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YEARS  
1988-2018

# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

JUL / AUG 18

AEA AGM 2018

Brexit on the Agenda

Dealer Profiles

Alex McDougall Mowers and  
David Eaton Tractors

Flashback

2000-2003 in review

# MOWER-MAN TO BUSINESS OWNER

Steve Bartle of The Mower Shop feels that more than ever, now is the most exciting time to be part of this industry

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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

**W**elcome to the July / August 2018 edition of Service Dealer. As we touched on last issue, we are hearing that recruitment is proving more problematic than ever for dealers this year. In the results of our recruitment survey which we report on in the Business Monitor section this month, perhaps unsurprisingly an overwhelming majority of respondents describe the process of finding new staff as 'extremely difficult'. We talk in this issue to Jennifer Park of Alex McDougall (Mowers) based in East Kilbride, who tells us "trying to find new staff is about the hardest element of running the business we have to deal with." These sentiments are echoed many times over by dealers who answered our survey. Reading your responses, which begin on page 34, it's very clear to gauge that many dealers are facing an increasingly tough struggle to find the right people. The problem for dealers in finding staff appears to be much greater than a single factor. However, perhaps an element that adversely affects the whole process more than any other is that difficult notion of the perception of the industry and what it can offer applicants. But what can be done to alter this perception? And whose responsibility is that? Our survey respondents in the main take a quite pragmatic view that the responsibility shouldn't lie with a single group – rather with an industry-wide partnership. But of course, this would have to be led from somewhere?

The sad part is that surely at the moment dealers are involved in some of the most cutting-edge technologies out there. It's an exciting time for anyone, young people especially, to be involved. But out on the ground, dealers are struggling to convince people there is a rewarding career to be had.



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## INDUSTRY

**DAVID HART APPOINTED KUBOTA UK MD***Joins from John Deere UK*

Kubota Holdings Europe has appointed David Hart as managing director of Kubota (U.K.) Ltd.

With over 28 years of leadership experience, Kubota says David Hart brings a wealth of knowledge and experience of the agricultural and construction industries.

David started his career in agricultural construction & grounds care equipment at Ben Burgess & Co. In 1990 he joined John Deere and after several sales and marketing roles, became the division manager for Commercial and Consumer Equipment in 2004, managing both sales and marketing for turf and utility equipment (homeowner, commercial and golf).

In 2011 David was appointed regional leader for strategic and key account management, responsible for John Deere's agricultural and non-agricultural strategic and key account business in Europe, Near Middle East, North Africa and CIS.

Dai Watanabe, President & CEO of Kubota in Europe, said, "With David on board we have a leader that can support our ambition by bringing his extensive experience and knowledge to identify and exceed our dealers and customers' needs and requirements."

David Hart said, "We have a big opportunity to grow further and continue to diversify into new sectors, bringing our strong business values and quality delivery to match the demands and rightly high expectations of our

dealers and end user clients. Kubota's brand, values and proven quality are facets I have respected as a competitor over many years, and I am excited to be part of the team that will take these to the next level."



## INDUSTRY

**SERVICE DEALER WEEKLY UPDATE LAUNCHED IN IRELAND***For grounds care and ag dealers*

Service Dealer is delighted to have launched for independent outdoor powered machinery dealers in Ireland a specifically targeted version of the Service Dealer Weekly Update.

Put together by the team behind the UK edition, the Ireland version sends on a Monday afternoon.

Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke, said, "I am delighted to have launched to just under 1,000 dealership workers in the Republic. We are already achieving average readership/open rates of between 35% and 40% - so it's been a good start."

"It has been apparent for some time that there has been very little dedicated media supporting our colleagues in the groundcare and ag dealer sectors in Ireland. Like in the UK, Service Dealer Weekly Update Ireland is distributed free of charge and relies on support from commercial partners and advertisers".

If you would like to opt-in to receive the Ireland edition of the Weekly Update then please visit [www.servicedealer.ie/subscribe](http://www.servicedealer.ie/subscribe) and make sure you check the Ireland version box.

## INDUSTRY

# BARRUS PARTNERS WITH CEUK

## *Range of products for arboricultural and forestry industries*

The CEuk range of outdoor professional products for the arboricultural and forestry industries is now being distributed by Barrus.

Barrus says the Cutting-Edge saw brands of Trojan Handsaws and Stallion Telescopic Polesaws are now available for arborists, foresters, orchard growers and garden enthusiasts. Suitable for high-reach tree pruning, and available in three telescopic pole length options, the

Stallion Polesaws feature high carbon tool steel blades with a serrated hard-chrome plated blade tip which is designed to leave a clean cut.

Also available is the Root Assassin Shovel which the company says is suitable for cutting areas that are heavily overgrown with weeds.

Commenting on the new partnership, Chris Gottfried, Owner of CEuk said, "I'm delighted to be working with Barrus and offering

these products to their extensive dealer network."

Tim Hart, Director of Sales and Marketing for Barrus said, "The CEuk range has proven extremely successful with professional users. These products offer our garden machinery dealers an additional revenue stream and access to a wide range of customers from arborists to allotmenters, foresters to fencers, gardeners to metal detectorists."



Phil Noble, Sales & Technical Manager for Garden Division at Barrus with Chris Gottfried, Owner of CEuk

## DEALERS

## REESINK MAKES A FINETURF CHOICE

*New dealer for Lincs and North Notts*

Reesink Turfcare has welcomed Fineturf Machinery as its new appointed dealer for Toro golf and fine turf machinery, Toro grounds machinery, and TYM tractors in Lincolnshire and North Nottinghamshire.

Fineturf steps into the role of dealer for the area vacated by Chris Sellars Groundcare. Before his recent retirement as Regional Manager at Reesink, Nigel Lovatt explained, "We

looked no further than Fineturf Machinery to take on this role. It's a company that is well established with a fantastic reputation and has expanded significantly in recent years. It has the same goals and ambitions as we do for the area and has invested in new staff to ensure these are achieved."

Simon Hutton, Managing Director of Fineturf Machinery, said he is delighted to become an official

Reesink dealer and service centre for Toro and TYM. "We're looking forward to our association with Toro golf, grounds care and TYM products and hope our depth of knowledge across the golf, grounds care and sports turf industry will benefit new customers, with existing customers gaining direct access to more premium turfcare brands."

Chris Sellars Groundcare will continue to work closely with Reesink to provide warranty support throughout the transition period, as Nigel confirmed: "We enjoyed a good working relationship with Chris Sellars Groundcare for many years, but 2018 sees a change in direction for them, and us. Chris Sellars Groundcare, Reesink Turfcare and Fineturf Machinery will all work together to ensure a smooth transition period for customers, and we wish the greatest success to Chris Sellars with its future endeavours."



Simon Hutton, Managing Director of Fineturf Machinery, left, with Nigel Lovatt, Regional Manager at Reesink

## DEALERS

## KJ STONEMAN JOINS TYM NETWORK

*Extends coverage in mid and north Devon*

TYM Tractors has welcomed KJ Stoneman & Co Ltd in Devon to its dealer network.

The appointment extends TYM's coverage in mid and north Devon and provides the family-run agricultural dealer's customer base of landscape and amenity customers with a comprehensive compact tractor range.

Commenting on the latest dealer to join the TYM network, Scott Turner, Southern Regional Sales Manager at Reesink Turfcare said, "KJ Stoneman was looking for a tractor range suitable for its customers' needs and TYM fit the

criteria. Not only does the partnership see our plans realised in continuing to grow the dealer network, but it also fulfils KJ Stoneham's plan to offer the choice of a reliable tractor to its customers."

Jason Heard, owner of KJ Stoneman, which boasts 71 years in the business, says, "A TYM tractor takes everything in its stride. Plus, its performance matches its appearance, both of which will be very appealing to our customers."

Scott Turner concluded by saying, "We're delighted to welcome KJ Stoneman to the

ever growing TYM dealer network and look forward to working with them."



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## DEALERS

# MAJOR OWEN GOES FOR GOLD

## In North Yorkshire

For a sixth year running North Wales' main Kubota dealer, Major Owen Ltd, has been awarded Gold for Kubota Dealer Service Excellence.

Kubota UK introduced the Dealer Service Excellence programme (DSE) in 2003 to measure each dealer's service capability and to improve the standards nationwide to meet Kubota's and its customers expectations.

Biannual grading has now been updated to annual grading for dealers and is based on a scoring system. This system covers all aspects of the service department including customer satisfaction surveys, mechanical training and competency, workshop area and facilities, warranty, and administration.

Major Owen Ltd says it was eager to take part in the DSE programme and joined in 2006, first receiving a Bronze Award in this year for their Groundcare division.

Major Owen Ltd was established in 1977 by Major Raymond Owen and operated from his garden shed in Penrhyndeudraeth.

Fast forward 41 years and expansion has continued. Major Owen Ltd's site now houses approximately 18,500

sq feet of covered trading space, incorporating showroom, workshop, parts, warehousing, and administration areas. Currently the company employs 26 people including a team of 14 after sales staff.

Now serving 32 years as a Kubota dealer, Major Owen Ltd has raised its service level through the years from Bronze to Gold. This year, it has been awarded the Gold Award in Groundcare and Construction for a sixth consecutive year

Malcolm 'Barney' Barnett, Construction Sales Manager at Major Owen Ltd said, "What a great achievement! I'm very proud of our company. Well done to all the service team and a big thank you to our customers and Kubota UK for helping us to achieve Gold yet again!"

Gordon Smith, CE Regional Service Representative for Kubota said, "Major Owen achieving Gold in its DSE is good for Kubota and our customers. The award means the after sales at Major Owen are to a high standard and will reassure confidence in our customers that Major Owen technicians are fully trained in Kubota products and equipped with the correct tooling to carry out any after care tasks. Well done to all the staff at Major Owen"



L-R: Gordon Smith – Regional Service Representative for Kubota, Andy Jones – MD for Major Owen Ltd, Malcolm 'Barney' Barnett – Construction Sales Manager for Major Owen Ltd, Tom Lockwood – Regional Service Representative for Kubota, Rob Jones – Workshop Manager



## DEALERS

# ERNEST DOE TAKES ON ETESIA

## *Esher branch in Surrey*

The Ernest Doe branch in Esher has been appointed as a new Etesia dealer and will be distributing Etesia's complete product range throughout Surrey.

The Ernest Doe brand can be traced back to June 1898. Still very much a family firm, current Managing Director Colin Doe is the fourth generation of the family to have taken the helm during the company's 100+ years of trading.

Ernest Doe now boasts a network of branches in the South and East of England. Of the 19 branches, the Esher depot based in Surrey is the only branch purely dedicated to groundcare machinery.

General Sales Manager at Ernest Doe, Andy Turbin, said, "Etesia is a brand that we have known about for a number of years and we have a lot of customers who use the equipment, so we thought it would be good to get the franchise and support these customers. Quite simply, it seemed a great opportunity for us.

"The Esher branch has a massive customer base

including contractors and local authorities, so the Etesia equipment will be ideal for them."

Ernest Doe's Surrey-based customers will now be able to choose from Etesia's 12 product families which include ride-on mowers, scarifiers, brush cutters, green technology and pedestrian mowers.



## INDUSTRY

# GARDENCARE APPOINTS CENTRAL SPARES

## *As UK mainland distributor of products*

With a growing demand for their diverse range products in the mainland United Kingdom, Gardencare, the Belfast based garden machinery supplier, have appointed Lincolnshire based Central Spares Ltd as a supplier of their products

Central Spares has been a supplier to the horticultural trade for the past 40 years and as a result have developed an extensive network of dealers which will now be offered the entire Gardencare machinery range, in addition to a full stock of parts and will also offer Gardencare's exclusive 5 year warranty.

Mr Gary Tully, Head of Gardencare said "Central Spares offer a fantastic opportunity for the further development of the brand's growth. The UK market is

demanding lower priced machinery yet still looks for quality and reassurance that their purchase will last.

"Over the past 14 years, we have proven that our products meet these demands and look forward to the continual development and strengthening of Gardencare's presence in the UK dealer network."

Central Spares have hit the ground running, signing up their first 'Gardencare Premium Dealer' Abbey Garden Machinery in Tavistock, Devon.

With a number of other potential dealers for the brand also in the pipeline, Gardencare say the following months are set to be a busy time for Central as they move into offering a new product range to an industry which they know so well.

Grant Aubrey, general manager at Central said, "Our aim is to provide dealers with a quality product that helps them to compete in and capture the domestic market."



L-R: Sam & Chris from Abbey, Grant & Steve from Central

## APPOINTMENTS

# CHRIS COOPER IS NEW AEA PRESIDENT

## *Product Marketing Manager of Hayter and Toro*

Chris Cooper, Product Marketing Manager of Hayter and Toro, has been elected President of the Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA). He was appointed at the AEA AGM held at the Institution of Civil Engineers on 10th April 2018 and holds the post for a 12-month term.

Chris started out in the industry at Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd, after graduating from college as a design engineer in 2002. A year later, he joined Hayter as a design engineer and assumed the role as Product Manager in 2006 when Toro acquired Hayter. Chris is now responsible for product management and marketing of the Hayter and Toro consumer brands in the UK.

"The AEA is all about diversification and making sure member companies have a voice from within the association," he said. "As incoming President, I will be helping with the development of the AEA and

continuing the great work that has been done by the Board and Director-General, Ruth Bailey, and through the member companies. We will also be looking at ways to help future-proof our industry.

"At the moment there is a lot of discussion around how we can get young people into our industry. However, I believe the bigger challenge is not how we recruit these young people, but how we retain them and continue to advance their professional development. For myself, I never thought I would follow the path I have taken; however, once I got more familiar with the industry and started working with the likes of Real Madrid CF and Arsenal FC, I realised it was completely different from what I first thought.

"This industry can give young people a great chance to get out and talk to people from all different



backgrounds, experiences and cultures around the world. There is great scope to make a difference in this industry."

Chris is the second-youngest President in the association's history. He hopes to use his recent experiences and career journey to help younger people develop and have a voice within the industry. Read our report on this year's AEA Conference on page 18.

## INDUSTRY

## STIHL LAUNCH NEW DEALERS SITE

### *Intended to simplify the application process for new partners*

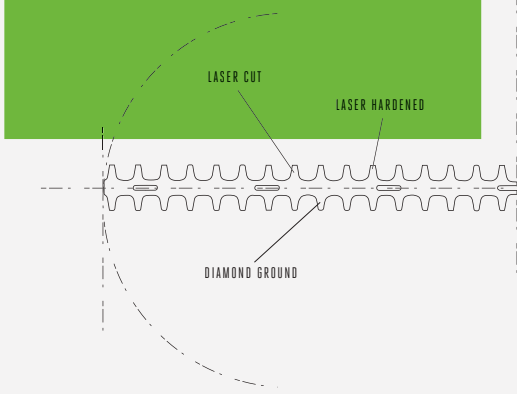
STIHL has launched a website dedicated to potential new dealers, which they say highlights their commitment to its retail network and simplifying the application process for new partners.

The company says the new website has been specifically designed to showcase the benefits of becoming a STIHL dealer and offers insight into the tools dealers can access to enhance their business operations.

For more information visit <https://becomeastihldealer.co.uk/>.



# JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD THE RIGHT TOOL, ALONG COMES A BETTER ONE.

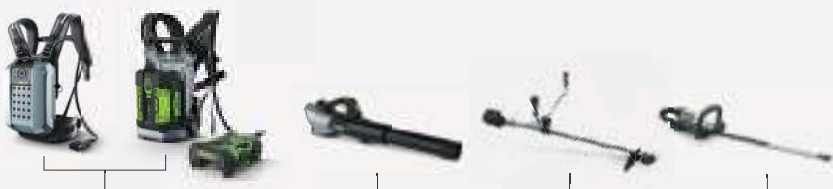


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30 YEARS  
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# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY  
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2018

## A LOOK BACK AND A LOOK FORWARD FOR SERVICE DEALER'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

*November's event will feature expert speakers who can help dealers prosper over the next 30 years and more, explains Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke*

### INSIGHTS FOR OUR INDUSTRY

## ▶ 2048

HELPING YOU TO PROSPER OVER THE NEXT 30 YEARS

**T**he theme of the conference this year is key to not just our industry, but a rapidly changing world.

We at *Service Dealer* are delighted to announce our exciting speaker line-up for this year's Conference which takes place once again at the Oxford Belfry Hotel, Thame, Oxfordshire on Thursday 15th November 2018.

Entitled *Insights for our industry to 2048 – Helping you to prosper over the next 30 years* we are developing from the success of last year. As such we have decided again for this November, rather than a single keynote speech, to provide our specialist dealer delegates with multiple expert speakers.

The speakers we have chosen

will offer a diverse range of insightful, fascinating and highly relevant talks for our independent dealer delegates. Grasscare, professional turf and agricultural machinery dealers alike will all benefit from attendance.

The afternoon, for example, features two very insightful talks from machinery purchasers in Groundcare (Angus Lindsay) and Agriculture (UK farmer). They will share with the Conference what they want, need and expect from a dealership now and in the future and what a dealership can do to acquire and retain similar customers.

Peter Harding from Maple Associate and Sara Hey from Bob Clements Inc (BCI) will be discussing how dealerships function both here in the UK and in the US. This not to be missed session will offer opportunities for insight into how top performing dealers on both sides of the pond make their businesses work for them.

We are running the very popular Breakout Sessions once again which see delegates split into two smaller groups, allowing for lively and interactive debate. This year we shall be offering sessions on the timely subjects of *Succession* and *Urbanisation*. Delegates attend one session in the morning and the alternate session in the afternoon. This way no-one misses a thing.

Finally the Conference will wrap-up with a Panel Debate and Q&A, allowing dealers to have any burning questions which the day's content has ignited in them, to be answered.

Our aim is to inspire delegates with useful information, tips and ideas which they can take away back to their dealerships and put into practical use.

We really hope as many of our readers as possible will be able to join us for what is always an educational and highly enjoyable day. Please visit [www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk) for full details.

# THE SPEAKERS

## Ed Gillespie – Futurist

Ed Gillespie is a writer, communications specialist, serial entrepreneur and futurist. His core talent is to take the complex, interconnected, interdependent nature of the many challenges the world faces, from climate change to disruptive innovation, and make common sense of them for non-specialist audiences.

Ed is co-founder of Futerra, a change agency that specialises in business transformation and creative communications and campaigns.

Ed is also actively involved in a number of pioneering businesses as a Director or Investor, from Zero Carbon Food, a renewable energy powered, LED-lit, hydroponic farm in a disused underground tunnel in South London, to Loco2.com a pan European rail-ticket agency that makes it as easy to book a trans-continental train as a plane. He is also a London Sustainable Development Commissioner, advising the Mayor and the Greater London Authority on green entrepreneurship and cleantech.

## Sara Hey – Bob Clements Inc (USA)

Energetic, personable and competitive – these are just a few of the adjectives that describe Sara Hey, Vice President of Operations and Development at Bob Clements Inc (BCI).

In 2011, Sara joined the BCI team to help build social media and marketing efforts. Soon after, she began to taking on the management of special events such as GIE +EXPO and the BCI Manager Boot Camp.

Today, Sara also assists with the daily operations and product development at BCI. Working with companies in the OPE, AG and Power Sports industries, she oversees the development of customised training programs for their dealers. And, in keeping with the mission of BCI, she consistently works to create new training materials and programs that can be delivered to dealers in affordable and accessible ways.

Sara is an engaging and commanding speaker and will share proven ways to help you gain and retain exceptional employees. She has a passion for helping dealers to find and hire great employees, which reduces turnover and can save a dealership thousands.

## Angus Lindsay – Group Head of Assets & Fleet Management at idverde

Angus is an experienced Agricultural Engineer and a well-known voice in the industry, having spent over 24 years working for national contractors and a short period in the supply side as an Account Manager for the IPU Group. His current role encompasses the whole life management



Ed  
Gillespie



Sara  
Hey



Angus  
Lindsay



UK  
Farmer

of assets and fleet for idverde in the UK, which currently turns over £110m per annum with a workforce of 2,500 operating at sites from the Isle of Wight to Inverness.

Angus will be giving us an insight into what he looks for from a grounds care dealership and how a dealership can help him.

## A successful Farmer

We will have a successful and progressive UK Farmer talking about what they want from an agricultural dealership and what is important to them and their business. They will be giving an insight into what a customer desires and how their account can be retained by a Dealership. More details to follow

## OUR 2018 SPONSORS

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2018 *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.



Sponsorship correct at the time of print



# ALEX MCDOUGALL (MOWERS) LTD

*Jennifer Park, second generation at the East Kilbride dealership, spoke to Editor Steve Gibbs about cordless, robots, staffing and competing with online retailers*

**F**ounded in 1990, Alex McDougall (Mowers) Ltd is a family-run business with over 30 years' experience in the groundcare machinery trade.

Based in East Kilbride, south of Glasgow, the company started out just repairing mowers before realising there was a market locally for expert advice in the sale of new machinery – followed up with professional service and provision of parts and accessories.

With founder Alex McDougall the engineering brain at the head of the workshop, it's daughter Jennifer Park who takes charge of the running of the business. When we met earlier this year, Jennifer was looking forward to the 2018 season hopefully offering something more than the generally quite disappointing one which many dealers in Scotland faced during 2017, due to the prolonged periods of wet weather. "With this

business," Jennifer said, "it is totally swings and roundabouts. One year can be good, the next just about OK."

What is she finding is doing well for the dealership at the moment, I ask her. "A lot of customers are getting into cordless now," she says. "Cordless equipment is brilliant for people with smaller, urban houses who don't have a lot of storage space. Some come in specially to buy a battery machine, but others come in for maybe a chainsaw – and we get chatting and we may suggest that perhaps they would want to go for the cordless. With the family of products available for the battery equipment, people quite often buy the mower and then return a while later and get the hedge cutter or the strimmer."

Alex McDougall (Mowers) also sells robot mowers, specifically the Husqvarna Automower. Not in huge numbers currently, but it's something

Jennifer says they would like to find more success with. "We usually have one whizzing about outside," she explains, "which when customers see it, they get really, really interested in. But unfortunately, that can often be it. We sold a few last year and as it's a product I'm familiar with, I'm happy to sell it.

"I do find people who buy robots tend to know that's what they want though. In general, it tends to be older people or tech-y people who purchase. We do the installations ourselves and in terms of servicing I tend to do it for about £100 – depending how filthy it is!"

Jennifer says she is starting to see evidence of Husqvarna's marketing campaigns for the Automower working, saying, "We did have a customer come in to ask about one last year as they'd seen it cutting in public in Edinburgh. Also, I know someone locally who was given one as part of the social media campaign where they had users blogging about them and uploading videos and pictures to their various channels."

With more customers looking at robots and especially the cordless equipment, does Jennifer have concerns over the effect this could potentially have on her workshop?

"Not at the moment, no. If everything eventually becomes battery it will of course have an effect, but I can't really see it happening in my working lifetime. We still find that a lot of our customers simply prefer petrol machines and don't want to change.



Jennifer Park with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke

# I'M SURE THERE'RE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO WANT TO BE ENGINEERS, BUT I JUST DON'T THINK THIS INDUSTRY IS PROMOTED SUFFICIENTLY TO THEM

I guess there's an uncertainty of how long things will last, but not in the foreseeable future are we worried about our workshop."

When I visited East Kilbride, Jennifer's service department certainly had plenty of work. If they receive repairs in for cheap machines from B&Q and the like Jennifer says they do accept the work, but she'll endeavour to guide the customer into buying something affordable which they stock.

"I find if I point people towards something like a Mitox and tell them they'll be able to get parts for that, they go for it," she says.

To make sure their workshop is full year-round, Jennifer says she posts out letters to remind customers. "I know it's old fashioned," she says, "but I find that they are effective. They certainly work for lawnmowers. Ride-on owners often tend to wait until it breaks in the summer time though!

"In order to be GDPR compliant we ask every customer who buys a piece of equipment now if they are OK with us contacting them again to follow up on servicing, and we've been writing to all of our database to make sure we're covered."

There are periods when Alex McDougall (Mowers) finds it is really busy in the workshop. Jennifer

tells me there's only Dad Alex and three others dealing with all the repairs and services which need attending to. There are also another three employees who work in the office. "We're just trying to juggle everything all the time" Jennifer says.

"We can have quieter periods in the workshop, like when the weather is rubbish as it was last year, but usually we're busy though right till the end of October.

"Usually when it's quiet though, November and December, that's when we'll phone round the bowls clubs, and once we get the service letters out, I've worked out that roughly around 20% of people

respond – so then we're busy again."

With this constant work, it is of course imperative that the business is populated with enough, and most importantly, the right staff.

"In general, trying to find new staff is about the hardest element of running the business we have to deal with," Jennifer says. "We really struggle with getting people in the workshop. Unfortunately, young people don't come out of school and say 'I want to be a lawnmower mechanic!' We did find an employee recently through an advert on Facebook, but it's ever so difficult.

"When we do employ, we often find it's people who've come from



Display of hand tools and accessories

## DEALER PROFILE

being motorbike engineers, but they won't have all the skills we require straight away. It really is hard to find people. I'm sure there're people out there who want to be engineers, but I just don't think this industry is promoted sufficiently to them."

Besides the troubles involved in recruiting new staff, Jennifer's other obstacle which the dealership has to negotiate is how to persuade customers to leave their homes and visit their store, rather than buy online. It's a predicament which garden machinery dealers across the country will know only too well.

I ask Jennifer how they market their business to get customers in through their doors?

"We're on Garden Trader and Mowerpro to catch the eye of people browsing online," she says.

"Anything we can do which doesn't cost too much we want to try because the money we spend on *Yellow Pages* is ridiculous, and that's not even for the actual book, just the online side. They do our website as well, but I'm gradually learning how to do more of that myself.

"I'm trying to compete for the local customers who go online and buy. I don't understand why people would choose to buy something like a mower online rather than come to their local store, but I've changed up a lot on our website to try to entice them here.

"If I could offer consumer credit, that could possibly lead to more ride-

on sales I think. It's something we've been looking into. It might just help us compete with the internet sellers.

"It's difficult though. It's just trying to attract people and to get your name out there. We used to advertise in the local paper, but it's just so expensive and we didn't find it was particularly effective. I'm going to look into the local Facebook advertising though, and we're using Twitter more – especially as our customers mention us on there sometimes

"But with all of this marketing activity, it's about finding the time to actually do it."

Looking ahead, where does Jennifer feel she would like to perhaps see some changes in their business?

"I'd like to concentrate more on ride-on sales and professional customers," she says.

"We don't seem to have as many of those guys as we once did. Again, I'm not sure if that's because of internet sales? We've got lots of

potential professional customers in our area with bowling clubs, golf clubs, schools and the like. There are landscapers too, but it's those guys that we're just not seeing as much of.

"It's disappointing if they are going online just because of price, because I understand they can't always find £1,000 for a new machine. But I'll help them find an alternative, less expensive machine which will do the job they require."

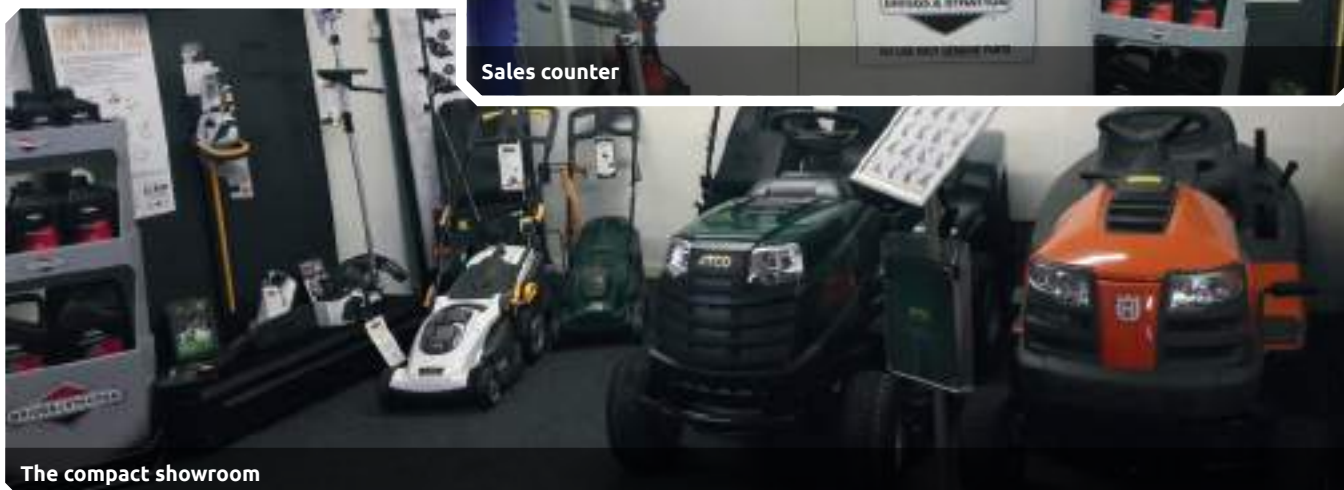
In general, though, Jennifer is upbeat about the dealership.

"We do okay, but it's hard running a small business. I'd love to know what the winning mix is. You just have to struggle through the quieter months and keep everything ticking over. But it's all dependent on the weather. As soon as there's a warm spell and people realise their mowers don't work, that's when we're busy.

"However, I'm a positive person, so I'm optimistic about everything really. Well, optimistic but cautious – especially when I do our winter stock orders!"



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# HIGH ATTENDANCE FOR AEA'S 2018 CONFERENCE

*Impact of Brexit on the agenda, writes CHRIS BIDDLE*

**M**ore than 180 members and guests, the best attendance for some years, enjoyed a thought-provoking AEA Conference on 10th April at the headquarters of the Institution of Civil Engineers in the heart of Westminster.

Inevitably, much of the conference was devoted to the likely impact of the ongoing Brexit negotiations, particularly on farming and the management of the countryside.

Leading economist, Derrick Wilkinson, a former Chief Economist at the National Farmers Union and the CLA (Country Land and Business Association) opened up by saying that since the referendum, "Brexit has been good for farmers with increases in CAP payments." However, he warned that the 'fork in the road' would be happening from 2020 when the transition period commences and there was clear evidence that "over the following five to seven years, there would likely to be a significant drop in farm incomes."

He added that the UK also faced "more competition from international food suppliers, so the farming industry has to ensure that it was 'match-fit' to survive and prosper during the transitional period".

Liquidity and gearing across the farming sector was generally okay, he said, but the return on capital of around 2% (compared with 12-15% in manufacturing) meant that many farmers could be exposed during the transition period.

Despite that, he considered that while the landscape for UK farming was bound to change after the transition period, the overall prospects were good.

"Yes, there are likely to be fewer farm businesses and land management will change, but improved efficiency

coupled with technological change and product innovation will mean a bright future for the UK's most efficient farmers."

Anthea MacIntyre is MEP for the West Midlands and authored a report in 2016 on *Technological Solutions for Sustainable Agriculture in the EU*. She said that technological change will drive the farming sector in the future, but that it had to be accessible to all farmers.

"We're fully behind the EU's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme, and the UK gets more out of it than it puts in," she said. "Only last week, the UK was awarded the most research grants for the next year, far more than countries such as Germany and France."

The final speaker was Dr Simon Moores who is described as a leading futurist. He took delegates behind the scenes of information providers such as Google and Facebook and said that the window of change is closing rapidly. "Forget long-term planning, nobody has a clue what will happen in five years' time." The mind set of new consumers is now not about ownership, but of renting or experiencing products and services.

He foresaw days ahead when Amazon would track your purchases and deliver items to your door automatically – which you would then return on the spot if not required. Or the development of 'blockchain' which meant that if a customer missed a regular payment on a car, the finance company could remotely turn off the starting mechanism so that the vehicle could not be used!

The speaker at the lunch, following the conference was Alfie Moore, a serving police officer and comedian who has performed at the Edinburgh Fringe and comedy clubs and is about to tour a new show called *Getting Away with Murder*.





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# MOWER-MAN TO BUSINESS OWNER



*Steve Bartle of The Mower Shop in West Haddon talks to Lawrence Gale Msc, MBPR, about his long career, challenges old and new, and how he feels now more than ever is the most exciting time to be part of this industry*



Steve believes the industry is at its most exciting time ever

**A**s always spring is a very busy time for grass machinery dealerships, with many working flat out preparing and selling their winter stock products for the onslaught of a new mowing season.

It was around this time that a phone call from Steve Bartle, the owner of The Mower Shop, had me scurrying down the motorway to West Haddon to catch up with how things had been going for his business recently.

On arrival, Steve was keen to show me around the site and introduce me to many of his staff. Tucked away on the outskirts of West Haddon, the shop is fully stocked with a wide range of professional and domestic mowers and powered hand tools.

Outside the store was a dedicated robotic mower demonstration area, providing both flat and embanked lawn areas to show off a range of robotic mowers – a growing area which Steve is very excited about.

I would like to thank Steve for taking the time to show me around his premises, giving up his time to speak to *Service Dealer*. I was really impressed by the way he runs his business and hearing at first hand the challenges they face on a daily basis.

#### **Service Dealer: When did you start the company?**

**Steve Bartle:** The company was formed in 1989 in an area of the country which I felt had an opening for a garden machinery dealership. My own career started when I began a part-time Saturday job repairing horticultural machinery. I soon found myself working full-time, gaining experience working for a Ransomes dealer in Lincolnshire and then working for E P Barrus before leaving there to start The Mower Shop.

It started with buying and erecting a small building at what was the garden centre site in West Haddon. I knew Jacobsen at Kings Lynn and asked if I could sell machinery in the Northants area for them and they agreed – which started me off in professional machinery and was the beginning of a lasting association selling professional machinery to numerous golf courses in the surrounding area.

Changes then took place in machinery distribution and as time went by I was approached by Lely UK asking if I would like to become a Toro Service Centre, which I did, and we've supported Toro machinery ever since.

#### **SD: What products do you stock and sell in the shop?**

**SB:** Over the years we've built up our reputation and relationship with several large manufacturers selling a wide range of their products. I've tried to always provide top-quality products including Toro, Hayter, Mountfield, Stiga, STIHL, Viking, Allett, Cub Cadet, and Grillo to name a few.

#### **SD: What is your role in the company?**

**SB:** I have a diverse role within my organisation which now employs over 10 staff. I have progressed from mower-man to business owner, which provides a daily learning curve. I rarely now do any actual physical work involving tools, mostly spending time in an organisational, communications role with customers – plus covering any members of staff when they are off.

I really enjoy my relationship with customers, as many of them I think of as friends. Although I must say that some customers can of course present challenges usually due to the nature of this seasonal business.

However, I have a great team around me, in whom I can put all my trust with confidence to deliver the values we share in running The Mower Shop. Staff retention is excellent, and I'm looking forward to developing the next generation from within the business.

#### **SD: Who is your customer base?**

**SB:** We supply a varied customer base including football and rugby clubs, local estates, large gardens, private individuals and some local authorities. It's really a good mix of professional and high-end domestic clients.

Our high value machinery sales are to golf clubs, schools, councils and local contractors. However, in recent years we've been seeing an increase in domestic sales due to the ever-increasing development of new housing estates around the surrounding rural towns and villages.

#### **SD: How has the start of this season been for you?**

**SB:** At present the economics of the country are not posing a problem.

The real problem has been the poor weather we experienced this spring. The wet weather delayed the start of the mowing season by several weeks, hence a delay in the demand for mowing machinery which in turn has reduced the potential of our sales forecasts. We will just have to hope we have a strong demand mid-season to catch up.

We mostly concentrate on new machinery sales and I often have great intentions with used equipment, but unfortunately never get around to refurbishing it due to demand on our present services.

We also have a busy parts and servicing centre undertaking warranty work, pre-delivery inspections, repairs and servicing, manned by our four experienced staff who are kept busy all year round. We pride ourselves on our first-class after sales service which is key to retaining customers.

#### **SD: What new technologies do you see having an impact on the industry?**

**SB:** Without doubt battery and hybrid technologies are moving at a fast pace. Cordless equipment is becoming more widely available due to more and more manufacturers establishing their own ranges. Most, if not all, of our selected manufactures are now embracing this technology. In just a few years we've seen a vast improvement in battery running times, thus making the equipment more viable.

The choice of battery-powered tools is staggering, with the options becoming more cost-effective which is attracting new domestic consumers.

I'm also really excited by the recent demand for robotic mowers. I can really see a lot of potential for us in these machines. They're even attracting the interest of local authorities now who see them as an economic way of maintaining some of their open space areas.

We've created a trial demonstration area where we have two robotic mowers constantly keeping the grass mown, which provides a great showcase for our customers. The demonstration area has proved popular and attracted a lot of interest, resulting in a growing demand for these mowers. We've had reasonable success with sales, installing 29 in 2017 and we're hoping to increase that figure in 2018.

**SD: Are you happy to demo machines for customers?**

**SB:** We willingly demonstrate new machinery to customers as it's our way of securing a sale. We're happy to do this regardless of the value of the item as our principal concern is that our customers get the correct machine for their job.

**SD: What do you do to market and promote your business?**

**SB:** Like most dealers, we rely heavily on maintaining a good relationship with our established customers and keep in touch with them via our database and monthly newsletter and e-shots.

I personally am of an age where Twitter and Facebook etc are a little daunting and I'm approaching them with a little hesitation at the moment. My fear would be not having enough time to respond adequately to questions and queries posed through them. I have no doubt that they will be essential moving forwards and I accept they will need to be embraced – it's another challenge to me as the business owner.

**SD: Do you attend trade shows and exhibitions?**

**SB:** I, along with my key staff, try to attend as many shows as possible, particularly Saltex and BTME which give us a chance to gauge the industry's needs and aspirations. However, these shows and demo days can be a great demand on our time away from our business. Our customers are our priority, so we need to balance the time we spend away from our shop.

**SD: What are your thoughts regarding online selling?**

**SB:** Online selling is something we started some years ago but found it posed more challenges than we had the ability to cope with. If you sell a machine five miles away and a problem occurs then it's relatively easy to deal with, but when its 25-200 miles away, that's another matter. You need to be able to respond and have the infrastructure to ensure a problem is dealt with promptly.

Our own website is designed to encourage customers to think about visiting us, to look carefully at their intended purchase in our showroom and then take our



Steve says most visitors tend to leave with an item of value



Steve Bartle, owner of The Mower Shop, West Haddon

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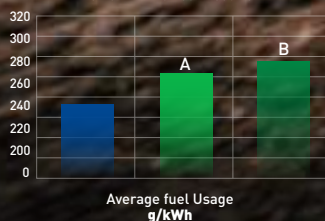
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advice. Most, if not all, of our visitors generally walk away with something of value.

One of our biggest problems, which has grown in recent years, is when customers come in and demand a lower price for goods which they have seen on the internet.

Just recently in fact, one of our own loyal customers came in and asked if we could reduce the cost of a piece of equipment we were selling by £30 as he had seen it for sale on a website, whose business is based 200 miles away. So what am I supposed to do?!

This practice is eroding the very ethos of our business model. Many of these websites do not offer any aftersales service. They are only interested in a quick sale with no ties.

The prices we set are governed by the prices we negotiate with the manufacturers and the profit margins we set are to give us a relative return on the investments we make to continue to run The Mower Shop and support our customers.

### **SD: How do you see the future for your business**

**SB:** The challenge going forward will be very intriguing due to the greater range of products being developed and brought to market.

Stocking this vast range of products will definitely be a challenge for dealerships especially with storage facilities under constant pressure, coupled with the way manufacturers want us to forward order our winter

stock machinery. This can, as we have seen with the late start to selling this spring, have consequences both financially and physically on our businesses.

So perhaps it is time for a rethink from suppliers to look hard at the 12 months of the year and how their actions for their own businesses affect individual dealers like The Mower Shop.

I would say that there is possibly a culture change needed to grow and strengthen the bond between supplier and dealer. I think this is a real potential talking point – after all, we had winter stocking when I was 16 and we still do now at 61. Not many other things have changed as little in the past 45 years have they?

I personally think there is a real need for the industry to come together to discuss these issues and others – particularly to address the issues of online selling and ways to retain a decent profit margin on the goods that we sell.

That said, I do believe the industry is at its most exciting time ever. Changes are happening every week with exciting developments in the products available to offer to our customers.

Having spent over 45 years working in this industry, I can honestly say that I have enjoyed every minute and would recommend and encourage any youngster to take the opportunity to come and work in this unique and satisfying industry.

### **SD: Thank you**



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# FOR ALL YOUR CUSTOMERS

# JOHN BUFTON

*An 'old school dealer' who loved a deal, remembered by CHRIS BIDDLE*

Well-known garden machinery and chainsaw dealer, John Bufton of Morris Bufton Ltd passed away aged 71 on 17th March 2018. A regular attender of shows and trade events, John has been universally described by those who knew him well as a real gentleman, the 'salt of the earth' and with an impish sense of humour.

The son of Morris Bufton who founded the Ludlow-based business in 1954, John leaves a wife Dorothy, two daughters Cindy and Johanna, and two sons Steve and Dan who both work in the business.

John joined his father in the business after leaving school and immediately established a lasting rapport with customers in and around Shropshire, and with key suppliers. He became one of the earliest STIHL dealers after meeting up with the late Peter Baker and continued to build the business through strong links with the likes of Mountfield, Hayter, E P Barrus and Ifor Williams Trailers.

The last few years had been marked with several bouts of ill-health, including the fitting of a pace-maker and severe pneumonia, but this did not stop him continuing to be heavily involved in the business, particularly trailer sales which he concentrated on after son Steve took over the running of the garden machinery business.

Steve says, "We bought Dad a scooter which he used virtually every day, 'buzzing' around the business, invariably on the phone doing deals whilst on the move. He didn't let his health get in the way of continuing a full life and doing what he liked best – closing a deal!"

Robert Muir, MD of E P Barrus recalls John attending the company's 100 year celebrations in 2017. "He came to the hotel complete with oxygen tent and scooter laden with oxygen bottles,

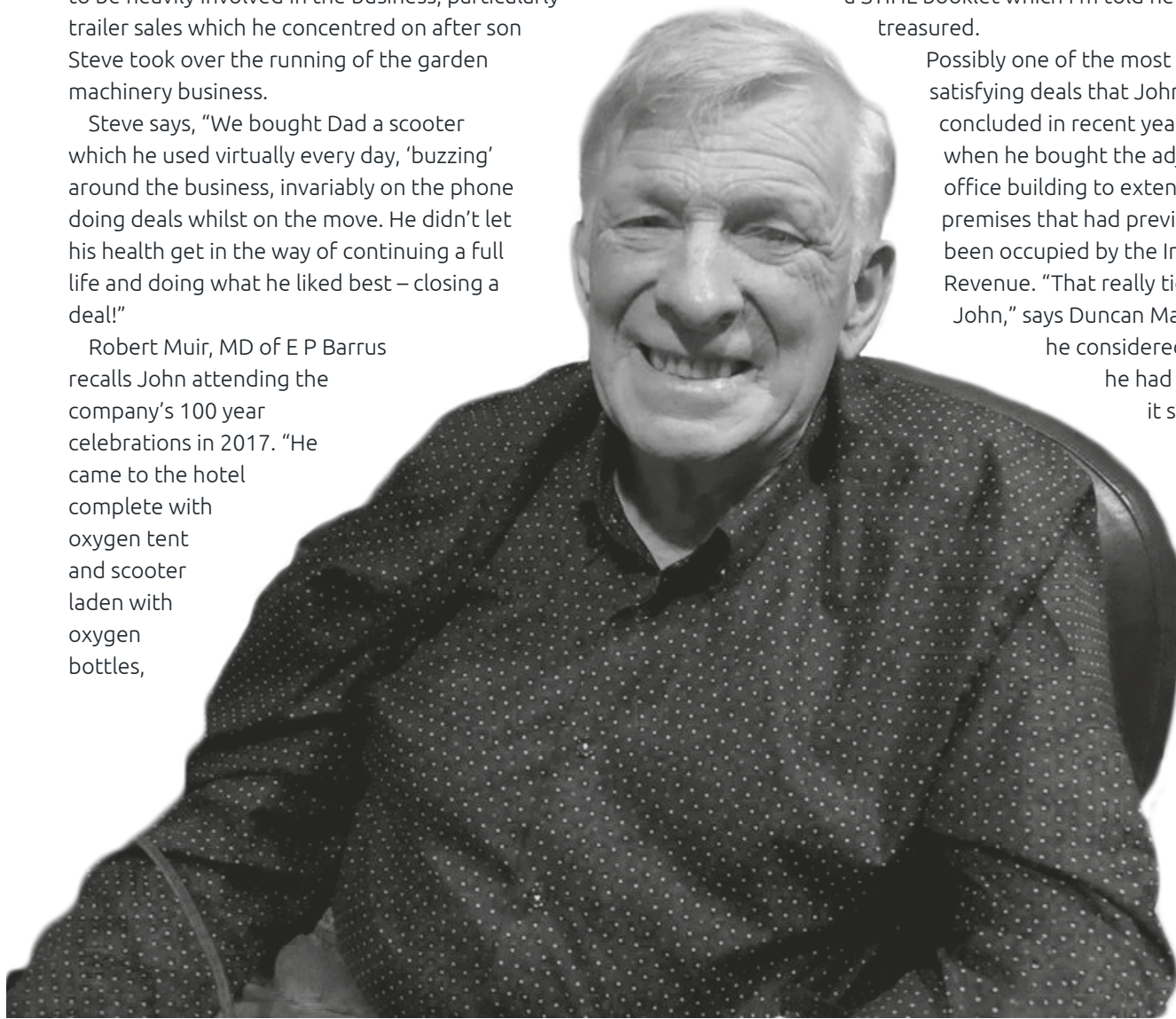
determined to enjoy our special event. That was John all over, one of the old school, absolutely genuine and always wore his heart on his sleeve."

Another long-time associate, Duncan Martin, MD of Stiga UK knew John for over 30 years. "When I joined Hayter on the road, John was one call I really looked forward to. I was always made welcome. He was a tough businessman, always liking 'a deal', but totally fair and honest. Whatever deal you ended up doing with him, often for huge numbers of machines which were then 'networked' to fellow dealers in his circle, you could always count on payment straightaway. John was a man of his word."

Robin Lennie, MD of STIHL GB, recalls John as a colourful character, totally committed to the heritage and future success of his family business. "I was privileged to be invited with my wife to John's surprise 70th birthday party. Unsure of the gift to take I was asked to dig out and frame a photo of the Morris Bufton stand at the Ludlow

Show back in the late 1970s that featured in a STIHL booklet which I'm told he really treasured.

Possibly one of the most satisfying deals that John concluded in recent years was when he bought the adjacent office building to extend his premises that had previously been occupied by the Inland Revenue. "That really tickled John," says Duncan Martin, "as he considered that he had bought it several times over!"



# ROBIN NETTLE

*Headed Winchester Garden Machinery for 47 years, writes CHRIS BIDDLE*

The garden machinery industry has lost one of its most successful and enigmatic characters. Robin Nettle, co-founder of Winchester Garden Machinery passed away on Saturday 5th May aged 69.

He leaves his wife Judith, two sons Toby and Jason, daughter Louise and six grandchildren. Robin was diagnosed with cancer a couple of months before Christmas after feeling unwell while on holiday. Although he underwent extensive treatment and chemotherapy in the New Year, he insisted (as was usually his way) on not only finishing a project to make his garden safe for the grandchildren, but he was out with Jason delivering mowers only a couple of weeks before his last few days in a hospice.

It was while they were both working at Huxleys in Alresford that Robin teamed up with Andy Hoskings when they spotted an opportunity to open a garden machinery business in Winchester in 1971. "It was a relatively untapped area," says Andy, "and we managed to find a unit on an industrial estate."

As the business grew, they realised they needed to be more 'in the sun' and a chance conversation with local garden centre owner, Hillier and Sons, saw them offered a greenhouse on their site in Winchester in 1975. It proved to be an inspired move, the vastly increased footfall really opened up new business in an era before the 'sheds' were fully established.

The greenhouse was soon replaced with a purpose-built showroom, and over the years, Winchester Garden Machinery established branches at Hilliers at Liss and

Sunningdale.

As the industry evolved from the days when dealers were severely challenged competing with the 'big-box' stores, through to the internet era, Robin was always ahead of the curve in making sure that WGM offered a personal service to customers. When the opportunity arose, WGM was one of the first specialist dealers to embrace an online presence but ensured that customers always knew that products were backed by a 'bricks and mortar' business with a solid heritage.

With my *Service Dealer* hat on, and when anywhere near Winchester, I knew I could always be assured of an open door, cup of coffee and 'both-barrels' on whatever issue was taxing Robin at the time. Much of it was unprintable for legal reasons, but as an insight into the mind of a real 'thinking-dealer' it was always exhilarating and never less than highly relevant.

Keith Christian of BAGMA in his Claymore days dealt with Robin on a regular basis. "He could be complex in many ways," he says, "and often kept you talking, waiting for an order, teasing you, only to open the desk drawer to pull out an already written order just before you left. I cannot think of anyone in recent years who has had the drive, the foresight and the personal magnetism of Robin. Our industry will be the poorer without him."

Final word to an unnamed dealer who said, "Heaven is now in for a real wake-up call!" And I suppose if there is such a thing as a celestial garden machinery dealership involving the likes of Peter Rochford, John Bufton and now Robin Nettle, what a formidable outfit that would be!



Robin (left) with Andy during the early days



# What's going on in your workshop?

Asks Denis Bullen, Managing Director of Evopos, Denis continues, "I often feel the workshop in a dealership is not as valued as much as it should be!"

The workshop often used to be the last department to be fully computerised. One reason was that it was hard to get a computerised diary that was as easy to update and access as a manual diary. Another reason is that it was just too difficult or time-consuming to log engineer's time (especially on internal work). Evopos solves both these problems brilliantly, and because we are getting the full picture we are able to manage and improve the workshop much more effectively.

Simple processes and procedures will provide you with results that you can trust. Many times I have heard dealers mention that the workshop doesn't make the profit it should. Investigating this further I have found that often the overall figure for Sales \ Parts and Workshop not necessarily true to actual activity that had taken place this was mainly due to internal work and parts not being booked to jobs correctly or internally.

For example a mechanic could spend hours working on sales vehicles but because the internal transactions were not being reported accurately it showed that Sales were making artificially high profits and the Workshop (and Parts) making artificially low profits. Once we had a system with accurate figures to work with it was easy to make decisions to improve not only the Workshop but business efficiency everywhere.

The workshop features in Evopos are exceptionally easy to use and brings dealer reporting to a whole new level. The post profit reports are particularly important as the internal costs are taken in to consideration therefore you can clearly see the true profit.

For example because we know the proficiency, efficiency and productivity ratios for each engineer, we can reward good

performance and also highlight when an engineer may need additional training (eg: if taking longer times on electrical jobs).

Evopos also helps in other areas, for example it helps ensure parts are not missed off the invoice and it helps controls sundries and consumables. Your customers will appreciate features like the automatic SMS or email reminder when their job is ready or parts are in. And with the automated 'story' generation, a detailed description can be created in a few key presses which can help enormously with the understanding and acceptance of labour charges.

So give the workshop its fair due. It can be a great profit centre and it is where many customers are won or lost.

The three key areas are: parts ordering, unit sales and workshop processes, below is a flow chart that goes some way to explaining how each department complements the other.

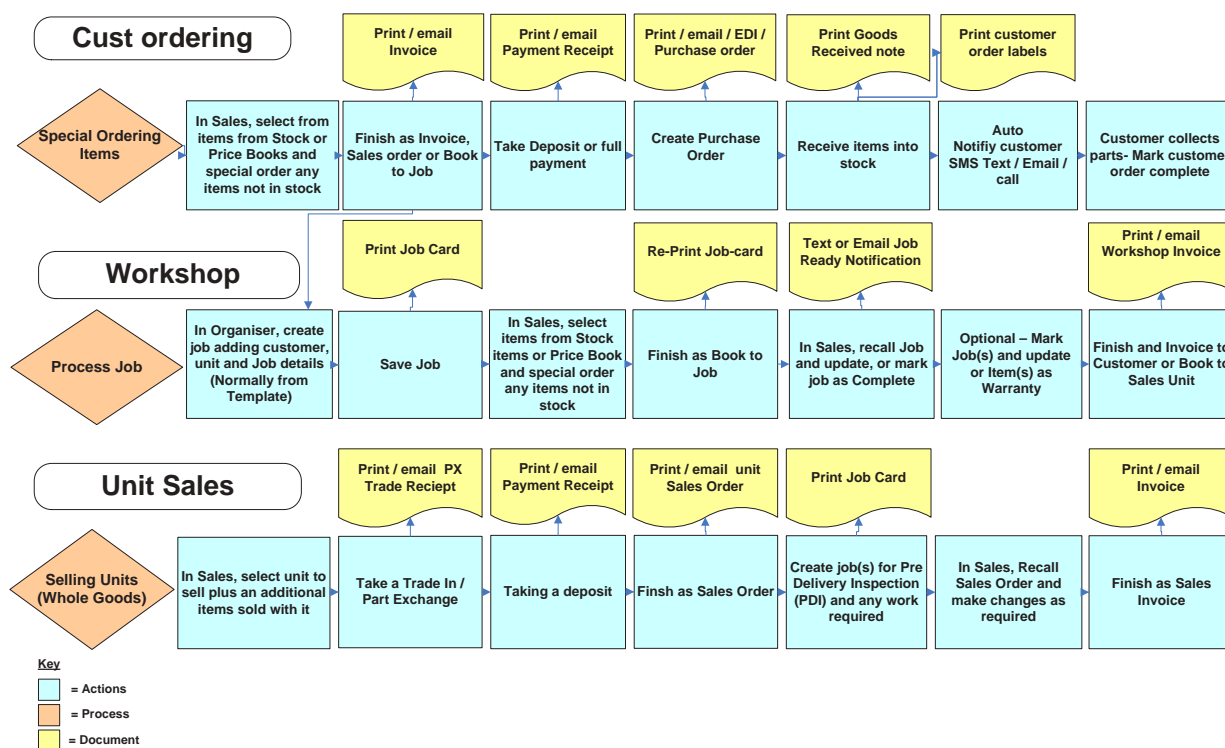
This flow chart has been designed to illustrate how Evopos can manage the workflow between departments - obviously there are variations however this is a good representation.

Evopos is designed around industry specific standards, and completing the ISO9000 and IIP business accreditations has also contributed valuable skills that provide a solid foundation to build a dealer system that is hard to equal. When it comes to ease of use we prefer a step by step common sense approach.

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Flow Chart illustrating some key processes in Evopos



# FROM SHOW SHUNNING TO JOINED UP TRAINING

2000-2003

Continuing *Service Dealer's* 30th Anniversary year, we look back at the first four years of the new millennium, which saw the magazine move from news on the cover to full pictures – also a slight name change from *Lawn & Garden*

*Equipment* to the snappier *LGE*.

We begin this edition with news of industry shunning that year's GLEE and end with BAGMA's announcement of a new 'joined up' training scheme . . .

## 2000 MACHINERY SUPPLIERS SHUN THEIR OWN SHOW

In August 2000 it became clear that virtually all of the UK's garden machinery suppliers would be boycotting that September's GLEE exhibition.

None of the 'big three' manufacturers, Flymo, Atco-Qualcast and Black & Decker would be in attendance, nor Honda, Mountfield-Westwood, Barrus, Briggs & Stratton, Husqvarna, Allen or Toro Wheel Horse.

The list lengthened when Hayter then announced its withdrawal, even

though its stand space had been paid for.

In a letter to David Metcalfe, MD of Trade Promotion Services, organiser of GLEE, Kim Macfie of Hayter said, "Although we remain firm in the belief that the UK industry is, and had been, well served by GLEE, the lack of support that this year's show has received from many machinery suppliers is a major disappointment.

"Our considered view is that the lack of a broad range of machinery exhibitors will deter many of our



present and future customers from attending, therefore our efforts will be better expended in alternative directions."

## MOUNTFIELD BECOMES STIGA UK

It became clear in November 2000 why Mountfield-Westwood had sold its Westwood Tractor division the previous month to rival Countax, when it was announced that Mountfield was to become part of the newly-created International Garden Products (IGP) group – and would trade as Stiga UK.

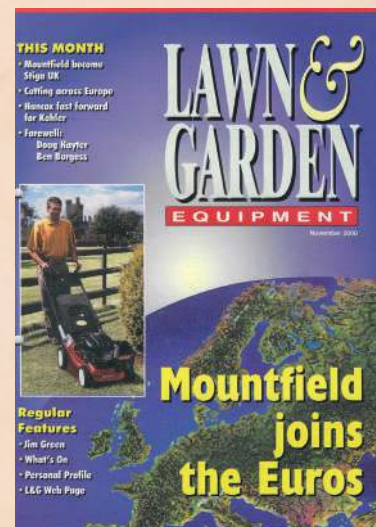
Duncan Martin was announced as Managing Director of Stiga UK, reporting to Stiga's MD in Sweden, Lars Brodd.

The sale of Westwood the previous month had cleared the decks for the deal as it left the

new Stiga UK operation free to sell products made by other members of the IGP group to complement the Mountfield mower range.

The decision by the Mountfield directors was said to have been greatly influenced by the fortunes of the euro at the time.

Duncan Martin explained, "This deal will protect the core market in which Mountfield has successfully competed for over 30 years and with a greater availability of products, will enable us to be in the forefront of the garden machinery market in the UK across all price sectors.



# 2001

## BRIGGS & STRATTON BUYS GENERAC

In March 2001, after many years of resisting any moves into the machinery and equipment sector, Briggs & Stratton announced its purchase of Generac Portable Products Inc, based in Wisconsin.

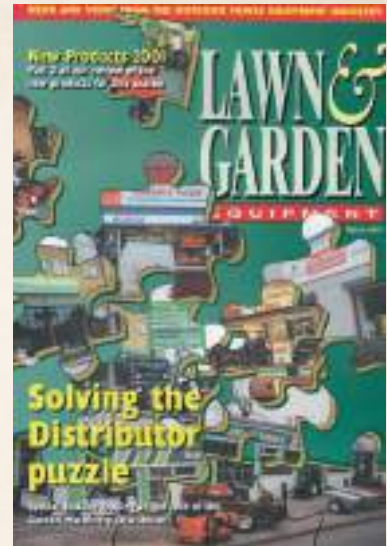
Generac, a leading supplier of generators and pressure washers worldwide, was considered the leader in the European small generator market.

Briggs & Stratton paid US \$55million in cash for Generac

but was taking on \$215million in anticipated debt.

CEO of the company, John Shiely, said, "We have historically been only an engine supplier to original equipment manufacturers, but we believe that as the power products market continues to evolve, the need for close liaison with manufacturers will continually be evaluated."

The biggest loser from the deal in the European market was speculated to be Tecumseh which was then a



major supplier of engines to Generac.

## BREAKWELL, HENTON & CHATTELL MAKE SWITCH TO JOHN DEERE

Two of the country's leading Textron distributors, ET Breakwell of Solihull and Henton & Chattell of Nottingham, gave notice that they intended to relinquish the franchise and switch to John Deere in July 2001.

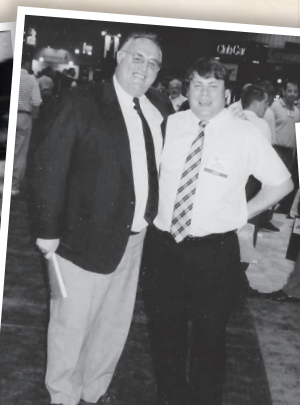
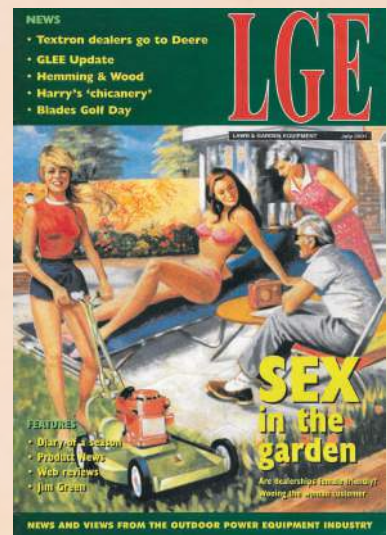
Len Breakwell, MD of ET Breakwell said, "It is a decision that we have not taken lightly. We have represented Ransomes and subsequently Textron, for almost 40 years.

"However, we have had to consider which product ranges will give this company the best commercial opportunities over the

coming years and have decided that our future lies with John Deere."

Harold Pinto, Textron MD told this magazine, "We are disappointed at both decisions of both companies, but will be putting in place plans to support our extensive customer base in the area. That will almost certainly mean setting up our own sales and service operation in the area."

Shortly after the defection of both dealers, Textron announced that it was to establish three new branches based in Solihull, Nottingham and Pontefract.



# 2002

## REPRIEVE FOR RANSOMES

Textron withdrew a threat to close its Ipswich mower manufacturing plant in August 2002, following intense lobbying from its UK management team.

In late July the US-based company ordered an urgent review of manufacturing facilities in the UK and managers started talks with the unions about a possible closure later in the year, which would have resulted in the loss of 150 jobs. It would have meant Ipswich being reduced to a sales and marketing centre with some design and engineering facilities.

The local press at the time was

in no doubt that the on-going talks would mean the plant would close, with production staff given the news just as they were preparing for the firm's annual two-week break.

However, a feasibility study was rapidly drawn up by Textron UK's MD, Steve Chicken, and his senior managers, who then flew to the Textron HQ in the US to present their case.

The team, which included Steve Chicken together with fellow executives Glyn Patrick and David Withers, outlined proposed changes that would ensure the continuation of the plant.



## HOOVER'S LAST-MINUTE REPRIEVE FOR ROBOMOW

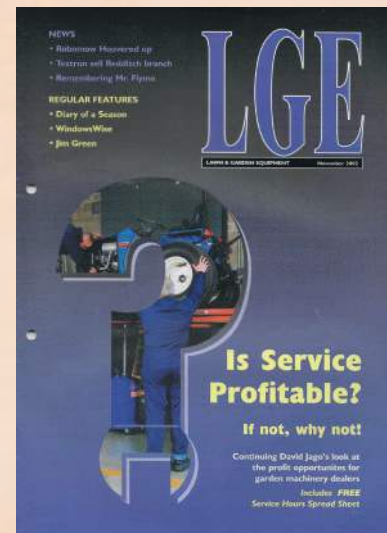
The giant Hoover company stepped in to rescue Israeli-based Friendly Robotics, the makers of the Robomow mower in November of 2002.

According to sources at the time, Hoover paid US \$2million to acquire the company. In April of the previous year, Hoover and Friendly Robotics had entered into a strategic alliance for the joint design and development of a robotic vacuum cleaner. However, Friendly Robotics had been on the point of bankruptcy

for some months and had been in receivership since August 2002.

Petitions to liquidate the company had already been filed by a major creditor, The First International Bank of Israel, to whom Friendly Robotics owed \$5million. This appeared to hasten the decision by Hoover to agree a settlement with the receiver in order to save the company.

Robomow was distributed in the UK at the time by Allen Power Equipment. Peter Bateman, the company's MD said, "We are very



pleased because this brings to an end a period of uncertainty for ourselves and our dealers."



# 2003

## HAYTER CONFIRMS HARRIER DEAL WITH HOMEBASE

Hayter confirmed that it was to supply two Harrier 41 models through 40 Homebase stores during 2003 in February of that year.

The models were the new Harrier 41 Push and the Harrier 41 Electric Start/Variable speed which had been introduced the previous year. The machines were to be supplied by Hayter distributor, Handy Garden Machinery of Swindon.

Announcing the deal, Hayter MD at the time, Derek Boulton,

said, "Hayter remains committed to selling top-quality mowers through its appointed specialist dealer network. However, we are committed to growing the Hayter brand significantly and to achieve this we must broaden the exposure of the products.

"These products are likely to be sold to customers who are neither in the habit of visiting a specialist dealership, nor may even know they exist."



## BAGMA LAUNCHES 'JOINED UP' TRAINING SCHEME

Many of the UK's leading grass machinery suppliers combined with a network of colleges across the UK to establish a coordinated training scheme for dealer staff in the domestic and professional equipment market in September 2003.

The Groundcare Technician Training Scheme (GTTS) was launched at a BAGMA press conference during that year's SALTEX on 3rd September. The scheme which had been brought together by Ian Jones of BAGMA

and Brian Cairns of Writtle College aimed to provide opportunities on a block release basis to existing and potential service personnel.

The network of 10 colleges were Bishop Burton, Brooksby, Cannington, Greenmount, Kirkby Hall, Myserscough, Rodbaston and Writtle.

Among the manufacturers supporting the scheme were Barrus, Briggs & Stratton, Countax, Dennis, Etesia, Hayter, John Deere, Kubota, Sisis, Tecumseh, Toro, Turfmech and Westwood.







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## DEALERS FINDING RECRUITMENT 'EXTREMELY DIFFICULT'

*Significant struggles being faced in finding the right staff*

The major takeaway from our recent Recruitment survey will come as no surprise to many readers, with the majority of respondent dealers telling us they are finding recruiting new staff extremely difficult.

Literally no one responded to the survey to say they found the recruitment process in any way easy – with the overwhelming majority of 94% choosing to describe it as either 'difficult' or 'extremely difficult'.

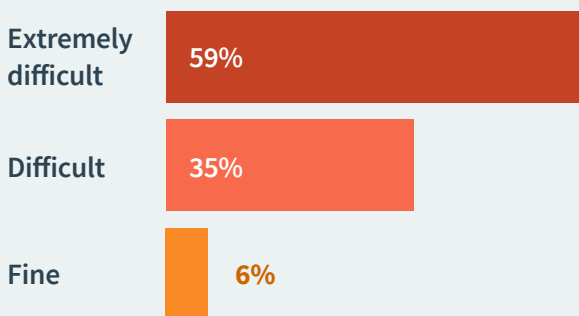
Problems faced when recruiting were varied but lack of appropriate skills among candidates was cited a lot (35%) – as was the option to answer 'other' and to explain it's often a combination of lack of skills, lack of applicants and unrealistic wage expectations.

It was interesting to discover that what once would

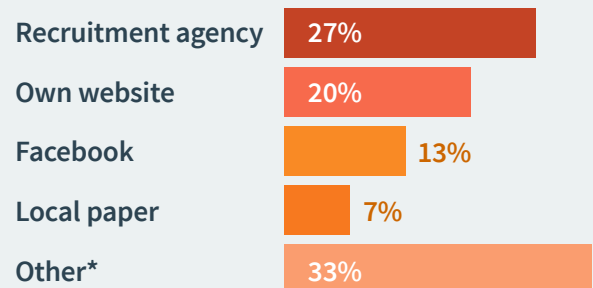
have been the medium of choice to advertise vacant positions, the local paper, was only considered the sole viable option by 7% of our respondents. A good number (27%) are relying on specialist recruitment agencies, with a fair proportion choosing to answer 'other' and either answer that a combination of various means needs to be attempted – or that they can't rely on any means to guarantee success.

Everyone who responded agreed that more needed to be done to promote the industry to potential new employees. And our respondents in the main (59%) felt that this is a responsibility that needed to be shared among the industry as a whole – between trade associations, manufacturers, dealers, specialist media and employment agencies.

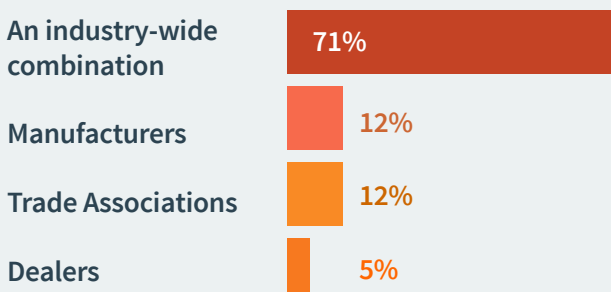
### How difficult are you finding recruiting new staff?



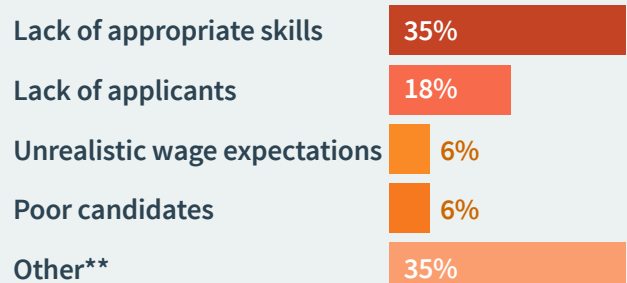
### Where do you find is the most successful place to advertise for new staff?



### Whose responsibility is it to promote the industry's profile to potential employees?



### What is the principal hurdle you face in recruiting new staff?



\*\*\*Other' answers mostly included combinations of the above factors.

\*\*Other' answers included online job search site Indeed, a board outside own premises or a combination of the above options

# YOUR SAY

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

- As an industry, we desperately need help with recruitment and staff retention. Finding good staff is a constant struggle. Industry experience is nearly non-existent and we are lagging behind on pay against other industries. For too long we have relied on the experience of our older staff who are now struggling with modern technology and the younger generation don't seem interested. With the lower margins we have to work on new machinery sales because of online prices and good but inexpensive new product keeping what we can charge for service/repair work down, it is a real struggle to retain staff and recruit new staff.
- Very difficult to recruit the right people due to lack of apprenticeships over previous 10 years. We need more focus by all involved to promote the industry, to tell potential prospects what a rewarding and long-term career can be achieved. We need to make it appeal and glorify it to potential future applicants. We as a company have recently given a number of presentations to our local colleges to try to get students to start an apprenticeship with us, currently starting possibly three students in parts and service departments. We need a nationally recognised apprenticeship scheme for our future technicians – not an ad-hoc bolted together scheme.
- Trying to recruit and keep good agricultural engineers is very difficult if not impossible.
- It is very difficult to recruit the right candidate. The industry is becoming increasingly more technical and the staff need to be of a higher standard. There are also less and less young people wanting to take up a career in the agricultural industry. This is the disaster currently unfolding.
- Very tough to recruit technical staff – not so difficult to find admin. We are taking on apprentices straight from school/college and running our own in-house training programme. Lately some of the manufacturers have been head-hunting employees from the dealerships for the same reason. Does that not suggest we have an even bigger problem than we first thought?!
- Young apprentices don't really want to work in the industry. Most have more of an interest in the automotive trade but have been unsuccessful in applying, so come to something similar. Qualified mechanics value themselves too much and expect an unrealistic wage. The industry needs to promote itself and with the help of our new futuristic technologies in the industry (ie robotics) we can use this to show that it's not just somewhere old people work and vintage mowers.
- The people who have the best industry knowledge are retiring or have retired. Workshop staff have a lot to learn from the older generation and skills are being lost as they aren't being passed down. Yes the workshop is full of a lot more tech now but workshop staff should be more than just fitters.



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# NEW FARM EQUIPMENT FIRM SETS OUT ITS STALL

*Following its Agritechnica 2015 launch and UK debut at LAMMA 2018, new Chinese-Italian farm equipment business Lovol Arbos has begun 110-136hp tractor production at its factory in Italy. MARTIN RICKATSON paid a visit to find out more about product and distribution plans*

**C**hinese manufacturing giant Lovol has been in the tractor business for some time, but until recently only as a maker of compact machines built in its home country under its own name. While that business remains unchanged, it's now gunning for a share of the mainstream market in Europe. Since 2012, it has resurrected a respected Italian brand, inherited a manufacturing base and compact product line by buying up an Italian specialist tractor maker, and begun assembly of a European-designed tractor range built in Italy chiefly from Chinese-manufactured major components. Meanwhile, it has been building a European distributor and dealer network, with the UK next in its sights.

The name on the flanks of the tractors is Arbos, an old rejuvenated Italian farm equipment brand, but behind this is Lovol, a large off-road equipment business best known in Europe as a producer of compact tractors under its own brand and blue livery. In an effort to create a higher-powered and more 'Western' product that will appeal to global buyers, Lovol purchased the defunct Arbos name, which until the mid-1990s adorned a range of combines built in Italy and offered there and in a limited number of other countries. The new firm has acquired rights to drawings for the dormant Arbos designs, and has an

updated prototype combine in development awaiting management approval.

In the meantime, though, it is tractors that are the centre of current plans, and with a research centre founded, a factory acquired and a team of senior engineering staff developed, plus other product lines acquired, Arbos has rapidly ramped up its plans. At Agritechnica 2015, it revealed prototypes and details for models from 100-260hp, but it is the four-cylinder 5000 series 110-136hp machines which have entered production first, at the plant of formerly independent specialist tractor maker Goldoni, whose business and factory Lovol acquired last year, retaining 230 employees and hiring new staff. Semi-assembled units built around in-house transaxles are shipped from China – where Lovol has built a new tractor assembly/component manufacturing facility – to Italy for engine installation and fitting-out of final components.

The 5000 series comprises three models, all powered by a four-cylinder, 3.4-litre turbocharged and intercooled engine made in the nearby former plant of Lombardini, acquired in 2007 by Kohler, better known for small petrol engines. Maximum torque of 500Nm is produced at 1,400rpm, with 95% of the maximum available between 1,300 and 1,800rpm and a torque increase under load



of 36%. Specific fuel consumption has been measured at 205g/kWh, and emissions are processed by a compact catalytic reduction system with diesel oxidation catalyst integrated into the exhaust, said to result in a compact bonnet and minimal turning radius.

All are equipped with a 40- or 50km/hr five-speed, two-range transmission, and two specification levels are available: mechanical shuttle plus two-speed powershift, or powershuttle and three-speed powershift with declutch button. Both specifications employ mechanical spool valves, with no electronic option, but electronic controls can be specified for the 4,400kg rear linkage, and both 4wd and diff-lock engagement are electronic. Hydraulic flow output from the gear pump-based system is 110 l/min, with 70 l/min dedicated to implements, and two/three/four remote valves. Optional front linkage capacity is 2,000kg.

Lovol's purchase of Goldoni means that, while the latter maker's products remain in production under its own name and remain imported into the UK by BSG and CTM, 38-75hp models from its line-up have also been added to the Arbos range in green and white to supplement the 5100 tractors. Meanwhile, further Arbos lines are in development, with 220-260hp 7000-series models to be launched at Italy's EIMA show in November, and a 140-200hp four- and six-cylinder 6000 range to come late next year. Original plans suggested the 6/7000 ranges

would be powered by Deutz engines, but FPT motors now look likely for these models, while transmission will be a 30F/30R semi-powershift, forward speed numbers being doubled if a four-step powershift is specified.

"We believe there is a market gap beneath the premium, high-spec makes and above the very basic specification tractors available," suggests Alessandro Zambelli, Lovol Arbos marketing manager.

"For those seeking systems such as guidance and auto-steering, we have a partnership with TopCon. But by focusing on simple specifications such as conventional semi-powershift transmissions rather than full powershift or CVT, we believe we will be able to price our tractors at around 10% cheaper than premium alternatives, and we will be offering a three-year/2,000hr powertrain warranty, with an option of up to five years."

Lovol Arbos is managed from Italy by a team headed by CEO Andrea Bedosti, formerly with Same Deutz-Fahr, Landini/McCormick parent ARGO, and Merlo. UK-based Tiziano Malavolti, who until recently had focused on selling to UK buyers maize drills from Italian maker Matermacc – Lovol's first European purchase in March 2015 – is now also managing efforts to recruit UK dealers for the full Arbos tractor and implement line. He led a team of staff manning stands at both LAMMA and Cereals this year, putting the 5000 series tractors and smaller 25-50hp Goldoni-derived units in front of potential



Lovol has purchased the Goldoni factory and product line, and is using plant it has acquired to also produce Arbos tractors

**“ WE WANT TO TALK TO SMALL DEALER BUSINESSES PREPARED TO GROW WITH US AND CREATE A NETWORK, AND IN THE LONGER TERM WE HOPE TO CREATE A UK SUBSIDIARY TO SUPPORT THIS ”**



Major components are assembled at Lovol's main tractor plant in China, before tractors are shipped to Italy for completion

customers and dealers, and recently hosted a small party of potential UK dealers on a visit to the Italian factory.

“Having already begun to build a dealer network in Italy and other countries such as Spain, we’re now looking to appoint UK dealers to retail and support our products,” says Mr Malavolti.

“We’re already talking with dealers of Foton compact tractors who may be looking to expand their operations, plus those of other brands. Our aim is the middle of the market, at competitive prices below the established ‘premium’ makes.

“We believe there’s a place in both western and eastern Europe for tractors which are modern in quality and design yet relatively simple. That means, for example, we’re focusing on conventional semi-powershift transmissions, and won’t offer full powershift or CVT. But we will have precision systems for those seeking them, having partnered with TopCon.

“We want to talk to small dealer businesses prepared to grow with us and create a network, and in the longer term we hope to create a UK subsidiary to support this.”

While livestock/grass machinery is in the firm’s longer-term plan, Lovol’s acquisition of seeding specialist Maternacc has enabled Arbos to add a full line of arable equipment to its offering. The Maternacc brand continues, but its factory is also now producing products in the green and white of Arbos, including piggyback drills, precision seeders and sprayers.

The range of mounted sprayers has tank capacities from 800-1,200 litres and booms from 12-18m, while pump

capacities are either 168 or 200 l/min, and there’s also a trailed sprayer line of up to 4,000 litres/36m. Meanwhile, other application machines in the range include a range of twin-disc fertiliser spreaders with capacities of 1,260-4,200 litres and spread widths of 18 or 36m. An auto-calibrating non-stop weighing system uses four load cells to monitor fertiliser weight and alter application rate accordingly.

Min till-minded farmers are likely to be most interested in the Arbos AS-F min/notill drill, which is available in 4.5m and 6.0m versions. It uses tines which both open the seed furrow and place the seed, with small wing points designed to create minimal disturbance as the seed furrow is opened and the seed dropped down behind the leg before press wheels close the slot. The seed cart is axle-mounted at the rear of the unit.

There is also plenty for those following more conventional tillage systems, with a range of MK power harrows available in 3.0m and 3.5m working widths. It is possible to pair these with the Arbos MSD 2.0 Combi drill to create a complete one-pass crop establishment unit.

Also in the line, and likely to be of particular interest to those growing maize or thinking of trying precision seeding of oilseed rape, is an Arbos line of precision drills, based on the units previously sold here in Maternacc’s yellow and red. It includes the MS Twin, which places seed in staggered twin rows, a format that is claimed to maximise light penetration into the crop, and hence help maximise photosynthesis in order to boost plant growth and yields.



Arbos was for many years well-known in Italy as a popular combine manufacturer, and plans to return to the sector

# NEW FRANCHISE, SAME FOCUS

*Recently appointed as the McCormick tractor dealer for Cheshire and Staffordshire, David Eaton Tractors has seen a few industry changes since its foundation in the early 1970s. Martin Rickatson found out more*

**B**ased between the two historic Staffordshire market towns of Stone and Uttoxeter, the premises of David Eaton Tractors Ltd, situated in the village of Fradswell, has seen a few franchise changes during more than four decades in business, with the merry-go-round of manufacturer acquisitions being the main driver behind them. But the dealership has also driven a number of the changes itself, with new forage, tillage and telehandler franchises added in recent years, and a new tractor agency having got 2018 off to an impressive start.

David Eaton founded his business in 1972, operating as a mobile mechanic working locally on all types of vehicles, but eventually specialising in the repair of tractors and farm equipment. Five years later, he purchased the premises from where the business still operates today, setting up a repair workshop and beginning the sourcing of good quality secondhand tractors and machinery to fulfil customer demand.

By 1990, the success of the latter venture led to the firm adding its first new tractor franchise to its business, signing up to sell Renault tractors, and five years later David

Eaton Tractors was named Renault Agriculture's Dealer of the Year. In 1994, having identified potential for growth, David Eaton took on his first salesman, at the same time signing up for the Claas combine and forage equipment franchise for Staffordshire and the surrounding areas.

In 1999 the business was incorporated as David Eaton Tractors Ltd. Two years later, with a growing dependence on machinery sales and stagnating sales of new tractors, a need for fresh impetus was identified, and following an approach by then-independent



Mark Eaton (left) oversees sales, while his brother John (right) looks after the service side of the business



Valtra's UK arm to market its tractors, plus advice from Claas UK, which at that time had a marketing affiliation with Valtra, David Eaton Tractors relinquished the Renault franchise in favour of the Valtra brand.

However, as is often the way with franchise agreements, bigger things can influence dealer/manufacturer agreements, and in 2008 Claas terminated its arrangements with the business, following its own purchase of Renault's tractor business in 2003 and the subsequent requirement for Claas dealers to sell Claas tractors.

"Having spent 11 years selling this product – albeit in another colour – and with our sales of Valtra tractors having far exceeded those of the orange brand after only seven years, we opted to pursue a future with Valtra," explains David.

"We also added further franchises to expand our product offering, taking on the Dieci telescopic handler franchise in 2006, the Amazone tillage, drill, sprayer and spreader franchise two years later, and the Krone green harvest and baler franchise in 2008."

However, with further recent industry reorganisation in recent years having included Valtra parent AGCO's decision to consolidate its

distribution channels into Massey Ferguson or Fendt/Valtra outlets, earlier this year David Eaton decided to relinquish his Valtra franchise and sign up to become the McCormick dealer for Cheshire and Staffordshire.

"The opportunity to expand with more staff and a larger trading area was one we were able to grasp by taking on sales, parts and service support for McCormick tractors," says David.

"Although we've been successful with the brand we've supplied for the past 17 years, switching to McCormick gives us access to a much wider and more varied product range, with more opportunities to meet the needs of local farmers and contractors.

"We can also trade across a larger territory with McCormick, so together with an expanded team of technicians in the workshop and for on-farm servicing and repairs we can aim to meet our goal of steadily expanding the business to secure its future and jobs."

David Eaton Tractors now represents the 43hp to 310hp McCormick tractor range throughout a territory extending from Warrington and Sheffield, bordering existing McCormick dealers J

Charnley & Sons and N&S Moorhouse, southwards to Burton upon Trent, Cannock and Telford, adjoining existing dealer HJR Agri to the west.

Having taken on the franchise at the beginning of April, the firm's first order wasn't long in coming, with the purchase of two tractors from a new customer running a large dairy unit.

In addition to supplying new and pre-owned tractors, there is an existing sizeable park of McCormick tractors already in the area, for which the firm is providing full parts and service back-up. David's son Mark, who heads up the sales side of the business, points out that although the dealership has not been directly involved with McCormick previously, salesman Mark Martin and service engineer Tom Whiston have past experience of McCormick products when they were built at Doncaster.

"Their experience and product knowledge, combined with that of our new recruit, Workshop technician Simon Fletcher, puts us in the perfect position for our new franchise," says Mark.

"Simon is working alongside my brother John, our service manager, as part of an expanded five-man team.

"He's a real McCormick enthusiast who knows the current product



David Eaton Tractors signed up to take on the McCormick franchise earlier this year, retailing its first two tractors soon afterwards

# “DAVID EATON TRACTORS IS THE CALIBRE OF DEALER WE’RE KEEN TO APPOINT IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY”

inside out, so we have the knowledge and experience to properly support McCormick users from day one. At the same time, we retain all the skills, knowledge and equipment needed to continue providing parts and service to users of the tractors we supplied previously, pretty much as if nothing has changed.”

The service team has undergone extensive training to ensure staff are well-versed in their new franchise, and continues to sell and support a range of complementary implements and other products, as well as providing a range of other services. In addition to the aforementioned Dieci, Amazone and Krone, among its other franchises are those of diet feeder specialist BVL, bale wrapper,

baler and mower maker McHale, muckspreader and trailer specialist KTwo, and hedge trimmer/vegetation equipment manufacturer McConnel, plus Browns of Leighton Buzzard, Walter Watson, Lucas G and Major.

The firm is also able to offer specialist knowledge in areas such as air conditioning service and repair, dynamometer testing, and fabrication and welding work, and in addition manufactures hydraulic hoses, offers hydraulic flow and pressure testing, and is accredited to carry out insurance repairs.

Ray Spinks, general manager and sales director at McCormick national distributor AgriArgo UK and Ireland, says he is delighted to welcome David Eaton, his sons Mark and

John, and the rest of the dealership team as a McCormick retailer.

“With the McCormick line having recently been expanded into new power brackets, we can now offer them tractors ranging from X2 compact models starting at 43hp, through mid-range machines for livestock and mixed farming to the high-horsepower X8 VT-Drive tractors of up to 310hp, which provide the power and features suited to arable farming tasks.

“David Eaton Tractors is the calibre of dealer we’re keen to appoint in many parts of the country to increase coverage of McCormick sales and service, prioritising good management and customer service.”



Other franchises held by the business include the full line of Krone grassland equipment

# Deals that will blow you away this Autumn

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# FLAGSHIP NEW ATVS LAUNCHED BY SUZUKI

## *KingQuads 750XP, 500XP and 500X*

**S**uzuki has launched three new ATV models – the KingQuad 750XP, 500XP and 500X.

The company says of the new flagship models that they boast a variety of features that will make them even more hard-working and user-friendly.

The front suspension, steering system, power steering system, rear stabiliser, and the chassis frame are all new, which combine to deliver straight-line stability as well as sure-footed handling when cornering and improved maneuverability. These improvements also make the machine easier to ride says Suzuki, as shock levels are reduced and less rider effort is required when travelling over diverse terrain.

The company says that improvements to the chassis also result in a superior towing capacity to the outgoing models – an increase of 33% to 600kg.

The engine's performance characteristics have been updated to deliver a smooth and strong acceleration from standstill in order to help achieve the increased towing capacity.

Additional updates to the CVT and clutch system have been implemented to alter the acceleration and deceleration behaviour so that it is smoother and stronger as well as improving engine braking. Furthermore, on the KingQuad 750 model, oil pump output has been increased by 25% and a piston oil jet has been added to increase durability by cooling the piston and increasing lubrication.

The company has also introduced a range of

features such as new additional storage compartments and a handlebar-mounted headlight. In addition, the new multi-function instrument panel is easier to view and includes a service reminder icon. Then, once the ATV is with an Authorised Suzuki Dealer for its service, the work itself has been made easier through the redesign of some body parts that make some components such as the fuel filter, easier to access.

A new LED tail light has also been introduced to improve visibility and to free up charging capacity for other electrical devices.

George Cheeseman, Head of Suzuki GB's ATV Division, says, "These exciting new models have been eagerly anticipated and I'm sure that they will prove to be extremely popular among current and new customers. Suzuki was the first on four wheels, introducing the very first four-wheel ATV in 1983, and we're proud that our engineers are continuing to innovate and invest in the product range, meaning that we remain the King of Quads!"

All Suzuki ATVs come with free EASI rider training and a free workwear kit consisting of overalls and a bodywarmer. They also come with a free CESAR Security System powered by Datatag, giving each ATV a unique 'fingerprint' with an identity that cannot be erased.

The new KingQuad ATVs will be ready to order from Suzuki dealers from September onwards.



# POLARIS GETS THE GENERAL IDEA

## *1000 Deluxe with ABS now available through dealers*

The industry's first ABS equipped side-by-side, the Polaris General 1000 Deluxe T1b ABS is now available in dealers.

Developed specifically for the European market at the Polaris Opole facility in Poland in collaboration with the Polaris R&D teams in the USA, the company says the General ABS marks the first time such a system has been made available in the industry.

The Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS) is switchable at lower speeds and offers the ability to steer while braking without the tyres breaking permanent traction. Additional benefits include controlled braking on varied surfaces and improved stopping distance in some conditions.

Rene Basej, Polaris EMEA Vice President, comments, "It was very important for us to be the first to bring ABS to the market – it's something we're very proud of. Already a very versatile machine, the application of ABS on the General was a logical step and will enable users to enjoy the vehicle for even more."

Producing 100hp, Polaris says the vehicle has class-leading acceleration, due to its off-road orientated 999cc four-stroke twin cylinder engine. Delivering a broad max torque throughout its rpm range, the General delivers 65ft-lb of torque.

The vehicle also boasts the industry's fastest engaging high-performance All-Wheel Drive (AWD) system with all four wheels engaging almost instantly when the vehicle

requires more forward traction, reverting back to 2WD when it doesn't.

Fitted with sway bars on the front and rear, its tuned suspension geometry features dual rate springs which maintain 62% of its ground clearance, even when fully loaded with passengers and cargo. The vehicle is fitted with Fox Podium X 2.0 QS3 shocks as standard, offering 12.25" of front and 13.2" of rear suspension travel and 12" of ground clearance. The shocks are adjustable for simple and repeatable suspension setting changes on the move.

Other features include a dumping cargo bed, integrated half doors to protect from weather and trail debris, and a tilt adjustable steering wheel.

The cockpit has been designed for a balance of work and play, with plenty of storage solutions and wide bucket seats for comfort. The analogue and digital gauge has an auto-adjusting backlight and users can change it from red to blue.

An MTX eight-speaker audio system comes as standard – users can connect via Bluetooth, plug in an audio player or tune into the radio.

Other technical enhancements for the whole Polaris General range include a revised CV propshaft for reduced driveline noise, passenger door enhancements and new colour options.



# SME DIGEST

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## TERMS & CONDITIONS

# ON YOUR TERMS

**A**t the core of every business should be a well-drafted set of terms and conditions, writes *Adam Bernstein, SME Digest Editor*. They govern transactions and what happens where issues arise. The problem for those with a retailer arm is that they are doubly caught because they sell to the public and have to contract with their suppliers.

Clearly, the success of a business depends on matters such as its size, worth and trading volumes. Yet many either forget, or neglect, to prepare a set of terms and conditions. However, this will set a firm up for a fall. The problem is this: how can a court be sure what a trader and customer originally agreed to without a written contract specifying terms and conditions?

In a retail context terms should include the specification of the goods – describing accurately the nature of these goods, the quantity and quality of the goods – to ensure that they match the description and are of satisfactory quality.

It's also important to outline at what point goods – if sold at a distance – were accepted; delivery details such as where, when, how, who covers the cost; and what happens if the goods are delivered late, damaged, not

accepted on delivery, or if the goods are never delivered at all, as well as returns.

Then there are questions about payment – methods, deposits, balances, and any deductions for returns that aren't faulty. Similarly, risk and title need resolving. This is a particularly important consideration if goods are destroyed (say following a repair) or if insolvency becomes an issue.

The exponential growth of online has created its own specific requirements when setting out terms and conditions. When purchasing online, the time at which a customer attains legal rights can be either when they pay for the goods or when they have been sent. The retailer's terms and conditions should outline when this is because it can have a knock-on effect where pricing errors appear.

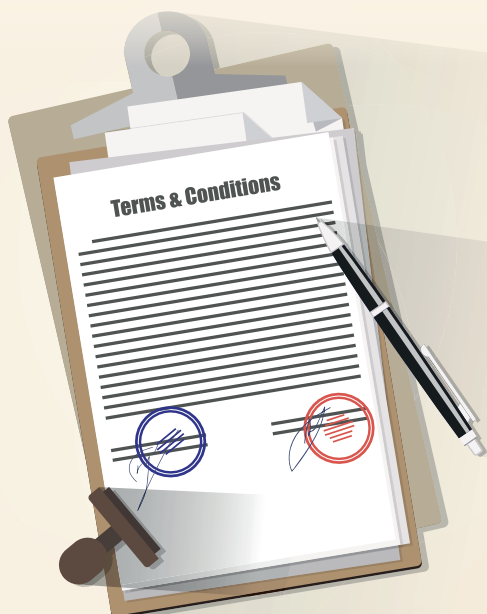
Generally, if there is a contractual agreement in place, the retailer will not be able to cancel an order if the goods are priced incorrectly online. However, a retailer may be able to cancel if it can be considered to be an honest mistake that the customer should have noticed when making the order.

Online retailers must also familiarise themselves with the law on distance sales (which also covers telephone, mail order and catalogues). The law in this area changed in June 2014, with the Consumer Contracts Regulations (CCRs). The regulations outline what information a business must provide to its customers, such as the description of goods, the total price, the details of its right to cancel, and who pays the cost of returning the goods. Customers must be provided with this information. Any failure to provide the required information, or to not provide it in the way set out in the regulations, could result in cancellation rights being extended by up to a year.

Investing time and money upfront in terms and conditions might seem like an unnecessary expense but will likely save considerably much more than they cost later on down the line.



Edited by Adam Bernstein





## SOCIAL MEDIA

# SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE

Social media can be extremely useful in the workplace with many businesses using platforms to promote their brand, says Mark Stevens, Associate in the Employment Department of law firm VWV.

However, the issue of individual members of staff using social media in the workplace is still one which is widely debated. Recent media stories have highlighted the potential damage which misuse of social media can have, both for employees and for the businesses that they work for.

But perhaps one of the most significant risks of social media is, however, the potential for inappropriate use.

Misuse can translate into internal difficulties with problems arising due to bullying and harassment via social media. It is common for social networking sites to be used by employees as a communication tool, both within and outside of working hours, but there is a risk that employees cross the line with conduct amounting to harassment, discrimination or other unlawful behaviour. This can have significant consequences for employers as they could potentially be found liable for the actions of employees in these circumstances.

Employers should develop a policy which sets out what is acceptable when employees use the internet, email, phones and networking sites. This should remind them that misuse of social media or inappropriate postings can amount to misconduct, for which they might be disciplined. The policy should tackle the firm's view on what is acceptable in terms of personal use of social media, as well as how the organisation will deal with employees who post inappropriate content on social media. Where staff are expected to post on the organisation's behalf, appropriate rules should be set on the topics that can be covered. Any such policy should have a particular focus on what type of information the employee can reveal about the organisation.

Any monitoring of staff should not go further than

necessary and employers should avoid implementing restrictions which are invasive or impractical.


When a breach of social media policy occurs, employers should seek to deal with any online matters in the same way that they would deal with offline issues. This might mean going through a disciplinary process with an employee where necessary. It's important to be consistent and employers should be willing to be flexible where the harm suffered by the business is minor.

Case law here suggests that some employers have been too severe in their reaction to employees' posts. One example of this is *Whitham v Club 24 Ltd* in which an employee made derogatory comments about her workplace on Facebook, one of which stated: "I think I work in a nursery and I do not mean working with plants." The employee was dismissed but an employment tribunal found that this dismissal was unfair and that the comments made by the claimant on social media were "relatively minor".

Where a disciplinary process does take place, case law suggests there are various factors which employers should take into account while making their decision, such as an employee's prior disciplinary record.

Other factors to be considered include the relationship between the employee and employer, and whether the relevant action has broken down the trust between the two. Many employment tribunal decisions also emphasise that there must be a genuine belief that there has been damage to the employer's reputation, rather than an assumption that the conduct is likely to cause damage.

Employers who can show that they have reacted reasonably and followed the company's procedures in the disciplinary process certainly have an increased chance of success when facing any employment tribunal claims in this area.



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# BOOSTING YOUR SALES

Online versus bricks and mortar. It's a battle that's been raging for a while and it's not going anywhere soon, says Adam Bernstein, SME Digest Editor. But all's not lost for traditional outlets, as there are some tricks that will help increase footfall.

## Draw them in

What is it that makes you want to go into a store? Clearly part of the answer will be what you're seeking to acquire. But others will say it's how welcoming a shop appears.

Stand outside your shop and look at it from a customer's point of view. Is it clean and tidy? Is the display attention grabbing? Is there an offer that will trigger the urge to walk in? Can you use the space outside? If so, use a board that shouts out your 'deals of the week'.

## Offer an experience

It's a point often made – a box may show features, but you need to demonstrate to customers the benefits. So – could you offer a 'masterclass' on how to use a

chainsaw? Could you illustrate the benefits of a brand you stock over a cheap Chinese import?

A note of warning though: with the advent of the web you don't want to become a shop window for Amazon. So make sure that the experience of dealing with you means the shopper has no excuse or desire to go elsewhere.

## Online isn't all bad

The web has made it ever so easy to create an online presence and your own forum and following. Use them and social media to promote your goods, services and sales. Remember also that rules on advertising relate to social media as well as print – a posting on social media that is in effect an advert needs to be identifiable as such.

Moving away from the hard-sell, offer not just product and sales but practical tips to help customers get the best out of their equipment. Remember that people get weary of non-stop promotion, so you need to stand out.

## Never say goodbye

A last tip. Once a customer has made a purchase, offer a voucher for further discounts.

The trick, though, is to apply them to purchases made on a close-to-hand but later date – in other words, use them to make customers return. And if you make the voucher transferable it might bring other (new) shoppers in.

## Flash for cash

There is nothing like a sense of urgency to get punters spending. Staying within the law – that is, having genuine offers that are genuinely time limited – may help to boost trade.

With this in mind, consider using the contact details that you will have obtained during the sales process (noting the new data protection law that came in on 25th May, whereby you need consent to market) to offer a series of one-day sales for specific items. One-day sales are good – they give customers a chance to act without being overly hasty.

# SME NEWS

## New laws introduced to shield company directors from identity fraud

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has introduced new legislation – SI 2018/ Draft – to prevent company directors from becoming victims of identity fraud. The legislation will be put in place by the end of summer 2018.

The new law will permit company directors to remove personal addresses from the UK's official company register, while still being legally required to provide their

business address.

Under the current law, a company director may only remove their personal address from the official company register when authorities deem the information to be putting the company director at risk of serious violence or intimidation.

## Government launches campaign to promote shared parental leave

The government has launched a campaign to encourage parents to take up the offer of shared parental leave in their baby's first year. With

only around 2% of 285,000 eligible couples taking up the offer of shared leave, the campaign aims to reach parents through digital website advertising, social media and adverts in train stations and on commuter routes.

Eligible parents are entitled to share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay after having a baby. It's estimated that around half of the general public are unaware the option exists for parents.

*Please take proper advice before acting on anything written here.*



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# AGCO ACADEMY APPRENTICES AWARDED

*Continual development is key*



The recent AGCO Academy graduates

**A** focus on continued professional development and career progression was the key message as 11 AGCO apprentices collected their awards having successfully completed the industry focused courses during a presentation and dinner at the Forest of Arden Hotel, near Birmingham recently.

In the 18th year of AGCO's industry recognised dealer apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with WCG (formerly known as Warwickshire College Group), the award ceremony was combined with presentations for the Vehicle Parts apprenticeship programme, run in conjunction with Reaseheath College in Cheshire.

Independent consultant, and author of engineering apprenticeship programmes across many industries including motorsport, aerospace and agriculture, David Kirschner welcomed apprentices and guests to the event by congratulating the recently qualified engineers on their career choice.

"This industry provides one of the best engineering apprenticeship schemes, providing the foundations to build your career," Mr Kirschner

explained. "But, your learning experience has only just begun.

"Agriculture is a vital industry supplying food for this country, and we will always need food. Therefore, with the right work ethic, job security will never be an issue. I have learnt that there is not one machine man can't damage!"

Mr Kirschner continued to explain the importance to the industry of bringing in fresh, young talent with new ideas, and the need to treat this juncture as a stepping stone to continued learning and development. He noted how industry, and AGCO in particular, recognise the important contribution apprentices make to agriculture.

"The standard cost to bring a new apprentice through is £75,000. That is how much is invested, so it demonstrates the value and significance of apprenticeships," said Mr Kirschner.

The awards were presented by William Judge, the Massey Ferguson National Sales Manager for UK & Ireland, and once again saw success for AGCO dealer B&B Tractors, as Bradley Smith became the third employee in a row to collect the

Apprentice of the Year award.

Luke McDaid, who works at the Attleborough branch of Thurlow Nunn Standen Ltd (TNS) received the Most Improved Apprentice of the Year, while Jack Huckstep of Lister Wilder of Wallingborough, Oxfordshire was voted Apprentices Apprentice of the Year by his fellow peers.

Mary Wallbank was awarded the Best Parts Apprentice of the Year, commenting, "Completing the AGCO apprenticeship has really helped me deepen my knowledge in the agricultural industry but also enabled me to establish new links within the industry itself, this has been a huge benefit in my current job but also will help when it comes to moving forward in my career".

Mary was joined by Antony Hempstead of Chandlers Farm Equipment in Belton, Grantham, as he also collected his Parts Apprentice Award.

Tim Hutchinson, Course Leader of the AGCO apprenticeship scheme at WCG commented, "One of the key benefits of the scheme and the course is that it is a combined effort. The apprentices on the course want to succeed and they can see a clear career path.

"Their dealerships and AGCO therefore equally benefit from committed and skilled technicians joining their teams at the end of their training."

Also collecting awards during the ceremony were Jack Adcock and Shane Hilton of Chandlers Farm Equipment Ltd, Henry O'Brien of Redlynch Agricultural Engineering, Josh Stephney of MST, Chris Underwood of TNS and Kai Farrow of Wilfred Scruton.

# 'TRAINING TRAILBLAZER' RETIRES

*Clive Pinnock steps down from department he helped to create at Reesink*

After 34 years, Clive Pinnock has retired from Reesink Turfcare and the training department he helped to develop.

Turf equipment Aftermarket Manager at Reesink, David Jackman, says Clive trailblazed his way through the industry he loved and will be much missed, not only by his employer but also the industry.

"Clive has been instrumental in helping us grow the company to where it is today," David Jackman says. "He's been an ambassador not just for us as a company, but The Toro Company too, and has passed his wealth of knowledge on to so many of our customers, employees and distributors."

Clive has worked with Toro products for 34 years, he explains: "I started at Lely, as it was then, one year after Lely became Toro distributor for the UK. As the only product specialist for the aftermarket service team for 12 years, I was responsible for supporting dealers and customers in a technical and product support role for the South of the country and Europe."

When Clive turned 65 he decided he didn't want to retire, but equally didn't want to be driving around the M25 so much, so it was agreed he would move into the training department in Reesink's head office in St Neots, which is where David takes over the story:

"It was the perfect solution for Clive and us. We kept Clive's product knowledge and training ability, and we had somebody that customers and dealers knew and trusted delivering our training. There are four people in the training department now, delivering nine training courses – that's one of the biggest selections from a distributor – and Clive has been a big part of building that success."

In fact, Clive has been quite the training trailblazer since his move into the training department. He was first in the turfcare sector to achieve a level four in the Landbased Technician Accreditation scheme (LTA), which is one of the highest training accolades there is. Clive completed all his training through Reesink, which was recognised as an assessment training centre in 2016, because, he says: "I wanted to add to my practical experience

with the training qualifications I strongly believe in, so when Reesink was made a training centre it made absolute sense to go through the training pathway, and it was a great experience."

David concludes by saying: "Clive has been an inspiration, his passion for learning and sharing his knowledge was evident in how he delivered our training; it was always with such enthusiasm attendees couldn't help but be motivated."



Clive Pinnock

# THE TRUE VALUE OF SERVICE

*Emyr Jenkins of Jenkins Garden Machinery looks for growth both in the grass and in the business – and considers just what it is that sets the dealer network apart*

**W**hen I was hoping for the end of the snow I didn't for a second predict the weather that May brought. It came in with a bang and although it was a month late, the season had finally arrived.

By the time we reached the middle of May we'd already surpassed the previous May, which although encouraging, was really just catching up for what was a pretty average April.

The bigger problem facing us by the first week or two of June was the lack of rain. The ground was rock hard and lovely and warm, so with a little bit of rain the grass was primed and ready for some serious growth.

Growth of the grass isn't our only focus at this time of year. We're always looking for ways of growing the business and June saw us partnering with a finance company to offer finance on goods in the shop.

I think there's a common mistake when offering finance to customers. Many people I've spoken to regarding this route to market think that they will achieve that sale of a £3,000 ride-on mower all the more easily. In reality, if that customer is coming in to your business to purchase a £3,000 ride on mower, and they have that sort of money to spend then yes, they are likely to buy that machine. However, if that customer has £3,000, but the machine they need is £5,000, then finance offers you the facility to 'up sell' that customer not only to a higher value machine, but just as importantly, the machine that is most suitable to their needs.

As a dealer I'm very keen to see the dealer business thrive and if there are options available to us that put us at an advantage over the big internet sellers or the sheds, then I'm very keen to explore them.



The reality, however, is that the one thing that gives us the biggest advantage is the ability to offer an after sales service. Although I agree with the statement 'the Customer is King' this doesn't mean that everyone who walks into your showroom should be treated as such; after all, not everybody who walks through your front doors are customers. I can think back to several instances where people have walked into the showroom demanding that I repair machines under warranty that they've bought on the internet. Although I don't tend to have an argument with these people, I do find it a good opportunity to try to educate them for their next purchase.

There has definitely been a huge swing in the past 15 years. The surge of the dot com companies without a doubt had a negative impact on the dealer network in the early days, but I genuinely believe over the past few years, the public have become more aware of the need to be looked after and the true value of service.



# PRODUCTS

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COMMERCIAL

## A WORLD'S FIRST LAUNCHED BY STIHL

### *First standard chainsaw with electronically controlled fuel injection*

STIHL has launched the MS 500i, which it boasts is the world's first standard chainsaw with electronic fuel injection and a never-before achieved power-to-weight ratio.

The company says the injection technology (i) not only "provides the chainsaw with incredible torque, but also ensures rapid acceleration of the saw chain from 0 to 100km/h in 0.25 seconds".

It also says that due to the intelligent lightweight design, the MS 500i features the best ever power-to-weight ratio – 1.24 kilograms per kilowatt, a value never achieved before by series-manufactured chainsaws.

STIHL goes on to say that together with the many additional design optimisations, "there is a substantial increase in operator comfort". The reduction of gyroscopic forces provides the 80cm<sup>3</sup>-class high-performance professional saw with dynamic manoeuvrability, which is a particular advantage during limbing. This makes the professional big

timber harvester easy to handle in all disciplines – from felling to cutting to length.

This is also supported by the new bumper spike geometry. The raised plunge bar on the fan housing – parallel to the axis of symmetry of the guide bar – makes directional control and tool guidance easier when plunge cutting. Captive nuts on the chain sprocket cover make changing the chain straightforward.

The company says that the MS 500i has "exceptional starting behaviour and provides optimum engine power right from start up". The engine does not need a carburetor, since the fuel metering is done using a sensor, and automatically adapts to the different operating conditions, no matter what the altitude and ambient temperature.

Due to the exceptional level of interest, the machine will already be available in selected markets, including Germany, in limited quantities in time for the 2018-19 season.



# DYNAMIC COMMAND ISSUED BY NEW HOLLAND

## *T6 tractor range now available in UK & Ireland*

New Holland's new T6 Dynamic Command tractor range is now available to demonstrate in the UK and Ireland. Demonstration units have been available from New Holland dealers since late April this year.

New Holland Agriculture says it enriched its T6 tractor series with the new T6 Dynamic Command all-round multi-purpose tractor.

The tractors offer between 145 and 175 max hp with engine power management, the lowest fuel consumption levels of a four-cylinder agricultural tractor, and a host of productivity-boosting features. The T6 24x24 Dynamic Command adds a further choice to the Basildon-built T6 range, complementing the T6 Electro Command and Auto Command models.

The T6.145, T6.155, T6.165 and T6.175 models are the only tractors in this mid-range segment to feature an eight-step semi powershift transmission.

New functions include:

- **Smart Range Shift:** will always put users in the correct gear when making a range shift, any overlap gears from one range to the next are skipped giving sequential ratios and rapid acceleration.
- **Dynamic StartStop:** a feature to ease the burden for the driver particularly where the tractor is stopping frequently. Press the brake pedal and the tractor will slow and come to a standstill, there's no need to engage neutral or depress the clutch pedal. Release the brakes and the drive is reengaged – simple effective automation.
- **Auto Shift:** the entry level of automation that takes care of shifting gears based on an adjustable engine speed threshold.
- **Ground Speed Management:** with this advanced level of automation the required working speed is dialed in and the Dynamic Command will do the rest, shifting up and throttling back the engine whenever possible, all done automatically to maintain the target speed, while reducing fuel consumption.
- **Adjustable Shuttle Aggression:** some tasks require the smoothest shuttle possible, sometimes the fastest direction change is the priority – with the T6 the driver can decide. Three aggression levels for shuttle speed are easily selected.
- **Dynamic IntelliShift System:** this is the brains behind each gear shift – every shift is unique. A closed loop analysis of engine speed, input and output transmission shaft speed, load and forward speed ensures that every shift is as consistently smooth as possible.
- **Kick Down:** for the most rapid acceleration the driver simply presses the throttle fully and the tractor will automatically downshift, positioning the engine speed at peak power.
- **Transport Power Management:** when above 22kph, the HI-eSCR NEF engine switches to a power curve with a different profile that concentrates more power at higher engine revs. This delivers consistent tractor acceleration rates across the rpm band, from peak power to maximum engine speed.



## COMMERCIAL

# VERSATILITY BROUGHT TO FLAIL MOWING

## Launch of Ransomes HM600

Textron Specialized Vehicles Inc has launched the new Ransomes HM600 flail mower. The mower features heavy-duty flail heads from the manufacturer, Müthing.

Building on the foundations of the Ransomes MP wide area mower platform, the HM600 features a 65.2hp Kubota turbo diesel engine and has been developed to meet the expanding needs of grounds maintenance teams.

The HM600 has a cutting width of 3.2m (1.6m at front) with all mowers engaged, combining a high cutting capacity with exceptional productivity.

The company says the size and design of the HM600 brings new levels of versatility to flail mowing. It is manoeuvrable with the ability to turn fast and cut close to parkland furniture. The fingertip control of individual units makes trimming around obstacles easy. Operators can then fold up all units securely to transport between work areas and access confined sites.

"We've developed the HM600 to tackle some of the issues that grounds maintenance teams face, such as extended cut cycles and an increase in the variation of

topographies," Lee Kristensen, Ransomes Product Manager, says. "The HM600 features mulching technology from Müthing, ensuring a superior after-cut appearance, and an even spread of clippings, even in wet conditions. The cutting units also feature rear rollers so the option to stripe sports pitches or finer turf is available."

This combination of technology from Ransomes and Müthing, says the manufacturer, will allow users to produce a clean, fine, rolled finish for sports pitches, or make light work of routine cuts, leaving an even spread of mulched clippings. It is also able to tackle irregular cuts, bringing the lesser maintained areas back under control.



## 50,000 PAGE IMPRESSIONS PER MONTH!

Garden Trader is really making headway and now that the season has started in earnest we are seeing interest in the site and traffic really increase.

We hit 50,000 impressions last month and 185 dealers have now subscribed and are benefitting from the site by guiding local people searching online to them. Garden Trader is also promoting your dealer community as a whole and the skills and services you offer.

With just 6 months of this year left you will only be charged for the rest of the year (about £47.50 + VAT at June 1st) so please join this online fight back against sheds and direct retailers.

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## JULY 2018

- 1 Cranleigh Show  
[www.cranleighshow.co.uk/](http://www.cranleighshow.co.uk/)
- 3-8 Hampton Court Flower Show  
[www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-flower-show](http://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-flower-show)
- 6-8 Kent County Show  
[kentshowground.co.uk](http://kentshowground.co.uk)
- 7 Monmouthshire Show  
[www.monmouthshow.co.uk](http://www.monmouthshow.co.uk)
- 7-8 Smallholders & Country Show, South Of England Showground, Ardingly  
[www.smallholdersshows.co.uk](http://www.smallholdersshows.co.uk)
- 8 Royal Isle of Wight County Show  
<http://www.riwas.org.uk/county-show>
- 10-12 Great Yorkshire Show  
[www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk](http://www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk)
- 14 Newport Show  
[www.newportshow.co.uk/](http://www.newportshow.co.uk/)
- 23-26 Royal Welsh Show  
[www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh-show/](http://www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh-show/)
- 18-22 RHS Flower Show, Tatton Park  
[www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park](http://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park)
- 21 Camborne Show  
[www.camborne-show.org.uk](http://www.camborne-show.org.uk)
- 24-26 New Forest & Hampshire County Show  
[www.newforestshow.co.uk](http://www.newforestshow.co.uk)
- 27-28 Border Union Show  
[www.buas.org/](http://www.buas.org/)
- 27-29 The Game Fair, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire  
[www.thegamefair.org](http://www.thegamefair.org)
- 28 Mid Devon Show  
[www.middevonshow.co.uk](http://www.middevonshow.co.uk)

## AUGUST 2018

- 1 North Devon Show  
[www.northdevonshow.com](http://www.northdevonshow.com)
- 2 Honiton Agricultural Show  
[www.honitonshow.co.uk](http://www.honitonshow.co.uk)
- 2-5 Countryfile Live, Blenheim Palace  
[www.countryfilelive.com](http://www.countryfilelive.com)
- 4 Garstang Show  
[www.garstangshow.org](http://www.garstangshow.org)
- 4 Emley Show  
[www.emleyshow.co.uk](http://www.emleyshow.co.uk)
- 4 Dumfries Agricultural Show  
[www.dumfriesshow.co.uk](http://www.dumfriesshow.co.uk)
- 10-11 Shrewsbury Flower Show  
[www.shrewsburyflowershow.org.uk](http://www.shrewsburyflowershow.org.uk)
- 12 Ripley Show  
[www.ripleyshow.co.uk](http://www.ripleyshow.co.uk)
- 14-16 Pembrokeshire County Show  
[www.pembsshow.org](http://www.pembsshow.org)
- 15 Gillingham & Shaftesbury Show  
[www.gillshaftshow.co.uk](http://www.gillshaftshow.co.uk)
- 22-24 Agritechnica Asia, Bangkok, Thailand  
[www.agritechnica-asia.com/](http://www.agritechnica-asia.com/)

## SEPTEMBER 2018

- 1 Alresford Show  
[www.alresfordshow.co.uk](http://www.alresfordshow.co.uk)
- 1-2 Dorset County Show  
[www.dorsetcountyshow.co.uk](http://www.dorsetcountyshow.co.uk)
- 2-5 Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC  
[www.autumnfair.com](http://www.autumnfair.com)
- 2-4 spoga-gafa 2018  
[www.spogagafa.com](http://www.spogagafa.com)
- 8 Usk Show  
[www.uskshow.co.uk](http://www.uskshow.co.uk)
- 8 Romsey Show  
[www.romseyshow.co.uk](http://www.romseyshow.co.uk)
- 10-12 Glee 2018  
[www.gleebirmingham.com](http://www.gleebirmingham.com)
- 13 Westmoreland County Show  
[www.westmorlandshow.co.uk](http://www.westmorlandshow.co.uk)
- 20-22 APF Exhibition 2018, Ragley Estate, Alcester  
[www.apfexhibition.co.uk](http://www.apfexhibition.co.uk)



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# STIHL®



# COULD THE BOYS' TOYS POSSIBLY DISAPPEAR?

## *Or are the robots replacing the ride-ons?*

I never thought I would ever say this, but it looks like, after almost 25 years, the robots have finally arrived in numbers – and in a much shorter space of time than I ever expected.

Is there a sudden swell of support from the dealer network for this method of lawnmowing? It certainly appears that the dealer demand for cable laying machines is growing quite dramatically.

Manufacturers are investing heavily in this 'new' wave of technology, although some have struggled to persuade their customers (the dealers) that they should get on the bandwagon. Of course, we all know that struggle has been going on for many years in the UK, whereas in Europe and especially the Scandinavian countries, robotic mowers have taken off big time to the extent that almost 50% of all domestic mowers sold in Sweden are robots. Germany and France are moving forward at a rate of knots in their sales, which leaves the UK, the third largest lawnmower market in Europe, a long way to catch up.

We must remember, however, the differences in product sales in these markets. Germany and France are very big in lawn tractor and petrol walk behind mower sales and not so in battery or mains electric. Whereas in the UK our volume sales are mains electric (approx 1,200,000 units), only circa 25,000 lawn tractors, around 250,000 to 300,000 petrol walk behinds, plus a growing army of cordless mowers.

It appears the robotic mowers sold in the UK at present are replacing lawn tractors or large petrol mowers. This is probably mainly due to price, as most robotic mowers exceed the £1,000 mark – although it is expected that prices will drop as volume sales grow.

Why are manufacturers so desperate to make this product a success? How can it be good for the industry, especially the specialist dealer network? Can it be the downfall of the petrol or even diesel powered product that has been the backbone of our industry for over a century? Is it the end for the traditional servicing dealer as we know it? Can public demand change the course of our industry's history?

These are all questions that stick in the back of the mind but like many other obstacles that have been thrown at our industry over the years, the truth must be faced and a way of making the robotic mower belong to the specialist must be found. And therein lies the problem!

Many dealers either don't have the manpower, or even the willpower, to tackle the main issue in the sale of the

robotic mower – and that is the time it takes to do a survey at the prospective customer's property. Which is then followed by the time and manpower it involves at the height of the season, when one or two staff have to be assigned to carry out the installation. Is that seen as too expensive and time-consuming, especially if there is a queue of repairs waiting to be done and other customers to be served? Some may find it very difficult to charge the actual price for doing the job and who pays for the time it takes to do the survey? In some cases the real cost could be as much as the machine itself.

Are robots now here in force? Just like the battery powered products that are raining in on the domestic household, robotic mowers are capturing the imagination of the wider public and as that circle grows, so will the word of mouth that creates a market much quicker than any media advertising ever will.

Is it true that customers are asking about robotic mowers? Are many already sold on the idea as the old tractor or walk-behind gets closer to retirement? Will room be made for the new kid on the block to roam around many of those gardens which once were the play areas for 'boys with their tractor toys'?

Have the robots really arrived? Perhaps best not to wait and see . . .



# JIM GREEN



## CALL A POLICE CUT-STABLE!

### COUNCIL WORKER CHARGED FOR MOW-BILE USE

*First case of its kind, say police*

Read with interest recently how a council grounds care worker is thought to have become the first person in Britain to be charged with using a mobile while operating a lawnmower after being stopped outside a police station.

The *Telegraph* reported that a 47-year-old faced a fine of £200 and six penalty points if he is found guilty of using his phone at the traffic lights outside of the police station in Ely, Cardiff. Unfortunately we had to go to press before I could find out the outcome of this trial of the century.

The man was followed by South Wales Police officers who spotted him allegedly using his mobile while driving along Cowbridge Road West.

The *Telegraph* report said that

Cardiff Council confirmed that he was a member of council staff and that he could face disciplinary action at a later date.

It added, "The council will be following up this matter in line with council policy and procedure."

Luckily Cardiff police had time in their busy schedule to do a new-fangled Twitter tweet about the incident, saying, "Luckily he didn't mow anyone down! After learning of his impending £200 fine and 6 points he turned a shade of green!"

Clearly this worker was breaking the mobile phone usage laws, but as a turf professional friend of mine pointed out upon seeing the picture of the offending mower – "What?! ROPs folded – why no HSE fine too?!"



## SOMETHING FISHY

### REELED IN!

*Fisherman catches a lawnmower in mid-ocean*

Fisherman Alex Rugus knew he was onto something big when a near 50kg force at the end of his fishing line nearly toppled him over in his boat.

But what he reeled in off the coast of Jurien, north of Perth, Western Australia, was certainly not edible. It turned out to be an algae covered lawnmower!

"I initially thought it might well have been a sizeable octopus," said Alex, "but was confused because it wasn't thrashing about."

The stunned angler said it was definitely the strangest thing he'd ever caught and he wasn't about to release it back to the sea.

"I pulled it on board and hauled it back to the marina area. Someone joked it must have been the gardener's

from Atlantis," he said.

"I left it there to organise getting rid of it, but it had gone by the time I came back. I assume to the bin, not for someone's shed."





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