

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021

GROUND CARE IS IN THEIR BLOOD

How family dealership John Osman Groundcare adapted and thrived

New ways of working

Kubota on changing the way it interacts with dealers, and what the future looks like

What lies ahead?

Our dealer panel looks forward to what 2021 might bring

ATV market

A manufacturer and its dealers talk of a resilient sector

MARKETING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Increasing numbers of larger dealerships are choosing to create dedicated roles for marketing managers



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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to January/February 2021's edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

It would be nice to think of 2021 as somewhat of a fresh start following all that 2020 had to throw at us. However, I do fear we at least have a very tough first quarter to battle our way through. At the time of writing, the light at the end of the tunnel appears to be Easter. This period has traditionally been seen by many dealers as the weekend when the season truly kicks off. Let's hope it's a real catalyst to get things moving in the right direction again this year. Goodness knows we all deserve it.

That isn't to say though, that season 2020 was a write-off. I think many dealers will be satisfied with where they ended up, certainly after what appeared to lie in store for them when it all kicked off back in March.

From the results of our *Business Prospects Survey*, which you can read on page 44, and indeed from the comments from our dealer panel this issue (starting on page 12) you can gather that optimism in the network is not in short supply. If the weather plays along and, crucially, if stock supplies can come back on stream relatively quickly, members of the network whom we've heard from certainly have belief in their businesses.

One dealer whom we'll be hearing from regularly this year will be Chris Gibson, MD of GGM Groundscare in Colne, Lancashire, who will kindly be sharing with us his dealership's experiences in our *Diary Of A Season*. We thank Chris and look forward to his insight into how a progressive grounds care dealership fares over these next 12 months.

I'd also like to extend our immense gratitude to Pete McArthur at Strathbogie for keeping us so well informed with his brilliant diary entries throughout what was a most turbulent year!



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DEALERS



Lister Wilder's Kubota premises

CHANDLERS BUYS LISTER WILDER'S AGCO BUSINESS

While Lister Wilder focuses solely on Kubota

Chandlers (Farm Equipment) Ltd has purchased Lister Wilder's AGCO Agricultural business. At the same time Lister Wilder has expanded its full line Kubota range of Agricultural, Groundcare and Construction machinery across the South. The deal, which both parties stress is mutually beneficial, sees them become two of the bigger dealerships in the UK for their respective partners.

Regarding the future of Lister Wilder's branches, from 4 January 2021, Chandlers operates from the premises at Southam (Warwickshire), Wallingford (Oxfordshire), Devizes (Wiltshire) Cirencester (Gloucestershire) and Bristol.

Lister Wilder continues to operate from Ashford (Kent), Guildford (Surrey), Reading (Berkshire) and is cohabiting at Southam, Cirencester and Bristol while it builds new Kubota Centres in the West.

On the announcement of the deal at the end of October 2020, Jason Scott, Lister Wilder's Company Chairman, said, "We'll spend the next couple of months integrating systems to ensure the transition is seamless. The entire AGCO team is moving across so it's very much business as usual." He said customers will "continue to ring the same numbers, visit the same branches, be supported by the same great engineers, looked after by the same

passionate sales team and served by the same attentive parts team – just with a different name on the invoices."

DEALER LED

Speaking to *Service Dealer* founder Chris Biddle on his *Inside AgriTurf* podcast, Kubota UK MD David Hart described the deal as "complex" and confirmed the move was not instigated by the manufacturers, but by the dealers themselves. David told Chris, "AGCO have never made it a secret that their 'Route 66' strategy is to separate their brands slightly and I think Lister Wilder realised that was something it had to do."

"What happened then is Listers had a meeting with Chandlers to see what the opportunities were, which got into a bigger conversation of 'why don't we let the AGCO businesses go?' That then allows Listers to focus wholly on the Kubota side."

David confirmed, "The move is good for Kubota because we've got a dealer now that is focused solely on their Kubota business. It's worked out for both of us really."

Both Chandlers and Lister Wilder Ltd have steadily expanded over the past half century, growing around the Massey Ferguson, Fendt and Valtra franchises. Chandlers currently operates from seven depots covering primarily Lincolnshire and the East Midlands, while Lister Wilder

operates from eight depots covering Oxfordshire and the South-Central region. Both dealers also partnered with Kubota for their commercial groundcare range of products, with Lister Wilder broadening its base further by encompassing Kubota construction across the South-East of England.

With the Kubota business playing such an important part of Lister Wilder's £100m turnover and Chandlers keen to expand its fully focused AGCO operation in line with AGCO's brand exclusivity strategy, the companies issued a joint statement which said they were delighted that an agreement had been reached that allows for both businesses "to develop in line with the strategic goals of their primary franchises – giving both companies a clear and bright future."

The joint statement went on to say, "Both companies believe that this arrangement is a mutually beneficial agreement, allowing each enterprise to continue to invest in the very best of facilities, and in their respective teams going forward, to provide the highest level of customer service for their respective brands."

"Chandlers and Lister Wilder look forward with excitement to the future and remain committed to being of service to their many customers for many years to come."

PEOPLE



STIHL's Robin Lennie

ROBIN LENNIE RETIRES AS MD OF STIHL GB

Successor named as Kay Green, joining from Hasbro UK Ltd

Robin Lennie retired as STIHL Great Britain's long-standing Managing Director at the end of 2020.

Robin joined the company in 1990 as Finance Director and Company Secretary and was promoted to Managing Director in 2008. Having studied accountancy, law and economics at the University of Glasgow, Robin qualified as a chartered accountant in 1978 and as an IOD chartered director in 2006.

STIHL said Robin leaves the company in excellent financial health and during his tenure as Managing Director turnover has increased from £57m in 2008 to over £109m in 2019.

The company said Robin retires with many exciting plans including exploring even more of the world with his wife and travel companion Liz.

STIHL GB went on to confirm the appointment of new Managing Director Kay Green. The company said Kay has a successful track record in sales and marketing and joins from Hasbro UK Ltd where she is Country Manager for UK and Ireland.

Kay will join STIHL on 1 March until which point Financial Director Nick Burroughs will act as Interim Managing Director.

All at *Service Dealer* wish Robin a long and very happy retirement.

PEOPLE



Briggs & Stratton's Florian Mayer

BRIGGS & STRATTON REORGANISES EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP

New team in place

Briggs & Stratton has reorganised its EMEA Sales and Marketing leadership team, but told *Service Dealer* that UK dealers should notice no change in their day-to-day encounters with the company.

In an official statement Briggs said the primary focus of the new team will be to deliver "...superior market driven innovations, technologies and services with specific focus on commercial engines, rental business and battery technology".

The Sales and Marketing management team will be headed up by Florian Mayer, Senior Director Sales & Marketing EMEA. Florian joined Briggs & Stratton in March 2020 and the company said he brings a wealth of market knowledge after serving in several sales and marketing leadership roles with Stanley Black & Decker in Europe.

Sales leads reporting into Mayer are Patrick Limberg, Director Sales Commercial Engines & Power EMEA based in Germany; Benjamin Mottaz, Director Sales Consumer Engines EMEA and Pierre Olivier Izac, Manager Regional Sales – MEA & India, both based in the regional head office in Switzerland.

Business planning and administration will be led by Uta Hackstein, Senior Manager Business Planning and Sales, who is also based in the Swiss office.

Paul Bramhall, Director Marketing EMEA – Engines & Power, will oversee the regional marketing strategy for the utility and residential engine, and battery business. Based in the Swiss office, Paul will also be the primary contact for communications within the region and will report directly to Florian Mayer.

NO CHANGE FOR UK

Service Dealer asked Paul Bramhall if UK dealers would notice any changes due to these appointments. Paul told us, "The EMEA sales and marketing organisational changes will not have any effect on the day-to-day encounters customers will have with our UK operations."

Paul also confirmed that the UK leadership has not changed, telling *Service Dealer*, "There are no changes to the sales and marketing set-up for the UK market specifically, with Mark Kerr heading up our OEM sales and Ian Small heading up Global Support (after sales)."

Paul also said, "The EMEA sales and marketing reorganisation does not affect the current leadership of our end-products or after sales divisions."

Florian Mayer added, "Our company has a proud past and an even stronger future with the recent developments and repositioning."

"The expertise and resources we have available to us now will not only enable us to better support our lawn and garden customer base, but will also enable us to invest in the development of game-changing innovations and technologies with regards to applying power, particularly with regard to commercial engines, rental and electrification."

DEALERS



SHARROCKS PARTNERS WITH AEBI SCHMIDT

Distributing motor mowers and slope tractors

Dealer FR Sharrock Limited has signed a partnership agreement with Aebi Schmidt UK.

Sharrocks will now be responsible for the distribution of the Aebi range of motor mowers and slope tractors across the North-West and Midlands with immediate effect.

Commenting on the partnership, James Sharrock, MD of FR Sharrock Limited said, "We have been speaking with Aebi Schmidt for some time and when they confirmed they were establishing a new dealer network for Aebi it was a simple choice for us. We previously distributed Aebi tractors before they were acquired by Schmidt and have always considered them to be the best in class."

Speaking after completing the appointment of Sharrocks, Martin Foster, Key Account Manager at Aebi Schmidt said, "We are committed to establishing the strongest dealer network possible to deliver our end-users the best service. With Sharrocks' extensive experience in this sector their appointment is a logical one. Their commitment to outstanding customer service and unrivalled product support reflects our own values and their continual investment into infrastructure and staff to meet customers' increasing demands is a sure sign of success."

DEALERS

TH WHITE ADDS CHAFER TO LINE-UP

British-built crop sprayers



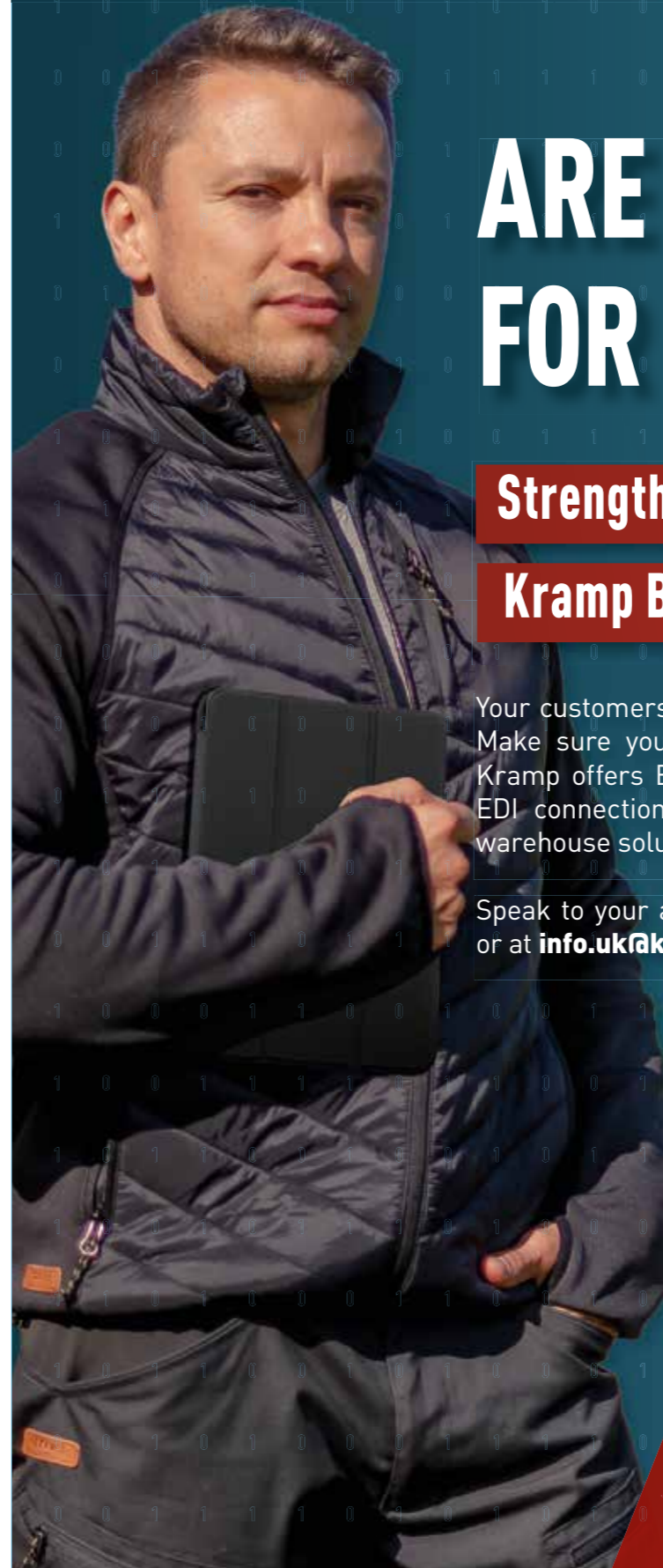
Dealer TH White has added Chafer crop sprayers to its line-up of agricultural machinery.

Established in 1901, the range of trailed and self-propelled crop sprayers is designed and built in North Lincolnshire.

"Although we haven't been around quite as long as TH White," said Chafer Managing Director Rob Starkey, "our two companies share a long history in the agricultural sector and we're delighted to be able to offer our range through such a highly-respected dealer network."

TH White Director David Rapkins said, "Both TH White and Chafer are dedicated to quality and service. We're proud to be able to extend our offering to farmers with these outstanding sprayers, which will help to drive efficiency and economy."

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DEALERS

GREENMECH TRIMS NETWORK

Current dealer becomes exclusive and has area expanded

GreenMech Ltd has rationalised its dealer network in the South and South-East of England, with an expansion in coverage area for dealer GA Groundcare Ltd taking effect from 1st January 2021.

The change means that Hunt Forest Group and Burden Bros Agri no longer represent the franchise.

Operating from its depot in Poulshot, Wiltshire, GA Groundcare Ltd is now exclusive to the GreenMech franchise, offering supply and support across the full pedestrian, road-tow and tracked chipper portfolio, together with stocking a full range of GreenMech replacement parts. Having originally been appointed in 2017 for the counties of Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, the move sees its territory extended to cover Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

Commenting on the expanded area, GA Groundcare Ltd Director, Ashley Stevens, said, "With over nine years of experience working with the GreenMech product line, I'm



GA Groundcare's Director Ashley Stevens

delighted to be offered the opportunity to develop this further across a broader territory. We will be increasing our sales and aftermarket resources to ensure we can deliver advice and support to customers, both existing and new."

GreenMech Sales Director, Martin Lucas, added, "Having seen how well GA Groundcare Ltd has performed with our range, we are confident that it will make a success of raising the level of both sales and aftermarket support in this key territory."

The manufacturer has said all existing warranties relating to their chippers, sold by Hunt Forest Group and Burden Bros Agri, will continue to be supported by GA Groundcare Ltd.

PEOPLE



Kevin Ashmore

HUSQVARNA'S KEVIN ASHMORE TO RETIRE

From UK Professional manager role

working at Husqvarna, I have had the pleasure of undertaking a number of different roles with the company. During this time, I have strived to meet all of the challenges that they brought, without forgetting to experience the many opportunities that working at Husqvarna has offered me along the way.

"It is not only those memories that will remain with me but also those of the people that both made, and still make, Husqvarna the company I have had the pleasure of being a part of. I am looking forward (along with my wife), towards starting a new planned chapter in our lives and a fresh

challenge in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland shortly."

The UK Professional team and regional Professional business manager, Arian Essenstam, worked closely with Kevin ensuring a smooth transition.

Ken Brewster, commercial director at Husqvarna UK said, "Everyone at Husqvarna thanks Kevin for his outstanding contribution, for being a valued colleague and friend, and for his commitment to our dealers, customers and the Husqvarna UK team."

All at Service Dealer wish Kevin all the very best on his well-earned retirement.

INDUSTRY



Makita will concentrate on production of battery-powered products

MAKITA TO CEASE PRODUCTION OF ENGINE PRODUCTS

From 31 March 2022

The Makita Corporation has announced its intention to cease production of petrol-powered engine products from 31 March 2022.

In an official statement the company said: "In the field of outdoor power equipment, Makita is dedicated to supplying a broad range of engine products such as brushcutters and chainsaws. However, in response to the heightened awareness of global environmental issues and increasing needs for highly convenient, cordless products, Makita has recently been enhancing development, production and sales of cordless products that are environment-friendly and will gain popularity.

"Makita now plans to focus management resources on development, production and sales of cordless products while leveraging its motor and battery charging/ discharging technologies, and accelerate the departure from engine products and the application of cordless solutions to power tools and outdoor power equipment.

"Accordingly, Makita will discontinue the production of engine products at the entire group level."

INDUSTRY



NEW HOLLAND PARTNERS MASCHIO GASPARDO

Disc harrow and subsoiler agreement

New Holland Agriculture has signed a supply agreement with Maschio Gaspardo.

Under the agreement, selected disc harrow and subsoiler models will be manufactured by Maschio Gaspardo for New Holland. The blue products will be sold under the New Holland name and will be available exclusively at the brand's dealerships.

Currently, in the UK, other Maschio Gaspardo products are distributed by Opico Limited. Speaking to *Service Dealer*, Opico's Marketing Manager, Helen Selkin, confirmed, "The recent announcement does not affect Opico's distribution of Maschio products in the UK."

Carlo Lambro, Brand President of New Holland Agriculture, said of the deal, "In Maschio Gaspardo we have a partner with a long-standing experience and a leader in its field, so that with this agreement, we're bringing their first-rate products to our customers, further widening the choice of implements to meet their tillage requirements with high-quality equipment."

Mirco Maschio, President of Maschio Gaspardo Group, added, "Maschio Gaspardo already has a consolidated OEM (original equipment manufacturer) supply partnership with New Holland. We're proud of this new prestigious project as it also confirms the high-quality standards achieved by Maschio Gaspardo for its products and the offered customer service. It's another important building block for our growth."

New Holland will introduce in season 2021 the first products to be supplied under the agreement: the SDM and SDH Compact Speed Disc Cultivators, and the SUM and SUH Subsoilers. The manufacturer said the new product lines will be suited to its tractor ranges from the T5 Series up to the 300hp T7 Heavy Duty.

The new products will first be launched in key European markets in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Spain and the UK.

DEALERS

FENDT APPOINTS JOHNSTON

As new dealer partner

Fendt has appointed Johnston Tractors Ltd as a new dealer in North-West England and South-West Scotland. This sees Johnston's become official Fendt stockists and service support dealers from its three branches in Carlisle, Dumfries and Penrith.

Johnston Tractors was established in 1962 and has always been a family-run business. Howard Johnston, who leads the team with his sister Lorna, said, "We welcome



L-R: Tom Johnston, Company Secretary Lorna Johnston and Managing Director Howard Johnston

the opportunity to work with and represent Fendt in our territories. We believe the Fendt brand will be popular with our customers and we're looking forward to introducing them to the wide range of machines available."

Martin Hamer, Fendt National Sales Manager; UK, IE, NL said, "It's a pleasure to welcome Johnston's to

the Fendt dealer family.

"This long-established business has the experience and knowledge to represent Fendt and offer excellent customer service and support."

Johnston Tractors became a Fendt dealer on 1 October 2020. This change to the dealer network is set to be fully effective by April 2021, to allow for a period of transition.

DEALERS



BALMERS JOINS INFINICUT NETWORK

Supplying Infinicut and TMSsystem ranges

Balmers GM has become the latest dealer for the Infinicut and TMSsystem ranges.

With depots in Wakefield and Burnley, the dealership will deliver sales and support to professional customers across Yorkshire, Lancashire and Manchester.

Established for over 40 years, Balmers GM will be stocking the full Infinicut range of floating-head, fixed-head and rotary mowers, together with the complete range of TMSsystem cassettes.

Balmers GM Sales Director, Darren Barker, said, "It is

fantastic news for Balmers to have Infinicut on board – a huge asset to have in our professional golf and turf machinery portfolio."

Oliver Hall, Infinicut Territory Sales Manager, said, "We are extremely pleased to be working with Balmers GM and certainly hit the ground running with a series of demonstrations and orders placed in the first few weeks! They have a fantastic reputation for sales and aftercare which is so important for us, as we look to work with both new and existing customers in this area."

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WHAT LIES AHEAD?



We asked our dealer panel for their thoughts on what may be in store this year for their business, how they see the recruitment situation developing and what new technologies they are using to give them a competitive advantage.

Editor STEVE GIBBS reports

Predicting the future is, of course, a fool's errand. This time a year ago I'm sure many readers would have said they were gearing up for a normal year, hoping the weather would be in our sector's favour. Little did we know!

As it turned out, however wildly strange and unpredictable 2020 was, many dealers did experience a strong year for their business. The surge in demand created by Lockdown 1, followed by a decent summer, combined with the increased use of digital tools to keep in touch with customers into Lockdown 2 meant that the decimated season initially feared, didn't really materialise.

But what lies ahead? Throughout the buoyant months of last year there was often a nagging fear of what we may face around the corner. Whilst we now have the light at the end of the tunnel of an effective vaccine, there is the real threat of recession and of mass redundancies looming. We've always maintained that the weather is the primary influencer on the fortunes of our industry, however will that continue to be the case this year, in a (hopefully) post-Covid world?

Service Dealer enlisted the help once again of a panel of dealers representing domestic, commercial and agricultural machinery specialists from across the country, to offer their thoughts on how they feel prospects are for their dealership. We also canvassed their opinions regarding recruitment as well as what new technologies they are utilising to help their business.

We thank them all once again for their valuable insights.

THE PANEL



Jennifer Park
Alex McDougall Mowers,
East Kilbride



Georgina Cornock-Evans
Arwel's Agri Services,
Carmarthenshire



Chris Starling
Briants of Risborough,
Princes Risborough



Neale Hopley
Buxton's,
Teddesley



Steve Brown
George Browns,
Leighton Buzzard



Chris Gibson
GGM Groundscare,
Colne



Gavin Bird
Green Stripe Garden
Machinery, Market Rasen



James Hayes
Hayes Garden Machinery,
South Molton



Simon Holmes
Lloyd Ltd,
Newcastle



Anthony Deacon
MKM Agriculture,
Marston Moreteyne



Phil Gregg
Ripon Farm Services,
Ripon



Richard Taylor
RT Machinery,
Aylesbury



Pete McArthur
Strathbogie Forest &
Garden, Iltingstone



David Rapkins
TH White,
Tetbury



Question 1

How do you view business prospects for your dealership over the next 12 months?

Richard Taylor, RT Machinery

Without the blessing of a crystal ball and with the lessons learnt through the early days of February and March 2020, one would be foolhardy to try to paint too rosy a picture, but I do believe we're moving into a new age of opportunity and change. There will need to be more changes to the way we work but ultimately, I believe the focused and flexible smaller businesses and experienced providers will rise and are in for some good business and sustainable growth.

James Hayes, Hayes GM

I'm pretty good with predictions in usual circumstances and I do love a good spreadsheet, but at the moment I wish I was a clairvoyant! As an industry, we've been very lucky to be in demand during these unprecedented times, however in terms of what the immediate future holds, we shall just have to take every month as it comes. How it will look during the winter months when people take less interest in the garden, we will have to wait and see.

Chris Gibson, GGM

Very positive. Despite the pandemic we've continued to grow our sales volumes over 2019, particularly in the golf market with Baroness and Kubota. Hire revenues

remain strong and the introduction of Roberine to our franchise offering gives us renewed impetus in the local authority market. From an after-sales point of view we've grown our service team by two engineers and are looking to recruit apprentices. We've also seen an increased take-up of service agreements as customers look to minimise their liability by doing their own servicing and ensuring their machines are in the right condition to do the job at a fixed known cost.

Phil Gregg, Ripon

I believe the aftermarket will remain strong, although I'm unsure as to whether agricultural sales volumes will get any better. Market shares for us remain static, but volumes are down.

Simon Holmes, Lloyd

Due to the decent performance in what has been a challenging year, we hope that next year will be even more positive. We have new showrooms at four of our branches and new displays in all showrooms, so as long as we can encourage customers into our premises, we will give them a good customer experience and hopefully that will equate to better sales.

Jennifer Park, McDougall

Not sure! Glass half-empty, recession hits and sales of commercial and residential machinery falls. Glass half-full, things carry on as expected, sales as normal (depending on weather conditions). Perhaps problems in supply of machinery (due to manufacturer production delays/cuts) may be a factor in reduced sales? I don't foresee any changes in workshop sales, perhaps an increase if people decide to repair rather than replace.

Steve Brown, George Browns

We understand the last year has been challenging for customers,

dealers, staff and suppliers, however we're optimistic for the next 12 months. We've seen a resurgence in golf, local authority parks have been in higher demand than ever and private estates, whether they use contractors or not, have been investing more in their properties while they can't travel as freely. These are just a few factors that should keep us busy until the end of next year at least.

Anthony Deacon, MKM

We've had a very good trading period since the start of Covid-19. It would normally have slowed down by now but it hasn't. I'm finding it very hard to predict, to be honest; we take each day as it comes. My guess is that it will slow up (it must) soon. My biggest concern is the stock shortage we're facing. I fear this will get worse and probably affect our business more than any potential lack of custom.

Chris Starling, Briants

We expect to have a strong finish to the season based on the prime growing season combined with healthy online growth. The winter will possibly be quieter than usual once the domestic customers head back indoors, but we anticipate another busy spring and summer next year. Trade professionals have put significant hours on their machinery this year and therefore may well be looking to replace, or at worst spend on additional repairs/servicing once next season kicks off.

Neale Hopley, Buxton's

The current boom in business is due to an increased awareness of the importance of home and garden post-lockdown. It's very hard to predict how long this will last. With the talk of a Covid-fuelled recession and a No Deal Brexit, the future could be very bleak. So, it's one of the hardest years to predict. I hope profits this year will help us weather any storms next year.

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Georgina Cornock-Evans, Arwel's

☞ We have taken over the Krone dealership for West Wales this year. This was a major undertaking for us and we have so far enjoyed demonstrating the various grassland equipment which the Krone product offers. Obviously, we're in recession which is a worry for anyone running their own business. We hope that Krone will go from strength to strength for us – as well as the McCormick tractors that are evolving, releasing a new 5x6 transmission recently, for example. ☞

Pete McArthur, Strathbogie

☞ Exciting! I believe we're entering a new era for our industry where working smarter, not harder, is going to be key to all customer bases. We're looking forward to creating solutions and seeking opportunities that have been exposed as a result of Covid-19. ☞

David Rapkins, TH White

☞ We're cautiously optimistic and anticipate further growth (Agriculture Division). ☞

Gavin Bird, Green Stripe

☞ We always try to remain in a positive light – the grass will always grow and people will always require machinery. If they don't buy new machinery, our workshops and parts department will be busy. I personally still maintain that the weather holds a major bearing in our business and how it performs. ☞



Question 2

Are industry leaders (trade associations etc) doing enough to promote career opportunities in the ag and turf machinery sector? And what skills will you be looking for in new recruits in the future?

James Hayes, Hayes GM

☞ I believe the ag side has a good following and is promoted well through colleges, but I don't think enough is done for the turf and garden sector. I wish I had the time to help promote this on a national level.

Firstly, dealers need to believe in the younger generation and take time to help, encourage and train them. I hear it so often from employers, "Oh, I had an apprentice once, they were rubbish. I wouldn't bother again," and then they complain they can't find anyone to work for them. Secondly, our industry bodies and manufacturers need to encourage colleges to offer short courses for small machinery, engines, engineering, DC electronics, robotics, hydraulics etc, and then encourage dealers to do block release schemes.

There are plenty of youngsters, or even mature people, wanting to retrain to pursue a career rather than just jumping job to job. Believe in people and people will believe in your business to help it grow and flourish. ☞

Chris Gibson, GGM

☞ I think they are doing what they can, but for us it's all about local. We're building links with local schools as well as the FE colleges. We feel that if we can gain interest in what we do at an early age we can offer a great career alternative. ☞

David Rapkins, TH White

☞ I don't think we collectively promote our industry enough in an attractive or sexy way. Our industry (ag) is still perceived as antisocial, limited career progression, antiquated technology and not so rewarding. I would like us to promote the technology employed in modern farm machinery: it's more technically advanced than other industries such as automotive; the industry offers autonomy and varied work (different wide range of machinery and different sites and locations); and the ag industry offers job security, as demonstrated through foot-and-mouth and Covid-19. The same can't be said for other sales/service/parts-related industries. ☞

Simon Holmes, Lloyd

☞ We never have enough good applicants for apprenticeship roles. This is something we're trying to promote locally but more help from industry leaders to increase the exposure would be welcome. ☞

Richard Taylor, RT Machinery

☞ I don't believe it's just an industry promotional problem, it's a national problem, and not just educational. You must give young people a vocational opportunity and a chance to develop their interests and practical abilities. If they have an interest in the first place, then there is opportunity to encourage them to learn how to grow and cultivate or operate and fix machinery.

Rural studies, domestic skills, metal and woodwork, all used to be part of the basis of learning and a trigger to a career path in agriculture or horticultural engineering. Perhaps a bit more heralding of these core skills at earlier opportunities should be looked at by the educational system? Also making early learning more practical and interesting on the core subjects. A sustainable world and broad skills base to work within it can only come from an understanding of our world and nature. We need to see a kickback on the wastage and throwaway society attitudes too.

These past few months have demonstrated how precious everything is for sure.

As *Service Dealer* has championed, there's a need for different skills in the workplace too. Areas such as digital communications and systems, need special people. We could do with seeing more affordable and in-house design and e-commerce skills. There's certainly room for these skills trickling down to our industry, as well as engineering. ☞

Steve Brown, George Browns

☞ As a collective we could all do better. The turf and agricultural industry has always been in the shadow of other similar industries, like the motor trade, for example. We need to make our world trendy, exciting and innovative so that young talent wants to join us. How we do it is uncertain, but we need to invest early, in people who are interested, enthusiastic and passionate to develop them. We then need to focus on keeping the talent within the industry. To do this we need to maintain and improve working standards, career progression and living wages. ☞

Anthony Deacon, MKM

☞ I've always been able to find new staff when necessary – in fact I've recently taken on two new recruits. I look in the local area and use social media to put the word out there. I'm not sure that the industry leaders contribute to this. ☞

Neale Hopely, Buxton's

☞ The lack of awareness of the sector as a career has always made recruitment difficult – it would be good to see this change. We're recruiting at the moment and looking for flexible and caring staff. ☞

Jennifer Park, McDougall

☞ I would say "yes" – however I'm not up to speed so much with career opportunities and recruitment. Skills in new recruits going forward for us would be horticultural engineering, IT skills and interpersonal skills. ☞

Georgina Cornock-Evans, Arwel's

☞ When you move into recession everyone tries to pull together. Sometimes it's out of our control and you just have to ride the storm. I've been in close contact with *Service Dealer* throughout Covid-19 and have joined many online meetings to keep in contact with other agricultural dealers and this has been supportive in being able to hear how they are managing and getting results. Obviously, we provide training for all our new recruits when they join Arwel's Agri and this is important as the knowledge of the brand is vital when we service and maintain our machinery. ☞

Chris Starling, Briants

☞ We're possibly unusual in that we don't have too much to do with trade associations as we're predominantly high-end domestic lawn care and pro forestry. However, skills and experience in battery, robotic and app controlled/connected products is coming to the fore but a requirement for four-stroke and two-stroke machinery is still ever-present. ☞

Gavin Bird, Green Stripe

☞ The turf industry has always been the poor relation in training. It has always looked unattractive for a prospective trainee. There's now a wealth of online training, but for me hands-on, instructor-led training is better. I know ag manufacturers place more weight behind the training process and offer more opportunity in this matter. We currently will not be adding to staff levels and will wait to see how everything pans out in the near future. ☞

Pete McArthur, Strathbogie

☞ I do think our industry could do more to create an image of a highly technologically-based sector, which could hopefully stimulate an interest in an ag or grounds care career. We will be looking to expand our workforce specifically in Automower and battery, but the main criteria for employment in any area will be an outgoing

attitude, good timekeeper, IT Skills and a methodical approach to work. ☞

Phil Gregg, Ripon

New recruits for the future, of course, will need to be multi-skilled and tech savvy. Most equipment now has some form of precision, software related management or complicated wiring. Few things are just nuts and bolts. ☞



Question 3

What new or developing technologies are you relying on to help your business in 2021?

Anthony Deacon, MKM

☞ It's all about the tech; social media is our most powerful selling tool. Our marketing is our best salesman, the sales team are just here to process the orders. We have recently launched a new website; nice, fresh and modern. Product wise, we are moving with the times and introducing more and more battery powered products into our range all the time. ☞

Phil Gregg, Ripon

☞ There is still only a certain amount of land, and with the growing population, we must produce more, with less waste, and faster. Precision is the key. We now have a dedicated team of eight staff absorbing information, guiding other staff and our customers in the right way to manage their businesses, support them in saving costs, and understanding the benefits precision farming has to offer. ☞

Chris Starling, Briants

☞ We take on the bulk of products our

supplying manufacturers range, so we naturally embrace any new technology they deploy. For our business though it is becoming increasingly important to use our own systems, website and software more smartly. Our sales/ accounting system and website back office is way more advanced than we've ever used it for, so it's finally being put to good use! It's not glamorous, but it's technology that's there to make time and efficiency savings. 📄

Chris Gibson, GGM

📄 Robotics and battery powered machines are becoming more and more important although, other than handheld equipment, this is still in its infancy. We're certainly seeing increased demands for electric utility vehicles with some customers asking more and more for battery powered commercial machines and tractors. Whether they are ready to pay the price for these remains to be seen? 📄

Gavin Bird, Green Stripe

📄 The technologies we're exploring more than ever before are ones that allow us to communicate better with our customers, so all social media platforms as well as direct email. As people are changing their buying habits our website has become busier and it's now ready for a re-vamp, which will become the focus over the winter months when the grass stops growing. In respect of the new technologies in products that are assisting, they would be the robotic mowers and all battery machinery. They still remain a product in demand and although profits are starting to be compromised as more dealers and manufactures are getting onboard, they still remain a major growing part of our business. 📄

Simon Holmes, Lloyd

📄 In agriculture we're heavily involved in precision farming. We have our own RTK network and offer a full range of services. In turfcare, we're seeing a huge rise in battery machinery sales and robotic mowers and we're investing in these by

running demonstrator fleets and actively promoting these to our customer base. 📄

James Hayes, Hayes GM

📄 I'm planning our premises to be a 'Smart' enabled building where we will be installing smart monitors/ assistants/speakers (Alexa, Google Home etc) around our premises to be able to encourage better communication. The list of possibilities that can be achieved with these systems is endless, but to start with we will be able to integrate our daily calendars, reminders and notifications where we can verbally add entries and for them to be voiced through segmented speakers throughout our buildings. We will also be able to make public and staff announcements.

Most current systems are based around the home environment which means we're going to have to adapt accordingly to fit with our business model. I've already been in touch with Google to try to get this set up on a business level, but I'm sure it won't be long before companies will be selling purpose-built products off the shelf for the business environment. 📄

Pete McArthur, Strathbogie

📄 We're always considering how technology can help our business. We're currently looking at display technology to help with customer interaction, information, tutorials, product information, product videos, registrations etc. 📄

Richard Taylor, RT Machinery

📄 We're putting a lot of time and effort into designing bespoke marketing-to-sales systems, linking together our processes to synergise our brand and the speed in which we can respond to and close the deal. We're utilising cloud-based systems throughout and are making it easy for the customer to select, purchase and order goods. We also use GPS systems for tracking our own vehicles and for monitoring clients' machinery for

service points and utilisation – with consideration towards sustainability and service. 📄

Jennifer Park, McDougall

📄 As an Automower dealer, it would be the continuing development of robotics to make it easier to manage and install these machines. 📄

Georgina Cornock-Evans, Arwel's

📄 Krone is a new brand we've taken on so we'll be looking to expand further in its grassland equipment. Also, on the McCormick tractors, we have the new 5x6 transmission which includes five ranges and six power shifts in each range. 📄

David Rapkins, T H White

📄 As we're a multi-depot Dealership we've been using Microsoft TEAMS a lot for team meetings. We initiated a weekly team sales call at the start of Covid-19 and will keep this meeting going indefinitely. We also use TEAMS across the other areas of our business, such as among the service and parts departments. We're also piloting online training for our staff, so we can continue developing our staff even if traditional face-to-face training is more challenging now. 📄

Steve Brown, George Browns

📄 We've always been customer-focussed, so we've invested heavily in Ibcos, our systems and our processes to improve the service our customers get. We're striving for the most efficient and effective system whereby we reduce our costs, improve our customer service and customers get better value for money from it. Linking this with a digital, seamless interaction between sales, service, parts and hire divisions will help us grow sustainability both in the short and long terms. 📄

Neale Hopley, Buxton's

📄 We need a better enterprise system for our business, the current one is holding us back. 📄



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ATV & SSV MARKET DISPLAYS RESILIENCE



Andrew Nicolson, Owner of Braewick Agri Services

With the challenges faced in 2020, the utility vehicle market, like all other sectors, needed to rapidly evolve to continue to provide its customers with the products and services they required. Service Dealer heard from James Dalke, District Commercial Manager for BRP and two of its dealers to see how they fared

For the ATV and SSV markets combined, the latest figures, which are up to the end of September 2020, show an almost neutral position compared with the previous year.

According to James Dalke, District Commercial Manager for BRP, which supplies the Can-Am range in the UK, "the figures highlight that the market has been pretty resilient as it deals with the pressures of the pandemic".

James explained further: "When broken down, however, we see that ATV sales are up approximately 8% versus last year, yet SSV sales are down by a similar amount, around 7% MAT (moving annual total)."

BRP believes this shows overall that the market has been able to stand up to the challenges caused by the pandemic, stressing that it should be noted that 2019 was a particularly good year for ATV and SSV deliveries.

Like every market, there are trends that emerge each year and for ATVs in 2020 it was the increase in demand for higher cc machines (+500cc) within the agricultural sector and from recreational users. BRP says this demand for leisure units in the +500cc bracket has been driven by the pandemic, with consumers looking to get outdoors and have fun in any way they can. This increase in demand was



James Dalke, District Commercial Manager BRP



Richard Jones, MD of Richard Jones ATV

also mirrored with recreational SSVs. James said: "This increase goes hand-in-hand with the 36% increase in sport and leisure SSV deliveries that the industry experienced."

In what is always a competitive marketplace, James added that their Can-Am vehicles have continued a strong performance. He said, "As a brand, we continue to outpace the industry and have even managed to grow our market share in declining sectors. Moving forward, we will look to continue this trend in 2021, while also exploring new ways in which to reinvent and challenge ourselves and the industry standard."

STRONG YEAR FOR DEALER NETWORK

James said the Can-Am dealer network performed well last year, even in the face of the pandemic. "We've had a good level of interest from dealers and franchises enquiring about the brand and how they can join our network, which in the current economic climate is good to see."

One of BRP's newer Can-Am dealers is Richard Jones ATV, based in Kington, Herefordshire, which took on the franchise in 2019. Richard Jones, Managing Director, said, "Since we became a Can-Am dealer we've noticed a higher proportion of sales are customers purchasing new Can-Am machines. We've also seen a rise in new customers coming to us wanting to part-exchange their previous make of machine for a new model."

Another of the manufacturer's

dealers is Braewick Agri Services, based on Shetland. Owner, Andrew Nicolson described 2020 as a strange year. "After the first few weeks of lockdown business started to pick up," he said, "and we found ourselves busier than normal. It led us to expand our team and add a third employee to our workshop."

Andrew went on to say that the company's quad sales in 2020 turned out to have been stronger than ever, leading the dealership to experience its best year yet.

"In the current climate and with no agricultural shows this year," he said, "this would have been difficult to achieve. But thanks to Can-Am's promotions, which ran throughout lockdown, and their continued support, we feel this has helped with our quad sales."

With regard to where the market might be heading in 2021, BRP believes it is hard to predict. However, James concluded, "The leisure units will react based on the lockdowns (local and national) and restrictions that are in place. If people can't travel, they're going to look for alternative ways to enjoy themselves, like they did in 2020. For the utility side of things, we know that agriculture doesn't stop for anything and it will remain in line with the marginal growth we've seen this year."

"In addition," he concluded, "the market for electric vehicles will continue to grow as fossil fuel alternatives become more viable."

NEW WAYS OF WORKING



2020 was an interesting year for manufacturers, with a major rethink required to maintain relationships with dealers, offer continuity in sales and product support, and deliver training. Service Dealer caught up with the two men on the ground at Kubota UK to find out how it has changed the way they work with dealers and what the future looks like

SERVICE DEALER: How did Kubota UK (KUK) cope with the events of 2020 and support its dealer network?



Tim Yates: We worked, responsibly and mainly remotely, to support our dealers and customers. Video calls have replaced many face-to-face meetings, which has increased our efficiency by reducing travelling. Dealers have had the full support of Kubota, it's just that our place of work was a little different for some months. Digital communications became prominent during lockdown, and this is still growing now, so that we can engage with customers and dealers with very little lead time. As an example, we

increased our portfolio of digital product demonstrations and machine walk-arounds so that customers could still access our products and make informed choices.

SD: Was parts supply affected by factory shutdowns around the world, and if so, is it back to normal now?

TY: We've not seen any decrease in parts supply in 2020. Japan has had comparably low cases of Covid-19, and our facilities are resilient. Even during the Fukushima disaster our supply was stable.

SD: KUK seems to be represented by a large number of longstanding, family dealerships. How do these continue to serve a changing marketplace and meet the need of their customers compared with the 'super-dealerships'?

TY: At a family dealership you do get the personal touch, to the point that the person you purchase a Kubota from may be a family member, or even the MD. This is the 'family businesses' USP which encourages many customers to return time after time.

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SD: You recently announced the appointment of HRN as a new dealership in Scotland – how does KUK support a dealer as they join the ‘family’?

TY: When a dealer joins the Kubota family our business is open to them to work with us as a partner. Whether this be help with IT systems, signage for vans and depots, technical training, product training, marketing etc we are there to support them to become established and engage with customers. It’s a flexible but ongoing process, and dealer requirements can vary. Further support is provided by Kubota Finance for the retail finance business, and in the case of HRN we give support in a joint manner with our colleagues at Kverneland.

SD: Is KUK looking to expand its ground care dealer network further in the near future and, if so, are there particular locations or types of dealership that you are targeting?

TY: For groundcare products we have 100% coverage of the UK and ROI so we’re not actively looking for more dealers. That said, our product range does change, and if and when this happens we will adapt accordingly.

SD: Are you still open to opportunities for groundcare-only (or groundcare and construction) dealerships where they have another brand as their lead agricultural franchise, given Kubota’s expanding range of agricultural tractors?

TY: We have a flexible approach, and it’s worth noting that machinery dealers differ in that not all will want construction, agriculture, and groundcare – many have their specialisms. Typically, cities and high population areas tend to need construction machinery and groundcare products and have little need for higher-horsepower agricultural tractors. Yet the reverse can be true as you head to the open

countryside. You can then see that it’s not a ‘one size fits all’.

SD: How does KUK’s tie-in with Baroness affect dealers?

TY: Our relationship with Baroness is nothing new, they have used Kubota engines for many years, and Kubota has also used Baroness components in the past. The relationship then grew of its own accord as some of our dealers became established with both brands. Now, we keep in touch and recommend each other’s products where there is opportunity.



Phil Catley – Groundcare Product and Key Account Manager

SD: Any thoughts about the lack of shows and events recently? How will KUK continue to introduce new products to its dealer network and end-user customers?

Phil Catley: The lack of shows has been difficult for the dealers and manufacturers. Dealers have had a lot of their local shows cancelled – these are normally their opportunity to show their customer base new machines and new aspects of their business.

With the national shows such as BTME and Saltex being cancelled, manufacturers have lost some of the end user and dealer contact that would normally happen. We’ve had to learn to adapt and change to maintain that contact. During lockdown we worked on a plan to produce some product walk-around videos as soon as it was permitted and these have come together well.

We were also preparing to launch our new G series mower, which we did in the style of a promotional walk-around video within a live webinar, giving the dealer network the opportunity to ask questions in real time. This worked very well and going forward this will be an ever-evolving and improving process. We already have some great ideas for our next online event.

SD: How are you carrying out product training in the age of ‘social distancing’?

PC: Product training has changed slightly. In the case of new dealers or dealer salesmen we’ve taken this to their premises, rather than the dealer coming to KUK’s headquarters at Thame where we have our own training centre. Training has only been carried out face-to-face if the dealer is happy with this, and in strict compliance with Covid-19 regulations.

We’re also looking at new ways to deliver our technical training. We have an online training portal in place where dealers can engage with pre-formatted courses at their own pace. For more technical courses we’re planning to use live remote sessions through online platforms. One benefit of this is that these will be recorded to allow our dealers to replay the training to suit their needs. To facilitate this, Kubota is investing in new technology and studio facilities at Thame.

SD: Similarly, how are you managing service training?

PC: Kubota UK Service has carried out some systems and base training during lockdown via video conferencing, which has worked well. We’ve also managed technical training on a more local basis where required, conducting some training at a dealer’s premises with small numbers of technicians during the current restrictions.

In 2021 we plan to conduct face-to-face technical training here at Thame HQ, albeit with reduced numbers and following all government Covid-19 guidelines.



SD: How important do you feel that technology is to the groundcare market and how do your developments reflect this?

PC: Kubota focuses on developments that we know work and offer tangible benefits to the customer – this might be as simple as moving the ROPS (rollover protection structure) on the B1 series from the rear to the centre of the machine to give more clearance when folded down in polytunnels and glasshouses.

But we also take the opportunity to update proven systems to make them even better, such as the electro-hydraulic cross control on the new G series ride-on, which increases comfort and ease of use for the operator, requiring the use of just one rather than three levers.

Also, we’re moving to Stage V engines for the L2, M4 and M5 tractors to meet the latest emissions legislation in 2021. A DPF (diesel particulate filter) is being added to all machines from 25hp and over while this change is being implemented. We will also take the opportunity to make other changes to the range.

SD: Have the restrictions on sporting fixtures hit sales into the professional sports turf market?

PC: Business continued to be good for the sports turf products as a lot of clubs already had their funding in place so could continue with planned replacements or new purchases. However, this is quite a long process for the clubs to go through, so we will

have to see how funding progresses after the difficulties they have experienced in 2020 and if it will affect future orders.

One unique benefit that we can offer, which has been popular with customers such as football clubs, is a service contract and extended warranty throughout the sportsturf range.

Sales to customers with large gardens and estates also continued to be buoyant; the GR ride-on and BX sub-compact tractor ranges have done particularly well.

SD: Under the pressures of lockdown, have you and your dealers been able to meet demand or have there been gaps?

PC: Covid-19 undoubtedly affected all businesses and moving forward this will be a learning curve not only for manufacturing in all industries but also in people’s buying processes. Our dealer network has reacted pro-actively – we’ve had a successful winter stocking campaign, and dealers have committed to stock the machines that are always in demand. They’re now forecasting for the end user – we’ve really seen dealers up their game.

SD: Thank you both.



Cornwall’s Vincent Tractor & Plant is one of Kubota’s full-line dealers

MAKERS MOVE TECH TO CENTRE STAGE

This 18-rotor/9.2m diameter drone was developed jointly by John Deere and Volocopter. For crop protection, this can include two liquid tanks, a pump and a boom

Farm equipment manufacturers are increasingly developing partnerships to provide dealers with advanced precision farming equipment. MARTIN RICKATSON looks at what John Deere and CNH Industrial are doing in this area

At the latest Agritechnica in 2019, there was a notable trend among the key farm equipment makers to set out their respective stalls as not just makers and suppliers of machines, but also in the supplementary precision farming equipment they offer alongside them. From nitrogen sensors to drones to soil mapping systems, it was clear that manufacturers believe they need to be involved at the heart of the technology revolution, and work alongside the technology companies to offer accessories through their dealerships.

JOHN DEERE

John Deere's dedicated Future Technology Zone focused on where it believes sustainable and productive agriculture might be going. Exhibits included an autonomous drone sprayer, complete with weed scanner and crop spraying unit for spot identification and control. While legislative hurdles to allow unmanned spraying have yet to be overcome in the UK, Deere says it is keeping an eye on developments in

markets across the world, and development continues with external partners on the machine, which features an auto-filled 10.6-litre tank and headland-based automatic battery charging system. Flight time with a fully charged battery is 30 minutes.

A further large 18-rotor/9.2m diameter drone developed jointly by John Deere and Volocopter features fully electric drive with replaceable lithium-ion batteries, one battery charge allowing a flight time of up to 30 minutes. The VoloDrone can be operated both remotely and automatically, on a preprogrammed route. Via a flexible standardised payload attachment system, different devices can be mounted on the frame. For crop protection, this can include two liquid tanks, a pump and a boom. Claimed potential hourly workrate is 6.0ha/hr.

John Deere is also investing research money in on-the-land autonomous spraying. The firm displayed a machine complete with a 560-litre tank, 1.9m ground clearance and four-track steering. Its camera-based spot-spraying

technology comes courtesy of Deere's recent acquisition of Blue River Technology. Exactly when dealers might expect to be selling and supporting such equipment is not yet clear, with much – as already mentioned – dependent on legislation.

CNH INDUSTRIAL

For Case IH and New Holland parent CNH Industrial, the creation of a separate brand, plus cooperation with and investment in key suppliers, has been the primary route to entering the precision agriculture hardware arena. Under the AgXtend banner, it says it plans to help start-up businesses in this area to accelerate development and provide precision technology hardware in a number of forms through selected outlets across both of its key tractor brand dealer networks.

In late October 2020, CNHi underlined its intentions in the sector through the acquisition of a minority stake in Zasso Group AG, a global specialist in non-chemical weed and invasive plant management solutions using electrical power. Zasso is the company behind one of



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Offered under CNH Industrial's AgXtend brand, XPower is an electrical weed control system that uses current to destroy weeds growing proud of a crop, or where total control is required

the implements that has attracted greatest interest since CNHi began marketing other firms' tech products under the AgXtend banner. Named XPower, the electrical weed control technology uses current to destroy weeds growing proud of a crop, and is suited to situations where total weed control is required – where glyphosate might otherwise be used – and where haulm requires destruction before harvesting, such as with potatoes.

Zasso Group, headquartered in Zug, Switzerland, was founded in 2016. Its XPower product joined the AgXtend stable in January 2019, providing exclusive distribution through CNHi dealers.

FRITZMEIER

In addition to its SoilXplorer tractor front-mounted scanner, which can be linked to a cultivator for variable depth working according to recorded soil density/compaction, CNH Industrial also showed a new version of its CropXplorer plant greenness/nitrogen requirement sensor.

New scientific findings show that using intelligent sensor systems enables crop cultivation to be made much more sustainable and, above all, more environmentally-friendly, suggests Fritzmeier, which also now markets the Isaria crop nitrogen requirement sensor system, also offered under the AgXtend

banner as the CropXplorer. Plant sensors have become well established in arable farming, enabling yield potential to be better exploited by tailoring fertiliser dosage according to crop greenness. However, the investment cost of technology used in previous models made it a viable investment only for farms of above 200ha, acknowledges the firm. It says its new Isaria Pro Compact makes the benefits available to smaller farms in an economic way.

Suited to use in daylight only, the system consists of two sensor units that can be attached to the tractor cab in areas such as the mirror mounts. A reference sensor on the tractor roof, to measure the incidence of light, completes the technology. The system is ISOBUS-compatible and solutions are available to allow non-ISOBUS-compatible combinations to also be controlled.

"We think highly of the new sales concept adopted by CNH Industrial, which brings together precision and digital farming solutions in an innovative branded package," says Ursula Fritzmeier, Managing Director of Fritzmeier Umwelttechnik.

"This approach enhances the efficiency of sales and support activities, and offers users substantial synergies, in particular by giving them a single point of contact. Our plant sensors are a good match for

the AgXtend product range."

The plant sensors on the latest version of CropXplorer are high-precision optical devices designed for attaching to the tractor in pairs. They simultaneously measure the crop's biomass and nitrogen uptake while the tractor crosses the field, with the appropriate parameters then instantly applied via ISOBUS to govern the output of liquid or solid fertiliser at the rear, according to the crop growth stage and farmer's strategy. Growth regulator dosage can be fine-tuned in the same way, notes the firm.

When the sensors are active, calibration is not generally necessary – a single calibration pass may be required, depending on the fertilizer system. No other action, such as taking manual measurements with a nitrogen tester, is necessary. In addition, detailed logs can be produced to record the adopted measures and the georeferenced amounts of fertilizer and crop protection products that are applied.

Max Birle, responsible for establishing AgXtend at CNH Industrial, says the firm aims to take the brand well beyond precision guidance: "For example, the CropXplorer can contribute to nutrients being applied according to actual need with unprecedented precision. Fritzmeier's expertise in crop cultivation complements this technology,



Fritzmeier's new Isaria Pro Compact makes the benefits of optical technology for use when fertiliser spreading available to smaller farms in an economic way, says the firm

and matches our approach."

With fertilizer application rates and timings increasingly restricted, precision agriculture equipment is coming to the fore in the arena of soil sampling, as more farmers, contractors and soil specialists seek to test land when they find it most appropriate.

To this end, Fritzmeier also used

Agritechnica to unveil the latest generation of its Isaria Scout soil sampler. It facilitates the fully automatic sampling of three distinct soil layers without risk of the samples becoming mixed.

The machine features a new operator terminal with membrane keypad and rotary knob, which is insensitive to dirt and allows the system to be controlled from the driver's seat. A redesigned user interface uses new software and a refined operating principle, says the maker, while among the settings that can be made quickly and easily from the driver's station are the drilling depth and the number and depth of the layers.

New sensors and dirt-resistant induction switches enhance reliability, while drilling geometry is said to have been optimised to aid penetration and minimise noise. For this purpose, the drill is coated with a special alloy said to prolong its service life. The sensors continuously monitor the relevant operating conditions.

The excavation operation has been improved to minimise the risk of samples becoming mixed. In consequence, the extracted layers are accurately separated and no samples are lost when drilling is stopped, claims Fritzmeier.

The Scout's automatic lowering movement has been improved so that it can be set down more easily on sandy or dry soils, while the special drilling geometry means operation requires low torque and power input, says the maker. Compared with conventional samplers, it is said to minimise soil compaction and allow the drill to rotate in the ground with greater elasticity. Sampling is thereby speeded up, depending on the available hydraulic power, and in ideal conditions the operation can be performed in around 30 seconds. Currently, this specialist piece of equipment remains marketed by Fritzmeier itself and is not available under the CNH Industrial AgXtend banner.

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GROUNDSCARE IS IN THEIR BLOOD!

North Shropshire's John Osman Groundcare, based in Oswestry, is a family-run dealership providing professional and domestic grounds care equipment throughout North Wales, Shropshire, Mid Wales and the Midlands. Service Dealer's LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, visited to hear how it successfully adapted its way of working through the pandemic to keep its customers satisfied

Like most machinery dealers, John Osman Groundcare offers a wide range of services supplying new and used machinery, spares and repairs for a wide-ranging customer base. Well over 50% of its business is focused on the agriculture sector with the rest of the market being made up from private estates, local authorities, schools and domestic customers.

It is also a main dealer for E-Z-GO, selling, hiring and maintaining golf buggies locally and nationally – offering the vehicles to golf courses, schools, caravan parks and estates, in fact just about anywhere that has a use for electric vehicles. Alongside this, the company stocks a range of Kawasaki and Polaris ATVs and utility vehicles.

It is also a main agent for Ransomes, Jacobsen, Iseki, E-Z-GO, Kawasaki, Ventrac, Kioti, Polaris, Shibaura, Simplicity, Wiedenmann, Muthing, MTD, Westwood, Echo, Tanaka, Wolf and Briggs & Stratton.

When I visited the dealership at the back end of 2020, I met Luke Osman, eldest son of Owner John Osman, who was keen to show me around and introduce me to his Mum and Dad. It was soon apparent that this was a friendly, well-run, family business with an all-hands-on-deck attitude. Luke also introduced me to the three technicians, Roger, Brian and Mark, who undertake all the repairs and servicing.



John and Luke Osman outside their Oswestry dealership

After the tour I managed to speak to John and Luke and asked how they had been coping during the pandemic.

Surprisingly, they both said business had been better than they anticipated, particularly in the sale of used equipment. John did tell me, though, that Covid-19 had caused a delay in spares and components arriving from all manufacturers, with some customers now having to wait for certain products. But John acknowledged this problem was being seen across the whole industry. Being a main Ransomes Jacobsen dealer, he said he was especially looking forward to the company moving its whole mower production to Ipswich, which will no doubt bring some great trading opportunities.

I then sat down, appropriately distanced, with Luke Osman to discuss the business.

SERVICE DEALER: What is your role in the company Luke?

Luke Osman: I'm the eldest son of John and Karen Osman. We're very much a family business and I've spent most of my childhood tinkering with old lawnmowers and machinery – I guess you could say grounds care is in our blood! My main role is sales, demonstrations, and service and repair work as required.

SD: What area do you cover?

LO: We cover North and Mid Wales, as well as Shropshire, for over 20 different brands. Having over 28 years' experience in the field, we've developed professional working relationships with councils, golf clubs, municipalities and the like in these areas.

We also distribute our new and used golf cars across a more national basis, along with refurbished equipment. We've even put some Ransomes equipment into New Zealand.

SD: Who are your customers?

LO: Since founding the business in 1992, John has built up a large and enviable client base, by remaining honest and providing customers with an efficient, professional service. We're proud to have customers from all walks of life, ranging from domestic to agricultural and professional.

SD: What's made your dealership successful over the years?

LO: Our success has been driven by our ethos of professionalism and customer service. The customer will always take priority and we will always try our best to ensure they experience a pleasant and seamless service whenever they deal with us. Our sales success stems from our attention to detail when refurbishing and servicing machinery. Nothing leaves our workshop without undergoing rigorous testing, with no stone left unturned.



Luke Osman

SD: 2020 was a year unlike any other though, how have you managed the pandemic?

LO: 2020 certainly was not a normal year, by any stretch of the imagination. This has meant each business has had to adapt and overcome obstacles as they have presented themselves.

As a family-run, family-owned business, who work and live together, we felt the safest approach would be to furlough all our staff and operate with a skeleton crew. This left us with myself and my parents, meaning that we could stay open for our key worker customer base, to be ready to help them out with breakdowns, servicing etc.

We worked like this from March until June, when we slowly started staggering staff back into the workplace, when it was deemed safe to do so, with all the correct procedures in place.

We also dramatically increased our online presence, developing our website and looking for new ways to operate.

SD: What new ways of working have you had to implement?

LO: We've kept a close eye on government guidelines and have adapted to each new guideline as and when they appeared. Our showroom floor is outlined clearly, with directional flow arrows for traffic. Sanitiser is on the door and masks are provided for those that have forgotten to bring one. Our counter is screened, we clean and sanitise work surfaces regularly, and have moved workstations to be two metres apart. We've delivered new machines and installed abiding by social distancing rules. We've a parts pick-up point so people can stay out of the shop and be distanced.



Part of the team. L-R: Brian woods, Roger Rees, Luke Osman and Mark Radcliffe

SD: Have you managed to demonstrate machinery to customers?

LO: Demonstrating machinery has presented a big challenge in an industry that relies heavily on onsite demonstrations. Our products speak for themselves when we can get bums on seats. We've overcome this in a number of ways, including offering phone and video calls with our customers, creating our own demonstration videos and using those already created elsewhere.

In some instances, when restrictions were lifted we were able to visit some customers, but whilst wearing the appropriate PPE and remaining socially distant.

SD: How do you view the support you receive from your suppliers?

LO: There are some big variances in the industry, but on the whole our suppliers offer excellent support. I believe over the years we've moved away from suppliers that offered poor parts and warranty support to us and ultimately our customers.

We believe our current suppliers can match our expectations in terms of financial and service support and the quality of equipment they offer.

As a dealership, our suppliers are not just our suppliers, but also our working partners. This partnership was understandably tested during the past year, yet all of our suppliers responded with outstanding professionalism and humanity.

SD: Have you had to change the way you market your dealership?

LO: During 2020 I looked more and more into effective marketing strategies. We're currently looking at mail drop opportunities for product-specific sectors, as well as interactive demonstration days, when it's safe to do so. We're also working on a new website and use social media to let customers know what we're doing. Since joining the

business in 2018, I've massively increased our social media presence. Marketing is a key part to a successful business, whether word-of-mouth or otherwise.

SD: What are your thoughts regarding selling online?

LO: Online selling is a pivotal part of our business success. We can advertise quickly and effectively to both our current and new customers.

2020 was a difficult year for a lot of businesses and online selling has naturally increased as businesses looked for new ways to adapt. We've taken the time to invest in our website, with an all-new layout and customer interface, so we can continue to provide excellent sales, service and technical advice facilities.

We find Google My Business to be an extremely effective tool, so that local and national customers can read reviews and testimonials about our business, so that they can feel comfortable with dealing with us.

We tend to sell more used equipment online than new. We find that selling new products online offers poor margins and we're better selling something that's unique, like a used machine, so we can maintain margin and offer good service.

SD: What new technologies are you embracing?

LO: We're always looking for new and innovative products and services to offer our customer base. This year we've embraced robotic mowers into our product line-up and have noticed a big success here, as more people look to take the cost and hassle out of maintaining their lawns. We've always been advocates for electric vehicles and equipment, having been golf car dealers for over 10 years. This year we've seen a huge increase in interest in the Polaris Ranger EV, the mid-sized electric utility vehicle, as well as an increase in battery-powered hand tools. The introduction of lithium-ion golf cars, in the form of the E-Z-GO ELITE series has also been a game changer.



Inside the busy workshop

SD: How important is it for you to continue to offer after sales repairs and servicing?

LO: Those are vital tools any successful dealership must possess and they have the opportunity to be one of our most profitable parts of the business. Our customers trust and rely on us to fight their corner whenever possible and that's something we're proud to offer here.

SD: Do you find it difficult to recruit new staff?

LO: We find it very difficult to find high-quality technicians, having tried apprenticeships in the past, with varying degrees of success. We find that technicians out of the HGV and agricultural markets adapt well. We also pay and train our technicians very well to retain them.

SD: How much do you think selling machinery has changed over the past 10 years?

LO: Machinery sales get increasingly difficult every year, as more and more companies are popping up all over the place. We see a lot of online retailers selling through online auctions who don't really care about after-care and in some instances whether the machinery is suitable for the customer's application. My father speaks of a time in years gone by, when you could sell a mower out of its crate before even having a chance to build them, which is certainly something I've rarely experienced today.

Groundcare is a very competitive industry and margins are tight, so customer service is key and a business must be dynamic, innovative and customer-focused to survive.

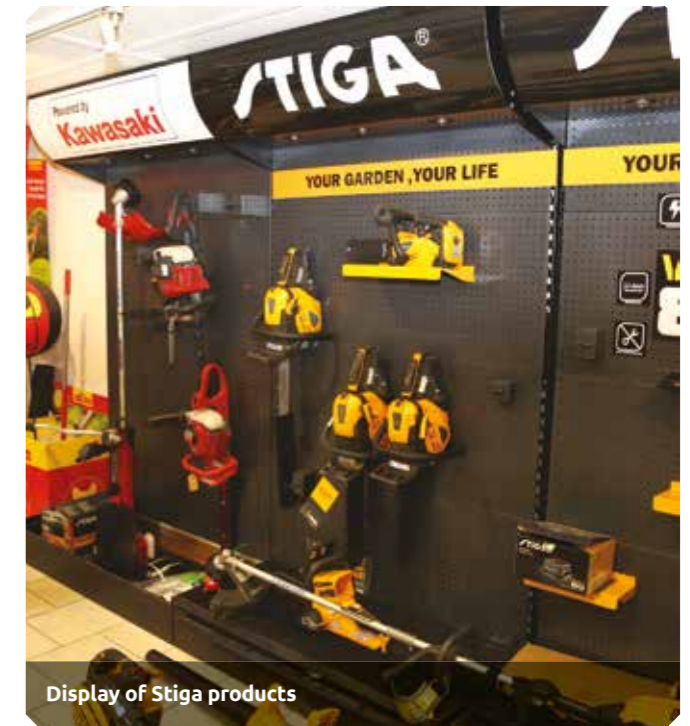
We also believe it's very important to invest, train and support our staff, without whom we would not be able to be as successful as we are.

SD: How do you see the future for your business?

LO: My father started this business from humble beginnings and has taken it to what it is today, which is something I would like to continue long into the future.



The showroom



Display of Stiga products

I would like to expand our commercial product range, to increase our offering to our professional and municipal customer base. Without a doubt, robotics and electric vehicles and machinery will play a big part in our future and we're embracing those technologies and are already installing them.

We're also working with GPS and tracking systems, mainly with our golf cars, which allows us to control and manage how these vehicles are used and where they can go on the golf course; this allows the car to be used virtually all year round because you can keep them out of wet areas, therefore increasing hire revenue.

I believe product availability is likely to be an issue and a concern next year, in the aftermath of both Covid-19 and Brexit.

SD: Thank you.



Richard and Guy Overton

ON TRACK FOR NEW MARKETS

Overton (UK) Limited is known for distributing the electric Mean Green Mowers for the professional market in the UK and Ireland, but for 2021 it is introducing the Altoz TRX range. Editor STEVE GIBBS heard from Guy Overton, who alongside brother Richard, is keen to establish a dealer network for the new machines

Richard and Guy Overton started the business that bears their name in Lincoln in 1992. The brothers say they prepared for the day they were to begin their own company almost as soon as they learnt to walk, coming as they did from a family business that saw them operating grass-cutting and landscaping machinery from an early age. The business was involved in the maintenance of military air bases and other landscaping projects and this experience in machinery that these early days afforded, stood them in good stead when they took time out from the family business to learn more about the industry, going off to work for various mower manufacturers, dealers and distributors.

Richard and Guy came back together almost 30 years ago now to form Overton (UK) Limited, starting their own company outside of the family firm from a petrol station. The company began distributing the Barber beach cleaning machine throughout the UK and Ireland, eventually becoming the Jacobsen and Snapper dealers for Lincolnshire.

Guy looks back on the end of this period, saying, "When Textron bought Ransomes mowers we lost a large part of our business and had to refocus".

This refocusing saw Overton innovate and begin to produce their own petrol-driven vacuum litter collectors that they sold to their same beach cleaner customers. This was followed in 1999 by being offered the UK and Ireland distribution for NIMOS WeedRippers.

“ONE OF THE BIGGEST STRENGTHS WITHIN OVERTON IS TO IDENTIFY WHAT THE MARKET IS LOOKING FOR AND THEN FIND A SOLUTION TO THAT”

ELECTRIC OPPORTUNITIES

It is those vacuum litter collectors and street barrows that have become the core products that Overton manufactures and distributes from its Lincoln base. Guy says the units are popular with councils, schools, hospitals and the like, providing their dealers with an opportunity to supply the customer with an effective solution to their problems.

These litter collectors, like equipment in the grass cutting sector, have evolved to meet the demands of modern users. Guy points out that, during the course of 2020, all but one of the original petrol vacuums was converted to electric power, with some models having the ability to clean all day on a single charge.

"We export our electric and petrol vacuums and street barrows to over 30 countries now," says Guy, "and it never ceases to amaze us that our vacuums are cleaning cities in these far-flung places."

It is the electric side of the market that *Service Dealer* readers will most likely know Overton best for. As well as the STAMA electric trucks which will continue to see new models released during 2021, it is the Mean Green Mowers which Overton imports from the US and distributes, that dealers will be most familiar with the company for.

Thinking back to when they started importing the Mean Green range, Guy considers themselves to perhaps have been a little ahead of the curve. He says, "With hindsight

we were possibly a little early to the battery revolution as the ZTR, Stand-On and Walk-Behind commercial mowers met a very sceptical audience for the first few years at SALTTEX – especially regarding the battery run and mowing times. However, with a great deal of effort and miles on the road demonstrating and proving the capabilities of the mowers, we've seen the Mean Green range become an accepted brand in the marketplace."

This acceptance has, of course, been aided with the increased discussion and greater understanding in recent years, surrounding the importance of low noise, cleaner air and lower emissions, and the impact those have on the general health of the operator. "Initially dealers were slow to commit to the range," confirms Guy, "as many were still getting to grips with handheld equipment which didn't always have the greatest battery life or performance. However, we're pleased to say we have steadily increased our network and have new dealers taking on the range all the time."

Overton clearly has a strong relationship with the Mean Green company in the States. This was illustrated when *Service Dealer* bumped into Guy and Richard helping out on the company's stand at Louisville's GIE+EXPO trade show back in 2019 – and was further emphasised in summer 2020 when the news broke that Joe Conrad, President and Owner of Mean Green Products, had sold the company to DR Power Equipment, a division of Generac Holdings Inc.



Richard and Guy on the Mean Green stand at 2019's GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Kentucky



The new Rival from Mean Green

With the DR Products distributed in the UK by AL-KO Gardentech there might have been some nervous moments for Overton's continued relationship with the brand, however any fears were quickly allayed. The week of the sale, Guy and Richard spoke to Joe Conrad who confirmed and reassured them that nothing would change regarding their distribution agreement for the UK and Ireland.

At the time Guy confirmed to *Service Dealer*, "After speaking with Joe we're looking forward to new electric mowers to come, now they have the investment".

The results of this investment, which Guy describes as "significant", will continue to be seen by dealers throughout 2021, with updated versions released of machines such as the Rival ZTR, the SK Stand-On and the WBX walk-behinds. In addition to this, new models will come to market this year, including the much-anticipated EVO-74.

NEW MOWERS ON TRACK

It is not just with the continuing development of the Mean Green machines though, that the Overtons have reason to look forward to this year. They have a new brand up their sleeves which they say they are excited to introduce to the UK dealer network.

The company is now distributor in the UK and Ireland for the three Altoz TRX zero-turn tracked mowers. Described as unique by Overton, these rubber-tracked mowers have low ground pressure and impressive stability making them suitable for cutting slopes of up to 25°. They can also traverse wet, boggy and rough terrains that otherwise would be nigh-on impossible to cut with conventional wheeled mowers.

Guy explains, "The Mean Green Mowers are suitable for regular amenity mowing, leaving us with a gap in our product range for a heavy-duty mower. We can now fill this with the flagship Altoz mower, the TRX 766i, which we're calling our 'go anywhere mower'."

Bearing out Guy's enthusiasm for the machine is the fact that since launch, this machine has had over 650,000 YouTube views. In fact, it was on YouTube that Guy and Richard first saw the Altoz machines themselves, back in April 2017. The brothers say they have been pursuing

the company since then, including in person at several GIE+EXPOS, to be given the rights to import the machines, such as their belief that they would do well in the UK.

In terms of technical stats, the TRX mowers are powered by Briggs & Stratton or Kawasaki petrol engines, come with either 54, 61 or 66" fine cut, side discharge decks or a 66" all-terrain rough-cut rear discharge deck. Other accessories available include a grass collector, mulching kit, snow blade and grit spreaders.

Overton is keen to build a nationwide network of specialist dealers for these new mowers. Guy says, "The Altoz range will be available for dealers to sell and we are actively looking for companies who desire new opportunities to work with us".

He continues, "I believe one of the biggest strengths within Overton is to identify what the market is looking for and then find a solution to that. Most of the products in our range are simple and robust – which is precisely what our markets require.

"We pride ourselves that the machinery we provide has been manufactured for reliability and longevity. We're not always the cheapest, but we like to think we sell quality."

Guy says that as a company they choose to offer dealers niche products that will not clash with their major lines. "Often our biggest hurdle," he explains, "is to convince dealers we don't always sell direct.

"As a company we operate in a fairly niche market and we're always looking at ways to move forward with product lines that will assist professional operators in carrying out their jobs."

The Overtons believe they have a lot to look forward to in 2021 with the launch of the Altoz tracked mowers, new models of the electric Mean Green Mowers coming on stream, plus the continuation of their electric vacuums and street barrows, as well as the STAMA models.

Richard and Guy are confident that the range of products available to interested dealers can provide real sales possibilities throughout the UK and Ireland.

"Yes, we've always sold direct as dealers have always thought," confirms Guy. "However, what we want is for dealers to come and talk to us so we can discuss these sales opportunities which we know can offer real potential."



2021 will see Overton distribute the Altoz range



In recent years, increasing numbers of larger dealerships have chosen to create dedicated roles for marketing managers. MARTIN RICKATSON spoke to three working with eastern England dealers to find out more about what their work involves

Where marketing a dealership's wares once consisted simply of placing an ad or two in the press, creating the odd leaflet and booking a stand at the county show, putting a business and its goods in the limelight is now very different.

The advent and rapid development of online communication under various different methods and channels, and the related decline in the importance of traditional promotional methods, such as static shows and the printed press, has meant a whole new set of skills is required to ensure a dealer business communicates effectively with current and potential customers.

This has been a key driver behind the development of dedicated marketing roles within agricultural

and grounds care equipment dealerships, particularly as many have grown in size and depot number. The position of marketing manager has been introduced into the staff structure of a number of dealers in recent years, with ranging and varied responsibilities.

P Tuckwell

Stacie Oreno took the position of marketing manager at eastern England John Deere dealership P Tuckwell in early 2018. While having no particular expertise in machinery and equipment, her background in business-to-business insurance marketing has enabled her to help raise the profile of the company across its core audiences.

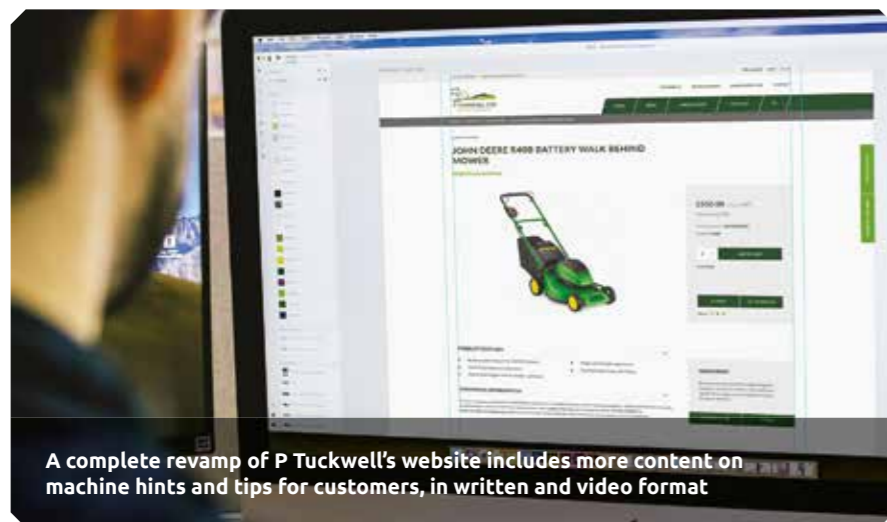
"I was marketing assistant at a large insurance firm in London, with a long commute, when I came across an

advert for the marketing post with Tuckwells," explains Stacie.

"I made contact and had an informal chat with Hannah Tuckwell, wife of



Part of Stacie Oreno's workload in the coming year will be communicating with new staff and customers as P Tuckwell's business expands into Kent, Surrey and Sussex



A complete revamp of P Tuckwell's website includes more content on machine hints and tips for customers, in written and video format

RW Crawford

For Hannah Kelsey, who works for Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire AGCO dealer RW Crawford, the path to the role of marketing manager was a little different. Having achieved a Level 3 NVQ in agriculture at Writtle College, she joined the firm as office assistant in 2012.

"I'd always had a strong interest in agriculture, and have been a long-term member of Essex Young Farmers, being County Chairman four years ago, so I was keen to work in the industry," explains Hannah

"I had no particular marketing experience, but it was when one of the staff in accounts took me under her wing and asked if I could use my IT knowledge to help manage our website that the company began to support me in developing a marketing role. Over the next few years I continued juggling my sales admin duties alongside this, until three years ago when marketing became my sole focus."

Hannah joined the business at a time of significant expansion for the company. Established in 1980, for many years it had operated from a single depot in South Woodham Ferrers, Essex. In 2001 it switched franchises from Case IH to AGCO's Massey Ferguson brand, and in subsequent years took on additional AGCO franchises Fendt, Valtra and Challenger. In 2013 its territory for Fendt and Challenger was extended into Kent and East Sussex, and Crawfords opened a purpose-built depot near Ashford, subsequently adding the Valtra franchise there. In 2018, a new headquarters depot was built at Writtle in Essex, replacing the South Woodham Ferrers premises, and in 2019 the firm was granted further Fendt and Valtra territory in West Sussex and Hampshire, opening a third depot, at Billingshurst, West Sussex.

"I joined the firm three months after our Kent branch was opened, so things got very busy very quickly," says Hannah.

Managing Director James, which revealed the huge scope the newly-created role would offer, building on my marketing background while gaining exposure to new marketing activities to challenge me. There was also an appetite from the management team to support new marketing initiatives – and the much shorter 20-minute commute didn't hurt either!

"Tuckwells had an excellent relationship with its existing customers, but with an opportunity to develop and improve market share within its area, it was decided a marketing role would provide more focus to improving its digital presence, strengthening its position within the sector and identifying and driving new customer recruitment."

As the sole marketing person in the business – which consists of seven outlets across Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, selling into the agricultural, turf and domestic grass machinery markets, and to the general public through its stores – Stacie's role is to communicate with a broad range of audiences.

"Beyond day-to-day marketing tasks, our current focus is on developing our digital strategy and strengthening our systems and processes," she says.

"We're also further developing our website and search engine optimisation to utilise as a base for implementing some new initiatives to appeal to new and existing customers, specifically

around used equipment and aftersales. Increasingly we're also using the website to post hints and tips for customers on using their machines to best effect, via blog posts and videos.

"We're still very much in the build and improve stage, looking at our current business structures and offerings to see where we can make impactful changes which make it easier for our customers to do business with us. As an example, we recently launched our new website for improved navigation of our used equipment and online retail shop.

"We also recently launched Service+, an umbrella sub-brand that encompasses our entire aftersales portfolio. All these initiatives provide a platform from which we can continue to grow and develop our offerings and enhance the customer journey.

"As we strengthen our systems and processes, I'd really like to look at strengthening our brand recognition and pushing forward with some new digital initiatives, like targeted email marketing, plus improved social media presence with better videos and key content tailored to each of our customer segments. With the company being in the process of adding three further branches in Kent and Sussex through the acquisition of a neighbouring dealer's business, we also have a new challenge ahead to expand our internal communications with a significantly higher number of our own employees."



Hannah Kelsey, pictured here with RW Crawford territory sales manager Tim Osborne and product demonstrator Dean Chaplin, says sales staff are good at coming up with publicity-happy customers

"We needed to communicate with new customers and new staff in Kent, as well as our established ones in Essex. Communications quickly developed beyond mainly booking magazine adverts to encompass developing our social media efforts and digital strategy.

"I've no marketing background as such, and am self-taught in most areas, but with support from manufacturers, the AGCO dealer network and online learning I soon built up the skillset I rely on today. In the agricultural industry a mix of media, almost a scattergun approach, is necessary as we're trying to reach a broad range of people, from older farmers who respond more to traditional media such as magazines, to younger people in the business who are more responsive to digital media. But there's no doubt coronavirus has moved digital communications to the fore.

"That said, in 2020 we produced our first in-house customer magazine, in both print and digital format, with print copies distributed to targeted addresses through a national magazine, and additional copies given out on-farm by sales staff. With the big increase in our geographical area from our new branches, we wanted to communicate who we are and what we can offer to a wider audience, and we intend it to be bi-annual.

"The magazine focuses on feelgood stories and customer and employee

profiles, rather than hard-sell articles. These are things we hope customers will want to read, as we know they respond best to reading about what others like them are doing – a bit like looking over the hedge. And our sales teams are good at coming to me with leads concerning customers who are happy to feature in publicity."

A good deal of daily marketing effort involves the update of social media across all platforms, says Hannah, involving as much different content as possible. Further online work includes updating the company's website and constantly reviewing its digital strategy, and the business is working towards improving its online services, including facilitating an online click-and-collect system for parts.

"But it's not all desk work," Hannah stresses. "I make a point of being active across all our depots and talking to people across the business in all

departments, and am never afraid of getting my hands dirty. We use employee focuses in our publicity to raise the profile of our staff among our customers – they are keen to know more about them and what they do. We're a family business and believe that people deal with people.

"We're also increasingly using video content and social media for new and used machinery marketing, doing product walkarounds to camera, which has helped not only to show export buyers what we have, but has also been useful for potential UK-based customers since coronavirus curtailed visits.

"When things are back to normal, we also hope to return to organising the shows and demonstration events that remain an important part of our customer contact. Crawfords has helped me grow with the business, and has been extremely supportive in helping me develop my role."



Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire AGCO dealer RW Crawford has created its own magazine to help connect with customers



Ernest Doe now has a team of three full-time marketers, and the firm's Hayley Hill says the firm aims to manage as much as possible of its needs in-house

Ernest Doe

Hayley Hill joined eastern England multi-branch dealer Ernest Doe five years ago, moving from MetsaWood, a European timber company headquartered in Finland, where she managed the UK marketing function for the building and industry division dealing with most of the large UK house builders, timber merchants and builders' merchants. Prior to that she managed the UK marketing for an international law firm, based in London, specialising in intellectual property.

"Whilst I had a strong grounding in product marketing and professional services marketing, and was very comfortable on a construction site, having visited several hundred during my time at MetsaWood, I had no prior agricultural experience before joining Ernest Doe – I don't come from a farming background and had never sat behind the wheel of a tractor before 2015!

"Ernest Doe had appointed its first marketing manager, Derek Marriott, 11 years ago. Derek had already been supporting the business with advertising and promotion work prior to this, but took on the permanent role in 2009. As a large multi-franchise dealership, the importance of consistent marketing across the business was a key factor in the decision to recruit a dedicated marketing resource. I joined following Derek's retirement in 2015, with the

remit of taking the role forward and expanding our digital footprint and e-commerce site, which was then at an early stage."

The fact the business was privately owned and managed by the Doe family particularly appealed, says Hayley.

"I report to the Managing Director, and this was a big influencing factor after coming from a very corporate environment where I spent a lot of my time travelling to Finland and various parts of the UK, repeating the same presentations to multiple internal committees before any decisions could be made. I was also attracted by the diversity of the company and the customer base, and the challenge of harmonising the marketing across the whole business group."

Hayley describes her role as encompassing all marketing activity for the business, ranging from producing point-of-sale materials for its 18 stores through to managing digital assets, from multiple websites to social media channels.

"It's an extremely generalist marketer role, as we try to manage as much as possible in-house, and it's a continuous learning process – every day I learn something new, either about the products we sell or extending my own marketing knowledge and skill set. Over the past five years we've expanded the team to three dedicated marketing personnel, enabling us to more

broadly support the business."

Like others, Hayley notes that the challenges of 2020 drove marketing further online and forced improvements in digital skills.

"That's been a huge benefit to our business. We already had a strong online presence, and the web shop launched just before my arrival has really built momentum and come into its own this year. Even the most reluctant digital adopters are changing their behaviours, and there's a renewed understanding of the challenges we face as marketers, resulting in a huge improvement in collaboration across the business.

"We're currently working on our 61st Doe Show, the annual three-day event we hold at our Ulting headquarters in Essex each February, but for 2021 the ongoing pandemic means we've had to be creative, and this time we're making it fully digital, incorporating an online auction and lots of interactive content.

"The company has been trading for 122 years, so the marketing function is still very new in comparison. The business's fifth Managing Director, Angus Doe, took up his role in 2020, bringing a revived energy to the business, and we have a really engaged marketing team, so harnessing our combined enthusiasm to continue developing the Ernest Doe brand and present our best possible business to the marketplace is a big focus."



An annual early February three-day fixture for decades, this year the Doe Show will be an online event, marking a new challenge for Hayley Hill and her team

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TARGETED MARKETING



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, advice on how to market to the different generations

One of the more common misconceptions dealers have is what type of person actually represents their target market or customer. Often, a dealer thinks their typical customer is someone just like themselves, but that is rarely the case. Just to be crystal clear, in most cases you (or someone just like you) are not your target market.

To better determine who you should be marketing to, take a step back and ask yourself these questions about your typical customers:

- What is the gender of your typical customer? I want you to think about who the typical decision-maker is during the purchase of the product.
- What is the age range of your typical customer? Are they: 25 or under, 26-40, 41-55 or 56+?
- What is their favourite radio station? Do they usually listen to country, top 40, oldies, or another station?

While we cannot completely understand our target customer through these questions, it begins to move you in the right direction.



Sara Hey

HOW DO WE RELATE TO THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS?

Each generation requires us to market to them differently. When we understand who the target customer is, we can put a plan together based upon their generation.

Let's walk through how you would be successful with a direct mail campaign by generation:

- If you've ever had a customer say, "Why don't you just pick up the phone and call me?" you're probably working with a baby boomer. When thinking about a marketing strategy to reach this group, you will have success with a direct mail piece followed by a phone call.
- Generation X can be reached most effectively through a combination of emails and text messages. Send them a direct mail piece and follow up with a text message or email three days later.
- Millennials like to be texted and made aware of your promotions through social media channels. Make sure you are texting this group three days after the direct mail piece should have arrived and after it has been mentioned on your social media accounts.
- Gen Z wants your marketing to integrate into their lives. After sending the piece, find ways to integrate where they already are. Investing some of your marketing money into very targeted ads on platforms such as Spotify is a smart move with this generation.

While each generation is different, you can use one piece to reach all of them and plan a follow-up in a way that will reach them most effectively.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKE YOUR CURRENT CUSTOMERS?

Once you identify who your target customers are and how to effectively engage them, I want to challenge you to work smarter. Find other people similar to your current customers and start looking for ways to reach them and convert them into new customers.

By understanding who your target customer is and by developing a plan to reach those people, you will see increased effectiveness and improved results in your marketing campaigns.



Chris Gibson

IN ANY DEALERSHIP, CUSTOMER SERVICE IS KEY

In his first diary entry for 2021, Chris Gibson MD of GGM Groundscare in Colne, Lancashire, reflects on a tough year and looks forward to the changes it has implemented benefiting the dealership and its customers

As I write this in late November, in the midst of the second English lockdown, it finally seems more likely that there's a way out of the nightmare of Covid-19, and what seems like never-ending changes to the restrictions and regulations we've had to adhere to. It feels like we might just start getting back to normal.

Yet again we've dusted down and refined our plans for Brexit, and while currently it's unclear if we will or won't have a trade deal in place, at least we've had a chance to fully consider and hedge against the negative effects of a No Deal.

Having a base in East Lancashire we've had quite tight restrictions on our operations since late summer, and I think like many of my fellow dealers, we've read the regulations, considered what we were allowed to do, and then where possible have gone beyond these to keep staff and customers safe.

Throughout the pandemic we've been determined to keep the whole team together, keep our commitments to our customers, and so long as we could do so safely, keep machines operational for our professional and domestic customers throughout the season.

We, like many businesses, have managed to find ways to continue trading successfully throughout the season, resulting in a performance that, had we been offered in

March, we would have accepted in a heartbeat. That's not to say it's been easy; 2020 was without doubt unprecedented, but as the saying goes, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going". This has certainly applied to our team at GGM and personally speaking, it's been an honour and a privilege to lead our team throughout the year.

With local restrictions remaining throughout the autumn, many of us were obliged to continue working largely from home, with all the potential wellbeing issues that creates. It has provided, though, an opportunity to look at how we move our business forward throughout the rest of the decade.

In any dealership customer service is key. We've been busy looking at all our processes to make them more streamlined and efficient, so we can more effectively measure KPIs (key performance indicators) across the business and minimise unnecessary paperwork. From a new online strategy with marketing, improved use of our CRM (customer relationship management) within sales, to our investment in new IT and systems in the service department for easy management of our maintenance agreements and outside service business, there's certainly been plenty to do.

We've also started recruiting again and are aiming to help some of the

younger members of our society with apprenticeship opportunities. These young people will be our future – engineers, and parts and support staff – the investment in their training and development will help secure our future growth.

Outside of customer service we've been working on how we can minimise our impact upon the environment, making a commitment to work towards carbon neutrality. We also continue to replace vehicles with EVs and the installation of LED lights and of solar PV panels to generate power within the depot. This will be an ongoing challenge for us and our manufacturing partners as they look to minimise emissions of their machines and seek to switch to alternative technologies. As a dealership and an industry we'll all have to adapt but, I'm sure with the resilience I've seen in 2020 we're ready for the challenge.

With Brexit done; a global pandemic and Tier 5 engine emission regulations hopefully largely behind us, my main hope is that 2021 allows the whole outdoor power equipment industry to return to the more normal challenges of meeting our customers' expectations for machinery, hire, parts and service in the always unpredictable UK weather. You never know, we might even see the return of the annual round of exhibitions and agricultural shows?

Happy New Year Everyone!

BUSINESS MONITOR

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BUSINESS PROSPECTS 2021

Confidence shown by dealers – and weather still a bigger threat than Covid-19 to dealership prospects

Despite all that 2020 chose to throw at the UK independent dealer network, those readers who responded to our survey at the end of the year appeared resilient as ever, showing belief in their businesses for 2021.

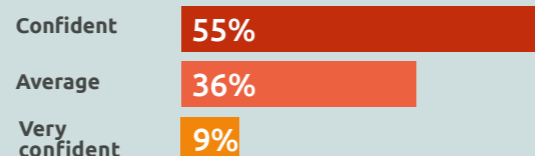
When asked in general how were they feeling heading into this year, the majority (55%) described themselves as confident, with no one at all responding saying they had no confidence.

Significantly, when asked what factor potentially posed the biggest threat to a successful or otherwise season, that perennial answer the weather still came out on top at 41%, with Covid-19 and its restrictions beaten into second place with just 18%. Brexit, interestingly, didn't get a single mention by anyone who responded.

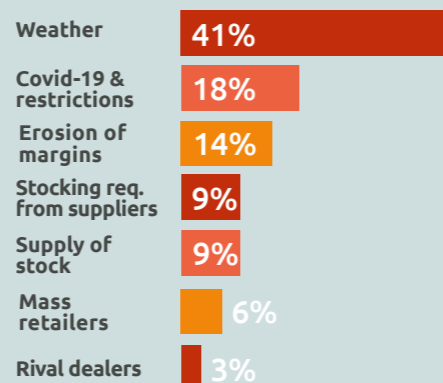
In terms of the various departments across the dealership – machinery sales, service work and parts & accessories – our respondents felt 2021 would most likely be steady as she goes, with 'staying the same' being the response given by the majority for how they felt each would perform this year.

There was caution and little enthusiasm reflected for increasing the team within the dealership this year though. When asked if they were planning on taking on more staff in 2021, a cagey 'possibly' was answered by the largest number of respondents (45%), while the question of whether they would be taking on a new apprentice in 2021 was answered as 'unlikely' by the majority (57%).

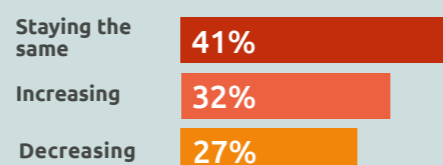
In general, how confident for your business do you feel going into 2021?



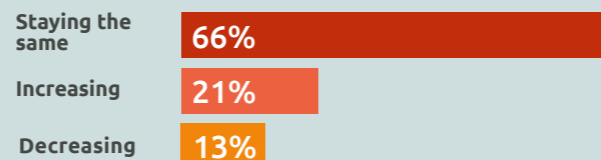
What do you anticipate as being the biggest challenge to your business in 2021?



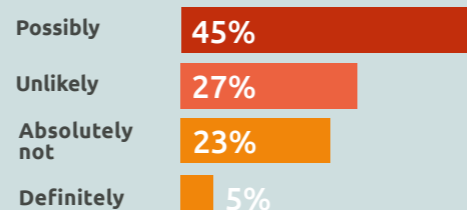
Do you see your machinery sales for 2021...



Do you see your parts & accessories sales for 2021



Do you anticipate having to take on more staff in 2021?



YOUR SAY...

We asked you, considering the challenges we all faced in 2020, are you finding reasons to be optimistic for your business going into 2021?

- I believe you have to be optimistic. Our industry is often challenging, whether that be from mass dealers, internet or weather – but you have to keep going, stay positive and adapt. Of course, 2020 was particularly challenging, but actually I think our industry has been extremely fortunate compared with some sectors that completely stopped and didn't earn a penny. So maybe we should be grateful, even though we have had to work a lot harder for what we have got. I think 2021 will be another uncertain year of possible start/stops, but as long as the weather is in our favour and dealers keep adapting and moving, then we'll do ok.
 - Assuming we are free of lockdowns, with three months trade lost in 2020, we can only improve – with luck from the weather. However, we are currently running in Bounce Back loan funds which have to be paid back. The bigger concern for our workshop is the move to battery power, with much work created from no-starts. 2021 is a make or retire year.
 - Given how we fared this year under the circumstances, how our team and customers rallied round, as long as we can continue to be the best we can, I can see no reason to be fearful of 2021. We have ordered plenty of stock and the grass will grow as always. Bring it on!
 - The industry and our own business have worked dynamically and creatively, so despite the likelihood of continued supply issues and price rises, we're anticipating a strong start to the year.
- The lockdown bolstered our relationship with the local community and advanced our online visibility, so we're hoping this will continue on an upward trajectory. The product mix and service offering are under continued evaluation, so reacting quickly to any future changes in the economy/pandemic/weather is likely to be crucial. A possible slowdown may come once world travel limitations lift and customers start to divert their cash into holidays, cars, homes etc – but who knows if that's likely to be in 2021 or even 2022?
- We are optimistic to a certain degree, but worry about the constant increase in machinery prices which customers are finding hard to justify when looking to upgrade their machinery. Also, delivery times from manufacturers are increasing which will have an effect on sales. The dealer is expected to constantly stock more, which puts pressure on cash flow.
 - The big issue will be the press talking the economy down with Brexit and Covid-19, but if the weather is kind we will overcome as usual.
 - After Covid-19 winds up, I think the government needs to increase taxes on internet companies to make them in-line with owning a retail premises.
 - If we can survive and prosper from this year, then there is reason for confidence for next year at least.
 - Not really, because this whole situation is so fluid, we have to live day-to-day. Hopefully we will see a vaccine come sooner rather than later. However, when the sun shines, for sure people will cut grass!

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Edited by Adam Bernstein

MENTAL WELL-BEING

STRESS AT WORK

Stress is a fact of modern life, writes SME Digest Editor, Adam Bernstein. None of us are exempt from it and most learn how to cope with it. Occasionally though, stress can become unrelenting and excessive and this can cause an individual to experience some unpleasant physical and mental symptoms



Stress is not the same for everyone; we all have varying threshold levels and have different strategies to deal with it. A certain amount of stress is necessary for normal functioning and it keeps us active, alert, and able to deal with life's problems. When functioning normally, we take the usual frustrations, long hours or routine work in our stride. But in certain circumstances, stress can become a real drain on our physical and mental resources.

Whether it's worry over being made redundant, having to work longer hours following staff cutbacks, pressure to meet rising management expectations, or a lack of control over how an individual works, stress is a real problem.

As some employers have discovered, stress can be very expensive should an employee take a case to the Employment Tribunal. Detailed under 'general damages for psychiatric injury', awards can range from £1,000 to £5,000 for less severe cases to between £50,000 to £100,000 for the most severe cases. Then there is the matter of special damages which could be substantial if an individual was well paid, as well as an award for loss of income and medical expenses, the costs of defending the case and reputational damage.

WATCH OUT

The early warning signs of stress build-up are often associated with increased muscular tension, so frequent headaches and muscular tension in the neck, shoulders, back and stomach are commonly experienced. Occasionally we may feel the heart beating rapidly. Clenched hands, profuse sweating, general restlessness with agitation, and snappiness are the other main symptoms.

Problems that affect work, social life, or family life increase stress. Similarly, bereavement, relationship problems, work relocation, unemployment, or financial worries can leave us vulnerable.

Associated illnesses linked with stress build-up are well recognised. These include anxiety, depression, eczema, psoriasis, tension headaches, migraine attacks, stomach ulcers and phobias. There is also a link between stress and high blood pressure, which is one of the factors that may eventually lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Stress can lead to mental confusion with an inability to think clearly and effectively. Memory can fail and simple things get forgotten, trivial work chores often take on a far greater significance than they deserve, and things can get blown out of all

proportion. Some cannot delegate tasks and others try to do everything themselves.

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS

There is no magic cure for stress and its physical effects. Some self-medicate for headaches and upset stomachs, others turn to their doctor or even self-medicate with alcohol and drugs. What were once considered to be safe medications are now known to produce psychological dependence and addiction, and doctors don't prescribe them freely. To an extent, individuals should try to learn how to recognise and manage stress and anxiety.

There are many well established techniques for recognising and managing stress. The best known is yoga, but meditation, self-hypnosis, muscular relaxation exercises, and music therapy can help too. The web, including YouTube, can help with these techniques, but sight shouldn't be lost of the stress management classes that doctors' surgeries can offer.

CREATE A PLAN OF ACTION

Other forms of self-help revolve around trying to plan the day and time management. Where possible, take a short break from work and take a

brisk walk. Learn how to become more assertive to deal with people who make unreasonable demands. Spreading the workload and delegating jobs can help too. But also look at diet and include a wide range of fruit, vegetables, pasta and brown rice.

It's important to allow time for relaxation. If smoking, alcohol and lack of sleep are a key feature of life, seek to address this. While cigarette or alcohol consumption may relieve stress in the short term, it won't help in the long run.

Some of the harmful effects of stress can be reduced through exercise. Exercise is an opportunity to get rid of pent-up energy and experience

a change of environment. The relaxation that occurs following physical exercise can aid sleep. Exercise that is age-appropriate and matches the general level of fitness is more likely to be sustained.

IN CONCLUSION

Stress isn't going away any time soon so employers and employees need to recognise when it's occurring and find solutions to mitigate its impact. Failing to address the problem isn't going to help the employee and won't do much for the organisation either.

SOURCES OF HELP

- Call NHS: 111 or your GP
- (In England only), refer directly to an NHS psychological therapies service: www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-psychological-therapies-service
- Time to change: www.time-to-change.org.uk
- The Samaritans: www.samaritans.org or 116 123 (free)
- The Stress Management Society: www.stress.org.uk
- Mental Health Foundation: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

BUSINESS LAW

PRE-PACK ADMINISTRATION: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE



Pre-pack sales of businesses are back on the government's radar as they continue to be a source of concern for creditors, says Paul Taylor, a Partner in the corporate department of Fox Williams LLP

At the start of October 2020 the government published a review into pre-pack administrations that set out draft regulations addressing sales involving connected parties. It is hoped that the review will boost stakeholder confidence and mitigate the adverse consequences caused by the potential increased use of pre-pack sales during the Covid-19 pandemic.

PRE-PACKS DEFINED

A pre-pack is the process whereby all or part of a company's business is sold through an arrangement made prior to the company entering administration. Once formally appointed, the administrator can

rescue the business by completing the asset sale. It is effectively a restructuring strategy which seeks to preserve the value of the business.

Throughout the years, the number of pre-pack sales has been steadily increasing and reported transactions have gone from 345 in 2016, to 450 in 2018 and 473 in 2019. While pre-packs are a valuable rescue tool, they have also been subject to numerous criticisms. These mainly involve the process of declaring the company insolvent and then transferring the same business to a new corporate vehicle managed by the same shareholders and/or directors, while leaving certain debts behind.

The problem is that pre-packs lack

transparency as unsecured creditors are often unaware that one has been lined up and cannot therefore influence the process in any way. Often, those buying the assets have previous connections with the business which feeds into speculations of favouritism over potential third-party purchasers, with sales taking place at an undervalue and lacking proper marketing. Unsecured creditors, therefore, risk missing out on maximising their returns.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSALS

Due to the concerns raised, a set of voluntary measures were introduced to regulate insolvency practitioners

and pre-pack administration sales. The Statement of Insolvency Practice 16 (often called SIP16) increased the reporting requirements of office holders by incorporating the recommendations put forward in the 2014 Graham Review. In essence, SIP16 required certain information to be made available.

INFORMATION TO CREDITORS

Within seven days of completing the sale, creditors are to be provided with a detailed explanation and justification of the transaction as well as with the marketing strategies and alternatives considered. Where possible, an independent valuation should be conducted and if that is not possible an explanation outlining why that is the case is to be provided.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

The administrator is required to consider various marketing strategies. The availability of the business should be broadcast to a wide pool of potential buyers, possibly including online marketing. The process should be documented to creditors and justifications should be given in relation to the amount of time spent publicising the business as well as the adequacy and the independence of the process, especially when the sale is to a connected party.

THE PRE-PACK POOL

Where the sale is to a connected party, a prospective purchaser can apply to a pre-pack pool where an independent and experienced business reviewer assesses and evaluates the information.



The cost is £800+VAT and while the process is voluntary, the insolvency practitioner is obliged to advise on this. Connected parties may also be asked to prepare a viability statement.

A statement of proposals is required and must be filed at Companies Houses within eight weeks. If the sale is to a connected party and the opinion of the pre-pack has been sought, this needs to be included as well.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Despite SIP16, stakeholders are still concerned by the low number of referrals to the pool, only 36 in 2016 out of 163 eligible transactions, and 18 in 2018. Disappointment has also been expressed over the price at which companies' assets were sold – less than market value in over 25% of sales.

In an ongoing battle to protect the interest of creditors with the need to promote company rescue, the government proposed new draft regulations at the start of October 2020 which specifically address the matter of pre-pack sales to a connected party.

The draft regulations proposed provide that where a sale is to a connected party within eight weeks of administration then one of two criteria needs to be satisfied:

Either the insolvency practitioner should seek and obtain the approval of creditors; or a written opinion from an independent evaluator should be obtained by the connected party, addressing whether a case has been made for the sale of the business. The connected party will be able

to obtain more than one report. The insolvency practitioner will review and evaluate the written opinion and decide

whether a case has been made for the sale. If his opinion differs, he will be required to provide a statement setting out the reasons. A copy of the report will be sent to the creditors and to Companies House.

Arguably, both options will delay the process and create additional costs. Paradoxically, the consequences of the new regulations might be higher costs for the insolvency practitioner and therefore lower returns for the unsecured creditors. The government, however, hopes that this will increase stakeholder's involvement in the process, promote transparency and save pre-pack sales from their fatal destiny.

Many questions remain unanswered. The government is proposing to issue guidelines to accompany the regulation and strengthen the regulatory requirements of SIP16 by increasing adherence to the marketing principles, reporting and viability reports. It might also give guidance on the future of pre-pack pools and the position of unsecured creditors, currently excluded from the definition of connected parties.

IN SUMMARY

Overall, the government's announcement is certainly a welcome development in the landscape of pre-packs. It remains to be seen whether the draft regulations will benefit both creditors and insolvency practitioners once they become law.

Please take proper advice before acting on anything written here.

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DOMESTIC

ROBOT HANDLES SLOPES OF UP TO 75%

4WD Quad enters the Ambrogio range



Ambrogio Quad

Ambrogio has introduced a new 4WD mower into its range, the Quad, which it says has been created for the management of extreme slopes.

Launching the mower on a live social networking event, Paolo Burali, Sales Director of Ambrogio Robot, ZCS Robotics Division, said, "The new Quad meets the necessities of those who have irregular gardens with very important differences. It manages slopes up to 75%, with a guaranteed precise and regular cut of the grass, both in the sloping and the regular areas."

The Quad has been kitted out with a new four-wheel drive system with each wheel having individual motorised steering. Radar is fitted around the machine for passive and active obstacle detection.

The mower also has all the features found on the other flagship models: advanced navigation systems, Touchscreen Display, ZCS Connect (to remotely interact with the robot anytime and anywhere), GPS and voice assistants compatibility (Smart Assistant).

Ambrogio claims the Quad can handle lawns up to 75% and with a slope rating on the perimeter wire of 65%. With the symmetrical design, super low centre of gravity, and the ability to mow in any direction without needing to turn, the company says it moves as well on slopes as it does on the flat.

The compact dimensions – 53 cm per side – and the square shape allow the robot to be agile and efficient on any type of ground and to move easily even in very confined spaces.

Moreover, the handles positioned on the four sides make it safe and easy to transport.

John Hall, Director at Magic Distribution, said, "We are thrilled to be able to announce that the QUAD will be launching in 2021. With an RRP of £3,999 and maximum lawn capacity of 3,500m², the Quad is a lot of mower for the money and gives customers with steeper gardens a robotic mowing solution that they have never had before."

AGRICULTURAL



STIHL MS 881

WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL PRODUCTION CHAINSAW

Launched by STIHL

STIHL has launched the MS 881, which it claims is the world's most powerful series-produced chainsaw, suitable for professional heavy-duty felling, logging and mobile saw mills.

With 121.6cc of displacement and 8.6hp/6.4kW output, the MS 881 is 19% more powerful than the heavy-duty MS 661, and the only saw in the manufacturer's line-up to drive a 0.404 pitch chain. It features standard bar lengths up to 41" and is able to accept guide bars up to 59".

At the heart of the MS 881 is the company's 2-MIX engine that makes the machine the only chainsaw in its performance class that meets the requirements of the European Euro-5 (EU5) exhaust emission standard.

STIHL says new construction of cylinders, slimmer sprocket covers, and the development of lightweight

components have resulted in a weight-to-power ratio of 1.55Kg/Kw, while maintaining robustness and durability. The new chainsaw also features a one-touch stop button.

Other design features include captive nuts on the optimised chain sprocket cover that offer additional convenience when changing the chain, as well as a new oil pump that regulates oil flow rate according to demand.

A long service life and ease of maintenance are improved through the use of a new HD2 air filter with a radial seal that provides protection against fine dust, which is often created when planking and in saw mill environments. The introduction of a diagnostic socket means that specialist dealers can quickly identify a fault and eliminate it quickly.

COMMERCIAL



Kubota G Series mower

KUBOTA GS UP RANGE

Updated range of mowers

Kubota has launched its newly updated G-Series range of mowers. These have been developed to meet the professional groundcare needs of key customer segments such as councils, contractors and large property owners.

There are two models in the new G-Series line-up, the G231 and G261, both available with low- and high-dump grass collectors. These models have developments such as a new hydrostatic transmission (HST), designed to increase traction and grip.

The mowers are also equipped with Kubota engines offering 23hp and 26hp, as well as an electromagnetic PTO clutch that replaces the hydraulic PTO.

Additionally, users of these new models will benefit from improved output, increased speed and greater comfort – top speed is now 19.0km/h. Enhanced driver comfort is offered by the new tilting steering wheel.

An improved collecting system features a wider and taller chute with a shorter travel distance between the deck and the grass collector, enabling grass flow and reduced clumping.

COMMERCIAL

ARIENS REFRESHES THE APEX

For 2021 season



The latest Ariens APEX zero-turn mower has been refreshed for the 2021 season with redefined features.

The mower's frame design incorporates large formed tubular frame rails serving as the backbone to support the loads of the machine. Most important in the list of commercial-grade features is the 10-gauge welded cutting deck design. The 14cm-deep deck with a reinforced leading edge provides airflow required to tackle tough mowing conditions. The unit boasts 15 cutting positions in 0.6cm increments, chosen with the vertical dial selector. Models available are the APEX 48 with a 122cm cutter deck or the APEX 52 with a 132cm cutter deck.

The constant belt tension system ensures correct belt tension, minimising wear and heat while providing

enhanced belt life with minimal adjustments. The APEX also has a foot-operated deck lift system, which is suitable for travelling over paths and gravel areas. When covering the ground at speed, and the APEX travels forwards at 8mph, large tyres are required for traction while moving gently across lawns and grassed areas without scuffing. In reverse, it will do 4mph.

Also featured are a high back seat and padded armrests. For operator protection, a Rollover Protection System can be added to the frame. Power comes from a Kawasaki V-Twin 726cc engine. The mower comes with a four-year or 500 hours commercial warranty and the machines are built in the UK for the growing domestic and European markets in zero-turn mowers.

AGRICULTURAL



PLUS-SERIES VARIABLE CHAMBER BALERS

Revealed by Vicon

Vicon has refreshed its RV5200 series variable chamber round baler models, with changes designed to improve output and lower operating costs.

Designated Plus-series, the newly updated RV5216 and RV5220 models are available with a range of intake systems including SuperFeed rotor or 14-knife SuperCut crop chopping system. Maximum bale sizes are 1.65m and 2.0m, depending on the model.

Upgrades include a redesigned roller crop press capable of lifting higher in heavier crops, while the side support arms have been strengthened and incorporate improved limit stops. Enhanced protection against crop wrapping is provided for the bearings, which have now been mounted inside the roller.

Up front, the 2.2m pick-up reel, which features twin-cam tracks and five tine bars, now features 10mm-longer tines and wider stripper plates to improve cleaning in wet crop conditions. The pick-up drive chain has also been increased in size.

The driveline is now equipped with long-life HBC specification chains providing higher fatigue strength and increased wear resistance, compared with conventional chain. The bale chamber features a new design of idler rollers which benefit from a 45% increase in bearing diameter, along with larger internal grease capacity and improved shielding. The idler rollers also gain a continuous central shaft, which adds rigidity.

Visually the new Plus-series models are distinguishable from previous RV models due to high-level LED road lights, now positioned out of harm's way, reducing the likelihood of damage from stray bales.

COMMERCIAL



NEXT GEN HIGH-POWER CHAINSAW

Coming from Husqvarna

This year Husqvarna will unveil its latest generation 90cc class chainsaw.

The company says the new 90cc class of chainsaw has been developed together with professional foresters and tree workers from around the world. They say the next generation chainsaw comes with increased cutting capacity, superior ergonomics, and enhanced balance for optimal manoeuvrability. Paired with Husqvarna's X-Cut chain and new professional light-weight bars, according to Husqvarna, both production fellers and tree care crews will now be able to experience "the ultimate high-power cutting system developed for their most demanding tasks".

Gent Simmons, Senior Director, Global Tree Professional Portfolio at Husqvarna said, "The new 90cc class chainsaw was designed first and foremost to exceed the accomplishments of its predecessors. We've improved the cutting capacity while optimising the weight and refining the balance – all without compromising on durability. Whether you're a logger operating in some of the most remote areas of the world or a tree care professional removing a diseased tree in the city, you can rely upon Husqvarna's next generation of high-power 90cc class to always perform."

The company says further details will be released soon.



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DOMESTIC

HARRIER JUMPS TO ELECTRIC

First of the iconic Hayter range to make greener switch



Harrier 48 Greenseries

Hayter have launched the Harrier 60V GreenSeries range. These battery powered mowers mark the first of the iconic Harrier range to make the jump to what the company describe as a "greener focused future".

The cordless Harrier 41 and 48 will feature the same 60V battery power system used in the rest of the GreenSeries range, as well as brother brand Toro's Flex-Force Power System.

As is a staple for the Harrier range, these mowers are equipped with the ribbed rear roller to create striped

lawns. Both models feature the two piece, ribbed rear roller which helps traction, manoeuvrability and the avoidance of turf marking when turning the mower. The trim sides of the usual Harrier models are also a feature on these models, meaning users can still cut to the edge of the lawn.

The new 60V system features plug and play technology. Hayter say the models use the latest lithium-ion technology that benefits from no self-discharge or memory effect. Using the Power Boost technology

the battery is able to automatically increase or decrease the power output when needed, maximising the overall run time of the battery.

The 60V machines have been designed and engineered by the team at Hayter and will also be produced at the company's Spellbrook factory alongside the petrol versions.

As part of the GreenSeries range and compatible with Toro's Flex-Force range, the battery is compatible across any of the products in either of these ranges.

COMMERCIAL

STAGE V COMPLIANT CHIPPING TECHNOLOGY

Forst 8D Series diesel



Forst 8D Series

Forst says the introduction of the new F8D Series brings Stage V compliant diesel engine technology to the woodchipper industry. Hosting a 55hp Doosan Diesel engine, the 8D is 10hp up on the previous model. An 8"x10" capacity woodchipper, it comes with the standard Forst performance features including ForstGrip feed

rollers, the Open Flywheel system and AutoIntelligence stress control. With 55hp the manufacturer boasts there is a huge amount of torque delivering more chipping speed and efficiency to make light work of any type of timber and brush up to 8" in diameter.

With wheeled and tracked models, it weighs in at 1,450kg for

the ST8D, 1,600kg for the TR8D and 2,250kg for the XR8D. The road-going version is towed with heavy-duty running gear, fully braked chassis and handbrake. The series features strengthening supports and gussets in the areas that take the most abuse, with all-steel panels large C section and oversized bearings throughout.



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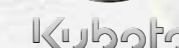
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PARTNERS NOT CUSTOMERS

One is for the long haul, the other purely transactional - writes Service Dealer founder Chris Biddle.

In the late 1970s, Kubota was making plans to establish a wholly owned subsidiary in the UK, and the Japanese company looked at the feasibility of handling all sales and service directly from its newly acquired headquarters at Thame.

The brand was still in its infancy in the UK, having previously been sold through a distributor, John Croft in Yorkshire. But could any manufacturer come into the market and dispense with a dealer network? It soon became clear that the costs and logistics would be prohibitive, so the plans were dropped.

As a result, the company appointed Brian Hurlley as its new Managing Director in 1980. Brian had worked for Massey Ferguson before joining MF distributor Eastern Tractors as Financial Director. He had spent a considerable amount of time in

The Gambia, where he was responsible for putting together a basic package of tractor, trailer, plough, and drill, mostly second-hand units, for use

by farmers in the under-developed agricultural economy. This required considerable logistics in transportation, setting up a dealer network, training and ensuring an adequate supply of spare parts.

When the Cowie Group acquired Eastern Tractors, Brian's role in the company disappeared, but his financial background, coupled with proven experience in establishing a distribution network, came to the attention of Kubota UK and he soon set about establishing the UK dealer network.

I recently asked David Hart, Kubota UK's current Managing Director, how or why it would ever be thought feasible to operate a business such as Kubota without a dealer network?

It appears that dealers and a dealer network are rarely used by Japanese manufacturers, and that they utilise a very different distribution model from the rest of the world.

All of which feeds into the current debate about the future of dealers – and the recent discussions surrounding 'disintermediation', a word which simply means 'cutting out the middle-man' (eg the dealer).

There have been a number of recent reports of manufacturers going directly to consumers, using various inducements, but to date these have been sporadic. Trading conditions during 2020 were unusual, to say the least. We've not known such disruption to day-to-day life since the Second World War, and even then comparisons are futile.

So there will be some strange things going on. Pressures on manufacturers and retailers have been mounting – and I think we might excuse the odd transgression from the norm.

BUT, if manufacturers or suppliers believe that they can have their cake and eat it by selling direct – while still expecting dealers to fill in the gaps and look after the product – they will soon get a rude awakening.

In a podcast I recorded with Bob Clement and Sara Hey from the US recently, the talk turned to the manufacturer/dealer relationship. Far too many manufacturers regard dealers, they said, as their 'customers'. But we are all customers and can walk away at the drop of hat. It's a transient and fragile relationship.

Then again, you often hear manufacturers talk of dealers as their 'partners', but frankly use the term without commitment. It just sounds better.

As the industry evolves, as it will, there will be changes, new strategies, different relationships in the supply of products from factory to farm gate or end-user. Dealers will play a crucial and important role, but principally where manufacturer and dealer have established a partnership where both are totally committed to each other.

Both need to be totally concerned with each other's success. Communication between them needs to be ongoing, honest and transparent.

So forget about being a customer, forge a partner relationship.

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.

JANUARY 2021

7 Oxford Farming Conference – Online
www.ofc.org.uk

FEBRUARY 2021

7-11 Spring Fair 2021, Birmingham NEC
www.springfair.com
POSTPONED TO 2022

21-25 SIMA, Paris Nord Villepinte, France
<https://en.simaonline.com/>
POSTPONED TO 2022

MARCH 2021

26-11 Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London
/04
www.idealhomeshow.co.uk

APRIL 2021

22-25 Harrogate Spring Flower Show
www.flowershow.org.uk/spring-essentials

24-25 West of England Game Fair, Royal Bath & West Showground
westofenglandgamefair.co.uk

28-29 Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry
www.executivehireshow.co.uk

MAY 2021

3 North Somerset Show
www.nsas.org.uk

12-15 Balmoral Show, Belfast
www.balmoralshow.co.uk

18-23 Chelsea Flower Show
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/

25-26 LAMMA 2021, Birmingham NEC
www.lammashow.com

29-30 Herts County Show
www.hertsshow.com

30-1 spoga gafa 2021, Cologne
/06
www.spogagafa.com

JUNE 2021

2-3 Staffordshire County Show
www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show

3-5 Royal Bath & West Show
www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show

6 Rutland Show
www.rutlandcountyshow.com

9-10 Cereals 2021, Boothby Graffoe
www.cerealsevent.co.uk

10-12 Royal Cornwall Show
www.royalcornwallshow.org

17-20 BBC Gardeners' World Live – Birmingham NEC
www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com

17-20 Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh
www.royalhighlandshow.org

18-20 Royal Three Counties Show, Malvern
www.royalthreecounties.co.uk

22-23 Royal Cheshire County Show
www.royalcheshireshow.org

23-24 Lincolnshire Show
lincolnshireshow.co.uk

27 Derbyshire County Show
www.derbyshirecountysshow.org.uk

30-1 Royal Norfolk Show
/07
royalnorfolkshow.rnaa.org.uk/
POSTPONED TO 2022

JULY 2021

2-4 Devon County Show
www.devoncountysshow.co.uk

4 Cranleigh Show
www.cranleighshow.co.uk

4 Royal Isle of Wight County Show
<https://iwcshow.co.uk/>

6-11 Hampton Court Flower Show
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-garden-festival

9-11 Kent County Show
<http://kentshowground.co.uk>

10 Newport Show
<http://newportshow.co.uk/>

13-15 Great Yorkshire Show
www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk

19-22 Royal Welsh Show
www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh/

21-25 RHS Flower Show – Tatton Park
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park

23-25 The Game Fair, Ragley Hall
www.thegamefair.org

24 Mid Devon Show
www.middevonshow.co.uk

28-29 New Forest & Hampshire County Show
www.newforestshow.co.uk

30-31 Border Union Show
<https://borderunion.co.uk/border-union-show>



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RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

B'ATCO TO THE FUTURE!

Sometimes work can be a pleasure. Sometimes...

Well I made it into 2021! Who'd have thought it? After sheltering in the confines of Service Dealer Towers throughout most of 2020, I'm looking forward to bursting forth and enjoying all the wonders that the outdoor powered equipment industry can offer a young(ish) man this year.

Although not quite yet obviously! Easter is what they keep telling us isn't it? Oh well, until then I'll stay safe and do what I'm told (both by the government and Mrs Green).

Zooms and remote interactions will have to continue to be my stock in trade for the foreseeable. Whilst we all might be getting a tad fed up with waiting for hosts to let us into their chatrooms and that awkward race to find the 'leave meeting' button, there's no doubt that this technology kept some businesses going throughout 2020.

I've heard from both dealers and manufacturers that even after we're granted some freedom of movement once again, these ways of working will continue to a degree. If it works for companies and their employees to work from their homes, if not all the time, at least on occasion, why put a stop to it? If the tech can improve a work/life balance and the job can still get done, where's the harm?

Of course, not all jobs can get done from home – unless home is a workshop. The dealer trade this past year has dutifully been turning up to their premises, perhaps with a skeleton

staff at times, to make sure they can satisfy and exceed the needs of their customers. And whilst it's sometimes a thankless task, with some customers less than understanding at the lengths you've been going to keep your dealership safe and open, there are those times when the work can be a real pleasure.

It warmed my old bones to hear of one such incidence recently when Phil Fleming at Lawnmower Specialists in Darwen, Lancashire, contacted the magazine. Phil's company is a small service and repair dealer in the North-West. It was recently given a 1951 Atco 14" cylinder mower by an elderly customer who had inherited it from his father, who in turn had purchased the machine new back in 1951.

Phil says his customer's only wish was to see the machine restored and back in running order. Phil told me, "Initial inspection the machine appeared to be of fairly good, complete condition - just a broken kickstart spring which is common. We decided to go full refurb and stripped the machine completely down, including the engine. Every part was cleaned, inspected, prepped and repainted in the original colours."

At the time of going to press Phil and Tom at Lawnmower Specialists were just waiting on delivery of some decals to complete the job which, along with the kickstart spring, were the only parts they needed to replace. They certainly built them to last back in the day!

Thanks for letting us know about the job lads and sending in the pics.



1951 Atco 14" cylinder mower... restoration begins



Job (almost) completed

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