

# Sweet Spot

When a baseball player hits the ball well, he can hear it and feel it in his swing. There's nothing quite like the feel of driving the bat through the ball and watching the ball sail over the fence. A lot of things have to happen for the batter to make the right connection. He has to see the ball well. The pitch has to be in the right spot. His timing has to be just right. His bat speed has to be high. And all those factors have to combine so that when he hits the ball, it strikes the right part of his bat, the part known as "the sweet spot."

Gear manufacturers may soon have the opportunity to hit a sweet spot of their own. Like the big league slugger, gear manufacturers need a lot of things to go right in order to hit the sweet spot, but it looks to me like everything may be coming together—just in time for IMTS.

America's industrial economy has been growing all year. Most gear manufacturers I talk to are extremely busy these days. Today, getting steel seems to be more of a problem than getting customers. The cutting tool suppliers I talk to are also extremely busy, although tool pricing pressure is still high. Many gear machine tool suppliers are quoting on new projects like crazy, but some are still waiting for the flood of orders to come in.

There's a lot of good activity in the gear industry, and now may be the right time for you to take advantage of it. With the intense pressure on the machine tool manufacturers right now, there are deals to be made. They want and need your business.

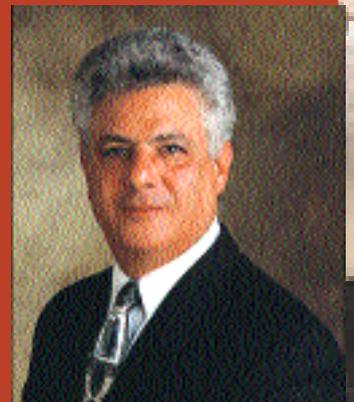
But if you need extra productivity or capacity, you'd better act fast, since there is very little gear equipment readily available or coming available shortly. It doesn't take long for the machine tool manufacturers' order books for near-term delivery to get filled, so what's out there is disappearing fast. You can't just double production of gear hobbers, grinders or any complex machine tool overnight. Right now, you may still be able to get a machine that's in stock, or one that's in the pipeline but not yet spoken for. For those who are thinking of buying machine tools, it may not yet be the bottom of the ninth, but time is running out.

IMTS provides a prime opportunity to see and evaluate most all of your options under one roof. Most of the major gear industry suppliers will be located in one place—the gear pavilion—and many of them are introducing new technology at the show (see our pre-show coverage beginning on page 14).

But even if your company isn't ready to spend money on new equipment, you should attend the show to familiarize yourself with what's out there and its availability. There's no better time to compare the products of the various manufacturers. The booths are usually loaded with a wide range of gear knowledge and experience. The people who design, build, sell, install and service this equipment will all be available. Now's your chance to ask questions about the technology and find out the situation regarding delivery times.

In baseball, hitters know that not every pitch can be hit out of the park. But the best ones are ready when the right pitch comes. Like them, you need to be ready for that pitch. Lately, for many of us in the gear industry, the pitches are starting to look like softballs.

**We'll be exhibiting in the gear pavilion in booth B-7113. We hope to see you at the show.**



*Michael Gustin*