

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

July/August 2023

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

CONSTANTLY BUILDING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Buxton's Neale Hopley talks to us about staffing, succession, and the surge in demand for battery powered products.

KICKING THE SEASON OFF IN STYLE

Dealers on what's going well and the challenges faced

CHANGING FRANCHISES

Collings Bros on refocusing and plans for the future

CORDLESS COMPLICATIONS

What are dealers to do with spent batteries?

OPEN DAY INAUGURATION

Plenty to learn about where MKM Agri is heading next as they welcome guests into the dealership



Letter from the editor
Steve Gibbs

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Welcome to the July/August 2023 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

We are delighted this time round to present an issue absolutely packed with the voices of dealers from around the country. As well as featuring plenty of dealer-centric stories within our News pages, we also hear in-depth from (*deep breath*) MKM Agri, MowersUK, Stubbings Bros, Albany Garden Machinery, Winchester Garden Machinery, Collings Bros and Buxtons. As ever, we are immensely grateful to all companies featured in our pages for offering up their time and sharing their recent business experiences with us. The magazine relies on hearing from our expert readers to keep us informed as to what is impacting their dealerships, allowing us to reflect on topical talking points.

A couple of subjects that are clearly on dealers' minds currently are what to do with spent batteries at their end-of-life, and the ongoing challenges regarding recruitment. The first of those subjects has generated some debate via our *Weekly Update* (which, if you haven't

signed up yet at www.servicedealer.co.uk, is available for free every Friday at noon). We consider what has been fed back to us, from both sides of the industry fence, starting on page 14. Suffice to say, it's a terribly unclear and confused situation that desperately requires clarification. At whose door the responsibility for this clarification lies – be it manufacturers, trade associations or government – is just another area of the whole debate that lacks specificity.

Recruitment, meanwhile, remains just as challenging for dealers as it has these past few years. We include some comments from readers who responded to our most recent survey on the subject, starting on page 44. I'll forewarn, though: they don't make the cheeriest of reading. Words like "difficult", "dire" and "abysmal" give an indication as to where some dealers opinions are on the subject.

I'm sure all reading this will be hoping that the various industry- and manufacturer-specific initiatives currently in operation, designed to raise the profile of our sector, will have the desired effect – and quickly!

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THE TEAM

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EVENTS



Taking Care of Business

Theme of this year's Service Dealer Conference & Awards

Service Dealer has revealed the date, a new venue and the theme for this year's Conference and Awards.

This year's event will be taking place at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-Upon-Avon, with the day to mark up in your diaries **30th November 2023**. The theme meanwhile has been announced as **Taking Care of Business**.

Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "Every year, your feedback helps to inform our future plans - helping us to make the next conference and awards bigger and better - and, most importantly ensuring that what we deliver is what you need. This year, we may have a new venue, but we intend to keep things down to earth and just as relevant for the dealer industry."

"Taking on your feedback from 2022 we know that the topics of sustainability and the retail experience are important to you. That's why we came up with this

year's theme - Taking Care of Business.

"At the 2023 event, we aim, through a great line-up of speakers and sector leading workshops to equip you with the tools and knowledge you need to help your dealership, not only to function but to thrive."

"With speakers and interactive workshops addressing the challenges of business today, and considering opportunities for development and growth, the **Service Dealer Conference 2023** will cover all you need and more to support you on your journey. Don't miss the opportunity to invest in your business by joining us for a day of learning, networking and Taking Care of Business."



Also announced is Kress returning as Principal Sponsor. Tony Macer, national sales manager UK & Ireland for Kress said, "Kress are proud to again be the principal sponsor of the Service Dealer Conference & Awards."

"We work closely with our dealers to build true partnerships to help bring our exciting innovations to market. The pace of growth across our business this year has been simply outstanding. We would like to thank every dealer for their continued support."

"We hope you all have a fantastic season, and we look forward to seeing everyone at this year's Service Dealer Conference & Awards in November."

Keep up to date with all the latest developments regarding the Conference & Awards via Service Dealer's Weekly Update, published every Friday at noon (subscribe for free at www.servicedealer.co.uk)



Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke presenting the 2022 Conference and Awards

DEALERS



Peter Chaloner, managing director of Henton & Chattell

Henton & Chattell take on Kubota

Expanding into ag alongside groundcare

Henton & Chattell Ltd has become a Kubota dealer for agricultural and groundcare machinery, covering the East Midlands area.

The appointment of the Nottingham-based dealership comes after their announcement in January this year that they were to part ways with John Deere following a relationship of two decades.

Peter Chaloner, managing director of Henton & Chattell, said: "We are delighted to have this opportunity to move our business forward with Kubota."

"We like to be successful in every market we're in, which means it's all about our team, its knowledge, and the ability to deliver first-class customer service."

"We already have a strong groundcare team," Peter continued. "The opportunity to develop an agricultural machinery business to provide sales, service and support to the industry through a partnership with a dynamic and forward-thinking tractor manufacturer is the next logical stage of our business development."

Kubota, meanwhile, said this appointment is a strategic move for their long-term business ambition, which is to continue to grow the groundcare and agricultural machinery aspects of its business.

"This latest dealer announcement reinforces Kubota's commitment to its customers and the market," explained Henry Bredin, general manager of Kubota (UK)'s Tractor Business Unit. "The appointment of Henton & Chattell will help Kubota to further strengthen its position in these important market sectors, by serving a wider cross-section of customers."

Established in 1931, Henton & Chattell is one of the largest garden machinery distributors in the UK. A family-owned business, it supplies a broad range of customers from its logistics operation, which boasts a workforce of 85 and over 11,000 square metres of warehouse space.

This new arrangement brings M-series tractors, implements and R0 compact loaders, plus a range of groundcare and professional turf care products, as well as RTV utility vehicles, to Hentons.

DEALERS

B&B's Manitou coverage expanded

Following Chandlers relinquishing the franchise

B&B Tractors have expanded their agricultural area with Manitou, effective June 1, 2023.

The recent decision of Chandlers Farm Equipment to relinquish the franchise provided the manufacturer with the opportunity to offer an expanded geographical area of responsibility to one of their long-established dealers. B&B Tractors have now taken responsibility for the area previously covered by Chandlers, and will open a new dedicated Manitou depot trading as B&B Machinery.

This depot will carry an extensive stock of parts and machines, and will be operated by a team of staff dedicated to the brand.

Established in 1991, B&B Tractors is a family-owned and managed business that currently operates out of four depots, covering Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire.

Mark Ormond, managing director of Manitou UK Ltd, said: "B&B Tractors is a very established dealer, with a strong history and commitment to Manitou and our mutual customer base. I am delighted that the business will now establish a dedicated Manitou outlet in Lincolnshire to serve Manitou customers in that area."

B&B Tractors are planning a new, centrally-located, permanent depot, and will be based in the Sleaford/Swineshead area, with the address to be announced shortly.

James Bowring, managing director of B&B Tractors, added: "We are thrilled to be working with Manitou and their team in the Lincolnshire area. We already have some relationships with customers within our new area, and we understand that aftersales support is vital. That is why we have chosen to run a dedicated team from a new premises, under the new B&B Machinery name, to focus on providing the best level of service that Manitou customers deserve. We are working hard to get everything in place to provide our new team and customers with a depot that will fully support their needs."



Glyn Wallace, area sales manager for Manitou UK in cab, and James Bowring, managing director of B&B Tractors, right

INDUSTRY

Maschio Gaspardo sets up UK subsidiary

Split with current distributor Opico



Maschio Gaspardo's chief commercial officer, Alessio Riulini

Maschio Gaspardo has announced that its product portfolio is set to be broadened with a raft of new product lines, due to an agreement with current UK distributor Opico.

The Lincs-based importer and Italian manufacturer say they are pleased to announce plans to establish an independent UK branch to distribute and back up the full range of Maschio Gaspardo products across the country.

Service Dealer contacted OPICO to ask what this move would mean for the current UK dealer network. An official spokesperson told us, "There won't be any changes to the dealer network. All Maschio dealers will continue dealing with Maschio direct."

Maschio Gaspardo's chief commercial officer, Alessio Riulini, said: "We are incredibly grateful to the OPICO team for the work they have done in growing the Maschio Gaspardo brand in the UK over the last 12 years.

"We're now at a point that we want to widen our offering to include the full range of products we sell across the

world, including sprayers, fertiliser spreaders, direct-drills and cultivation equipment. To do that, we are setting up our own branch in the UK, just as we have in other major European markets."

The two companies are working together to establish a new UK headquarters, with all the people and facilities required to support dealers and customers. A dedicated sales team has already been set up by OPICO for the Maschio Gaspardo brand in the UK.

The recently bolstered line-up consists of three territory managers, who will be supported by a dedicated technical support team based in the UK. Recruitment is underway for additional staff to provide farmers and dealers with after-sales support for the Maschio Gaspardo range, as well as assisting with demonstrations.

With its own Midlands-based office and parts storage facility, Maschio Gaspardo say the new business is ideally positioned to service the entire UK dealer network.

Taking place just as this issue went to press, Cereals 2023 was due to provide visitors with the first opportunity to see a wider range of products exhibited on the Maschio Gaspardo stand. The sales team, supported by staff from the factory in Italy, were on hand to show farmers and dealers around the existing range of machinery and a host of new products which were seen in the UK for the first time.

To ensure continuity and a seamless transition as dealers move across to the new business, OPICO will continue to oversee distribution of Maschio products and provide back-up until end of the year.

"We're really proud of the job we've done in growing the Maschio and Gaspardo brands in the UK over the last 12 years," says OPICO managing director James Woolway.

"It's really heartening to see such a strong, healthy business ready to take the next step and we're pleased to be assisting Maschio Gaspardo in that. Having a broader product range, and its own dedicated team to back it up, can only help in building on the success we've had."

OPICO have confirmed to Service Dealer that, once establishment of the new business is complete, the two companies will go their separate ways. The spokesperson said: "This will be a complete parting of ways. OPICO will support the setup and then, later in the year, Maschio will run on their own."

DEALERS



GreenMech EVO 205D

GreenMech reveal dealer reshuffle

Important areas across the country

A reshuffle of the GreenMech dealer network has seen the introduction of a number of new sales, service and parts partners in important areas across the country.

Full distribution arrangements have been reached with Ross McTurk Engineering, Silvestria and Griffin Machinery Solutions, while MKM Agriculture will now be providing after-sales support to customers in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, with Hunts Engineering covering customer support across Oxfordshire.

Ross McTurk Engineering, from their depot at Felixkirk Airfield near Thirsk, will be offering sales and support across the manufacturer's portfolio to those operating in and around Yorkshire, County Durham and the area south of the Tyne in Tyne and Wear.

Picking up the baton for Cheshire, Merseyside and North Wales is Silvestria, owned and operated by an experienced tree surgeon. Together with sales, the company will also be offering tailored servicing and parts support.

Completing the trio of new full-line dealerships is Griffin Machinery Solutions (GMS). The dealership will be adding GreenMech woodchippers

to the list of machinery available for hire, sales, service and repair to their extensive customer base across Hertfordshire, Essex, Middlesex and the area north of the Thames in Greater London.

Two new supporting dealers have also been announced by the manufacturer.

Bedfordshire's MKM Agriculture will be providing parts and servicing to those in the surrounding counties of Northants and Buckinghamshire, while Hunts Engineering will be looking after customers in Oxfordshire from their depot in South Warwickshire.

GreenMech's sales director Martin Lucas, said: "As a brand, we pride ourselves on offering not just quality products, but industry-leading after-sales support to our customers both old and new.

"In this reshuffle, we are delighted to welcome a wealth of knowledge and experience into the network, that will ensure we can continue to deliver the top level of service that people have come to expect when they purchase a GreenMech product."

Service Dealer understands these appointments are to replace county areas previously covered by Balmers, Lloyds, Turners and George Browns.



MKM's Anthony Deacon

MKM join Can-Am network

Manufacturer looking to increase share of the utility market in UK

Bombardier Recreational Products (BRP) is continuing to grow its Can-Am off-road dealer network in the UK with the appointment of Bedford-based MKM Agriculture.

The manufacturer says this new addition is part of their ongoing expansion plans to increase its share of the utility market in UK.

A family-run business with over 30 years' experience in the agriculture and ground care sectors, MKM Agriculture will be adding the Can-Am off-road line-up as part of the business' ongoing strategy to continually strengthen its product offering through the provision of vehicles its customers are requesting.

Mike Loach, BRP commercial manager (UK & Ireland), said: "We're delighted to be adding such a knowledgeable and experienced dealer to our growing network in the UK. We believe the company will hit the ground running, and we look forward to supporting the business as it helps us expand our share of the market in the utility sector."

Anthony Deacon, managing director, MKM Agriculture Ltd, said: "Adding the Can-Am off-road line-up aligns with our ethos of investing in quality products that will benefit our customer base. The combination of the Can-Am offering and our team's knowledge and experience will enable us to become the 'go-to' business in the area for anyone looking to purchase an ATV or SSV, and we look forward to working with Mike to achieve this."

You can read about MKM's recent open day starting on page 20.



Overall Dealer of the Year for Excellence in Customer Support, Reesink Turfcare South East

Reesink name their winning dealers

Aftermarket honours presented

Each year Reesink UK highlights its dealers who go above and beyond in providing exceptional standards of customer service, goals and considerations with its Aftermarket Dealer Awards.

The awards recognise an overall Dealer of the Year for Excellence in Customer Service, alongside outstanding performance in three key areas: Service, Parts and Skills. For the first time this year, Reesink also recognised its dealers that showed the greatest improvement across all key areas in a brand new award.

Dealers are scored across all three key categories in keeping with Reesink's Service Level Agreement. The dealer that achieves the highest combined score across categories is awarded the overall Dealer of the Year for Excellence in Customer Support. This year, that award went to Reesink Turfcare South East, who also won the gold award for Excellence in Skills.

Tom Clark, branch manager of Reesink South East, said: "Receiving these awards is a proud achievement and recognises our staff members doing a good job. It shows customers we're a trusted brand as an award winner in what we do to be recognised as one of the best in the field."

The runners up in these respective categories were Lloyd Limited and Oliver Landpower, who both took home silver awards.

When it came to Excellence in Parts, Revill Mowers took the gold award, with Gammies Groundcare taking silver. Stan Grewar, parts manager at Gammies Groundcare, says: "We've got a young team and this award reflects their hard work. I'm very proud of them, I know that the company and the parts department are in safe hands with them."

Excellence in Service saw Cheshire Turf Machinery win gold, while Redtech Machinery took silver.

Mark Woodward, service director at Cheshire Turf Machinery, said: "We are continually investing in our customer service, and the Excellence in Service award is our eighth award since 2017. All of our staff have been brilliant in maintaining and improving standards since the Reesink service level agreement was introduced.

"I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate one of our service technicians, Chris Hester. He's our first technician to successfully complete the prestigious Toro Master Tech course."

The new award for the dealership that showed the biggest step up across all sections of its KPI scoring: service, parts and skills went to Devon Garden Machinery. Steve Dommet, from the company, said: "This award recognises the efforts our after sales team has put into raising standards and improving the service we provide our commercial customers. As this is a new award, it was a pleasant surprise when we found out we'd won."

Lee Rowbotham, service and training manager at Reesink UK, added: "The relationship between distributor and dealer is vital to the success of both businesses. In many cases, Reesink's dealers have that all-important customer facing contact. We appreciate how vital that role is and feel strongly about strengthening our relationship with our dealers wherever possible. That's one of the reasons why the Aftermarket Dealer Awards came to fruition."

Lee continued: "Reesink has always prided itself on delivering fantastic after-sales service, and the Aftermarket Dealer Awards recognise those dealers who do an exceptional job at upholding this customer service standard. We'd like to thank them all for their continued hard work and incredible work ethic. It's a real pleasure working with them year in and year out."

PEOPLE

Senior appointment at Pugh

Experienced industry figure joins

RVW Pugh Ltd has confirmed the appointment of Andrew Purnell as sales director for their Massey Ferguson business.

Andrew has previously spent 10 years associated with the Massey Ferguson brand working for AGCO, and, most recently, has spent two years as distribution channel development manager for Lely. Andrew will be responsible for not just the Massey Ferguson brand, but all other machinery brands held by the dealership.

RVW Pugh Ltd has held the Massey Ferguson franchise since 2000, and say they continue to grow their agricultural business with the recent separation of the Fendt brand to form its sister company TR Machinery. Pughs also hold the franchises for Merlo, Väderstad, Sumo, Alpego, Teagle, Yamaha, Sulky and AW Trailers, to name a few.

Robert Pugh, group chairman for RVW Pugh Ltd and TR Machinery, said: "Andrew's passion for the Massey Ferguson brand, in-depth knowledge of the Massey Ferguson products, and good working relationship



L-R: Emma Pugh, Andrew Purnell, Robert Pugh and Caroline Pugh

with the RVW Pugh team and customers makes him an excellent fit in helping drive our business forward".

Emma Pugh, managing director, said: "Both Dad and I have had an excellent working relationship with Andrew for over 12 years from when he started out as our area sales manager for Massey Ferguson. We are all very excited about having Andrew on the team."

Andrew Purnell said: "I am delighted to join RVW Pugh Ltd. I have known Robert, Caroline, Emma and the team for many years, and I am looking forward to working with them again, only this time as part of the successful dealership team.

"I have always had a passion for Massey Ferguson, even learning to drive on a 590! I have gained great experience, having worked for two of the industry's leading companies, and cannot wait to get stuck in."

DEALERS

Addition to Merlo's dealer network

RC Setchfield Ltd join



L-R: Matt Gledhill, Merlo UK product support specialist; Hannah Setchfield, director, and Ashley Clough, area sales manager of RC Setchfield Ltd

Merlo UK have announced that Lincolnshire-based RC Setchfield Ltd have joined their dealer network.

"This appointment symbolises Merlo UK's commitment to providing our customers with strong and full coverage across South Lincolnshire," explained Owen Buttle, national sales manager at Merlo UK. "As a family-owned business ourselves, we understand the strengths and stability of family-owned and operated companies. The longstanding reputation of RC Setchfield as telehandler specialists places them at the forefront of service and sales expertise in the local area."

Founded in 1982 by Richard and Heather Setchfield to service machinery, RC Setchfield rapidly expanded into sales and parts following demand from their customer base. The business has since been passed to their daughter, Hannah Setchfield, who has led the company as a director since 2021.

Hannah said: "We are delighted by this partnership with Merlo at this juncture in our history, a perfect addition to our current service offerings and existing franchises, solidifying our position as a material handler expert in the local area.

"All the team are excited to be working with a company that shares our core values; a family business, putting customers and innovation at the centre of its operations, in order to compete and do things differently."

DEALERS

Corvus grow network again

Redlynch Agricultural Engineering and Baggleys join

The Corvus Off-Road Vehicles dealer network grow again, with UK distributor Boss ORV announcing both agricultural and groundcare machinery dealers as new additions to the team. Corvus coverage in Dorset will now be provided by Redlynch Agricultural Engineering Limited, the business founded from humble roots by Nicholas Heal in 1980. Building on a passion and success in buying and selling second-hand machinery, Redlynch has grown to span three counties in the southwest.

“At Redlynch, we’ve carefully chosen the franchises we represent,” said a spokesperson for the company, “and our mission is to provide customers with the right machine for them.”

Boss ORV MD Phil Everett welcomed Nick Heal, Paul Cooke and all the team at Redlynch, adding that it

is a major step forward for the Corvus Terrain range of 4x4 utility vehicles to gain such highly-regarded sales and service in the area.

“Corvus UTV presence in the groundcare sector is growing from strength to strength as well,” added Phil. “The Boss ORV team is joined by Baggleys Machinery, and we welcome Solly Mansfield, Oliver Mansfield, Toby Mansfield and all the team in distributing the Corvus Off-Road Vehicles range in East Anglia.”

Based in the heart of Norfolk, the dealership has been providing a service to the Norfolk community for many years, regarding offering a service to maintain machinery as being just as important as sales. They operate a fully-equipped workshop, which includes staff who have gained their MST Master Service Technicians award.



L-R: Solly Mansfield, Phil Everett, and Oliver Mansfield



L-R: Boss ORV MD Phil Everett with Redlynch group sales manager, Paul Cooke

DEALERS

Avant name their dealer of the year

National recognition for Chichester Farm Machinery



Chichester Farm Machinery’s MD, Lewis Ramm and sales manager, Steve Everton

Chichester Farm Machinery, based in West Sussex, has received national recognition for its knowledge, professionalism, and customer service at a prestigious awards ceremony.

The dealership was presented with the Avant Dealer of the Year award following an exceptional period of sales, servicing and repairs. The award also recognised the company’s aftercare, parts and product knowledge.

Managing director Lewis Ramm, who attended the event in Norwich together with sales manager Steve Everton, said: “We were delighted to have even been considered for such an award, so to then be named as Dealer of the Year

was a true honour and a privilege.”

He said the award was the culmination of hard work and determination from the whole team: “We may only be a small company, but we’re a strong and effective one, with staff who are really committed to their jobs. Receiving an award like this makes it all worthwhile, and we couldn’t be more pleased.”

Chichester Farm Machinery, based in the village of Runcton just outside Chichester, has been an Avant main dealer since 2018. The company specialises in all types of farm and garden machinery sales and maintenance.

INDUSTRY



L-R: Canycom director of international sales, Mr Yasuhiko Mori; PSD sales coordinator, Lindy Gildert; Canycom president, Mr Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki; PSD managing director, Chris Gibson; PSD Director, Hilary Gibson

Dealer network expansion opportunity confirmed

Canycom visit PSD

PSD Groundscare welcomed representatives of Japanese manufacturer Canycom to their premises in Lancashire during May.

Canycom president Mr Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki and director of international sales Mr Yasuhiko Mori were met by PSD managing director Chris Gibson, director Hilary Gibson, sales director Stuart Mercer and many of the team, in their first visit to the UK since launching a partnership with PSD last October.

After an official UK launch at SALTEX, the range of ride-on brushcutters has been promoted at dealer events across the UK, and to customers with national advertising, with the range due to be showcased again at this year’s event. Since the initial launch, both companies say they have been focused on working closely together to ensure they have machines and after-sales back-up to support the UK dealer network, and are both pleased with the progress made so far.

Despite it being a public holiday in the UK, when approached by Canycom about the trip, Chris Gibson says he took the necessary steps to make it happen. Chris said: “It was an absolute privilege to welcome both Mr Kaneyuki and Mr Mori to our offices. When we visited them in Japan last October, their whole team made us feel incredibly welcome, and we were delighted to be able to provide them with the same courtesy.

“The visit was a real success, as it allowed us the opportunity to update them on the UK business and our further plans for a long-term partnership. We were also delighted to receive confirmation of an additional shipment of machines for the 2023 season, that will allow us to both support the existing dealers and continue to grow our dealer network.”

Canycom president Mr Yoshimitsu Kaneyuki added: “We would like to thank Chris and his team for making our trip possible, and such a warm welcome. We made our visit to gain a better understanding of the UK market, and we return to Japan confident that, with PSD, we can work together as one team to ensure a successful long-term partnership. We are two nations, but we believe we can be a good family.”

PEOPLE



Ian Ellis

GreenTek announce new md

Ian Ellis has worked his way up from yard man

GreenTek, the specialist supplier of grass, ground and turf maintenance equipment, has announced that Ian Ellis has become their new managing director.

Ian says, with expansion into new overseas markets, and new product developments underway, he has exciting aspirations for the company’s future.

“We’re aiming to double our turnover in the next six years,” he confirmed. “We’re expanding into new markets, including the US, and have some exciting new products in development.”

Ian continued saying he never forgets his roots within the business, explaining: “I joined the company in 2000 as a yard man, and spent most of my time loading and unloading forklift trucks and stacking pallets in the workshop. I remember the whole site was on a slope, which made stacking shelves in any sort of order quite a challenge.”

In 2012, Ian became a shareholder within the business, and soon afterwards was promoted to the position of operations manager and started looking for new premises for the expanding business. Now based at the 3.5-acre site in Walton, near Leeds, with 31,000 sq ft of onsite warehouse storage, the company says it can respond to customer orders quickly and deliver from stock.

Ian continued: “I absolutely love my job, which has given me great opportunities to expand my product knowledge and share this with customers through face-to-face product demonstrations.

“I’m extremely honoured and privileged to be offered the position of managing director, and look forward to continuing to build on the legacy of innovation at GreenTek to grow the company in the future.

“We’ve got exciting plans for new product development - both enhancements to existing machinery and completely new products - and we’re looking forward to expanding into new markets.”



Trainer, Gary Taylor (in orange hi-vis) with delegates

GGM launch training academy

LANTRA-accredited operator training added to portfolio of services

GGM Groundscare have unveiled a new LANTRA-accredited training academy as the latest offering to their portfolio of services, after “identifying a requirement in the industry.”

The new courses provide delegates with the skills and knowledge required to safely operate and maintain relevant machinery through courses that deliver both practical skills and health and safety guidance. All training can be carried out either on customers’ own premises, using the equipment that team members will be using on a day-to-day basis, or at GGM’s own dedicated training centre in Colne, Lancashire.

The LANTRA-accredited training courses ensure that operators are trained to a national standard, whilst fulfilling the organisation’s legal

obligations with regards to the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulation 1998 (PUWER).

GGM managing director Chris Gibson explains: “After many conversations with our customers, as a business we identified that there was a requirement in the market for a one-stop shop that offers accredited operator training in addition to selling machinery.

“GGM are committed to continuing to strive for excellence in customer service, and the new training academy is the next chapter in this.”

The training covers all makes and models of machinery. Upon successful completion of the courses, all delegates will receive a certificate of competence, and, for the LANTRA training, an accredited certificate and skills card will be awarded (LANTRA

registration fees apply).

The training is aimed at any employee either employed in, or who is looking to be employed in, agriculture, horticulture, landscaping or grounds maintenance, who is or will be required to operate machinery. It will be run by Gary Taylor, who has over 20 years of experience.

Chris Gibson continued: “After-sales and service has always been a key part of our offering, and so the launch of the GGM Training Academy was a natural step for the business.

“It’s our aim to ensure organisations have adequate and appropriate training to operate and use work equipment, to fulfil their health and safety requirements, and to help to prevent unnecessary accidents. We’re extremely excited to take this forward.”

DEALERS

Dealership technicians honoured

Highest training achievement bestowed by Reesink

The Master Service Technician award, the highest training achievement Reesink Turfcare and Toro Commercial has to offer, has been awarded to four more technicians.

They are:

Chris Hester

from Cheshire Turf Machinery

Ian Hill

from Oliver Landpower

Stuart Barrie

from Reesink Scotland

Michael Dixon

from Lloyd Limited (Newcastle branch)

Each have completed one of the most stringent and comprehensive training courses in the industry, and are now able to offer the highest level of service in the UK.

The Master Service Technician (MST) programme is specifically designed to provide the most thorough training for Authorised Dealer Technicians, ensuring their skillset is updated and meets the demands of the industry’s continuous evolution.

Reesink say, with the rapid development of electric and hybrid technology, it’s important that the skills and knowledge in those areas progress at an equivalent rate, so that technicians and dealers can better serve their customers and the Toro product.

Stuart Barrie confirms this is very much the case: “As engineers, we need to keep up with industry progress and development. We all know about climate change and the move from petrol/diesel to electric power in the car industry. Not so well-known is our industry is going through the same changes. This course makes sure all engineers are adequately trained to carry on with day-to-day repairs and requirements as the changes happen.”

When considering the advantages this will bring for customers, Ian Hill said: “The MST course provides the



Reesink’s first Master Service Technician, David Creasy

opportunity to train to a standard that’s not widely-available in the industry. In a customer facing role, it’s an advantage to be able to give the best level of support and advice to customers, and ensure high standards of service on hybrid and all electric systems.”

Michael Dixon agrees, saying: “Completing the MST training has meant that Lloyds as a dealer has also benefitted, receiving better warranty return rates and boosting the dealer standards score. It has not gone unnoticed by the company that my efforts have had a positive impact on the business.”

Chris Hester added: “It’s a huge achievement to pass the interview process and be accepted onto the course. That, in itself, is a worthy addition to the CV! But, most of all, it’s recognition for the dedication and hard work you’ve put into your career, and, with it being similar to a degree in this sector, it’s a big deal.”

Summing up the benefits, having a qualified MST in the business, Sean Trotter, service manager from Lloyds, said: “This training gives the engineer the recognition they deserve for their skill set and abilities. It’s an industry-recognised qualification, held in high esteem with our customers in the golf industry, and brings financial benefits with warranty reimbursement and a contribution towards the training once qualified.”

The course has been set up with further benefits for the qualifying technician, too, as Michael explains: “There’s a trip to America to get a first-hand insight into the goings-on of Toro and where it all comes from. For someone who works for a dealer, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and trips like this rarely come around.”

DISCUSSION POINT

What are dealers to do with the volume of used batteries being returned by customers? A lack of clarity regarding who is responsible for their safe disposal and recycling has been highlighted by recent discussions. Editor STEVE GIBBS reports.



Batteries: Cordless complications

With the season well and truly underway now, we at *Service Dealer* have been hearing from our dealer readers that an ever-growing proportion of machinery sales to both homeowners and professional users is battery-powered kit.

Over the last 10 or so seasons, these cordless products have boomed in popularity with consumers. When we first started talking about them in depth in our pages, there was a distinct section of the network who were quite wary of the impact that the technology would have on their businesses. The phrase used by more than one dealer was that battery

tools were the 'death knell' for the industry.

I believe we've moved beyond those kinds of views now, with battery machinery an everyday part of a dealership's offering. However, a problem that has arisen, that as yet no-one appears to have a definitive solution for, is **what to do with spent batteries at their end of life?**

This incredibly complex and unclear area of business is an unhelpful fact of life for dealers up and down the country. The grey area of responsibility has recently generated discussion via our *Weekly Update* (published every Friday at noon – **subscribe for free at www.servicedealer.co.uk**).

Where do dealers stand?

We reported in the *Weekly Update* some months prior that a possible breakthrough in the disposal of batteries had been made by scientists at Linnaeus University in Sweden. Apparently, researchers there have discovered a new energy-efficient method for recycling lithium-ion batteries. Essentially, they say they have developed a more environmentally friendly way of retrieving cobalt from the used batteries. With a liquid solvent made of readily available substances, derived from urine and acetic acid, they say over 97 percent of the cobalt can be recovered. The researchers claim they see good potential for large-scale application of this technique.

However, as it stands, this exists only as a theoretical solution, potentially for some time in the future.

But what happens now? What are dealers to do with the volume of used batteries being returned to them by customers?

Whose responsibility are they for their ultimate safe disposal and recycling? The customer? The dealer? The manufacturer or supplier?

I was contacted by dealer Nigel Barnes, of Moggs of Wells (Engineering) Ltd in Shepton Mallet, who told me he feels the industry needs a definitive statement regarding what should be done with spent lithium-ion batteries.

Nigel said: "Whilst our local vehicle dismantlers are quite happy to take complete machines for scrap and conventional lead-acid batteries, they will not accept lithium-ion batteries. I suspect the local community recycling centre would take the same view, but we don't go there because we are seen as having commercial waste for disposal.

"This reluctance to accept certain items for recycling will only increase fly-tipping by the unscrupulous, and there is already far too much litter lining roadside verges as it is."

Nigel continued, saying that his understanding regarding lithium-ion batteries for disposal is that the manufacturers and importers are ultimately responsible. "I have asked several of our suppliers about this," Nigel told me, "and generally received a blank look or a wall of silence.

"If it is, in fact, the case that the manufacturers and importers are responsible, they should have systems in place for such recycling."

Understandably, Nigel is – like, I'm sure, dealers across the country – keen for a conclusive directive, offering guidance as to what is the correct course of action to take.

Nigel also spoke about the procedures involved in sending used batteries back to manufacturers and suppliers to deal with, bearing in mind the hazardous nature of the material and observing the carriers' health and safety requirements. "There would obviously be a cost to us for such carriage via the courier services," he said, "of which, as far as I can see, only UPS seem to have any proper hazardous cargo documented procedures."

Nigel concluded: "From my experience these lithium-ion batteries fail quite frequently, so there must be a lot of them out there requiring safe disposal. Let's take some



DISCUSSION POINT: BATTERIES

definite action, please. Otherwise, the waste is only going to turn up on some consumer affairs programme, illegally tipped or buried, and with the consequential bad publicity we can all do without. That's before considering cobalt poisoning, hydrogen cyanide gas and other life-threatening by-products that can emanate from disused lithium-ion batteries."

Strong, wise words from Nigel, and I thank him for getting in touch to highlight this issue so eloquently.

Views from manufacturers

Following the publicization of Nigel's thoughts in the *Weekly Update*, we received some interesting responses from the manufacturer and supplier side of the industry in regard to what to do with spent lithium-ion batteries and who the responsibility ultimately lies with for their safe disposal.

Also, we had the discussion widened, hearing that the industry should be concerned not only about the disposal of batteries, but also their shipping.

Firstly, some manufacturers were keen to point out that their batteries are all serviceable, which, they argue, is a major plus over some competitors' batteries that they would consider to be inferior. One told me how they were yet to replace a cell in one of their batteries after seven years, although they have experienced imbalances which they were able to rectify with the software they hold.

I heard how certain batteries apparently use a less volatile and toxic lithium mixture than other sealed batteries, allowing safe servicing, a longer life cycle, and the ability to be re-energized.

Whilst I'm sure everyone reading this would agree that some batteries are, indeed, better than others, I suppose all will eventually come to their end-of-life, and then we're back to the same issue of the correct means of safe disposal, and who must take responsibility for this.

Another manufacturer and supplier, who asked to remain anonymous, wanted to highlight that the whole discussion around lithium is incredibly complicated. They were keen, in fact,

to expand the debate beyond just disposal, saying that they believed that other companies were not supplying the batteries correctly in the first place.

They told me that their business had taken this issue extremely seriously, and had spent thousands of pounds to put their staff through the correct training so that they are able to issue dangerous goods notes, and, therefore, be compliant. On top of this, they said, they have paid the extra expense to have two DGSA's (Dangerous Goods Safety Advisers) employed at their company to make sure they stay compliant. By doing this, they told me, they are authorised by the likes of TNT to ship batteries.



Where this supplier believed there was a problem in the industry was with what they described as companies "black wrapping product" - meaning to ship without declaring that they are in fact dangerous goods. They described this as a huge issue, which, they felt, could cause some serious difficulties down the line.

They told me that to their understanding (and, just to stress, I'm only passing on what I was told), the legal requirement at the moment if a dealer is delivering new products that are classed as dangerous goods to customers in a van, they should be in possession of a written DGN (Dangerous Goods Note), and the driver should be ADR-compliant (the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road).

This, they said, would cost dealers a significant amount of money - and they did not know of any that were currently doing this.

Disposal

Returning to the issue of end-of-life battery disposal, this supplier said their company had spent a lot of time looking into the subject. They had come to the conclusion that the problem is that the product being disposed of is classed as "faulty" - therefore, as soon as a waste company is contacted to dispose of "faulty batteries," the prices quoted are extortionate.

Now, this supplier was keen to point out that it is not the case that they are shirking their responsibilities in terms of disposal. They simply believed that, at the moment, there is not an affordable solution available.

They explained that the advice given to them, and what they pass onto their dealers for disposing of lithium batteries, is to give the battery back to the consumer, and ask them to dispose of it themselves at their local waste or recycling centre. This is because most of these places will offer a service where they take faulty lithium products, but only from members of the public. As dealer Nigel Barnes correctly pointed out last week, for businesses, it is classed as commercial waste, and, generally, this cannot be disposed of at a local centre - a specialist disposal company would most likely need to be engaged, at some considerable cost.

The other problem that this supplier spoke of was space. I heard how their company held disposal bins at their premises, but they were expensive and large. They felt if they were to issue these bins to dealers, many would simply not have the space for the number required - because, of course, dealers are trading in multiple battery-powered franchises.

This supplier (perhaps controversially, some may feel?) also did not accept that the assumption that suppliers should be obliged to pick up the cost for battery disposal

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was quite right. They drew parallels with the waste oil and fuel that dealers have always had to get rid of from petrol machinery. Should batteries be considered any different to these, they asked?

They told me that they believed, in the future, dealers will own disposal bins, and they will have to add a charge for disposal onto their service bills to cover the cost.

Certainly, when we hear the situation described as “complicated,” I don’t think anyone could dispute that!

Confusing and complex

Speaking with dealers as to what their understanding and practical experience is with handling spent batteries, it’s a confusing and complex situation, with the guidance available far from crystal clear.

What we have heard from our readers, is that, in general, customers are not giving much thought to what happens to their batteries at end-of-life. Buyers are focusing on the widely-discussed benefits that battery power offers. With the top-end cordless equipment

enjoying a much longer usage life, the eventual disposal of batteries is not on their agenda.

Dealers we have spoken to, though, all believe it is an important topic that does require some serious industry-level consideration. Sales of battery-powered machinery for some dealers has jumped massively, so the issue of spent batteries is one that is only going to grow larger and more pressing.

At the moment there arguably appears to be a bit of finger-pointing, not unlike that famous Spiderman meme, with three parties all addressing the others and saying: ‘You’re responsible’. In this case, dealers, manufacturers and customers alike can believe the onus is on the other two for disposal.

We have been pointed in the direction of the official government WEEE Directive advice, and the website of the UK’s WEEE Distributor Take-back Scheme (DTS), which could be helpful for readers to peruse. But surely what would be most helpful is that a clear industry path to safe disposal is

established? Service Dealer approached BAGMA, the dealer trade association, for this article, to see if they were able to offer some guidance to the network. To be fair to BAGMA, it is as complicated a situation for them as it is for everyone else.

By the time this magazine went to press, we had unfortunately not yet received a response.

I have been promised by the Association that they and their colleagues at the AEA are doing some serious digging into the situation, considering the conflicting information on various governmental websites, with the intention to offer some clarity. They tell me they are reviewing all available information, and will make an announcement when able.

Service Dealer will report their findings just as soon as we can in the *Weekly Update*, and within these pages.

Until then, it is clearly an unwelcome situation that is going to rumble on, with some considerable sorting-out required. The sooner this can happen, the better for everyone.



Model Pictured: Cobra LT86HRL

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Open day inauguration

MKM Agriculture, the ATV, UTV and outdoor power equipment dealership run by previous *Service Dealer* diarist Anthony Deacon, held its first open day during May. Given the business' rapid recovery from a devastating workshop fire, there was plenty to learn about where the company is headed next, and multiple franchise products for visitors to see and try. MARTIN RICKATSON joined them



MKM Agriculture welcomed hundreds of visitors to the first open day to be held at its Bedfordshire main depot back in April

A lot has changed at MKM Agriculture's Marston Moreteyne headquarters in Bedfordshire since 1987, when managing director Anthony Deacon's father, Mark, began repairing and servicing farm machinery, working with two friends in a converted pig shed. Branching out four years later into farm machinery retailing with a Valmet (now Valtra) tractor franchise, by 2000 business growth warranted a new purpose-built larger building, the company by this time having chosen to focus on used machinery sales and repair, with the Valmet franchise having been given to another dealer despite considerable sales success.

In 2003, MKM signed the first franchise agreement for the machine type that was to define it: the ATV. That year, the company agreed to become a Suzuki dealer, having been approached to sell its range of utility ATVs, leading two years later to a further agreement to market the same maker's leisure and racing ATVs, and to take charge of the Suzuki GB ATV racing team, competing and winning across the UK and Europe. In 2007, MKM earned the maker's 'Dealer of the Year' accolade. Alongside Suzuki, MKM also signed to sell Logic ATV attachments.

The opportunity to move into utility vehicles came in 2010, when MKM was offered the agency for JCB's venture into the sector, the Workmax. With the UTV market growing fast, there was strong demand despite stiff competition, and the company achieved the highest UK dealership sales during 2014.

Then, in 2013, came the chance to expand MKM's ATV offering, when the company was approached by Yamaha Motor Europe to take on its ATV franchise, the existing local dealer having chosen to retire, leaving a strong park of machines to service, support and ultimately replace.

In 2014, JCB decided to cease Workmax production, but a year later the UTV gap in MKM's portfolio was quickly filled with the company's appointment as dealers for Kawasaki, maker of the Mule UTV. MKM completed its line-up of 'big four' Japanese ATV maker franchises in 2016, when approached by Honda to take on its franchise for the local area.

A year later, the decision was made to move the workshop out of the company's purpose-constructed building across the yard into the farm's old cow shed, with a design

laid out to cater for ATVs and UTVs and the occasional larger machine. More franchises also required more display area, so a larger showroom was created, reckoned to be probably the UK's largest for ATVs.

Such was the success to date of the MKM business that, in 2019, the company was offered the Honda franchise for Suffolk, an area previously managed by ATV specialist Fieldens. Ex-Fieldens man Keith Collins joined as branch manager, and a further deal was signed to also offer the full range of Honda lawn and garden machines, and its industrial/energy franchise, at both branches. With a sizeable amount of local business via the RSPB and co-operatives Fram Farmers and AF Group, the new depot got off to a flying start.

Devastating fire

As the business battled through the coronavirus pandemic, in early April 2021 there was a major workshop fire at the Marston Moreteyne premises. Losses included 86 machines – 54 of which belonged to customers – and 35 years' worth of tools.

Despite the shock, measures were quickly put in place to deal with insurers, continue servicing and selling from the yard, and work from service vehicles where possible. By early 2022, plans were afoot for new buildings on a redesigned site.

Much of this has been detailed by Anthony in his regular writings for *Service Dealer*, but it was worth a quick summary to set out the background for our visit to MKM's first open day, which provided the chance to see just how far the business has progressed since then.

"In summer 2020, we had reshaped the yard, which is in a ten-acre site, to give us more working, display and storage space," explained Anthony.

"When the fire happened a few months later, we didn't really have a recovery plan – few people do, I suppose. The structure lost was a re-clad, repurposed livestock shed. Our insurers took three weeks to accept liability, but, once through that, they were brilliant. Our total claim totalled about £800k, and, if everything had been in one building, it might have been a lot higher.

"We quickly rearranged our systems to work in the yard in the interim from the back of service vans, and the builder who works regularly for us came in quickly and laid the concrete we needed. Because of all this, our business interruption claim was pretty small, but sorting out other issues was more of a challenge, and I spent three months doing pretty much nothing but dealing with the fire aftermath.

"Anything with a steering wheel or handlebars was classed as a vehicle and valued in conjunction with a valuer. It was a long process, with some trickier to value than others, but, on the whole, it worked well, and I then checked with the customer whether they were seeking payment or replacement.

"Unfortunately, the fire coincided with the beginning of



Anthony Deacon believes there remains room for a business like that of MKM alongside the larger farm machinery dealerships



A 10 x 30m semi-permanent building is currently providing workshop facilities, and will be turned over to storage once the new 50 x 20m permanent building is constructed

supply shortage issues, so there were some replacement difficulties which compounded things, but Honda sold us 13 ATVs from their demo fleet, and helped keep high-use customers going. Anything else, such as mowers, were replaced on a new basis.

"We then grasped the opportunities presented by the aftermath to lay more concrete hardstanding and remove some old buildings to really improve on the start we'd made.

"Initially, we planned to erect a temporary marquee on an aluminium floor, but, as the days progressed, we started to think more about what we might want the yard to look like in ten years' time, and decided to take the opportunity to shape it to match what we thought we'd need.

"We bought a 10 x 30m semi-permanent building to provide workshop facilities, which we were in just three months after the fire. It has a 25-to-30 year guaranteed life, but should be good for more. We have planning permission for further 50 x 20m permanent building that will give us 1,000 sq m floor space, plus 300 sq m mezzanine storage. This will include all our covered needs, with a showroom and offices at one end and our workshops at the other, plus parts department, aftersales office, customer collection area, sales, marketing and accounts offices, staff room, and a meeting/staff training room. The current workshop temporary building will then be used for storage. Currently,

we're still in the middle of planning, though, with a pond on-site and newts being an issue. Ultimately this doesn't mean we won't be able to build, but will have to make some concessions and show we're doing the right things."

Franchise changes

Meanwhile, MKM's ATV offering continues to evolve. Having held the Yamaha franchise since 2013, the manufacturer is making changes to its retail arrangements, and MKM is no longer a Yamaha dealer.

"We have not yet replaced Yamaha directly, but, after today, we will be announcing a franchise agreement with BRP to offer Can-Am ATVs and UTVs from this branch. I've been very impressed with their way of doing business, and, while there are a few products that overlap, their range gives us something different to offer, particularly in UTVs, where currently we have only the Kawasaki Mule and Honda Pioneer.

"We're also now offering ATVs at a different price point from Taiwanese maker Kymco, which is part-owned by Kawasaki, and CF Moto from China. We've always been about offering a wide range and choice, and these products are very price-competitive.

"Having multiple ATV franchises enables us to cater for the whole of the market, especially as choice has lessened



Inside the semi-permanent building, which was sourced from France, MKM's technicians have plenty of space and light in which to work

since many manufacturers dropped many models when new emissions rules were introduced.

"Some customers are especially brand-loyal, while others are seeking a particular specification – for example, Honda are the only manufacturer who offer a manual transmission, while others offer a particularly good auto transmission. Honda only go up to 520cc, whereas Suzuki offers a 750cc machine, as does Kawasaki. Kymco and CF Moto are a different type of offering at a different price point."

While long-standing franchises such as Logic continue to provide a full line of ATV implements and attachments, MKM has signed multiple other franchises of late. Recent new agreements include one with GreenMech, primarily as a service supplier.

"Woodchippers are a new sector for us, and moves us further into forestry and arboriculture, which complements the franchise we have developed over the



Honda remains a key franchise for the business, with the full range of lawn and garden machines, and the maker's industrial/energy products, offered alongside its ATVs



Two years since signing its first tractor franchise agreement since its Valmet (Valtra) days in the 1990s, MKM has retailed a number of Iseki tractors

past two years with Stihl, while we have also entered the domestic battery-powered equipment sector with Kress.

“Two years ago, we signed with Iseki, our first tractor franchise since Valmet in the 1990s, and that’s worked really well, with tractors and mowers that complement our customer base, selling particularly to large homeowners and equestrian customers. We’re also talking to a local football club about a groundcare tractor.

“Since December, we’ve also been agents for Brian James Trailers, giving us a full range of flatbed, plant and other types. We are the UK and Ireland distributor for Rammy front mowers from Finland, and are building a dealer network, with a couple of good retailers already signed in Scotland and further machines sold into Ireland.

“We’re also dealers for Swedish firm Kelfri’s flail mowers, which have been very successful. We can put them on a pallet and send them anywhere – last year we sold 40 units.”

All of this is a lot to manage with a staff of 15 – although there are another four full-time and one part-time staff at the Suffolk branch.

“Workshop recruitment and retention can be a challenge,” acknowledges Anthony.

“We’ve had a couple of apprentices who have gone through an apprenticeship programme but later decided to see if the grass is greener elsewhere, and we’ve lost a couple to tractor dealerships over the past year that we’ve trained up since school. One of our workshop team also moved into sales, so we needed to replace him

“But we now have three full-time ATV and garden machinery technicians here, and two engineers – my dad being one of them – who also spend part of their time delivering and installing machines with customers. Add a service manager and a service adviser, and that’s a workshop team of seven.

“Commercial work remains our core, but domestic is a growing focus, and there are blurred lines - some domestic users with larger grounds who need an ATV and a flail mower, for example, are almost professional users, so our customers are probably split equally.

“I think there remains room for a business like ours alongside the larger farm machinery dealerships. We work well with those locally, and, if we had the opportunity to open a third dealership elsewhere, I’d like to think we could make it work again.”



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SCAN ME

Kicking the season off in style

Back in May, *Service Dealer* embarked on a road trip south, visiting a selection of dealerships to discover what was going well and what challenges were being faced as the season finally got underway.

Editor STEVE GIBBS reports

Duncan Murray-Clarke, the owner of *Service Dealer*, and I embarked a mini road trip towards the end of May, visiting several dealerships. Our intention was to gain a sense of how the season was taking shape, and to hear what was going well and what challenges a selection of our readers were facing so far this year.

We have undertaken a couple of these before, memorably in Scotland and Wales, but circumstances dictated that we were unable to set off on tour for a couple of years now. It had been far too long, in all honesty, so it was great to get out and about, taking advantage of the first real prolonged period of fine weather and enjoying

fascinating conversations with some talented entrepreneurs.

This time, we headed to southern England, including making the crossing over the Solent to the Isle of Wight. We received a warm welcome from friends old and new at each stop, and we thank everyone we met for their generosity of time and spirit.

We won't leave it so long before we take our next trip around a selection of dealerships, with ideas already formulating for possible areas to visit.

It is pleasing to report that everyone we spent time with were full-on busy, with both buoyant machinery sales and workshops booked to capacity. The slow start to the 2023 season, which it seems that all areas of the country experienced to some degree

or another, was acknowledged, but thankfully, by the time we visited, that appeared to be behind us. It was full steam ahead for the dealers we met.

Clearly, all still had hurdles to overcome - some common, some unique to their own circumstances - but I would say everyone we had the pleasure of meeting on our road trip were upbeat and looking forward to tackling what lay ahead.

Whenever we speak with dealers, we always learn something new or gain an insight we didn't have before. Dealers like to talk, and all have a story to tell, an opinion to share or some wisdom to impart - and May's excursion proved no different.

MOWERS UK

A small, large business



The showroom in Tadley, near Basingstoke



Service Dealer owner with MowersUK's manager, Sam Hudson



In the showroom at MowersUK



Robotic mower promo videos play behind the counter

We began our jaunt enjoying a great conversation with Sam Hudson of last year's *Service Dealer* awards finalists, MowersUK, who are based at Tadley, near Basingstoke in Hampshire.

Sam was telling us what machinery was going great guns for them now the season was in full flow - and, like others we spoke to, it was the EGO range he singled out for mention as proving popular with customers. Also, he said it was mulching mowers in general that are rapidly rising in popularity, with zero-turns in particular finding favour.

MowersUK were also seeing an uptick in interest in their robotic mower offerings, we heard. An innovative display touch that stood out in store was a screen above the counter, where the company were playing their own, professionally-made promo videos on loop - for both Automowers and Honda's Miimo. Sam told us customers often do a double take when they see their assistant manager and robotic specialist, both behind the till and on the TVs.

"We're actually finding that robots are proving popular amongst customers with smaller gardens," Sam explained. "We're fortunate with our location, in that we're based in quite an affluent area, so we have a market who are open to the technology."

Sam said that they treat everyone who walks into their store as if they are a potential new customer - even if they are looking for warranty work on a machine that has not been purchased from themselves. "It's sowing seeds," he said.

It was also interesting to hear from Sam about how valuable he found it to interact and discuss issues he faced as a dealer with fellow specialists around the country. He said that taking the opportunity that manufacturer dealer days and the like afforded him to share experiences and ideas with others who were going through the same things gave that reassurance that "it's not just us."

Of course, finding the time to spend away from the business is always tricky, he said. Hence, he has to be selective in what he chooses to attend. "I find events where I can network with other dealers, hearing how they are having similar interactions with their customers as we are, to be the best use of my time," he explained. "Often at trade shows, this doesn't really happen, so I ask myself: do we really need to attend another one? Choosing to go to dealer-specific events, therefore, tends to be my preference."

Sam summed up how he views his dealership, saying: "We are a very small, large business, if that makes sense? For our physical size, we do some seriously impressive numbers. With our parent company, Acacia Groundcare Equipment Rental Ltd, specialising in hire of groundcare and landscaping machinery, we are able to look after our customers' hire, sales or service needs."

STUBBINGS BROS

Going like the clappers

Our first stop on the Isle of Wight was Stubbings Bros Ltd in Chale Green, near Ventnor. Here, we met multi-generational father and son team Andy and Luke Stubbings.

The duo told us business had been “going like the clappers” since the season had truly kicked off. They spoke of how they had found great success offering Kubota’s agricultural, groundcare and construction lines. With the full gamut of machinery options, any and each of the three could pick up the slack if one of the others were experiencing a slower period, they told us.

Stubbings have built up a loyal following of customers on the island over their 40 years of trading. They are proud that their quality of customer service keeps people coming back to them time and again, they said. Alongside the Kubota offerings, we heard how, for their domestic customers, especially popular lines are the Aspen Fuel and the EGO battery ranges. “Customers are becoming ever keener on quality battery-powered tools,” Luke told us, “often because they’ve had such bad experiences with traditional fuel going bad in their equipment which has been sat in their sheds.”

As it is for dealers around the country, recruiting is tough for Stubbings, we heard – perhaps more so with their island location and naturally limited pool of potential applicants.

“We have an apprentice in the workshop at the moment, and another coming through,” said Andy, “but what’s tricky is finding that correct quality of person. You need to identify someone who ideally has an interest in mechanics outside of the work environment, too. We find those kinds of people fit best with what we need.”

Andy also told us how impressed they were with the Kubota apprenticeship scheme that they are a part of, as very specific knowledge is required these days for each manufacturer’s range of machinery.

Another frustration that Stubbings told us they are facing is local bureaucracy, who are making potential plans for the company’s desired expansion tough going. The dealership would be keen to move to new, larger premises, as what they have now is becoming too cramped for their needs.

“We want to stay rural,” Andy explained, “but getting planning permission for anything is so difficult. If we were able to expand, we could take on more people and potentially move into new areas for ourselves such as robotics.”

For the time being though, until a potential move is established, Andy and Luke believed that their mix of old school experience and youthful digital literacy was a great combination to keep their dealership thriving.



Multi-generational team at Stubbings Bros Ltd, Luke and Andy Stubbings



In the yard at Chale Green, on the Isle of Wight

ALBANY GARDEN MACHINERY

A unique micro-climate



Adam Bennett on the lawn he uses to demo robotic mowing around the back of the showroom

Also on the Isle of Wight, we visited Adam Bennett at Albany Garden Machinery in Newport.

Adam explained to us how, over on the island, due to their unique micro-climate, they do seem to experience an extended season compared to the rest of the UK. The grass will start to grow earlier and finish later - which will reflect in their business patterns for the year. “I have my Automower running until Christmas Eve,” said Adam, “and then start it off again on January 31.”

Due to the season having kicked off in earnest before the rest of the country, when we visited in May and for the near future, Adam was telling us how the books for their workshop were utterly rammed full. He went on to describe the dealership’s year so far as “staggering.”

A significant development recently for Albany has been the increase in interest seen for robotic mowers. A new raised display as customers enter Adam’s showroom has sparked many conversations, and piqued curiosity in the technology. But where the real advantage has been generated is that Adam is then able to walk the intrigued customer out, round the back of the store, to a beautiful, large lawned area, which is surrounded by rolling hills. Here, an Automower can be viewed in action, trundling about, keeping the grass in great order. A better illustration of what the automated system could provide for those perhaps wishing for a change from their traditional ride-on couldn’t be hoped for.

“Our setup for Automowers now is fantastic,” confirmed Adam. “We’re so lucky, because I can be in negotiations



Adam speaking to Service Dealer editor Steve Gibbs in Albany’s workshop



Albany enjoys a prominent roadside position on a main route into Newport on the IOW

with a customer in the showroom – and then bring them round the back to the demo area and secure the sale.”

With more investment coming onto the island, there are some large, expensive properties with expansive lawned areas, who are driving sales in robotics. Wedding venues, second home owners, high-end professionals working remotely from the office – all are affluent consumers, potentially in the market for an automated solution.

“We do enjoy superb word-of-mouth between our high-end customers,” Adam told us. “If they want the top-level machinery, they find us.”

Adam also shared that he believes that the stretch of water separating his dealership from the mainland greatly helps in the battle that dealers everywhere will know only too well – that of convincing local customers not to purchase through online traders from afar. Adam explained that, once that extra shipping cost for ferrying across the Solent is added into the equation, islanders will tend to realise that buying from a local specialist is a much wiser course of action.

“It’s such a short journey across that small strip of water,” said Adam, “but it certainly proves advantageous.”

WINCHESTER GARDEN MACHINERY

The industry must stick together



WGM's Jason Nettle speaking to Steve in one of the store areas at the HQ



Jason in the parts department

Duncan and I ended our brief tour back on the mainland, visiting the headquarters of Winchester Garden Machinery, run by *Service Dealer's* diarist of the season, Jason Nettle.

As readers of this magazine will know, Jason is never short of an opinion or three, and myself and Duncan had an enjoyable time listening to him discussing all manner of industry issues. In terms of the start of the season being delayed this year, Jason believed we were about eight weeks behind. However, he was not overly concerned about this, as he felt that anything missed in the first three months of the season could be caught up in the final three.

"We have been selling brushcutters before mowers this year," Jason told us. "Which is weird. There is plenty of stock out there in the network at the moment – and plenty of money to be made."

Jason gave us an eye-opening tour around the extensive facilities at WGM's base. A truly impressive setup, that had been expanded last year with the construction of a new mezzanine floor in one of the buildings. As Jason put it, the "fluid" movement of stock through the business needed to be closely monitored, to their own exacting system, to keep everything moving smoothly. To which end manufacturers who supplied machinery in packaging that didn't stack neatly along with all the other brands were one of the banes of Jason's life!

This notion of the industry needing to work closely together - dealers and manufacturers alike, for the benefit of



Jason in the workshop, consulting with a technician



Duncan, Jason and Steve

all – is a theme that Jason returned to many times. Both sides need and rely on each-other, he said. "If I don't sell, they don't sell" is how he puts it.

"I don't want to come into conflict with my suppliers," explained Jason, "but I'm happy to share concerns on behalf of Winchester Garden Machinery and the industry whatever that might be."

Dealers should be communicating with each other up and down the country, believes Jason. "We need our community to stick together," he said. "We can help each other, and shouldn't feel like we're in conflict."

He also has a deeply held view that dealers have to

offer their customers something more - something to give consumers a reason to keep using them, and to not look elsewhere. This has always been the case, he says, but he feels it's more important now than ever.

"We need to be asking ourselves: what do our customers want from us?" Jason said. "Our businesses are led by their wallets – and, at the moment, our domestic customers are saying they want battery products.

"We do need to be mindful though," Jason warned, "that we want these customers to keep coming back to us to have their products serviced – which, obviously, isn't the same with the battery products as it was with petrol.

"However, I will say that we are noticing a trend emerging, perhaps, with some of our professional customers choosing to revert back to petrol-power, away from cordless, for certain tools.

"As ever, what we stock in the future will reflect what our customers are telling us they want to buy."

Once again, Duncan and I would like to thank all who we met on our trip for their kindness and openness in talking to us about their businesses. It is always so encouraging to get out into the country and meet dealers who are thriving in their local communities – whilst at the same time facing challenges head-on with ingenuity and good humour.

If you have any suggestions for areas of the country we could take a trip to next time, please do get in touch.

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Constantly building customer relationships

LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR visited dealership Buxtons, where he spoke to managing director Neale Hopley about staffing, succession, and the surge in demand for battery powered products



Neale Hopley, MD of Buxtons

Buxtons is situated on the busy A34 near the town of Penkridge, not far from the edge of Cannock Chase, a well-known Midlands beauty spot.

The dealership has been servicing its customers for well over 60 years, and, since the 1990s has been under the leadership of its managing director, Neale Hopley.

Buxtons focuses machinery sales to a 30-mile radius and sells arboricultural equipment nationally. They cater for a wide range of customers including farmers, rural estates, schools, local authorities, contractors, tree surgeons and a domestic market that's ever-growing due to the constant building of new housing estates in the area.

The business was originally started by local farmer, Bernard Buxton, in the 1960s. Neale's involvement began when he married Bernard's daughter in the 1980s. However, by the 90s, they had parted - with Neale taking over the machinery dealership and his ex-wife taking over the farm.

Laurence Gale: What sort of products were you selling in those early years of the business?

Neale Hopley: Initially, we were selling domestic lawn mowers. We also concentrated heavily on chainsaws, as there were a lot of farmers and tree surgeons within our trading area. At the time, we were specialising in STIHL saws imported from Germany, and we also set up a workshop for repairing and servicing them.

Since then, our business has become renowned for selling arboriculture products. We now have a massive range of products that includes chainsaws, ropes, clothing, and sundries for the professional tree specialist. In fact, the sale of arboriculture products represents almost 50% of our business's turnover.

As for mowers, we now retail a large range of both domestic and professional mowers to a wide range of customers. We stock the likes of Kubota, Mountfield, Allett, Husqvarna, Honda, Stiga, as well as many other brands.

LG: How many staff do you have?

NH: We now have twenty-five members of staff working for Buxtons. I also have two of my daughters, Kelly and Sophie, who have been involved in the

business for a number of years now. They started when quite young, helping out in the dealership. However, since leaving school, they have both become interested in developing their careers working here at Buxtons.

In 2022, they jointly won the Star of the Dealership award at the Service Dealer Conference for their outstanding contribution to the business. The honour recognised the fact that they go above and beyond with their time, in and out of the office. For example, they work on the website, on our social platforms, and in the planning of shows for the company. On top of this, they volunteer for charity work helping those affected by the war in Ukraine, rescuing and re-homing ex-commercial hens for Fresh Start for Hens, and arranging personalised care packages for those less fortunate at Christmas.

They are both keen, driven, and have helped me enormously, especially as they are particularly savvy on what digital opportunities and social media platforms can bring to table. We have clearly seen since Covid the value of these sites helping to promote businesses like ours.

And, in terms of succession planning, both Kelly and Sophie will no doubt be taking on more and more responsibilities and roles in the coming years.



Sophie and Kelly Burgess, who won jointly Service Dealer's Star Of The Dealership award in 2022

LG: How do you find looking for staff in general?

NH: We have five qualified, trained and dedicated mechanics, who are either out on the road or working in the workshops repairing, servicing and demonstrating machinery. We also have two sales managers, and the rest of the staff are admin and sales staff. In terms of recruiting new staff, we,



Buxtons' premises in Penkridge, not far from Cannock Chase



Buxtons say they are continuously seeing growth in sales of robotic mowers



Battery products have surged in popularity for Buxtons post-Covid



The shop floor at Buxtons

like many other dealers, are finding it quite difficult to find qualified, experienced technicians and mechanics. There are definitely fewer filtering their way down from larger dealerships, or even fewer youngsters coming into our industry at all. Like most family-run dealerships, we often rely on finding staff via family friends and associates.

LG: How did the past few Covid affected years impact the business?

NH: We coped like all other dealers. Once we had procedures in place, we could still serve our customers and deliver machinery, or customers would arrange collection. The grass did not stop growing during the pandemic, hence the need to continue to supply and service our customers.

Since things have returned to normal, the sale of battery-powered products has shot through the roof. We now offer a wide range of battery powered products from the likes of STIHL, Husqvarna, Honda, ECHO and EGO. We are currently noticing a healthy growth in the sale of EGO battery products, with many local contractors now turning to the brand for their needs. Their new zero-turn ride-on mowers are proving popular, along with their rotary pedestrian mowers.

LG: Regarding cordless products, what is your take on dealing with spent batteries?

NH: Well, this surge in sales of battery-powered products means that we are having to store both new and used batteries on site. We are now talking of having to find appropriate storage facilities for hundreds of batteries. We, like many other dealers I speak to, are not sure of the best way of the long-term safe handling of these items.

The industry has not really been given any clear advice of what we should be doing. There are no national guidelines on the subject. Everyone needs some clarification of the correct course of action to take. I'm aware there have been several cases of

batteries igniting, and once alight they are difficult to extinguish. So, the quicker we can find a solution to the fact that we are storing a wide range of battery types, the better it will be for the whole industry.

Another issue we are facing regarding battery-powered products, of course, is that some manufactures are now themselves selling direct to customers via online selling sites - at prices that we as dealers struggle to compete with.

LG: Are you seeing sales of robotic mowers also increasing?

NH: Yes, we are continually seeing a growth in the sales of the technology. We offer three different makes - Husqvarna, Honda and Stiga - that between them offer over 25 different models of robotic mowers to suit different customers' needs. Last year our sales on robotic mowers increased massively, and we are forecasting further increased sales as the products continually improve.

It is important people realise that these robots need proper maintenance and servicing to ensure they can work efficiently. We offer a full installation as well as service backup on any sale of our robotic range of mowers. I'm sure it won't be long before we see the demise of the need to install a perimeter wire to control them though. They will all be sold on a GPS style tracking system, linked to your mobile phone.

LG: Are you still experiencing any issues regarding getting hold of stock?

NH: Yes, we did have a few issues with some manufacturers. However, now we seem to be catching up with parts and equipment being delivered regularly. Like most dealers, during the past two years, we probably bought more stock than we would normally, to ensure we have something to sell.

LG: What are your thoughts on attending trade shows?



Buxtons have five qualified, trained and dedicated mechanics

NH: We try to attend some shows each year, to keep up with trends. We always attend the Service Dealer Conference that we find is an excellent networking event - and we've been lucky to have won a few awards over the years!

LG: What do you see for the future of your dealership?

NH: With online sales becoming so competitive, the profit margins on these sales are often very low, so we need to be focusing on higher margin products that enable us to offer a better service to our customers and build up a strong relationship with them. We need to offer the whole process of sales, aftersales and repairs to give us more scope to make a healthy return on our investments.

"Most of our sales of groundcare machinery are within 30 miles of our premises. Selling locally allows us to deliver machines fully assembled and fuelled, and handed over correctly. We are also able to offer our customers a

more responsive service should they have any issues with their equipment.

"My policy is really to try and push the business on to a more commercial basis, by selling more professional products. There is no doubt that in a few years' time most small machinery products will be driven by battery technologies. With places like California now banning the use of petrol driven machinery, it is likely other areas will follow suit.

"I am also concerned for the future of dealerships. We have seen a fair number cease trading and sell-up in recent years, often due to rising overheads and profit margins decreasing, as dealers try to compete with the low prices set online. "However, I still believe firmly in the role and provision that professional machinery dealerships offer. Customers still rely on us if and when their machine breaks down.

LG: Thank you.

Handling the challenges of changing franchises

With a history that stretches back to 1930, Cambs-based Collings Brothers has seen many changes over its near-century of existence, with plenty in just the past few years. At its early spring open day, MARTIN RICKATSON learned more about how the firm has refocused, and its plans for the future



In a major change from just a few years ago, Collings Brothers now offers new lines of tractors, combines and telehandlers



The firm's Deutz-Fahr tractor sales got off to a strong start, and Collings has also sold some combines in a highly competitive area where big rotary machines dominate

Customer loyalty is one of the hardest-earned assets any dealership can possess. That holds particularly true among agricultural equipment dealers, where farmers can be especially committed to a certain manufacturer. So, when a dealership is forced to change a major franchise, such as that for its tractors, a good test of that loyalty comes when a customer's machine is up for renewal. The mark of a good dealership is one that can bring the customer with them across to the new supplier's products, rather than seeing them stick with the same make and a new dealer.

For Collings Brothers, the independent dealership based at Abbotsley on the Cambs-Beds border, that loyalty has resulted in strong support since a move to Deutz-Fahr as its main tractor and combine franchise, following industry moves which saw

its previous supplier of thirty years' standing sign with a larger dealer group, which then opened a new depot nearby.

"After careful consideration, in early-2020 we then signed with Deutz-Fahr as our tractor supplier, which also gave us access to a range of straw walker combines," explained Josh Clayton, who recently returned to the business as sales manager, overseeing a team of three area sales staff under the guidance of managing director Jason Weston.

"Choosing a new major franchise partner isn't easily done, and it has meant we have had to refocus some of our target market, as while Deutz-Fahr gives us a good spread of models across different power brackets, we are no longer in the 350hp-plus, tracked tractor or rotary combine sectors in which we were previously

strong. In tractor terms, those are the lower-volume sectors, though, and most Deutz-Fahr tractors across the mid-high horsepower sector that is our mainstay come from the newest tractor factory in Europe, with a whole new plant opened in Germany in 2017. That appeals to us and to our farmers. In April, we took 20 existing and prospective customers to the plant at Lauingen, and I think everyone came away impressed. Deutz-Fahr parent SDF now also has a new UK HQ, which has equally impressed us as dealers in terms of its facilities.

"Despite not having those big tracked tractors and rotary combines, Deutz-Fahr gives us a pretty big product line, from 51-336hp, and while there wasn't a big park of machines in the area, meaning each deal was a conquest sale, we've seen a lot of customers staying loyal to us and switching over when needing



The breadth of arable and livestock equipment offered by Kuhn means regular sales from stock through the year, says Josh Clayton (centre)



Visitors to Collings Brothers' open day took the opportunity to benefit from some open day deals and stock up on supplies at the parts counter



Beyond agricultural telehandlers, Merlo's entry into the market for battery-powered electric handlers with its eWorker opens up new market possibilities, says Josh Clayton

to replace a tractor from our previous franchise, and from other makes, too. That's helped grow sales year-on-year since switching, although 2023 has been a bit more challenging so far, but I think that's true across the industry.

"We carefully planned our ordering, focused largely on 185, 250 and 280hp tractors in the power bracket that has always been strong for us, and supply has been ok, added to which we've been able to be very competitive on price, all of which helped secure orders.

"But we've also been able to compete more strongly in other areas, and tractors like Deutz-Fahr's 125hp 5125 have also proved popular among local livestock farms, which hasn't previously been a strong sector for us.

"Getting farmers to change their tractor make isn't easy, especially when it isn't to one of the bigger brands, but we've found demonstrations are essential. Get someone in the seat, show them how good the machine is, and let them operate it for a while on their own farm. Then give them a competitive price, and the personal support of a family dealership, and

deals can be done.

"Combine business has been more of a challenge, especially as previously we offered only rotary machines and now we have only conventionals that can't quite match those for output. But demonstrations have proved to potential customers that the machines produce a good sample, and we have made our first sales.

"We remain dealers for MacDon combine draper headers, and are looking forward to demonstrating a unit again this year, as we missed opportunities in 2022 because of delayed delivery. These are big-ticket items, but we sell three or four units a year, with potential buyers often convinced once they see what how these headers can boost combine input and output."

Further franchises

Elsewhere, reconnecting with another major franchise formerly offered by Collings Brothers has proved a popular move. In autumn 2021, the company announced it was once more

partnering with Italian telehandler specialist Merlo.

"The franchise had moved from us some years ago to a larger dealer group, but we retained a lot of Merlo knowledge among our staff, and were really pleased to be able to regain the agency in 2021," said Josh.

"People know we have the engineers that know Merlo products well, and this helped build sales quickly. We ordered ten machines of various types for 2023 sales, and they were soon all gone, with demand meaning we also had to buy in machines from other dealers to fulfil orders. Many orders were from existing Merlo customers who know and like the product, but others were conquest sales, which were especially pleasing as we have some strong competition locally.

"With Merlo having recently entered the market for battery-powered electric handlers with its eWorker, we have a whole new sector to target in commercial and industrial businesses working on concrete and in warehouses. It's something we have

set aside some sales focus for, and are looking forward to exploring new opportunities."

In terms of implements, a wide product offering for both arable and grassland/livestock customers is provided by Collings' Kuhn franchise.

"We've been the Kuhn large square baler support centre for the area since 2020, and, again, although there's fierce competition in this sector, we're pleased with what we've been able to do so far. The machine here at our open evening is sold, and we are keen to target more business this harvest.

"Other Kuhn products which sell well for us include its cultivators and the Megant tine drill. With such a broad product line, we're able to hold quite a quantity of Kuhn stock as it soon moves out of the yard, whether it's simple flail mowers or more complex cultivator drills.

"Since autumn 2019, we've also been dealers for Claydon's strip-till drills, and associated equipment such as its straw harrows and Terrablade inter-row weeders. These have gone especially well for us, particularly

during periods when Defra grant funding has been available to farmers to support purchases.

"Supplemented by agencies such as Marshall trailers, Richard Western trailers and muck spreaders, Bomford hedgecutters and range of arable machinery from KRM and Cousins, we're able to offer most requirements of arable and livestock farmers."

Wider scope

Although sited on a village B-road, the Collings Brothers site at Abbotsley is not far from the A428, and attracting business in sectors such as arboriculture and domestic turfcare is another priority for the dealership.

"We have some really strong and highly-regarded brands, including Hayter, Husqvarna and Toro, plus Lawnflite, Countax, Echo and Wessex, and we offer servicing and repairs for all makes of lawnmowers, including delivery and collection. We're stepping up our advertising and marketing for grass machinery sales and service, and have recently added a full-time

domestic grass machinery service engineer to our team, meaning we can now put a dedicated focus on service in this sector, where previously our agricultural team had to fit this work between other commitments. This should help us turn around grass machinery service work much faster, which, in turn, will help boost margins.

"We're also agents for Kioti tractors, which span compact units starting at 21hp right up to a 125hp model, giving us a good offering at the smaller end of the scale for everyone from large homeowners to equestrian enterprises and small farms. It's a competitive sector, but we have a well-priced range and we're keen for more business in this area.

"Our location is a slight challenge, as is the fact some people think of us as purely a farm machinery dealership. To counter this, we've made the premises more welcoming to the public, with new signage and gravelled areas.

"Beyond this, we're also planning more investment on our core agricultural side, including various building updates and investment in



Domestic turfcare is an area where Collings Brothers hopes to make bigger local inroads by attracting more prospective customers to its premises

infrastructure, such as a new wash bay which should be completed this year.”

Having been on the same large roadside site since 1930, the Abbotsley site retains a good deal of character in an era when futuristic glass buildings are becoming increasingly common among big-brand dealerships.

“It’s great to have a site and a building of this size which offers us plenty of space, and our aim is to ensure it is updated and refurbished on a continuous basis,” said Josh.

“It has been added to and extended over the years, and we have multiple small plans to improve what we have here, funded by the profits that go back into improving the business.”

Like many of the businesses it serves, the company has consolidated its operation to span a wider area from a single site, and now covers its Cambs, Beds, Herts and Northants territory from Abbotsley alone.

“We had operated a branch at Brigstock in Northants since buying the business of Woodlands Brigstock in 2013,” explained Josh.

“It worked well for us for many years, but, with recent franchise changes, plus staff retirements, we made the decision to cease operations there, sell the site and focus on covering the territory from here, which we were already doing to an extent on the service side. Currently, we have two sales managers to cover the area west of here, and are appointing a further one to cover the

Northants area. We’re also looking at putting a parts van on the road for further-out areas.

“We currently have a vacancy for a further service engineer, and filling that role will give us a service team of five, which works well with our current workload. The team is aided by a service app we have recently introduced to help provide accurate recording of each engineer’s time spent on individual jobs, as well as parts accountability. This is combined with our service van tracking system to give customers assurance that all time is accurately accounted for.

“They also know we still have engineers with specialist knowledge of the key products from our previous main franchise, and, while we can’t work on machines under warranty, there are plenty of owners who come to us for work on out-of-warranty tractors and combines.

“People know what we do, and like the fact we’re a relatively small, focused and personal family business – the Collings family remains involved. We could have become part of a bigger dealer group, but our owners wanted us to remain an independent family company under the family name, with loyalty to its employees. I think that’s what our customers wanted, too, which is why they have continued to support us and our new franchises. I think there is certainly still room for a dealer model beyond the big multi-branch business, and I hope that committing to it should see us soon celebrating our century.”

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Three ways to develop loyal customers

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 ENGENDER LOYALTY AMONGST YOUR CUSTOMER BASE

What is the difference between a satisfied customer and a loyal customer?

A few months ago, I was having an issue with my car. I took it to a shop that was just a few minutes away from our office. They fixed the issue, communicated with me promptly, and sent me on my way. It was a good experience. I was satisfied.

A few weeks later, I had another issue pop up, and took my car back to the same shop. They called me with a quote that seemed a little high, so I did what anyone would do: I called my dad and asked him what he thought! I ended up taking my car to the shop that my family has used for over 20 years, but which was over 20 minutes away from my office. Not only did they find another substantial problem, but they saved me over \$700!

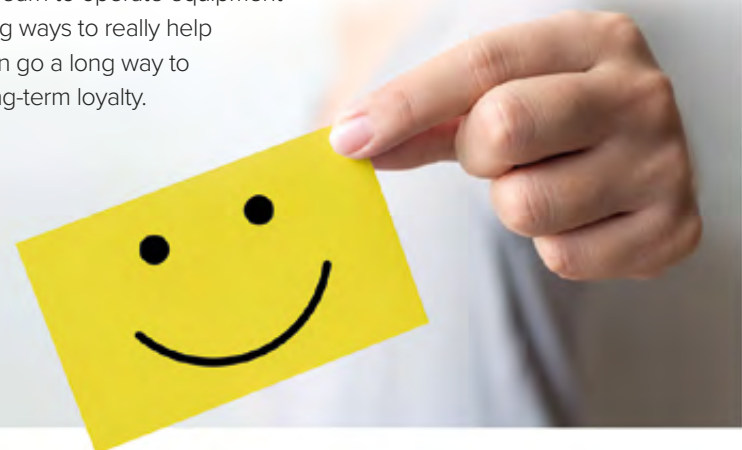
The difference between a satisfied customer and a loyal customer is that a satisfied customer is just as easily satisfied somewhere else, while a loyal customer will end up coming back to you time and time again, even if it's inconvenient.

So, how to do you develop a loyal customer base?

1 Focus on integrity.
No one likes to feel cheated. There is nothing that will drive a customer away faster than feeling like they were taken advantage of. Having a focus on integrity means that you do what you say you're going to do, AND, when you do something wrong, you make it right. Your customers will understand. Everyone messes up from time to time. The thing with integrity is that you own up to the mistakes you made, and let your customers know how you'll fix them.

2 Find ways to help your customers.
Obviously, you want to help your customers. But we have found that, when you help people, they want to help you! Think about how you can help your customers be successful, beyond fixing their equipment or having the right parts on hand. To do this, your team needs to be willing to have meaningful conversations with them, and look for ways to provide referrals or other training opportunities. Perhaps they need a windshield repaired on their car – who would you recommend? Maybe consider hosting a workshop to teach new skills, or learn to operate equipment safely? Finding ways to really help customers can go a long way to producing long-term loyalty.

3 Be loyal to your customers.
Know your customers and what they do. Learn about their families, kids, and what is important to them. If they have children who are involved in activities like Scouts or sports, be intentional in supporting them whenever you can. Maybe it's as simple as being a sponsor for the local soccer team. We do this exact thing at BCI. If there is something that we need, and one of our customers sells it, we buy it from them! When you can, be loyal to your customers, and they will be loyal to you as well!



Does the winter stocking system need to change?

Jason Nettle, of Winchester Garden Machinery asks whether the traditional system needs to shift to one of inventory stock?



That was a strange start to the 2023 season!

For us, we have seen the workshop maintain a constant flow from early doors. However, on the sales side, we have seen a mix. I put this down to the doom and gloom from the news, along with the cold start. We have had some good rainfall in areas, and I'm praying for some more rain imminently whilst the temperatures are on the rise.

As an industry, we can try to make sure everything is in place and available, but we are still experiencing issues, with winter stock trickling in from last season and the hold-up in the supply chain for spare parts.

However, we really are in the hands of the gods with the weather. The weather is what really pulls people out into their gardens.

With this in mind, and because the weather is clearly changing its patterns over time and can be unpredictable, I question: do the traditional winter stocking programmes and winter stock payment plans need to change? I have spoken to multiple manufacturers over time with regards to working closer together, with a view of moving to inventory stock. Obviously, this has an additional risk for the manufacturers, and every company would have to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. As it stands, the risk is carried by the dealers, and, this year, we have already seen an element of stock shifting in the form of price reductions because of the late start to the season.

I always say the true keen gardener will do all the hard work through autumn and winter to reap the rewards come spring and summer. Then there's the customer, who will expect everything to be perfect without doing anything - a bit like the customer who pulls out their mower after putting it away last November and expects it to work. They are then baffled to understand that people are already in the queue for service work, and there can be a four-to-six week wait, asking: 'Surely you can just have a quick look?' I'm sure we have all heard the classic lines: 'Can I be pushed to the front of the queue?'; 'My garden is like a jungle'; 'The grass is above my knees'; 'I'm having a garden party' - the list goes on! This week, we were told that it would be our fault if the customer's dog was bitten by an adder because the grass wasn't cut!

I have come to terms with the fact that we spend a considerable time educating people, be it time management for booking their machines in with plenty of time, how to approach the first cut after a month of NO MOW MAY (those breakdown calls are about to hit the system), or fuels - fresh fuel does not mean the fuel from their petrol can, which has been in the shed since last October.

I tell our team that it is our duty to educate these customers on a yearly basis. They come knocking on the front door because we are the experts in the industry, and, without us, they would be lost. We hold their hand and educate along the way, and this is how we turn these customers into customers for life.





BUSINESS MONITOR

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

Just as difficult as ever

Dealers speak of struggles with finding staff

The overwhelming message that came through from the dealers who responded to our recent survey regarding recruitment into the dealership is that the situation has not improved since we last asked our readers for their thoughts – with many still wanting to take on new people.

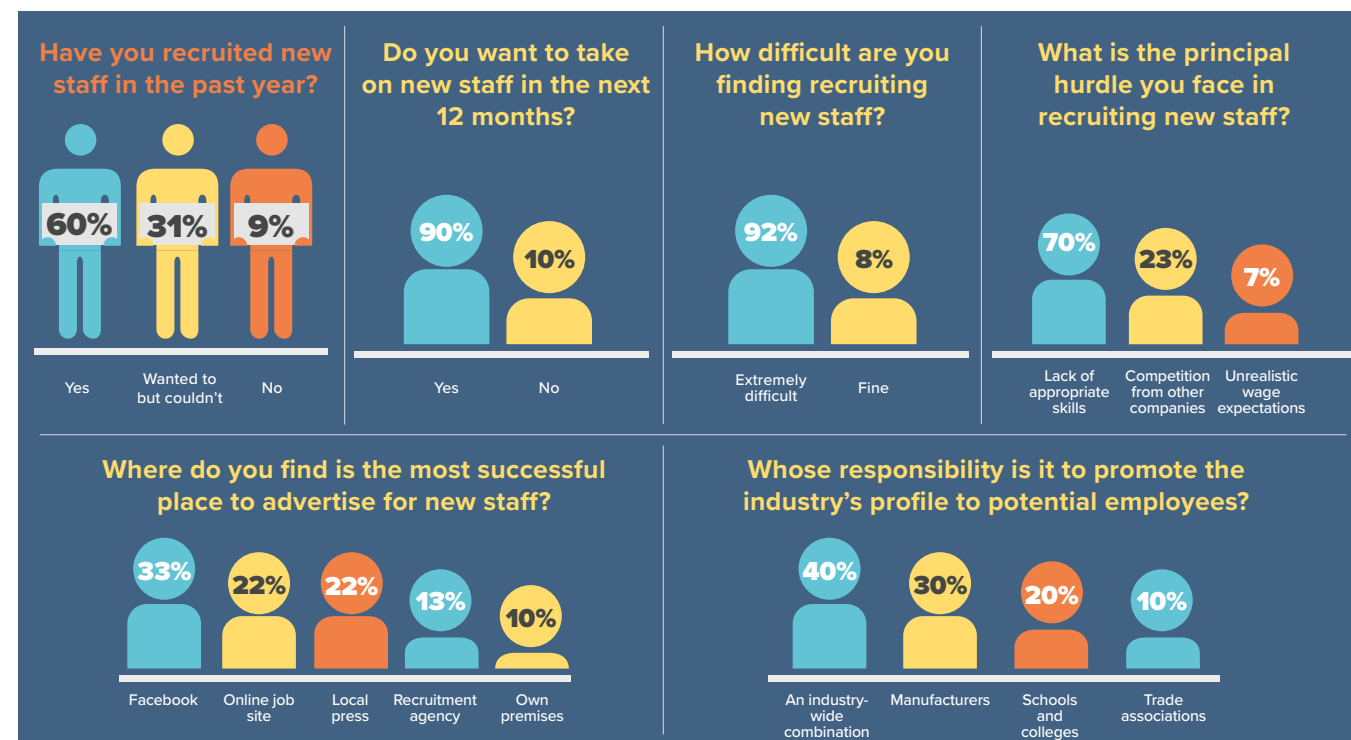
Similar to last year, 60% of those who answered our survey had taken on staff in the past 12 months – but the majority (90%) still said they were hoping to recruit more in the next year.

Most dealer readers who responded said it was extremely difficult (90%) to find new staff. Once again, the most popular answer to what made recruiting so challenging was a lack of appropriate skills amongst

applicants. Although, interestingly, compared to last year, the idea of competition from other companies when looking to employ was cited much more frequently – perhaps an indication that the competition between dealerships for quality applicants is hotting up?

In terms of where to turn to in order to seek out fresh blood, Facebook had returned to the top of the pile for those who responded to our survey, with online job search sites and local press also getting mentions.

Finally, again, it was thought it was the responsibility of a combination of groups with a vested interest in the health of the industry (manufacturers, schools / colleges, trade associations etc) to work together to try to improve the situation.



“Your say”

We asked for your thoughts on the current recruitment situation in the industry.

- Abysmal would cover it. Tried trade press, local press, Facebook, agency - absolutely shocking candidates, or no-one at all. No skills and no work ethic. Think schools need to think about practical-type courses alongside colleges, with work placements for those that are interested. Not every child fits the academic mould, but practical kids don't have an avenue to shine. However, generally, we are finding that, since Covid, no-one wants to work a full week. Everyone wants to work from home - and, when you have a workshop, that's not possible! Quite honestly, I don't know what the answer is, but, with the average age in dealerships creeping up, if we don't inject some young blood into the business, there quite frankly won't be one.
- More technical training colleges are required. Manufacturers should do road-shows both at local colleges, schools, career fairs, etcetera, and at any outdoor exhibitions (e.g. county fairs which the younger generation attend). They should have a dedicated area to promote our industry and make it look and feel appealing. People relate/acknowledge brand names (e.g. Honda, Hayter, Stihl, etcetera), so they would be interested to listen to any career information that they (i.e. manufacturers) promoted.
- Trying to avoid headhunting for good service engineers. Recruitment agencies are very expensive.
- A dire situation has only become worse. Wage expectations are now way too high. Repairing garden machinery is becoming uneconomical for all but the most expensive machines.
- Our feelings are like others: it is difficult to find people who want to actually work. Also, schools and government need to recognise that not all pupils want to go to college or university – nor are all suitable for this. These pupils should be enabled to get into a working environment sooner.



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A compelling Return On Investment.



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ONLINE INTERACTIONS



Risks that arise in the workplace

It's easy to see that employees can be distracted by social media while at work – especially by their own accounts – with the follow-on detrimental impact on productivity. While employees may connect with co-workers in the online world to enhance relationships, as Mark Stevens, a senior associate at VVV LLP, notes: “These online interactions can create the potential for inappropriate behaviour and online bullying and harassment.”

Facebook and Twitter are two well-known platforms where users can express their personal views for others to see. As Stevens has witnessed first-hand, employees not only have the ability to post controversial comments and opinions, and often do so, such messages can very quickly spread. He says that “where inappropriate, controversial or offensive comments or viewpoints are shared, members of the public could very easily associate those comments or points of view with the company which employed that individual, thus damaging its reputation.”

Of course, many use social media platforms as a tool for marketing. However, the line between personal and professional accounts can become blurred, and this is why Stevens says that “employers should ensure that employees with responsibility for running a business social media account use it in a professional way, and not as though it is their own personal account.”

Navigating social media risks in the workplace

Social media can be a powerful tool for many businesses. However, its use by employees creates a real risk for employers, particularly in terms of productivity, confidentiality and the potential for reputational damage. Employers need to carefully consider what expectations they have around employee social media use and how they communicate them to employees, writes *SME Digest* editor, ADAM BERNSTEIN

Tribunal cases brought

Stevens highlights a fair amount of case law around the subject - *Whitham v Club 24 Limited t/a Ventura* in 2010, *Trasler v B&Q* in 2012, *British Waterways Board v Smith* in 2015, and *Gibbins v British Council* in 2017.

Notably, social media cases have fallen considerably over the last five years, which may be testament to the measures employers are putting in place to guard against its misuse. However, those cases that have come before the tribunals have resulted in conflicting decisions, reflecting how fact-specific these types of cases are.

In essence, Stevens says: “Case law has shown that dismissals in situations where the reputational damage is minimal-to-non-existent are invariably unfair. However, more damaging allegations can see a dismissal found to be fair. And in one case a dismissal was found to be unfair even though the post stayed online for seven months without reputational harm.” That said, the award to the employee was cut by 60% because of his actions that led to the case being brought.

The importance of a social media policy

It's clear to Stevens that these cases illustrate the importance of a good social media policy. In his view: “Employers should have an enforceable social media policy in place in order to minimise the potential risks that come as a result of using social media in and out of the workplace.” He adds that the

policy should set boundaries and define acceptable and unacceptable use and behaviour, as this will prevent any ambiguity around social media use amongst employees.

Stevens often advises employers writing a policy to detail how employees should portray themselves online; what social media accounts are deemed acceptable, especially in the workplace; whether personal social media accounts can be used during working hours; the difference in using company social media accounts and personal social media accounts; and guidance on how employee's activity on personal social media accounts can be linked back and associated with the company.

The policy should also highlight expectations when sharing company information online, and the extent to which this is prohibited. It should also make mention of the disciplinary measures that could be taken if policies are breached, which could include dismissal on the grounds of gross misconduct, particularly if the conduct damages the employer's reputation.

It's also vital, in Stevens' eyes, that “the policy makes clear that it applies not only to use of social media sites using the employer's equipment, but equally to social media sites used or accessed outside of work or using the employee's own equipment.” He also says that the policy should make it clear that accounts set to ‘private’ should still adhere to the requirements of the policy.

It is likely that employers will have other policies that may have a bearing on a social media policy. As a result, Stevens advises that these other policies – for example, disciplinary and grievance, bullying and harassment and data protection – are “all updated in line with any social media policy that is written.”

Beyond policies, there is the desire for employers to not want employees accessing social media accounts - at all - in the workplace. Where this is the case, Stevens recommends employers apply technical measures to block access to these sites from company devices and its network.

Only going so far

Finally, there's the matter of training for HR teams and managers, as this is an important part of ensuring compliance with policies. “Employers,” says Stevens, “must be careful about monitoring employees in the workplace. This should not go further than necessary, and employers should avoid implementing restrictions which are intrusive or unreasonable - it is a balancing act that employers must carefully undertake.”

He warns that “human rights legislation provides individuals with the right to respect for private and family life and correspondence, and this could be contravened by monitoring.” Also, employees could argue that scrutinising their social monitoring postings could be discriminatory. Proportionality and consistent treatment of employees is therefore important.

In summary

Social media is a part of society whether we like it or not. Employers have no choice but to live with it, and this means applying thought as to how it's to be managed within the workplace.

HMRC



Anything to declare?

With the cost-of-living crisis placing financial pressures on all of us, many individuals and businesses are looking to develop new sources of income and maximise the income that they already receive, writes HELEN THORNLEY, technical officer at the Association of Taxation Technicians

While setting up a side hustle or seeking new income streams is a sensible strategy, keeping the details of new or existing income sources from HMRC is not wise.

It's tax evasion, it's illegal, and those that HMRC catches risk paying not just the tax they should have done, but substantial additional costs in interest and penalties. In very serious cases - not considered here - it could even land the individual in jail. And there is a good chance that HMRC will catch evaders, based on the large amount of information they can obtain from third parties.

Each year, HMRC estimates the difference between what it thinks it should collect in tax and what it actually collects. Called the ‘tax gap’, the latest estimates for 2020-21 put this figure at £32bn.

The gap is made up of lots of different factors, from fraud and error to differences between HMRC and taxpayers on how each think that the law operates. Within that figure, an estimated £1.1bn of lost tax is to people entirely outside the

tax system. A further £900m is estimated lost due to 'moonlighters.'

One of HMRC's jobs is to try and catch up with these taxpayers, and it carries out a range of compliance activities. In 2021-22, it launched 265,000 investigations, and its activities yielded an extra £30.8bn in tax.

In general, HMRC has 12 months from the date that a tax return is submitted to open an enquiry (called a compliance check) into that return. Such checks are both random – all taxpayers are at risk of a random enquiry - and targeted, based on information HMRC has gathered.

What does HMRC know?

Although many are aware that HMRC can carry out enquiries into their tax affairs, the risk of being the subject of a random enquiry is perceived as low. However, HMRC has access to an enormous amount of information that allows it to make targeted enquiries, where what a taxpayer has put on their tax return doesn't fit with the information that HMRC has.

HMRC either automatically receives, or has the ability to request, information from third parties, including banks and building societies, financial institutions, letting agents and online cryptoasset exchanges, as well as other government bodies such as HM Land Registry, Companies House and DWP. It can also request data about sales or income from online marketplaces, such as AirBnB, eBay and Etsy.

Thanks to information exchange agreements with other countries, HMRC also automatically receives information on savings income from banks and building societies held by UK residents in overseas accounts. This can help HMRC spot undeclared wealth held overseas.

Finally, HMRC also receives information directly from whistle-blowers, including unhappy business partners, ex-spouses and partners, disgruntled employees, and jealous neighbours.

But data is only part of HMRC's compliance approach. Since 2010, HMRC has had access to powerful data analysis software called CONNECT. This matches information from multiple sources to taxpayers, and identify patterns or anomalies which need to be investigated.



'Nudge' letters

Using CONNECT, HMRC often starts by issuing a standard letter to a number of individuals or businesses that have been identified as potentially under-declaring tax. These 'one-to-many' letters act as a cue to the taxpayer that they need to review their tax affairs and take appropriate action.

Not everyone who receives a one-to-many letter will necessarily have under-declared tax – there could be other factors, such as available reliefs, or expenses which mean there is no tax to pay. However, individuals in this position should not just ignore these letters, as, generally, income must be reported, and reliefs and expenses claimed officially via a tax return. It is important to read the letter carefully to see what action is needed, and to take appropriate

professional advice on how to respond, as HMRC will normally want taxpayers to confirm that they consider their tax position is correct. If no action is taken, or HMRC does not accept the response given, then HMRC may move on to open a formal enquiry.

Coming clean

If a taxpayer knows that they have undeclared income, it's important that they seek professional advice and get in touch with HMRC to declare and pay the tax as soon as possible.

Penalties are calculated as a percentage of the underpaid tax. The percentage could be anything from zero to 100% - or over 100% for offshore income or gains. Penalties will be lower where the taxpayer voluntarily comes forward to HMRC, and if the taxpayer is cooperative. Taxpayers are scored on how much they 'tell, help and give' to HMRC during the enquiry.

Where income has been under-declared as a result of an innocent error then, broadly, any returns for tax years (or periods of account for companies) ending no more than four years ago will need to be corrected. This can be extended to six years if the understatement was careless, and up to 20 years if the understatement was deliberate.

Lastly, it is important to check that undisclosed income doesn't have a wider impact. There may also be tax consequences over more than one tax – for example, a business which has not declared all of their sales will not only have paid insufficient income tax or corporation tax, but they could also have under-declared VAT – or missed that they should have registered for VAT.



Products

DOMESTIC

Eight goes into Fortis

New cassette cylinder mower from Cobra

Cobra say their new Fortis range of cylinder lawnmowers combine eight machines in one – and are the first powered cylinder mowers they have launched.

There are four mowers in the range. Starting with a compact 14" model, powered by a Loncin petrol engine, and then the 17", 20" and 25", all featuring Briggs & Stratton engines for extra power for larger lawns. They are all self-propelled, and have a three-way drive facility, allowing the blades to be disengaged without having to stop the engine.

The mowers all feature a six-blade precision ground-cutting cylinder. The height of cut can be adjusted, too, with variants as low as 6mm and ranging up to 30mm. The finishing touch comes from the steel front-roller, which the company says gives an enhanced definition to lawn stripes.

The mowers also feature foam-cushioned handles that fold down for transportation and storage. The Fortis machines are also able to transform into seven other machines. The six-bladed cassette can be removed and replaced with another accessory cassette in the range to switch its use. Other cartridges include:

- Verticutter ● Scarifier
- Dethatcher ● Aerator
- Turf rake ● Lawn brush
- 10-blade cassette



DOMESTIC



EGO has introduced a world-first Line IQ Technology to its newest model of cordless grass trimmer.

Described by the manufacturer as removing the hassle and complexity of feeding the line, the tool automatically feeds the correct amount of line to provide a 40cm cutting diameter. By sensing when the cutting swathe is reduced, Line IQ feeds out line to ensure maximum cutting efficiency, without users having to manually bump and feed the line. The system is aided by the company's Powerload technology, which enables users to replace the line by

EGO boost their IQ

World-first line technology on newest model

threading it through the head eyelets and pushing a button.

Adding to the tool's useability, adjustable handles and a telescopic shaft allow it to be suited to the user by adapting to their height. Designed to tackle all trimming tasks around the garden, two pre-set speeds make the grass trimmer suitable for everyday work and tougher jobs.

Alongside the latest technical developments, the new grass trimmer is powered by EGO's 56V Arc Lithium battery technology.

AGRICULTURAL

Under the radar launch for cultivator

Stealth model from Opico



Opico is launching a new version of its HE-VA Combi-Disc.

The company says the 'Stealth' variant of the combination cultivator gains ultra-low-disturbance legs, and a choice of different points depending on the level of sub-surface action required.

Now available in working widths from 2.45m to 5.25m, in both mounted and trailed formats, the Combi-Disc employs two leading rows of soil-loosening legs, followed by two rows of serrated Sabre discs to provide a surface chopping and mixing effect. This is all followed up with a V-profile roller to produce a corrugated, weather-proof finish.

It is this combination of soil-engaging elements that, Opico says, makes the Combi-Disc such an adaptable tool. In normal circumstances, the tines, discs and press are used in partnership to turn previously uncultivated ground into a seedbed in one pass. When conditions require it, the discs can be lifted completely out of work, enabling the unit to be used as a straightforward subsoil loosener/pan-buster.

Likewise, with the legs lifted out of contention, the machine can be put to work as a straightforward shallow disc cultivator.

The addition of new 'Stealth' soil-loosening legs make it a true low-disturbance subsoiler, with the added ability of being able to provide some surface tillage creation at the same time.

The 15mm wide Stealth low-disturbance leg and low-disturbance point are the product of many years of development. The narrower legs are made from ultra-strong Hardox steel, and can be interchanged with standard 25mm-wide subsoiler legs as necessary. However, it is the point that really makes the difference, says the manufacturer. The Stealth standard 120mm low-disturbance point has a shallower wing angle and shorter nose that has been designed to open up the soil to create drainage fissuring without mixing the whole soil profile.

COMMERCIAL

Pump action from STIHL

New range of four-stroke units



STIHL has launched its first range of petrol four-stroke water pumps, specifically designed to meet the needs of construction, hire and agricultural markets.

The new range consists of two models, the WP 300 and WP 600. The WP 600 boasts a cast iron impeller, a 4.4 kW engine and 3" hose connections for the delivery of large volumes of water up to 63 m³/h, and comes complete with an integrated suction filter to protect the pump from dirt particles.

With a similar design, its counterpart, the WP 300, includes the same features as the WP 600, except for 2" hose connections and a lower 37 m³/h delivery capacity for smaller jobs.

The pumps can be fuelled by the manufacturer's Moto4Plus, an alkylate fuel specifically designed for small four-stroke engines. STIHL say that, compared to forecourt fuel, Moto4Plus has a significantly longer shelf life, less harmful emissions, and no tank drainage requirement when in storage.

Both pumps offer intuitive technology, including low-oil protection, meaning the engine switches off when the engine oil level falls below the safe operation threshold. An anti-vibration system also helps to reduce mechanical stress.

The company says the WP 300 and WP 600 offer a sturdy frame for stability and easy transportation, simple controls, and toolless access to the air filter for easy maintenance.

All STIHL tools, including both water pumps, are compatible with their Connected fleet management system. Installing a Smart Connector allows the runtime to be recorded and sent to the user's smartphone via Bluetooth for accurate usage and maintenance records.

COMMERCIAL

Steep control offered

AS-Motor start production of new remote-controlled tracked-flail mower



AS-Motor have announced they have started series production of their new remote-controlled tracked-flail mower, the AS 1000 Ovis RC.

They say the Vanguard Professional two-cylinder engine with 23hp maximum output, is transmitted directly and with low loss of efficiency to the blade shaft via a belt drive. The four-stroke OHV engine with cyclone filter is equipped with a strong crankshaft, and has a displacement of 627cm³ at a speed of 3,600rpm. The unit enables a mowing speed of up to 5km/h and, thus, an area output of up to 5,000m²/h.

The company says the 100cm-wide flail mower, in combination with the somewhat narrower tracked undercarriage, makes it easy to mow close to the edge, and comfortably to within a few centimetres of crash barriers and other obstacles.

Guided by a wide-caster roller, the mower deck adapts to contours. The adjustable sliding frame means that the specified minimum cutting height can be maintained throughout. Maximum traction on difficult terrain is ensured by the carried insert without ground contact. The mower's surfing suspension, with its large pendulum travel, also adapts well to uneven ground in difficult, hilly terrain.

The AS 1000 Ovis RC, with its compact design (183cm long, 114cm wide and 69cm high), mows difficult terrain and hard-to-reach areas via remote control from a safe distance. The automatic, mechanical parking brake provides additional safety when working on slopes. The large track units, with steel inserts, ensure low ground pressure, ideal power transmission and best grip on steep slopes.

Its weight of 419kg protects the ground, and the balanced weight distribution and robust crawler chassis also enable safe mowing of steep slopes up to 55 degrees.

The new mower uses reliable components from the YAK series, such as the robust flail mower and the belt pressure spring-tensioning system. Hydraulic motors from large-scale production, with their enormous torque, also ensure a precise, powerful travel drive, say AS-Motor. Clear operating elements and precise controls ensure comfortable, intuitive handling, and also precise manoeuvring.

Air ducts, filters and oil control are accessible without tools, and the mower can be easily placed in the service position to provide optimum access to the flail mower.

AGRICULTURAL

New Holland straddle multi functions

Tractors designed for narrow vineyards

New Holland has introduced the new Straddle Tractor TE6 Range - TE6.120N and TE6.150N - multifunction tractors specifically designed for narrow vineyards that require machines with an extreme manoeuvrability and compact dimensions, and that will be available starting from the end of 2023.

The new Straddle Tractor range's design is inspired by the Straddle Tractor Concept, created by New Holland, in collaboration with Italian design firm Pininfarina and winner of the Good Design Award and of the German Design Award in 2022. The company says the Concept tractor featured a futuristic and stylish look, inspired by the shape of a glass of champagne, as a homage to premium wine growers of regions such as champagne, Médoc and Burgundy.

The new tractor range is highly multifunctional: it features three independent tool zones for multiple possible implement combinations. They are also designed to grant an extra

quick hitch – less than 10 minutes for the sprayer – and to allow the operator to keep the tools attached without leaving the cab.

The company says maximum manoeuvrability is granted by the Superlight new steering system. They also say the Straddle Tractors are equipped with innovation technology: Intelliview IV Plus display and its rear-view screens give a total control of the tractor, and My PLM Connect allows operators to manage data in real time, onboard or remotely, to maximize efficiency and productivity.

The Blue Power livery reflects the manufacturer's new styling lines, whilst the ergonomics have been completely reshaped with a renovated cab, offering comfort and high visibility all around the machine.

The FTP Industrial Stage V engine in the row ensures total stability on slopes and inclines, and the IntelliFlow hydraulic system gives a balanced distribution of power all around the tractor.



5 SECOND INFO

- Designed for narrow vineyards
- Winner of the Good Design Award
- Extra quick hitching
- IntelliFlow hydraulic system

AGRICULTURAL

Seeding combinations boosted

Kverneland launch f-drill



Kverneland has introduced the f-drill front hopper, for those looking to carry larger capacities of seed or fertiliser, to run with combination outfits.

Available as the f-drill Compact and f-drill Maxi, the two versions provide hopper capacities of 1,600 litres and 2,200 litres respectively. Both benefit from the company's ELDOS electric metering unit, complete with hydraulic fan drive, which is capable of delivering application rates from 1-400kg/ha.

Kverneland's seeding specialist, Graham Owen, said:

"The f-drill is a great solution for those looking to boost productivity when placing fertiliser with an eight-row maize drill. With its own seed metering unit and 100mm diameter distribution system, the f-drill front hopper is ready to be combined with many different outfits, including the Kultstrip, Optima maize drill and Monopill sugar beet drill.

"When combined with a power harrow drill combination, such as the Kverneland e-drill, the f-drill front hopper could also be used as an additional seed hopper to suit companion cropping," he added. "Doing so contributes to better balance for the entire combination."

The carrying capacity of the f-drill also enables it to be combined with the manufacturer's power harrows and a coulter bar, to deliver a compact drilling rig up to 6m wide.

With ISOBUS e-com software, the f-drill provides plug and play functionality through any ISOBUS-compatible tractor, using either the tractor terminal, a Universal Terminal, or the IsoMatch Tellus Pro or Tellus GO+ terminals.

A Duo version of the f-drill is also available, and is equipped with two ELDOS metering units and split-hopper capability.

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AGRICULTURAL



Amazone reverses on land

New semi-mounted plough

Amazone is now offering the Tyrok 400 semi-mounted reversible plough for on-land ploughing.

The Tyrok Onland offers what the company describes as quick and easy change between either on-land or in-furrow operation. The new models are offered with a choice of seven, eight or nine furrows for tractors of up to 400-hp.

The plough features a substantial, high-tensile steel rectangular beam, with dimensions of 200x150x10mm. This gives it an extremely high level of rigidity. This ensures a uniform working depth over the entire length and working width, which is crucial, especially at the larger working widths.

It also features the SmartTurn system. On the headland, the

fast-turning procedure is hydraulically slowed down two-fold just before the end. This results in a damping effect, which reduces stress on the plough structure when the cylinder is retracted. The manufacturer says there is no need to compromise on speed as, with the Onland variant, the "beam" is automatically retracted before the turnover process via the Onland cylinder, so that the turnover centre of gravity is as low as possible, and so the forces acting on the tractor and plough are kept to a minimum.

The SpeedBlade plough body, with its patented extra-large front shin on the mouldboard, makes for minimal wear on the shin. The main wear point automatically shifts further and further back towards the centre of

the plough body by increasing the working speed from, say, 6 km/h up to 8 km/h. As a result, the main wear point is kept on this enlarged front shin of the mouldboard and away from the main mouldboard, even at high forward speeds. Various slatted and solid mouldboard profiles are available, depending on the application and objective.

The Tyrok Onland is also equipped with mechanical furrow width adjustment as standard. As an option, the working width can be infinitely adjusted hydraulically from the tractor cab to suit the conditions. The front furrow adjustment can also be provided mechanically or hydraulically.

Getting the message through



Our anonymous columnist, THE SPROCKET, holds forth on supply, apprenticeship schemes and a new bill that could affect dealers

We're well into the season now, with glorious weather for sunworshippers, but a prolonged dry spell that will no doubt affect sales of machinery by the time this edition hits the streets. With possibly higher stock levels with dealers than normal, the last thing the dealer network needs is for the stock to be sitting in the warehouse.

Shamefully, for me, I had to take my mower into a local dealer for some repairs, mostly due to neglect and a lack of TLC over the last 20 years. I was expecting a four-to-six week turnaround, but was told their normal turnaround was going to be about two weeks. They called me the next day to say it was ready for collection, which was amazing and a big favour. Talking to them, it seems that they are still having trouble getting some pre-season stock, particularly in the battery equipment area, and trouble getting certain parts that are holding up their workshops. Whilst very grateful for the quick turnaround, I was surprised at their low charge-out rate for the service they are offering, though. Maybe it is just what the local area will accept.

I was also shocked to hear that some new product being promoted to the dealer network and to the public will now not be available this year, or, at least, will only be available in limited supply. Seems that the suppliers are shooting themselves in the foot and jumping the gun just to keep their brand alive.

Industry apprenticeship efforts

In the last edition of SD, I was disappointed to read a comment in the 'Your Say' section of the 'Business Monitor' feature (Service Dealer, May-June 2023, page 45) about the likes of BAGMA not bringing together an apprentice scheme with the big



manufacturers and colleges to offer training, etcetera. Having harped on about recruitment at the dealer level, and the industry getting together to recruit new people and support training schemes – like apprentices – I wanted to put the record straight as far as I can (not being an expert in anything particular, I would defer to the more knowledgeable in this matter). Anyone who feels strongly about this should write to the editor.

As a general overview, the government and its various and ever-changing departments on education ultimately determine how apprenticeships work, and what funding is provided. Some years ago, the system was changed and a 'recreation' of how the apprenticeship scheme works was put in place after a long review. This became the Trailblazer Apprenticeship scheme for England only. Our devolved nations do something different, just to confuse the issue and complicate it even further. The idea was to have a template for all apprenticeships, but this would then be populated by input from employers in each of the respective industries being involved with only 15 routes.

At the time the funding for this was to come from a new training levy that would be paid by business, with a more than £3 million pay bill, not pay roll. Companies would then be allowed to draw down from this levy to fund apprentices in their business. The government aspiration was to have three million apprentices sign up to this scheme, but, to date,

they are woefully short of this target, with billions unclaimed sat in the levy.

The schemes that had to be set up were employer-led, and required a huge amount of work, and none funded investment to ensure that a particular industry had its own apprenticeship. Now, who in the land-based engineering sector was going to pull this

together? Guess what? It was BAGMA, the AEA and IAgRE, through the little-known partner group called LE-TEC, the Landbased Engineering Training and Education Committee, and initially with financial support from some of the main industry suppliers, as well as funding from the respective organisations. Had this not been done, it is unlikely there would be any apprenticeship scheme in our industry today.

LE-TEC pulled together the expertise and money to ensure that a level 3 and level 2 apprenticeship would be present in the LBE industry. The problems in doing this are in the detail, but, also, in the numbers, as it had to be proved to IFATE, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, that there was a demand in the industry for the apprenticeships. This was a huge and expensive undertaking, and required people who knew how the system worked and what would be required by the employers in terms of standards and assessments. After several years, with many shifting goal posts and a lot of hard work, this was all achieved.

The process then moved onto the introduction of the Technical Qualifications, or 'T' Levels, which is essentially a technical 'A' Level, again organized and funded by LE-TEC and its three partner organizations, BAGMA, the AEA, and IAgRE. These will be introduced in September of this year, another three projects that the industry trade organisations have organised.

Coming back to the comments made in SD, BAGMA, along with the AEA and IAgRE through LE-TEC, have indeed brought together an apprentice scheme for the industry, which is used by the 'big' manufacturers and the whole of industry. John Deere and CLAAS have their own academies based on these schemes, and enhanced by what they can bring to the scheme. Colleges use the scheme, and other manufacturers partner with certain colleges to deliver the scheme. Without the LE-TEC partnership and the industry trade associations, this would not have happened.

Apprenticeship schemes for LBE are delivered by a number of Landex colleges around England - they can be found on the internet. LE-TEC promote and provide careers information through wearelandbased.engineering and landbasedengineering.com The level 2 apprenticeships cover horticultural engineering.

The whole subject of apprenticeships has been widely-reported over the years, its progress well-documented and communicated to industry as well as it can be. The message does not get through, though, which is a frustration for all. I would suggest that, if you have a question or doubt about apprenticeships, please, please contact one of the LE-TEC partners and ask your question. You do not have to be a member of the organisations to make an inquiry, but you could join one of them to support your industry and ensure its future prosperity.

Equipment Theft Prevention Bill



Now for something even more taxing.

Have you heard about a private member's bill that is going through Parliament called the Equipment Theft Prevention Bill? It is starting to get reported, but, in a nutshell, it is a bill that will require immobilisers to be fitted to certain types of equipment, initially quad bikes but now extending beyond that, by law and by the supplying dealer, if not fitted as original equipment. There does not appear to have been much consultation about this, and a lack of understanding concerning the various legal requirements when it comes to type approval, CE and UKCA certifications.

Generally, any modification outside of the original approvals requires the legal sanction of the manufacturer, and needs to comply within the countries legislative requirements, and also be added to the original technical file for the product in question that will detail all aspects of the equipment.

For the UK to be considering an aftermarket modification that could affect the operating systems of equipment is an incredible nonsense when it could contravene existing legislation. There is no question that preventing equipment theft should be a priority, but it seems somewhat naïve to encourage legislation that requires immobilisers to be fitted post-production, and only for the UK. The big question is: will immobilisers by themselves solve the theft problem? The bad guys know what they are doing if they want to nick something, and an immobiliser is only going to stop a driveaway theft. I hear that many thefts are where keys are left in the ignition of wheeled vehicles.

Not sure if it will still be live by the time the mag is on your desks, but there is a 'Call for Evidence' being requested by the government. Just look it up if you are interested. This may be a load of hassle for everyone, or a profit opportunity for the dealer network – who knows?

All heavy stuff, I am afraid. On a lighter note, I hope you industry bikers are finding a little time to dust off your bikes and get a ride while the weather is good. There are usually a number of 'biker meets' at this time of the year, and, if any of you ride in the Cotswolds, look up Cotswold Biker nites – they have a Wednesday nite meet throughout the summer at different pub and village venues in the Cotswolds. I went to one the other week, and there must have been a thousand bikes there. All shapes and sizes – people as well as bikes! An amazing show of motorbikes, and all for a donation to the Air Ambulance.

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