



**Dr. Akihiko Saito**  
FISITA President

## “FISITA is an Engineering Congress – Not a Lobby Group”

In the run-up to the FISITA World Congress from September 14 to September 19, 2008 in Munich (Germany) ATZ and the outgoing FISITA President Dr. Akihiko Saito, talked about his personal goals, the experiences he has made being President of the world body for automotive engineers and the 32. FISITA World Congress. Also the challenges the automotible industry has to face were discussed by Saito, who is Senior Technical Executive at Toyota as well.

**ATZ** In your opinion, what is the main function of FISITA?

**Saito** FISITA's mission is to share knowledge among the world's automotive engineers and by doing so, contribute to the development of automotive technology.

**ATZ** What would you say are the biggest challenges that the automotive industry has to face nowadays?

**Saito** Our biggest challenge is to develop a new approach to product development which is more forward-looking and proactive. Toyota's vision for research and development can be summed up in two words: “Zeronise” and “Maximise”. “Zeronise” means we are striving for zero negative impacts on our environment, zero accidents and zero traffic congestion. At the same time, we are striving for maximum positive impact on personal enrichment through comfort and fun. This philosophy

is key to gaining widespread consumer acceptance of more sustainable technologies. Take as an example Toyota's petrol hybrid vehicle Prius, which gained worldwide popularity when the second generation was launched in 2003. It provides outstanding environmental performance, and at the same time, uplifting driving performance. This is exactly the realisation of both “Zeronise” and “Maximise”.

**ATZ** What are the goals, the expectations for the FISITA World Congress 2008?

**Saito** Our first goal is always to have excellent quality technical information and lively exchange between engineers from industry and academia. We will also have an innovation at the Munich congress that we are calling “Islands of Excellence”. We had a

competition in which universities from around the world applied for the chance to present their automotive research projects.

**ATZ** What impacts will the congress have, politically and on the automotive industry?

**Saito** We have to keep in mind that FISITA is an engineering congress – not a lobby group. But we know that today, people everywhere are more concerned

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about the social and environmental impact of the automobile than ever before. Politicians have to react to that concern,

but to do this well, they must understand the facts. I worry that, too often, the message from some of our leaders seems to be “don’t worry, technology will come along and solve everything”. The present concern over oil prices and future alternatives to fossil fuels is a

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prime example. As engineers and scientists, we accept that the world is looking to us to find solutions to sustainable mobility. And every day we are making progress. But we are not magicians. We know that sustainable mobility calls for a partnership between players in the automotive industry, but also energy companies, policy makers and consumers. Cleaner, safer vehicles also need better infrastructure, improved urban planning, better driver education and the right fiscal incentives. If we can use the FISITA Congress to help convey the technical reality behind the choices facing governments around the world, then I believe we can contribute to a climate where mobility policy decisions are based on the best scientific knowledge, and not just on short-term political expediency.

**ATZ** If you look back, with which goals and ambitions did you start as FISITA President?

**Saito** When I was a young engineer starting my career with Toyota, it was considered a great honour to be asked to present a paper at the FISITA Congress. Today the industry is much more global and the pace of technical development is faster. There are many more competing conferences and sources of information on offer for engineers. So when I had the privilege to be elected FISITA President, my ambition was to strengthen our association so that we can respond more rapidly to the changing needs of our members and protect FISITA’s reputation as the world body for automotive engineers.

**ATZ** What did you achieve, in which concerns do you think you have brought FISITA forward?

**Saito** We have expanded our links with industry. Today, most of the leading global vehicle manufacturers and top suppliers support FISITA, which is vital to our future development. Just as important is the fact that now, among our FISITA Honorary Committee we also have the three leading energy companies, along with leading companies from the electronics and Intelligent Transportation Systems worlds. This is important for us because we have to build links between engineers working in the vehicle world – our traditional members – and those colleagues working in related and increasingly important areas like fuels and lubricants, electronics and telematics. We have also welcomed our first member companies from India and China – the two fastest-growing automotive economies, where FISITA has to be more involved. In 2012 we will have the FISITA Congress in Beijing, hosted by SAE China. I think we can be proud of the progress we have made in strengthening FISITA’s organisation over recent years, but there is still much work to be done.

**ATZ** Which personal conclusion can you draw from your presidency?

**Saito** The activities we support in the education area, such as our sponsorship of the FISITA Formula SAE World Cup, has given me the chance to meet students from around the world as they take part in exciting, highly successful competitions organised by our member societies. This has led me to conclude two things: First, that the work of FISITA and our 38 societies makes a real difference. And second, that the next generation of automotive engineers absolutely possess the skills and the talent needed to solve the challenges we now face.

**ATZ** Dr. Saito, it has been a pleasure talking to you.

*Interview conducted by Roland Schedel.*

**Dr. Akihiko Saito**

is FISITA’s President for the 2006 to 2008 term. He was born in 1940 and joined Toyota in 1968 after earning a Doctorate in Mechanical Engineering at Nagoya University (Japan). In 1980, Dr. Saito became a member of the team that handled product planning work for the Corolla, served as Chief Engineer and became a General Manager in the Product Planning Division in 1987. Dr. Saito was named to the Board of Directors in 1991, became Managing Director in 1996 and Senior Managing Director in 1998. In 2001 Dr. Saito assumed the position of Executive Vice President. In July 2005 he became Senior Technical Executive in Toyota and also Vice Chairman of Denso. He was named Chairman of Denso in June 2007.



Dr. Akihiko Saito, FISITA President, Senior Technical Executive Toyota Motor Corporation