



THE POWER OF
ALUMINIUM

IMAGINATION • INSPIRATION • INNOVATION

July 2007

Aluminium: so sexy, so sustainable – so use it

“The properties of aluminium – lightweight, flexible, attractive and infinitely recyclable – make it the metal for the 21st century.”

So says Andy McLoughlin, head of The Power of Aluminium, a new organisation set up to promote increased use of aluminium and aluminium extrusion among architects, designers and specifiers.



Image courtesy of aluminium.org

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For correspondence only: 72 Francis Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B16 8SP. **T:** 0121 450 4260 **F:** 0121 455 9785

Registered Office: Broadway House, 60 Calthorpe Road, Five Ways, Birmingham, B15 1TN. **T:** 0121 456 1103 **F:** 0870 138 9714 www.powerofaluminium.com

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And it is the sustainability part of the aluminium equation that is attracting the most interest right now, as recycling tops both business and social agendas.

The ability to recycle the metal over and over again – using only 5% of the energy needed for its primary production – sets it apart from rival metals, says The Power of Aluminium, which reports that more than 60% of all aluminium is recycled, a figure that it anticipates will increase steadily in future.

Couple this with the weight saving advantages, finishing options and downright sexiness, and it is the perfect metal for now, according to McLoughlin: “At a time when protecting the environment, climate change and sustainability are at the top of so many agendas, the time is right for aluminium and aluminium extrusion. Once out of the ground, it can be used in products as diverse as cars and cans again and again, at relatively little energy usage compared to rivals like steel.”

Established last year by the Aluminium Extruders Association, driven by aluminium products giant Hydro and extrusion manufacturer Sapa, and administered by the Aluminium Federation, The Power of Aluminium has ambitious plans, among them a 2008 awards ceremony to reward and recognise excellence and innovation among aluminium and aluminium extrusion users across several industry sectors, and among students.

And it wants to attract interest from Europe’s largest producers and users of aluminium, Germany and Italy, where per capita consumption of aluminium is almost twice that of the UK.

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For example, in 2005 kg per capita consumption of extruded aluminium was:

- Germany < 8kg
- Italy 7.5kg
- UK < 4kg

The Power of Aluminium Awards will offer total prize money of up to £60,000, and have already won sponsorship from the UK's Council for Aluminium in Building (CAB), Aluminium Stockholders' Association, Aluminium Finishers' Association, and finishing company Powdertech.

McLoughlin said: "We're inviting all users of aluminium and aluminium extrusion to enter the Awards, not just those in the UK, but on the Continent, too. We know there is huge take-up of the material there, and it might be the case that more exposure to what Europe is doing with aluminium will help drive increased interest and use here in the UK."

Indeed, The Power of Aluminium has already begun to explore Euro opportunities, and was among those attending the recent 7th International Metallurgy Trade Fair (METEC), in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Prize money totalling more than £60,000 will be presented at next year's April 17 Awards in six categories:

- Building & Construction
- Transportation
- Consumer & Engineered Products
- New Product Design
 - Concept
 - Material Substitution
- Most Attractive Surface Finish

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Soon after they were announced, the Awards secured their first sponsor – CAB – which has agreed a headline sponsor package for the Building & Construction category.

CAB supports the interests of the architectural aluminium industry by encouraging increased use of aluminium products in architecture and the construction industry.

Its chief executive Justin Ratcliffe said: “Our members were impressed by the whole Power of Aluminium concept, and when the opportunity arose to support the associated Awards they were keen to get behind them. Anything that highlights the use of aluminium as a sustainable material has to be a good thing, particularly when it is branded strongly as it is here.”

CAB member companies are involved in all stages of construction, extrusion and design of systems, fabrication of products, finishing, production of associated products and site installation.

Other sponsors include the Aluminium Stockholders’ Association, Aluminium Finishers’ Association, and finishing company Powdertech.

The Awards event will be hosted by popular designer and fan of aluminium, Wayne Hemingway, and held at the University of Warwick.

A TV regular, Hemingway now runs Hemingway Design, which is involved in urban, fashion, interior, product and media design projects. He is also chairman of Building for Life, an organisation comprising the house-building industry, government and campaigners, and with a shared commitment to quality in new homes.

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He said: “Aluminium is a versatile material, a material with a future, and I’m looking forward to seeing how it being used, while learning more about the whole aluminium and extrusion industry.”

The venue was chosen for its central location and because the University of Warwick is known as an innovative and entrepreneurial centre of knowledge and technology transfer in the heart of the Midlands, itself a hub of excellence in the UK manufacturing industry. Near Coventry, the university is now the fifth highest ranked research institution in the UK.

Andy McLoughlin said: “This is a go-ahead university with a reputation for research and innovation. Couple that with the fact that it’s easy to get to, with brilliant facilities, and we feel it provides the perfect Awards venue.”

But McLoughlin is eager to make clear that The Power of Aluminium is not all about the Awards: “It’s about long-term awareness raising across key industries in which aluminium and aluminium extrusion can bring real benefits, for example light weight leading to reduced fuel usage in the automotive sector.”

And so The Power of Aluminium has its very own technical expert, Geoff Doyle, who boasts more than 25 years’ experience as a metallurgist, 20 of them working in the aluminium industry. Organisations that support The Power of Aluminium Awards are being offered the chance to tap into that wealth of knowledge, including free-of-charge design consultancy.

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A BSc.Hons (Metallurgy) from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and a Chartered Engineer and Member of The Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, Doyle runs his own consultancy – AluServ Ltd – offering metallurgical and management services in the aluminium and surface engineering sectors. His expertise stretches from aluminium extrusions; research and development project management; corrosion, surface treatment and joining; and product quality.

Doyle said: “This is a major initiative, and one I’m delighted to be involved with. As well as providing the technical content for The Power of Aluminium website, I’ve so far been able to provide technical input for the Awards’ design categories, and have been liaising with leading universities to encourage students to get involved.”

He is a key player in the development of The Power of Aluminium’s own website, too. The www.powerofaluminium.com – believed to be the world’s most comprehensive technical resource for aluminium extrusion design – answers design and engineering questions as part of a free-of-charge design support service. It also allows visitors to share their views and best practice via a forum, and will feature case studies.

Doyle has been director of the Hydro Aluminium Technology Center for North American Operations; technical manager at Sapa’s Cheltenham extrusion plant; BA Tubes’ extrusion development manager and surface treatment and joining group leader at Hydro Aluminium’s Norwegian research and development centre.

And he is proving to be a key link in a newly forged relationship between The Power of Aluminium and the influential Institute of Materials, Minerals & Mining (IOM3).

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During a meeting at IOM3's London headquarters, the two organisations agreed to work together to help promote more use of aluminium, and within days The Power of Aluminium was exhibiting at the annual meeting of the Materials Knowledge Transfer Network, an IOM3 organisation.

Other joint events are expected, including joint workshop presentations, crossover technical support, and contributions from The Power of Aluminium to IOM3's London resource centre and its new Materials and Design Exchange facility, in Lincolnshire.

IOM3 chief executive officer Bernie Rickinson said: "We applaud what The Power of Aluminium is trying to achieve, and we're very happy to help it in any way possible to achieve its aims. There are obvious links between the two organisations, and one of the materials that always excites the designers we communicate is undoubtedly aluminium."

Andy McLoughlin added: "This is a real coup, because with its expertise, resources and connections, IOM3 can open lots of doors for us, and help identify and fast-track opportunities that might not otherwise have been available.

"Opportunities that mean greater knowledge and use of this wonderful, of-the-moment material."

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