

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

September/October 2022

- News
- Industry
- Dealers
- Training
- Shows
- Reviews
- SME Digest

SERVICE IS THE CORE OF OUR BUSINESS

Says Hunts Engineering Ltd, who tell us what makes their loyal customers keep coming back

DEALERS BECOME PART OF THE ROBOT REVOLUTION

Signing up for FarmDroid

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

For dealer diversification

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Letter from the editor
Steve Gibbs

steve@servicedealer.co.uk



Welcome to the September/October 2022 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

A debate that often crops up in our conversations with dealers and suppliers is, how many is too many when it comes to brands to represent in store? This conundrum has perhaps come into even sharper focus these past couple years with the difficulties dealers have faced in getting hold of stock to display in their showrooms.

One could argue there's essentially two schools of thought on the subject. The first is that solus dealers, or those with very few brands, are vulnerable. If the marque you have chosen to represent can't supply you with machines or parts, you're kind of stuffed. Therefore, the sensible option is to spread the risk, offering your customers a range of buying options.

The flip side to this is a belief that having a potpourri of suppliers isn't ideal. There are those who advocate holding just a small number of carefully selected machinery ranges is a much better option than collecting brands. I've heard industry figures argue that dealers can dilute their specialist USP by trying to be too many

things to too many different customers. Or that they can end up carrying excessive products from different manufacturers that are essentially similar and therefore cannibalise sales that would have happened anyway.

So, it's certainly a tricky one and an area we're interested in hearing from you, our dealer readers, regarding. You can read the results of our recent survey on the subject and a selection of your insightful comments starting on page 42 of this issue. From those of you who responded, I think it's fair to say that spreading your options has been a favoured course of action these past couple of years. "We selfishly cherry-pick products that we deem to reflect the quality we wish to represent, and don't overlap products," one dealer tells us.

However, manufacturers shouldn't rest on their laurels and assume they have dealer representation for life. As circumstances begin to settle down, dealers will clearly stick with those suppliers who have treated them well during this period of uncertainty. "Some of our brands have been so incapable of providing products, the decision to cut them for next year is very much being discussed," explains one.

THE TEAM

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INDUSTRY

Kubota to buy Gianni Ferrari

Creating new groundcare division



Kubota Gianni Ferrari

Kubota Corporation has announced their intention to merge the lawnmower business division of Italian manufacturer Officine BIEFFEBI (BFB) and its subsidiary Gianni Ferrari (GF) into a new wholly-owned subsidiary of Kubota Holdings B.V., Kubota's European subsidiary for its agricultural industrial machinery business.

The company says the creation of this new subsidiary, which will be called Kubota Gianni Ferrari S.R.L., will expand their range of groundcare products, aimed at turf professionals. By integrating these new resources into its sales, production and development processes, Kubota Holdings Europe say

they will speed up the expansion of this business line in Europe.

Officine BIEFFEBI and Gianni Ferrari have a large market share in Europe for centre collect front mowers (CCFM), a segment of medium to large professional mowers for which Kubota say demand has been growing steadily in recent years. In particular they say, both companies enjoy popularity in the UK, Italy, France and Germany, among other Western European countries.

In an official statement Kubota said even though their lawnmower division in Europe had been showing "solid growth in the professional and high-end consumer segment", the new company,

Kubota Gianni Ferrari S.R.L., will have "even vaster capabilities to develop and manufacture lawn equipment in Europe, including the highly-demanded CCFM."

Kubota's CCFM segment will thus also receive a boost and will have the company's sales and dealer support network at its disposal.

The closing of this transaction is subject to the completion of the condition precedents including the obtainment of the Golden Power clearance. (The Golden Power is the special power of the Italian government to limit or stop foreign direct investments and corporate transactions involving Italian strategic assets).

INDUSTRY

A climate positive business

Achieved by *Service Dealer* publisher

TAP, the publishers of *Service Dealer*, have announced they are now a climate positive business.

Owner Duncan Murray-Clark said, "As part of our ongoing approach to better our environmental credentials and working practices, we have been working with Earthly to audit our environmental impact over the last year.

"We have been able to offset our impact by supporting

projects in Keo Sima, Mai Ndombe and Maroallika Madagascar, supplying natural assets. We will be tracking this progress over time and we'll report back."

Duncan continued, "We would like to thank TAP staff who have taken the time to make this happen through Earthly, demonstrating our commitment to reducing our environmental impact."



EVENTS

Kress announced as Principal Sponsor

Of the 2022 Service Dealer Conference & Awards



Service Dealer have announced Kress as the brand-new Principal Sponsor for November's Conference & Awards.

Taking place on Thursday 24th November 2022 once again at the Double Tree by Hilton Oxford Belfry Hotel, Thame, Oxfordshire, the theme for this year's event is Sustaining Dealerships.

Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "We are delighted to welcome Kress on board as our Principal Sponsor this year.

"We know as a company they share our ethos of supporting a strong, independent dealer network - so they are a perfect fit with what we want to achieve.

"We are proud that our Conference & Awards builds in stature with each edition and it's great that Kress have recognised it as the industry event of the year!"

Tony Macer, national sales manager UK & Ireland for Kress said, "Here at Kress we are proud to be the Principal Sponsor

of the Service Dealer Conference & Awards.

"We are working closely with our dealer network to build partnerships and support our industry with market leading, fully stocked and supported products - with even more exciting market innovations arriving soon. The Kress brand is exclusive to the independent machinery market."

Kress was established in 1928 in Lustnau, Germany by Christian Kress. Since 1966, the company says generations of professional users have trusted their power tools. All modern Kress products are designed and built to the highest standards that made them an iconic example of German quality.

They are a global leader in battery technology, operating in over 70 countries, with product ranges varying from domestic to full commercial use.

You can read more about this year's Conference & Awards starting on page 20



L-R: James Madge, aftermarket director, Sharmans; Scott Barclay, managing director, Sharmans; John Smith, managing director, Louth Tractors; Sally-Anne Hazard, marketing director, Sharmans; and Twitch the dog (John Smith's)

Sharmans Agricultural Ltd have announced an agreement in principle has been reached to acquire the business of Louth Tractors, the Case IH main dealer for the central and northeast Lincolnshire area.

Sharmans, whose head operating office is located at Gonerby Moor, Grantham and who currently hold five other branches in Melton Mowbray, Stamford, Lowdham, Pytchley (Kettering) and Eltisley, say the process is underway to finalise the purchase details over the coming months.

In a statement the dealerships said Louth Tractors will operate as normal but under the new ownership and management of Sharmans Agricultural Ltd and the Barclay family. The announcement posted to the Sharmans website read, "With shared reputations for quality, honesty, hard work and family values the agreement seeks to achieve continuity for both the Louth Tractors team and customers, while enabling

Sharmans to acquire Louth Tractors

Agreement reached in principle

Sharmans to expand its business and build on the success of the Case IH brand and enhance the customer experience."

All employees will transfer as part of the agreement and the existing branch location based in Louth will initially be retained while new premises are developed.

The official statement continued, "For our existing and new customers the combined dealerships offers the ability to invest further in our team, our facilities and technologies so that we can go much further in supporting your businesses and delivering an exceptional customer experience."

Managing director of Sharmans, Scott Barclay, explained, "Growth in this industry has become a necessity. However, as a family-run business, people are at the centre of what we do, be they the staff that make up the Sharmans family, or our customers and business partners.

"These decisions around growth are never taken lightly and Sharmans along with farming family AW Smith (Farm Machinery) Ltd, trading as Louth Tractors, have worked together, closely, amicably and openly in securing the agreement to the benefit of all parties."



RVT ‘takes charge of own destiny’

Franchise separation leads John Deere to expand three other dealers’ territories

Rea Valley Tractors, the West-Midlands and mid-Wales farm machinery business, recently announced they will become a New Holland dealer from 1st November 2022, while continuing to supply products from JCB, Kuhn and a number of other manufacturers - meaning they will separate from their current main franchise, John Deere.

The move by RVT meant John Deere subsequently extended the trading areas of three of their established dealers.

The appointment of RVT as a New Holland dealer for agricultural tractors and harvest machinery throughout Shropshire, part of Staffordshire, Cheshire, part of Lancashire, mid and North Wales, marks a significant change for the dealership, which currently operates four branches and employs 130 staff as the largest business of its kind in the region and one of the biggest in Britain.

Steve Petford, managing director, said, “In discussions concerning the long-term

development of the company, the options presented by our current tractor supplier effectively involved either downsizing or selling the business, scenarios that were emphatically opposed by RVT’s Chairman and main shareholder Simon Clarke, not least because of the impact on jobs.

“Instead, we have taken an alternative route, taking charge of our own destiny by successfully negotiating to take on the New Holland territory for tractors and harvest machinery across an area that is larger than the one we have today, and also an extended JCB territory that will include Cheshire from 1st January 2023”.

RVT say they will continue to support customers with repairs, routine servicing and parts for the John Deere products they have been selling, and are convinced that the combination of New Holland, JCB and Kuhn, together with Bailey, Grimme, Joskin, Ag Leader and other franchises, will be a long-term success.

The dealership has depots at

Shrewsbury and Newport in Shropshire, Welshpool in Powys, and Sudbury in Derbyshire, with new branch locations to be announced in due course.

The company has applied for planning permission to substantially enhance the Shrewsbury depot with new buildings that will double the amount of workshop space and improve working conditions, provide a technical training facility and covered storage for used machinery.

The development will also enhance presentation of the Isuzu commercial vehicles supplied exclusively from the Shrewsbury branch.

There are also plans to significantly expand the workshop facility at the Sudbury depot, where the focus will be on JCB and Kuhn sales and support, to increase servicing and repairs capacity and improve working conditions.

RVT Chairman, Simon Clarke added, “This is a new dawn for Rea Valley Tractors. After 38 years, we are really excited by the opportunity not only for our business, but customers alike by

supplying and servicing machinery from world-class British manufacturers. Combined with our skilled workforce, knowledge of the area and drive to move our business forward, the future is tremendously exciting”.

He continued, “The decision to change RVT’s main franchise has not been taken lightly; but we were determined to protect the jobs of our dedicated staff by securing a profitable long-term future for the business. We look forward to sharing our plans with you in the coming months.”

Extensions to Deere dealer territories

Following RVT’s announcement that they were forgoing their John Deere franchise, the manufacturer announced that three of its dealerships would expand their territories to support the company’s agricultural customers across the West Midlands and mid-Wales.

Charles Groundcare and Machinery, Farol Ltd and Tallis Amos Group Ltd (TAG), will all take on new areas to offer full sales, service, and parts support within the region.

Deere said the move will ensure a

seamless transition for their customers who have been served by RVT for the past 38 years.

Charles Groundcare and Machinery – who will rebrand to Charles Ag & Turf as a result of the change – is based at Coed y Dinas, Welshpool, and already supplies John Deere golf and turf products. The company will now add John Deere’s agricultural portfolio to its business, supporting customers west of Shrewsbury and across mid-Wales through a purpose-built agriculture facility at its Welshpool site.

Farol will grow its business to supply and support customers in Staffordshire and Derbyshire, while TAG will represent the brand in Shropshire, east of Shrewsbury. Deere say both businesses have already begun actively searching for premises to set up new, local dealerships.

Each business will communicate its own plans separately in the near future.

Brian D’Arcy, Agricultural Division sales manager, said, “Ensuring that the highest possible level of service and support continues for our customers is the main priority, and we are pleased to have been able to appoint three dealers who will quickly establish themselves in their new areas of responsibility.

“TAG, Farol, and Charles, are well established, successful businesses which have served John Deere customers extremely well, so I am confident that the high level of service will continue across the West Midlands and mid-Wales.

“We are grateful for the excellent partnership John Deere and RVT has maintained for the past 38 years and are thankful to the entire team at RVT for its dedication in serving our customers.”



Charles are one of the dealers to have their Deere territories expanded

Depot transformation plans revealed

Rea Valley Tractors were quick to reveal plans for the transformation of their Sudbury depot following the announcement of their split from John Deere.

The dealership say they are transforming their branch in Sudbury into a dedicated JCB Agriculture sales, service and parts centre to serve customers in Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Shropshire and mid-Wales.

In conjunction with that investment, RVT will also expand its territory into Cheshire in January 2023 to offer the full range of JCB agricultural products from new premises in the county and say they bring their high standards of technical, parts and service support to new and established JCB customers.

They believe both moves will

strengthen their 15-year relationship with JCB, serving customers throughout the region from depots in Welshpool, Shrewsbury, Newport, and Sudbury.

The Sudbury depot, located just 10 miles from JCB World Headquarters at Rocester, will become the RVT hub for managing JCB product sales, service, repairs and parts support.

Experienced JCB-trained technicians will continue to provide local support from all the company’s branches, with a comprehensive parts stock also maintained at each location.

In the meantime, JCB business in Cheshire will continue as usual, with products, parts, servicing and repairs available from the existing John Bownes premises at Winsford for the

rest of this year.

JCB Agriculture managing director John Smith said, “The RVT management team has ambitious plans for growth of JCB product sales, especially for Fastrac tractors, which have been constrained to some extent by other franchise considerations.”

Steve Petford, RVT managing director, added, “As a large Midlands-based business ourselves, we have always been immensely proud to represent JCB and expand our relationship; transforming our Sudbury branch to a dedicated JCB hub is a clear illustration of that. We are also delighted that JCB has given us the opportunity to expand our territory.”

DEALERS

Opening of new dealership branch celebrated

Campey welcome over 150 guests

Campey Turf Care Systems recently marked the official opening of their new showroom in Bosley, Cheshire, by welcoming over 150 guests to the new facility.

The new showroom, based half an hour away from their HQ in Marton, is home to new and used tractors, machinery, new mowers, strimmers, chainsaws, parts, and clothing, from brands such as New Holland, Echo, Dennis, Trimax and Granit.

During the opening day, the full range of Campey machines was on display while guests enjoyed the hospitality to celebrate this milestone in the company's story.

Speaking about the event, Campey Chairman, Richard Campey said, "We were delighted to see so many customers, friends, and work colleagues come to the

open day. It was our chance to show everyone our new venture and celebrate the achievement.

"This new branch will play a significant role for us as we grow into the new areas of agriculture, horticulture and professional landscaping. We're looking forward to welcoming customers to the showroom in the coming months and taking Campey forward."

An auction and raffle was held on the day, which raised £1,290 for The Christie Charity, which provides enhanced services over and above what the NHS funds. This includes continued funding for a number of services throughout the hospital, including the cancer information centre, wig fitting service, art room and complementary therapy. Prizes were donated by New Holland, Trimax Mowers, Vredo, Bellon Mit and Dennis Sisis.



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EXHIBITIONS

Good leads at second SAGE staging

But attendance on the low side



SAGE show 2022

Exhibitors doubled at the second staging of a new trade show for the commercial turfcare sector this summer - although visitors through the gates remained on the lower side than might have been hoped.

The sophomore edition of SAGE took place at the Three Counties Showground at Malvern on 6th and 7th July, following its debut there last summer.

This year exhibitors included major professional turfcare machinery players including Toro, Price Turfcare, Redexim, Campeys, Ego, Stiga, Trimax, Overton, Handys (with Cramer), Kersten, Cub Cadet and Husqvarna amongst others. This represented a significant increase in stand-holders compared to last year.

Many of the representatives of suppliers on these stands who Service Dealer visited on day one of the show, voiced similar feelings. They told us that whilst they would have liked to have seen more people walking through the gates, those who they had met had been quality, decision-making visitors - representing warm leads.

All were keen to support to the show into the future as the ability to demo machines there and then to potential customers in the outside space, was seen as a real bonus for the event.

It was hoped that attendance can be built on in subsequent years.

PEOPLE

From dealer to supplier sales role

Jon Lewis makes the switch

Jon Lewis has joined Price Turfcare, the UK distributor of the Ventrac all-terrain compact tractor and associated attachments, in a regional sales management role.

Jon has enjoyed a successful 22-year career in the grounds care industry, starting as an operator mowing



grass for grounds maintenance contractor Smart Cut, before moving into his first sales role with Parks & Grounds Machinery. He later joined T H White, operating out of their Redditch depot, where he spent five years as area sales manager before joining Lely (now Reesink). After a successful nine years selling Toro products, he moved on to John Deere dealer Farols, again in an area sales management role, before making his latest move to join Rupert Price and the UK Ventrac operation.

"I have nothing but praise and respect for Rupert for the way in which in he has bought the Ventrac product to market here in the UK. I have supported him since he launched the business because of his integrity; he simply does right by the customer, they always come first.

"He leads a small but flexible group of people and thoroughly deserves the success he has achieved. To have sold a significant number of machines in the UK from a standing start in 2017 is some achievement, especially when you take into account two years of Covid.

"I'm really looking forward to the challenge, but also to the opportunities it brings."

Rupert Price added, "I'm delighted to have secured Jon's services and welcome him aboard; he is very well known, not only across the West Midlands, but also throughout the industry. He's a larger-than-life character and a shrewd businessman who knows this industry inside out! We recently returned from the SAGE event where he slotted into the team perfectly. I have no doubt that he will be a great asset as we grow the business."

INDUSTRY



L-R: Roy Jones, md London and South, Glencar Construction; Councillor Helen Whitcroft, Mayor of Surrey Heath; Michael Traub, Chairman of the Executive Board, STIHL AG; Kay Green, md, STIHL GB

STIHL break ground

On new UK HQ

STIHL GB held a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the first official day of construction of its new 11,500m2 purpose-designed headquarters and state-of-the-art warehouse facility in Camberley, Surrey.

Chairman of the executive board at STIHL AG, Michael Traub, STIHL GB managing director, Kay Green, Mayor of Surrey Heath, Councillor Helen Whitcroft, and managing director London and South at Glencar Construction, Roy Jones, attended the ceremony to turn the first soil and announce the official commencement of works on the site.

Due for completion in 2023, the site will be home to nearly 100 employees and will include dedicated dealer training facilities, an on-site restaurant, flexible collaborative workspaces and a technical workshop.

The company says the new 9,000m2

warehouse space will utilise the latest picking and storage system technology. All logistics will now be consolidated onto one site, which they say will mean a speedier and more efficient delivery service to the 700 strong STIHL dealer network.

Kay Green, managing director of STIHL GB, said, "The groundbreaking ceremony is the beginning of an exciting new chapter for STIHL GB and the result of a sustained period of growth in recent years. Our new purpose-built headquarters represents a significant capital investment and is a commitment to the future for our dealers and end user customers."

The new HQ boasts environmental credentials including BREEAM Certification, the sustainability assessment method for building projects. In addition, it is proposed that two-thirds of the total roof area

(1600m2) will be covered with photovoltaic solar panels to provide power to the new facility, as well as the installation of EV charging points.

The new headquarters will be connected to Blackwater railway station by a dedicated cycle path and will feature landscaped gardens with native shrubs and trees and a wildflower meadow, which forms part of an integrated flood risk mitigation zone on the former Thames Water Utilities site.

Three biodiversity offset planting schemes will be implemented in the local area, which will replace the greenery that has been removed during construction, as well as adding an additional 10% planting provision. All the planting has been carefully selected so that only native species are planted.

PEOPLE

Barrus md to retire

Robert Muir has 32 years with the company

The Board of E P Barrus Ltd has announced that in December 2023 managing director, Robert Muir, will retire from his position after 32 years with the company, including more than 11 as md.

Robert joined Barrus in 1990 from Ransomes Consumer Ltd, where he was managing director. The company say he has contributed enormously to the growth and success of Barrus during his tenure. First as finance director ensuring the financial stability of the company; and then as sales director and managing director. Barrus say that as well as being a popular leader of the company, he is hugely respected by both their suppliers and customers.

Robert was instrumental in taking Barrus into the garden tools market, first with Wolf-Garten, then Wilkinson Sword and Town & Country. More recently he has been leading the drive on electrification within the markets that Barrus

operates in, not least with the design and building of a hydrogen fuel cell powered inland waterways vessel.

Odgers Berndtson has been appointed to lead the search to identify Robert's successor.

Robert Glen, owner of Barrus said, "It is hard to know where to start to thank Robert for his dedication to Barrus and his friendship to me and my family. There have been some interesting times over the last 32 years and Robert's unwavering commitment has served us very well."

Tara Glen, Barrus chairman added, "I have known and worked with Robert for over three decades. He is a tremendous leader and on a personal level, adviser, so I am thrilled that we will retain his wise counsel and expertise as he has agreed to remain on the board of the company as a non-executive director."



INDUSTRY

Ariens joins Made in Britain

Becomes part of the manufacturing community

Ariens have announced that it has joined Made In Britain and will now adorn all petrol zero-turn mowers for the EMEAA market with the iconic Made in Britain mark.

Ariens has historically manufactured machinery in the United States, but to better meet the needs of its European customers, opened its first zero-turn production line at its UK plant over three years ago. This milestone meant Ariens is able to manufacture its complete petrol zero-turn line-up



of Edge, Ikon XD, Apex and Zenith mowers - for the EMEAA market in Oxfordshire.

Made in Britain brings together the best of British manufacturing and only accredited organisations that meet its high standards can use its mark. In an official statement Ariens said, "There is also a growing awareness among consumers of the importance of buying local as recent Covid-19 and Brexit issues have caused supply chain concerns

and impacted the quality of imported goods."

Darren Spencer, VP of EMEAA added, "Although we find ourselves in uncertain times, both here and abroad, investing in manufacturing in the UK is critical to ensuring our EMEAA customers continue to receive the quality machinery they expect from Ariens.

"Being able to brand all of our petrol zero-turn mowers with the Made in Britain mark shows them just that."

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Steve Brown

A family affair

Family is the golden thread behind the success of many dealerships, and at George Browns, a tradition of innovation and service that began almost 200 years ago is being pursued with dedication and passion by the latest generation

In 1830, George Brown established a blacksmith's shop in Lake Street, Leighton Buzzard. The headquarters of his eponymous business is still in the Bedfordshire town, but now at a purpose-designed site at Grovebury Road, where the business's manufacturing arm and retail outlet sit side by side.

"The first three generations focused on producing farm equipment initially for use behind the horse, and then steam engines before the advent of the tractor," explains managing director Steve Brown, whose great grandfather Ernest took the farm implement business into semi-mass

production, selling across the southern half of the country. "We became a dealer group in the 1950s, establishing branches at Buckingham, Chesham and Aylesbury. The business was based on the principle of a 'diamond', seeking sales around the points of the diamond. With a distance of around 18 miles between each, it was possible to service a market of around an hour radius using the road networks at the time."

After a period as a sub-dealer for Ford, in 1955, Ernest Brown and his sons Bernard, Alan and Bob signed an agreement with Massey Ferguson as the company's distributor for

Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and the business grew significantly over the next 40 years. "By the late 1980s we held about a 40% market share, as Massey Ferguson was then the market leader," comments Steve.

By 1976 there was a new face on the UK machinery scene in the form of Japanese manufacturer Kubota, and a year later, George Browns added the brand to its portfolio.

Steve points out that back then, there was little concept of a separate 'groundcare' business, but his father Chris, with Peter Hopkinson (still a director of George Browns), pioneered the use of the compact tractor and



1955: Ernest Brown and sons Bernard, Alan and Bob signing the Massey Ferguson agreement



In the service department

the Redexim Vertidrain, alongside the implement's importer Charterhouse Turf Machinery.

"We demonstrated it to golf clubs and other fine turf customers, creating the market segment we now know as groundcare."

Challenges with product and competition for Massey Ferguson saw their agricultural market share decrease to 20% in the late 1990s and in turn a strong growth in Kubota saw the business become more dependent on groundcare machinery.

Thus, when Massey Ferguson's parent company AGCO asked dealers including George Browns to commit

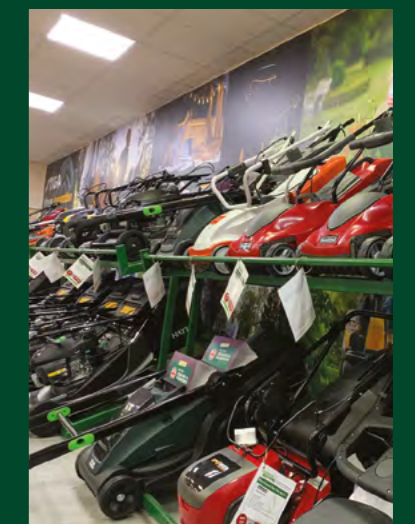
exclusively to the brand in 2004, the family decided to walk away, despite being one of the largest MF dealers in the country.

"It was a defining moment in our commitment to Kubota," comments Steve. "However, while the tractors were getting bigger with the ME9000s and M108s, they weren't yet big enough for our agricultural business. We knew this would come in the future but sought a new agricultural brand to keep us relevant in the market at the time."

Looking for another brand that would complement the Kubota portfolio, the company opted for Valtra, at the

Groundcare hire

Operating out of a dedicated facility also in Leighton Buzzard with dedicated staffing and bespoke lorries to transport the machinery, the groundcare hire fleet equates to around £2 million worth of equipment, servicing hire from one day to five years, all with breakdown backup. This division was first started by Andy Lathwell in 1999, who is still a director of the business today, pioneering groundcare hire and now boasting one of the largest groundcare hire fleets in the UK.



time an independent manufacturer. However, six months after signing the agreement the Finnish company was purchased by AGCO.

"We were assured that Valtra and the other AGCO brands would never be in the same dealership, and this independent approach allowed us to grow the Valtra brand for 10 years. However, in 2014 AGCO's new strategy was to put all brands together, which led to our termination."

"There was a gap before the Kubota M7 came to market, but we didn't seek another brand, choosing to trust in Kubota."

The Kubota group's acquisitions

Strong bonds with Kubota

“The rise of Kubota has been in my lifetime, so when I came into the business my key supplier has always been Kubota and I also did a marketing internship with the company,” explains Steve Brown.

“We have strong bonds with all the team and the time that managing director David Hart, and general manager, Henry Bredin, have given me personally and us as a business is more than you’d expect of senior management in a large corporate business.

“I feel that the decisions we make in business are aligned with Kubota’s decisions, and that they are influenced by us – we want the same thing.

“Our aim is to be the UK’s Premier Kubota dealer; we want to be large enough to have economies of scale but small enough to genuinely care for our customers and adapt to our specific market.

“We have Kubota Gold workshops in all branches, and recently found out we were the first multi-depot dealer to achieve this – it also shows our staff that we do really care, offering them the tooling, training and facilities to be top class engineers and managers.”

Steve adds, “When an agricultural customer buys a machine, they are buying into the George Browns brand – not only do they like the product; they know it has our backing behind it.”



have since brought a full agricultural line to George Browns in the shape of Kubota Farm Implements and Kverneland implements.

Specialisation and investment

While in the 1990s George Browns was principally an agricultural business, by the time the split with Valtra came, groundcare had become dominant.

“We weren’t as big in agriculture as we wanted to be,” says Steve. “Over the last five years the agricultural side has grown again to be around a quarter of the business, but we are aiming to expand it dramatically. Our market share has already increased, and that is linked to the Kubota and Kverneland product and reputation.”

“We also now have a portfolio of agricultural machinery that fits most of our clientele, so we can add on people, infrastructure and aftersales to support that. I believe that at the end of our five-year plan, agriculture will be at least half of our business.”

He comments that the company has the benefit of his father’s cousin,

Richard Brown, running the family farm at Verney Junction to offer a perspective on the challenges faced by farmers.

“He manages 700 acres, and like a lot of farms in this area it’s mixed farming with some diversifications. We know our market well and our portfolio of tractors up to 180hp, telehandlers and implements suits our clientele.”

Steve points out that while in some parts of the country Kubota is seen as the ‘new boy’, in certain postcode areas, George Browns is market leader in sub-100hp tractors.

“We are newcomers above 130hp, but we can see that in the 130-170hp segment the M7 is growing. Year on year we are selling more, and the part that adds real security – showing that we are supporting it well – is that customers are part-exchanging their M7s to buy a newer M7.”

The plan is now to reinvest in the business to support the expansion. By the end of 2022 the Daventry, Northamptonshire branch will see its workshop space doubled, and another area sales manager added. In September, a new branch will open

at Witney, a decision led in part by agricultural expansion, he explains.

“Our branch at Haddenham couldn’t support agriculture in Oxfordshire in the way that we wanted it to, so we needed to find other premises. The market is leading our decisions – the Kubota product and how it is looked after and perceived has given us that confidence.”

Interestingly, rather than adding more agricultural brands to the portfolio, George Browns has reduced its range.

“We’ve cut down the franchises in the last 12 months. We want to serve the agricultural customer with expertise, but we don’t want to ‘dabble’ or stretch our capabilities. The Kubota product can get you through most doors – tractors, RTVs, compacts, implements and Kverneland cultivation equipment. We then have Bomford hedgecutters and Merlo as our telehandler brand to complete our line-up; if someone wants a specialist item, we’d prefer to walk away. We want to be the masters in our field and have the reputation that we are good at what we do.”

The groundcare portfolio remains

fairly constant, with Baroness catering for fine turf mowing needs, and other brands including Redexim, Campey Turfcare, Trimax, Grillo, Roberine, Greenmech and Hilltip.

“Because our groundcare offering is very mature, we want to be a one stop shop in this sector, and if someone wants an item of machinery, we have a market leading brand for it. The idea is that they all complement each other.”

Development plans have involved increasing groundcare resources in the area served by a one-hour commute from the branches.

“We’ve added on more area sales managers where there is potential, and then it’s on them to unlock that potential using the market leading brands. Because those brands have confidence in us to provide the aftersales service, our territories have expanded. Customers will see very similar franchises, support and pricing, so their experience is the same wherever they are.”

Investing in groundcare in this way isn’t going to see a dramatic increase in turnover, he points out, but will help

with market share and lock customers into aftercare.

“The business will grow but not as dramatically as we are likely to see with agriculture.”

George Browns also has a strong homeowner customer base, in the face of tough competition from chain stores, and latterly, online outlets.

“We aim to sell high-end, professional standard products to the domestic user, offering garden equipment sales specialists who look to guide them down a sensible long-term route with workshop back-up and parts supply – very much in the traditional model,” says Steve, “When we look at our prices compared to online outlets, we are either competitive or cheaper. If it goes wrong, we are a bricks and mortar business to bring it back to.”

The company has also seen the internet’s potential for sales, however.

“This year we’ve added an online store, which is currently click and collect only. We could change that to be a postal service, but we’re not going to open that up until the market and the business is ready.”

Post-pandemic and supply

The pandemic brought challenges as it did for others, and opened up the pros and cons of remote operation, he explains.

“While the emphasis was on keeping the business alive, the priority was also to keep our staff safe. We tried to be as remote as possible, posting out parts where possible, remaining interactive through phone and email, trying to limit contact. But our business didn’t ultimately alter that much – we wanted to still supply a good level of service for the products that we offer but with less contact.”

“Today we’ve kept some of the basic personal hygiene aspects, and we find that some customers like the ‘remote’ service, using phone, post and email, which we are still fully offering and supporting. Others have reacted the opposite way, wanting human contact, which we are also fully supporting but in a safe environment.”

He notes that while there was still the need for training during the pandemic, the ability to deliver it varied between suppliers.

GEORGE BROWNS

“Everyone still wanted the best for the end user and for the business, so training was still available via video calls or face-to-face, with varying levels of success. But we find that we are able to provide even more expertise than before the pandemic. Part of that is staff retention and sales growth, but part is also down to the support we received from suppliers. You never know if we are completely out of the woods, but we feel we are coming out of it quite stable and able to grow.

Tackling machinery supply issues has presented a challenge to many dealerships, and Steve says:

“We’ve been trying to be proactive from the start. It’s easy to see what you have got in stock and what you have sold, but rather than ordering more to keep up with supply we questioned whether that was what the customer wanted.

“We developed new KPIs to see what is on order, when it’s estimated to arrive in stock and if it’s ordered for

stock or an end user. Using real data we have been able to see stock levels increase, orders increase and sold orders increase. The ‘sold, on order’ category shows you what the market trend is; we have seen it consistently rising, so using that data we can order more stock to try to get ahead of the supply issues.

“Supply is poor, I think the whole market understands why. We don’t

“Even with supply issues, interest rates and inflation rising, our customers still want to purchase machinery”

like the situation but we’re trying to give customers honest, realistic expectations. It’s for us to educate the market that if you need a product for next year, you should order it well in advance.”

Steve comments that despite the cost of living crisis, the trend is still upward.

“Even with supply issues, interest rates and inflation rising, our customers still want to purchase machinery. But if

we see the trend moving away from sales, we will change our business to suit that. We’re not seeing it yet, but I can appreciate that next year could be economically hard.”

Other trends being noted include interest in ‘green’ technology.

“Our customers are impacted by Oxford zero emissions, and London and Birmingham low emissions policies. They are required to

seek or acknowledge greener alternatives, but if the equipment doesn’t meet their needs, they currently don’t have

to purchase it, although I can see that changing in time. The market is starting to adapt – Stihl battery handheld products are big sellers, and Stiga Mountfield now offers some battery ride-ons. “

“While it will be customer driven, it’s also good to know that Kubota, our primary supplier, is forward thinking and is working on solutions in this area.”

Manufacturing

Browns of Leighton Buzzard, the agricultural machinery manufacturer now run by 5th Generation Jim Brown, was ahead of its time from the start, Steve points out.

“It began with cultivators, harrows, straw carts, rollers, and was quite innovative holding multiple patents on horse drawn equipment, then moving to steam and very early diesel engines, but from the point where tractors became mass market, we’ve specialised in simple, sturdy and basic implements. Today the range is based on harrows, log splitters, mole ploughs, flail mowers and slitters etc, and the reason that it has sustainability is that although its bulky nature makes it hard to export, it’s also difficult for companies to import to the UK.”

The range is sold through an extensive dealer network, which includes George Browns, and the businesses remain independent.



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Service Dealer Conference '22

Thursday 24th November 2022

Former SAS soldier to deliver keynote on overcoming adversity

Robin Horsfall stormed the Iranian embassy



Robin Horsfall

Service Dealer has announced that the keynote address at November's conference will be delivered by Robin Horsfall, a former SAS soldier turned motivational speaker, author and veteran's campaigner.

Having followed an extraordinary life path, Robin's extensive career both in and beyond the armed forces has given him valuable insights into "what makes people tick".

From fighting on the frontline as an SAS Royal Marine sniper and attending urgent medical needs as a paramedic, to establishing and teaching at his successful martial arts academy, and beating the medical odds – Robin is well aware of the factors that keep people motivated, even in the face of challenges.

During his keynote, delegates will discover a fascinating life as Robin shares stories from his extensive military career, as well as his own personal experiences and how they relate to his underlying theme of overcoming adversity.

Robin was also a member of the SAS counter terrorist team that famously stormed the Iranian Embassy in London in 1980, helping to rescue the 19 hostages who were held for six days.

He has had an extraordinary life and has been speaking about it at events both large and small for more than 10 years.

Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "We are delighted to confirm Robin for our conference this year.

"I have been following Robin's posts for some time. His credentials speak for themselves and I find him to be clear in his beliefs and extremely knowledgeable. The insight he has shared regarding the situation in Ukraine has been important and he expresses his considered opinions thoughtfully. I can't wait to hear his keynote at this year's Conference which I know will spark plenty of conversation."

Taking place on **Thursday 24th November 2022** once again at the DoubleTree by Hilton Oxford Belfry Hotel, Thame, Oxfordshire, the theme for this year's event is **Sustaining Dealerships**.

For more information regarding this year's Service Dealer Conference & Awards, including further speaker announcements, keep an eye on the *Service Dealer Weekly Update*, published every Friday at midday. For the latest details, visit www.servicedealer.co.uk/2022-awards.

Recruitment experts to address conference

Also among the speakers at this year's Service Dealer Conference will be two experts in specialist recruitment, both from De Lacy Executive Recruitment.



STUART GOODINSON

Group managing director

Stuart was born and bred in rural Northumberland. After leaving Seale Hayne, Stuart started his career as an agronomist, selling arable input supplies to farmers in Devon, he then moved on to

sales management, sales director, business and project management across the arable, machinery, horticulture and dairy sectors. Stuart's last role before moving to De Lacy was as country manager UK, Ireland and South Africa for a global animal nutrition business. Stuart says his passion has always been for people and people development within business.



GRACE NUGENT

General manager

Grace joined the De Lacy Executive team in 2011. She has worked her way up through the company and now manages the recruitment team, whilst still dealing with key clients. Grace is a farmer's daughter, giving her a strong

understanding of the agricultural sector. The home farm is a mixed arable and sheep farm in Worcestershire in which she takes a very practical interest. She has worked in New Zealand, where she was in charge of running two stations. She graduated with a degree in Agricultural Business Management. She thoroughly enjoys travelling, reading and the rural way of life.

2022's Dealer of the Year Awards

The categories have been announced for 2022's Dealer of the Year Awards*

The core dealer categories for the awards are:



There are also four special award categories this year:



For details of how to enter your dealership into any of the above awards, keep watching the *Service Dealer Weekly Update* and visit www.servicedealer.co.uk/2022-awards.

Our 2022 Sponsors

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2022 Service Dealer Conference and Awards. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.



* correct at time of going to print

Dealers become part of the robot revolution

It may be self-propelled, but it has no engine, no complex transmission and no cab with associated creature comforts and controls. That doesn't sound like the sort of machine that will require much support from a dealer, yet a number of the trade's biggest names have signed up as agents for Opico's FarmDroid. MARTIN RICKATSON attended its launch earlier this year to find out more

Not long ago, autonomous or robotic agricultural vehicles, particularly those for field work, were the stuff of prototype areas on stands at big international shows, or demo zones at field events. The question of market-readiness was something many manufacturers seemed to stall when asked.

However, over the past year or so, the time to market of such machines seems to have shortened from 'soon' to 'now'. Conventionally engined robots are already working on UK vegetable farms' weeding duties, as reported previously in Service Dealer. Now, though, the principle has moved yet further forward, with the launch earlier this year of a new solar-powered robot that can not only handle simple weeding tasks, but can also plant crops beforehand. And this time it's being sold and supported through an established UK dealer network.

Development of the FarmDroid FD20, which is now being imported by Lincs-based Opico and sold through a selected network of its dealers, began in 2011 on a family farm in central Denmark. Jens Warming first began to investigate the idea of a simpler, more time and fuel-efficient and less labour-intensive way of inter-row weeding sugar beet. Joined subsequently by his brother Kristian, and by specialist robotics engineer Esben Østergaard, the three set out to create an autonomous machine for seeding and weeding of sugar beet and other row crops – such as herbs, salads and oilseed rape – based on the principle that a machine using ultra-high-precision placement based on RTK for planting crops would then be able to use recorded placement data to

weed not just between plant rows, but also between plants themselves in each row, all without the need for camera systems. A further principle was that of harnessing solar energy to propel the vehicle, which they felt was a practical proposition given the relatively low energy requirement of a machine that, because it is aimed mainly at vegetable growers, operates largely on light, flat land.

After designing and building the first prototypes in their farm workshop, the Warming brothers then tested, trialled and developed these over the next eight years, until a first-generation production version was ready for launch at Agritechnica 2019. By now, with a team of 30 people working from a new manufacturing complex, the business had a dozen machines on Danish farms the following year, before an updated model was developed for autumn 2020, and production was ramped up to 60 units, with six international distributors appointed. Today, FarmDroid is represented in 18 countries with over 250 units sold, six of which were in the UK by spring 2022.

How it works

The FarmDroid is powered via four solar panels that charge two lithium batteries on the machine. Two further spare batteries can be charged remotely, if required, although charging takes place during daylight operation whatever the light level, with 24-hour operation possible from battery storage of solar-generated power. Should it run out of power in the night, the machine will simply begin moving again when the sun rises and the solar panels again become active. It also features a rain sensor that will stop the machine if a certain



Opico has set up a specialist FarmDroid team, working with selected dealers. L-R: Opico's James Woolway, Charles Bedforth, Angus Steven, FarmDroid's Eddie Pedersen and Opico's Harvey Sherwin

amount is detected, or notify the owner's app so a decision can be made as to whether or not to cease operations.

Propulsion is via a 400W electric motor on each wheel, and operation is therefore fuel and emission-free, and CO2-neutral, something the firm points out will particularly aid farmers whose produce buyers are pressuring them to fulfil environmental demands along with crop supply contracts. Electric motors also engage and power the seeding and weeding units. Steering is via drive motors on the front wheels, which work constantly at different forward speeds to keep the machine on a straight

course. There is a single wheel at the rear. The majority of the machine's working parts are stainless steel, with Hardox used for the weeding wires and seed couler.

The 3.0m FarmDroid can be equipped with four, six or eight precision drill and inter/intra-row cultivation element sets, both having been developed and manufactured in-house. Although cameras are not required for guidance, one unit is fitted to provide the person monitoring the machine via FarmDroid's smartphone app, to provide a view of its activity. The app also provides data such as forward speed



FarmDroid's smartphone app provides a camera view of its activity, plus data such as forward speed, any error message alerts, and a field map of progress.



The machine uses a combination of weeding wires and blades to remove weeds between and within rows, based on records of each seed's sown location

and any error message alerts.

The 900kg machine (without attachments) is transported between fields by tractor, and because it operates at less than 1.0 km/hr (working speeds can be set from 450-950m/hr), and is fully equipped with safety stop and smartphone app alert features should it come into close proximity with an object or person, it is not subject to any further safety legislation during operation. The maker suggests that, where practical/required, it can be left in the field for the season, and calculates that despite its sedate pace it has a 6.0ha/24hr potential workrate. Although the machine does not work deeply, slower working speed minimises required downforce and therefore power and torque, says the firm.

In the field, the FarmDroid is guided around the perimeter to record the corner points, thereafter setting a geofence from this so that it knows the field boundary, and the headlands can be set. In addition, any obstacles, the number of headland bouts and the seed spacing are set at this point. From this, the machine calculates the best path plan for work. All of this is recorded via FarmDroid's own RTK system, which works to a repeatable accuracy of 0.8cm, using front and rear machine-mounted antennae communicating with a farm-installed fixed base station, which must be within 10km of the field. This enables the FarmDroid to work up to within 5mm of each seedling between the rows, and 20mm in the row.

"If we can seed it, we can weed it," says Eddie Pedersen, FarmDroid's sales manager.

"To enable inter- and intra-row weeding without cameras, we had to design a high-precision seeding system. For drilling, once those field parameters are set, it's simply a matter of programming in the required plant density and spacing, and setting it off.

"Roller disc pairs are followed by a furrow opener that creates a V-shaped slot. The individual six-litre seed hoppers each supply an electrically driven seed motor, feeding individual seeding discs with a range of interchangeable units 3D-printed in-house. These also feature different hole diameters, disc thicknesses and disc diameters for different seed types. Gravity feed is preferred over a more complex pressure or vacuum system, and a mark in each disc provides monitoring of positive seed disc drive. A light sensor at the base of each unit requires a beam to be broken to show a seed has passed and been placed. The



An on-board controller is used for initial machine placement within the field. RTK receivers front and rear work with an on-farm base station

last element of the seeding set-up is individual pressure wheels to firm the soil over the seed.

"Then, as the machine remembers where each seed has been placed within a variation of 0.8cm, once drilling is complete, the tool units can be changed over – the seeding units simply flip up out of work and the weeding ones drop down. The FarmDroid can then be set up for pre-emergence or 'blind' weeding soon after drilling, and for repeated passes at intervals in the weeks afterwards to catch weeds as – or even before – they hit. And while the weeding wires remove all weeds between rows, separate weeding knives interject between each plant, based on the known seed positions.

"The number of selective herbicides available to farmers is shrinking, as is the availability of labour for manual or even tractor-operated hoeing, whether a farm is producing organic or conventional crops. This machine can overcome those issues in crops up to 40-50cm in height, at row widths of 22.5-90.0cm."

Angus Steven, Opico technical director, reckons that, having been involved in UK agriculture for over 55 years as an importer of various technologies, the business has the expertise and knowledge to back up and support this type of new technology.

"Via our grain dryers, we've been involved with automated products and those that work around the clock since the early 1990s, and through that experience we also have sound knowledge of equipment that uses remote connectivity.

"Those in our technical team working with FarmDroid will be involved from the start in helping dealers to install the product on-farm with a customer, and our selected FarmDroid

dealers have also received thorough product training. In addition, we have a team at Bourne able to support these machines remotely, as well as with the manufacturer's help. There will also be strong online support and advice via the FarmDroid app and website.

"We have already stocked £20,000 of parts for Farmdroid at our Bourne HQ, and added 500 new pallet location spaces."

Harvey Sherwin, Opico's FarmDroid product manager, says weeding is best done in relatively dry conditions, which will allow the uprooted weeds to desiccate and die.

"The inter-row hoeing is passive, in that it is in work all the time, and when the machine is set up, the row width is fixed," he explains.

"Conversely, the active intra-row hoeing, with the knives moving in and out between plants, can be altered down to 10cm spacing, according to crop type and stage."

Dealer involvement

Opico is now selling and supporting the machine through a small specialist network of dealers totalling around 60 depots. MD James Woolway says the company had been keeping an eye for some time on autonomous vehicle developments, seeking to be in from the start in a sector which he believes suits its specialisms.

"We believe robotics will form the backbone of the next major

step in technological development for agriculture," he says.

"The technology is not so radical – many farmers are already working with remote monitoring, RTK and automation. But the potential savings in herbicides, fuel, labour and machinery costs, including depreciation, maintenance, tyres and capital tie-up, are what make me believe this technology is here to stay, and we want to be in from the beginning.

"The financial argument for FarmDroid is strong, especially as the purchase price and ongoing running costs are a fraction of those associated with traditional equipment used for these tasks when establishing row-crops. On that basis we expect some growers to see a return within two years."

The four-row FarmDroid FD20 retails at £59,022 (with additional rows at £3469), with an additional £5,225 required for an RTK base station. The maker and importer suggest this could be recouped in two years through reductions in labour, herbicide and other machinery costs. Grants may be available to help customers fund a proportion of this, notes Opico.

Mr Woolway says dealers who have signed up as FarmDroid agents include Ernest Doe and Chandlers.

"Installation, support and advice will be an important part of getting these machines onto farms working at their best. We have hand-picked a group of dealers who we think are best placed to do this, and they have got off to a flying start with the product."

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Service is the core of our business

So says Peter Hunt of Hunts Engineering Ltd of Shipston-on-Stour. LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, visited to find out what makes their loyal customers keep coming back

The months of June, July and August can be one of the busiest times of the year for ag and garden machinery dealers, with end users of mowing and farming machinery working flat out to maintain grass cutting regimes and harvest their crops.

I witnessed this activity when I visited Hunts Engineering, just after the hottest day on record back in July. The recent warm weather had accelerated the need for farmers to begin harvesting their crops, and combining was in full swing.

Catching up with owner of the company Peter Hunt, his wife Julie and his staff enabled me to see first-hand how busy they truly were.

Hunts Engineering Ltd was started by Julie and Peter Hunt on 6th August 2007. Effectively a “one man in a van carrying out agricultural repairs”, Peter began his career undertaking one of the prestigious John Deere engineering apprenticeship schemes whilst working for a large local machinery dealer. However, after a few years learning his craft, he saw the potential to start his own business, having noticed a gap in the market for the supply of essential combine harvesting repairs, as well as servicing for local farmers.

He then took the opportunity to secure a small industrial unit to work from, and began enlisting the help of additional mechanics to help serve his customers. As the business evolved, they moved to larger premises and began increasing the services and products they could sell. Over time, the hard work paid off, allowing them to become a dealership for some of the most respected brands in the marketplace.

Service Dealer: What is your role in the company?

Peter Hunt: I am the managing director, but I'm very happy to still be a hands-on member of the team. I regularly go out and service and repair combines for local customers during the busy times of the year, and I'm keen to ensure our customers come first and are well looked after. We are not the sort of company who



L-R: Richard Lucas, Peter Hunt and Jeff Deane



The Shipston-On-Stour depot



Peter and Julie Hunt

just wants to sell a product and walk away. We specialise in our after-sales services – which, over time, engenders customer loyalty.

SD: Tell me about your team here?

PH: We currently have 15 members of staff working at our depot in Shipston on Stour. My wife Julie and two other members of staff generally look after the accounting side of the business. We have, over the years, secured a range of experienced and loyal staff who are all good at mucking in and helping in other areas of the business when required. We have Dan Griffith, parts manager,

Graham Miller, workshop manager, Richard Lucas and Jeff Deane, area sales managers, Martin Wasley, sales and marketing, and five mechanics with two apprentices who share the responsibilities of going out on site and delivering and repairing machinery.

SD: Which customer groups are you serving?

PH: Our customer base on the commercial side are groundsmen, greenkeepers, groundcare contractors, councils and large estates. On the ag side, we have farmers and farming contractors. And on the domestic end, garden enthusiasts and hobby farmers. Over the years we have managed to bring to the table a wide range of professional products that suit all our customer needs.

SD: What makes these customers keep coming back to you?

PH: The success of Hunts Engineering Ltd has been down to delivering on our promises and the quality of service that we provide. Throughout our growth we have always retained the key value of adding the personal touch to our

service. We believe this is important in retaining our customers and gaining new ones for the future. I have not and never will be interested in just selling a product and walking away. An enjoyable part of the business for me is building relationships with our customers.

SD: How important is the service side of the business to you?

PH: It's essential to us to continue to offer aftercare. It is the core of our business and we believe it's the reason people come back to us.

SD: Are you a believer in demonstrations?

PH: Demonstrations are a must-do with some products we offer, especially the professional machinery. To us, the demonstration process is not just a means of showing off our products, it's also to show the customer that we are capable of handling and supporting the products we sell. It helps build trust, confidence and relationships for the future.

SD: How did the business cope through the past couple of pandemic-affected years?

PH: We managed well through Covid and the restrictions that came with it. We put in place all necessary measures needed to protect our staff and customers. It changed the day-to-day sales and aftercare procedures with pick-ups, deliveries and demonstrations – but we adapted well.

SD: What new marketing strategies are you embracing to help promote your company?

PH: We have been using the services of a marketing consultant to handle social media and product videos to showcase new machinery, current offers, and aftercare services according to the time of year. We are currently in the middle of updating our website, which will improve our online presence. However, a lot of our business comes from positive word of mouth.

SD: What are your feelings regarding online selling?

PH: Whilst online selling is not the preferred method of selling at Hunts Engineering, we accept that we will have to look at it more as time goes on. We have grown through being a customer-facing business. Price is often the key reason for customers buying online. However, when buying from a local dealer the customer gets real guidance about what they actually

need. And if required we do site visits to ensure they get the right equipment. They also get a ‘ready to go’ machine and face-to-face handover to answer any queries they have. Most importantly, they get the back-up and support.

SD: How are you finding the recruitment process at the moment?

PH: Although we don’t have a high staff turnover, I’m sure other companies in our industry will agree that it is difficult to recruit new staff that have the skills and experience.

We see apprenticeships as the future. The key is retaining them. We believe that to achieve this we must maintain a good working environment, keep them interested by giving them a variety of different tasks to find their strengths and interests, but most importantly reward them fairly. We have an apprentice working with us currently who is doing a great job and is enthusiastic to learn. We have another apprentice starting soon and we also have a recently qualified service technician who is a great asset to us.

SD: How does selling machinery today compare to say 10 years ago?

PH: It’s been easier to sell machinery but difficult to supply at the moment due to lack of stock and crazy demand. During these strange times our

customers have been understanding and happy to compromise. In fact, 2020 was one of our best years for sales. However, in normal times it has become more difficult due the level of competition in the market. It’s the aftercare we provide and the relationships we have built that make it easier.

As for getting spares and stock, the combination of Brexit, the pandemic and now the war in Ukraine is finally taking its toll on our industry in terms of the time we are waiting for specific parts and products. Raw materials are scarce, and it has a knock-on effect on our industry. Like most dealerships we are doing our best and keeping our customers informed of the current situation and will, if possible, keep any costs to a minimum.

We are coping well with the current situation regarding spares though. We have maintained good levels of parts stock and we’ve planned ahead using our database to stock fast moving parts for regular year-on-year servicing of customers machines.

Machinery supply has been very difficult though. We have had to increase our stock orders and make our customers aware of the lead times to avoid disappointment.

Our biggest cost, however, is the price of fuel. The recent high prices have doubled our fuel bills and operating costs. Like most businesses



Nigel, one of the workshop engineers

we try to absorb costs where we can, but at the end of the day we are here to make money to enable us to continue investing into our business.

SD: Would you like to see suppliers be more generous with profit margins?

PH: Yes, of course! However, our manufacturing partners have been very supportive and have tried to be as fair as possible, especially with the world the way it is now. We can appreciate the current difficulties they

endure with costs of shipping, raw materials and staff shortages.

SD: Are you passing your higher costs on to the customer?

PH: We have tried to maintain our prices as best as we can, but with bills rising our costs have had to be closely monitored. Everyone is feeling the pinch currently and it’s not getting any easier – but we will always be as fair as we can.

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

PH: We’ve been expanding our product range more on the professional side over the last few years, increasing the level of business we do. It has opened the door to dealing with more commercial groundcare and agricultural customers. We believe that we will see our business continue to grow the way that it always has.

SD: Thank you.



Inside the showroom



The reception

Switched on for the next half century

This year, Makita UK is celebrating 50 years of trading in the UK. Service Dealer caught up with marketing manager, Kevin Brannigan, to reflect on how the company has grown over the years and its relationships with its dealer network



Kevin Brannigan,
Makita UK's marketing manager

Service Dealer: What's the background of the company in the UK?

KB: Makita Corporation opened Makita UK in Luton in 1972 and due to successful expansion, opened a new purpose-built HQ with offices and warehousing in Milton Keynes in January, 1993. This remains our headquarters today. In 1991 the company acquired Dolmar, the German engine manufacturing company, to

expand into the garden machinery sector. Subsequently, in 1991, a new UK manufacturing plant was opened called Makita Manufacturing Europe (MME) in Telford to support the European supply chain and UK manufacturing, which is one of nine global manufacturing plants. MME is now the only power tool manufacturing facility in the UK.

Continuing the story, in 2017 the first Makita UK Factory Service Centre (FSC) was opened in Glasgow as a site dedicated to offering training as well as product servicing and repair support. We recognised the huge value that this offered to both our dealers and end user customers via increased levels of regional support within the market, so continued to open further sites throughout the UK. A centre in Feltham, London, opened in 2019, and a dedicated service site in Milton Keynes followed. Most recently, the Wigan site that we opened earlier this year also incorporates a new 35,000 square feet warehouse to support supply chain requirements and to help meet growing market

demands. It is our largest FSC site, with showroom facilities, training classrooms and product demonstration zones, as well as the additional warehouse space that enables us to support the UK market with quick access to stocked lines.

Since joining the UK market 50 years ago, we have released hundreds of new products aimed at the professional building, construction and landscaping sectors. Notably, the introduction of our LXT range in 2005, the first Lithium-ion battery platform for power tools, and an industry first, which now has more than 280 products in its range. In 2020, we launched the 40VMax XGT collection, which is our most powerful range of cordless tools to date – and now incorporates over 60 products.

SD: How would you say the pandemic affected the company?

KB: Like most of us, the pandemic was a very challenging time and we had to adapt quickly. We remained open for businesses throughout the lockdown periods and our warehouse



LXT garden range

and distribution employees continued to work on-site within a COVID-19 safe environment to ensure as many services could remain in place for our customers.

Throughout this time, we continued to invest into research and development and our launch programme has remained on track. Of course, we always want our dealers to touch and try our products when they are launched, but the pandemic has taught us that we can use webinars and video workshops to support our dealers with virtual training and digital communications, as well as online 'Book a Demo' campaigns, where customers could trial new products as part of a COVID-19 safe visit as an alternative.

We are happy that our sales teams are now able to resume their store visits, working as usual to foster customer relationships and share company news and product updates. Despite all that video and virtual offers, we feel face-to-face contact is absolutely fundamental to a successful partnership.

SD: How is the business coping with the worldwide stocking crisis and access to materials?

KB: We are experiencing the same difficulties as most regarding shipping, transport and importing post-Brexit. With our global network of sales and distribution sites, and our planning for

Brexit, we have been able to respond quickly to market requirements and mitigate the impact where possible. We implemented a robust stocking strategy and our position in the market remains strong. We will continue to forward plan to ensure our supply chain is as efficient and robust as possible, with a strong roadmap of new products in place.

SD: How would you describe the relationship with your dealer network?

KB: At Makita we pride ourselves in having a strong relationship with our dealer network thanks to the commitment of our salesforce and product specialists, as well as our in-house communication platforms and face-to-face events.

Our FSC showrooms are a great opportunity for dealers to learn more about our products and technologies, and we believe this higher level of insight and service is a great asset that can be passed on to their end-user customers in store.

We offer regular training and support, either on site, or at our Factory Service Centres on a wide variety of topics including new product launches, safety courses, and workshops specially aimed at students and apprentices, as well as

user training for our dealer network and end users. For Makita UK ASA's (approved service agents), we also run courses in maintaining, servicing and repairing our products, which we see as a valuable way for dealers to provide an extra level of service and support for their customers, as well as an additional revenue stream.

For our authorised PDI dealers, our garden machinery equipment is offered with an extended, additional 24-month warranty, totalling three years for the end user if they bring the products back for a service within 12 months of the initial purchase. The service offers an extra revenue opportunity, plus, recognising the value in this service for both our network and the end user base, Makita will pay dealers for all machines they cover with a pre-delivery inspection. For construction power tools, Makita UK offers a standard one-year warranty, which can be extended by a further two years if the customer registers the product online via the Makita UK website.

SD: What trends do you foresee coming up in the industry?

KB: Sustainability. More and more professionals are seeking ways to improve their environmental impact across all areas of their business. In line with this, Makita Corporation



The company's recent outdoor power equipment showcase trade event

SD: What does the future look like for Makita and its dealers?

KB: The future is very positive, and we have lots to look forward to. We are looking at further diversification and expansion into new market sectors – which we have already initiated with our cordless garden machinery collection, cleaning and facilities management products and our leisure range. To support this, the company is committed to investing into developing new products and technologies, especially the development of cordless products that may not have been thought possible 5-10 years ago. Although the economic and market situations are difficult for everyone at present, we are continually planning new products and increasing stock to meet market demands.

Our dealers are invaluable in providing us with their unique and special understanding of their customer base and remain a core part of our strategy and focus on the UK. Dealers can expect to see more of us, more launches, and more battery power!

SD: Thank you.

has made the decision to cease the manufacturing of petrol engine (fossil fuel) products to help protect the environment and operators of our machinery and help to improve the current climate change situation. Makita has a vision of improving products for individuals and the planet. As such, battery technology will continue to develop as more end users adopt cordless tools

and machinery. We are already facilitating high drain applications with cordless power equivalent to two-stroke and four-stroke engines with our ranges of LXT and XGT products, thanks to advances in battery power, charging systems, and brushless motor development. And we will continue to invest in this expertise – our vision is to have a truly cordless jobsite.



A power tools training workshop at Makita's FSC in Glasgow

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The future's bright

Dealership John Bownes Ltd has found success increasing their income stream by diversifying within the showroom. The dealership's parts manager John Twiggs tells *Service Dealer* why he feels the future's bright with a range of lighting options for machinery



L-R: John Twiggs and Ian Eardley



John Bownes Ltd's Winsford, Cheshire premises

The Bownes Family have been trading since the late 1800s, running a large agricultural machinery dealership. Based in Winsford, Cheshire, John Bownes Ltd has for three generations supplied new and used tractors and machinery throughout the UK and Europe.

Post-lockdowns, the dealership said they were looking to diversify their offering to meet the demands of their customer base, which had been forced to shop online whilst the dealership was closed. One new range they chose to take on was LED lights and light bars for tractors, forestry and construction vehicles offered by UK brand UTV Products.

John Twiggs spoke to *Service Dealer* about how diversification has worked for their dealership and how he sees it benefiting their company into the future.

Service Dealer: What prompted you to take your dealership into areas you hadn't traded in before?

John Twiggs: Like many others, Covid had a massive impact on our

business. We had to close the store due to regulations and noticed that customers began shopping online a lot more.

Once our store was fully open again, customers returned but we found they were looking for other products they had seen online. So, we decided we needed to increase our business, expanding the range we offered to ensure we were meeting our customers' needs. Therefore, over the past couple of years, we have increasingly stocked a wider range of products than we traditionally had before, items our customers have expressed an interest in.

SD: Did the stocking issues of the past couple of years have a bearing on your decision?

JT: I think every business is experiencing problems with stock availability. Thankfully, we haven't been too badly affected by this, but when there are delays in stock arrivals or items go out of stock at the last minute, it takes up a lot of time trying to resolve the issue.

SD: Once you decide on a new range to stock, how do you introduce them to your customer base?

JT: We always promote new products on our social media channels, including Instagram and Facebook. We also include flyers in statement runs and place them centre stage in our retail shop to catch customers' eyes.

SD: One of the new ranges you've diversified into are these UTV lighting products for machinery – how did that decision come about?

JT: It began when one of our customers asked for their machine to be fitted with UTV lights and we were really impressed by the quality. We always want to help our customers find the best products, as well as increase our revenue, so we decided to stock some of the UTV LED lights. We stocked a few to start with and quickly found high demand so now our range is growing. We have been stocking them for 12 months now and we have a prominent display stand so that customers can interact and



An example of the lighting on a JCB tractor

demo the lights themselves. One of the reasons I believe we're doing well with them is that the pricing is attractive for the customers compared with the competitors.

SD: How does the range fit in with everything else you sell in store

JT: We have always stocked a range of aftermarket lights that sell well, actually. But after seeing the UTV lights, we decided this was a brand we wanted

to stock. We've found that from initial stocking, people have shown a great interest in them.

SD: What's the main benefit you see from diversifying in the dealership?

JT: I feel that for dealerships to have several streams of income is important. Stocking these UTV Products in our dealership, for example, means we have expanded our range and have a new opportunity to create more business.

We find that as the customers come in to get other parts, they see the lights on the display stand and often buy them there and then. If we didn't stock UTV Products, we wouldn't get that revenue. Another advantage is that customers know we've got them, they come in to buy the lights and chances are they'll pick something else up too whilst they're here. Stocking an increased but related range fetches more people through the door – so it's a big plus.

SD: Do you think a similar philosophy would work for other dealerships?

JT: I do – and I would recommend UTV Products specifically to other dealerships. They are an easy

company to deal with. Problems are few and far between, but if there is one, it's sorted out straight away. Also, when we place an order, we often get the lights the next day. Not to mention the great quality of the lights, which not only means we hardly have to deal with returns, but it's helped us to receive even more good customer feedback. We've been able to rely on the quick and readily available supply from the company – that has included several new products.

SD: What are your plans for the dealership over the next 18 months?

JT: Our goal is to continue expanding and doing more business. I'd say UTV Products is helping us do that through the profit we receive when we sell the lights from the dealership. Likewise, we're looking to set up an online shop stocking them as well.

So I'd say with this diversified range, not only do we have more products we can display in store to help increase customer footfall, we will in turn help to build our online presence

SD: Thank you.



A display of the UTV light products in store

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Efficiency and accuracy drive Cereals 2022 developments

Many of those browsing the 320 stands at Cereals 2022 back in June were buoyed by higher crop prices but wary of continuing high input costs, lack of pre-harvest rainfall and issues with supply and cost of new kit. MARTIN RICKATSON rounds up some of the show's main developments

Harvest prospects always lead the talking points at Cereals each June, but while the spring drought was a topic of general discussion, many visitors were more concerned with broader and longer-term issues. Potential margin gains from higher commodity prices have been tempered by higher input costs, including fuel, fertiliser and crop protection products, as well as costlier machinery. Efficiency gains were therefore a key theme of the event, as were ways of tackling labour shortages.

Sprayer developments

1 Sands Agricultural Machinery's new Infinity sprayer range takes over at the top of the Norfolk manufacturer's line, and incorporates multiple new design features. The machines feature tanks of 5,000 or 6,000 litres now manufactured from steel, with a larger sump and all pipes plumbed straight into the tank, minimising pipework lengths and eliminating internal moving parts, save for the six internal cleaning nozzles operating at 8.0 bar pressure. Externally, the new spraypack features new lighter yet stronger steel booms of up to 40m, with a six-sensor boom levelling system and auto-lowering when folding up. There's also a new side-mounted filling station with 40-litre induction hopper.

An all-new chassis provides 1.2m underbelly clearance, allowing fitment of larger wheels, yet keeping turning circle down to 7.6m. Four-wheel steering, selectable via a foot



1 Sands Agricultural Machinery; Infinity sprayer



2 John Deere; R975i



3 Knight section; 1800-series



4 Team Sprayers; new trailed sprayer



5 Chafer; Pulse width modulation

pedal, offers options including maximum turn, true tracking, speed-related switching, and spray on/off engagement. Further specification includes fully independent suspension and 1.8-2.2m (72-88in) adjustable track width. A Stage V Deutz six-cylinder engine produces 242hp, driving through a new hydrostatic transmission said to provide seamless range changes, and featuring traction control, while additional details include cruise control and eco engine management with road and field modes. In the cab is a new armrest and the new Sands Overhead Screen control system, a fingertip operation arrangement for filling, lights, machine health check management and hydraulic sliding axles.

Other sprayer developments included one of the first national showings of **2 John Deere's** new flagship R975i trailed model. The 7,500-litre machine joins the R900i series' existing 4,400-, 5,200- and 6,200-litre models, with specification including Deere's PowrSpray dual-circuit system, which combines a spraying circuit with 750l/min pump and separate filling circuit with 1,200l/min pump designed to enable fast tank filling.

Meanwhile **3 Knight** new 5,000-litre 1850V SP sprayer has additional under-chassis clearance, yet a lower centre

of gravity than its predecessors, with a wider, lowered tank draining to a single sump. The boom folds to a five-degree angle rather than ten degrees, reducing transport height by 50cm. On the tractor sprayer front, **4 Team Sprayers** showed off improvements to its 800-1,500-litre/12-18m Sigma mounted sprayers, including a redesigned chassis plus narrower and slightly higher tank to aid weight distribution, and a new induction hopper. In addition, it unveiled new trailed models of up to 4,000 litres, now available with a beefier boom design up to a new 36m maximum width. There was also news from **5 Chafer** which introduced a pulse width modulation system option for all its trailed and self-propelled machines. Based on Raven's HawkEye technology, pulsing the nozzles on/off 15 times/second (this standard setting is adjustable) is claimed to help achieve consistent application across a much larger window of rates, speeds and pressures than is possible with conventional nozzles, while offering additional benefits including turn compensation by increasing output on outside nozzles and reducing it on inside ones during a turn. The firm cites possible applied product savings of 3-5% as a result. In addition to conventional sprayer nozzles, the system can also work with air induction and fertiliser types.



6 Spaldings; Flatlift subsoiler

Tillage and drills

New from **Spaldings** was a revised 'V' version of its long-serving FlatLift subsoiler, designed to meet growing demand for looseners that can lift shallow compaction rather than bust at depth. The redesigned V-shape format is claimed to minimise draft requirement and place the legs in the optimum position for shattering across the implement's full width, while also aiding trash flow. Key features retained from the previous generation include slim legs and replaceable shins, with prominent points and broad wings, while there is a hydraulic auto-reset leg protection option. The wings are set back from the point and operate at a shallow angle to create a lifting and restructuring action with the least possible effort, says Spaldings. Maximum working depth is 500mm. The legs are followed by an 800mm Multipacka serrated ring roller. Models comprise three mounted versions (three-leg/900mm spacing, four-leg/650mm, five-leg/650mm) and a 4.7m trailed folding model with seven legs.

Targeted primarily at the Scottish market where grain/fertiliser establishment remains a popular way of giving crops a head start, the new Centaya-C is a new split hopper version of **Amazone's** Centaya piggyback drill aimed at smaller farms. Total capacity is 2,000 litres, split 60:40 or 70:30, and the machine is available in 3.0, 3.5 and 4.0m working widths.

In addition to seed/fertiliser work, the twin-chamber hopper allows companion or undersown crops to be planted simultaneously with the main cash crop. Coulter options, spaced at 12.5cm or 15cm, include 400mm RoTeC pro single-disc/single-shoot units or TwinTeC double-disc/double-shoot coulters, the latter suited to applying two different seed types or seed and fertiliser at two different entry points. The ISOBUS-compatible Centaya-C Super can also be used in conjunction with Amazone's GreenDrill 200 catch crop drill for simultaneous sowing of catch crops or fine seed from a separate 200-litre mounted hopper. Via Amazone's QuickLink quick coupling system, the Centaya-C can be paired with the firm's KE 02 power harrows, KG/KX rotary cultivators or, for very light ground, the company's CombiDisc compact disc harrow.



7 Amazone; Centaya-C

Handling and baling

Fendt revealed a second model of its rising-cab Cargo telehandler range, built by German handling equipment specialist Sennebogen. Where the original T955 machine, launched in 2019, has maximum lift height/weight capacities of 8.5m/5.5t and a 167hp Cummins engine, the new model slots in underneath, with comparative figures of 7.7m/4.0t and 136hp. Backed by a 170 l/min hydraulic system, this takes it into territory that Fendt believes accounts for the biggest proportion of the European telehandler market, representing some 80 per cent. The headstock uses Z-type kinematics, providing a breakout force of 65kN.

The slightly smaller design trims the 11.8t overall weight of the T955 down to 9.4t on the T740. The machine retains the same 'LiftCab' design concept, though, enabling the operator to raise the cabin to a viewing height of 4.10m, for seeing over the top of bucket/fork loads and up to the top of stacks or into lorry bodies or feed mixers. A roof-to-floor curved front window and no dash further aid forward view.

If the same cab position is repeatedly required during an operation, it can be stored via a memory function. This allows, for example, a maximum cabin height to be determined for certain doorways and for it then to be stored and recalled repeatedly.

New Holland chose Cereals to introduce its new flagship contractor-targeted Pro-Belt variable chamber round baler range, available in two models with maximum bale diameters of 1.65m and 1.90m. ISOBUS-compatible, and claimed to offer advances of 20% in tonnes/hour workrate and 8% in density over the existing 1.50m/1.80m Roll-Belt 150 and 180 models, the new range supplements those balers rather than replacing them. Featuring 1,000rpm PTO, the two balers feature split drive, with the rotor and pickup powered from one side and the pick-up from the other. Only two spool valves are required, one powering the tailgate and the other the pick-up, chopping unit knives and drop floor. A five-bar pick-up feeds a 530mm rotor, claimed to be the largest on the market. On machines with the optional Crop Cutter package this goes on supply a 13- or 25-knife chopper,



8 Fendt; Cargo telehandler

on which 0, 12, 13 or – on the latter – 25 knives can be engaged. Tyre options include 500 or 620mm-wide units.

Robot news

The autonomous machines on display at Cereals drew bigger crowds than the conventional machinery at times during the event, marking the increasing number of such units on the market and growing farmer interest in them. Dutch manufacturer AgXeed sees growers with significant hoeing workloads as key buyers for its new four-wheeled AgBot autonomous tractor, which joins existing tracked and three-wheeled models. The 2wd machine's 75hp engine drives a generator that electrically powers the rear wheels, optional PTO and high voltage connector. There are conventional three-point hitches front (1.5t) and rear (4.0t), with options including up to three proportional double-acting spool valves. Track widths are adjustable from 1.5-3.0m. A planning and reporting web tool works alongside the AgXeed portal, which allows remote management of the machine and its tasks, and the AgBot is set working by the operator in the field via a remote control, after which it can then be left to work and monitored via the portal, which includes a camera view.



9 New Holland; Pro Belt



10 Opico; FarmDroid

Opico demonstrated the Danish-made FarmDroid robot it now imports, which relies solely on solar energy for propulsion. Capable of both seeding and weeding precision-sown crops, it uses high-accuracy RTK technology to record each seed's exact placement when drilling. When subsequently used for weeding passes it can then distinguish between plants and weeds based simply on the recorded location of the former, with inter-row hoe shares running permanently between each row and blades interjecting between each plant to remove weeds in the row. This eliminates the need for cameras, and means 'blind' weeding can be begun before the crop has emerged. Benefits beyond lack of labour requirement and zero fuel cost – the machine stores power in batteries and so can work in the dark – include energy self-sufficiency and zero emissions, plus elimination of the need for herbicides, points out Opico.

You can read more about the FarmDroid launch earlier this year, starting on page 22 this issue.

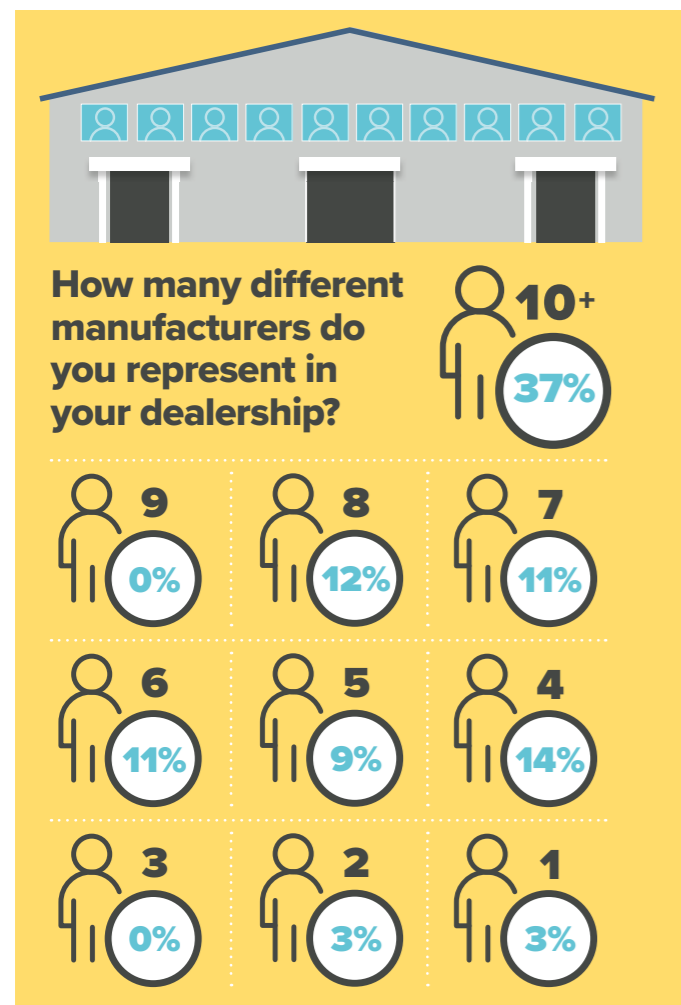


BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by Garden Trader

Dealers spreading the risk

Multiple suppliers seen as positive during the supply crisis



Despite the theory that fewer brands represented in the showroom can be a good move for specialist dealers, readers who chose to respond to our most recent survey told us that having options has helped them during the supply crisis.

Asking how many different manufacturers did they represent in their dealership, the most popular response was, a perhaps surprising, more than ten (37%). Very few said they only represented one or two brands.

A clear majority (79%) expected this number they represent to stay the same over the next 12 months, with 68% saying the current situation with supply hasn't made any difference to the number of brands they stock.

When thinking about the reasons for choosing to represent a particular make of machinery, reliability of product was the most popular answer with our respondents (43%) - with availability way down in last place.

Finally just over half of those dealers who answered the survey said that their suppliers did try to influence the brands they stocked, but they did their own thing regardless.



“Your say”

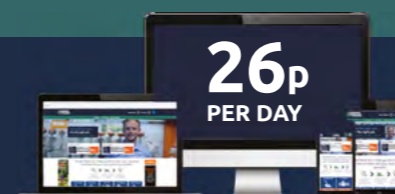
We asked for your thoughts regarding how many manufacturers to represent in your store in the current stocking climate?

- Whilst we have considered ourselves to have held too many brands for many years, during the crisis of supply, having multiple franchises ensured we capitalised on sales during 2020-2022. Having said that, some of our brands have been so incapable of providing products, the decision to cut them for next year is very much being discussed.
- I believe in the foreseeable future, the market will see a bigger parting between domestic brands and professional brands. We now only do professional brands – partly due to staff shortages and increasing prices. Specialising allows better customer service, increasing customer loyalty and future business.
- We've always tried to have the minimum number of suppliers to provide the cross section of machinery we want to stock, at the level of quality our customers' demand. So having other supply chain options, without stocking commitments, is our goal in the current climate.
- Our 8 brands are split between 5 suppliers which makes it more manageable. Fortunately, product groups have evened out across the range with regard to availability - one man's loss, another man's fortune! We have toyed with going solo with one brand, but thankfully we didn't make that jump this year!
- Manufacturers pass on enquiries, so a higher chance of picking up new customers. If a couple of manufacturers are out of a range, higher chance you have an alternative.
- It is all about availability of stock. When we come through this period we will review and stay with and promote the ones we judge to have treated us best.
- We have reduced our manufacturers recently and also look to see what is selling or not and that dictates what we are stocking and promoting. We look at this on a regular basis.
- Better to pick and choose, otherwise you end up with similar products that are difficult to sell one against the other.
- We aim to have a broad portfolio of equipment, from recognised suppliers, that offer great support. We selfishly cherry-pick products that we deem to reflect the quality we wish to represent and don't overlap products. This helps simplify the sales process.
- Our tractor brand only manufactures tractors. We are therefore free to select the brands of all other types of machinery we need to sell.
- I keep it simple and don't give the customer too many choices. The stocking climate has affected sales but not in a big way.

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Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

Edited by Adam Bernstein



Customer satisfaction

Service means business

Picture this. You're a dealer that's run quite happily for years. But there's a new operation in town. How can you compete against the newcomer – and the web?

Asks Adam Bernstein, SME Digest editor



It's not a new problem, but it's one that is not unbeatable. But there is an answer, and it's one that applies even when there is no direct competition – that is, offering the best possible service to customers.

Service as a solution

According to Joanna Causon, CEO of the Institute of Customer Service, good service can be just the tonic. And she bases her comments on empirical evidence, the most recent of which is the January 2022 UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) – a survey in its 12th year, and one that polls 10,000 consumers to track the effects of customer service on business performance.

As Causon points out, the top 10 organisations combine “functional efficiency and human care”. The index

also found that “the highest rated organisations care about their customers, they make it easy to contact the right person to help and they build trust and give reassurance”. In essence, these organisations are more successful than others in ensuring they get it right first time.

And this is important because, as Causon says: “All of our research demonstrates that where an organisation has consistently higher than average customer satisfaction in their industry sector over a five-to-eight-year period of time, they will have better levels of financial performance, reputation, loyalty and productivity.”

It's just as logical to say that where an organisation focuses on the customer experience, they improve their customer satisfaction levels. And satisfied customers tend to return.

Another point that Causon notes is the role that Covid has played in pushing service up the corporate agenda. She says that “the pandemic demonstrated the critical role that customer service plays in the performance of any organisation... from a consumer perspective there are so many ways that we can communicate and feedback our concerns and issues in a very public way if we are not satisfied”.

Spin-off benefits

It doesn't take a doctorate to realise that good customer service leads to trust, loyalty and recommendation. As Causon explains: “We know that as consumers we want to buy from brands that are well trusted, care about us as customers, are ethical and do the right thing.” She continues: “But in addition to

the financial benefits for businesses, enhanced reputation and greater trust help build better relationships with stakeholders, partners and regulators.” The research also found there's “the productivity bonus to organisations and the wider economy... and it enhances your ability to attract and retain employees”.

But on the flipside, poor service just adds in cost with remedial action needed further down the line. The institute sees increases in complaints and problems leading to poor productivity, damaged employee morale, and difficulty in winning business – some have even lost franchises through poor service performance.

For Causon, customer satisfaction can help predict future financial performance: “We have seen organisations cut investment in service, which has led to a reduction in satisfaction, and financial performance has fallen in future years.” In fact, she believes that far fewer businesses now see short-term cuts to service as a good long-term strategy.

In a retail environment, where a firm is looking to improve, a ‘customer service charter’ is a good place to start. As to

what a customer charter should say, Causon's response is direct: “It should always reflect the values and purpose of the organisation, focus on what's important to customers, define clear standards and provide differentiation.”

Getting buy-in

Of course, having a policy is one thing, but making it work is quite another. And it's for this reason that Causon cites the institute's ‘The Customer Knows’ research, which addresses this question: “Employee engagement is critical because it leads to more discretionary effort, emotional connection with customers, improvement ideas, and consistent performance.”

And just as employee engagement is important, so firms need to broadcast their efforts. Naturally, how this is done depends on the nature, size, and culture of the business. She says that word of mouth is still crucial, particularly at a local, independent level. Some businesses communicate via email, social media or in-store displays. But “what is most important is consistently hitting those standards and keeping promises to customers”.

Understand the customer

Now to the crucial question – how can a business properly measure and understand what customers genuinely think?

Clearly, thorough research and performance measurement help, but independent benchmarking is an effective way to get feedback and assess performance. Here Causon suggests “giving customers different opportunities such as surveys, focus groups, social media comments – and listening to your own people”.

The converse of this is dealing with complaints. Here Causon offers one key recommendation – “avoid them in the first place”. Even so, it's relevant that “drivers of satisfaction with complaint handling are speed of response, keeping customers informed, and following up after resolution”.

In summary

Customer service is everything. Firms, no matter how small, that don't listen to their customers won't have to worry about their concerns for long; customers will be buying elsewhere.

Employment law

The Practicalities of Employing and Dismissing Apprentices

Firms employ apprentices for any number of reasons, chief of which is the cost savings available given that a lower minimum wage applies specifically for apprentices aged under 19, or aged 19 and over who are in the first year of their apprenticeship, writes Charlotte Morris, senior solicitor at ESP Law

But there are non-financial benefits for employers too. They can train apprentices not only in how to perform the role, but how to do so in line with the preferred methods. This can result in employees who can not only undertake the roles

required, but who can be moulded in a firm's ways of working from the outset rather than seeking to change what has been learned previously.

The practicalities of employing and dismissing apprentices depends

largely on the type of apprenticeship agreement in use. Using the wrong contract is the main pitfall for employers to be wary of; it can make dismissing an apprentice, even for gross misconduct, high risk.

There are two types of apprenticeship agreement:

1 Approved English Apprenticeship Agreement

If a business operates within a sector for which the government has published an approved apprenticeship standard (which applies to most sectors) then it should seek to engage apprentices on an 'approved English apprenticeship agreement'. This is governed by the rules under ASCLA 2009 (Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009).

Employers can check the list of sectors for which approved standards have been produced or see an example of the standards and required learning outcomes on the Institute for Apprenticeships' website.

There are many reasons why an employer may seek to end an apprenticeship agreement early, including a downturn in work, poor attitude to work or attendance issues. It is much easier to dismiss an apprentice employed under an approved English apprenticeship agreement as they are treated far more as a standard employee would be in terms of their employment law rights. If a dispute arises over the nature of a particular apprenticeship, the courts will determine which form of apprenticeship agreement is in place. ASCLA sets out various criteria that the contract must meet to be classified as an approved English apprenticeship agreement. If a contract does not comply with the provisions of ASCLA and fails to include all the relevant provisions required, it may be determined that a common law contract of apprenticeship has been entered into.

2 Common Law Contracts of Apprenticeship

Traditional apprenticeships are a contract under common law in England and Wales. The primary purpose of the contract of apprenticeship is training and teaching, to enable the apprentice to secure

the required qualification. Work is only a secondary purpose of the contract.

A traditional apprenticeship cannot be lawfully terminated before the expiry of the fixed term contract, except in exceptional circumstances. This is because the contract is entered into to enable the apprentice to receive training and obtain qualifications as a means to obtain better employment. This gives the apprentice far greater employment rights than an ordinary employee.

If an employer terminates a contract of apprenticeship early, and as a result deprives the apprentice of training, the apprentice is entitled to claim damages for wrongful dismissal under the contract. The remedy for such a claim would include their loss of earnings for the remainder of the fixed-term apprenticeship in addition to damages for future loss of earnings and prospects as a qualified person. This applies even if the individual is a poor performer or is having difficulty passing any of the exams. The apprentice would be able to make a claim regardless of whether there are conduct issues such as timekeeping and attendance. Even a genuine redundancy situation, such as a downturn in work, would not entitle an employer to terminate a traditional apprenticeship agreement (regardless of the length of service).

Employers can still discipline a traditional apprentice, but it will only be safe to dismiss them under exceptional circumstances, in certain situations.

These include where an employer completely closes down the business; where the nature of an employer's business changes to such an extent that the employer cannot properly teach the apprentice the trade or profession that was intended to be taught. The latter would include acts of serious gross misconduct and continual neglect of duties or serious incapacitation on behalf of the apprentice to the extent that it has become impossible for the employer to continue to teach the apprentice (subject always to following a fair dismissal procedure); and where the agreement is terminated by mutual agreement. Where both parties genuinely agree that the contract can come to an end, this is an acceptable termination.

Terminating Employment at the Expiry of the Apprenticeship

The expiry of any fixed-term employment contract constitutes a dismissal and as such employers need to have both a fair reason and follow a fair procedure in doing so if they are to minimise the risk of resultant claims. In many instances this will be "some other substantial reason", and the employer will be able to say that the apprenticeship was a one-off agreement and there is no need for it to be renewed once it has been completed and a qualification obtained. At the end of the fixed term, the apprentice will not be deemed redundant if they do not get a new contract and, therefore, they are not entitled to redundancy pay.

Training Fee Agreements

Training fee agreements are not uncommon for apprentices, however, employers need to be mindful of how the apprenticeship has been funded. If the co-funded levy has been utilised, an apprentice cannot be required to contribute towards this on termination or otherwise including as part of any training fee agreement.

Summary

While apprentices are employed to learn, they also have rights. Their position is not sacrosanct but good advice is necessary if they are to be dismissed.

Difficult employees



Sara Hey, vice president of operations and development at Bob Clements Inc, the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers U.S. dealers with Service Dealer's UK readership every issue

THIS ISSUE: How to deal with a problem member of staff



One of the greatest headaches of any owner or manager is a difficult employee. A difficult employee can take something you love and turn it into something you dread and cause a negative impact on your other employees and customers. So why do you have difficult employees and what can you do about it?

The problem has not been addressed

As we work through the issues owners and managers have with difficult employees, we find that many times the problem isn't addressed until it becomes unbearable.

When an issue arises, one of the things you should do and say is this, "Walk with me". Take a walk and talk to the employee about the issue. Many times, the employee is not trying to make everyone else's lives terrible; they may not understand what is expected of them.

One issue that we see often in dealerships is a chronically late employee. Often, it starts out with the employee being just a few minutes late, and in other cases we have seen where the issue of being on time has become so lax that employees feel free to come and go as they please. The owner and managers become frustrated and ask why the employees don't care. The truth is, whatever you don't address, you allow.

Now, I'm not saying that you need to micromanage your people. But, if timeliness is important to you, you need to address it as soon as it starts happening. No one benefits from you avoiding the conflict.

You aren't utilising performance reviews

We are big believers in utilising performance reviews. Whenever we (here at BCI) or the dealers we work with complete performance reviews, we always see a benefit to investing the time and effort.

For example, often the employees that you are having the most problems with may not know what is expected of them. By conducting a performance review gives you an opportunity to clarify expectations.

Take time to do performance reviews on all of your employees at least once a year, but ideally twice a year. Before you conduct the performance review, ask the employee to complete the review on themselves as well. This will allow you to see anywhere there is confusion and provide good discussion points. In addition, it will also lower the employee's apprehension since they know what they are being reviewed on.

If there is an issue that comes up, don't wait until the next performance review to check on the progress of it. Come up with a plan that allows you to follow up until the problem is resolved or the person is no longer part of your team.

Stick to your employee handbook

Another reason that so many owners and managers struggle with difficult employees is that they don't follow what they have outlined in their employee handbook. Your employee handbook is simply your HR process. Just like any other process in your dealership, if you don't follow it, you must become a firefighter instead of a manager or coach.

Following the processes that are outlined in your employee handbook will not only let your employees know what is expected of them, without having to come ask you every time, but can also protect you from legal issues down the road.

To show, or not to show?

With circumstances conspiring to cause multiple problems, *Anthony Deacon* of MKM Agriculture considers whether to continue with shows



Where do I start? I feel like I've been chasing my tail all summer and I've got the world against me.

No rain = no grass. Attend a show = stolen ATVs. Ecological barrier = no planning permission. And I know back in January I promised not to mention the shortage of stock, but come on suppliers, let's sort this out!

It's not been the best season for mower sales so I guess, like most of you, we are sitting on more stock than we would like, but on a positive note, the way the price increases are going, the stock we have should make a good margin when it does sell, providing us dealers hold our nerve and don't give it away.

You may have read about our misfortune at the Royal Norfolk Show at the end of June, where at 2am on the morning of the second day of the two-day show, we had two brand new (in short supply) ATVs stolen from our stand under the watchful eye of a professional security firm – supposedly guarding every gate with a roving K9 patrol throughout the show ground. Whether the security firm did their job properly or not, do we really need situations like this? Isn't the job hard enough as it is?

So, 'to show, or not to show?' We went to the Royal Norfolk contemplating whether or not to continue with our three two-day shows or not, and after the first day we felt positive having made some sales and gained some strong leads. However, after arriving at the show at 7am the following morning to find we had been burgled, I'm afraid that was the icing on the cake for us and the show unit has already been sold. I feel the shows are not what they used to be. It's a great opportunity to meet with existing customers, and wine and dine them, but if you want to

attract new business I feel the money is better spent elsewhere. Therefore we will have a different marketing plan for 2023.

Unfortunately, we still have not had our planning application approved for the new dealership building. The holdup we are currently working on is providing the ecological reports needed by the planners to satisfy them that we are taking appropriate action to protect the great crested newts. So I'm afraid to say we are at a bit of a standstill right now.

We are, however, progressing very well with our team. We are now 19 strong and full of talented young (and older) staff who come to work with a smile and go home with a smile – well, most of the time anyway! The two new apprentices have settled in well and they are looking forward to starting their apprenticeship program in the next few weeks. One position we are trying to fill is a 'robotic lawnmower specialist' – now where do you pick one of those up from, and how do you advertise the position?

We have tried all sorts, but with no luck so far. We will need to do something different soon to attract the right individual otherwise I fear we could be left behind in this fast-evolving robotic world we live in.

My concentration now as we move into the autumn is to stabilise our stock levels. Ultimately this means reducing certain ranges as we all move into the winter with concerns of high fuel and utility costs and what it may do to our economy. At the same time, we need to commit to the correct stock to keep the sales drive at a level required to generate enough profit. We are not out of the woods just yet; in fact, I think we have only just arrived.



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DOMESTIC

Toro to keep consumers connected in the garden

Launch of new robotic mower

Toro is launching a new robotic mower to the residential garden care market that they say represents the latest in smart, connected technology for homeowners.

The new unit, available to consumers in selected European markets in the first half of next year, features a vision-based localisation system and wire-free navigation. The company says the setup is easy and tailored to each garden without a boundary wire installation. This proprietary vision system uses multiple cameras to map and localise in the garden, allowing the mower to navigate tight spaces and move around structures such as trees and landscaping. It is also capable of crossing surfaces, such as driveways and sidewalks, to maintain all areas of the property.

Another feature is the dedicated smartphone app that allows users to customise their mowing schedule. The

app can also recommend an ideal mowing schedule based on weather forecasts and patterns. In addition, the mower has third-party safety certification, theft-proof features, slope-friendly cutting abilities, and quiet functionality.

The mower also features the patented Smart Zones pattern mowing system that can be controlled through custom settings in the app. Through this system, the mower will automatically keep the lawn at a consistent, owner-selected height by cutting the smallest amount of grass each day for optimal lawn health.

Toro says it expects this robotic mowing category to grow significantly in the next 10 years in Europe as the technology develops to deliver accuracy and efficiency.

The new autonomous mower will be available in red or charcoal grey.



5 SECOND INFO

- Wire-free navigation
- Dedicated smartphone app

DOMESTIC

Ergonomics improved

On new 40cm chainsaw say EGO



EGO Power Plus has launched a new 40cm chainsaw. Described by the company as featuring improved ergonomics and a combination of high torque and chain speed, users can deal with medium-sized logs up to 40cm in width.

With a well-balanced design, and weighing 4.1kg without the battery, EGO says the addition of automatic chain lubrication with a 150ml oil reservoir makes for worry-less work. For safety purposes, the oil filler cap can be opened

and closed without the need for tools. The chain tensioner has also been improved and streamlined to make flush felling cuts possible, whilst automatic chain tensioning maintains the correct tension during use for easy set-up.

Vince Brauns, group product manager, said, "Equipped with any of our 56V ARC Lithium batteries, the chainsaw can deliver petrol-matching power, long run times, and fast and clean cutting from a single charge."

COMMERCIAL

Symmetrical sprayer to suit users

Straps can be switched between sides on PSP unit

The Professional Sprayers People (PSP) have added to their range of backpack sprayers with the Guarany 16L Symmetrical Backpack Sprayer.

The 16L's symmetrical design means the straps can be switched between sides to suit the user. The backpack comes with a three-year commercial-use warranty as standard.

As with all of Guarany's equipment, the 16L can be used with a range of accessories – including vertical and horizontal booms, flow rate regulators, a dosing valve and various discharge sets and lances.

PSP business director, Malcolm Mullender, said, "We are constantly monitoring our offering to dealers and know that a medium-sized sprayer is popular among their customers. We believe the 16L is the best in its class and will fill this gap."



AGRICULTURAL

Carrier on with Vaderstad

Adds to portfolio of disc cultivators



Vaderstad has added Carrier XT to its portfolio of disc cultivators, used for high-speed primary tillage and seedbed preparation.

The company says hydraulically rotating disc axles help to increase the disc angle towards the soil, so penetrability is maximised. This allows a full cut-out at a shallower working depth or reduced soil flow at deeper working depths. Both factors contribute to lower diesel consumption.

The unit can either be fitted with the 450mm disc, 470mm TrueCut disc or the ultra-shallow CrossCutter Disc. Each disc is built from Swedish V-55 steel, for high wear resistance and long-lasting field performance.

The Carrier XT is available in three different working widths: 4.25m, 5.25m or 6.25m and can either be delivered as trailed or mounted versions. All models can be equipped with a range of both single and double packer options.

The new product had its official premiere at the German field exhibition DLG Field Days in June. It will be available to order from October 2022.

AGRICULTURAL



Spaldings FlatLift subsoiler

Flat-Lift off for Spaldings

V shape places tines in optimum position for soil loosening

An all-new design for the Spaldings FlatLift subsoiler has been unveiled to cater for higher horsepower tractors.

The new design incorporates a strong box-section frame to cope with the rigours of operating on powerful tractors in heavy soils, and its 'V' shape places the tines in the optimum position for soil loosening across the entire width but with low draft forces and good trash flow.

Steve Constable, Spaldings managing director, said, "The original FlatLift started the trend towards shallower, targeted subsoiling that restructures compacted soils with minimal impact at the surface. The new FlatLift V Range implements maintain that core purpose and ability but are much stronger to match today's more powerful tractors and offer auto reset leg protection."

Key features from the original FlatLift design are retained, such as the slim legs with replaceable shins, and the prominent point and broad wings.

The wings are set back from the point and at a shallow angle so that these two components work together to create a progressive lifting and aggregate restructuring

action with the least possible effort and without excessive heave or soil 'boiling' at the surface.

"Maximum working depth is 500mm, the emphasis being on the ability to work at shallow depths just beyond any layers of compaction caused by field traffic during cultivations, ploughing, harvesting, and so on, or at greater depths if necessary," explains Steve Constable.

"Restructuring compromised soils in this way helps maintain effective drainage, encourages rapid infiltration of water after heavy rain, and enables deep-rooting crops – such as oilseed rape – to put down strong, healthy root systems."

In addition to the standard soil-engaging fitments, the new V Range subsoilers can be upgraded with tungsten-protected and Spaldings' own SPLUltra high-performance wearing parts.

Standard equipment includes multi-shot shear pin leg protection, but a hydraulic auto-reset system is also available for work in more challenging conditions; and this system has the added ability to lift the legs for increased clearance during transport.

COMMERCIAL

Ikon-ic range expands

Now available with Ariens' 764cc engine

Ariens is adding to its Ikon XD range of zero-turn mowers with two new models; the Ikon XD 42 and Ikon 52, both featuring the new 764cc twin cylinder Ariens engine.

The company says this new engine has an enhanced combustion chamber that burns fuel mixture quicker, resulting in greater



combustion efficiency. Couple this with its carburettor and the finely tuned fuel spray it produces, and Ariens says the engine is one of the most fuel-efficient available today – but with no impact on power.

The Ikon XD 42 engine is rated at 15.5kW of power @2800RPM whilst the Ikon 52 engine is rated at 16.6kW of power @3000RPM. Both models also have over 50Nm of torque for cutting performance. The engine is also said to be easy to maintain due to toolless access to the air filter and oil drain.

The mower's zero-turn capability means it can turn in its own footprint. This is achieved through its ability to drive and steer from the back wheels via two independent transmissions. Additionally, it also benefits from a fully fabricated commercial style deck with advanced airflow and range of cutting sizes.

DOMESTIC

Fully button-operated mowers launch

Stiga's Tornado and Estate

Stiga is launching what it says are the first fully button-operated machines that boast the largest mowing area on a single charge for battery power.

The Series 7 machines are smartphone compatible with a one-pedal drive system. The company's two machines in the range have been engineered in Italy to meet the needs of garden owners with very large lawns. They both offer run times of 110 minutes on a single battery charge.

There are two models in the 7 Series: The Tornado, a side-discharge machine that cuts up to 7,500 square metres, and the Estate, which offers a collection facility that will cut areas up to 7,000 square metres, both on a single charge.

The new models are fully electric. Using the dashboard, the full range of functions can be managed directly from the driver's seat with the touch of a button. All operations can be carried out from here, from starting up the machine, adjusting the blades' speed and cutting height, to emptying the collection bag.

Stiga electric tractors are equipped with a Bluetooth module that connects the machine's electronic 'brain' – the



Stiga Vehicle Management System – to a smartphone, creating a seamless connection to the STIGA.GO App. This allows the user's phone to work as a virtual dashboard, illustrating all key information whilst cutting the lawn.

Two motors power the patented blades. Additionally, users can enjoy a pleasant ride, due to a comfortable seating design, coupled with electric battery technology, generating less vibration, noise and no fumes. The company says the machine's cutting deck, blade positioning and orientation improves the cut's uniformity, whilst its central tunnel design boosts collecting performance and helps prevent blockages in the chute.

The collection bag has been created with a wedge-shape allowing it to fill to capacity and facilitate efficient emptying operations.

COMMERCIAL

Lithium-Ion battery tech added to golf car range

By Yamaha

Yamaha Motor Europe N.V Branch UK has introduced Lithium-Ion battery technology into its golf car range with the introduction of the new Drive² AC Li.

The new Lithium-Ion battery is a cobalt-free unit from manufacturer Roypow, and according to Yamaha, offers several key benefits. Linked to a 3.3 kW motor, it provides fast, smooth acceleration and, with greater torque than a conventional lead acid battery, it's 20 percent faster climbing a 15-degree incline.

The company also says they charge almost twice as quickly as their lead-acid equivalents and provide in excess of three rounds before they require recharging.

The new Drive² AC Li has fully independent front suspension, optimised to compliment the lightweight battery pack. The rear suspension has been redesigned, and offers increased comfort for the golfer.

The vehicle can utilise YamaTrack, Yamaha's management



Yamaha Drive2 AC Li

system, that improves the operational efficiency of any golf car fleet. A 25cm (10") screen, mounted on the dashboard, allows golfers to enjoy 3D terrain graphics and customisable pro tips. Geo zones can be set up to protect environmentally sensitive areas and players can pre-order food and beverages while out on the course.

The system also has a lockdown feature for improving overnight security; it allows the monitoring of battery condition to improve fleet rotation and can send maintenance alerts from the car to the pro shop.

COMMERCIAL



Etesia ET Lander

Following the launch of the ET Lander electric utility vehicle from Etesia UK in 2021, the company has announced the launch of the next phase of production, including becoming fully N1 homologation compliant.

Coming off the production line in Wissembourg, France, from June 2022, with the first sold machines having arrived in the UK during July 2022, the new models are fully N1 homologation compliant, meaning that the ET Lander is fully road legal along with being able to be used off road.

The new models feature Lithium-Ion batteries, meaning that the range extends to 100km and utilises a charger system compatible with a standard type 2EV car charger.

The vehicle is built on a robust chassis and has an array of

Next phase of Lander production

Etesia announces details

options, including a three-way tipper bed with dual control from the fully fitted two-seater cab or by remote control when outside the vehicle.

With a length of 3.72 meters and due to the power steering, the unit has a short turning radius of 4.40 meters and 360° visibility. Fitted with a Lithium battery (77.8V 210 Ah producing 10Kw), the company says the autonomy of the vehicle lasts for a full working day.

The ET Lander can transport loads of up to 940kgs and can also tow up to 750kg. It benefits from all-road tires and powerful transmission. It has integrated loading ramps that allow for the transport of materials, ride-on mowers and other grounds maintenance equipment.

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‘What unites us is greater than what divides us’



How will the AEA, BAGMA ‘merger’ shake-down?

Chris Biddle

It is just over a year since the news broke of the coming together of the Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA), representing manufacturers, and the British Agricultural and Garden Machinery Association (BAGMA), the dealers’ ‘trade union’.

Whilst hardly on a par with Transport for London taking over the union representing their employees, you’ll take the point that for many years both associations represented opposite sides of the industry fence.

Furthermore, it wasn’t a merger – AEA bought BAGMA.

You can interpret that anyway you like, but it means that the manufacturers association now owns the dealer association. You might have expected an outcry from BAGMA members – and certainly AEA were braced for that.

But as Ruth Bailey told me in an episode of my *Inside Agri-Turf* podcast, “There has been hardly any adverse reaction from members of either association.”

Despite rumblings about issues such as direct supply, price controls and so on, the core membership of AEA needs dealers – and dealers need suppliers with whom they can build a profitable business.

And that business will be based on service – in all its connotations. The oft-adapted phrase, used originally by John F Kennedy in 1961, “What unites us is far greater than what divides us”, is the rationale behind the coming together of AEA and BAGMA.

Long-term?

We are in a different era today in so many ways – and let me put that into some personal context.

As a dealer, I was on BAGMA committees during the 1970/80s – and was elected vice president. I also chaired the grandiose-sounding Long Term Planning Committee charged with looking at the future role for the association in the light of regular adverse feedback about the value of membership.

It was criticised for being too centralised around HQ, too remote, and not reflective of the general run of members.

Our solution was to directly involve more of the membership by setting up eight (yes, eight) BAGMA regional committees, stretching from Inverness to Taunton, which could act as ‘think tanks’ regularly feeding views and suggestions back to HQ.

That proposal was put to the BAGMA Council at a special meeting at a swish hotel in London in September 1983 – and was generally accepted as the way forward.

Labelling something as Long Term is fraught with dangers, for you never know what is around the corner. You can bet that most long-term planning forecasts done in 2019 would have been knocked out of the park a few months later when Covid struck.

In 1983, it was just three or four years before Sir Tim Berners-Lee brought us the internet. A phenomenon that has totally transformed the way we communicate, the way we conduct business and has resulted in total change across society.

Those ideas about more meetings involving more people soon became totally redundant for several reasons. Compared with current economic conditions (*bank interest rates have risen to 1.75% as I write*), trading conditions were volatile in the 1980s. Interest rates reached 11.4% in 1985 and rose to 14.8% in 1989!

Companies were looking closely at their staffing levels, so the idea of sending more people to more meetings was not on.

As vice president, I was due to take on the BAGMA presidency, but the co-directors in my dealership were of the opinion that it would take up too much time. I agreed. They were right. The company had to come first. It is a situation that has become more acute over the years – and something that associations such as BAGMA have had to contend with.

What next?

When I recorded the podcast interview with Ruth Bailey, it was exactly a year since AEA took over BAGMA. It is clear that a heck of a lot of nitty-gritty detail has had to be dealt with and agreed. The bringing together of two associations, both with a long heritage, will have been time-consuming and complex.

Ruth was understandably still guarded in her remarks about the future for the joint association. Will they remain separate entities? Will there be a single membership fee? Will all benefits agreed be available to all AEA/BAGMA members? What will the future structure be? Obviously more questions than answers.

We are a small industry. Our identity isn’t clear to outsiders, and we need to speak with an industry voice, not with sectional interests.

To me, it seems the ideal opportunity to rebrand our industry body with an identity that says who it is and what it is - in a clear and unambiguous manner.

Given the diversity of our sector, that’s easier said than done!

What’s on?

Status of the events correct at the time of going to press, but we advise confirming with organisers’ websites and social media channels.

SEPTEMBER 2022

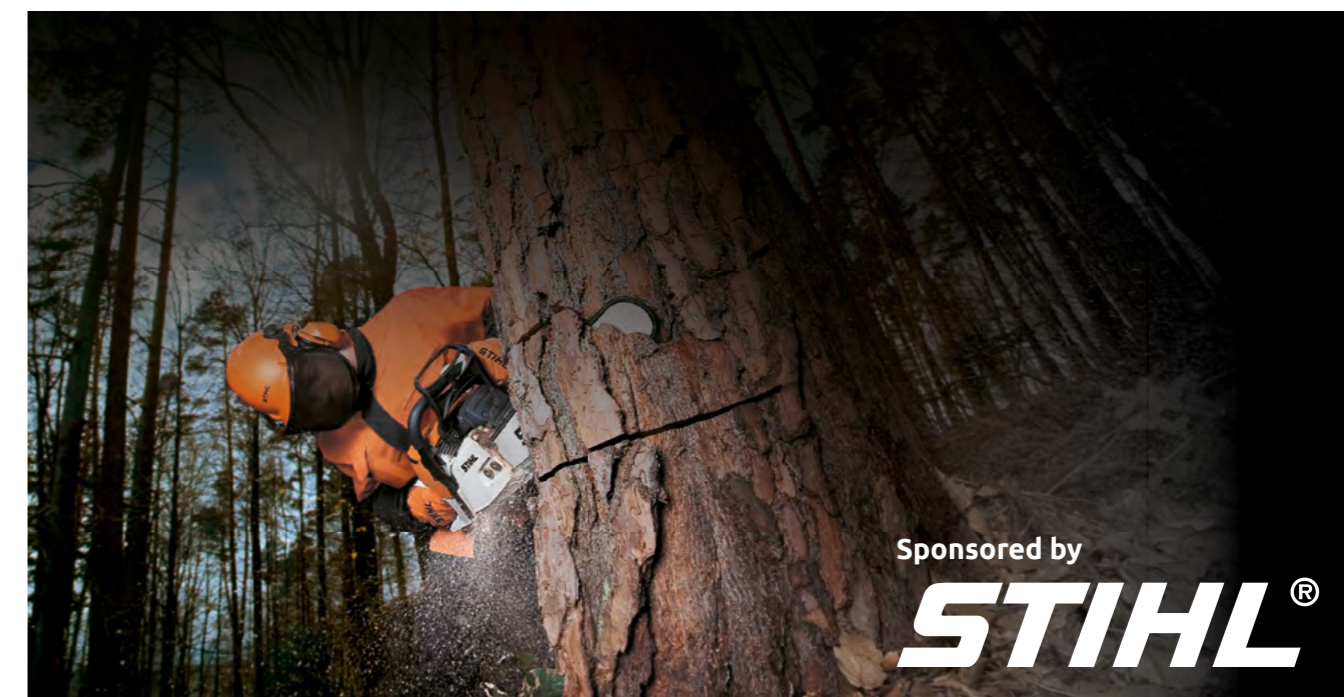
Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC www.autumnfair.com	4-7
Romsey Show www.romseyshow.co.uk	10
Salon du Végétal, Angers, France www.salonduvegetal.com/pro/en/	13-14
APF Exhibition 2022, Ragley Estate www.apfexhibition.co.uk	22-24
Tillage Live, Dunbar, East Lothian www.tillage-live.com	28
Landscape Show, NEC www.landscapeshow.co.uk	28-29

OCTOBER 2022

The Dairy Show, Bath & West Showground www.bathandwest.com/the-dairy-show	5
Equip Exhibition, Louisville, USA www.equipexposition.com	19-21

NOVEMBER 2022

GMA Saltex 2022, Birmingham NEC www.gmasaltex.co.uk	2-3
Newark Vintage Tractor & Heritage Show, Newark Showground www.newarkvintagetractorshow.com	5-6
SIMA, Paris Nord Villepinte, France www.en.simaonline.com	6-10
EIMA International, Bologna www.eima.it/en	9-13
AgriScot 2022, The Royal Highland Centre www.agriscot.co.uk	16
Midlands Machinery Show www.midlandsmachineryshow.com	16-17
CropTec 2022, East of England Showground www.croptecshow.com	23-24
Service Dealer Conference & Awards www.servicedealer.co.uk	24
Royal Welsh Winter Fair www.rwas.wales/winter-fair	28-29



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Dealers can help us all keep cool

Artificial claims

Phew, what a scorcher! I'm having to hand this issue's scriblings in during that crazy heatwave we all experienced in July when the mercury topped 40 degrees!

Grumpy old geezers such as me are not built to withstand such extremes. I'm much happier when I can sit in the shade of a big tree, with a cheeky glass of something in hand, happily watching the grass grow. As I write this, though, I'm hidden in the basement, with all the curtains and windows closed, frozen towels adorning every inch of my boiling person!

However, despite my suffering, I feel our industry can gain some capital out of what will unfortunately become an ever more frequently occurring situation. Considering the public's overwhelming discomfort with the bonkers temperatures, the benefits of naturally grassed areas – and the accompanying tools used to maintain those surfaces – should be shouted about as an integral part of the solution to cooling our urban areas.

Grass, of course, has a natural ability to lower ambient temperatures, and offers a sanctuary where humans, pets and wildlife can escape the heat-trapping properties of manmade surfaces including – spit! – artificial grass!

Those bright green carpets have thankfully been on the receiving end of a fair amount of bad press lately. Firstly, if you want a laugh, may I recommend the Twitter account @shitlawns – which, at the time of going to press, had 33,000 followers, and rising. They describe themselves as dedicated to “Showcasing the hideous trend of plastic lawns. Cutting through greenwash & exposing examples of garden habitats being replaced by sterile and lifeless Astroturf.”

The state of some of the gardens they highlight would be hilarious if it wasn't so tragic. At least it illustrates, I suppose, the number of potential new customers our loyal dealer readers could target, if the message of how harmful these artificial monstrosities are succeeds in cutting through.

I first heard about the account through a high-profile article in *The Guardian* entitled ‘Why fake grass is far from green in ways you might not guess’. This piece followed on from an even more serious blow for the carpet-makers, when the Advertising Standards Authority upheld complaints in June against adverts claiming artificial grass produced by Evergreens UK Ltd was eco-friendly. The ASA judged that boasts made in three advertisements were

“unsubstantiated and misleading”.

This story gained a lot of attention across the mainstream press when a serious reprimand was issued over the untruths that plastic grass is “eco-friendly” and “purifies” the atmosphere. In their ruling, the ASA said, “The ads must not appear again in the form complained of. We told Evergreens UK Ltd to ensure their advertising did not overstate the environmental benefits and air-purifying qualities of their products.”

This couldn't be a starker illustration of corporate greenwashing. Hopefully homeowners saw through the BS and paid heed that there's only one option to consider if they desire an environmentally friendly lawn – and it doesn't roll off a factory production line!



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