Iain Waddell, RSTA Chairman

Welcome to the first annual dinner of the Road Surface Treatment Association (RSTA) in the Marriott Forest of Arden Hotel. In particular I would like to welcome guests of RSTA members who are with us this evening.

An event such as this doesn’t merely ‘happen’. A lot of work has gone on in the background to ensure the success of today’s events. In previous years, the Road Surface Dressing Association has held successful annual conferences and dinners in London, with attendances of between 80 and 100 people. The RSTA Executive Committee believed that it was an approach it wanted to follow. The turnout tonight, of 182 people, clearly supports our view.

As this was to be the first annual dinner of the RSTA, we felt that we should have a new venue and a slightly different format. With all this in mind, an Organising Committee was established, consisting of Stewart Struthers, Chris Thomas, Roger Dennison and Terry Marshall to come up with a new format and venue. I am sure that you will agree with me that the event they have put together has resulted in an excellent day, at a superb venue. Those of you who took part in the golf event can either blame, or thank, Terry, for the challenge you faced.

I would also like to thank Lydia Vaux and Karen Connor who have not only kept us on course throughout 2007, as we moved to the formation of the RSTA, but more importantly for providing the administration support necessary to the organising committee and the RSTA members, in particular in relation to today’s event.

The RSTA officially came into being on 2 January 2008 after a lot of hard work by many people. You will remember that a similar organisation; FORSTA (Federation of Road Surface Treatment Associations), was established a number of years ago as an umbrella organisation for the road surface treatment industry. For many reasons, which I do not intend to go into and in any event, are past history, it didn’t work.

The main difference this time and the reason why I am sure that the RSTA will successfully go from strength to strength in the years to come, is that we are now truly representative of the industry, with more than 70 member organisations and the number continuing to rise. All this has come about through people forgetting about the past and genuinely committing themselves to our new organisation. All four sectors have this time fully integrated themselves into one body - the RSTA and you should all be congratulated for taking this bold step.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular, the chairs of the sector groups; Rob Gillespie (RSDA), Peter Buckley (SSCA), Alan Taylor (HFSA) and Phil Mason (Allied Industry Sector) for all their hard work in establishing the RSTA. I would also like to thank John Baxter and Alastair Jack for their contributions and assistance with the Working Group and their input toward the running of the RSTA since January.

We all need to recognise what we have achieved to date, with regard to the RSTA. In three short months your Executive Committee has taken the organisation off the drawing board, out of the starting blocks, to a fully functioning Association.

We have established a business plan and budget covering the next twelve months and have appointed a Press Relations Consultant, Laurie Perks of Initial Contacts, to raise the profile of the RSTA and more importantly, the challenges facing our members. I would emphasise, however, that Laurie can only publicise what we think is important, so please ensure that you feed into this process through the Chair of our Marketing Group, Larry Walsh.

I would remind you that the RSTA is your Association and if you want it to be
successful, you need to contribute to the work of our four sector Committees, as well as the Marketing Sub Committee, the Training Sub Committee and the soon to be established Health and Safety Sub Committee.

The RSTA web site (www.rsta-uk.org) is now up and running. It states that our association stands for QUALITY, COMPETENT WORKFORCE AND SAFE WORKING PRACTICES. However, we stand for much more than that. Indeed it is worth casting our minds back to the aims and objectives of FORSTA, which were:

- To raise the profile of the road surface treatments industry
- To provide a consistent liaison between associations and various bodies including:
  - The Highways Agency
  - The British Standards Institution
  - The European CEN Committees
  - The British Board of Agreement
  - Local Authority Organisations
  - Any other official body involved with the industry
- To develop consistent quality assurance processes in accordance with Sector Schemes and Factory Production Controls,
- To promote the environmental benefits of the industry
- To encourage technical development and innovation
- To provide training for members and clients on all aspects of the industry’s work, including Health and Safety.

I believe that these objectives are still very relevant today and should continue to be the aims of the RSTA, with our one clear objective being that we want to be:

The voice of the road surface treatment industry, which the Government and other decision makers consult with, actually listen to and act upon what they hear.
I know that we all have our own commercial aims and objectives, but by all working together through the offices of the RSTA we can achieve so much more collectively than we can individually.

We are facing challenges within the highway maintenance environment on a scale that we have not seen in the past. No longer is it just UK, or even European issues that we are subject to, now we are experiencing influences that are truly global as emerging economies, such as India and China, are seeking to grow at previously unimaginable speeds.

We are also facing a serious skills shortage at a professional, technical, managerial and operative level, the likes of which we haven’t seen. This is only likely to get worse with an ageing workforce and large capital projects such as the London Olympics and the Glasgow Commonwealth Games soaking up the skilled workforce.

We need to ensure that as an industry we play our part in developing a competent workforce culture through committing ourselves to training the operatives, engineers and technicians of the future. One of the benefits of the RSTA is that we have our own approved NVQ/SVQ Assessment Centre and associated training centres, which can help meet these future needs. In addition, we are also working very closely with our Clients to deliver suitably targeted training courses for their staff.

These particular issues have become particularly relevant as the spending gap on highway maintenance has started to widen again. I don’t need to go over this again as the challenges facing us were fully and expertly detailed at to-day’s seminar.

Through the RSTA we can raise the profile of all our members’ services, to ensure efficient and cost effective methods of highways maintenance for our clients and thereby helping to extend the life of the highways asset. I firmly believe that we are moving in the right direction, but there is still much work for us to do. We can only achieve this if we all work together. I am therefore delighted that, at an occasion such as this, we have guests from all sections of the industry, including some of the decision makers. It gives us the opportunity to discuss and understand the views of all parties and hopefully, will enable us to encourage the use of our processes. I believe today’s conference was extremely useful in this respect and I am sure that the discussions will continue for many days to come.

Thank You.
Response, on behalf of the guests, by Richard Ellis, President of the County Surveyors Society (CSS)

ODE TO THE RSTA

To the RSTA
I've a few things to say
That others have not said before
If you stay awake
Five minutes I'll take
And then I will utter no more

Delegates were so pleased
With my lengthy treatise
They gave me a pleasant surprise
Special attention
To all I mentioned
Was given by closing their eyes

For the RSTA
Can listen all day
To talks on Road Note Thirty Nine
They sit up straight
And cannot wait
To improve their treatment design

There are cynics about
Who unreasonably doubt
The sincerity of our task
They just seem to think
Our aim is to drink
The remains of a real ale cask

But RSTA knows
That experience shows
That people matter most by far
And that must explain
Why there's so much to gain
In a drink with our friends in the bar!

To return to my theme
Mister Chairman I've seen
It's knowledge for which you're yearning
With wide ranging thought
Your members have sought
These chances for further learning

But RSTA knows
That experience shows
That people matter most by far
And that must explain
Why there's so much to gain
In a drink with our friends in the bar!