

## Preface

The use of lead/acid batteries in transport, telecommunications, computer centers and power systems has been continuously increasing. This has led to the formation of a world community of scientists, technologists and battery experts who, during the late 1980s, broke the borders between countries and began to meet periodically to discuss the achievements and major problems in the development of this power source of vital importance. The initiative for organizing a world conference on these problems has been taken by the Lead/Acid Battery Department of the Central Laboratory of Electrochemical Power Sources at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In spring 1989, the first LABAT Conference was organized which was attended by 250 scientists, leading technologists and experts from all over the world. The Conference was held in Varna and speakers from 34 countries presented 80 lectures. LABAT'89 was a success. This gave impetus for the organization of a number of regional lead/acid battery conferences in Europe and in Asia. The second LABAT Conference took place in 1993 and had a similar success. Thus, LABAT Conferences have ranked themselves among the prestigious international meetings of the world battery community.

From 3–6 June 1996, the third LABAT Conference was held in Varna, Bulgaria. It was attended by 220 battery experts from more than 30 countries. Sixty lectures were presented organized thematically under 9 topics including: positive plate; negative plate; lead electrodes; oxygen electrode; grid corrosion; paste preparation and formation; valve-regulated lead/acid battery technology, performance and testing. At the end of each daily session a free panel discussion was held on the topic of the day, which proved to be very useful. During the Conference sessions LABAT'96 delegates discussed fundamental problems of lead/acid batteries on a theoretical level. Good theory provides a sound basis for solving of various, even the most difficult, practical problems.

The second aspect of the LABAT'96 Conference was of a purely applied nature. Representatives of 15 battery-related companies displayed their latest products at the exhibition held during the Conference. New business contacts were established and a number of deals were closed during LABAT'96.

In the eve of the first LABAT Conference in 1989, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences established a medal, in honour of the inventor of the lead/acid battery, the French scientist Gaston Planté. This medal is granted to scientists from different countries for their outstanding contribution to the development of lead/acid batteries. The Gaston Planté Medallist is selected (by secret vote) by an International Committee comprising scientists from 13 countries worldwide. During LABAT'96 the new recipients of this prestigious international award were announced.

The Organizing Committee of LABAT'96 thanks sincerely the sponsors of the Conference: UNESCO, Maschinenfabrik Gustav Eirich (Germany), Bitrode Ltd. (UK), Johnson Controls, Inc. (USA), AKUMICAR Ltd., START Ltd., ELCHIM-ISKRA Ltd., ENERGIA Ltd., IEHIT Ltd. and ROVA-7 Ltd. (Bulgaria), for their financial support, as well as DARAMIC (Germany) and Cookson Entek (UK) for their hospitality suites which provided an excellent opportunity for social contacts between the delegates.

It was the opinion shared by many attendees that the LABAT'96 Conference was well organized and very successful. This was a result of the enormous work done by the members of the Organizing Committee: Dr Geno Papazov (Scientific Secretary of LABAT'96), who was responsible for all aspects of the scientific and technical programme of the Conference, Mrs Mariana Gerganska (Secretary of LABAT'96), who did, in a most professional way, the correspondence with delegates from all over the world and took an active part in planning and implementation of all events before and during the time of the Conference, Dr Temelaki Rogachev who was in charge of all financial matters as well as of the organization of the lunches, the cocktail party and the reception dinner, Dr Boris Monahov, responsible for the accommodation of all delegates, Dr Stefan Rudevski and Mr Georgi Sheitanov, who organized the exhibition, Dr Anton Momtchilov and Dr Branimir Banov, who were very helpful to all delegates with their transportation from and to the airport in Varna, Dr Galia Petkova, responsible for the ladies' programme, Dr Martin Bojinov who was in charge of the Gaston Planté Medal nomination and election, Dr Mitko Dimitrov, who organized printing of some of the conference materials, and Mrs Lili Bogdanova providing valuable technical assistance before and during the Conference.

The LABAT Conferences have always passed in an extremely friendly atmosphere. The Organizers of LABAT'96 did their best to make this Conference most interesting and enjoyable to all who attended, and to expand the friendly relations established between lead/acid battery experts from all over the world. Hopefully we have achieved our goal: to make all LABAT'96 delegates feel like a big family.

The next international Conference on lead/acid batteries will be held during the spring of 1999, the last year of this century.

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