

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

September/October 2023

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



OLIVERS CELEBRATES ITS SECOND CENTURY

How the dealership has grown into a twin-business concern with interests in agriculture, turfcare and more

HELPING DEALERS GROW THEIR OWN TALENT

One manufacturer tells us about their vision

GROUNDSWELL EVENT

In the zone where everyone wants to be

CEREALS 2023

Cautious optimism as exhibitors return



WORKING AS A TEAM IS KEY TO OUR SUCCESS

Discussing sales, margin, recruiting and why staying local works best for Express Mowers

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Letter from the editor
Steve Gibbs

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Welcome to the September/October 2023 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

There has been one topic that has dominated the dealer discourse these past couple of months, and that's the demise of F.R. Jones - and the subsequent fallout.

We recap the situation in our news pages overleaf, but, by now, many industry members will have had their say in various online forums, and conclusions will have been reached regarding who was principally at fault - and where the industry goes from here. It doesn't seem like an overstatement to conclude that feelings are running high. I have certainly picked up on plenty of anger and resentment emanating from the dealer community - towards both F.R. Jones themselves certain manufacturers who supplied them.

Something doesn't seem right when dealers are phoning me, saying that, in the weeks before the company went bust, they were able to buy machinery from F.R. Jones' website, cheaper than what their actual supplying manufacturers could provide them with. Purchases were made, I've been told, with nothing

supplied - meaning other dealers were left out of pocket to the tune of hundreds or thousands of pounds. Questions are now naturally being asked about when F.R. Jones and their suppliers knew that they were going out of business.

It is most certainly an unifying situation for the industry to be mired in. Justin Jones is telling us he's faced threats and online attacks, whilst other dealers are telling us they feel duped, and that the business practises that F.R. Jones specialised in has contributed to a 'race to the bottom' culture amongst some online retailers.

Hopefully, this whole sorry mess will indeed act as a 'wake-up call,' and lead to real change. I know many readers will be cynical that such a change is possible whilst bandits are making a living with their rock-bottom discounting. However, as there is now tangible evidence that the 'pile it high, offload it cheap' practice can lead to spectacular failure - no matter the size of the retailer - might change be forthcoming? The F.R. Jones saga can now be classed as a case study that the industry can reference. Surely it would be prudent for all to do so?

THE TEAM

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DEALERS

F.R. Jones in administration

Well-known dealer ceases trading

F.R. Jones & Son Limited, one of the most well-known names in the UK dealer sector, has ceased trading and is in administration.

The Kent-based dealership, which specialised in gardening and arboricultural products, had been operating since 1963, and was one of the largest dealerships in the UK.

However, on June 26, 2023, Arvindar Singh and Ben Jones, of FRP Advisory Trading Limited, were appointed as Joint Administrators.

A statement on F.R. Jones' now-defunct website read: "The Company has now ceased to trade, and it will no longer be possible to fulfil any outstanding orders."

It continued: "The affairs, business and property of the Company are being managed by the Administrators and who act as agents of the Company without personal liability.

"Insolvency Practitioners are bound by the Insolvency Code of Ethics when carrying out all professional work relating to an insolvency appointment."

STIHL, who were a major trading partner of F.R. Jones, were approached for comment by Service Dealer. Simon Hewitt, head of marketing at STIHL Great Britain, told us: "STIHL GB was saddened to learn that F.R. Jones recently went into administration. We have worked with the business for many years, and its demise is devastating for the employees affected.

"Fortunately, there are many excellent approved dealers in the South East of England to support STIHL customers. It's our hope that F.R. Jones' former employees will be able to find alternative roles within the dealer network, too."

As well as having a major online presence, F.R. Jones had recently expanded, opening a new warehouse and service centre in Redditch.

They were also due to organise a retail area described as "the largest ever seen at a groundscare event" at the inaugural GroundsFest this September, where they had promised "some incredible discounts."



Personal threats and online attacks

Justin Jones, ex-managing director of F.R. Jones, issues a statement to *Service Dealer*

After F.R. Jones entered administration, Justin Jones, ex-managing director, issued a statement to Service Dealer. Justin told us:

"For me, personally, this has been the hardest time of my life, and has made me quite ill: seeing a 65-plus year-old business fold, that was successful up until 2019.

"I've been overwhelmed with the support from some manufacturers and customers who have reached out to me personally. On the other hand, I've also had personal threats and online attacks that are unnecessary and quite frightening when you know your address is in the public domain, and have a young daughter living at home.

"Most of our suppliers had good RoT, and have had the opportunity to collect their goods. I'm sure there are lots of rumours regarding the amounts at play, but they are just that - rumours and exaggerations. STIHL was nowhere near the quoted £1.6 million, for example. All customers with outstanding orders were contacted by the Administrators and advised to

claim back from their payment providers, so none should lose anything. All the people with machines in for service were also contacted, and given two weeks to collect their items.

"I've been trying to look after the staff and help them get jobs elsewhere. Most of these guys were, and still are, personal friends that have been with us for up to 25 years. I put them before myself, my wife and my boy, who were also made redundant along with the rest of the staff on June 30. I've been successful in placing people with AL-KO, Genpower, Arbortec, Godfreys, Ron Smith and ATS, to name a few, and two have already started their own local service company.

"The race to the bottom on pricing will have been a big part of losing money, and our demise, but also the effects of the supply chain issues from 2022, over-investment on the back of some very unusual trading years during Covid, and manufacturers going direct to consumers. I realise that I am the face and name of the company, but the reality is that, since 2017, I was only a 10% shareholder, and then had CEOs brought in above me who had no experience of our industry and would not listen to my advice. They were only interested in shifting boxes and showboating about large online turnovers, at the expense of our trade customer service.

"I really hope that this is a wake-up call for the industry, and some big lessons are learnt. The stock loading that the big two insist you take is the cause of the discounting - when you look round a warehouse with millions of pounds of stock on the shelves and the bills need paying, people go into panic mode and start discounting. It only takes one dealer with a cashflow problem, and, then, everyone holding large stocks must join in.

"I love this industry; I started back 1989, and it kills me to see us disappear. I really hope I can stay in the industry, and advise anyone that gets an offer from a big PE company to beware and think it through."

Lessons must be learned

Comment by *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS



There must now be significant question marks raised over how one of the highest profile outdoor powered machinery dealerships in the UK was controlled, which led to it failing so spectacularly mid-season. Lessons must be learned for this to not to happen to another business.

I have spoken to some leading dealers, who highlighted some important issues that need to be considered.

Principally, it's this question of margin. The business model seemed to be based on volume, not profit. Which, as any businessperson will attest to, is simply unsustainable in the long term. As it was put to me: "It's a suicidal game."

The wider industry problem that this 'pile it high, sell it cheap online' model creates, of course, is a false sense of value of what this machinery is worth in the minds of customers.

I've heard accounts many times of dealers experiencing customers coming into their stores with highly unrealistic cost expectations – based on what they had seen on F.R. Jones' website. Being asked to price match on something which appeared to have rock-bottom (if any) margin makes no business sense to any carefully-managed dealership.

I've had opinions expressed to me that this event might need to be a wake-up call for manufacturers. Discussions may be required regarding how every dealer operates their business. Selling great volume extremely cheaply can't be doing either side any favours. It devalues what should be seen as a quality, high-end purchase.

I was also told that manufacturers might need to rethink their policies on inventory. Rather than pushing product on to dealerships, stock levels should be led by dealers themselves. Stock being dumped onto dealers isn't helpful. It needs to be the dealers who do the pulling. Having these pressures of shifting great mountains of stock could have been another factor that led to the downfall.

Quality dealers understand and accept that online retail is a way of life. However, what seems clear is it does not help anyone if those sites are giveaway, bargain-bucket outlets. They should act to draw customers into a business where, once there, they receive premium customer service, for a premium product at a premium price. This, surely, is the model that benefits dealers and suppliers alike?

As a dealer said to me: "The specialist dealer will always win on profit and on customer retention - which is key to any business."



F.R. Jones premises

DEALERS

GGM expands into ag sector

Increases their Kubota portfolio

Kubota (UK) Ltd has announced that GGM is to widen its Kubota portfolio as it expands into the agricultural sector, with higher-horsepower M-series tractors and R0 loaders, to sit alongside its existing groundcare business.

The extended product range is described by the manufacturer as a logical step for the dealership, as it looks to broaden its customer base with a full range of Kubota tractors suited to the agricultural sector. The additional models will include M6001 Utility, M6002 and M7003 models spanning 104-175hp, plus corresponding LK tractor-loader models and R0 pivot steer loaders.

“GGM’s expansion into agriculture continues to reinforce Kubota’s commitment to its customers and the markets,” explained Henry Bredin, general manager of Kubota (UK)’s Tractor Business Unit. “GGM already has considerable M-series tractor experience, having delivered on sales, service and support with smaller M4003 and M5002 models to a broad spectrum of customers and industries.”

GGM has a long-standing business relationship with Kubota, which spans more than 45 years. Based in Colne, Lancashire, with a second depot at Haydock, Merseyside,



Chris, Hilary and Thomas Gibson of GGM

GGM will be accessible to agricultural customers throughout Merseyside, parts of Lancashire and West Yorkshire.

Managing director Chris Gibson said: “This is an exciting new chapter for our business. Many of our staff already have experience and knowledge of the smaller M-series tractors, and we’re in the process of increasing our sales, service and engineering teams to support new and existing customers with Kubota’s higher horsepower tractors and implements, as we extend into the agricultural sector.”

Chris continued: “We already have a strong and competent team that is capable of delivering first class customer service and support, with professional groundcare machinery. And we’re confident of replicating that same level of support across the farming sector.”

DEALERS



GreenMech’s dealer realignment completed

Final wave of changes for 2023

In the final wave of their 2023 dealer realignment, GreenMech have announced the appointment of 1st Base Plant & Machinery as a full sales, service and parts partner for Lancashire and Greater Manchester.

In addition, Cutting Edge Machinery have joined the network to provide service support to customers in Worcestershire and the West Midlands, while Hunts Engineering will be extending their service dealer coverage to customers across Oxfordshire and Warwickshire.

Specialising in new and used plant machinery, GreenMech say 1st Base of

Warrington have built a reputation for providing quality product and the right advice and support to their varied customer-base. As approved dealers of Avant Wheeled Loaders and Messers Construction equipment, the dealership says they are well placed to reach customers across the groundworks and industrial sectors with access to the full GreenMech pedestrian, road-tow and tracked woodchipper range.

Cutting Edge Machinery’s team of engineers, meanwhile, will now offer servicing, repairs, parts and fault-finding in Worcestershire and the West

Midlands. From their workshop near Redditch, the team say they have built up more than 25 years of experience working with domestic and commercial garden, arb and groundcare brands.

Finally, and extending their current service dealer territory, is Hunts Engineering, who will be serving customers across Warwickshire in addition to those in Oxfordshire. A well-known name, with over nine decades of combined experience within the team of trained technicians, Hunts say they also offer a fleet of dedicated service vehicles.

INDUSTRY

EGO teams up with John Deere in the States

Service Dealer hears what it means for the UK

Chervon, the parent company of EGO, has announced a strategic agreement with John Deere.

The deal will allow the brands to provide users with EGO’s complete range of battery-powered mowers, blowers, trimmers, edgers, chainsaws and snow blowers at John Deere dealers in the United States and Canada starting in the autumn of 2023.

Service Dealer reached out to EGO Europe to ask what the arrangement will mean for dealers in the UK.

Peter Melrose, managing director at EGO Europe, told us: “Making EGO available to even more people is great news for our colleagues in North America and Canada. In Europe, we continue to be fully committed to our distributors and the servicing dealer network, and this remains unchanged by the agreement.”

Mike Clancy, CEO at Chervon North America, meanwhile said: “We are thrilled to join forces with John Deere to bring our best-in-class battery platform to even more customers.

This partnership represents a significant milestone in our commitment to revolutionise the outdoor power equipment industry, and provide sustainable solutions without compromise to consumers all across North America.”



INDUSTRY



Maruyama finds new UK distribution

Danarm take over from FGM

Danarm Machinery have taken over the UK distribution of Maruyama-brand brushcutters from FGM Claymore.

The managing director of Danarm, Karen Blanch, said: “FGM Claymore have had great success with the Maruyama brand, and Danarm are excited to continue to build on this.”

FGM Claymore MD Paul Butterly told Service Dealer: “While we only represented Maruyama for a short period, it was a great product range, but, with our commitments to Echo, it was never going to work long-term. We are delighted that Maruyama have a new distributor, and wish Danarm well. We are also delighted that all our loyal customers will have continuity for after-market customer care.”

Karen Blanch continued: “Being high-quality Japanese brushcutters, Danarm are confident that these

products will sit well alongside our existing ranges of professional machines.”

Initially, the company say they have stock of the MX22E brushcutters, the MX27E in both loop and cowhorn versions, and the higher-powered MX36EH with cowhorn handles. They say they welcome feedback from any existing dealers regarding any of the other Maruyama products that they would like to see stocked in the future.

The company also confirmed they will take over the parts supply for these machines, as well as any after-sale support and parts supply for machines sold previously by FGM Claymore.

Karen added: “Danarm would be pleased to hear from any existing Maruyama dealers that we haven’t yet reached out to, as well as those unfamiliar with the products.”

DEALERS

RVT acquire neighbouring dealer

Teme Valley Tractors taken over



On July 5, 2023, Rea Valley Tractors (RVT) signed heads of terms to acquire neighbouring dealer Teme Valley Tractors (TVT).

TVT has a reputable and long-standing history supporting the New Holland and Kuhn ranges, say RVT, who issued a statement explaining that this acquisition “will combine a wealth of technical knowledge and understanding of the brands to help better-serve the local agricultural community.”

The statement continued: “Customers will benefit from an enhanced offering in the region, with more choice of New Holland and Kuhn equipment available within the larger group. There will also be an expanded product range from a single provider, offering additional brands – such as JCB materials-handling equipment, Bailey Trailers, and domestic groundcare products, like Milwaukee and Stihl, that are all core franchises held by Rea Valley Tractors.”

Both TVT Welshpool and Knighton branches will continue trading from the current locations, and TVT employees from both businesses will transfer to

Rea Valley Tractors at the completion of the deal, targeted to be the end of September. This will include Graham Probert and Martyn Hall, who will continue in key management roles within the business.

Rea Valley Tractors made a number of changes to the business in November last year, including being appointed the New Holland Agriculture dealer over a larger trading area, with three new branches, and the expansion of its JCB territory into Cheshire. The three new branches are located in Middlewich (Cheshire), Ormskirk (Lancashire) and Denbigh (North Wales).

Simon Clarke, chairman of Rea Valley Tractors, said: “The agricultural machinery industry has been through a period of substantial change. RVT has been at the forefront of that. I am delighted to have reached an amicable agreement with Graham and Martyn to acquire TVT. This acquisition will benefit all our stakeholders: customers, staff and suppliers. I look forward to working with Graham, Martyn and the TVT teams over the coming years.”

With this acquisition, Rea Valley Tractors will operate from a total of nine locations, with each branch being a fully functional sales, service and parts operation that can independently serve each local area.

RVT and TVT say they will continue to work as usual, while making the necessary preparations for the future collaboration and integration.

Teme Valley Tractors began in May 1983, before expanding into Welshpool in 1993, with Martyn Hall and Graham Probert managing the Welshpool and Knighton businesses, respectively.

Graham Probert, managing director at TVT Knighton, commented on the acquisition, saying: “We’re welcoming the agreement, as it brings clear opportunities and benefits for both our customers and our respective teams. Both companies have the same shared family values and dedication to understanding and focusing on the customers’ needs, each with a well-established and knowledgeable team, and we look forward to the next chapter with Rea Valley Tractors.”



COBRA

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PEOPLE

T H WHITE make senior appointment

Adrian Pipe now responsible for agriculture, construction, dairy and groundcare



T H WHITE has made a new senior appointment of after sales director, with Adrian Pipe joining the team. He is now responsible for the agriculture, construction, dairy and groundcare businesses (ACDG). The company says Adrian has extensive experience in capital goods across these and the commercial vehicle sector, with specific expertise in aftersales, technical support and customer care. Most of Adrian's career has been served with CNH Industrial, although he previously worked within a dealer environment. Prior to CNH Industrial, Adrian joined Ford New Holland in 1988 as a training instructor and then pursued a long and varied career covering numerous roles in aftersales, product support, quality and manufacturing, with ever-increasing responsibility at the market, regional and global level. Adrian has worked extensively across the world, including assignments in Poland, Belgium, Brazil and Italy, culminating in five years as a senior executive and member of the CNHi Group Executive Council.

Leaving CNH Industrial four years ago, he turned his hobby into a business, building bespoke sportscars and running a high-end car transportation service across the UK. Latterly, Adrian has also been working as a consultant with key global manufacturers in the development of their sales and aftersales business.

Adrian says he looks forward to returning to his roots, and developing T H WHITE's business, working closely internally and with customers to ensure they can continue to provide a customer experience that is second to none.

Adrian Lovegrove, ACDG division director, said: "I'm particularly pleased to have Adrian's skillset and expertise devoted to our business, to develop and grow our parts and service functions for the future, in conjunction with supporting key projects within our ACDG divisions."

INDUSTRY

Husqvarna invests in robotic waste collection

Expands green space automation interests

Husqvarna Group has invested 2.5 million Euros in Angsa Robotics, a Munich-based startup that they describe as "disrupting automated waste collection in green spaces."

The investment by Husqvarna Ventures, the corporate venture capital arm of Husqvarna Group, aims to accelerate the development and commercialisation of Angsa's robotics platform.

Angsa Robotics say they are developing an autonomous solution, providing a cost-efficient, ecologically-friendly and AI-adaptive robot for waste collection in green spaces. With its ability to navigate autonomously, detect obstacles and collect litter, Angsa boast their technology offers another opportunity within green space management.

Mark Johnson, head of Husqvarna Ventures said the company sees significant potential in Angsa's solution. "By investing at an early stage," he said, "Husqvarna can contribute to the development of Angsa's innovative technology, and collaborate around potential future product offerings. This investment aligns perfectly with our strategy to explore new complementary robotics applications and address the evolving needs of commercial green space management."

Lukas Wiesmeier, CEO and co-founder of Angsa Robotics, added: "We are thrilled to have Husqvarna Ventures as our strategic investor. Their deep understanding of the robotics market, combined with their extensive global network, will provide invaluable support in scaling our development and accelerating our go-to-market strategy. We look forward to collaborating with Husqvarna Group to bring our cutting-edge robotics platform to customers worldwide."



Husqvarna waste robot Angsa

DEALERS

New Kramp store opens

Filey venue is the eleventh in the country

The family-run agricultural parts supplier, Independent Agri Parts (IAP), has opened a new Powered by Kramp store in Filey.

It becomes the eleventh Powered by Kramp store to open in the country. The store provides the local agricultural community with spare parts and products from a range of brands.

IAP is an agricultural parts and wheels business, sourcing and selling replacement and wearing parts for all agricultural and plant machinery models and makes. The Durkin family took over, relocated and relaunched the business in April 2022, and have since continued to develop and grow the business. Now supplying Aztec Oils, Exol Oils, LWC agricultural attachments and Marshall Trailers, they have expanded the company with the addition of the Powered by Kramp retail store. The new store will offer locals over 3,000 agricultural parts and



accessories in stock, plus access to the entire online Kramp range.

Steven and Jay run IAP alongside the family farm, with the support of their parents, Paul and Debbie Durkin. Having a lengthy background in agriculture, and currently rearing 4,000 pigs, doing contract work for other local farmers as well as restoring and repairing machinery, the family have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the demands of agriculture.

"We celebrated the store opening with an open day," says Jay. "Since then, we have seen an increase in footfall. It has been a mix of our regular customers and new ones introduced to IAP on the open day. There is not anything like this in the area."

"We chose to partner with Kramp

because of our relationship with our account manager, and the service and support we receive from them. If we ever have issues, there is always someone to talk to. Even if our account manager isn't available, we can call their head office, and, nine times out of ten, we speak to the same person we always do.

Kramp retail consultant John Sumner added: "Our job is to identify businesses with lots of retail potential, and to support them to grow their retail offering. We love getting to know the business owners, and look forward to seeing the IAP shop develop. The team there are incredibly knowledgeable and ambitious. We look forward to continuing to support them in their venture."

DEALERS

Euromec take on Corvus

Add to their machinery lineup

BOSS ORV has announced they have partnered with Euromec Contracts Ltd to retail Corvus Off-Road Vehicles' products in the East Midlands region.

Euromec, which dates back to 1997, has developed as industrial cleaning and groundcare equipment specialists. They offer sales and service of scrubber dryers, floor sweepers, lawnmowers, tractors and utility vehicles. Based in Market Harborough, they are also dealers for Kubota, Honda Power Products, STIGA and Mountfield. The dealership says they have a particular pride in sourcing innovative products, but emphasise they believe in putting the customer first and providing a full range of aftersales services.



L-R: Maria Griffiths, finance director; Graham Hill, sales director; Phil Everett, BOSS ORV MD; Nikki Heighton, director

Phil Everett, MD at BOSS ORV, welcomed the company to the Corvus dealer network, which now comprises forty-three dealers – giving a total of sixty outlets across the UK. Phil said: "I'm looking forward to working with finance director Maria Griffiths, sales director Graham Hill, director Nikki Heighton, Annie Povilionis, and all the Euromec team to grow the Corvus business in the region."

INDUSTRY

AP Air Europe offering free training

City & Guilds qualification

AP Air Europe, the supplier of agricultural air conditioning, have announced they are offering free City & Guilds Air Conditioning Training for third-year apprentices.

The company's managing director, Ian Beswick, said: "We are proud to support the British agricultural sector. After 13 years trading as a supplier to dealerships across the UK, and over 40 years in the industry, we have decided it's time for us to give back to the talented engineers within the sector.

"AP Air Europe recognises the importance of actively encouraging

engineering talent within the industry. With over 40 years' system expertise, we are inviting dealerships' third-year apprentices to study free of charge for City & Guilds qualifications with us at our approved centre in Gloucestershire, or at other locations subject to sufficient candidate numbers."

Ian continues: "Pledging our support to the industry's future, all eligible candidates can enrol on complimentary City & Guilds courses, which consist of theory and practical assessments and take place over two days. This includes refrigerant handling certification."

Offered are:

COURSE 1

Level 3 Award in Basic Mobile Air Conditioning Systems (7543-01)

COURSE 2

Basic Mobile Air Conditioning Principles (7543-02)

Interested parties are asked to email lauren.savage@apairltd.com, and an area sales representative will be in contact.



DEALERS



L-R: Colin Blood, group sales manager, B&B Tractors; Oliver Beekes, sales manager, Grange Machinery Ltd; and James Bowring, managing director, B&B Tractors

B&B take on Grange

Dealership expands their offering

Grange Machinery has extended its dealer network with the appointment of B&B Tractors.

Established in 1991, B&B has four depots covering Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire.

Rhun Jones, Grange Machinery managing director, said: "We are very pleased to have B&B Tractors on-board. We feel the product range we offer will enhance and compliment the current B&B product portfolio perfectly. They are a progressive company, offering high-quality products with a vision of where farming practices are moving to, and

we're looking forward to working with them and growing the brand in their area."

Colin Blood, sales manager at B&B Tractors, added: "We're thrilled to be working with Grange Machinery and feel that the addition of a deep cultivating range will be highly valuable to our offering. As some of our branches are in mixed farming areas, the GLL grassland loosener will be well-received, and we are also looking forward to offering products such as the LDL low-disturbance subsoiler and LDT low-disturbance toolbar to customers moving into regenerative agriculture."

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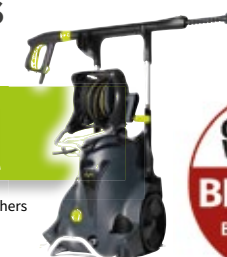
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Service Dealer Conference '23

Thursday November 30 2023

Experienced global brand director to deliver keynote on bringing brands to life

Daryl Fielding will be taking to the stage at this year's *Service Dealer* Conference to help delegates delve deeper into what makes their dealerships tick.



Global brand director, Daryl Fielding

Service Dealer has announced that the keynote address at November's conference will be delivered by Daryl Fielding, a branding expert whose career has included leading global strategies for food brands such as Kraft, Cadbury and Trident. Daryl was also part of the team that famously launched the Dove Real Beauty Campaign – taking the brand to a new and modern audience. The former brand director of Vodafone UK will be sharing how bringing a brand to life, is as much about its people and good leadership as it is about the end product. During her keynote, delegates will discover how to make their brand stand out from the crowd – and how their people can be part of that process.

Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "We are delighted to confirm Daryl Fielding as our keynote this year. Daryl brings a wealth of brand experience at the highest level, with a message relevant to all. She will explain how a brand is now far more than just look, feel and messaging." Taking place on November 30 2023, at the Crowne Plaza in Stratford-upon-Avon, the theme for this year's event is 'Taking Care of Business.'

For up-to-date information regarding the *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards, keep an eye on the *Service Dealer* Weekly Update, published every Friday at midday. To subscribe for free, visit www.servicedealer.co.uk

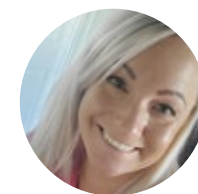


Sustainability, customer experience and mental health awareness take the focus in series of workshops

A series of workshops are also on the agenda at November's event.

Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said: "Our workshops are, as ever, designed to give practical take-outs for the dealer community, covering topics like the sales process, staff well-being and sustainability.

"We always take onboard feedback from delegates every year, and our event program strives to reflect this. This year's program is no different, and we hope our workshops will not only give attendees practical nuggets of information to use in their business, but also an opportunity to have open discussions on challenging and topical subjects which really do impact on everyone's businesses." The workshop sessions this year will comprise:



Abigail Kimber

From Mental Health First Aid England, leading discussions on the impact of mental health in the workplace.



Adrian Swinscoe

A customer experience expert, exploring what makes the customer's journey.



Sophie Brooks

A leading trainer in the B Corp world, offering plenty of food for thought on running sustainable businesses.



2023 Dealer of the Year competition

The categories have been announced for 2023's Dealer of the Year competition.

The core dealer categories for the awards are:



There are also special award categories this year:



In addition, of course, all those considered for entry will be put forward for the prestigious

Overall Dealer of the Year Award



For details of how to enter your dealership into any of the above awards, keep watching the

Service Dealer Weekly Update and www.servicedealer.co.uk

Our 2023 Sponsors

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2023 *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.

Details of sponsors are correct at time of going to print.





Peter, pictured recently

Remembering Peter Elliott

Peter Elliott, one of the most colourful characters from the garden machinery industry in the '80s and '90s, died on June 26, 2023, writes *Service Dealer* founder CHRIS BIDDLE

In the spring of 1989, a price war raged amongst the leading DIY superstores in response to a looming recession. Lawnmowers spearheaded multi-million pound promotional campaigns, TV commercials and full-page national advertising (these were pre-internet days). Together with longer opening hours, seven-day trading and ample car parking, the 'sheds' provided a huge challenge to independent dealers.

Derek Belcher, of Handy Garden Machinery in Swindon, said: "I'm frightened. We have a warehouse of machines, but, if we try and match their prices, we'll go out of business. I've worked out I could buy my stock from B&Q cheaper than from some of my suppliers."

The discounting fever came at a time when consumer spending was under pressure from tight monetary controls and high mortgage rates (sound familiar?).

BAGMA meetings were dominated by views on how the specialists could respond. These ranged from withdrawing warranty and service facilities offered to the mass merchandisers to boycotting suppliers to the 'sheds'.

Step forward, Peter Elliott.

Peter first engaged with the industry when he started buying and selling



Peter Elliott in his mower days

old mowers from his parents' home. As someone who was never afraid to break the mould or ruffle a few feathers, Peter subsequently established a dealership, P & E Garden Machinery.

Mower City

When the price-cutting began, he drew up plans to create a buying group for specialist dealers, which would not only improve terms, but which would also raise funds for a national advertising campaign.

Thus, at the 1989 IOG SALTEX show, he launched a new buying group, Mower City, with a target of attracting 70-to-80 dealers who would pay

£1,000 initially, all of which would go into a national advertising 'pot'. The aim was to raise a budget of £100,000 for a campaign to run during the spring of 1990, with funds supplemented by contributions from manufacturers. At the time of the launch, Mountfield, Hayter, Victa UK, Tecnamotor (Tecumseh) and Ariens had confirmed their support with Hayter, announcing that they were withdrawing the supply of mowers to B&Q the following year.

Peter was regarded by many in the mainstream garden machinery business as a bit of a maverick. Under pressure from members, the dealer trade association, BAGMA, was not impressed with the concept. Former BAGMA president Gerry Cohen, who ran near-neighbour Power Gardening of Slough, was a particularly fierce critic of Peter.

However, the trade was stunned when, in the spring of 1990, Peter Elliott announced that Gerry, now retired, would be joining Mower City as director and general manager!

When the national advertising began, Mower City had only recruited 38 dealers, which Peter described as "a satisfactory start for the first year, with dealers entering unknown territory".

To bolster membership, Mower City took a stand at the 1990 GMA Show

held at Kempton Park, the year when the turf machinery industry decided to break away from the IOG SALTEX show, which had moved from Windsor to Peterborough. The two shows clashed – and the GMA Show proved to be a one-off event.

Lost backing

Shortly after the GMA Show, Peter was informed that Mountfield and Hayter were withdrawing their support. It was a massive blow, a decision almost certainly taken in response to pressure from their existing dealer/distributor network. One of these, Henton & Chattell, had themselves announced the formation of a new dealer group, The Cutting Edge. MD John Chaloner said: "We are a selling group, not a buying group. We aim to underpin the strength of the specialist though the promotion of buying from the experts."

It proved to be the beginning of the

end for Mower City. Peter had booked a stand at the GLEE show that year, which he cancelled. The stand was subsequently taken over by Victa, who were still 'on-board' with Mower City.

By November 1990, financial pressures were building up - from manufacturers owed for machines and other creditors. At a meeting held on November 28, the manufacturers involved agreed a six-week voluntary arrangement to allow Peter to complete his search for 'additional financial strength'

However, all came to nought, and Mower City was formally disbanded and wound up. As was his P&E Garden Machinery dealership, which later re-emerged as Meadowbrook Lawn and Garden.

There followed a number of initiatives to set up buying groups, selling groups, own-brands, franchises - but none have stood the test of time.

Peter Elliott was a pioneer, an original. Whilst 'talk-talk' was prevalent amongst specialist dealers on how to combat their potential nemesis, the sheds, Peter was a 'do-er'. He took risks, he was engaging, and had loads of ideas to promote the specialists.

The problem was, he lacked the financial strength needed for long-term success. 'Politics' also played a part - as did the timing. There were a host of mergers and acquisitions within the industry at the time, which particularly impacted Mountfield and Hayter, as both their futures were in doubt.

I am grateful to his wife, Elaine, and brother-in-law Trevor Thorp, now with Kersten UK, for providing me with additional information.





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Working as a team is key to our success

That's what Dave Aston of Express Mowers in Stourbridge told *Service Dealer's* LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR. They discussed sales, margin, recruiting, and why staying local works best for their business.



Managing director of Express Mowers, Dave Aston

A recent trip to Stourbridge, a market town in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley in the West Midlands, offered me the opportunity to call into Express Mowers Ltd, a small garden machinery dealership run and owned by Stuart Whitman, whose father Frank started the business in 1982.

The current premises are in the centre of town, and occupy around 6,000 square feet of space that provides a showroom, workshops, and storage space. I was met by one of the MDs of the company, Dave Aston, who has been with the company since he left school 33 years ago.

Working alongside Dave is the company's workshop manager, Lee Partridge, who himself has been with the company some 22 years. So, between them, Stuart, Dave and Lee have over 90 years of trading experience at Express Mowers Ltd.

What I saw clearly displayed during my visit was the passion they all had for the business and what it meant to them in providing a valuable sales and aftersales service for their local customers.

Service Dealer: What products do you stock and sell?

Dave Aston: Express Mowers is an authorised dealer and service agent for many leading brands, including STIHL, Toro, Hayter, Club Cadet and Echo. We supply an extensive range of domestic and commercial equipment, and we pride ourselves on our excellent aftersales service for repairs and spares.

SD: What area do you cover?

DA: We have a strong ethos for looking after our local

customers, stipulating a free delivery service to all customers within a 40-mile radius of the shop.

We try and keep our customer base local, and refrain from selling to customers outside the area. We feel that trying to deal with sales and aftersales services from outside our area can be time-consuming, and often ad hoc. Virtually all our business is conducted within our dedicated area.

SD: Who is your customer base?

DA: We sell to a wide range of customers, with perhaps a 60/40 split between domestic and professional sectors including contractors, schools, local authorities, housing associations and estates. We have supplied the likes of Benchmark and Mitie Landscapes, and several other large landscape contractors, for a number of years.

Saturdays used to be one of our busiest trading days back in the day, when we were open all day to cope with the demand for products and spares. However, it seems since online shopping and the fact that people tend to want to do other activities on Saturdays, people's shopping trends have changed - hence we have reduced our opening times on Saturdays.

While on the subject of trends, we have also seen quite a dramatic decline in the sales of cylinder mowers over the years, with more people turning to rotary mowers - and, post-Covid, we have seen a dramatic increase in the sale of battery-powered products.

SD: How many staff do you have?

DA: I am one of the longest-serving members of staff having joined the company in 1990 as an apprentice. Over the years I have taken on more responsibilities and roles, working under the supervision of Stuart. I was made MD in 2013, and now, with Lee who joined in 2000, the three of us work well as a team to keep the company profitable and to ensure our customers' needs are satisfied.

As for other staff, the company have two trained mechanics, Marc Harris and Andre Didlic, a delivery driver, Gary Jones, and Nicola Guise who is our office receptionist.

We are a tight-knit team, and work very well together. Finding good staff is becoming rather more difficult, especially when it comes to recruiting experienced mechanics and technicians.

We are currently looking to increase our staff by taking on another mechanic if we can find one.

SD: How did the pandemic affect you?

DA: Like most of us dealers, we were unsure what to expect. It was a scary time at first, and we were not sure how we would cope. However, we soon found ourselves very busy once we sorted a safe way of dealing with our customers. We managed to stay open, and, more importantly, we took a big gamble on securing a large



Express Mowers is based in Stourbridge, and serves customers locally within a 40-mile radius



L-R: Dave Aston, owner Stuart Whitman, and workshop manager Lee Partridge



Inside the showroom



Express Mowers say they are tight-knit team who work well together

order of winter stock from STIHL and one or two other suppliers. That enabled us to satisfy our customer's needs throughout the period.

SD: It must be difficult to gauge what stock to buy each year?

DA: Yes, one of the hardest parts of the job is deciding on what stock and products to essentially take a gamble on. It is not as if we've got a crystal ball! It comes down to knowing your customer base and what has sold before, hopefully foreseeing potential sales. That's why we believe in selling local, building up a strong relationship with our customers. We like to think they will remain loyal and continue buying from us. This policy seems to be working, and is one of the reasons we set the 40-mile radius for sales and after care.

SD: You say sales of battery-powered products have noticeably increased?

DA: Yes, we are seeing a greater demand for battery-powered products. With more and more manufacturers going down this route, we can offer more choice of products. STIHL offer our biggest battery range, along with the likes of Echo, Stiga, Toro and Hayter.

We now stock a lot of different cordless products, and we luckily have a huge stock of batteries in store. One of our biggest issues we face is how to store them and keep them safe. Like most dealers, we have never been informed on the best way to look after both new and old battery stocks, or, indeed, how many batteries can be stored. Especially now we stock several different brands and types of battery.

Should different types of batteries be stored and handled in a different way, for example? Currently we have a local scrap merchant who is willing to take our lithium batteries at a cost per battery. We need to pass this cost onto the customer, though, and also make them aware of their responsibilities when recycling batteries.

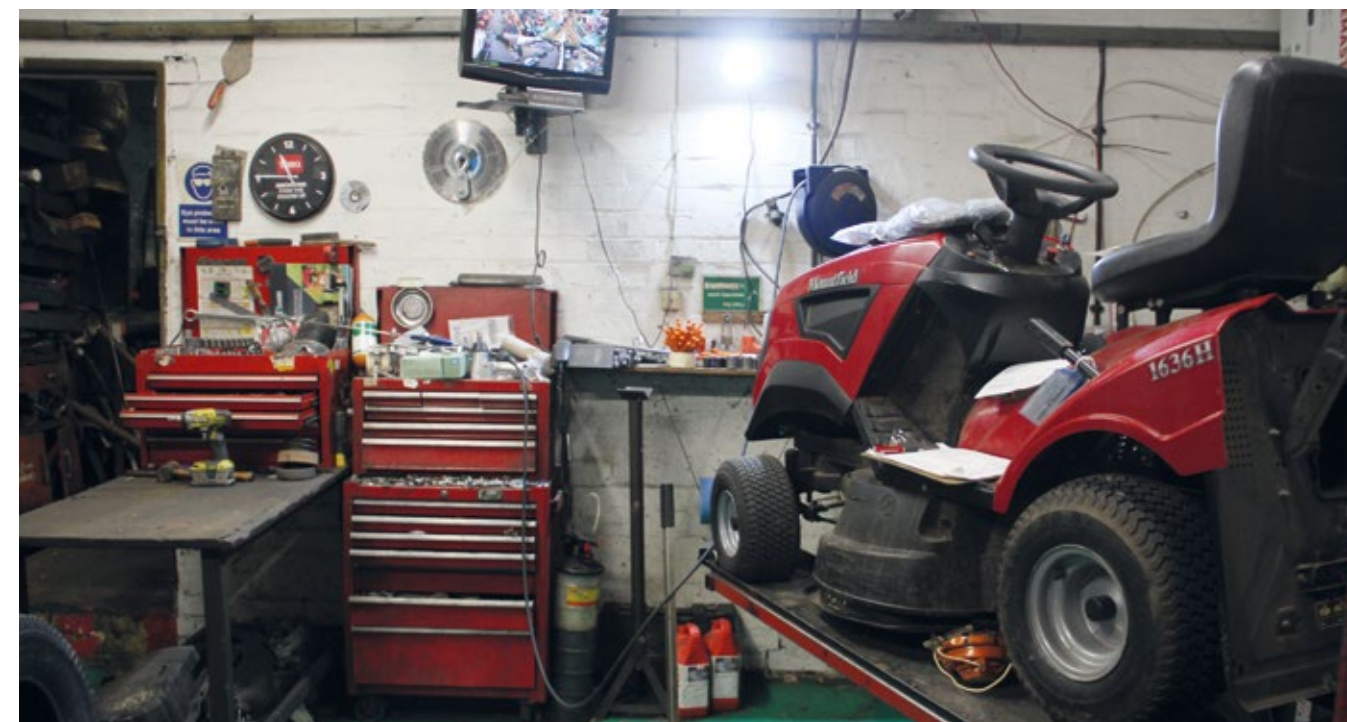
We definitely need some clarification by a governing body, or by the government themselves - plus, we need clear protocols set by the manufacturers. I don't think the manufacturers know themselves what they should be doing in terms of appropriate storage. If they did, they would be hopefully telling us!

The problem is only just beginning. At the moment, we are selling new batteries, and many have still a few years life in them. It will be in a couple of years' time, when we start seeing thousands of batteries being returned, that we may be facing a major industry problem - and that will no doubt come at a cost.

SD: Are you seeing demand for robotic mowers?

DA: We have sold a few in the past, but we have never fully taken it onboard in a big way, due to the fact we did not have the staffing resources to spend time setting up the robots and fixing the perimeter wiring. However, the technology has moved on, and, with many of the latest models working on GPS systems, installation is a lot easier. So we should now be in a better position to stock and sell more robotic mowers, as I do see that that demand could be there for these products in the domestic market.

SD: Do you attend trade shows, and will you be attending any this year?



Express Mowers pride themselves on their aftersales care

DA: Yes, we hoping to go to Saltex in November. It has been a while since we last went to a show. We are not planning on going to any of the others we have seen advertised, purely due to the fact that we do not have the time, because we are kept busy looking after our customers. Especially now, we do not have seasonal work patterns anymore. Like most dealers, we find there is no end to the working week! Gone are the days when we would be busy in the spring selling mowers, and, in the winter months, repairing and servicing machinery - and maybe have a lull in the summer months when the grass stopped growing. The combination of changing weather patterns, climate change, and the constant demand by customers means we are extremely busy all year round.

SD: How do you see the industry changing in the next couple of years?

DA: We are seeing a greater use of the internet to help sell products. However, we must be mindful that there needs to be profit made. We are not here to give products away. We have just seen the demise of F.R. Jones, who have been a big player on the internet, who specialised in selling products at low prices to attract customers. We are all in the business to make money. That's why we need to charge a reasonable rate to make a living, maintain staff levels and be able to offer a good aftersales service to our customers. All this needs to be costed into the real value of the machinery and equipment we are selling.

We are not interested in selling throwaway products, it is not in our culture. We want to sell better value, longer lasting equipment that is robust and reliable.

The current economic climate is likely to be with us for

another couple of years, and I can see further dealerships facing uncertainty and the possibility of having to close due to the high overheads and not making decent margins on the sale of products.

When customers buy online, they are only looking at the initial cost and think: 'That's it, done.' They often do not take into account that these products need servicing and replacement parts to give them longevity.

Most of our success is down to the aftersales service we offer, and the long-term relationships we build up with our customer base. They tend to stay loyal, and we benefit from repeat business.

SD: Do you have any plans of expanding your business or moving into bigger premises?

DA: No, we have no thoughts on moving. We have been on this site since 1992, and it serves us well. We are well-known locally, and people are prepared to come into the shop and see us. We are very much a face-to-face business, and enjoy the relationships we have built up with our customer base for the last thirty-plus years I been with the company. Moving to a new venue would bring a lot of disruption, and, without a doubt, additional costs would be incurred by new rates and rents - and we would probably have to move out of town.

So we are very happy with our current position, and happy to continue serving our customers from here.

SD: Thank you.

A changing approach for dealers?

Husqvarna announced in June that they have partnered with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to support horticulturists and strengthen RBG Kew's ambitious climate-positive plans. Whilst at the official launch, editor STEVE GIBBS also heard about their plans for their dealer network.



Jonathan Snowball, head of business unit professional UK, at the Kew launch

Husqvarna has now installed three commercial robotic lawnmowers – two Automower 550 EPOS units and one 535 AWD machine – at RGB Kew in southwest London. On top of this, a 550 EPOS mower has also been installed at Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden in Sussex.

The robotic mowers will be used by horticulturists to aid lawn management in areas of both gardens, with the intention of freeing up more time for the team at Kew to take care of one of the most diverse living collections in the world.

Husqvarna and RBG Kew said at the launch I attended in June that they both have ambitious sustainability aspirations, with RBG Kew planning to become climate positive by 2030. The introduction of electric autonomous mowers contributes towards a reduction in carbon emissions when compared to petrol counterparts, they said, whilst also reducing cost and noise emissions.

Yvette Henshall-Bell, president of Husqvarna Global Pro, said: "Husqvarna and RBG Kew share a strong commitment to sustainability. Through this partnership, we hope

to demonstrate how autonomous solutions can provide outstanding results for one of the finest and most admired landscaped gardens in the world, inspiring more organisations and companies to make the shift, and harvest the benefits of new technology."

Simon Toomer, curator of Living Collections at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, added: "We have an ambitious plan to become climate-positive by 2030, and our collaboration with Husqvarna helps advance this. By incorporating electric mowers and adopting the latest in battery technology, we can help to reduce carbon emissions and continue to put sustainability at the heart of what we do. We are already starting to see the benefits that robotics bring, and look forward to seeing even more results over the summer."

Plans for dealers

Whilst at Kew, I took the opportunity to speak with some members of the manufacturer's senior management team regarding how they saw the current role of their dealer network - both specifically in placements such as this one, and in the broader sense.

As everyone reading this will know, the past couple of years hasn't seen the smoothest sailing on occasion, in terms of the relationship between the dealers and Husqvarna. The issues that have been faced by dealers are well-known, and have been discussed much in recent times.

Therefore, bearing that in mind, it was fascinating to hear the manufacturer's take on how they believe the dealer network is going to need to adapt and evolve, to keep pace with the changing desires of customers.

Jonathan Snowball, head of business unit professional UK, told me the company are working with their dealers all the time to help them plan ahead – to essentially future-proof their businesses in regards of where Husqvarna are convinced it is heading.

"There are some key trends that we observe in the market, especially regarding customers' requirements," Jonathan explained. "As a consequence, we believe that some dealers need to have a bit of a rethink about their operating model."

Jonathan went on to explain how the company has now developed what they call their Pro Partner dealer programme. What this is is identifying dealers across the UK, Europe and globally, with, firstly, what he described as 'very strong after-market capabilities'.

"Although there is a shift towards more electronic and technology-enabled products," Jonathan told me, "we actually see that requirements of aftercare through the dealer network will increase. However, it will be less of maintaining oily petrol and diesel machines, but, rather, providing a different kind of service with these new electronic machines."

Jonathan continued: "With these new

aftercare requirements, we're looking for dealers who have the capability of actually going out into the field to look after customers' machines - to visit their customers more. We don't want Kew Gardens, for example, to have to take their machines to a dealer - the dealers should be able to go to them to try to diagnose and fix issues out in the field. And, then, if that's not possible, take it back to the workshop."

I also heard that, wrapped up in this new service offering, are different ways of customers paying for their machinery. It was explained to me that Husqvarna are launching in the UK an operational lease function for their dealers. "This allows customers to spread the costs over a three or five-year period," said

"There are some key trends that we observe in the market, especially regarding customers' requirements"

Jonathan. Within those costs, customers will apparently receive extended warranty, and, on some products, a winter service package.

A third strand of what the company is looking for in its modern dealer, I heard, was a strong field sales focus. This means that the company want their dealers to go out there and visit the customers more. "We want dealers to understand users' challenges, and their applications out in the field," Jonathan puts it. "We believe you can't understand as much about your customers when you are stood in your showroom. So it's important for dealers to have that good facility of being able to get out there and mould a package to suit an individual customer's requirements. We see that as the way forward for our Pro Partners."

Dealer feedback

Being honest, I was expecting to receive some feedback from dealer readers on these comments when we mentioned this in our Weekly

Update (published every Friday at noon – subscribe for free at www.servicedealer.co.uk). And a couple of readers did, indeed, choose to anonymously leave their thoughts below the article we published.

One dealer said: "It sounds to me like Husqvarna is talking the talk while expecting their dealers to walk the walk... Sorry, but I have been around too long to swallow 'manufacturerspeak'."

Whilst another said: "I think Husqvarna UK are the last company in our industry that should be giving advice on aftersales support and customer service. Perhaps the upper management at Husqvarna SHOULD spend more time in showrooms to

understand the difficulties of dealers and to understand what we want/need from our suppliers."

I got the impression, when speaking to Husqvarna, that they were well aware of the somewhat fractious relationship they had experienced with some dealers recently.

Yvette Henshall-Bell said at the launch: "There is a big market opportunity for dealers to make inroads into the commercial market in the UK. With products like our recently-launched Ceora for example, it offers dealers a wider market opportunity."

"I think it's really exciting for some of our dealers to see opportunities in areas such as the golf industry, and Ceora is a real gamechanger for this. With our broad range of machines, what we're asking dealers is to go out into their markets and get closer to those customers. And it's not just the products, it's the aftermarket support capabilities that are essential."

"In return," Yvette explained, "we will improve our capabilities and our backup support, as well. We need to be working in partnership with the dealers to be better at what we do – to service our customers and to maximise uptime."

Whether this new approach finds favour with Husqvarna's dealers, time will tell.

There are three Automowers in use at Kew Gardens, and one at the Wakehurst site

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Helping dealers to grow their own talent

Service Dealer editor, STEVE GIBBS, was invited to Kubota (UK)'s premises in Thame, Oxfordshire, recently to hear about developments at the manufacturer, its plans for the future, and how they want to help dealers expand their teams.



The Kubota (UK) team

Described by the company as an update event, the overarching theme of the two days that Kubota (UK) invited members of the specialist trade press to at their UK headquarters in June was ongoing investment into the industry, with updates on recent acquisitions and new initiatives in the areas of warranty and recruitment. The company also took the opportunity to show off some of their latest products from across their mower and compact tractor portfolios.

During the visit, I heard several presentations by key team members, experienced a tour of the extensive premises, and was able to view and try out some key new pieces of groundcare equipment - the line-up including an early example of a new electric tractor called the LXe-261. We were told only three or four of these models will be seen in the UK over the next 18 months or so, before the company enters full production.

It wasn't just the press that were able to hear from the manufacturer and try out these machines, either - many members of their dealer network had also attended similar events at the headquarters earlier in the week.

Kubota (UK)'s managing director, David Hart, and their general manager for tractor business unit (TBU), Henry Bredin, kicked things off, with Henry leading a session

giving a general overview of the manufacturer. After learning about some of the corporate history and more recent global developments, such as the new £0.5bn Kubota Institute of Technology opened in Osaka, Japan, attendees were given a tour of the facilities, where questions on the challenges of worldwide manufacture, logistics and alternative power sources were covered.

It is clear that, as a company, Kubota are exploring new and cleaner means for fuelling their ranges across agriculture and groundcare - with not only battery but other options, such as hybrid and hydrogen, being tested. Henry Bredin talked of how, as a company, they desire to move toward carbon neutrality, and away from diesel. At the moment, though, they must "back different horses" when it comes to future power sources, as they believe it remains to be seen what will ultimately work best for the business and, most importantly, for their customers.

Dealer support

The baton on the second day of the visit was handed over to Phil Catley, Kubota (UK)'s groundcare product manager, and Tom Lockwood, their field service manager. A similar theme was continued, with further discussion around the area of investment in aftersales, as well as dealer support.



Marketing manager Rob Edwards leading a tour around Kubota (UK)'s premises in Thame

Phil said their vision is one of creating an "industry-leading dealer, technical and commercial support infrastructure". Meanwhile, in his presentation, Tom discussed initiatives, including the Kubota Service Excellence Awards and Kubota University programme, both of which are designed, he said, to develop and deliver training and advice to dealers with the intention of ensuring an ongoing positive experience for customers.

Tom stressed how vital the company's apprenticeship scheme is to their ongoing success. He acknowledged how there is an industry-wide problem of a shortage of people entering the sector, and how it is in everyone's interest for employers to find ways of drawing people in.

Tom described how Kubota offer dealer apprenticeship schemes across agriculture, groundcare and parts. "Intake is increasing nicely," he told us, with 13 students currently undertaking the programmes. As well as the core education provided, the company are doing all they can, he said, to encourage more young people to sign up, offering added incentives, such as visits to key facilities, training in associated products, and the gifting of merchandise. All sounded like innovative, proactive moves to me, designed to appeal to the next generation.

Alongside the formal apprentice schemes, the company also regularly attends events to raise awareness of what they can offer to people looking for a rewarding career. We were told they go into schools and colleges, attending careers fairs and the like to spread the word. Also, we heard about a recent event that had taken place, targeting those who were leaving the armed forces and considering their future employment options.

Kubota took a stand at this meeting, along with dealers George Browns and Lister Wilder, where, apparently plenty of leads from interested, skilled individuals were taken - and subsequently shared with dealers around the country.

"We really need to conquer this staffing shortage in the industry," stressed Tom. "To do this, we must grow our own talent, and also help dealers to grow theirs."

It was greatly encouraging to hear just how seriously Kubota are taking the employment situation, and the tangible efforts they are making to tackle and improve



Groundcare product manager Phil Catley introduced the LXe electric tractor, which is currently in the country on test

the reality that dealers around the country are having to contend with. Of course, by no means are Kubota the only manufacturer taking such steps - there are plenty of examples of others rolling out comparable schemes and endeavours - but to hear just how keen they are to help dealers cultivate a new generation of industry members was to be applauded.

Proceedings concluded with a ride and drive experience, where the press had the opportunity to demonstrate a number of machines from across the range, including the recently-launched FC3 and FC4 mowers, and the aforementioned LXe electric compact tractor, which was in the country for extensive testing.

Commenting on the event, marketing manager Rob Edwards said: "We, like all manufacturers, are aware of the issues facing the industry, and that doesn't just stop at having the right products to fit today's market. It was brilliant to be able to demonstrate to the press the programmes we're delivering to support our dealers and our customers, and show how proud we are to be re-investing in the needs of the next generation."

In the zone where everyone wants to be

That was the view of *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke, who visited this year's only two-day, on-farm, regenerative agriculture festival in the UK, writes editor, STEVE GIBBS.



The Groundswell 2023 exhibition took place back in June at Lannock Manor Farm, Hertfordshire.

Described as a 'regenerative agriculture festival,' organisers sum up the event as providing "... a forum for farmers, growers, or anyone interested in food production and the environment to learn about the theory and practical applications of regenerative farming systems".

This year's edition sold out once again, attracting over 6,500 attendees, with organisers saying 75% either directly farm or are involved in a farming enterprise.

With over 100 sessions and 200 speakers from across the world, the theme this year centred on 'What is regenerative agriculture?', which, the team behind the show said, created a welcoming stage for technical experts,

experienced regenerative farmers, leading researchers, politicians, retailers and NGOs to explore and debate the topic.

Taking place from June 28 to June 29, and now in its eighth year, the event is hosted by the Cherry family at Lannock Manor Farm in Hertfordshire, and brings together a wide range of discussions, supporting both theoretical and practical applications of agroecology.

To ensure the event was inclusive for everyone, sessions included 'first principles' for those at the start of their journey, through to advanced sessions looking at integrated pest and disease management and enhancing underground communications.

Event director Alex Cherry said of the event: "It's been a monumental eighth Groundswell, welcoming old friends and new faces, and catching up

with people about their evolving farms and projects, some of which were initiated at Groundswell.

"When we first launched Groundswell, just 400 people joined us. Today, thousands travel from across the world to look at how we can continue to develop and advance sustainable agriculture, improving our soils and enhancing our food production. It is really humbling that, together, we can create stimulating conversations that generate positive change."

Across the site, crop plots – including cover cropping and herbal leys, direct drilling demonstrations, mob grazing, composting and tree management – were on display to illustrate the work of those exhibiting, and allow visitors to experience how these could be integrated into their own farm.



Event director, Alex Cherry



John Deere were represented by dealership, Tuckwells with Tim on stand to meet customers

Visitors included Patron of the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations, HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh, and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Thérèse Coffey, who joined the Cherry family for a tour of the site to understand more about the progress being made to deliver a sustainable agricultural future, and the challenges facing the sector.

Electric dealers

Service Dealer's owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke, attended the event this year and enthused about what he saw, saying: "It was a brilliant, buzzy event - possibly the best outdoor industry show I've ever been to. It really took me by surprise."

Duncan continued: "The show was clearly in the zone where everyone wants

to be right now regarding sustainability. The organisers had truly nailed it.

"What I found most impressive was that every exhibitor there had to have a purpose, a good reason, to be allotted a space. All must align closely with the ethos of the organisers, making sure that what they are promoting ties in with the show's sustainability theme.

"In terms of machinery exhibitors who our *Service Dealer* readers will be familiar with, Kuhn, John Deere - represented by Tuckwells - Opico and Weaving were in attendance, as well as some seed drill guys. But I'm sure, in subsequent editions, we'll see more manufacturers from our side of the ag industry want to get involved, because this is the space where everybody wants to be right now."

Whilst there, Duncan also caught up with a couple of dealers who were

exhibiting, who have set up businesses to trade exclusively in electric utility vehicles - Matthew McAuley of Electric Wheels and Marc Monsarrat of Off-Road Electric.

Matthew was pleased with the visitors they had seen on their stand, saying of the couple of days: "It's been really busy. We've had plenty of interest, with lots of people looking to go electric rather than relying on petrol or diesel."

Duncan asked: with groundcare dealers seeing more and more customers move to battery-powered equipment for all sorts of applications, were these guys seeing similar for their UTV customers?

"Absolutely," replied Marc. "People want to be moving to electric for a variety of reasons – certainly in terms of the climate. But, also, just in terms of the comfort of operating vehicles on a daily



Electric dealers: Matthew McAuley of Electric Wheels, and Marc Monsarrat, Off-Road Electric



Autonomous agricultural machinery was demoed at the show

basis. You want to be in something that's quiet and doesn't vibrate."

Marc continued: "Also, some of our customers are working in low-emission or zero-emission zones, such as colleges or inner city areas – and they have actually been told by the councils they've got to go down the zero-emission route."

"So, for increasing numbers, electric is the way to go."

But it was not just in the public utilities sector where Marc and Matthew's dealerships were seeing an increase in custom – it is in agriculture, too.

Said Matthew: "I'd say we've got a quite high uptake within ag. A lot of people are now using a machine we deal in, called the Beast, as a

game-keeping vehicle. And we're always looking for and launching new machines to cover further areas to help with farmers' needs." See separate item for details on one of these new launches they made at the show.

Duncan finished his time with the guys asking: as they are distributing electric UTV products too, is it maybe worth Service Dealer's readers getting in touch if they are interested in expanding their portfolios?

They both agreed, with Matthew saying: "Absolutely. If any dealers are interested in stocking any of the vehicles we stock, please feel free to reach out to us, and we can have a conversation about it."

Summing up this year's exhibition,

Alistair Leggatt, catchment and biodiversity manager, from headline partner Affinity Water, who has been working with the Cherry family for over six years, said: "It's been such a positive event. Those who attended had a sharp focus, and came armed with questions to put to exhibitors and speakers, showing a real desire to develop and improve UK agriculture."

Duncan Murray-Clarke, meanwhile, concluded: "I believe this is one event that our sector will want to keep its eye on."

"It was incredibly well-attended, it had a great festival vibe, and it's clearly firmly on the up."



Pickman unveiled

By specialist dealer Electric Wheels

Specialist dealer Electric Wheels unveiled the latest addition to their range of all-electric farm vehicles at Groundswell. They described the Pickman as a compact all-electric pick-up reminiscent of a farm cult classic, the Suzuki Jimny.

The vehicle comes fully-equipped with LED lighting, reversing camera, power steering, a USB charger, a roof rack with lights- and an infotainment system with Bluetooth connectivity. Its dual 7.5kW and 3kW motors deliver four-wheel drive, with a top speed of 40mph and a range of up to 70 miles from one charge. For farmers looking for a load-carrying vehicle, Electric Wheels said the Pickman can transport up to 500kg on its bed, with a similar towing capacity, and a four-door model is available.

Visitors to the show were able to test-drive the full range of vehicles from the specialist dealers on stand,



with the Pickman garnering lots of attention from passing farmers.

"We are delighted to add The Pickman to our range," said Electric Wheels' managing director, Chris Hurdle. "It is a unique vehicle that attracted significant attention from our customers at Groundswell. We have four machines available to demo this summer as part of our test market for the Pickman, and we expect to have a full launch for the vehicle in spring 2024."

The anticipated retail price for The Pickman will be £20 - £22K +VAT, depending on model specification.

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Cautious optimism at Cereals

With a new location, the return of some names absent from recent events, and some significant news among manufacturers and importers, this year's Cereals event seemed to have regained some spark, despite being tinged with uncertainty over such issues as government farm support. MARTIN RICKATSON picks out some highlights.

After alternating for many years between one host farm in Lincolnshire and another on the Herts- Cambs border, organiser Comexposium found a new home for this year's Cereals event, the annual arable farming exhibition. While only 30 miles northwest of the Lincs site, the new venue at Thoresby Estate in north Nottinghamshire seemed to prove popular with visitors and exhibitors alike, and, although never jam-packed, drew a steady stream of visitors on both days back in June.

At that point, of course, no-one

could predict the damp start to harvest that lay ahead the following month. Grain prices had come back a little, but then, so had fuel and fertiliser costs, and crop potential looked good. Uncertainties remained, though, over issues from the continued impact of war in Ukraine to drought elsewhere in the world, and the government's failure to provide clarity on the format of its Sustainable Farm Incentive, the centrepiece scheme by which farmers will be subsidised in return for committing to environmental protection measures on their land.

So Cereals 2023 was mixed in terms of the messages it left behind. Certainly, there was plenty of caution among exhibitors and visitors alike that investments in machinery over the coming year are likely to be subdued. However, there was some optimism to counter the doubt, with crops looking decent at the time of the event, many visitors still seeking new ways to drive down establishment costs, and a core of farmers keen to seize the new opportunities offered by new techniques and ideas.



Grassland kit from Lynx

Among the companies offering something along those lines was Northants-based Lynx Engineering, which is now the distributor in both the UK and Ireland – Lynx has a separate Irish business – for Düvelsdorf, a German manufacturer of grassland maintenance machinery, including rakes and rollers, silage, cultivation and seeding products. Reporting a decent first day for visitor numbers and enquiries, Nick Ewbank, Lynx managing director, explained that the product line was likely to be offered through selected Lynx dealers in key grassland areas, and with a particular focus on the sector.

“Düvelsdorf is a family-owned firm based in Ottersberg, northern Germany, focusing on grassland maintenance kit, and we have been importing its products into Ireland for a year or so, where we've had good success, so now we are marketing them in the UK,” he said.

“Overseeding, and the use of cover crops for soil protection, have been popular in Germany for some time. With interest growing here in the UK, particularly as farmers



Lynx Engineering's Düvelsdorf Green Rake

come under pressure to consider alternative methods to ploughing up and reseedling when looking to address the issue of tired grassland, we think the products Düvelsdorf manufactures have good market potential, and offer good opportunities for dealers.”

Among them, and on show at Cereals, is a range of Green Rake grassland rakes. Available in widths from 1.2-9.0m, they comprise a levelling board followed by seed distributors – if fitted with a seeder unit – and then three rows of floating tines on which the working angle can be altered. Optional Güttler press rings can be fitted at the rear.



Falc Strip-Till from KRM

KRM shows strip-till cultivator

Another firm offering something a little different was Yorks-based KRM. Designed for wide-spaced row crops, the Falc Strip-Till is a powered cultivator, designed to only move the ground where the crop will be planted. Available as a four-row machine, with 75cm spacing or a six-row at 50cm, each row of the Strip-Till consists of a ripper tine to loosen the ground, a rotary cultivator unit, and then a segmented packer roller, the working pressure of which is hydraulically-adjustable. Working depth of the machine can be adjusted from 15-25cm.



Case IH Optum 340 CVX

Case IH Optum 340 CVX upgrades include optional new semi-active suspension

At 340 max hp, the new 340 CVX model heading the Case IH Optum line offers 27hp - or 9% - more power than the former flagship in its range. Peak torque is 1,398Nm at 1,400rpm, compared with 1,282Nm at the same speed for its smaller stablemate. Cab upgrades include optional new semi-active suspension and a standard new AFS Pro 1200 touchscreen monitor with Bluetooth functionality.

Opico enters a new era focused on future of farming

One of the key talking points among the machinery lines at Cereals was the debut of the new Maschio Gaspardo UK business, following the decision announced in April that the Italian manufacturer intended to move away from its import arrangement with Opico and operate its own subsidiary.

James Woolway, Opico managing director, stressed that, from Opico's point of view, the change would have no effect on the firm's other product franchises, which include He-Va, Sky, Strautmänn, FarmDroid and its own Opico lines such as grain dryers.

"We have a couple of areas we have wanted to put more into, and this change will free up some resources to do that," said James.

"We also have a couple of other irons in the fire, and have been approached by a number of companies, but it's too early yet to say anything definitive on this front. We want to set up our product offering beyond just today's requirements, and look to tomorrow, something we have shown with the solar-powered FarmDroid, which has been very successful for us since we introduced it to the UK – 16 units have been retailed as of June, and there are some exciting



developments coming here at Agritechnica.

"The way farm support is changing looks set to have a significant bearing on farm inputs, including machinery, and our aim is to be well prepared for that. We are already well able to meet the growing interest in mechanical weed control, for example, via our associations with Hatzenbichler and Kult. The Stocks applicators and wheels business is also a focus area, and we'll be unveiling new Stocks products at Agritechnica in November."



KRM Sola Aura drill

KRM Sola Aura drill

KRM also unveiled a new Aura front tank/rear coulter bar drill from Sola. The 1,600/2,000-litre pressurised hopper can be configured to supply every coulter across the four rows, or can be split to simultaneously establish two different crop types at different rates via individual ISOBUS-controlled metering units. Front consolidation wheels are optional.



Karat 10 shallow cultivator

New Karat from Lemken

Cultivator debuts included Lemken's latest Karat 10 mounted or semi-mounted model, available in 3.0-4.0m mounted and trailed 3.0-7.0m versions. Intended for shallow work, and a maximum depth of 30cm, new features include tines that have been rearranged symmetrically around the tensile axis, reducing draught requirements and – with auto-steering in mind – side-draught forces. The three rows of tines can be equipped with wider wing DeltaCut shares for shallow cultivation or narrower points for deeper work. A quick-change system is standard, and carbide shares are optional. Levelling tines are centrally adjustable, while levelling discs for heavy soils are optional, as is a hydraulically-adjustable leading disc section.

Maschio Gaspardo UK plans to offer the Italian firm's full product line

Warren Rivers-Scott, who has moved from Bednar's UK operation to take on the managing director role at Maschio Gaspardo UK, explained that Opico and Maschio Gaspardo have come to an arrangement which will see the importation of Maschio through Opico cease on October 31, and, on November 1, the new Maschio Gaspardo UK business will then take over responsibility for the sales and support of Maschio Gaspardo products in the UK.

"Until that point, we're working together to determine the dealer network and many other factors," he said.

"Part of this agreement is that the workforce we bring together will be trained up fully to be able to hit the ground running by November 1. We aim to retain as much of the existing network of Maschio dealers as we can, but we also want them to grow with us, with access to the wider portfolio. We are as interested in smaller dealers who want to grow as we are in their larger counterparts.

"Until now, the focus of Maschio in the UK has been on power harrows, combination drills, rotary cultivators, flail mowers and ploughs, but now there is a UK subsidiary we have scope to expand the product line to include the company's full range of around 25 product lines, including fertiliser spreaders, sprayers, drills, disc cultivators, hedgetrimmers/verge mowers and balers. Maschio Gaspardo has built up a good name in the UK through Opico, and previously through RECO, but the management feels that now is the right time to go to the next step, with a full UK subsidiary that promotes the whole portfolio. The site of our new premises site is to be confirmed, but will likely be in the Midlands, within the A1/A46 area.

"The company sells 80,000 product units each year, with a turnover of almost €500m, and Maschio's business in the UK has represented around £5m of turnover. We want to be responsible for a bigger proportion of those units and that global turnover here in the UK. Products I'm particularly excited about include the Gigante direct drill, which has been very popular elsewhere in the world."

The company has expanded significantly over the past decade, acquiring plough firm Moro in 2017, baler specialist Feraboli in 2014, sprayer maker Unigreen in 2012, and seeding/spreader firm Gaspardo in 1993, since when it has been known as Maschio Gaspardo.

"The baler product is well-proven – the company makes fixed chamber models for one of the major tractor and forage equipment producers," says Warren.

"We know this sector has many established players, but I think there's still a market for the Maschio product. And here at Cereals we've already seen strong interest in products such as inter-row cultivators, and our mounted and trailed sprayers, with the latter extending up to 6,500 litres/36m."



Maschio Gaspardo UK stand at Cereals 23



New Holland's T7.340 HD features Integrated Large Square Baler Control

European debut for new New Holland T7 HD flagship

Among the big tractor news at Cereals was the first UK showing of the recently-released new flagship for the New Holland T7 HD line, the 340hp (max) T7.340 HD, now heading a three-model range, with the smallest T7.275 HD no longer made.

The 340hp (max) new tractor inherits its styling and key features from the established 288hp (max) T7.290 HD and 313hp (max) T7.315 HD tractors, which remain in the range – the smallest T7.275 HD model has been dropped. However, it offers more power packaged within the same dimension and weight figures. It also includes new technology pioneered on the recently-introduced T7.300 LWB, the largest tractor in the range beneath the T7 HD line.

A key feature of the new model is Integrated Large Square Baler Control, which is said to enhance operator comfort by optimising the interaction between the tractor and an attached big baler. By anticipating the baler's crop compression stroke, it maintains a more consistent engine and PTO speed, cuts cab movement by 15% and reduces fuel consumption by up to 12% through the baling cycle, says New Holland.

Olivers celebrates its second century

Home Counties dealer Olivers and Sons Ltd this year marks its 200th birthday.

MARTIN RICKATSON, who was asked by the Oliver family to chronicle the company's history in a book launched earlier this year at a celebration event, looks back at how it has grown into a twin-business concern, with interests in agriculture, turfcare and more.



Martin Rickatson, Service Dealer's freelance agricultural editor, authored a history of the business, published in time for the event



The Wandon End premises sometime during the 1970s



Oliver and Sons held a 200th birthday celebration for customers and staff at the Herts Showground in June



A Claas Matador Standard combine in the Wandon End workshops during the late-1960s

Few dealerships still in existence today can trace their foundations back to the early years of the 19th century. Oliver and Sons, based in the countryside on the Herts/Beds border within sight of Luton airport, retains plenty of records that show how its roots can be traced back that far and beyond, though. Not only that, but its management is still headed by descendants of the founder, and the company continues to grow.

Thomas Oliver and his family were farming at Hatfield Hyde, near what is now Welwyn Garden City, in the early 1800s when he began to seek ways to diversify. The Oliver service to farmers can be traced to 1823, when Thomas started to provide horse equipment to other farmers, alongside contract labour services. The family enterprise

grew when James, Thomas' son, founded his own contracting and machinery repair service in 1861, at a site near Harpenden, before latterly moving to the then-rural and small nearby town of Luton. Here, his business began to develop as a seller of equipment as well as a repairer, being awarded an agency in 1866 for Marshall steam machinery, necessitating a further move in 1880 to Wigmore Hall Farm in Luton.

Walter J. and Archibald T. Oliver, James' sons, latterly joined him in business, meaning he eventually retired, and, with Walter later pursuing other business avenues, Archibald then carried on the company's expansion independently, moving in 1890 to the rural four-acre premises just over the Hertfordshire border in the hamlet of Wandon End, King's

Walden, where Olivers' headquarters remains. He was later joined by his own sons, Percy and Ralph.

As steam-powered threshing was developed, Olivers grew a contract business that operated 32 threshing sets, making it probably the UK's largest fleet. The advent of the tractor in the 1920s, though, saw the business move into tractor retailing, with franchises for International Harvester, Overtime and Wyles. In 1921, the company opened a second branch at Shefford, between Hitchin and Bedford, and, soon afterwards, A.T. Oliver and Sons was formed when Ralph and Percy became partners alongside their father, managing the dealership alongside the family's farming activities. Archibald Thomas Oliver retired in 1926, and passed away aged 80 in 1940.

Claas partnership signed

In 1947 Olivers became one of the first UK dealers for Claas, signing a franchise via importer J Mann and Son, and 2023 also marks the firm's 75th year as a Claas dealer. The move proved timely, as steam threshing was falling out of favour in tandem with the growth of the combine, leading also to a gradual move away from bag to bulk grain handling, and Olivers developed a significant grain handling division.

Watford-based dealership B. G. Young was purchased by Olivers in 1964, with its business transferred two years later to a newly-purchased site at Home Park Works, Kings Langley. In 1967, St. Albans dealer J. & C. Sheppard also became part of Olivers, its activities being integrated into Kings Langley. Horace Smith Mowers, of Linslade, near

Leighton Buzzard, became Olivers' next purchase, in 1969, helping expand its groundcare business.

Fred's son Antony had joined Olivers in 1961, becoming a director in 1970, while in 1969, John Humphreys, nephew of John Oliver, entered the business. By this point, David Brown had become the business' key tractor franchise, alongside Track Marshall crawlers and Muir-Hill equal-wheel 4wd tractors. In 1975, Andrew Boorman, whose family had formerly owned an agricultural engineering business at nearby Cromer, Stevenage, and who had subsequently managed dealerships for firms including Ernest Doe at Fulbourn, joined the business as Shefford branch manager. His wide industry experience and expertise meant he was also appointed a director of the company, alongside John Humphreys. Further major franchise developments saw the company become a JCB dealer in 1983, and a Mercedes-Benz MB Trac dealer a year later.

Further tractor developments in 1984 saw the purchase of International Harvester's agricultural interests by Case/David Brown parent Tenneco, and, from 1985, Olivers became the new Case IH brand's dealer in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. Over the next decade, sales proved strong, but, by 1997, Case IH had become keen to work with dealers without competing tractor and combine franchises. Given an ultimatum, Olivers' management decided to commit to long-term to JCB and Claas, relinquishing its Case IH franchise.

As a replacement conventional tractor offering, in 1997 Olivers took on the Valtra Valmet franchise, followed shortly by multiple other Claas dealers.

The company also re-entered the crawler market via the marketing arrangement between Claas and Caterpillar. Its success in this area, becoming one of the country's top dealers, meant that, when the Cat/Claas agreement was dissolved four years later upon the sale of the Challenger crawler line to AGCO, the new parent signed Olivers as its only non-AGCO Challenger dealer. In 2001, a deal was also signed to sell and support McCormick soon after the brand had been reformed, supplementing Olivers' Valtra and JCB tractor offerings.

With Claas latterly entering the telehandler sector, and, in 2004, the tractor market through its purchase of Renault's agricultural arm, a new business structure was planned, with two separate companies to support distinct franchises and markets. This came alongside the chance to grow the company's coverage for both Claas and JCB into Bucks and Oxon, and in 2002 a new branch was opened at Bicester.

Meanwhile, with farms growing larger and fewer, the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire area was now served purely from the Wandon End branch near Luton, and the Shefford premises was sold, with manager David Jarman and staff moving to Wandon End.

Business divisions separated

A new business structure was created in 2008, with ATO Holdings as the parent company of the Oliver Agriculture and Oliver Landpower trading companies. A.T. Oliver and Sons remained as a separate service company to oversee the common business activities of both. Oliver Agriculture was – and is – responsible for Claas business and associated franchises, while Oliver Landpower managed the Challenger business and the JCB franchise, each having different implement lines. Landpower is also responsible



Visitors to the celebration event were treated to a display of equipment from Olivers through the ages

for the groundcare side of the business from Kings Langley. Luton and Bicester became dual Agriculture and Landpower depots, while Kings Langley was dedicated as a Landpower branch. Since 2013, Oliver Landpower Kings Langley has also been an Isuzu pick-up sales and support centre.

When Claas decided during the 2010s to make a strategic exit from some of the retail outlets it had formed in the turbulent manufacturer takeover times of the 1980s/90s – notably following the Ford purchase of New Holland – in 2015, it offered Olivers the opportunity to purchase the Southern Harvesters/Reading Harvest Centre retail depot, which became Olivers Reading. Two years later, when AGCO chose to rebrand its Challenger line as Fendt meant Oliver Landpower ceased to sell the Challenger crawlers and sprayers, and Oliver Landpower was reorganised to focus solely on JCB in the tractor sector.

Further expansion of the Oliver Agriculture side of the



John Humphreys spoke at the celebration event, which followed a function for employees to show the company's appreciation

business came in 2018, with the sale by Claas UK of two further Claas Southern Harvesters branches, this time at Petworth in Sussex and Winchester in Hampshire. Beyond the south coast, Oliver Agriculture also works with a service agent, M.R.Aagri, on the Isle of Wight.

With the Bicester branch having outgrown its depot, a site was purchased nearby at Tingewick, Bucks, and a new-build premises opened in 2015 for both the Oliver Agriculture and Oliver Landpower businesses. This also became the home of the company's second Isuzu pick-up outlet, opened in 2021.

Most recently, developments in the overall Olivers business have centred on the Oliver Landpower arm.

In 2022, LQG Agri, the JCB dealership based at Upper Quinton, near Stratford-upon-Avon, west of Oliver Landpower Tingewick, was purchased following its directors' retirement, and was subsequently rebranded as Oliver Landpower Stratford. Then, following changes in JCB's dealer coverage for Essex, Oliver Landpower was asked to extend its territory into the county from January 2023. A suitable premises was secured in Colchester, and a new branch opened.

The business generically known as Olivers today comprises five Oliver Agriculture outlets and five Oliver Landpower branches. While Antony Oliver and John Humphreys retain an interest in the business, the overall



Olivers' newest venture is in Essex, via its Oliver Landpower arm, which recently opened a depot in Colchester



“None of this could have been achieved without the support of our customers and the commitment of our employees,” said John Humphreys, speaking at a celebration event held for employees in late June at the Hertfordshire Showground.

The staff of Warks JCB dealership LQG Agri recently joined the Oliver Landpower business, following the sale of the firm

“They have been the biggest factors in helping us get to where we are today. We know that nothing the company has achieved over the past 200 years could have been done without the loyalty, commitment and endeavours of our staff, some of whom belong to families whose forebears also worked for Olivers.

“We are also proud of the family record of succession, growth and achievement since the business was founded. Anna Barnes, who in July will take over as Chair of the AT Oliver and Sons Ltd holding company, is the seventh generation to work for Oliver and Sons Ltd since our foundation”

leadership was recently transferred to Anna Barnes, John’s daughter, supported by management boards for the individual businesses and the overall company, blending family interests with the expertise of long-serving employees and younger, more recent additions to the management boards.

Customers and employees acknowledged

The anniversary event was attended by hundreds of farmers and others from across Olivers’ territory, who were not only able to view examples of equipment from across the Oliver Agriculture and Oliver Landpower sets of franchises, but were also treated to an extensive display of tractors, combines and equipment from Olivers’ history in farm equipment retailing. Exhibits sourced from customers and enthusiasts included many machines retailed by the company, including MB-trac, Muir-Hill and other tractors. The long history of Olivers’ relationship with its current core franchises, Claas and JCB, was underlined by displays of combines stretching back to the early-1960s and Loadall models from the 1980s, plus one of the earliest Fastrac models retailed by the company.

“We also owe our thanks to all those who kindly loaned their machines to use for the event,” said John.

“The historical machinery displays seem to have struck a real chord with the visitors, and provide a great illustration of how far our industry has come. Everyone present has made this a fantastic event of which we are all very proud, and we look forward to serving land-based businesses for many more years to come.”

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Documentation!



Sara Hey, vice president of operations and development at Bob Clements International, 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 PROVIDE INCREASED CLARITY WITH DOCUMENTATION IN YOUR DEALERSHIP

Creating a base of documentation in our dealerships typically causes the dealers we work with quite a bit of stress. Simply the idea of taking the time out to make sure the paperwork is in order can be incredibly overwhelming

As you think about the different ways you can provide increased clarity with documentation in your dealership, I would challenge you to start with just one area. Tackling all of the areas simultaneously may seem appealing at first, but will be a sure track to put you and your team on a quick road to burnout. Here are three goals you should have in order to improve the documentation in your dealership.

1 Create a consistent experience across all departments.

Be mindful of what is being communicated across the different departments of our dealerships. If you have multiple locations, this can become even more challenging, as each location has a slightly different way they do things. One of the frustrations that we hear time and time again is that a customer was not in the CRM, so an employee didn't know the status of their equipment/sale or parts order. For reasons like this one, it is important that every interaction with a customer to be documented. Yes, I know that sounds like a lot - and it is - but, if we expect three different departments to take care of each customer with the same standard, we must have all of the information needed to take care of them.

A dealership I recently visited put a clause into their compensation program in order to encourage documentation of customers by the sales department. The clause stated that, if the information in the CRM was 95% accurate, they would be eligible for an extra 1% in commission on the sale. Figuring out what will work for you and your team will take a little time, and some trial and error, but the result of everyone being on the same page will eliminate chaos at the end of the day.

Our goal with documentation is that we are able to provide the best possible experience for our customers, and, for us to do that, everyone needs to be on the same page.

2 Process is everything, but don't overcomplicate it.

Establishing a process is key to having a professional approach to your documentation. Maybe it's having a process where all emails and/or phone calls are responded to within the day they are received, or perhaps every customer who has had a piece of equipment in the service department receives a handwritten thank you note.

Processes are how you move from being a firefighter in your dealership to leading your team. One of the struggles that we see time and time again is that owners and managers over complicate the process so much even they don't understand what they are asking. Regarding processes for documentation, here are some of the key areas you should be thinking about:

- Documenting techs' times (clocking in and out of work orders).
- Documenting all interactions with customers in your CRM.
- Documenting expectations for customer follow-up.
- Documenting parts that were asked for, but that you don't currently carry or have in stock.
- Documenting each salesperson's daily customer touches.
- Identifying what processes you can document not only creates clarity for your team - it continues to eliminate chaos from your life.

3 Utilise technology to make life easier.

Think about using additional technology to document what your customers are doing with you. We have a number of dealers who utilise texting software for their dealerships, which allows them to text through their business phone line, creating a clear and effortless experience for their customers. Some texting software even integrates into your business management system, allowing uncomplicated backend documentation for your people.



Now it is time to choose one area you want to see documentation improve in, and put your focus there. My guess is that you already have the process outlined, at least in your mind, but it just hasn't been communicated clearly yet. By focusing on one area at a time, some of the unnecessary chaos will be eliminated not only for you, but for your people and your customers as well.

This is where we can really make a difference



Jason Nettle, of Winchester Garden Machinery considers the important role dealers play in reducing scrappage – and offers his thoughts on the F.R. Jones situation

It's fair to say that quite a bit has happened within the industry since my last write-up.

I will touch on the loss of F.R. Jones from the industry shortly, but, first, I would like to share with you a customer's comment which has resonated throughout this year. It was said to me over a year ago, but is still true to this day.

Set the scene. I was out with my customer who has a large garden and pool, with one robotic mower running about. We were discussing whether they should or shouldn't go for another one to do the other side of the garden. It was at this stage that he was umming and ahhhing whether to spend another £5,500. His wife who was doing her lengths in the pool swam up to the side, and the following words were spoken:

*"Darling, for f****s sake, if we don't start spending our money, how the hell is this country going to get out of the s****hole it's in?!"*

She had a point. It was beautifully put, and one of the best closes to any sale.

Why do I mention this now? Well, we are seeing the sales side of the business currently slow up, and every sale is that little bit more contemplated by the customer. People are choosing to repair and fix machines, whereas in previous years gone by, they would have chosen to replace.

This is where we really can make a difference. We are the ones keeping these machines going for years and years. If it wasn't for the servicing dealers, then machines

would be being replaced as and when they fail. I know this would result in more sales at the front end of the business - and I'm sure some manufacturers would see this as a positive - but customers are becoming more mindful about the product life of their machines, and where they end up once they are condemned for scrap.

It's great to see that customers are still using their 15-year-old machine. They know that they have spent good money keeping it going over the years, but it doesn't faze them - and when they do come back to buy a new one, they typically just replace like with like.

New isn't always greener for the environment, and when you do buy something new, it's always nice to know that it can be repaired should something go wrong.

With regards to F.R. Jones, I'm sure everyone has a comment to make and an opinion to share. I have taken time to read various articles and comments.

I have spoken to Justin himself shortly after the news officially broke, and again since then. I have various thoughts on why, what, when, if and surely... One thing is for sure, you can't just rely on the front-end sales. The purchase of a quality machine is a retail package that includes a full range of add-on services and a relationship.

With the ever-shrinking pool of expertise in the groundcare sector, the loss of any employees to alternative industries is concerning. We should all wish them well, whatever their journey might be.





BUSINESS MONITOR

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

Risk still being spread

But dealers pushing back against 'stock loading'

A majority of dealers who responded to our most recent survey asking about the number of brands represented in store told us they are still stocking 10 or more brands. However, listening to comments received, there appears to be some pushing back against manufacturers 'stock loading' into dealerships.

While most said they would likely stick with the number of brands represented for the coming year, a significant proportion of respondents (31%) said they were considering cutting back.

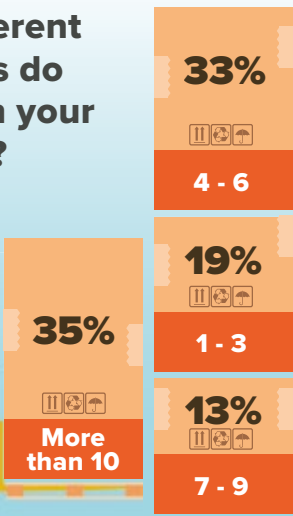
Asked if a volatile stocking

situation (either too scarce or too much) had any influence over how many manufacturers they represented, most answered that it hadn't (50%). And, like when we asked last year, it was still reliability of product that was cited by many respondents (41%) as being the most important factor they consider when choosing a brand to stock.

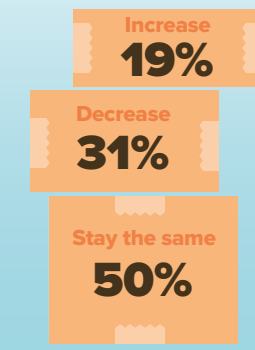
Finally, as before, you can trust independent dealers to pride themselves on not being pushed around, with most (66%) telling us their suppliers try to influence them in what they stock – but they do their own thing.



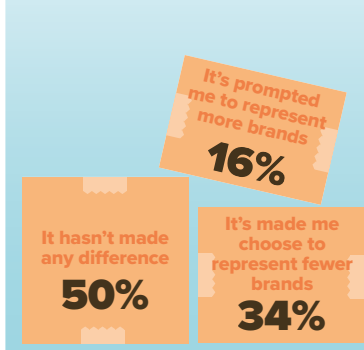
How many different manufacturers do you represent in your dealership?



In the next 12 months, do you expect this number of manufacturers represented to:



Does a volatile stocking situation (either too scarce or too much) have any influence over how many manufacturers you represent?



Which factor most influences your choice of which manufacturers to represent?



Do your suppliers attempt to influence your choices of brands to represent?



“Your say”

With reports of manufacturers 'stock loading' into dealerships, we asked what your thoughts are regarding how many brands to represent in your dealership?

- Stock loading has led us to halve the number of manufacturers' products we represent.
- We would not take on a manufacturer that insisted on loading us with excessive stock for the privilege of carrying their banner. We do not stock cheaper products - any issues and, the minute they walk back in the door with a problem, you are usually out of pocket. Even with a good manufacturer's warranty backup, it still takes time and time is money.
- Manufacturers need to relieve the pressure on dealers by investing into larger warehouse facilities and/or better delivery schedules. It is important that dealers represent the manufacturer by stocking in-depth and sensible support stock, rather than warehouses filled to bursting, with DD being taken out monthly regardless of how sales have been. With changing seasons, heavy stocks with slow sales can result in sleepless nights for many business owners.
- Do what you feel is right for your business. Don't let manufacturers try to run your business. Make your own mistakes and learn from them.
- We produce good sales for the brands we represent. If they start forcing stock on us (which none of our current ones do), they will be told where to go – pronto.
- Our suppliers haven't been asking for too much in the last few years. It has to work for suppliers and dealers together, as the suppliers couldn't stock the quantity of machines needed throughout the year and dealers want to have a certain level of stock "on hand."
- I have been mentioning every year, when the sales rep comes in for winter stock order, that "stock loading" is a recipe for disaster. We know what products sell well in our area, and it should be up to us, the dealer, to choose level of stock holding. Forcing dealers to carry lines that don't sell simply results in selling these cheaply, with little or no margin (loss leaders) to clear slow-moving stock, and, hence, it creates a price war. When will manufacturers realise it is in all our interest (as an industry) that they need to LISTEN to the dealers!
- Keep it minimal and simple. Too many brands, and your customer leaves your showroom without a purchase! If too much pressure is put on, we will walk away and either find another brand or manage without. The ones attempting to load are the very ones that have poor stock levels themselves. This includes spare parts.
- I have not seen any attempt at stock loading since pre-pandemic.

Industry first, profit second

That's the philosophy of Garden Trader and we have made our annual subscription affordable at £96 for the whole year, which equates to 26p per day and an average of just 83p for every potential customer the site delivers to dealers.

A compelling Return On Investment.



If you are not yet subscribed, please join our UK dealer network and help us to make servicing dealers more visible.





EMPLOYMENT LAW

Fair and unfair dismissals

When it comes to dismissing an employee, there are right and wrong ways to go about it and employers who make a mistake could find themselves before an employment tribunal, *writes Alexandra Farmer, head of team and a solicitor at WorkNest.*



With the average award for unfair dismissal sitting at £10,812, missteps can be costly. It's therefore essential that employers understand what a fair dismissal process looks like, what might constitute unfair dismissal, and what dismissals are considered automatically unfair.

What is a fair dismissal?

There are two key ingredients to the fair dismissal process. They are having a valid reason to dismiss, and acting reasonably in the circumstances.

In relation to the first criteria, the Employment Rights Act 1996 details five potentially fair reasons for dismissal. These are listed as, firstly, dismissal related to an employee's conduct, such as for theft, fraud, bullying or negligence. This could be either one serious incident that warrants dismissal

for a first offence, known as gross misconduct, or a series of more minor offences, such as persistent lateness.

The second is a dismissal related to the employee's capability or qualification for the role. This might be a long-term sickness absence, or performance concerns.

Third on the list is redundancy - say, a business closure.

Next is a dismissal because of a statutory restriction. This might apply if continuing to employ the person would break the law, such as a driver losing his driving licence or a worker without the legal right to be employed.

Lastly, there is dismissal for some other substantial reason. This is a 'catch-all' category that employers may rely upon if none of the other potentially fair reasons for dismissal apply. This category might be relevant if an

employee is handed a long prison sentence, their conduct outside of work brings the employer into disrepute, or they refuse to accept changes to contractual terms.

From a legal standpoint, however, it's not enough that the employer has a valid reason to dismiss - they must also be able to demonstrate that they acted reasonably in the circumstances.

A fair dismissal procedure

While there is no legal definition of 'reasonableness', in determining whether a dismissal was fair, an Employment Tribunal will consider a number of factors, including whether the employer properly investigated the issues and considered mitigating circumstances, informed the employee of the issues in writing and notified them of the potential for dismissal, conducted a disciplinary hearing with the employee to give them an opportunity to respond, allowed the employee to be accompanied at any hearings, informed the employee of the decision to dismiss in writing, and gave the employee the chance to appeal.

In addition to these components of a fair dismissal procedure, a tribunal will consider whether the decision to dismiss fell within the band of reasonable responses. For example, even if the employer does have grounds for dismissal, this doesn't mean that it was reasonable to take this step - would an informal discussion, letter of concern or written warning have been more appropriate in the circumstances?

Other considerations for the tribunal are whether the employer set clear standards of conduct and performance, whether the employee could be expected to understand the consequences of their behaviour, whether the employer's policy has been applied consistently and fairly, and how similar offences were dealt with in the past.

It's important to note that, even if the employer follows a fair dismissal procedure, the employee may have certain characteristics that still render the dismissal unfair.

What makes a dismissal unfair?

In contrast, a dismissal will be considered unfair if the reason for dismissal does not fall under the scope of one of the five potentially fair reasons for dismissal outlined above, the employer did not follow a fair disciplinary or dismissal process, and/or the decision to dismiss was outside the range of reasonable responses open to the employer.

It should be said that, in cases of misconduct or where there are performance concerns, employers should follow the procedures set out in the Acas Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, as an Employment Tribunal will take this into account when assessing whether an employer has acted reasonably.

If it is found that an employer has unreasonably failed to follow the relevant procedure in the Code, a tribunal may consider that the dismissal is unfair.

Likewise, in redundancy situations, there are three main elements to a fair redundancy process that need to be considered. These are warning employees of redundancies, the creation, and application, of fair and non-discriminatory scoring criteria, consulting with employees, and exploring suitable alternative employment options.

Employers who fail to follow a fair selection or consultation process may find that the dismissal is deemed unfair. If this is the case, an employee with at least two years' service may be able to

submit a claim to a tribunal for unfair dismissal. Such claims must generally be submitted within three months of the date the employee's employment was terminated.

Beyond the 'standard' dismissal are dismissals that will be automatically unfair. By law, for example, employers cannot dismiss an employee, or select them for redundancy, if the main or sole reason for their dismissal is that they are pregnant, on maternity or paternity leave, or exercising any of their statutory rights in respect to this.

Likewise, it is automatically unfair to select or dismiss an employee for any reason connected to them, such as making a protected disclosure - known as whistleblowing -, for refusing to work or undertake certain duties due to health and safety concerns, for trying to assert a statutory employment right (such as refusing to perform certain activities that would breach the Working Time Regulations), having part-time status, participating in trade union activities, including taking part in industrial action or acting as an employee representative, or for making a request to work flexibly.

In normal circumstances, employees must have two years' service to bring a claim for unfair dismissal. However, in cases of automatically unfair dismissal, the usual time constraints don't apply. Therefore, if any of the above apply, an individual can usually bring an unfair dismissal claim irrespective of length of service, and regardless of whether an employee has acted reasonably or not.

What's more, because employers cannot justify or defend a dismissal which is automatically unfair, it is significantly easier for an employee's claim to succeed. And, unlike ordinary unfair dismissal, there's no maximum compensation limit if the dismissal is automatically unfair, greatly increasing financial risk to employers.

In summary

It is a fact that dismissals do occur. However, just because they occur, doesn't mean that employers have to open themselves up to unnecessary risk. By following the rules and fair processes, employers can minimise the chance of ending up in a tribunal.

TAXATION

Time to make a change?

From 6 April (2023), how income tax payable by unincorporated businesses - such as sole traders or partnerships - is calculated changed under new rules brought in by HMRC. However, the tax body is worried that many businesses still seem to have not heeded its warnings about how it'll impact them. Put simply, some could pay much more in tax and be burdened with extra unnecessary admin, too, *writes Adam Bernstein, editor of SME Digest.*

The change to what is known as the 'basis period' rules will make little or no difference to the many businesses that already have a April 5 or March 31 year end. But as Emma Rawson, a technical officer at the ATT, points out: "For those with accounting years that do not align with the tax year, the impact will be significant."

Unfortunately, she says that: "Many businesses who could be hit by this change remain unaware of it. The resulting temporary increase in their tax bills, and ongoing additional admin burdens, could, therefore, come as a nasty shock."

What changed?

Currently, once established, sole traders and partnerships pay income tax on the profits of their accounting

year ending in the tax year. For example, if a trader draws up accounts to December 31 each year, in the tax year 2022/23 it will be taxed on profits for the year ended December 31, 2022.

From April 2024, Rawson says that this all will change, and they will instead pay tax on the profits they actually earn in any one tax year – i.e. from April 6 to the following April 5.

She notes that: "Tax year 2023/24 is a 'transitional year', in which the tax system swaps over from the current basis to the new tax year basis. To achieve this, special rules apply to calculate taxable profits and tax.

"Effectively, those that have a year-end other than March 31 or April 5 will be taxed on their normal basis period, plus an extra amount of profits to bring them up to the end of the tax year."

Rawson gives the example of a business with a December 31 year end that will be taxed on their profits for the year ended December 31, 2023, plus their profits for the period from January 1, 2024, to April 5, 2024.

Rawson highlights that this will result in more than 12 months' worth of profit being taxed in 2023/24. To help ease any additional tax arising as a result, she says: "Businesses can offset any 'overlap profits' they may have from their early years of trading (when they may have been taxed twice due to how the old basis period rules work). They may also be able to spread any remaining 'excess profits' over up to five years."

The problem outlined

As noted above, the transitional year rules could see a temporary increase in the tax payable by businesses without a March 31 or April 5 year end. However, for Rawson, that is not the end of the story, as these businesses will also experience ongoing additional admin burdens.

In particular, she warns that once these changes come in, those that draw up accounts to something other than March 31 or April 5, will have extra work

to do each time they complete their tax return: "To get to the profits for a tax year, they will need to combine amounts from two separate sets of accounts and depending on how late the accounting date falls, the second set of accounts may not be ready by the time they come to file their tax return."

Where this is the case, she says that: "They will have to estimate the amount of profits to take from the second set of accounts and include a 'provisional figure' on the tax return. They will then need to amend the return to correct that provisional figure within one year of the original filing deadline (i.e. by January 31, 2027, for a 2024/25 return)."



Irritatingly, these extra steps are not a one-off, but will recur every year when they prepare their tax return.

Making the change

So, with the change set out, Rawson says that the best way to avoid these ongoing administrative burdens is to change accounting date to March 31 or April 5.

Luckily, for the moment, Rawson says that it's possible to change the accounting date by drawing up a set of accounts for a shorter, or longer, period than usual, ending with the new accounting date.

She says that the best time to make

this change may be during the transitional year 2023/24. This is because: "Special rules applying in that tax year may allow them to 'spread' any excess profits they have to bring into account as a result over up to five years - something which isn't available if they make the change in any other tax year."

Beyond that, Rawson says: "Another advantage of changing in 2023/24 is that the normal rule, which says a set of accounts can't be longer than 18 months, is disapplied in that year. This means that they can draw up one long set of accounts to make the change."

Reducing burdens

Unfortunately, moving the accounting date will not help the trader escape any temporary increase in tax as a result in the change of the basis period rules. However, from Rawson's standpoint, it will greatly reduce their ongoing admin burdens, as they won't have to worry about splitting accounting figures between tax years or estimating and then correcting provisional figures. This will clearly save time and effort and, says Rawson: "[They] may also help avoid a significant increase in fees if they pay someone to prepare a self-assessment return." And then there's the issue that tax return fees are likely to increase for businesses with an accounting date other than March 31 or April 5, as tax agents will have to do more work to calculate the profits for the year, as well as having to amend returns to correct any provisional figures used.

So, in Rawson's view: "Changing an accounting date to March 31 or April 5 will undoubtedly make a trader's life easier from a tax perspective."

In summary

Before making any business change, good advice is necessary to weigh up what's best for the business overall alongside the tax-related issues. Time spent with an accountant or tax adviser in seeking more help and information would be a wise investment.



Products



DOMESTIC / COMMERCIAL

EGO extends

Launch of telescopic pole saw

EGO Power Plus has further extended its telescopic tool range.

The new PS1000E Telescopic Pole Saw reaches lengths of 4m when fully extended, and features the motor at the head of the tool for improved balance and ergonomics, as well as cut accuracy.

With a 25cm bar and chain (speeds of up to 20m/s), the company says its carbon fibre shaft makes it easy to handle while helping to keep cuts accurate – further enhanced by the LED cutting guides. Other features include tool-free chain tensioning and pole telescoping. Storage is also made easy, as the cutting head and shaft attach to the tool via a connector, meaning the Pole Saw is more compact when not in use.

For work on trees that require additional reach, EGO is also introducing the EP1000 extension pole as an optional extra. This 1m long carbon fibre extension pole is made of the same carbon fibre, maintaining rigidity while also being lightweight. The tool-free connectivity ensures that the user can quickly and easily attach and detach the extension pole as needed.

COMMERCIAL

McConnel display remote control

All-electric slope mower

McConnel has unveiled the ROBOCUT T S300e, an all-electric remote-control slope mower.

Building upon the capabilities of the ROBOCUT S300, the manufacturer says the S300e retains its features, including 55-degree slope operation, a 150m range, and bi-directional cutting. However, with the integration of electric power, it now offers the same high-performance level, while ensuring zero emissions and reduced noise.

The unit is powered by two Vanguard 48-volt lithium batteries, which McConnel says provides a runtime of up to four hours for uninterrupted operation on a single charge. Recharging the batteries typically takes around eight hours. For added convenience, a fast-charging option is available, reducing the charging time to four hours.

The S300e features a new 1.1m rotary mulching deck that has been specifically designed for electric operation. Equipped with two motors that directly drive the blades, the company says this design ensures efficiency and cutting performance, resulting in a more effective and quieter mowing experience.

The machine made its public debut at Flood and Water Live, a working demonstration event hosted by the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), Lincolnshire, on July 5 and 6, 2023 – and is set to enter full production later this year, with delivery of new orders expected in early-2024.



DOMESTIC



GreenWorks cuts in

Mini chainsaw launched

Greenworks has released a 24V battery-powered 10cm Brushless Pruning Saw / Mini Chainsaw.

The saw comes with a 10cm bar and chain, measures 43.89 x 8 x 20.8cm, and weighs less than 2kg. A simple push button gets it started.

Maintenance is straightforward, with toolless tensioning of the bar and chain, no carburettor, and no spark plug to clean.

The manufacturer says its brushless motor provides double the torque, for more power, longer run-times, quiet operation and extended motor life. Furthermore, the battery is interchangeable with more than 30 Greenworks garden, power, and indoor products.

AGRICULTURAL



Merlo has announced the introduction of a new model for 2023 to specifically meet the needs of those working in confined spaces, such as a traditional farmyard setting.

The TurboFarmer 30.7 is the successor to the P32.6 model. The compact overall dimensions of this new model, at 2m wide and 2.10m high, means that it can reach the places that other handlers in its class cannot.

Powered by a 100hp Deutz TCD 4-cylinder Stage V diesel engine, this new model offers almost seven meters of reach and a three-ton lift capacity. In common with all other Merlo TurboFarmer models, the 30.7 features EPD-managed hydrostatic drive, with a maximum speed of 40 km/h plus as-standard load-sensing, flow-sharing hydraulics giving the operator the ability to

Reaching places others cannot

Compact dimensioned Merlo TurboFarmer

make simultaneous multiple-boom movements at once.

Fitted with a full-size Merlo ROPS and FOPS cab, the company offer two additional cab specifications as alternative to the standard cab – the L model offers a reduced overall height of 1.98 meters, and the patented hydraulic Cab Suspension is available as an option for standard models.

The patented Merlo ASCS safety system provides the added benefit of automatic attachment recognition when used with genuine Merlo attachments. The addition of the optional 10.1" monitor in the cab offers the operator complete control of hydraulic oil flow rate. Working parameter adjustments and digital live load chart is displayed.

COMMERCIAL

Lineup of commercial mowers from Bobcat

Company enters market with ride-on, stand-on and walk-behind units

Bobcat has launched the first four models in the company's new range of mowers for the European market, as part of the Ground Maintenance Equipment (GME) portfolio introduced at the end of 2022.

The four new models are:



ZT3000 Commercial Ride-On

Driven by a choice of Kawasaki FT series engines from 20-24 HP, and featuring Hydro-Gear hydrostatic transaxles, the ZT3000 zero-turn mower provides speed up to 12.8 km/h. The mower can be equipped with 122cm, 132cm or 155cm TufDeck Pro cutting systems with professional-grade components. The machine is also available with a mulching kit.

ZT3500 Professional Ride-On (pictured)

This zero-turn mower is equipped with a 24 HP Kawasaki FT series engine and Hydro-Gear transaxles for speed of up to 16 km/h. It features a mechanically suspended seat with weight adjustment, ROPS structure as standard, two fuel tanks and a TufDeck Pro cutting system. The machine can be equipped with a mulching and collecting kit.

ZS4000 Stand-On Professional Mower

Available with a choice of 20 or 24 HP Kawasaki FT series engines, and utilising hydrostatic transaxles, Bobcat says the ZS4000 provides all the torque required, and enables a maximum speed of 16.8 km/h. It can be equipped with 122cm, 132cm or 155cm heavy-duty AirFX decks, with Air-Gap baffles for better airflow and bolt-on, steel-fabricated spindles for durability. This mower can again be equipped with a mulching kit.

WB700 Walk-Behind Commercial Mower

This is powered by a choice of 15.0 or 18.5 HP Kawasaki FS series engines. Featuring hydrostatic transaxles, with heavy-duty output torque and comfortable ground speeds of up to 10.5 km/h, the unit can be equipped with 122cm or 132cm TufDeck cutting systems, featuring steel-fabricated blade assemblies to handle tough mowing in tight areas. The machine can also be equipped with a mulching kit.

AGRICULTURAL



5 SECOND INFO

- Drop floor mechanism
- A combination of six, twelve, thirteen or twenty-five knives
- Twin satellite arms
- Wrapper frame mounted on a parallel linkage

Non-stop baling from Kubota

The FB1000 arrives

Kubota's baler range has been extended with the arrival of the FB1000 – a non-stop round baler wrapper combination that integrates a pre-chamber, main chamber and wrapper.

Designed and developed at sister company Kverneland Group's baler competence centre in Ravenna, Italy, the FB1000 uses two bale chambers arranged in series, to allow a number of rollers to be shared.

Operating as a pre-chamber, the front half of the FB1000 produces two-thirds of the bale. As the pre-chamber reaches its preset density, crop flow is diverted into the main bale chamber, allowing baling to continue non-stop. The pre-chamber is then opened, moving the pre-formed bale into the main chamber, where it can be taken up to its maximum size of 1.25m.

Once bale formation is complete, crop flow is switched back to the pre-chamber without stopping, allowing round baling to continue as a non-stop process. Net is then applied to the completed bale in the main chamber, after which, the tailgate is opened and the finished bale is

transferred onto the wrapper. This entire sequence enables baling to continue uninterrupted.

The manufacturer says, to make bale transfer simple, the machine uses a wrapper frame mounted on a parallel linkage. This enables the wrapper to be lowered from its working position to collect the completed bale as it rolls from the main chamber. This avoids the need for a complex mechanical transfer system.

With the bale collected, the wrapper is raised to allow twin satellite arms to rotate around the bale. Unlike traditional wrapping mechanisms, the FB1000's twin satellite arms rotate in a vertical plane. With the required number of film layers applied and the satellite arms in their parked position, the wrapper frame is lowered to allow the rear wrapper roller to be raised, gently releasing the wrapped bale onto the ground.

Operators can choose from a combination of six, twelve, thirteen or twenty-five knives through the Super Cut crop chopping system. Knives benefit from spring-loaded protection, and the FB1000 includes a drop floor mechanism.

COMMERCIAL



Brushless brush cutting

Makita expand 40V ranges

Makita has added two new Brushless Line Trimmers (UR014G and UR017G) and the UR013G Brushless Brush Cutter to its range of 40VMax XGT products.

The manufacturer says the UR013G 40VMax XGT Brushless Brush Cutter (pictured) is suitable for heavy-duty tasks. It has a 1,500-watt maximum output, delivering power equivalent to that of a 35cc petrol machine, and features a high-torque mode. It has a variable speed control, with a maximum speed of 6700rpm, a lock-off function, and a temporary reverse-rotation 'grass tangle removal' function. The machine is operated using the intuitive control unit on the right-hand side of the adjustable offset U-shaped handle.

The UR017G 40VMax XGT Brushless Line Trimmer offers a 600w power equivalent to a 23cc petrol engine. It has three speeds, with a maximum of 6500rpm plus an ADT (Automatic Torque Drive Technology) mode, which adjusts the speed and torque automatically for optimal performance. Like the UR013G, the UR017G also includes the grass tangle removal function.

Makita say the UR014G 40VMax XGT Brushless Line Trimmer, meanwhile, offers the same compact design and loop handle, but delivers a power output of 1500w and a maximum speed of 5700rpm on a variable speed control. It has a 450mm cutting diameter and a high torque mode. It also features a reverse-rotation mode to suit different user requirements as it allows control over the direction in which the grass clippings are scattered. The grass is scattered to the right and left, with clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation, respectively. This can be useful, for example, when cutting verges or lawns next to a road or driveway.

All three machines include the manufacturer's brushless motors that, they say, minimise wasted energy to extend runtimes per battery charge and improve productivity. The UR013G, UR014G and UR017G also all include safety features, such as an anti-restart function, electric break and Active Feedback Sensing Technology (AFT), which shuts the tool down if it detects the rotation speed suddenly slowing.

ELIET expand EGO electrified equipment

New machines on the way

Belgium manufacturer ELIET have announced an expanded range of battery equipment powered by EGO.

Following the launch of the industry's first battery-powered shredder around twelve months ago, the company says they have been working on extended e-power range, which was previewed recently at Demopark (where all products were available to view).

The company says the new e-power range includes:

- Traditional scarifiers
- Self-propelled scarifiers
- Lawn edgers
- Blowers
- Green waste shredders

All the e-power machines will be showcased at Groundsfest by UK distributor PSD on September 19 and 20, at Stoneleigh Park, and availability planned for 2024.

ELIET also say they are in the final stages of electrification of a larger green waste shredder, with the preview of the battery-powered Prof6, the very first self-propelled shredder that is battery-powered by Vanguard battery, and one of the first applications of Vanguard Batteries in this field.



AGRICULTURAL



Maschio Gaspardo has launched a new version of its high-speed Chrono precision drill.

The Chrono 500 is a mounted machine, which has a key feature that, the manufacturer claims, sets it apart from anything else. It can be set up to run with variable row spacings, and is equipped with either eight or twelve planting units, making it suitable for sowing a range of crops with 45cm, 50cm, 70cm or 75cm row spacings. This versatility, says the maker, makes it possible for the operator to switch from drilling sugar beet in the morning to maize in the afternoon, the conversion taking less than two hours.

Whether customers opt for the

fixed row variant or the variable spacing option, the 500-series shares all the common features with the other high-speed precision planters in the Chrono range.

“The Chrono was specifically developed for fast-paced precision drilling, with unrivalled seed placement no matter what shape, size or seed type,” explains Dominic Burt, Maschio UK Field Sales Manager.

“Adding a version to the range that can swap between 50cm and 75cm row spacings in under two hours puts the Chrono further ahead of the competition, and provides the customer with a much more versatile machine, capable of drilling multiple crop types.”

With this year’s maize and sugar beet planting out of the way, Maschio Gaspardo dealers are offering early-order discounts for certain Chrono models.

Standard specification includes air-bag suspension, GPS-compatible ISOBUS connectivity, 60-litre low-level easy-fill seed hoppers, and front disc-openers to ensure consistent coulter penetration in UK conditions. A 1100-litre fertiliser front-tank and electronically-controlled microgranular applicators with 16-litre hoppers are an option, as are trash-cleaning wheels for minimum tillage and direct-drilling situations.

The loss of any dealer is a blow to the industry



Our anonymous columnist, THE SPROCKET, considers the demise of F.R. Jones, muses on staff retention, and enjoys the start of the show season.



By the time the mag hits the streets, I am sure my first missive will have been beaten to death by all and sundry, with rumour mixed with fact and a lot of mud being thrown around, amongst some serious feelings of concern and maybe even regret.

I was shocked to learn of the demise of F.R. Jones in late June, and, like many, can only speculate as to why a 60-year-old business, with something like a £20 million turnover, has suddenly collapsed mid-season. Who pulled the plug, and why? FRJ have been in the headlines on and off for some time, and have rattled many dealers with their

'special' online price offers, and I am sure some will be saying things like: 'Serves you right.' However, is this good or bad news for the industry as a whole?

Whatever people's feelings, maybe the closure of such a large and significant business mid-season should be a concern whatever their trading policies may have been? All through the pandemic, and with product shortages, many have harped on about margin retention to help businesses be sustainable. One could speculate that high volume and low margins could have been the trigger to the problems with FRJ, with costs increasing due to inflation, lower-than-

expected turnover for the time of year, and too much stock in hand. Is it simply a case that the return on investment was not enough to justify the continuation of the business, and the future prospects looked too dismal to carry on in any sensible commercial way?

At the risk of incurring the wrath of some readers, I have to say: the loss of any outdoor power equipment business is a blow to the industry, even if it may be deserved. The industry relies on its independence and its tenacity, and a weakness in this could encourage more suppliers to further expand into direct selling routes as their reliance on a dealer network becomes frayed.

On the other hand, is there any culpability in the supply chain that creates an unbalanced commercial model within a dealership that suppliers could be more sympathetic to? As one dealer mentioned to me: 'It will be interesting to see if any of the suppliers' terms are changed to reflect some of these issues for next year.'

The 'ancient' practice of pre-season ordering needs to be addressed, as getting dealers to be a third-party warehouse for suppliers who do not or will not consider a more just-in-time approach is becoming less sustainable. We all understand that manufacturing processes can be complicated, and flexibility costs money, but the burden should not fall to the dealer network in terms of warehousing or financing a supplier's product line against a background of inflation, unpredictable markets and lowering margins.

The agricultural machinery dealers generally have differing problems to deal with, but are usually focused on one main brand as full-line dealers with other products tagged on. We have seen a lot of consolidation in this area, as manufacturers try to secure their marketplaces in the big equipment game. We have also seen large dealers choosing to go their own way and not be dictated to, and develop their own brand strategies whilst carrying out their own acquisitions or mergers with neighbouring dealers. Whilst the number of actual registered dealers in this area is reducing, it is heartening to know that branches or outlets and staff numbers are pretty much remaining the same.

Staff retention

Which brings me onto staff retention. There is more and more competition from employers in the UK for technical people of all ages and abilities, and the land-based engineering sector is hard pressed to compete for new technical staff.

Companies need to keep a close eye on their staff, and ensure that they are happy and comfortable in their jobs. It costs far less to hang onto a good member of staff than it does to recruit a new one.

It does not have to all be about money when it comes to keeping people. Look at benefits, working hours, holidays, training and maybe occasional bonuses that will help

people cope with inflation but not permanently crank up wage bills. Keep in touch with your staff on a regular basis, and have an informal chat about how they are doing. Importantly, don't put yourself in a position where a staff member has to come to you to ask for more money. Make sure you know what is going on, and can address the situation before you must deal with a kneejerk reaction and maybe lose a valued member of staff. Recruiting is expensive and time-consuming, so hanging onto the good guys you already have is worth investing some time and attention into what they need or want.

Show time

I have been able to attend a few shows this year. Now, the Royal Three Counties was buzzing over the weekend I attended, although it's not the biggest of the Royal County shows. I also was at the Royal Highland Show at Edinburgh in June, a show I thoroughly enjoy and would highly recommend, as it has one of the biggest displays of agricultural machinery of all the UK shows and is a shop window for what Scotland has to offer.

The RHS has invested considerable amounts of money in its showground infrastructure to cope with increasing visitor numbers. They have moved to online ticket sales only, and, sadly, entry prices have rocketed up since the pandemic. Even though the show is restricted on numbers, it is reported to have topped 217,000 visitors over its four-day period. A mammoth task for the well-organised show staff, and a logistical nightmare for traffic control and parking.

The RHS is well-supported by dealers and manufacturers alike, and the quality of the stands and their presentation is exceptional. A wonderful testament to the tradition of the show and its variety. I would highly recommend a visit for anyone that has not attended the show before.

As the Sprocket, I am allowed to have a brief mention about motorbiking. Well, I did ride to the RHS, parking the bike in the approved parking area at the hotel along with a couple of other bikes. I did chain mine to a lamppost, though, as I cannot afford to replace it! Caught on camera at 2am in the morning, though: four bad guys came along and just lifted a BMW GS onto a truck bed and drove off! The owner was a Suisse guy, about to go touring around the NW 500. Poor guy had to go home. Even my special bike lock probably would not have stopped them nicking my R1200RT, but maybe it is not in demand on the nicked bike market?! Looking on the internet, it seems that motorbikes being stolen from hotels in Edinburgh is a big problem. So chain it up, put the alarm on and make it as difficult as possible for anyone trying to nick your bike!

I just had a main service and new tyres and brakes - oh boy, what a shock that bill was! All dealers note the labour rate was £90 an hour, and the parts were an horrendous price. A labour rate that our industry should be considering so the techies can be paid more and retained!

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 2023

Orsett Show www.orsettsow.co.uk	1
Moreton-in-Marsh Show www.moretonshow.co.uk	2
Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC www.autumnfair.com	3-6
Bowes Agricultural Show www.bowesshow.org.uk	9
Penistone Agricultural Show www.penistoneshow.com	9
Kington Show www.kingtonshow.co.uk	9
Driffield Show www.driffieldshowground.co.uk	19
Stanhope Show www.stanhopeshow.com	9-10
UK Dairy Day, The International Centre, Telford www.ukdairyday.co.uk	13
Mid Devon Show www.middevonshow.co.uk	22
Tillage Live, WH Corbett, Atherstone www.tillage-live.com	14
GroundsFest, Stoneleigh Park www.groundsfest.com	20-21

Landscape Show, NEC www.landscapeshow.co.uk	27-28
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OCTOBER 2023

Future Farming Scotland Expo, Aberdeen www.futurefarmingexpo.com	10-11
Equip Exhibition, Louisville, USA www.equipexposition.com	18-20

NOVEMBER 2023

GMA Saltex 2023, Birmingham NEC www.gmasaltex.co.uk	1-2
Midlands Machinery Show www.midlandsmachineryshow.com	8-9
Agritechnica 2023, Hanover www.agritechnica.com	12-18
AgriScot 2023, The Royal Highland Centre www.agriscot.co.uk	22
Royal Welsh Winter Fair www.rwas.wales/winter-fair	27-28
CropTec 2023, East of England Showground www.croptecshow.com	29-30
Service Dealer Conference & Awards www.servicedealer.co.uk	30

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