicago.

By the time this issue reaches the printer, we will be somewhere on the interstate between Tyler, TX, and our new apartment in Lancaster, PA—more than a thousand miles of it, with everything we own rolling along behind us. A move turns out to be an inventory exercise. We pick up every object in our lives and ask the same question: Does this come with us, or has it served its purpose? It is not a bad way to take stock—of a house, or of an industry: which tools genuinely move us forward, which we are keeping out of habit, and which we can finally set down.

The pages that follow are full of that sorting—automation reaching shops that could never before justify it, robots learning to handle parts that will not hold still, and design choices made long before the first chip is cut. Our decisions either smooth the road ahead or leave us stranded at the machine. We can plan a route, but the road always has the

final say—the closed lane, the storm over the mountains, the detour that turns out to be the scenic way. The map is not the road, and the design is not the part. What looks clean on the screen still has to be cut, measured, and made to work in steel.

A cross-country drive means living between worlds for a while—much like the before and after of a big show like IMTS, where the frontiers of technology open to something new. So it is with an industry that has spent a century turning raw energy into controlled, useful movement—and is now learning to hand some of that control over to machines that can sense and adapt on their own.

You do not make a trip like this alone. The industry's version is the harder, more important kind of company—the people entering the trades, the ones training them, the standards bodies arguing over the rules of the road so the rest of us can travel it safely. At IMTS, our industry will once again gather in one place to compare notes on the road so far. Consider this issue something to read before you go—a map spread across the hood, tracing where we have been and where we are going. And keep on rolling under the stars.

