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Preface

The first rechargeable batteries were invented well over 100 years ago. Since then, and throughout their evolution, batteries have made vital contributions to one of the great triumphs of physical science... the conversion, portability and conservation of energy. Following its birth in 1859, the lead-acid battery has continuously been adapted to meet the increasing demands of a wide range of commercial opportunities and applications. As a result, the production and sale of lead-acid batteries, worldwide, is strong and is expected to strengthen even further. In 1997, for example, about 300 million automotive (SLI) batteries were produced globally with a sales revenue of close to US$7 billion. Manufacturers also supplied industrial batteries with a sales value in excess of US$3 billion; this business included 45 million small batteries based on advanced technology, valve-regulated designs. Overall, the manufacture and sale of lead-acid batteries of all types is a large, global business with annual sales of US$10 billion, and it is still growing!

Building on a proven track record and supported by ongoing research and development, the lead-acid battery industry is developing products which have improved performance, are cost-effective, and are easy to recycle. Thus, lead-acid batteries are in a strong position to meet the many energy needs associated with the powerful surge in technology that will boost economic growth in both Europe and overseas, as the industry and its consumers move towards, and beyond, the Year 2000. This progress was exemplified by speakers at the 6th European Lead Battery Conference (6ELBC) who reported on the encouraging advances which are being achieved in the design and production of lead-acid batteries for electric-vehicle and remote-area power-supply systems.

The primary aim of the European Lead Battery Conference is to assist and sustain the success of lead-acid batteries in all their existing, new and emerging markets. In particular, each Conference and accompanying Exhibition provides an important forum for the exchange of scientific, technical and commercial information on lead-acid batteries. Ten years ago, in 1988, the first Conference was held in Paris and was attended by just over 100 delegates. Succeeding meetings have witnessed a remarkable and consistent rise in attendance. Indeed, 5ELBC, held in Barcelona, firmly established the Conference as one of the most important lead-acid battery events on the international calendar. The record attendance at 6ELBC reinforced this status: the meeting attracted 460 delegates, 60 technical papers, 52 exhibitors, and 100 accompanying persons—from 45 countries.

On behalf of the organizers of 6ELBC, I would like to pay particular tribute to all the past and present speakers, exhibitors and delegates who have made this important series of Conferences increasingly useful to the battery community. I would also like to acknowledge the strong support of my colleagues, in Europe and in Australia, whose foresight, enthusiasm, encouragement and hard work have made each ELBC possible.

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