What makes an international conference and trade show such as the World of Asphalt Show & Conference exciting is the opportunity to see the newest technology the industry has to offer. Innovations in milling and paving machines; technology and software systems that enhance equipment performance; and professional services that help asphalt and aggregate industry contractors make more money are all displayed.

The asphalt market is truly dynamic. Each year it is amazing to see new products and refinements/enhancements of existing products. The large equipment manufacturers are always vying to offer machines that are easier to operate, more productive, and more efficient while being gentler to the environment.

When visiting the equipment manufacturers this year at World of Asphalt, look for these innovations and trends:

**Innovative Designs**

Look for gravity-fed pavers. These must be paired with material transfer vehicles to ensure a steady flow of HMA to help reduce physical and thermal segregation in the asphalt mix. With the design, gravity is what feeds the material directly to the auger from the mass flow hopper, replacing the need for slat conveyors, hopper wings, push rollers and tandem front buggies used in conventional pavers.

Gravity-fed pavers are said to be more fuel efficient because less engine power is required as compared to a traditional paver conveyor system, which requires more moving parts. The simple design of the gravity-fed paver also has been shown to reduce maintenance costs and technician time.

**Increased Operator Comfort**

Look for machines that feature greater operator comfort. It has long been acknowledged that operator comfort can reap many dividends. A less fatigued machine operator is more productive, less accident prone, and happier. Look for operator platforms that swing out to improve the operator’s line of sight and that can pivot so the operator can position themselves to see not only down the side of the machine but also back. Look for machine controls and display screen to be intuitively arranged and for them to move with the seat as it swings into better viewing vantage. And look for the seat to be positioned up a little higher, giving the operator the advantage of seeing more of their surroundings.

Look for pavers with an air curtain feature. Operator comfort is increased through an airflow system that creates a barrier near the back wall of the hopper. This air curtain feature pushes the asphalt fumes and heat up and away from the operator platform, ensuring a cooler and more breathable space.

**Easy Maintenance**

Some paving and milling machine makers are designing their machines with the repair and maintenance technician in mind.

Look for logically-placed access doors on the sides and tops of machines. Look for engine hoods that lift hydraulically and with a back up manual-lift feature. Manufacturers who are interested in making maintenance easier are providing an engine compartment that is roomy enough to make component access convenient.

The intent behind these refinements is to ensure quick and thorough maintenance and reduce having technicians take short cuts because it’s too difficult to work on a machine.

**Compact Machines for Smaller Spaces**

The market for smaller asphalt pavers, generally under 21,000 lbs (9,525.4 kg) has improved as the economy has improved.

The key is versatility. A compact machine can be used in housing and commercial projects requiring different paving widths for parking lots, bicycle paths and driveways. And they can be helpful in urban areas with growing downtown revitalization projects. A compact machine can pave a narrow alley and with screed extensions can easily turn a lot into paved parking.

Look for compact wide rubber-track asphalt pavers that are designed to work in all types of sub-grades and paving applications.