

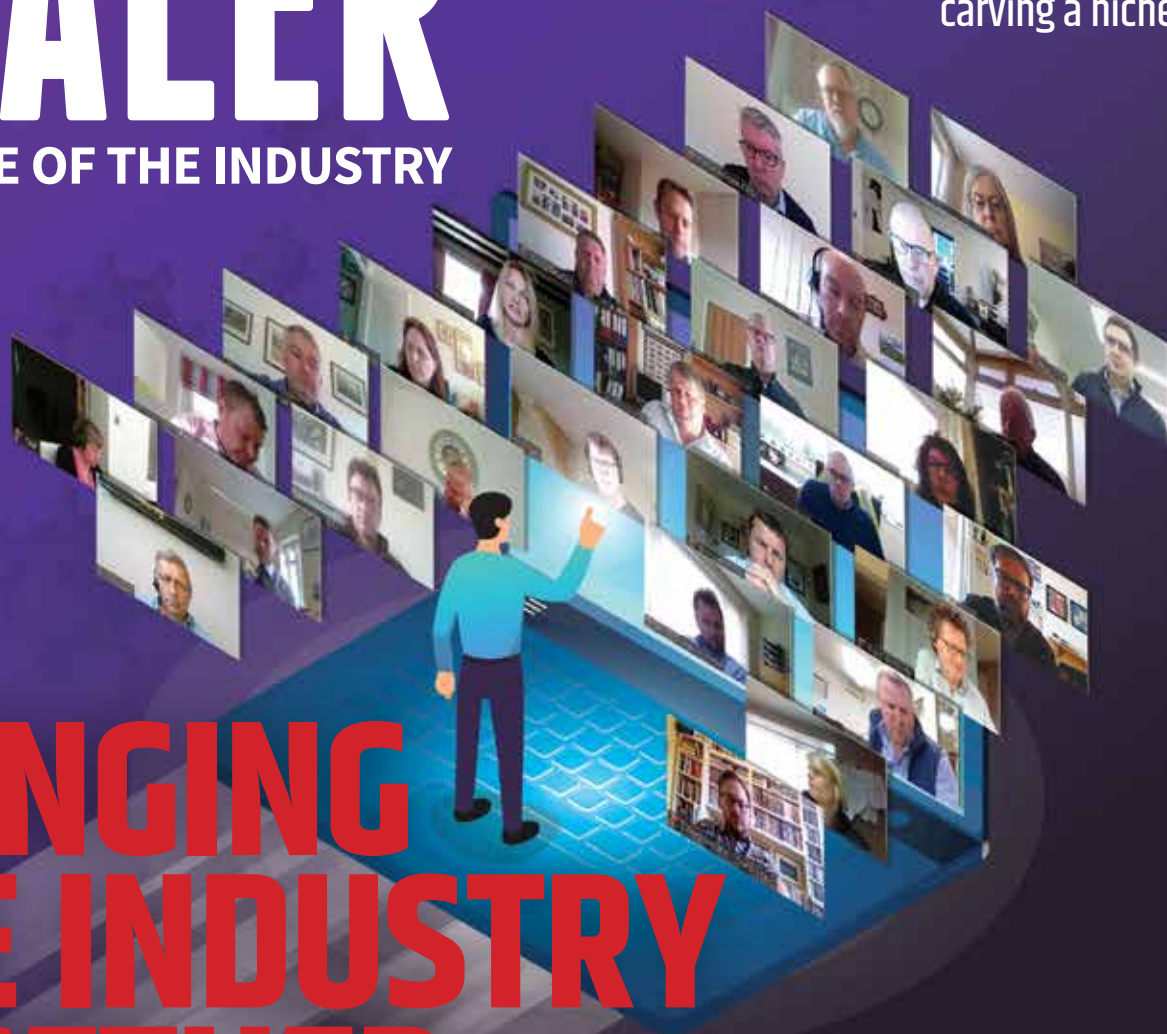
SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

MAY / JUNE 2020

Thinking
outside
the box

BRAD Farm Machinery
carving a niche



BRINGING THE INDUSTRY TOGETHER

Dealers, manufacturers and trade associations convene with Service Dealer to discuss response to outbreak

New range launched

Trade day see Makita launch 30 new products

Petrol engines

Is time running out?



**I HAVE TO BE TOUGH
IN THIS TRADE**

WE TALK TO GEORGINA CORNOCK-EVANS
OF ARWEL'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

SHAPING THE FUTURE



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CONTENTS

- 4 NEWS**
Latest industry developments
- 12 COVID-19 RESPONSE**
Dealers, manufacturers and trade associations talk to *Service Dealer*
- 18 WOMEN IN THE DEALERSHIP**
Georgina Cornock-Evans of Arwel's Agri Services talks to us
- 24 TRADE DAY**
Makita launches 30 products
- 28 INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS**
Is time running out for the petrol engine?
- 34 ATVs**
Honda refines offerings
- 38 DEALER PROFILE**
BRAD Farm Machinery on thinking outside the box
- 44 BOOK REVIEW**
Lawnmowers by Brian Radam
- 46 SME DIGEST**
Budget special report
- 50 VIEW FROM ACROSS THE POND**
Sara Hey offers advice from a US perspective
- 51 DIARY OF A SEASON**
With Strathbogie Forest & Garden
- 52 NEW PRODUCTS**
Coverage of new equipment to hit the market
- 56 IN MY VIEW**
With Chris Biddle
- 58 EVENTS**
Shows and industry events over the coming months

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to May/June 2020's edition of *Service Dealer* magazine. I never thought I'd be writing an introduction such as this. None of us could have ever foreseen the country, and indeed the world, would be in such a position.

Since mid-March, when it became starkly apparent how the coronavirus outbreak would impact all our lives, both at home and at work, everything has changed.

Via our *Weekly Update* we have been doing our best to keep our readers informed of the developments and guidelines that have directly affected our industry. At first it felt like matters were changing at breakneck speed. It wasn't even a case of what was differing week by week, it was more like day by day, hour by hour.

As the lockdown became the new (sort of) normal, however, things settled down somewhat. Dealers were finding what was right for their businesses. Some of you will likely to be shut now, some open with restrictions in place. We're all hoping, as the weeks and the months slowly tick by, that everyone will be in a position to return to full speed as soon as possible. We know from the regular video conference calls we've been convening, that dealers are already looking ahead to this time – more evidence of the grit and resourcefulness of the network.

In the meantime, *Service Dealer* will continue to be with you during these extraordinary events. Communication is more vital now than ever before. We'll be arriving in your inbox every Friday as close to noon as we can and this mag will be sticking with its bi-monthly publication.

To keep you fully informed on your industry, this issue we feature a mixture of our regular features, articles compiled pre-outbreak, as well as the most up-to-date information our printing schedule allows. Stay safe.



www.servicedealer.co.uk

OUR PEOPLE

PUBLISHER
DUNCAN MURRAY-CLARKE

EDITOR
STEVE GIBBS
steve@servicedealer.co.uk

AGRICULTURAL EDITOR
MARTIN RICKATSON
jmr.agriculture@gmail.com

SME DIGEST EDITOR
ADAM BERNSTEIN
adam@adambernstein.co.uk

CONTRIBUTOR
LAURENCE GALE
laurence.gale@btinternet.com

PRODUCED BY
THE AD PLAIN LTD
Pipe House, Lupton Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 9BS, UK
01491 837 117

www.theadplain.com
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DESIGN & LAYOUT
IAIN ROBINSON

ADVERTISING SALES
NIKKI HARRISON
nikki@theadplain.com
01491 837 117

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INDUSTRY



The first *Service Dealer* industry video conference meeting

SERVICE DEALER CONVENES INDUSTRY THINK TANK

To offer dealers advice during Covid-19 outbreak

Starting on Wednesday 25 March 2020, *Service Dealer* convened the first of an ongoing series of informal industry think tank sessions, conducted remotely via video conference, featuring senior representatives of industry trade bodies, manufacturers, suppliers and business support services.

The intention of the sessions is to talk through the current thinking and mood among the industry regarding the coronavirus outbreak and to consider what the latest governmental guidelines and advice mean for dealers across the country.

Chaired by *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke, the meetings have employed the framework of considering what the latest advice issued by the government has meant for dealers and their technician staff of agricultural machinery, commercial grounds care machinery and domestic garden machinery. *Service Dealer* has then reported on what has been said in our *Weekly Update*, published every Friday at noon.

Following the first two industry representative sessions, *Service Dealer* held a meeting, attended by dealers of a variety of machinery specialisms.

Duncan said after the first session, "We are in the independent position that we can link the manufacturers and service providers together at this challenging time.

"We consider these video conference meetings, which we shall be running weekly for the foreseeable future, as a most valuable exercise. With them we hope to be able to offer a little more clarity for our dealer readers during what is a most stressful and confusing time.

"We have been most grateful to be joined by some very senior and respected members of our industry, all of whom have 'left their weapons at the door' so to speak and have been most open with their advice and help.

"The intention by all, is to discuss what individual company's measures have been in reaction to this

outbreak, as well as to talk about their understanding of what the official rules mean for their dealers.

"I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to contribute."

You can read what some of the thinking to have come out of the sessions has been, starting on page 12 of this issue.

The first two sessions were attended by senior representatives of trade bodies the AEA, BAGMA and IAgRE, as well as key people from the following companies:

- AGCO
- Briggs & Stratton
- Catalyst Computer Systems
- FGM Claymore
- Hayter/Toro
- Husqvarna
- Ibcos
- Iseki
- Kramp
- Kress
- Kubota
- Makita
- Price Turfcare
- Stiga
- STIHL

INDUSTRY

JCB JOINS NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION

Over ventilator shortage



JCB ventilator housings

At the time of going to press, JCB was poised to re-start production at a factory closed as a result of the coronavirus crisis, in order to join the national effort to manufacture ventilators.

JCB received a direct appeal from Prime Minister Boris Johnson earlier in March to help plug the national ventilator shortage. Following the approach, JCB Chairman Lord Bamford promised to help in any way the company could and immediately mobilised a research and engineering team to examine potential ways to assist.

JCB planned to restart production at a factory which had been closed as a result of the coronavirus crisis. But instead of making cabs for JCB diggers, the plant was mobilised to make special steel housings for a brand new design of ventilator from Dyson. A minimum of 10,000 of the JCB housings were earmarked for manufacture once Dyson received regulatory approval for its design.

The first prototypes of the housings were delivered to Dyson after rolling off the production line at JCB's £50 million Cab Systems factory in Uttoxeter, Staffordshire. The factory fell silent on 18 March, along with eight other JCB UK manufacturing plants, after a fall in demand caused by the coronavirus crisis.

Lord Bamford said, "When we were approached by the Prime Minister we were determined, as a British company, to help in any way we could. This project has gone from design to production in just a matter of days and I'm delighted that we have been able to deploy the skills of our talented engineering, design and fabrication teams so quickly at a time of national crisis. This is also a global crisis, of course, and we will naturally help with the production of more housings if these ventilators are eventually required by other countries."

JCB's response to the national call to action would see the return to work for around 50 employees affected by an extended company shutdown announced previously. JCB suspended production at its nine UK production plants until at least the end of April as a result of the coronavirus crisis and furloughed the vast majority of its 6,500 workforce. The company announced they would be paying them 80% of their basic pay for the next month, regardless of what they earn.

Employees returning to work to help manufacture the ventilator housings will be paid 100% of their normal pay.

INDUSTRY



Kate Godber, Garden Trader's site manager

WE NEED TO GET GARDENING!

Campaign supporting local dealers

Service Dealer's colleagues at Garden Trader are developing a series of blogs to encourage people in self-isolation to get out into their gardens.

The blogs will also promote the importance of supporting local garden machinery dealers.

Garden Trader's site manager Kate Godber said, "With gardening being one of the few activities at the moment we can do, without putting others at risk, we felt we should be promoting its benefits. Gardening has a great number of health benefits, in terms of exercise, our mental health and overall well-being. It allows us to get outside even when we are largely housebound.

"Our seasonal gardening tips will also support dealers during this time. We feel this latest initiative can be adopted by dealers too on their own social media platforms."

The blogs will urge people to continue to shop with their local garden machinery dealers if they can. With many already offering home deliveries and extra customer support, it's still possible to purchase and get machinery repaired with them.

The team will be sharing more over the coming weeks that they think will help. Visit gardentrader.co.uk to have a read and if there are any tips any of our dealer readers would like to share please send them to us and the team will give your business a shout out!

EXHIBITIONS



IOG SALTEX 2019

SALTEX PLANNING FOR NOVEMBER SHOW

Organisers hopeful exhibition can go ahead as scheduled

The organisers of this year's SALTEX exhibition, due to take place at the Birmingham NEC from 4-5 November, have issued a statement stating that planning for the show continues to be in full swing.

Geoff Webb, CEO of the Institute Of Groundsmanship which runs the show, said: "After recent consultation with our strategic partners we are hopeful that the situation we face today will have passed and that SALTEX will take place on 4 and 5 November. We understand, though, that this is an evolving situation. Recent exhibitions at the NEC that were scheduled to take place this March and April have already promoted the fact that they have rescheduled for October and November this year. This provides us with added confidence to continue preparations for SALTEX 2020.

"SALTEX has faced many challenges in its 74-year history and everyone associated with the exhibition – organisers, exhibitors, visitors – knows the grounds-care industry, has always shown resilience. It is this strength and unity that

defines this fantastic industry.

"We are ever mindful of the government's advice and guidance. We live in hope that after this period of darkness, SALTEX and the grounds care industry will be a shining light as we plan for a brighter future and return to better days ahead.

"SALTEX 2020 will be a great opportunity for the industry to come together, to reunite and to look ahead to the future. It is our hope that we can all gather as one and that SALTEX's 75th anniversary will be the most vibrant and celebrated event in its long history!

Geoff continued, "Of course, it is necessary to adapt to the uncertainty we are all experiencing, as government advice can change at any time. We are committed to keeping you up to date every step of the way.

"Please take care of yourselves and loved ones and remember to offer extra support to those most vulnerable. Try and maintain a positive outlook and we look forward to brighter days ahead – because they will come."

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DEALERS

OPICO APPOINTS LOUTH TRACTORS

For Maschio Gaspardo in North Lincolnshire



L-R: David Day, Product Manager for Maschio Gaspardo in the UK elbow bumping with Philip Stephenson, Agricultural Sales Manager, Louth Tractors

OPICO Ltd has announced the appointment of Louth Tractors to its Maschio Gaspardo dealer network.

Louth Tractors has been in the business of providing Lincolnshire's farmers with the latest agricultural machinery for over 30 years. The company believes the addition of the full Maschio Gaspardo tillage line-up of ploughs, cultivators, drills, combination drills and rotovators, as well as the range of Maschio flail mowers, strengthens its offering. With a depot on the outskirts of the town of Louth, it believes it is ideally positioned to grow the franchise in the North Lincolnshire area.

Rob Immink, Maschio Gaspardo's Sales Manager said, "We couldn't be more delighted that Louth Tractors has chosen to sell and support the Maschio Gaspardo franchise, it's a well-known local business with a hard-earned reputation for quality and honest, family values."

Philip Stephenson, Agricultural Sales Manager, commented, "The area Louth Tractors covers is historically a strong area for Maschio products, parts and service. Our sales, service and parts teams are fully up to speed with the product range and are ready to get stuck in to demonstrating, selling and supporting the range."

DEALERS



Honey Brothers' premises

Honey Brothers, the dealership established in 1955 that specialises in forestry and arboricultural equipment, has opened new, purpose-built premises in Peasmarsh near Guildford, Surrey.

In early March the company held an Open Day to celebrate the occasion and to show off the new facility to customers old and new.

Director Martyn Day said, "The open day was a chance for us to share our brand new shop with our customers and to thank them for supporting us over the years. We created almost a mini trade show with exhibitors set up with stands outside and running demos such as chainsaw trouser tests and a climbing forum.

"Everyone who came enjoyed a burger and a beer, and were able to speak to key suppliers such as Petzl,

HONEY BROTHERS OPENS NEW PREMISES

Open Day held to celebrate in early March

Husqvarna, Outwear and Stihl, see new products and share ideas."

Fellow Director, Stu Girdler, added, "The new premises allows us to display a huge amount more of our product range and with the space it has given us the chance to create a climbing area for customers to test out ropes, hardware and harnesses. We also have a much larger serving counter to keep up with the increase in customer footfall and a fantastic new workshop, so we can service and repair machinery a lot more efficiently.

"In the future we're looking forward to hosting events, product demo days and climber meet-ups, as our shop and outdoor areas now provide the ideal space. Here's to the next 65 years!"

DEALERS

BEN BURGESS AWARDED VADERSTAD FRANCHISE

Across its locations



Väderstad UK has appointed Ben Burgess as a full dealer at its Norwich, Aylsham, Beeston, Newmarket and Ellington locations with immediate effect; its new depot at Oakham will come on stream in 2021.

Väderstad says its primary aim, whenever there is a commitment to change within the distribution network, is to retain the support of the customer base, and to this end it says it is confident that Ben Burgess will apply the shared

values to the benefit of everyone.

"We are pleased to announce our new partnership with Väderstad," said Ben Burgess Sales Director David Fairman. "Its product line will offer us a full portfolio of cultivation equipment that ties in seamlessly with John Deere's technology and tractor line-up, including the latest range of large models. It is therefore a very exciting opportunity for Ben Burgess and our customers."

INDUSTRY

CLAAS BRINGS FORWARD LAUNCH OF ONLINE PARTS DOC CATALOGUE

In response to coronavirus pandemic

In order to minimise human contact and still provide a high level of service to customers, Claas UK has launched its Parts Doc electronic parts catalogue on its website for customers.

Available to users throughout the UK and Ireland, Parts Doc enables customers to identify any parts they require, which can then be ordered through their local dealership.

Parts Doc can be accessed either via the www.claas.co.uk or www.claas.ie websites where it can be found under the Service + Parts – Applications heading or directly via www.claas.co.uk/service-new/

applications/spare-parts-catalogue.

From here, having selected the machine type and model, the customer then needs to enter their machine's serial number to bring up the appropriate machine sections, from which they can then identify the parts they require.

For simplicity, instead of a long parts number, each part is given a simple drawing number.

Once they have found the parts they require, to order them the customer needs to contact their local Claas dealer and tell them the machine model or serial number and

appropriate drawing number for the part, which the dealer can then cross-reference to the full part number and advise on price and availability.

Once ordered by the dealer, the part will be dispatched from the central Claas UK Parts warehouse at Saxham for next day delivery to the dealership for collection by the customer.

For parts that have to be dispatched from the company's Parts Logistics Centre in Hamm, Germany, again, says Claas, the majority of these items will be delivered overnight directly to the dealership for next day collection.



DEALERS

SHARROCK ACQUIRES ASSETS OF JACOBSEN DIRECT

Territory expansion also



Sharrock Jacobsen

FR Sharrock Limited has acquired the assets of Jacobsen Direct UK in a deal which will also see responsibility for the distribution of Jacobsen machines and products in the Staffordshire, Shropshire and Derbyshire areas transfer to it.

Commenting on the deal, James Sharrock, Managing Director of FR Sharrock Limited said, "Jacobsen Direct UK have done an outstanding job in building direct relationships with customers, including several of them in the design and testing phases of the new Jacobsen products being released to the UK market.

"These new machines, incorporating knowledge gained in the Utility sector with Ransomes, has produced some of the most innovatively engineered, well-built and robust machines I have seen in my 30 years in the industry. Having the design and manufacture based here in the UK is critical in the current climate and after seeing the factory's

vision for the future with TR, HR, HM and AR series it became a priority to align our distribution with that."

Speaking after the signing of the agreement, Will Carr, Sales Director for Ransomes Jacobsen said, "In 2014 we appointed Sharrock as Ransomes Jacobsen dealer for Lancashire. Their commitment to outstanding customer service and unrivalled product support has seen their area of responsibility grow to cover most of the North and Midlands. This deal is a logical step with Sharrock well positioned to cover customers from its existing outlets.

"In 2017 it was awarded Ransomes' Dealer of the Year, in 2018 was nominated in the *Service Dealer* awards and in 2019 was a finalist in *Service Dealer's Professional Turfcare Dealer of the Year* award. This continual investment into infrastructure and staff to meet customers' increasing demands is a sure sign of continued success."

Sales Director of FR Sharrock Limited, Steven Hanlon, added, "This is an exciting development. Reuniting the Ransomes and Jacobsen brands across the area will only increase the service levels to both brand customers. Having machinery that is not only designed specifically for the UK but also manufactured here at the superb facility in Ipswich is a massive advantage in the sector.

"I am personally overseeing the reintegration across the area, with support from our internal teams and that of Bruce Alexander at the factory."

INDUSTRY



Victoria and James Seaton of JVS Machinery

BELAIR CHOOSES NEW UK DISTRIBUTOR

JVS Machinery takes on bedding machines, mixer wagons and self-loading wagons

Belair has chosen JVS Machinery to be the sole distributor of its bedding machines, mixer wagons and self-loading wagons in the UK. The French manufacturer produces a range of livestock machinery including zero grazing and forage equipment.

JVS Machinery is owned and run by husband and wife James and Victoria Seaton. James, who has experience of contracting and a background in dairy farming, said, "We're based in Shropshire, but we serve the whole of the UK. We know Belair equipment has been popular so we want customers to know that we're here to help with parts and new machines."

JVS Machinery will be offering the full range of Belair products new, and refurbishing used units.

"Some customers have upgraded to newer models and this is creating a market for used machines," said James.

To support farmers with Belair machines, the business is also offering parts, servicing and repairs throughout the UK.

James said: "These machines are made of quality materials and can be reconditioned to a high standard for those who prefer to buy used. We have confidence in the build quality and believe these machines are the best available in the UK for this type of work."

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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARDWARE PLACE



From mid-March when the government issued its stay at home advice and listed which non-essential retail premises were to close due to the Covid-19 outbreak, dealers were left in confusion by the guidelines that initially just listed 'hardware' stores as exempt from closure.

In order to hopefully gain some clarity for dealers, Service Dealer began convening industry video conference call meetings comprising trade bodies, manufacturers, suppliers and business support services – as well as ones with dealers of all machinery specialisms.

Editor STEVE GIBBS reports

Dealers from all around the country, who focus on all machinery areas including agriculture, commercial groundcare and domestic garden machinery, were forced to make some incredibly difficult decisions in mid-March – most likely the most difficult business decisions of their lives.

Fundamentally, did they remain open and if they did, in what capacity? Was it okay to shut the showroom and continue with the workshop? Or to make deliveries? These are the questions dealers found themselves wrestling with.

These decisions were made all the more difficult by the official guidelines issued by the government being, shall we say, open to interpretation.

First, what must be said, where there was no doubt, was in the safe working practices which had to be adhered to which we have all heard so much about. Plus, of course, those jobs which can be carried out from home (accounts, admin, HR etc), having to be being carried out from home.

Where the lack of clarity initially came for dealers was when the question was posed: is a dealer's retail business one of those on the government's list of retailers exempt from closure?

In order to attempt to gain a sense of what the industry's thoughts were on questions such as these, *Service Dealer* organised the first of a series of conference video calls on Wednesday 25 March, which included many of our commercial partners (manufacturers, suppliers, business support services) as well as representatives of industry trade bodies.

Our intention was to chat through what had been developing with the government advice and, as best as we could, see if we could reach some sort of consensus of advice which we could pass on to you, our dealer readers.

Agricultural machinery

What began to emerge was that the advice to agricultural machinery dealers was probably the clearest. The link between the work carried out in this sector and the preservation of the food production chain was unarguable.

In fact subsequent to the official government guidance first being issued, "Agricultural supplies shops" were added as a new entry to the list.

Agricultural showrooms perhaps began to be closed, but parts supply and workshops required to keep farmers farming were in the main ongoing – observing the strict social distancing requirements which are mandatory for all.

Another area which dealers wanted guidance on was whether they could be classed as key workers, meaning they could continue to send their children to school. Keith Christian, Director of BAGMA, has kindly been involved in the meetings and had some advice on the subject. Keith said, "We concluded that agricultural technicians, those people involved in the food production process, would be considered to be key workers.

"The only advice we could give on that was for those who thought they were key people to contact their local school and talk to the schools themselves to see if their children could go in. The recommendation is to keep children at home if possible, though."

Regarding agricultural machinery dealers staying open, Keith added, "We've been inundated with dealer inquiries, mostly agricultural dealers, wanting to know if they could stay open? They wanted to know if they were considered to be a critical or essential business, and it's an interpretation of what guidance exists; you can interpret the government information given in the way

that you want to suit yourself.

"Our interpretation is that the support element that the agricultural machinery dealer offers to the farmer is part of the food processing and production chain. We are saying that the dealers must make that decision for themselves, but we believe they are a critical or essential business in that respect.

"We are telling all dealers they must abide by what the government is telling them, in terms of their duty of care for their employees. If people can work from home, they must work from home – that's not a choice.

"Many businesses we have talked to are distancing their customers from their staff, by not allowing them into the business, delivering equipment to the gate and such like.

"I have to say, dealers I've talked to are using a lot of common sense during this crisis."

Outdoor power equipment

What was more confusing and less clear, however, was what were dealers whose business is concerned with the sale and service of commercial grasscare or domestic garden machinery supposed to do? Were these businesses exempt from closing?

As I'm sure our readers are very much aware, a term which was used in the government's guidelines as a retail business exempt from closure was 'hardware' store – which was subsequently extended to also include the description "equipment, plant and tool hire". Out of all the business descriptions cited in the guidelines, this would be the one which, if an individual dealer so desired, could be applied to themselves.

During the week which *Service Dealer's* second video meeting took place on 1 April, the figure which was mentioned anecdotally a couple of times was that certain manufacturers believed that around 70% of their dealers of commercial and domestic machinery had taken the decision to close their doors completely.

It was thought that domestic machinery dealers with a robust online sales offering were managing to serve customers – meeting at the gates of premises, dropping things off at a safe distance, etc. There still appeared to be a demand among customers who were stuck at home to maintain their gardens.

However, where there was more of a grinding to a complete halt was with commercial grasscare. This was due to the professional end-users simply not working, or at least not working on grass-cutting duties. The golf course sector, in particular, was cited as an area of great concern, with unfortunately a very tough time predicted to be ahead of it.

Laurence Gale, Editor of *Service Dealer's* sister title *TurfPro*, confirmed that many local authority workers, for example, who would usually be looking after our open green spaces, had been redeployed by their councils to other areas deemed to be more essential.

Laurence said, "I've spoken to several local authorities

who have conformed to me that all grounds maintenance activities have been suspended as non-essential work. I've been told that in many areas gardeners and grounds staff are supporting the most vulnerable members of our community via the distributing and sorting of food and essential items via foodbanks or local community hubs. Also, many workers who would usually be cutting the grass are now supporting other council services, such as refuse collections."

Therefore, with less demand and concerns over safety, some dealers have inevitably been forced to scale back their operations.

Furloughing

The advice for dealers who have been forced to scale back on staff, is to familiarise yourselves with the government's guidelines regarding furloughing staff.

BAGMA's, Keith Christian, said, "It is really important for companies to know that they can furlough people, meaning to lay them off – and then apply to the government to have 80% of their salary paid up to a maximum per month of £2,500.

"When under furlough an employee remains employed by the company but is not allowed to do any work for their employer who has furloughed them. When things return to 'normal' the employee can be bought back into their job if it is still available and go back on full pay." The government's 80% payment is in place for three months and can be backdated to March 1st.

"It could be very important to help companies survive for the next three months to be able to furlough people while there is no work for them," continued Keith,

"but bring them back into work at a later date and the individual will still get 80% of their salary from the government plus they will maintain their employment benefits and rights."

A similar package was subsequently announced for the self-employed, but they will be able to get the 80% and carry on working if they are allowed to by the current guidance. In the self-employed case it will be a lump sum payment for three months paid in June. It is important to not mix up self-employed and those employed under the PAYE scheme.

Via our discussions, it emerged there was initially some confusion amongst the network over minimum periods of furloughing staff and whether staff could be furloughed multiple times.

The official government guidelines on this state: "Any employees you place on furlough must be furloughed for a minimum period of 3 consecutive weeks. When they return to work, they must be taken off furlough. Employees can be furloughed multiple times, but each separate instance must be for a minimum period of 3 consecutive weeks."

More information can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme#when-your-employees-are-on-furlough>

It must be stressed though, that if workers are furloughed, then they are unable to perform any paid-for work for the duration for the company which has furloughed them. They are however, allowed to do paid-for work for another employer. The only problem might be, is if the employee's contract of employment

says they cannot – and then the issue would be with their employer, not the government. They wouldn't be contravening the scheme's rules.

Service Dealer's SME Digest editor Adam Bernstein confirmed, "It should be noted that if the contract allows, furloughed employees may undertake employment elsewhere without affecting the grant that employers can claim under the scheme."

What all furloughed workers can do without any doubt, however, is volunteer work.

Regarding this, there has been plenty of talk on Service Dealer's calls that many dealership workers would possess skills which could be very much desired locally. Those in rural areas, who know how to drive tractors or operate machinery, could very well be able to assist farmers who are crying out for help right now. Or perhaps dealership vans which aren't in constant use currently, might be able to be put to good use? It was felt that our sector was in a good position to offer genuinely useful help to the community.

Dealer response

Service Dealer held the first of a series of video conference calls with dealers during the second week of April.

We heard from a selection of dealers from around the UK, representing dealerships large and small, multi-branched and single units. We heard from dealers who sell agricultural machinery, commercial grasscare equipment and domestic garden equipment.

As expected, what we heard was that dealers were having to find ways to adapt through this situation with a resourcefulness which they have shown repeatedly over the years.

Experiences seemed to be broadly split along the lines of those involved in serving farms and farmers and those handling outdoor power equipment (OPE) – both commercial and domestic.

Considering first the experiences which were discussed from those in the OPE sector, we heard that dealings with customers since the government's announcement of the lockdown had been mixed. Mostly people were understanding, we heard; they understood why showrooms weren't open, why they weren't getting their mowers back from the workshops straight away, and why they had to wait by the gate and other social distancing measures.

'Mostly' however, was the key word here, because it seemed everybody had experienced one (or two!) bad customers – those who had unreasonable demands, who phoned repeatedly or who, in the worst case scenarios, acted outright aggressively. It was felt these customers were thankfully in the minority, but they did exist and weren't helping with what was an already incredibly difficult situation.

It was suggested that keeping up your messaging and communication channels with customers could help with these conflicts. Making sure websites and social networks were updated and changed regularly to reflect what's going on in your business might do its bit to head off some unnecessary calls.

There was no doubt that some dealers were incredibly stretched – those who were even open in some capacity. A lot of this was down to dealers being understanding of the needs of their staff. Post the Prime Minister's announcement on restriction of movement, we heard that some workers felt too anxious to return to work and some were not able to come in on the grounds of health concerns or age. Therefore some smaller dealerships, if they were open at all, were operating on what could be described as a skeleton staff.

In all cases it was felt to be important to keep all staff in the loop with what was happening. We heard that Zoom, Skype, Whatsapp and the like had become increasingly relied upon by businesses, keeping teams joined up with



“ABOVE ALL THE LOUDEST MESSAGE MUST BE TO CONTINUE TO MONITOR AND TO OBEY THE GOVERNMENT'S GUIDELINES”

each other. Where people are working from home, or alone somewhere, or not at all, a group chat with some friendly banter can do wonders for morale.

Technology was also advocated as a means of demonstrating to customers. Making and posting videos to websites was mentioned several times as a way of keeping customers at a distance but still being able to illustrate machinery.

For staff who are going out on the road, either delivering kit or visiting for on-site repairs, it was thought to be a sensible idea to issue them with an official, headed letter of authority. Were they to be questioned on what business they had being out and about, they would have something to show.

Some of the issues discussed also applied to the agricultural dealers on the call. It was felt that the situation was indeed a little clearer cut for these dealers, with most branches open but with distancing measures in place.

Also common across all dealerships were the financial concerns which the outbreak was causing. It was stressed again how important it is that dealers should familiarise themselves with the rules surrounding the furloughing of staff. As well as this, there are grants and business rates help which can be applied for. The problem, of course, is cashflow, with the timings for this assistance not exactly being instant. It was also suggested that dealers might want to review all the standing orders and direct debits they have set up for council tax and other costs.

Alongside this, there was a strong desire to hear from manufacturers what assistance they intend to offer their dealers – to hear what their strategy was for getting through this situation. Dealers want clear instruction on what help will be available. With this being a far from normal season, the network wants a commitment from the companies whose stock they have piled in their showrooms which they cannot sell currently, that support is there for them – now and going forward.

Due to necessity, focus for the moment for certain machines may well be on online retailing, but it mustn't be overlooked that the servicing dealer and manufacturer relationship is a mutually dependant one.

What was abundantly clear, is that plans are being made for when we get through this. Be it one more month, two months, or more, dealers are doing their best to be ready

to go when restrictions are lifted.

Until then, dealer resourcefulness is being tested, as never before.

There won't be a one-size fits all solution to this. All the while there is any ambiguity from a governmental level, decisions will continue to be made by individual dealers as to what is right for them.

Above all, the loudest message must be to continue to monitor and to obey the government's guidelines. Things might change if lockdown restrictions become tougher, but at the time of going to press the official advice remained, if you can't do your job from home, you can go into work – being sure to observe the known safety requirements.

With the wording on the retail outlets closure exemptions list, dealers were still able to interpret for themselves whether they chose to open or not.

USEFUL LINKS

Businesses and premises to close

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>

Furloughing: Employers' guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme#employees-you-can-claim-for>

Furloughing: Employees' guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

Further details

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-details-of-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-announced>

OTHER USEFUL LINKS:

<https://bagma.com/resources/coronavirus/>

NHS Volunteer Scheme

<https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS>



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I HAVE TO BE TOUGH IN THIS TRADE

That's what Georgina Cornock-Evans told Service Dealer Editor Steve Gibbs when they met up at Arwel's Agricultural Services, the dealership she runs with her husband Arwel, in Carmarthenshire in early March this year.

In the first of a series of articles focussing on women in the dealership, we hear from Georgina about the difficult start to 2020, how they built the dealership up, their belief in employing apprentices and where they see the future for their dealership

Arwel's Agricultural Services Ltd is a family-run business based in Harford, Carmarthenshire, West Wales, providing a service for farmers within the surrounding counties.

The relatively young dealership, which was only formed in 2009, is run by the husband and wife team of Company Sales Manager and Director Arwel Evans, alongside Company Secretary and fellow Director, Georgina Cornock-Evans.

It was Georgina who I met up with in early March, the week before the coronavirus outbreak in the UK had ramped up and pre the government advice advising the restriction of movement had been issued. Even at that point Georgina was worried about its potential impact. "If it really hits the country down here, how far do I go to stop mechanics going to farms?," she wondered.

"At the end of the day, farmers will have to carry on regardless," Georgina continued. "Machinery will still break down and need to be maintained. The land will still need to be farmed. But the problem will be, will my mechanics be well enough to keep going? I've got to provide a service somehow."

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These concerns, which were being felt by dealers across the country, followed on from the first couple of months of 2020 which had already seen quite profound difficulties for many business in the agricultural machinery sector, due to the extreme weather conditions which many areas of the UK had experienced. Like many other places, the area of Wales which Arwel's serves had seen huge tracts of farmland submerged under water. "It's challenging out there in the farming industry at the moment," confirmed Georgina. "Here in Wales the weather has been against us. Because farmers haven't been able to get on to the land to do their spreading, tractors aren't selling. That side of the business has been noticeably slower."

Georgina did say they had been doing well in the preceding months though, with sales of some smaller tractors proving successful. The less large McCormick models they deal in had proved popular with local farmers, with several being sold off the back of their appearance at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair. It was, however, at that time, the local contractors who would be more inclined to purchase the larger models, who had been holding back.

Putting aside the highly unusual circumstances of the start of 2020, Arwel's Agri has achieved much in its 11 or so years of trading – including winning *Service Dealer's Farm Machinery Dealer of the Year* award in 2016. I asked Georgina what she believed they had done correctly in order to get to this stage.

"What we did right was not to rush immediately into a big business," she explained. "We started with just one van and we built our clientele up. We then built a workshop and increased to two vans which we ran with for several years.

Over the subsequent years we increased our footprint here gradually, year by year. We built slowly as the business grew."

Agriculture has, of course, faced tough times before. "When we started, agriculture was in a real dip and trading was hard, very hard!" said Georgina. "However, we gained clients then whom we still work with today. It was very important that we worked closely with the community and within West Wales. We also pride ourselves with working well with other local dealers, which I believe is very important. There's an 'I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine' philosophy around here. You have to, because Wales is small at the end of the day."

Speaking of which, the value of the Welsh language is vital in the business. "It goes a long way," confirmed Georgina. "If we're dealing with a Welsh customer, very often they want to communicate with us in Welsh – that works very well in our favour. We make sure a lot of our staff, including the mechanics, can speak the language."

Customers enjoy coming to Arwel's premises because of its rural setting. The company is so well known locally that they don't even use any roadside signage directing customers to the site.

"We did have signs made," explains Georgina, "but because we've been so busy, we haven't needed to put them up."

"People know us, plus we take adverts in the *Agri-Trader*. We've also just built a new website that's really good; we do a lot with Facebook and we use the Farm Locator. We're careful in where we promote ourselves though. Lots of places want our advertising business, but I look at our sales and if we're doing well, I think twice about my spend. If I see we're dipping, I'll decide we need to invest."



Georgina and husband Arwel have run the dealership since 2009

"What we have found is good for us though, is sponsoring various community events, such as local shows. We don't tend to take a stand at those kinds of days, as it doesn't really pay to, but sponsoring them has proved successful. We attend the event as a family and we see business then, just walking around the show."

Another facet of their business philosophy, which Georgina and Arwel truly believe in, is the employment of apprentices in their workshop.

Over the relatively short period of their existence, Arwel's has taken on a good number of apprentices, currently having two on their books. From the outside it almost seems as if it's quite easy for them, taking on apprentices, while the story one hears from other dealers around the country is that acquiring people willing to learn the trade is a real struggle.

"I don't know what it is," said Georgina. "We work closely with Reaseheath College and have had a few join us from there, as well as from Coleg Sir Gar. The lecturers there always recommend us as a place for apprentices. We take people on for trials – some are successful, and some aren't."

"Arwel is very keen on employing apprentices though. What he likes is that if they start their career from the beginning with us, they train the way Arwel wants them to train. If we get them from somewhere else, they're stuck in their ways. Arwel has his way of training and they learn straight away how he wants them to learn."

Georgina believes that sometimes perhaps, apprentices might be reluctant to join dealerships, under the misapprehension that they'll be given all the terrible jobs. This is certainly not the case with Arwel's though. "Our apprentices go out with mechanics and gain experience on-field," she confirmed. "They'll go out with a senior technician for a certain amount each week to experience break-downs as well as doing PDIs [pre-delivery inspections] and the like back in the workshop. I think that's what interests our apprentices."

"Also, according to our mechanics, what the apprentices like is that we look after a wide variety of machines. You go to some dealers and they're obligated to a single brand. That isn't the case with us, we've got everything so they get a feel and experience of a wide range of equipment and makes."

When we visited in early March, as well as the two learners in the workshop, Georgina had just employed a new storeman that week whom they had found via advertising on

the Indeed website, which she said often worked for them. "Perhaps the only thing that's hard for us in terms of employing," Georgina conceded, "is that we're located out in the sticks. It does involve people travelling to get here, so we can't look too far afield."

While by no means unique, Georgina is of course in the minority as a female in the ag dealer industry. I ask her if during her career she has ever felt that her gender has played any bearing on how staff or customers have dealt with her?

"I love the industry," she said, "because as I'm a farmer's daughter, I was always one for the machines. My Dad, who I lost two years ago to cancer, was always very pleased that I'd taken this path. I remember him saying how proud of me he was that I'd gone into this industry and kept it in the family."

"Arwel, when he met me, he knew he wanted to meet a farmer's daughter who had the same interests and we were just very lucky."

"Once the business started and was big enough to sustain both of us working for it, I stopped my job at the council planning office and came and worked here full time. I do all the accounts – my husband doesn't even look at a bank statement! He doesn't want the stress of it, so I take that on my own!"

"What I do hear from our mechanics, coming back from being out on jobs though, is that customers will say to them 'oh, we know who the boss is!'. Because if things go wrong with an

account, it tends to be me who sorts most of it out.

"I have to be tough in this trade. I take on board how farmers feel – and coming from an agri background I can appreciate their side of things. I sympathise a lot and I will listen, but I will stick my ground if I know I'm right. I will argue my case. I'm not afraid of the agri industry. I'd like to think I know enough to get by."

"Arwel tends to be more of the 'keep you sweet' type and I'm the hard one! Someone must take that position in business or else people will walk all over you."

"My staff have always said though, I will listen and take on board what they say. If they've got ideas, I will listen and am willing to try things."

How does Georgina find the experience of running a business as a husband and wife team, I ask?

"It's not easy," she answered. "It's really difficult in many ways actually because you never get away from the business. You go home at night and you talk business –

“I'M NOT AFRAID OF THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY. I'D LIKE TO THINK I KNOW ENOUGH TO GET BY.”



Arwel's won *Service Dealer's Farm Machinery Dealer of the Year Award* in 2016, with Georgina and Arwel being presented with their prize by Julian Thompson of sponsor Kramp



Duncan Murray-Clarke and Steve Gibbs of *Service Dealer* with Georgina and Arwel

because there's various things as two directors we need to discuss which we do in the house. We don't get to do many holidays, but the kids do love the business too – their hearts are in it with us."

The running of the dealership is clearly very much a partnership between Georgina and Arwel. When Krone approached the company last year, wanting Arwel's Agri to take on their franchise, which it subsequently did, it was that solid partnership that the manufacturer cited as liking about the business. "The fact that there were two of us here very much involved, that I was striving for the business just as much as Arwel, impressed Krone," Georgina confirmed.

Back in early March, before the unprecedented events surrounding Covid-19 took hold, I asked Georgina where she saw the future for their dealership and whether they had any expansion plans.

At that point she said how Arwel might have been tempted by another depot in Pembrokeshire – with his heart saying to do so, but his head saying no. However, it wasn't something which Georgina thought was quite right for them.

"I don't want to," she said. "I'd rather work in one depot because otherwise you've got a double cost and you need to get more managers in place. With us here at our current depot as a family, it means there's always me or Arwel around as a director.

"We work well together here. We could perhaps put more mechanic vans on the road to cover the Pembrokeshire area, which might seem a better option than opening another depot?"

Arwel's Agri won *Service Dealer's Farm Machinery Dealer of the Year* a couple of years ago. It was also one of the finalists in 2019. Georgina though, is adamant that she only wants to enter the competition in years when they have something new to celebrate.

"In my eyes I want to try for it when I feel we've got an improved offering. For example, now we've got Krone on board, once that's settled down, it'll be good to try again. When we feel the business deserves it and we've got something new to show off, then it's nice to get that recognition."

Hopefully that time will be upon Arwel's Agri Services once again very soon.

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MAKITA LAUNCHES NEW RANGE TO THE TRADE

Service Dealer's Laurence Gale Msc, MBPR, attended a trade day recently which saw Makita launch 30 new products to an audience of dealers, contractors and service providers

During a sunny day in early March, I attended a Makita Trade day at the Walton Hall (Mercure) Hotel in Warwickshire. The 16th Century Grade II listed building set in 65 acres of private grounds was an ideal setting for the day's event.

The day began with a warm welcome and introduction by Mark Earles, Makita's Business Development Manager, who ran through a number of slides and spoke about the vast range of products the company produces and highlighted the many new products we would be testing throughout the day.

With over 100 years of trading and manufacturing experience, Makita believes the key to its

vision is to constantly strive for innovation and development of new products. I was astounded to hear that the company has in excess of 270 products in its portfolio, while at this event it was launching a further 30 new products.

The company manufactures its tools in plants across the globe, from its headquarters in Japan to here, in the UK. Its Telford manufacturing plant is the only full-production facility for power tools in the UK and has been successfully running construction on top-line cordless power tools since 1991.

Attending the day was a wide cross section of industry professionals that included contractors, service providers, machinery dealers and end users. I managed to meet up with Jason Nettle, Director of Winchester Garden

Makita's Business Development Manager, Mark Earles and Marketing Manager, Kevin Brannigan

Machinery, who like the rest had come to see at first hand some of the new products on offer.

In most cases the new products offered were centred around new, improved performance and running times, brought about by ever-improving battery technologies. Makita's new PDC01 backpack also offers a universal power system that can be used with most tools, increasing their running times considerably.

One of the first products I tried was the self-propelled DLM533 a 530mm (21") cordless lawn mower powered by two 18v LXT Li-Ion batteries in series. The new mowers will take four batteries to work as a dual fuel tank, which means for larger areas when the first pair of batteries runs down, operators can simply flick the switch and change over to the second pair of batteries and continue working.

Recommended for lawns up to 2,300m², with a running time of around 30 mins (for each pair of batteries), the mower was light and manoeuvrable with easy handlebar controls and it ran very quietly. The machine cut well and seemed very robust – however I would like to try it out on some more testing ground conditions.

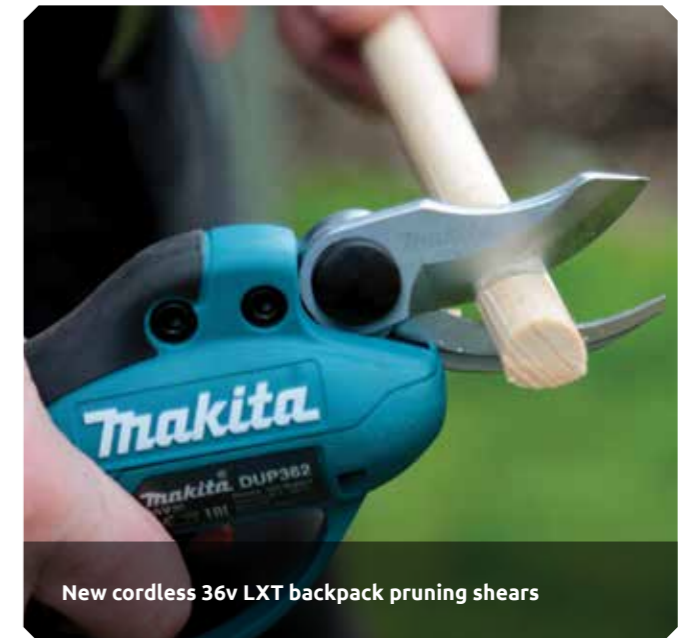
On the hedge trimming stand I tried the new DUN500W, a 500mm cordless pole hedge trimmer powered by a single 18v LXT Li-Ion battery. I was very impressed with its cutting performance and the way it was easily handled. A very well balanced and lightweight (3.9-4.4kg) hedge trimmer.

The next product I tried was the new cordless 36v LXT backpack pruning shears. The DUP361ZN provides 36v of power and features a two-stage blade opening adjustment which varies according to the size of the branch. The shear has a maximum cutting capacity of 33mm and a maximum blade opening of 54mm. The blade can be interlocked with the trigger, providing smooth blade movement similar to that of a hand pruner. A newly designed, slim backpack harness provides comfort, while an arm band and cord holder prevent the connection cord from dangling around the operator's body and from getting caught on branches.

Using two 5.0Ah Li-Ion batteries, a run time of three working days is delivered, although branches and growth of wider diameter can reduce this slightly. The charge time of a 5.0Ah battery using a Makita fast charger is 45 minutes and Makita's intelligent battery technology heightens charge retention. This model has a net weight of 3.3kg, low sound and low vibration levels.

The line trimmers and brush cutters were again neat, light and compact, and offered a durable harness and battery pack system to extend their running times.

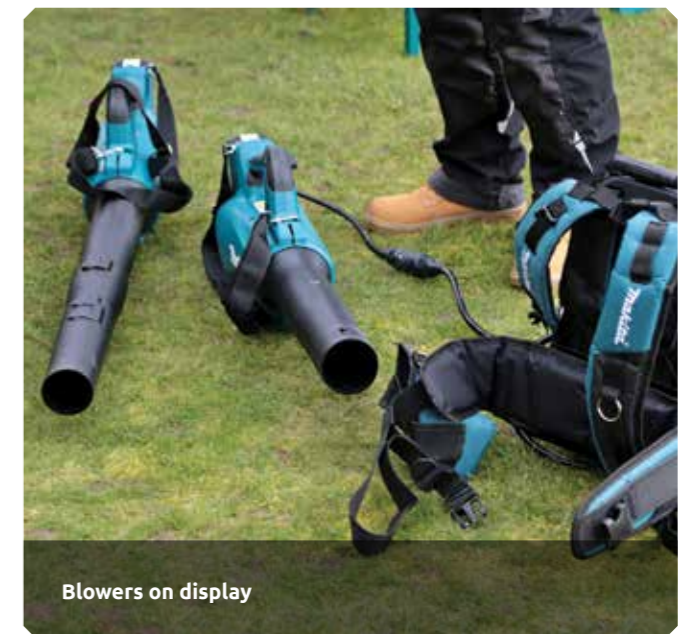
Makita's new models, the DUR369A and DUR369L, offer Active Feedback Sensing Technology (AFT) that shuts down the tool to protect the user if the rotation speed suddenly slows down, along with Automatic Torque Drive Technology that automatically changes the cutting speed according to load condition for optimum



New cordless 36v LXT backpack pruning shears



New line trimmers offer Active Feedback Sensing Technology



Blowers on display

performance. The 1kw motor is equivalent to a 33cc two-stroke engine and Makita recommends professional users to consider the PDC01 back-pack battery system for extended run-times.

Finally, I tried out a couple of blowers: the DUB184 that has a running time of between 9-55 minutes depending on the power setting you have it set on, along with the DUB363 that has a running time of between 9-30 minutes. Both were very light and benefitted from low hand vibration and noise levels.

Again, there are options to increase running times with the universal PDC01 battery back-pack system, where the batteries are interchangeable within the back-pack rather than having an integrated back-pack battery system where the entire unit needs to be recharged – so again, contractors can carry on working and downtime is reduced.

At the heart of the company's manufacturing process is the belief that for a good tool you need a good motor, and Makita makes every effort to make sure their motors are of the best quality. The company sources what it describes as the absolute best raw materials and components in order to build the most powerful and efficient motors it can.

With the world going down a new path of renewable energy, Makita, like many other competitors, is embracing new battery and motor technologies to provide a more efficient and clean way of powering tools.

During the afternoon I caught up with Makita's Marketing Manager, Kevin Brannigan. Kevin has worked for Makita for over 20 years and has seen many new products come to market. He said he was very excited about the new range of cordless garden products the company was launching at the event, particularly as the day was attended by a varied horticultural and landscape sector audience.

Kevin was keen to point out that the success of Makita products was purely down to synergy between the products' reliability, efficiency and performance, which is largely driven by the development of the brushless motor technology and the ongoing advancement of battery design and performance.

There was something for everyone to see and try on the day. I am sure that, like me, all those who attended had an enjoyable experience and got to learn a lot more about the vast choice and range of Makita tools and applications on offer.



Service Dealer's Laurence Gale testing mowers at Walton Hall

UNITED

Our industry is also a community and we want you to know that we are all doing what we can to be both responsible and supportive. It is in all our best interest that the agriculture and groundcare service dealer network comes through this.

As manufacturers, service providers and associations we are sharing our experiences to find ways forward in these very challenging times.



IS TIME RUNNING OUT FOR THE PETROL ENGINE?

Recent industry developments, in both the agricultural and grasscare machinery sectors, have brought into even sharper focus what showrooms might look like in the future for dealers across the spectrum. Editor Steve Gibbs considers the consequences

I have always been a big fan of science fiction and fantasy. Since I was a kid, I've enjoyed reading comics and watching films and TV shows that deal in the fantastical.

As you can imagine, in the past it hasn't been too often that my work interests and my fandom interests intersect. However, that has started to change with a couple of notable exceptions.

For instance, in the final film to feature Hugh Jackman's Wolverine character, Logan, there are key sequences set in vast GM corn fields that are being tended to by gigantic, automated combine harvesters. In the story set in the not-too-distant future, these machines appear to be continuously working through the night, with no people around to monitor their progress.

More recently, the new *Picard Star Trek* series finds Patrick Stewart's titular character retired to his vineyard – where we see

autonomous drones, gently floating back and forth above the rows of grapes, spraying the crops without disturbing the environment.

Whilst the agricultural machinery industry isn't quite matching the writers of these speculative fictions just yet, if you listen to key industry figures they will tell you that this is most definitely the way technology for the farming sector is heading. Indeed, they would assert it's the way it must develop.

It's also very clearly the way a lot of forward thinking is concentrating in the grasscare sector, both for domestic users and ever increasingly, for commercial grass cutting applications.

In the first few months of 2020 the discourse has very much highlighted that radical thinking for both ag equipment and grass cutting machinery is well underway. Which, of course, begs the question: what does this mean for dealers across the

machinery spectrum? Will forecourts, showrooms and workshops be full of robotics in years to come and indeed is the writing on the wall for the internal combustion engine?

Let's consider some of the developments that have been breaking during the early part of this year, starting on the agricultural machinery front.

DREAM TRACTORS AND SMALL ROBOTS

As we reported last issue, back in January, Kubota unveiled a concept tractor equipped with artificial intelligence and electrification technology, at a product exhibition held in Japan – representing what the manufacturer sees as the future of farming.

This theoretical design incorporated fully unmanned operation driven by AI as well as full electrification facilitated by a combination of lithium-ion batteries

and solar batteries in order, the manufacturer said, to achieve an environmentally-friendly on-farm operation.

This news was followed up quite quickly with the story that the Small Robot Company (SRC), a British agritech start-up for sustainable farming, had announced the industrial design and manufacture of its first fleet of agricultural robots.

What was significant about this was that unlike the Kubota announcement, this wasn't a concept design of things which might be possible in the future – rather this is actually happening and being put into commercial production right now.

The announcement that came from SRC in February said the production of this first robot fleet will take place in Britain. The initial fleet of 10 robots will be manufactured by Tharsus, the UK advanced machine and robots designer and

manufacturer. In the webinar announcement, which was hosted by co-founder Ben Scott-Robinson, shareholders were told that the first of the fleet will be ready for commercial service in October 2020.

Tharsus will finesse the Tom monitoring robot prototype design for eventual mass production in Blyth, Northumberland, working together with SRC on what the company described as a "rigorous industrial design process".

Tharsus is experienced in advanced robot manufacture, having also made Ocado's warehouse robots for global sale.

The Tom robot is delivering SRC's first commercial service for weed mapping. The machines have been undergoing trials on a number of UK farms during the first few months of this year, therefore having to cope with the wet and difficult conditions that the UK countryside has been experiencing.



SRC's Robin, Nemo and Susant with the next generation weed mapping robot, Tom



Harry robot together with Sam Watson Jones, Co-Founder, Small Robot Company, Andrew Hoad, Partner and Head of the Leckford Estate, and Joe Allnutt, Head of Robot Awesomeness

SRC said it is planning to service around 2,000 hectares with the new Tom robots by January 2021. Customers signed up to use the new robots include Waitrose & Partners and the National Trust, which is looking to expand its use of robots across its farms. Early field trials are already underway in 20 farms across the UK, including the National Trust Wimpole Estate and Waitrose & Partners Leckford Estate.

Tom's per plant view of the field is the initial foundation for SRC's commercial non-chemical weeding service, which uses the monitoring



Harry being shown to farmers

robot to first locate the weeds. The weed zapping service is anticipated to be available from autumn 2021.

Other benefits from the mapping service include yield predictions and measurement of herbicide efficacy.

Small Robot Company says its mission is to maximise food production while reducing its cost on the environment. Using robotics and artificial intelligence, it says it has created an entirely new model for “ecologically harmonious, efficient and profitable farming”. Its farmbots Tom, Dick and Harry will plant, monitor and treat arable crops autonomously, with minimal waste.

John Toal, Director of Business Development at Tharsus, said, “Small Robot Company is an archetype of a radical disruptor. It is changing the face of an industry that is experiencing significant economic and environmental challenges by proposing to do things differently. Significantly so. Our engagement melds together its vision, ambition and inventiveness with our own experience of creating commercially successful products.”

Rob Macklin, the National Trust’s Head of Farming and Soils believes that technology needs to play a big part in solving many of the issues currently being faced in farming – “Particularly,” he said, “improving soil health and carbon sequestration, reducing our reliance on fossil fuel power and fertilisers, and avoiding the adverse impacts of synthetic

chemicals on the environment. We have started small robot trials at Wimpole and intend to extend trials to other estates in the near future.”

Sam Watson Jones, Co-Founder, Small Robot Company added, “The global opportunity is huge. This is a fourth agricultural revolution, and British technology is leading the charge. We’re currently first to market, so it’s absolutely crucial that we get our commercial delivery right.

“This is a massive step in scaling up our robots for the mass market. Our focus for our robotics business is very much on design, innovation and service. Manufacturing with Tharsus gives us the confidence to deliver robust, resilient and farm-ready products, time and again, and in thousands of units. They have the expertise we needed to get our commercialisation right.”

Another Co-Founder of SRC, Ben Scott-Robinson, explained how they believe the uptake for robotics in farming is on the cusp of really taking off. He said, “We’ve attended several trade missions with the Department for International Trade and Innovate UK, including the US, Canada, India, China and Africa. The appetite for agritech robotics and the global opportunity is staggering. This partnership means that when we are ready, we can now scale with confidence. With Tharsus, the world is our oyster.”

SRC has clearly hit on a concept that its investors have belief and faith in. After its announcement of

partnering with Tharsus, the company issued a statement saying it had been initially looking to crowd-fund £700,000 for the concept. In the end, what the company actually raised was £2.1m – over-funding its target by three times.

SRC said, “This overwhelming support really demonstrates the huge appetite for agritech. It shows just how much demand there is for this new technology.”

A MANIFESTO FOR GRASS CUTTING AND A CORDLESS EVOLUTION

On the domestic and commercial grass cutting side of the machinery sector, the start of 2020 has also seen some interesting developments – some of which may have significant implications regarding what dealers might find themselves stocking in years to come.

Firstly, battery-powered machinery manufacturer Ego launched what it referred to as its ‘manifesto’. Entitled *Challenge 2025*, the company is calling for a change to make battery-powered equipment the preferred choice over tools that “emit noxious fumes and damaging noise pollution” within five years. The manifesto has as its goal to highlight what the company describes as “the dangers of petrol gardening equipment”.

Pitting petrol against battery-powered tools, the company says *Challenge 2025* tackles the issues head-on in



Ego wants battery power to be the ‘preferred choice’ in the next five years

a bid to educate users to move away from petrol. It also says it is “issuing a rallying cry for like-minded organisations” to join it and bring the issue in front of parliament.

Steve Roskell, Marketing Director EMEA at EGO explained, “There’s a baffling irony in the fact that the majority of the tools created to beautify our gardens are actually destroying our environment. Air pollution, noise pollution and

sustainability are all clearly huge issues in today’s society. People are waking up to the dangers posed by petrol-guzzling cars. Yet, when it comes to gardening and landscaping equipment, the momentum for change simply doesn’t seem to be gathering pace in the same way.

“Petrol tools are known for being

incredibly noisy, worryingly dirty and downright dangerous to our health – we’re keen to educate users that there is a viable, strong, powerful and cheaper long-term alternative.”

Steve continued, “Cities up and down the country are making moves to reduce and discourage car usage. Yet while councils are doing their utmost to hit new emissions targets and car manufacturers are evolving to help meet the demand for eco-friendly alternatives, the nation is busy pumping pollutants into our green spaces.

“Research suggests that operating a commercial leaf-blower for one hour emits as much smog-forming pollution as driving a 2.5-litre passenger car around 1,100 miles! Something has to change – and we’re happy to lead that change by urging like-minded businesses to join us in our quest.” Quite the rallying cry there from Ego.

Its story was followed soon after in March by the news that Cobra had launched its *Green Power To The People* campaign, which will see



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the brand beginning to phase out the introduction of petrol-powered products to its range. Perhaps not as ambitious as Ego's intent, it is still, nevertheless, a significant step for the brand to be taking.

Peter Chaloner, Managing Director, explained, "Similar to car manufacturers with battery models replacing petrol, we're adapting our model to be more environmentally conscious. We've already made significant moves away from petrol in recent years and have introduced an extensive lithium-ion battery range, as well as electric options too. Our battery-powered products have proven to be incredibly popular, showing the demand among customers for not just a convenient option, but also a more environmentally-friendly one too."

"However, this isn't going to be an instant change, this is just the start of the process. Supply lines and contracts mean that we aren't instantly going to stop production of petrol models. It does, however, show our commitment to sustainability and our recognition that cordless is absolutely the long-term future for Cobra."

To support this, the 2020 new product line-up sees the introduction of the brand's first battery-powered lawn scarifier as well as a range of robotic mowers.

Both Ego and Cobra were on show with their battery products at the beginning of March, before the coronavirus really took hold, alongside many other brands

exhibiting similar technology. A private show for the wider gardening press, the trend for cordless at this year's Garden Press Event in Islington, was clearly displayed by companies including Greenworks, STIHL, Husqvarna, Cub Cadet, John Deere, Ambrogia, Honda and Makita.

The story that battery was the future was clearly illustrated for the mainstream journalists in attendance by Hayter, which boasted an eye-catching stand with a beautifully restored vintage Harrier sat alongside a prototype battery-powered version of the mower, due for release later this year. The display made clear the story of the heritage of the brand and where the industry will be heading in years to come.

Craig Hoare, Sales and Marketing Manager, told me the company is looking forward to the new battery model coming out in order to give the dealers a premium battery mower they can really get behind.

WHERE NEXT FOR DEALERS?

With these announcements so far this year, plus all the other battery, robotic and futuristic developments that are gathering pace from many machinery manufacturers, what will dealers showrooms look like in years to come?

Thinking specifically about agricultural machinery dealers for a moment, *Service Dealer* founder Chris Biddle believes there will certainly be an impact, but perhaps not immediately. Chris explained,

"We're already witnessing a consolidation of the dealer network – multi-branch dealerships set up and equipped to handle and support new technologies, often staffed by graduate-level staff."

"These dealers will continue to support new machine technology as it is introduced by their suppliers. They will be well-versed in understanding and implementing 'big data' in order to maximise yields etc. They will act as a partner to their customers in achieving farm efficiencies."

"However, a rapid transition to new technologies will not be the revolution that many predict. At the recent Institution of Agricultural Engineers (IAgrE) conference speaker after speaker admitted that the majority of farmers were not yet convinced by precision farming."

Change will come though, Chris thinks, and dealers who have shown that they are adept at facing up to the new market realities over the years will do so once again.

Chris said, "Ag dealers have always been at the forefront of implementing change. Over the years, they have professionally responded to advances in hydraulics, power units, electronics, transmissions and guidance systems. They have acted as the essential go-between, ensuring new technologies developed by global manufacturers are used to best effect by local farmers."



"In today's world, the farmer needs fast diagnosis, predictive and proactive maintenance regimes. Analytics to provide this are becoming increasingly common within dealerships, as are robotics in dairy parlours, and in feeding operations. Change is all around, but it will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary."

Chris believes that smaller dealers will also have an incredibly important role to play where localised service is important to support small and mixed farming. "Alongside agriculture," Chris said, "there is an important role for dealers to play in the care of the countryside, forestry, water management, sports and recreation areas."

On the domestic and commercial grasscare side of the industry, as we move forward, it won't solely be consumer taste and manufacturer

preference which drives the continued proliferation of battery and robotics in this sector – legislation will play an increasingly dominant role. More and more stringent laws will be put into place regarding emissions and noise levels, meaning the internal combustion engine will become ever more marginalised.

If we look to America, and specifically to California, we can see precedent of the increased hand of legislation coming into play when it comes to sales of petrol-powered machinery. California is considering a statewide ban on all petrol-run gardening equipment.

In a recent story on the subject from the US trade journal *Landscape Management*, the head of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), Kris Kiser, is quoted as saying, "For all intents and purposes, California wants to drive the internal combustion

engine out of the state and move to the implementation of zero-emissions products, so switching to battery/electric."

When I spoke to Kris about this subject at the GIE+EXPO in October last year he had this to say regarding California's plans: "It's an extraordinarily aggressive programme with a target of, by 2031, eliminating the sale of internal combustion engines. Period. By that year they do not want any internal combustion engines sold in the entire state at all."

Kris explained to me that the way the law works with this kind of legislation, is that if California develops new rules, other states can then elect to adopt them also.

Clearly there is change in the air. Dealerships are here to stay – but what is displayed in their showrooms is inevitably changing.

Actually, perhaps a more apt term is progressing?

How different will machinery stocked in dealerships look in 10 years time? In five years even?

How big a role will robotics play in agriculture?

Will there still be a place for petrol power in grasscare dealerships or will battery have fully taken over?

It's the \$64,000 question. Most manufacturers you ask who have a foot in both petrol and battery camps will tell you petrol still has a place for the foreseeable future – but for how long?

Chris Biddle is convinced of one thing though, that dealers of today are more important than ever in implementing and supporting new technologies.

"But they need to be proactive," he says. "There will be an increasing need to recruit new skills to support this new digital, analytical and automated age – and the dealer network must sell itself to attract high-calibre staff with skills virtually unknown just a few years ago."



HONDA REFINES ATV OFFERING

Creator back in the 1970s of the original all-terrain vehicle (in its first guise a three-wheeled all-terrain cycle or ATC), Honda today leads both the UK and global markets in ATV sales. MARTIN RICKATSON learned of its 2020 product and dealer plans

While load deck-equipped lightweight utility vehicles (UTV) with side-by-side seating and steering wheels now account for almost half of total all-terrain vehicle sales, the more familiar and longer-established single-rider handlebar-steered ATVs still represent the majority of the sector. And while Honda is a relatively recent entrant into the UTV market, it has an established dominant position in the 'conventional' ATV category. For 2020, the company revealed some significant developments to its offering in that area, in

addition to further news for dealers and customers.

"We've grown our share of the UTV sector to 7% since our relatively recent entry with the Pioneer in 2017," says Steve Morris, head of Honda UK's Power Products division.

"But we recognise we still have a lot to learn in terms of what customers want, and are using this feedback all the time to refine the product. Although we don't have a diesel offering, and the UTV market has predominantly been 75% diesel, new buyers

coming from new markets are keener for petrol as environmental concerns have changed and the petrol engine benefits of low noise, greater speed and easy fuel access have become more important. To support this sector we're now offering a new three-year warranty for the Pioneer – one year more than the industry standard – and three years' 0% finance.

"ATVs, though, are where our core business remains in this sector, and while the total ATV/UTV market was down around 200 units in 2018 to around 6,500, we took 71.6% of the 300-499cc sector. That's a presence we want to build on, so have introduced a number of updates for 2020."

Key among those are upgraded versions of Honda's Fourtrax 420 – said to be the UK's best-selling ATV, with 385kg towing capacity – and 600kg capacity Foreman 500 models, designed at Honda's R&D facility in Ohio. Key among them is an engine upgrade for the Foreman 500, meaning it has been renamed the Foreman 520, with the power unit now having a 518cc displacement, up by 43cc on the outgoing model. Coupled with updated engine mapping, this means the TRX520 delivers stronger low-mid range power and torque, for quicker acceleration and better hill ascent.

Both models feature a longitudinally-mounted, liquid-cooled engine and a double-cradle steel frame. They also use Honda's Traxlok system, allowing the operator to switch quickly between 4wd where necessary and 2wd where manoeuvrability and lighter steering are most important.

The first change applicable to both models is an

all-new forward/reverse skip switch for Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT) and Electric Shift (ES) variants. Said to offer easier and quicker shifting in and out of reverse, it allows this to be achieved with just one lever. With full electronic operation, Honda says it has been introduced in particular response to those whose work involves constant shuttling.

DCT models also get a new manual-override system, which allows the operator to manually change gear even when in automatic drive, with the transmission reverting back to fully automatic mode after a few seconds. This is said to provide greater control of speed and power and be ideal for upshifting on descents or downshifting into corners.

Meanwhile, a further change for DCT and ES models is a new shift map, which monitors engine speed in real time during – rather than immediately before – shifting, which is claimed to deliver smoother transition between gears.

There are further practical improvements to the two machines. Newly-engineered front and rear cargo racks on all models provide greater surface area for carrying larger loads, while fitted as standard is an integral front-mounted utility box with a weatherproof cover. Honda says the 1.9-litre box has been designed to be easy to access from the riding position.

All models have also been given new guards covering the full length of the suspension arms, providing comprehensive coverage of the driveshaft and outboard CV joints to maintain durability.

Other changes for the Foreman model include



Despite the 2017 launch of the Pioneer, ATVs, rather than UTVs, remain Honda's core focus, says Steve Morris



For 2020, Honda upgraded the engine capacity of its Foreman 500 model to create the new 518cc Foreman 520

the addition of 50-watt LED lights, and a new front bumper and grille.

The TRX420 FM1 is priced from £6,425 ex VAT, while prices for the TRX520 FA6 begin at £8,600 ex VAT. All machines are supplied free-of-charge with Datatool tracking equipment, with the TQA-approved TrakKING Adventure package using GPS chip set technology to offer theft protection, instant notifications and full journey history logging. The only cost to the customer is a nominal monitoring subscription of £9.95 per month or £109 inc VAT per year.

Honda also continues to offer free specific EASI rider courses with every new Honda ATV or Pioneer utility vehicle at no extra cost. Customers can register for a training course with their Honda authorised dealer, and the course can qualify riders in risk assessments for PUWER or HSE requirements.

For commercial users, HSE risk assessments may require further training, for example through Lantra, or as part of a tractor loading and towing course.

DEALER DEVELOPMENTS

Steve Morris, who heads up Honda UK's power products division – which includes lawn and garden equipment, marine power, industrial power and ATVs – says that while the ability to buy on-line is becoming increasingly important to mower buyers, in the ATV sector the dealer

business model currently operated by Honda remains the best method of sales and support.

"This is a key characteristic in defining our ATV dealer areas. We generally look at the travel time customers within a dealer radius would have to drive, working on a 45-minute radius for customers depending on location and population. This defines dealer territory numbers and gives dealers sufficient territory to be profitable – although this is also dependent, of course, on population density.

"While some dealers sell more than one of our lines – almost 20 sell our lawn and garden products alongside ATVs, including businesses such as MKM, Ernest Doe and Lloyd – our ATV network extends to just under 100 dealers, and I'd like to think we have a good supplier relationship with them, individually and through the Honda dealer council. It's a network of which we are very proud and we treasure the relationship we have with both longstanding dealers and more recent appointments.

"Our focus is on providing dealers with tailored support packages to give them what they need to run successful, profitable businesses, and while we are always looking to develop our distribution, we will not add to it with appointments that could weaken the network through unnecessary competition.

"Over the past year we lost three dealerships due to general business attrition, the most I can remember in

my 10 years in this business, but there were reasons for these losses beyond Brexit uncertainties and farming's difficulties. But we were able to quickly fill the gaps with new dealer appointments and expansions to support our customers.

"Some of those, as a number do across our network, also sell other ATV brands, and we have no objections to this. Honda sits comfortably alongside others, and our only request is that dealers make sufficient investment in our brand and meet sufficient support requirements. We also recognise that we are a late entrant into the more competitive UTV market, where there are more players, which was one factor behind some dealers wanting to sell another brand alongside ours.

"Since the Pioneer was introduced in 2017, our dealers have embraced it fully, and with growing sales we are receiving more and more feedback from both customers and dealers that will help us to compete more strongly and build our position in this sector. Although we have two and four-seat models with 520cc and 1,000cc versions available in North America, and range development remains a possibility for the future, we're not rushing headlong into the UTV market, and for now we remain focused here in the UK on the compact 700 model."



DCT models get a new manual-override system, which allows the operator to manually change gear even when in automatic drive



New front and rear cargo racks have a greater surface area, while there's also an integral front-mounted utility box with weatherproof cover



New front and rear cargo racks have a greater surface area, while there's also an integral front-mounted utility box with weatherproof cover

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THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

With local farming dominated by big arable farms, Suffolk dealership BRAD Farm Machinery, while not neglecting that sector, is carving a niche by targeting the local resurgence in livestock, plus the equine and smallholder segments. MARTIN RICKATSON attended its open day last summer

While certain agricultural dealers and dealer networks are understandably expanding to serve the needs of ever-larger farms across the UK, particularly in the arable sector, there remains a niche for smaller single-branch companies to serve smaller farm businesses, independent contractors, livestock units and the smallholder and equine sectors.

That's the thinking behind the way Suffolk-based BRAD Farm Machinery has developed its business model in recent years, despite the fact it is sited in the arable heartland of East Anglia.

Established in Hadleigh, Ipswich, in 1984 for the sales, service and parts support of new and used farm machinery, BRAD – the initials come from the original four directors – was founded on the Deutz-Fahr tractor and combine franchise, which it still holds. While that provides a tractor line spanning 39-336hp, and supplementary franchises such as Pottinger, McHale and Teagle allow the firm to compete strongly for larger-farm arable and grassland business, it has been the addition over recent years of other more livestock and groundcare-oriented franchises that has driven the business's direction.

"Some of the founding directors of the business were formerly employed by Eastern Counties Farmers, a regional farming co-operative that was involved in machinery sales among other agricultural business areas," explains Phil Bryce, last year appointed BRAD managing director after retirement moves among the firm's founding management. Not among the founding members but now the majority owner of BRAD, he runs the firm alongside two fellow directors – his wife Rebecca and service director and BRAD founding member Tony Reason.

"One of the recent challenges for the company was how to move forward from the stage where some of the founding directors were looking to take things a little easier, a stage that all businesses face. Paul Offord, one of the other founding members, stepped down as a director but remains as the business's sales manager, while Steve Morton, who was stores/parts director, also stepped back from the business after

more than 30 years. Although I wasn't here when the firm was founded, I was invited to purchase the shares of Joan Canham, who was the retiring finance director, and now hold the majority shareholding, running the business alongside Tony and Rebecca.

"When ECF dropped the Deutz-Fahr franchise for Renault Agriculture in 1984, the opportunity to take over the Deutz-Fahr area became available, and BRAD was founded off the back of this."

FRANCHISE EXPANSION

Over the past 36 years, during which BRAD and Deutz-Fahr were apart for just a short break during a regional shake-up of local Deutz-Fahr dealers, the company has developed a loyal local following for the German marque as its premium tractor brand. But while single-marque dealerships are the industry norm where tractor franchises are concerned, BRAD has developed its tractor offering in other areas by taking on two further franchises that offer lower cost and compact options to cater for different types of buyer.

"The company took on the local franchise for Zetor tractors in 1987," says Phil.

"Although these Czech-built machines of up to 170hp have always been simple in design and specification and targeted at the livestock sector, we developed a good following for them locally among the small number of farms in our area where this sort of machine was in demand.

"Then, just over three years ago, we also signed as a dealer for the South Korean manufacturer Kioti. That's given us a complementary range of compact tractors from 26-110hp, plus a side-by-side UTV, taking us into another market sector."



BRAD remains on the same industrial estate unit where it was founded, but longer-term there are plans to develop a new premises



BRAD MD Phil Bryce (centre) says a focus on smallholders, lifestylers, the equine market and livestock farmers has helped the dealership to diversify



Last year marked the first time BRAD held an off-site open day rather than a traditional on-the-premises affair

DEALER PROFILE

The firm has also carved out a reputation for its expertise in telescopic handlers. After many years as a successful dealer for Italian marque Merlo, the franchise was lost in a local dealer shake-up when eight dealers in the eastern counties were replaced by one large dealer group, but BRAD seized the opportunity to consider a new supplier from the same country.

"Merlo's decision gave us the opportunity to look at Dieci, and we haven't looked back," says Phil.

"Although it's a less well-known marque, and JCB, Manitou and Merlo dominate the market, Dieci make an excellent product range, including compact and articulated models as well as conventional machines. Reliability has also proven really good, and a lot of the problems we had with our previous make we haven't experienced with this one, while we have customers who say their operators almost fight over who will drive the machines.

"As a result, we're making inroads and sold nine Dieci handlers in our first year with the company. Last year our sales successes included a fleet deal of three machines into fruit grower Boxford (Suffolk) Farms."

Other franchises which help the firm to offer a comprehensive grassland and groundcare product range include Major, Sutton, Wessex and Twose. The most recent additions to the offering are cattle and sheep handling specialist Ritchie, and a range of compact tractor and forestry equipment from Oxdale

Products, plus plastics manufacture JFC, Shearwell Data, Hotline and Volac. Many of these were on display at BRAD's first off-site open day last spring, held in a field near its potential new premises.

"Although we remain on the same industrial estate unit where we were founded, we are considering a move to develop new premises on a nearby, more rural site owned by my family," explains Phil.

"This would give us a more suitable and accessible site for our key customers, because not only is it more rural on the one hand, but on the other it is adjacent to a road which carries around 20,000 car movements per day, so will enable us to attract more passing trade and be more visible to a wider audience. The plan is for the creation of not only a dealership premises with workshops, but also a country store and possibly a farm shop, utilising one converted building and three new steel portal buildings, plus outside space for things like mower demos.

"BRAD has held open days at its premises before, but we thought that for a change we would do something different and hold our first off-premises open day on this site, to connect existing and potential customers with our staff and those of our suppliers. It worked very well, and we were really pleased with the results. Catering with free tea, coffee and bacon sandwiches helped attract an audience and get them talking, as did a raffle and a 10% off voucher for those attending for use on products when next visiting our showroom.



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In addition to Deutz-Fahr, the company holds further tractor franchises for Zetor and Kioti, and has replaced its former Merlo handler agency with Dieci

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We also offered a hand-in blade sharpening service for visitors bringing in their livestock clippers.

“We are in a predominantly arable area, but are focused to a large extent on meeting the needs of livestock and mixed farms and independent contractors, and that’s working well for us. The resurgence in stock farming – for example with sheep increasingly used to graze the cover crops that have become more common in arable farming – has been a focus area for us and helped us branch into livestock equipment and animal medicines. We’ve expanded our staff to include two who have the Suitably Qualified Persons (SQPs) qualification required to advise on and dispense animal medicines. Both formerly worked for Mole Valley Farmers, which is where I also began my career in this sector after leaving the home farm – as manager for a time of the Mole Valley branch in Colchester.”

FUTURE HORIZONS

While this diversification in recent years has helped to take the firm into the livestock sector, BRAD is also looking increasingly at those with large houses and gardens or a few acres, often London commuters with good income, as a promising target market.

“Without forgetting our core audience, we want to broaden our horizons to look at this largely untapped sector and get selling to them the tools that they need and can afford, such as compact tractors and equipment. Larger dealers and their sales staff arguably cannot or do not have this focus, but there is money here in the part-time smallholders who have perhaps a few sheep or horses. Expanding existing markets and identifying new ones is all about thinking outside the box.”



While based in a predominantly arable area, BRAD has carved out a niche focusing on the needs of local livestock farmers, with franchises such as McHale



There is a strong local market for products such as chain harrows for local horse paddock owners

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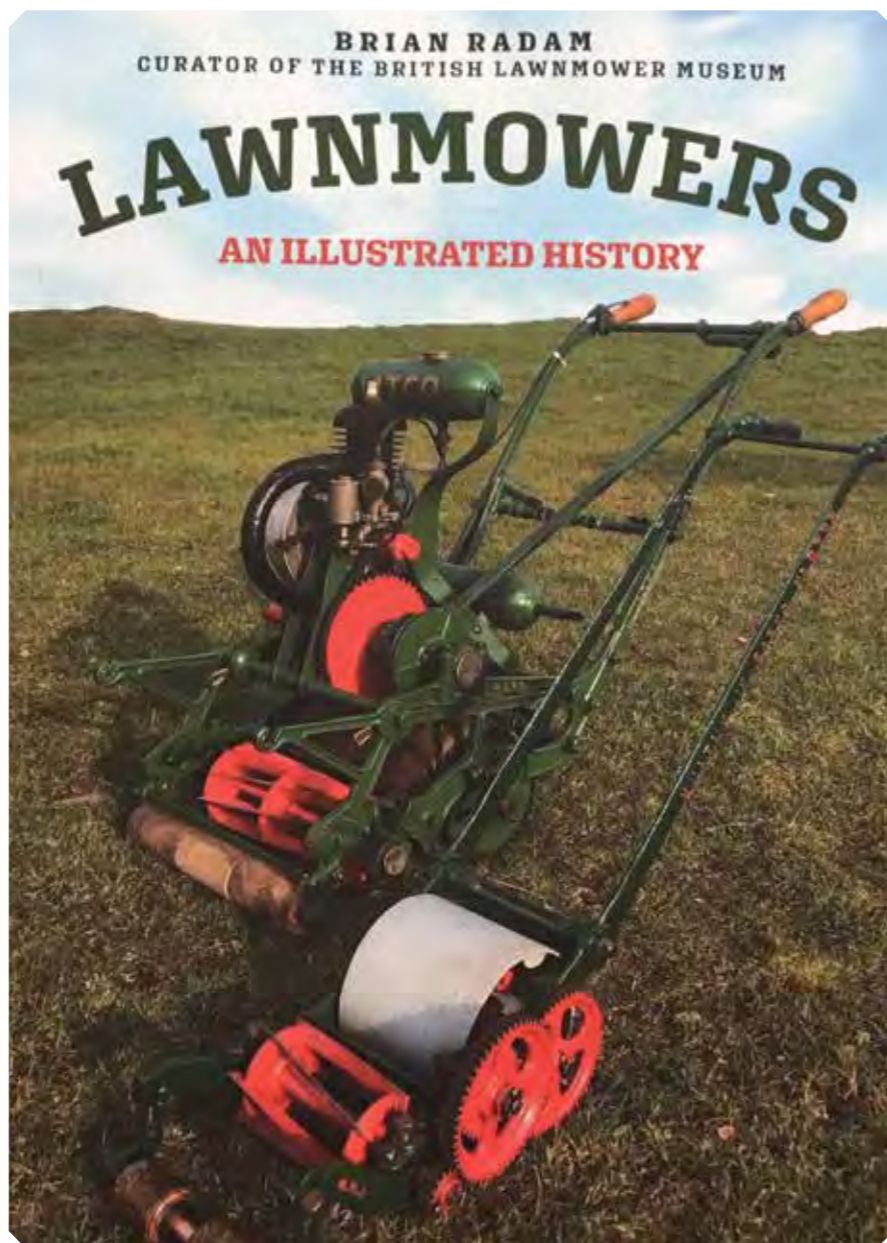
LAWNMOWERS

New book illustrates the development of a quintessentially great British invention, writes CHRIS BIDDLE, Service Dealer founder

As most in the industry will know, Brian Radam's British Lawnmower Museum regularly features in listings of the UK's most unusual and quirky museums, alongside the likes of the Derwent Pencil Museum, the Dog Collar Museum and the House of Marbles.

Nonetheless, the display of over 200 machines from across the ages attracts thousands of visitors to the museum above Brian's retail shop in a modest side-street in Southport.

Now, Brian has written a new book which initially takes us back to Roman days when author Pliny the Younger is thought to have been the first person to mention a grass lawn 2,000 years ago. And for thousands of years, grass was cut using various forms of scythes in often back-breaking conditions.



That all famously changed in 1830 when Stroud engineer Edwin Budding, working as a textile engineer at Thrupp Mill, discovered that he could adapt a machine used to trim the nap from guardsman's uniforms, to also trim the grass surrounding the mill.

Often trying out the machine at night to avoid the disparaging cries that branded his prototype as 'lunacy', Budding eventually settled on a final

design and obtained a patent in 1830. From there, things moved rapidly. In 1832, he sold the patent licence to Ransomes for the Ipswich-based farm machinery manufacturer to develop the design. Over the next 20 years, Ransomes produced 1,500 machines, moving into the manufacture of petrol-powered machines in 1896.

From there, many other manufacturers saw the potential and names such as Shanks, Greens, JP, Allettt and Dennis entered the market.

However, it was the Atlas Chain Company, founded by Charles H Pugh, that adopted the brand name ATCO and did much to drive the popularity of lawnmowers in the early part of the 20th Century. In the 1920's, the Atco Standard was regarded as the gardener's best friend, but development was halted during WW2 as production switched to the war effort.

SERVICE HEAVEN

By the 1950s, production of lawnmowers really ramped up with Atco among the leading brands – and at the age of 15, Brian Radam became an apprentice at Charles H Pugh. The lawnmower business was not every boy's dream career, he says, and in any case he was earning twice his weekly wage in one night playing in a rock band (probably why Brian, with a passing resemblance, was soon nicknamed Ringo by dealers on one of the fabled week long dealer trips to the AL-KO factory).

The Atco service centres were factory-owned and provided a service to cylinder mowers that would today be regarded as excessive – and expensive. Collection, steam clean, strip down, immerse in caustic bath, replace worn engine parts such as piston, rings, crankshaft and conrod, re-bore cylinder if required, regrind cylinder and bottom blade,

completely repaint, run and test, deliver back to customer and demonstrate – all with a 12-month warranty.

It was a service manager's dream, now from a by-gone and phased out in the late 1970s, as service responsibility switched to lawnmower specialists.

The book then takes us on a tour of lawnmower development, from cylinder mowers through rotaries, hover machines, electric, battery power and onto the robotic mowers of today. Packed full of fascinating photographs, Brian Radam's book is a fitting and comprehensive account of this quintessential and sometimes ridiculed piece of kit – but without which lawns, sportsgrounds, golf courses and parks would not exist in their present form.

Nor is the book without its cringy but oft used slogans such as 'What mower would you want?', 'All you need to mow' and 'You'll be no mower alone once you've read this book!'

DETAILS

Rather aptly *Lawnmowers* is published by Amberley Publishing based in Stroud (the home of the lawnmower), priced at **£14.99**. Ref: ISBN: 978 4456 9482 2 (print) and ISBN: 978 1 4456 9484 9 (ebook). www.amberley-books.com



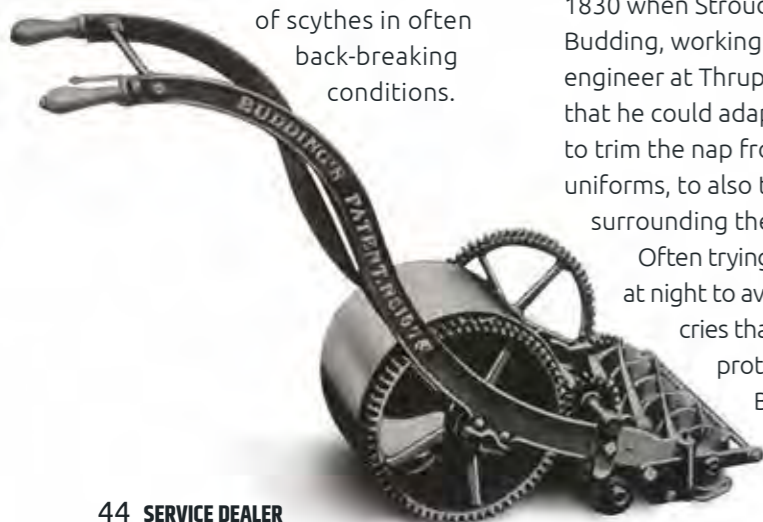
Early example of radio controlled mower



Atco provided a service to cylinder mowers that would today be regarded as excessive



Atco production line



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The Better Solution For Your Business



Edited by Adam Bernstein



A BUDGET FOR OUR TIME?

Politics aside, it takes a brave man to become Chancellor of the Exchequer and then, within 27 days, write and present a budget at a time of global crisis brought on by the smallest of enemies, a virus, writes SME Digest Editor Adam Bernstein.

But present Rishi Sunak did and with gusto too. Only time will tell whether or not his speech goes down in history as one that 'got things done' – to reuse the phrase that he repeated some 26 times – or is just another where brave claims made rot in the cupboard.

One thing is certain: coronavirus is proving to be a moveable feast and so changes, and other forms of help, are coming thick and fast. Indeed, just six days after the budget the Chancellor announced another £330bn of assistance, and more was announced subsequently.

CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY

Sunak rose to the dispatch box and went straight for the topic that's on everyone's mind at present – coronavirus and how the government plans to tackle it – touching on what everyone is hoping, that the outbreak is a serious, but temporary, disruption to the economy.

The Chancellor commented, "for a period it's going to be tough" and announced a series of "temporary, timely and targeted" responses to support those who cannot work while helping businesses that are struggling through no fault of their own. The measures announced follow on from the Bank of England's 'surprise' action in the morning – namely an immediate 0.5% cut in interest rates from 0.75% to 0.25% and billions of pounds of extra lending with 'additional incentives' to help banks support otherwise healthy SMEs.

Back to the budget, Sunak announced a three-point plan at a cost of £7bn. The first granted the NHS whatever resources it needs to cope with the virus, irrespective of cost.

Next, aside from those absent from work who will receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from day one, those who self-isolate regardless of showing any symptoms are to get the same. The self-employed eligible to claim Contributory Employment and Support Allowance will be able to claim from day one too.

The last element involves enhanced support for businesses through the full refund to SMEs with fewer than 250 workers of SSP for 14 days; HMRC scaling up its Time to Pay scheme for firms in trouble following the outbreak; and a new, temporary, Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme with £1bn in funding which

originally was to offer loans of up to £1.2m to SMEs facing difficulties, but was subsequently increased to £5m, the first six months to be interest free. Large firms were given cashflow protection via a new Bank of England scheme – the Covid-19 Corporate Financing Facility.

Also any business currently eligible for small business rates relief was to be provided with a £3,000 cash grant. That, too, was changed so that it now stands at £10,000. On top of that a further £25,000 in grants is to be given to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses operating from smaller premises, with a rateable value over £15,000 and below £51,000. Businesses that cannot pay their rent because of coronavirus will be protected from eviction to the end of June.

Firms that cannot afford to keep employees on have been offered a lifeline to avoid the need to make redundancies: they can furlough employees and keep them on the books, and the government will pay 80% of their salary to a monthly cap of £2,500. However, employees are not to do anything for the employer.

The test, of course, will be in how long it takes for the government to pay out these monies.

THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

With the headline material announced, the Chancellor turned to the state of the UK economy and other measures. It's entirely clear that even before the outbreak of coronavirus that the world has been slowing down. The Chancellor's figures don't include the effects of coronavirus, but GDP growth is predicted to stand at 1.1% in 2020 and 1.8% in 2021, then 1.5%, 1.3%, and 1.4% in 2024. Sunak announced an extra £175bn of capital investment

over the next five years, which the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expects to mean that another 500,000 will be in work. Inflation is predicted to rise to 1.4% in 2020 and 1.8% next year.

Of course, it's natural to ask with all of the announced spending where the money is coming from to pay for it? The answer is that part will come from tax changes, but a sizeable amount will follow from increased borrowing – which had been previously highlighted. In summary, borrowing is likely (OBR figures) to rise to 2.1% of GDP in 2019-20, 2.4% in 2020-21, 2.8% in 2021-22 and 2.5% by 2022-23.

In terms of the now annual rise in the National Living Wage (NLW), that will increase by 6.2% from 6 April. However, the Chancellor went further and announced that the Low Pay Commission has been given a revised remit to ensure that NLW reaches 66% of median earnings – more than £10.50 an hour by 2024. It's worth pointing out that, according to Incomes Data Research, when the NLW was launched in 2016 it was designed to pay a rate that matched 60% of median earnings. While this increase will help the low paid it will increase employer costs; the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group is worried that this could lead to 'false self-employment' or fewer workers being hired.

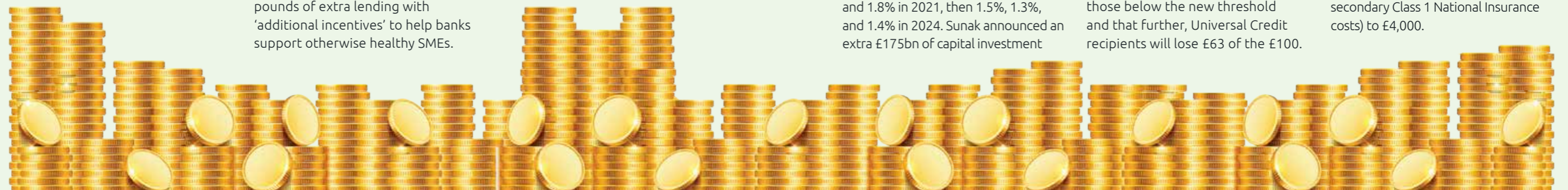
Another allied change relates to the National Insurance threshold which will rise from 6 April to £9,500 from £8,632. The Chancellor expects this rise to give workers an extra £100 a year. However, the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group is concerned that this doesn't help those below the new threshold and that further, Universal Credit recipients will lose £63 of the £100.

Those experiencing mortgage payment difficulties will be able to take advantage of a three-month mortgage payment holiday.

For the self-employed who work as contractors, Sunak refused to cancel the tightening up of IR35 legislation. However, its implementation has been put back to 2021 because of coronavirus. This means the self-employed who work for a company as if they are an employee could potentially end up paying the same level of tax that permanent staff members pay, but without the benefits. That said, the Chancellor has given the self-employed who earn less than £50,000 80% of their earnings to a cap of £2,500 if they're already in the tax system. The money won't be paid until June though.

NUMEROUS CHANGES

Following on from the government's manifesto pledge to review the efficacy of Entrepreneurs' relief, Sunak announced that it's to be restricted so that it offers a lifetime allowance of just £1m compared with £10m previously. As he explained, the relief apparently does little to incentivise the creation of businesses, mostly ends up going to a comparatively small number of individuals and costs the government some £2bn a year. The predicted savings will be redirected to business via an increase in the Research and Development Expenditure credit (RDEC) from 12% to 13%, a rise in the Structures and Buildings Allowance (which relieves the construction costs for new structures and buildings) from 2% to 3%, and an increase in the Employer's Allowance (which reduces an employer's secondary Class 1 National Insurance costs) to £4,000.



THE BUDGET – IMPACT IN OTHER AREAS

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Chancellor announced changes to how the issue of pollution is tackled, notably, from April 2022 the levy on electricity will be frozen while that placed on gas will rise; a new Plastic Packaging Tax of £200 per tonne will be applied to plastic packaging where less than 30% recycled plastic content is used; and the use of red diesel will be restricted to agriculture, rail and domestic heating and fishing. Those in construction, civil engineering and related trades, plant and equipment hire, transport, quarrying and mining, and leisure will lose out.

TRANSPORT

There's to be money for greener and cleaner transport options to make it less expensive to buy lower-emission vans and cars as well as pay for more rapid charging hubs. And there's to be £120m for defences damaged in recent floods, £200m to local communities to help areas flooded repeatedly and £5.2bn for new flood defences.

These green changes will be partly paid for by the increase in Air Passenger Duty that will, from 1 April, see long-haul economy tickets rise £2 to £80, and premium cabin fares rise £4 to £176.

The regional governments are to

be offered more funding – £640m extra for Scotland, £360m for Wales, and Northern Ireland will see £310m.

SMART MOTORWAYS

Other changes to infrastructure will involve gigabit broadband being rolled out nationwide at a cost of £5bn, and £510m being spent on creating a shared 4G network so that 95% of the UK will be covered. Roads and rail will see spending too; Sunak noted that there would be "over £27bn of tarmac" through a strategic fund for roads and motorways providing "over 20 connections to ports and airports, over 100 junctions, 4,000 miles of road" alongside £2.5bn over five years to fix potholes. Some might question how this fits in with the government's green credentials.

NHS

To ease the pressure on NHS funding the planned cut to Corporation Tax has been shelved – it remains at 19% which, Sunak reiterated is the "lowest rate in the G20". There's also extra funding for HMRC to reel in an expected £4.4bn in additional revenue.

BUSINESSES

A further measure to help firms will permit the deferral of VAT

until 5 April 2021 and self-assessment income tax to 31 January 2021. Businesses caught by the Making Tax Digital (MTD) regime for VAT will welcome the Chancellor's plans to evaluate MTD's introduction before (if) it's rolled out further. According to the Chartered Institute of Taxation, MTD hasn't reduced errors, reduced costs or greatly improved productivity.

For importers, the introduction of 'postponed accounting' means that those who are registered for VAT will account for import VAT as an entry in the VAT return, rather than paying it at the time of import or by using a monthly deferral account; this will aid their cashflow significantly.

SUMMARY

The Chancellor has combined election pledges with pragmatism in helping the country to fight coronavirus. The question is: is the government storing up economic problems for the future or is it hedging on the basis that interest rates will be low for some time?



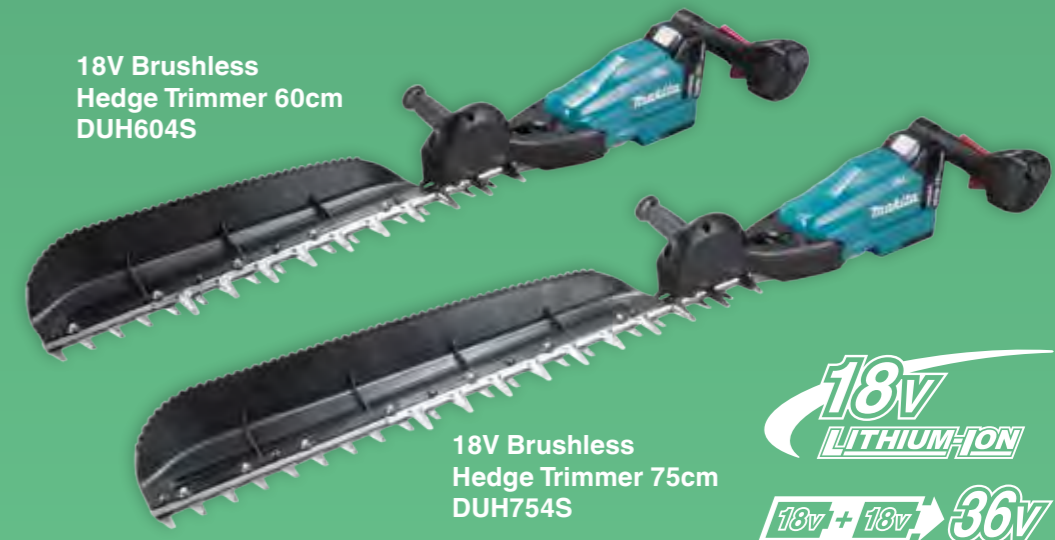
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PDC01 Portable Power Supply
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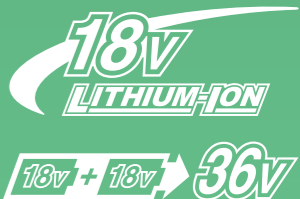
18V Brushless
Hedge Trimmer 60cm
DUH604S

191A64-2
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Includes 2x 18V 5.0Ah Batteries,
Charger and Twin 18v adaptor

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UR201C

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Twin 18V
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COVID-19: BE CALM. BE INFORMED. BE PROACTIVE.

Sara Hey, Vice President of Operations and Development at Bob Clements Inc, the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers US dealers with Service Dealer's UK readership every issue. This issue, the advice Bob Clements International has been giving to the dealerships it works with in the States during this outbreak

Coronavirus or Covid-19. This will probably be the "word of the year" and many will want to define 2020 by the virus that has disrupted the lives of people around the world. Often our response to an event like the one we are experiencing is anxiety, fear, and even panic. To navigate any storm or trial, however, one must have a level head and remain logical, not letting the emotion take over.

At BCI, we have been talking with hundreds of dealers across the United States about what our personal response should be, and we summarise it with the following:

Be Calm. Be Informed. Be Proactive.

We have worked to help our dealers do exactly that, and while there is new information available every day, and the rules of the game changing just as often, we must do our best to remain logical and lead our people through this storm. We will get through it!

On our free webinars during the early period of the outbreak, we have been sharing answers to some of the most asked questions we have received. The following is a summary of some of those answers.

One of the top questions we have been asked is: **"Are we considered an essential, life-sustaining business?"**

While this varies somewhat across

our country, in many cases the dealers we work with may very well be considered essential. With this said, even though some dealers have a valid claim to being "essential", you do have the option to simply close during this time. For those who don't choose to do that, we are finding that they are discovering creative ways to service the public and private sectors. I will touch on this more below.

We have been asked: **"How do I meet the needs of my people and customers?"**

Now, more than ever, your role as a leader is required. Your employees and your customers are looking to you to be calm, informed and proactive. This is done only through constant and clear communication. Meet regularly with your employees. Keep them updated on all changes, listen to their concerns and answer their questions to the best of your ability. For your customers, you need to make sure you are keeping them up to date on all social media channels, your website and signage.

It is also important to **follow all guidelines** and orders regarding keeping a safe, clean environment. This is where you must be proactive.

Finally, we are advising dealers

regularly on **how to financially survive this time and maximise cashflow.**

If you aren't already, NOW is the time to monitor your numbers and take advantage of opportunities. Many of the dealers we are working with were showing strong sales during the early days of the outbreak. People who were needing to buy were doing just that. We advised our dealers to utilise technology to assist the customer and support the selling process for all your departments.

In closing, we know that this storm will pass, and the recovery process will begin. We are all blessed to be in one of the best industries in the world. You represent the heart and soul of your towns and communities. With certainty, we know from talking to hundreds of dealers, manufacturers and vendors in recent weeks, that everyone is working tirelessly to manage the impact of this global pandemic and together, we will recover and come back stronger than ever.

As you lead in the coming days, we encourage you to remain calm, stay informed and be proactive. We must plan to define 2020 not by Covid-19, but by another term – strength, resolve, ingenuity, or perhaps triumph. How will you define 2020?



OPEN OR CLOSED?

Pete McArthur, of Strathbogie Forest & Garden, says never in their wildest dreams or nightmares did they ever expect to be in this perfect storm

January to March was the strongest quarter we have experienced in many years. Record breaking even. We had new machinery going out the door, enquiries for new products, site visits in commercial applications, service and repair work, weather favourable and even suppliers fulfilling Pre Season Orders to 95%.

We also held a successful Automower and battery open evening with current and new customers attending. Then we were all watching with great interest how the coronavirus swept across the world and arrived on the shores of the UK. Friday 17 March was the first day that we noticed a drop in calls and the purpose of visits that week was like a winter storm arriving: picking up extra two stroke, chains, engine oils and service items. During the day on Monday we started to notice that a lot of our customers and local business owners decided to close their premises or go into self-isolation. We therefore made the decision to close our doors, hoping that we might turn the corner quicker – believing the sooner we close, the sooner we return!

A very hard decision when you know exactly how much stock you have sitting in the store; it's just coming into prime season and the previous quarter having shown so much potential for the next! Then you look at staff: 50% lost if one of our household family goes down. Bob is on the high-risk category as well. The decision then becomes a little easier as life is more important – without life we haven't got a business!

The first week from home was taking calls from customers applauding our decision to close for the benefit of staff and customers alike, and hearing how they can't wait to see us again when we re-open. This made me feel much better as we seemed to be the first to commit to closure. I could see through various social media that some dealers remained open. When I received the letter from STIHL about the closure of Camberley with no deliveries until further notice, it brought a smile to my face thinking there is a manufacturer caring not only about its staff, but the dealerships as well.

I'm very glad that we have a great working relationship with our suppliers and bank manager.

There have been so many packages announced by the government that I can't remember the half of them, but they seem to be based on headline grabbing, as opposed to relief. We were grateful for the 100% rates relief and the business disruption grant, but the furloughed worker did have me bemused! Speaking with our accountant, their advice was don't count on any of that coming through before June. What happens between now and then? You pay as normal, then claim back. All of a sudden, the projections look a little different if we can't get back to work by then! Now you realise why profit is essential in any business, not turnover. We can all turn over money in huge sums, but it's how much that is left in your pocket that really counts for those rainy, or Covid-19, days!

I have also read with great sadness about most local shows and national shows being cancelled for 2020. Very understandable, but these quite often stimulate sales throughout the season.

Thinking on a positive note, when you get this spare time it does make you look at your business and the processes you carry out and think "why on earth do we do that?" I might over analyse slightly, but very rarely do you get a chance to do it right at the beginning of a season. Normally all you have on your mind is the customer who is shouting the loudest!

The window of hope for us is that the weather is just starting to change and the temperature starting to rise slowly, bringing things back to life. We're starting to hear the mowers cutting the grass in the evening and people cleaning down patio areas ready for the summer BBQ. I really do hope that we can catch some of the late spring buyers and get back to some form of normality by the end of June.

Hopefully my next *Diary* will be full of optimism and looking at the green shoots of recovery! These past few weeks will have gone down in history, rocking our economy and I'm sure we will all suffer the consequences in years to come in one tax or another!

PRODUCTS

CONTACT:
07929 438213
steve@servicedealer.co.uk

FORESTRY



OPTIMISED PERFORMANCE

Husqvarna launches new battery chainsaws

Husqvarna is launching two new battery-powered chainsaws.

The T540i XP and 540i XP chainsaws feature a new design and are developed with professional users in mind. Used with the newly released Husqvarna BLi200X (T540i XP) or Husqvarna BLi300 (540i XP) batteries, the company says the new chainsaws have capabilities equivalent to professional 40cc class petrol chainsaws, making them suitable for tree removals and smaller felling tasks. With the completely redesigned and optimised system, according to the manufacturer, power has been increased by more than 30% compared with previous Husqvarna battery chainsaws.

Due to the battery technology, the latest X-Cut chain SP21G and the X-PRECISION bar, the new T540i XP offers cutting capacity for drop cuts of thick trunks and

branches, while also being fast and nimble enough to take on smaller tasks. The rear-handle version, 540i XP, boasts the same power with the company describing it as an all-round saw for any kind of groundwork.

The new chainsaws feature a user-friendly interface for quick control, and balanced saw bodies that provide the maneuverability needed for difficult cuts. The battery status is easily visible on the newly-developed interface and the chainsaw starts and stops at the press of a button. The absence of direct emissions is one of the benefits with a battery-powered chainsaw. The user is also subject to less noise and fewer vibrations.

To handle the everyday work life of arborists, the company says only premium materials and durable components have been used, resulting in a robust chainsaw. The saws are IPX4 classified, meaning that they can operate in challenging weather.

DOMESTIC

MOWER CHOICE FROM EGO

New 42cm self-propelled lawnmower



Adding to its range of cordless power tools, Ego is now launching a new 42cm self-propelled lawnmower (LM1701E-SP).

In addition to the variable speed self-propelled drive system, the lawnmower has wheels with what the company describes as larger than usual tread to give better traction. It also features adjustable handle heights and an easy to access battery and grass-box.

Weighing 25kg, the 42cm mower benefits from an extra-large 55-litre textile bag for grass collection and is supplied with a 2.5Ah battery and standard charger, so users can cut up to 300sqm on one single charge. It's also manufactured from a robust and easy to clean polymer material suitable for collecting, mulching and rear discharge cutting.

Powered by 56-volt Arc lithium-ion technology, the mower retails at £529.00 with a five-year domestic warranty.

DOMESTIC

TORO UNVEILS ITS FLEX FORCE

New range of battery products

Launching in the UK, Toro's new range will include a 55cm battery mower, a brushless leaf blower and a brushless string trimmer all powered by the new Flex-Force Power System featuring 60V lithium-ion technology.

The products are powered by a heavy-duty, quick-charging lithium-ion battery to optimise run time and output. The battery is interchangeable between the products within the range. Each Flex-Force item can be purchased with or without chargers and batteries, with spares available for separate purchase to fully customise the system to the user's individual needs.

The first item in the range is the 55cm Recycler 60V mower. This multi-functional mower is equipped with the Toro Easy Start function and Recycler system. With the push of a button the mower automatically starts and with its Automatic Drive System it will adjust its speed to the operator's pace. The Recycler system re-cuts the grass trimmings into fine mulch and returns them to the soil for added nutrients and a healthier lawn.

Also part of the Flex-Force line is the 60V leaf blower. The new blower comes with a variable speed trigger and turbo-boost button as well as a 'cruise control' feature. Boasting 115mph air speed paired with 605 CFM of air volume, the company says it delivers both high power and long run time, making it efficient when moving large piles of wet leaves.

The final product in the



Flex-Force line-up is the 60V cordless string trimmer. This unit allows users to adjust the line, size and cutting length to find the right performance and angle for any job. With a variable speed trigger and two speed settings, users can adjust the cutting power to raise and lower intensity to suit the terrain and enable higher performance where needed, and an overall longer battery life.

Built with a brushless DC motor, the string trimmer boasts a cast-aluminium direct-drive head to provide a long product life with little maintenance. Line replacement is quick and easy, with no spools required.

The Flex-Range comes with three batteries available for any application; the L135 battery (2.5Ah), for compact power and suitable for hand tools; the L324 battery (6.0Ah) which provides versatile power and will easily mow a small to medium garden; and finally, the L405 battery (7.5Ah) which will provide heavy-duty power for mowing a large garden.

All Flex-Force products come with a three-year warranty, which will include the battery and mower as standard.

AGRICULTURAL/COMMERCIAL

WHEELY VERSATILE LOADERS

Next-generation R070 and R090 launched by Kubota



Kubota, has announced the launch of its next-generation wheeled loaders, the R070 and R090. The new machines are suitable for use in agricultural, groundcare and construction environments.

Redesigned inside and out, the new machines boast a fully enclosed glass cabin for improved visibility, as well as a more ergonomic control layout. New features include:

- Air conditioning (optional)
- Full opening right window
- Adjustable right wrist rest
- New loader boom design
- Tilttable steering wheel
- Enlarged glass surface
- High visibility cabin
- Full suspension seat
- Large foot space
- Digital display

Both machines have a high lifting capacity (R070: 1880 kgf, R090: 2160 kgf), enabling operators to smoothly manoeuvre materials. All major loader functions are on a single RH lever that is easy to operate with just one hand, both on the R070 and R090. The two-step speed control switch enables the operator to quickly change speeds.

The manufacturer's V2607 direct-injection engine is now fully Stage-V compliant and fuel efficient. Additionally, the new and improved DPF [diesel particulate filter] reduces maintenance by increasing the service intervals.

AGRICULTURAL



KATANA COMBINES POWER & COMFORT

Forager launch from Fendt

The new Fendt Katana 650 self-propelled forage harvester is now available to order.

The manufacturer says the new model offers more power, with 25 horsepower added to the existing MTU six-cylinder in-line engine, to bring it up to 650hp overall. It also boasts a new intake and processing system which improves crop flow and increases cutting capacity. New roller conditioner crackers have been introduced to improve the quality of the harvested crop and reduce the power and fuel requirement.

For the operator, the new cab brings a quieter driving experience facilitated by coated glass which has reduced noise levels by three decibels, and benefits from improved ventilation.

Fendt says its BalancedGrip all-wheel drive system makes the new model more versatile and provides greater stability in undulating fields. The cutting speed, efficiency and longevity of the knives has also been enhanced, says the manufacturer. Two new roller conditioners, new crackers that expand the cut length to 30mm, and an enlarged 300mm roll diameter have increased the flow capacity by 21%. However, the new machine also boasts a drop in fuel consumption of 12%.

The new model's in-cab ventilation system uses a variable fan that features a reverse function which can be triggered by the operator automatically from the cab. The fan controls the air flow by adjusting the angle of each blade. It therefore clears the coolers of deposits and fine dust particles which reduces the need for time consuming interruptions during long periods of use.

Maintenance has also been considered, with the design of the new harvester giving operators better access to the heart of the machine. New service openings give direct access to the knives which helps to maintain moving parts more easily and safely. Fendt has also introduced a new knife sharpening system which it says adjusts continuously to reduce wear and provide a smoother, more consistent chop.



A FOND LOOK BACK

That was the year that was – 1993
Chris Biddle, Founder Service Dealer

Since its launch in 1988, *Service Dealer* has reported the ebbs and flows of the industry. Droughts and deluges have come and gone, the economy has boomed and bust – but nothing to compare with the disruptive impact of the current crisis. So for this issue, with some help from my old mate Jim Green, I've gone back to the spring of 1993 to remind you of some of the stories we were covering over a quarter of a century ago.

MASS CIRCULATION OF CONSUMER TABLOID

Lead article from Alan Titchmarsh

In the spring of 1993, we produced and published a tabloid newspaper which was delivered to over a million homes in the UK.

Called *Lawnleaders News*, the project was masterminded by five leading UK distributors, Henton & Chattell, Handy's, Rochford's, Paice and Sons and Cheshire Light Tractors (then a Flymo retail business). It provided advice on buying garden machinery, gave lawncare tips and featured a selection of special offers. Editor Chris Biddle interviewed Alan Titchmarsh in his Hampshire garden for the lead article.

The aim was to demonstrate that specialist dealers could compete with the 'sheds', but offer much, much more. It was underpinned with the slogan *Earn Your Stripes* with complimentary



artwork for dealer use.

Printed in Lincoln by Northcliffe Newspapers, part of the *Daily Mail group*, the newspaper was overprinted with participating dealers' names and details and distributed via Northcliffe's in-house home delivery service using Mosaic profiling to identify areas with houses with gardens.

Thus in a pre-internet age, *Lawnleaders News*, became a forerunner of the current online *Garden Trader* website.

GREAT MOWER GIVEAWAY

Purchase price returned in five years!

Early season sales in the spring of 1993 were universally described as fantastic following a wet winter and very warm March.

Flymo's Les Evans described the start to the year as "the strongest quarter the industry has ever known".

Despite that, Flymo and Atco-Qualcast were still going head-to-head for market leadership. Atco-Qualcast launched an extraordinary promotion, which ran for two weeks from 28 March to 12 April, that promised to return all the money paid for mowers purchased during this period – in five years' time! All the consumer had to do was clip a coupon from a national advert, attach a dated till receipt and send £5 as a registration fee. Then in the spring of 1998 they would receive a full refund for the original purchase price plus the £5 registration.

WHICH? CHOOSES YAMAHA AND VICTA

Best buys for spring 1993

In its annual test of lawnmowers, *Gardening from Which?*, chose the Victa Silver Streak and the Yamaha YLM446 as Best Buys in its petrol mower category.

It also tested battery mowers by Ginge (rated poor in long grass) and Wolf (did not cope well in short grass!).

GfW also reported that it had been to B&Q to purchase one of the Murray petrol walk-behinds introduced the previous year at sub-£100 but said, "We bought a model and tested it quickly, but have been unable to report on it before stocks ran out".



FROM MUPPETS TO MOWERS

Flymo hires Shepperton Studios

Flymo completely revamped its spring TV advertising campaign by building a garden set at Shepperton Studios (home to many James Bond films), filming a series of 40-second commercials over three weeks at a cost of almost £1 million.

The commercials departed from the previous gardener character (Jethro) and M'Lady format and featured animation

of hosepipes, trees, hedges and a topiary peacock, all created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop production company, the man behind *The Muppets*.

Lawn had been grown in greenhouse conditions before being transported to Shepperton in trays, where it was kept fed and watered under lights simulating day and night to recreate normal growing conditions.

IN BRIEF

- Mike Barnfield, Honda Divisional Manager, suddenly announced his early retirement in March 1993. He had been with Honda for 13 years and was responsible for establishing a strong dealer network following the company's tentative launch into the mower business at the Motspur Park show in the late 1970s.
- EP Barrus reported a near 100% take-up of its Mowmaster Direct promotion by Lawnflite Dealers which featured products at key price-points, including a £99 steel-deck rotary and an 11hp, 32" lawn tractor at £999. General Manager Ron Miller said "early consumer interest is quite staggering".
- At John Deere UK, former General Sales Manager Alec McKee took over as Managing Director from Doug Walker, who had been MD since 1968.



In spring 1993 I reported that Brent Council in London had declared lawns to be 'politically incorrect'!

It said that books carrying references to houses with lawns and gardens should be banned from Brent Library "as unrepresentative of the majority of the people in this country"!

I also reported how there was continuing hostility between Ransomes Consumer and Countax. Harry Handkammer had claimed

market leadership for his tractors barely 18 months after their launch following Ransomes removal of his contract to supply attachments for Westwood. He had suspicions that his rivals were requiring dealers to restrict access to Countax products – and suggested that he had received dozens of 'brown paper envelopes' containing evidence.

Tensions were fuelled by a Westwood advert with the strapline "Why buy a copy when you can buy the original?".

EVENTS 2020

Status of the events listed below was correct at the time of going to press, but due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, we advise checking with organisers' websites and social media channels

MAY 2020

- 3 North Somerset Show
www.nsas.org.uk **CANCELLED**
- 9-10 Nottinghamshire County Show
www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com **CANCELLED**
- 13-16 Balmoral Show, Belfast
www.balmoralshow.co.uk
POSTPONED UNTIL 19-22 AUG 2020
- 16-17 Smallholding & Countryside Festival, Royal Welsh Showground
<https://rwas.wales/smallholding-and-countryside-festival> **CANCELLED**
- 19-23 Chelsea Flower Show
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events **CANCELLED**
- 20-21 Grassland & Muck, Ragley Estate
www.grasslandevent.co.uk/ **CANCELLED**
- 21-23 Devon County Show
<http://devoncountyshow.co.uk>
POSTPONED UNTIL 28-30 AUG 2020
- 23-24 Herts County Show
www.hertsshow.com **CANCELLED**
- 25 Surrey County Show
www.surreycountyshow.co.uk/surrey-county-show **CANCELLED**
- 27-28 Staffordshire County Show
www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show **CANCELLED**
- 27-28 Suffolk County Show
<http://suffolkshow.co.uk/> **CANCELLED**
- 29-31 Gardening Scotland, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh
www.gardeningscotland.com **CANCELLED**
- 31 Rutland Show
www.rutlandcountyshow.com **CANCELLED**

JUNE 2020

- 4-6 Royal Cornwall Show
www.royalcornwallshow.org
POSTPONED UNTIL 10-12 SEPT 2020
- 11-13 South of England Show
www.seas.org.uk/south-of-england-show **CANCELLED**
- 10-11 Cereals 2020, Duxford
www.cerealsevent.co.uk **CANCELLED**
- 12-14 Three Counties Show, Malvern
www.royalthreecounties.co.uk **CANCELLED**
- 16-17 Cheshire County Show
www.cheshirecountyshow.org.uk **CANCELLED**
- 18-21 BBC Gardeners' World Live – Birmingham NEC
www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com **CANCELLED**
- 18-21 Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh
www.royalhighlandshow.org **CANCELLED**
- 24-25 Lincolnshire Show
<https://lincolnshireshow.co.uk/> **CANCELLED**
- 28 Derbyshire County Show
www.derbyshirecountyshow.org.uk **CANCELLED**

JULY 2020

- 1-2 Royal Norfolk Show
www.royalnorfolkshow.co.uk **CANCELLED**
- 7-12 Hampton Court Flower Show
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-flower-show **CANCELLED**
- 10-11 Kent County Show
<http://kentshowground.co.uk>
- 11 Newport Show
<http://www.newportshow.co.uk/> **CANCELLED**

- 14-16 Great Yorkshire Show
<https://greatyorkshireshow.co.uk/> **CANCELLED**
- 20-23 Royal Welsh Show
www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh-show/ **CANCELLED**
- 22-26 RHS Flower Show – Tatton Park
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park
- 24-25 Border Union Show
<http://www.buas.org/> **CANCELLED**
- 24-26 The Game Fair, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire
www.thegamefair.org
POSTPONED UNTIL 18-20 SEPT 2020
- 25 Mid Devon Show
www.middevonshow.co.uk
- 28-30 New Forest & Hampshire County Show
www.newforestshow.co.uk **CANCELLED**
- 31-2 Royal Bath & West Show
www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show

AUGUST 2020

- 1 Dumfries Agricultural Show
www.dumfriesshow.co.uk **CANCELLED**
- 5 North Devon Show
www.northdevonshow.com
- 6-9 BBC Countryfile Live, Castle Howard
www.countryfilelive.com **CANCELLED**
- 9 Ripley Show
www.ripleyshow.co.uk
- 14-15 Shrewsbury Flower Show
www.shrewsburyflowershow.org.uk
- 18-20 Pembrokeshire County Show
www.pembshow.org **CANCELLED**
- 20-23 BBC Countryfile Live, Windsor Great Park
www.countryfilelive.com
- 30 Royal Isle of Wight County Show
<https://iwcountyshow.co.uk/>

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