

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

JULY / AUG 19

BRANCHING OUT IN THE SOUTHWEST

Elliot Prior of Masons Kings on the dealership's philosophy, its belief in apprentice schemes and faith in developing technologies

Throwing open the doors
Olivers Agriculture event draws a wide crowd

Challenges for China's farmers & dealers

Similar issues to UK faced 5,000 miles away

ATV/UTV round-up

Developments in the market



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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to July/August 2019's edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

You'll find a subject which is never far from the thoughts of dealers, discussed a few times during this issue – namely that of recruitment.

Recruitment is clearly a perennial issue in this industry and is never far away from the thoughts of both dealers and manufacturers. It's a discussion that seems to crop up whenever there is any sort of industry gathering. I heard a dealer speaking at an event I attended recently who said they were having a "terrible" time trying to acquire new staff members. "No one wants to join the industry," they said. They'd obviously had it tough just lately as they were exceedingly pessimistic in their outlook. This dealer was talking about the recruitment crisis, as they saw it, "being the death of the industry in 10-15 years, unless something is done". Strong words, but you can understand their frustration. And they are by no means alone in their concerns, as evidenced by our recent survey on the subject, the results of which you can read, starting on page 34.

The subject is also discussed in our coverage of the AEA's recent conference and in our interviews with dealers around the country. I suppose if the problem is at least being recognised and acknowledged more frequently, it must be the first step to finding solutions?

Perhaps a forum where solutions could start to be formulated is this November's *Service Dealer* Conference which is launched this issue. Certainly, with the news that US dealer guru Bob Clements is speaking, attendees can be confident that some fresh ideas from across the pond will be thrown into the mix.



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OBITUARY

ANDREW RODWELL

SCH (Supplies) Founder passes away aged 80

SCH (Supplies) founder and former managing director, Andrew Rodwell, passed away following a short illness on the morning of Saturday 4th May at the age of 80.

Many will know Andrew from the company's 33 years of extensive attendance at garden machinery shows across the country, where SCH have displayed their product range to potential customers and machinery dealers.

Due to health concerns, in December 2018, Andrew and his family decided to hand over the running of SCH to two of his long-term employees John Free and Ian Holder.

A spokesperson for the company said, "SCH had been Andrew's passion for over thirty years, and his hard work has put the company's future on a successful trajectory. We will continue to trade as normal, so that his legacy is maintained."

SCH (Supplies) were the first

company ever to advertise in Service Dealer magazine back in 1988. The magazine's founder Chris Biddle said, "I am saddened to hear of the death of Andrew Rodwell. He was an innovative inventor, a SALTEX stalwart, genial host and one of the turfcare industry's real characters. Rest in peace, Andrew."

In 1986, Andrew recognised that the ordinary lawn mower tractor was capable of a lot more than merely mowing grass. With the help and encouragement of Malcolm Vandenburg at Wests Engineering Ltd, the pair set about designing and manufacturing a range of grass care machinery. Before long, SCH (Supplies) Ltd was created and began selling products to a handful of local dealers.

Through sheer hard work and determination the business flourished and expanded, and now has a catalogue of over 200 products, and a vast network containing



hundreds of machinery dealers across the country.

From the early days of SCH, Andrew was an advocate of training local aspiring engineers. He nurtured and mentored his young apprentices, some of whom have remained with SCH for over twenty years. The business now employs 25 people who design, manufacture and deliver the machinery.

Andrew has been described as a larger than life character, he was gregarious, often hilarious and a great British eccentric. He had a passion for anything mechanical from vintage tractors to classic cars. He will be sorely missed by SCH and all who knew him.

DEALERS

VINCENT TRACTORS TAKES ON KVERNELAND

For Cornwall and South Devon



The range of Kverneland includes ploughs, cultivators, drills, fertiliser spreaders, haytools and diet feeders

Kverneland has extended its coverage throughout Cornwall and South Devon, with the appointment of Vincent Tractors & Plant to its dealer network.

This means two of the dealer's branches – Fraddon, Cornwall, and Plympton, Devon – now have access to the entire range of Kverneland implements, which includes ploughs, cultivators, drills, fertiliser spreaders, haytools and diet feeders.

With an extensive stock of parts and implements, Vincent Tractors & Plant is able to provide sales, plus after-sales service and support for new and current Kverneland customers in the area – reinforced with its own Kverneland-trained engineers.

"We have been listening to our customers who have said that they would like us to supply a wider range of tillage products," explains Paul Vincent, Managing Director of Vincent Tractors & Plant. "The addition of Kverneland products to our portfolio will let us do that."

PEOPLE

IAN TALBOYS JOINS HANDY DISTRIBUTION

As Southern Area Sales Manager

Ian Talboys has joined Handy Distribution, replacing Brian Pattle as Southern Area Sales Manager.

Handy said that after 16 years of dedicated service and significant contribution, Brian Pattle has left the company to pursue a new career opportunity at Stiga.

Ian has been working at Briggs & Stratton for the past 11 years and has accumulated a wealth of experience during his time spent there. His former roles have included Area Sales Management with Claymore and Central Spares.

Mark Moseley, Sales Director at Handy Distribution said, "We are absolutely delighted to have Ian on board. His enthusiasm, flair and experience will help develop our dealers' businesses."



Ian Talboys, developing the dealers' businesses for Handy Distribution

Ian Talboys can be contacted on 07860 773970 or ian.talboys@handydistribution.co.uk

DEALERS



Timberwolf chippers on display at Mason Kings

TIMBERWOLF APPOINTS NEW DEALERS

And extends the coverage area of another

Timberwolf has appointed Mason Kings to offer sales and support to customers in North Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

Also, Tallis Amos Group has been appointed by the manufacturer for Bristol, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Newport.

In addition, its long-term dealer Ben Burgess GroundsCare Equipment, with its head office in Norwich, will extend its East Anglia coverage to include Bedford and Milton Keynes from a brand new, purpose-built depot in Ellington.

This latest business growth takes the number of Timberwolf dealers to 17, working from 38 depots, with over 225 trained technicians.

Guy Marshlain, Sales and Marketing Director at Timberwolf, said, "We know our machines are a crucial element in the smooth running of businesses throughout the UK, which is why end-to-end support for our customers is something we provide with every

Timberwolf product."

With three depots, located in Exebridge, Chudleigh and St Columb, the Masons Kings team of over 40 trained technicians will ensure parts are located closer to businesses, reducing down-time required for servicing and providing quick access to spares, as well as an increase to the Timberwolf sales and demonstration teams in the area.

Colin McIntyre, Turf and Commercial Director at Tallis Amos Group, said, "I'm delighted that we have become a part of the Timberwolf dealer network and have expanded our product range further to fulfil our customers' needs and expectations."

Ben Burgess GroundsCare Equipment's new depot based in Ellington enhances the already comprehensive service support that Timberwolf owners are given in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

INDUSTRY

ALLETT WINS QUEEN'S AWARD FOR ENTERPRISE

In recognition of export growth

Allett, the Staffordshire-based specialist cylinder mower manufacturer, has won the Queen's Award for Enterprise: International Trade 2019 in recognition of its growth in exports and contribution to the British economy.

A wholly British-owned company, Allett has designed and manufactured mowers for the sports and premium lawns market for over 50 years.

The award marks a major period of development for the company, with ranges of new products launched to meet the needs of strong emerging markets. Allett's main export success has been achieved with its professional products for sports stadiums and training grounds, achieving increased sales with the USA, Russia, Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Spain leading its top-10 markets in the past three years.

"We're very honoured to receive the Queen's Award," said Austin Jarrett, Allett's Managing Director. "It recognises our achievements and team efforts in bringing innovative developments in our mowing systems to meet challenges in overseas markets with large potential. We're no longer confined to the seasonality of domestic sales cycles in the UK. Our mowers and turf maintenance systems are used throughout the world where they are maintaining sports surfaces and lawns to the highest standards."

Allett was the major supplier to the host stadiums and contractors in Russia for the 2018 World Cup football tournament.

The company concentrates on assisting a World Cup country for a period of three years to help attain the striking

light green-dark green stripes in time for the main tournament. Markets with large potential such as the USA offer access to developments for sports such as American football and baseball as well as soccer. South America, where previously they have not had the financial resources, is now a developing market, says the company. Allett has placed its first mowing systems in China where there are great World Cup ambitions.

"The groundsman in the UK are recognised as being the best in the world and they demand the highest standards from their equipment suppliers," says Austin. "This demand drives our engineering team to improve and develop our mowing systems which consequently produce world-class sports surfaces and garden lawns. Every one of our machines proudly wears a Union Flag decal, and this really helps us in our export markets where the UK is revered for its lawns."

Allett recently launched and continues to develop products powered by lithium-ion batteries. To accommodate the growth of the business the company recently moved its Hixon, Staffordshire base to a new, larger factory. The company has an after-sales team in place to support overseas national distributors and, as export sales grow, considers it is important to maintain the 'brand value' which has been a keystone to home market success.

Allett said the recognition of achievement the Queen's Award for Enterprise brings is a proud moment in its history, and one the company can bear as a premium standard into the export markets of the future.



Allett concentrates on assisting a World Cup country for a period of three years to help attain the striking light green-dark green stripes in time for the main tournament

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DEALERS

RIPON EXTENDS KUHN SUPPLY

To its newly-acquired branches

Following its acquisition of RBM Agricultural Limited earlier this year, North Yorkshire-based agricultural machinery dealership Ripon Farm Services has extended its supply of the Kuhn Farm Machinery range to its newly-acquired branches in Malton, Market Weighton, Brigg, Louth and Retford.

A longstanding Kuhn franchisee across its established eight branches throughout Yorkshire, Humber and Teesside, Ripon Farm Services will now extend its geographical reach into Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

Training in sales, servicing and parts in relation to the Kuhn offering is now ongoing at the five newly-acquired branches as the first



Geoff Brown (left) Managing Director of Ripon Farm Services, with Kuhn Farm Machinery Area Sales Manager Nigel Donkin

orders are taken.

Geoff Brown, Managing Director of Ripon Farm Services, said, "Our association with Kuhn goes back over 30 years and this partnership has been an integral part of our growth and development. Kuhn now offers

one of the widest ranges of quality equipment and has in recent years significantly increased its level of technical support. As such, Kuhn will continue to fit well with Ripon Farm Services' reputation of delivering high-quality products and services."

INDUSTRY

ANOTHER AWARD FOR EGO'S POWERLOAD

Independent newspaper bestows

Adding to its list of awards, EGO's new Line Trimmer with Powerload technology featuring a self-winding line, has received its latest accolade.

The ST1510E loop handled line trimmer has been voted a Best Buy in IndyBest (published in *The Independent*), coming out on top in a test of nine manufacturers.

This is the latest in a run of awards for the manufacturer, which won a BBC *Gardeners' World* Best Buy for its

new 47cm self-propelled mower.

EGO Power+ was rated highly for the best mid-price mowers, scoring 19/20 and reporting on the ease of use.

Vince Brauns, Product Manager EMEA, at EGO, said, "We're very pleased to be awarded the IndyBest Best Buy. Listening to our customers pain points has allowed us to create a multi-award-winning product that works for everybody."



EGO's new Line Trimmer with Powerload technology featuring a self-winding line

INDUSTRY



TRIO OF AWARDS FOR HUSQVARNA

Including Best in Test from PriceRunner

Husqvarna has been successful in a test of robotic lawnmowers on the market. Husqvarna Automower 310, Automower 430X and Automower 450X have all come out on top in their respected categories.

The test was carried out by PriceRunner and compared a total of 24 models over a period of several months. Challenging the mowers on a range of different lawn types and in all kinds of weather, each model was assessed on performance, efficiency, reliability, ease of use, functionality, security, design and build quality.

The mowers were then compared on their price and value, and overall winners were confirmed. The 310, 430X and 450X all came out winners in the categories Best in Test, Best Premium Choice and Best Luxury Choice.

AUTOMOWER 310

Best in Test

The testers praised the good terrain handling, smart connectivity and an almost silent operating level of the Automower 310. The machine's ability to navigate complicated gardens and keep heavily sloped areas and elongated corridors well cut also impressed PriceRunner's team of testers.

AUTOMOWER 430X

Best Premium Choice

PriceRunner's testers said that Automower 430X is industry-leading when it comes to dealing with different terrains, making light work of heavy slopes, bumps, roots, loose surfaces, high grass, complex areas and obstacles, navigating narrow

passages and hard to reach areas with ease. With an RRP of £2,700, the testers stated it offered an "unbeatable combination of reliability, terrain handling and ease of use".

AUTOMOWER 450X

Best Luxury Choice

PriceRunner's testers commented on Automower 450X's ability to handle extreme slopes as well as navigating a range of challenging terrains in different weather conditions, meaning there are very few lawns this model can't handle. The testers concluded this model is in a "class of its own".

EXHIBITIONS



SALTEX ADD ECO VILLAGE

New for this October

New for 2019, SALTEX are promising visitors a showcase of the latest green technology in groundscape in a new area on the show floor, which is purely dedicated to environmentally friendly products.

This addition to the show has stemmed from the results of the

post-event survey last year which revealed that visitors thought the exhibition could benefit from a wider choice of eco-friendly products and services.

The organisers say the new Eco Village will feature a programme of daily demonstrations of sustainable technology - offering visitors an

opportunity of seeing a number of products in action. Also, industry experts, within this village, will offer advice on green technology and how it could benefit current working practices.

SALTEX 2019 takes place at the NEC, Birmingham on October 30 and 31.

PEOPLE

AGRI-ARGO APPOINTS NEW PRODUCT MANAGER

As Paul Wade retires

An important two-way technical communications role between the Argo Tractors factory and independent dealers supplying Landini and McCormick products has been taken on by Andrew Starbuck, a new recruit to the growing team covering the UK and Ireland.

“As Product Manager, my principal role is to communicate technical information to our dealers about the features and benefits of the tractors so they are fully informed when talking to customers,” he explained.

“But I will also be referring any constructive comments and observations from users back to our team at Harworth and to the product managers and engineers at the Argo Tractors factory.”

Adrian Winnett, Managing Director of Argo Tractors operations in the UK and Ireland, said that effective two-way communication is essential to help with Argo’s philosophy of continuous development as current products are refined and improved while new tractors are planned for the future.

He added: “This is an important role in our expanding team, so I’m delighted to welcome Andrew, whose past experience working for dealers and for Europe’s leading potato and sugar beet equipment manufacturer will be invaluable.”

Andrew takes over from Product Specialist Paul Wade, who has retired after a long career in agricultural engineering, first with International Harvester in the UK, then with the merged IH and Case operation before the Doncaster



Andrew Starbuck (right) with the retiring Paul Wade

factory became part of the Argo Tractors group as McCormick.

Adrian Winnett said: “For years, Paul has been the go-to man for anything technical, for when product features needed explaining and putting into an on-farm context. He’s made a tremendous contribution to the uptake of tractor technology in general, as well as to the Argo Tractors business and others he’s worked for over that time. We wish him a happy and relaxed retirement.”

As the new Product Manager, Andrew Starbuck is realising an

ambition to work with tractors once more after 10 years with Grimme in area and national sales roles within the UK, which followed three years in farm management and two years with a dealership in his home county of Nottinghamshire demonstrating tractors and harvest machinery.

“This new role combines elements of all the jobs I’ve had in the past – product technical detail, technical and sales training, and liaison between all parties in the process of supplying machinery to end users,” he said.

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STIHL'S SIGNIFICANT POLICY CHANGES GENERATES REACTION



With the announcement that almost all products can now be shipped directly to customers, dealers let their feelings be heard in public forums

On the morning of Friday 5th April 2019, STIHL informed its dealers of a number of significant changes and announced plans for a new STIHL Approved Dealer contract.

In an official statement released to dealers, the company said these changes had been brought about by "a huge surge in customers' appetites for online shopping and more recently, STIHL's merger of its VIKING and STIHL businesses". This it said, "now requires the introduction of a new dealer contract".

The headline change in the contract, as defined in the official statement was, that with immediate effect, all STIHL products – with the exception of chainsaws and spare parts – could be shipped directly to the end customer.

This understandably led to many dealers letting their feelings be known about these changes via both the *Service Dealer Weekly Update* comment section and other social media forums.

The official statement from the manufacturer continued, "Customers must continue to be

offered the option of advice and instruction, however online methods, such as videos or web chats, can now be used for this purpose as well as face-to-face instruction.

"All products – except those prohibited for shipping – may now be dispatched in their original packaging and unassembled.

"All chainsaws and spares parts must continue to be personally handed to the customer."

The official statement also laid out the company's revised policy for battery and electric-powered products. This read, "Battery and electric-powered products can be sold in store, in their original packaging. However dealers must still provide the option of product assembly.

"Petrol products must still be assembled and tested before being handed over to the customer in a ready-to-use condition.

"Chainsaws, irrespective of power source, still need to be assembled and tested before sale.

"These changes apply with immediate effect and can be implemented by STIHL Approved

Dealers before signing a new dealer contract.

"A third-party platform ban continues to apply which means that products cannot be sold on sites such as Amazon, eBay or any other third party marketplace website."

The statement also addressed the recent transfer of the Viking product lines to the STIHL brand, saying dealers will be asked to discontinue using the Viking brand. The company said it is "actively supporting its dealers to remove Viking branding from their stores."

The statement also said the company would be "working with its Approved Dealers to achieve a higher standard of service across the sub-dealer network".

Speaking about these changes, STIHL Great Britain's Managing Director Robin Lennie said, "STIHL has had a hugely successful partnership with our dealers for over 90 years. Although more items are being sold online, the vast majority of STIHL products are still sold in store and this will continue to be the case for years to come.

"STIHL remains absolutely



committed to the STIHL Approved Dealer Network and we will continue our programme of dealership development to improve the physical shopping experience. We will also be enhancing our training programme with webinars and marketing courses to help STIHL Approved Dealers to increase their ability to sell online."

Despite these assurances many dealers felt compelled to let their feelings be known in public forums online, with many expressing disappointments with the decision.

As a few examples, dealer Stuart Brown said on *Service Dealer's Weekly Update*, "It's hard to see how genuine old-school dealers who bought into the business model of shop profiling and being totally loyal and committed to the brand, can feel nothing other than betrayed."

Bob Bruce of Action Lawn & Leisure posted, "STIHL want to have their cake and eat it. Dealerships like ours who have most of their eggs in the STIHL basket will be having a long hard look at their future."

Philip Shaw of New Forest Garden Machinery wrote, "I can see an influx of online customers coming through the door from now on with all their problems to sort. Sorry but the money is not in it to do this. Thanks STIHL."

And Gavin Williams of D.Williams and Son said, "We have been loyal STIHL dealers since the early 90s and over this time we feel we have helped to grow and develop the STIHL and Viking brands in our area. We do not sell any STIHL products online and have no intention of ever doing so.

"Over recent years we have seen many changes within STIHL GB that have caused many frustrations to our small business."

Many, many more comments were posted on the *Weekly Update* and other online forums, some much stronger than have been recounted here.

The week following the announcement, *Service Dealer* Founder Chris Biddle wrote a guest blog on the *Weekly Update* where he took a pragmatic view of the changes announced by STIHL and

the reaction it had generated.

Chris wrote, "Online buying is now a reality. We simply have to adapt to new norms, rather than get sucked into a discounting spiral where being a specialist holds no value."

He went on to say, "Today, every business has the power to promote online. What a pity if the very tool that has provided specialist dealers with a level playing field, should be only used to promote price and not the professional and personal service they provide. Garden Trader is a positive step to increase consumer awareness, but then it is down to individual dealers to demonstrate their individual strengths.

"Being an optimist, I do believe there is enough talent and tenacity amongst the dealer fraternity to react positively to these new challenges. And after all, in the dealer/supplier relationship, the dealer is the customer – and the Customer is King (as we are always told)."

This was met by an overwhelmingly positive reaction by our dealer readers, with universal agreement with its sentiments.

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY
SINCE 1988

CONFERENCE + AWARDS

2019

TURNING A PROFIT IS THE THEME FOR 2019'S SERVICE DEALER CONFERENCE

*The subject of this year's event is at the heart of what
all independent dealers' businesses must be about*

TURNING A PROFIT

The organisers of November's *Service Dealer* Conference are pleased to announce that this year's theme is one which will be of utmost relevance to independent dealers – Turning A Profit.

Returning to the DoubleTree by Hilton Oxford Belfry, the date of this year's event has been confirmed as Thursday 21st November.

Commenting on the theme for this year's conference, *Service Dealer* Owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "Turning A Profit is at the heart of what all independent dealers must be about. Be they large or small companies, domestic, professional turfcare or agricultural specialists, maintaining profits in all areas of the dealership is essential.

"To help our delegates in this regard, we have a superb international line-up of speakers in place to offer real,

practical nuggets of information which dealers can take away and put into operation in their businesses.

"Subjects such as recruitment, marketing and business structuring amongst others, will be discussed, all with the underlying theme of how best practice can lead directly to profitability."

As ever the Conference will comprise of presentations, breakout sessions, workshops and panel debates. Throughout the day dealer delegates are encouraged to participate and join in the discussion, sharing their thoughts and experiences with their fellow specialists.

Service Dealer Editor, Steve Gibbs added, "The event is always an important date in the industry diary. It gives an opportunity to network, share stories, discuss business challenges and most of all share a valuable and enjoyable day with each other."

Further details at:
www.servicedealer.co.uk/
2019-awards

OUR 2019 SPONSORS

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2019 *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.

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BOB CLEMENTS TO SPEAK TO DEALERS

Attending for the first time, US dealer guru to offer insight, advice and words of wisdom for delegates

Bob Clements, the President of Bob Clements International Inc (BCI), the Missouri-based dealer-development specialist, will be speaking at this year's *Service Dealer* Conference.

Bob is a sought-after speaker who loves to challenge and motivate owners, managers and salespeople to reach new levels of success. He will be speaking at the DoubleTree by Hilton Oxford Belfry specifically in relation to the Conference's theme of profitability in the dealership.

Service Dealer Editor, Steve Gibbs said, "I first saw Bob present to a huge

room of American dealers, several years ago at the GIE-EXPO in Louisville, Kentucky. He was such an engaging speaker, who clearly inspired the dealers in attendance. They would all have left that room buzzing with ideas to try out in their own dealerships. I am so pleased we are finally able to align schedules and it's possible for Bob to make it across the Atlantic to speak to our readers, because I know they will gain so much from listening to him."

Bob says of his business's philosophy, "Our success is found in the success of others. When we have the opportunity to work with a dealer who, after years of struggle, has been able to turn his dealership around, finally showing a profit and breathing a sigh of relief, we know that we are doing work that matters.

"Equally, when we work with a dealer who used to look at his service department as a necessary evil but is now realising a significant income and impact on customer satisfaction because of the work they produce, we know that we are involved in work that matters.

"Sometimes," Bob continued, "we are fortunate to work with dealers that are thriving but know they can reach new levels of success. We've been able to help them successfully establish new locations, expand their markets and product lines, and work to transition their businesses to the

next generation."

Bob's solo presentation at the Conference will be entitled, '*Structuring Your Dealership to Maximise Profit*'. During this session, he will talk about the importance of balance in each department and its impact on overall dealership profitability.

Bob will also be running a breakout session on '*Turning Your Service Department into a Cash Producing Machine*'. Here he will discuss the basics of BCI's service process and how dealers can begin implementing it. He will talk about the importance of triaging and the role of the service co-ordinator.

Joining Bob in making the trip over and returning to the Conference after running two very successful sessions in 2018, will be Sara Hey, Vice President of Operations and Development at Bob Clements Inc (BCI).

Sara, who now contributes a popular column to each issue of *Service Dealer* magazine, will be teaming up once again with Pete Harding of PFW Associates dealership consultancy, for one of their popular US vs UK workshops.

This year they will be discussing Recruitment Issues, with Sara offering her knowledge on best practices in hiring that they are seeing in the States right now, and Pete bringing the latest techniques from the UK to the table.

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Many factors are taken into account when judging the categories, but the most important is customer feedback – which will once again be acquired online, between now and October. The judging panel will meet later that month to assess the entries.

As last year, the core dealer categories for the 2019 competition are:

- **Garden Machinery Dealer Of The Year**
- **Professional Turfcare Dealer Of The Year**
- **Farm Machinery Dealer Of The Year**
- **Forestry Equipment Dealer Of The Year**
- **Atv/Quad Dealer Of The Year**

There are also two other award categories:

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BREXIT AND RECRUITMENT DOMINATE AEA CONFERENCE

A thought-provoking event, with an of-the-moment line-up of speakers, also saw AgriArgo's Adrian Winnett elected President, writes Editor STEVE GIBBS

The Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA) held its Annual Conference and Lunch back in April at 1 Great George Street, London, the headquarters of the Institution of Civil Engineers – and there was one subject which understandably dominated the agenda: Brexit.

Three out of the four speakers from the superb line-up, approached the subject from their own field of expertise. Because of the nature of the beast though, all that was discussed was very much of-the-moment. As the subject is changing hourly, let alone daily, to recount what was said by Jeremy Moody, Adviser to the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, Anand Menon, Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at

King's College London, or Paul Johnson CBE Director of the Institute of Fiscal Studies, would be interesting but out of date now. The fourth speaker however, Swedish tech entrepreneur, Joakim Jardenburg, the world's only Head of Internet emeritus, changed the mood somewhat with his entertaining presentation about fully grasping the opportunities which the digital world offers for interaction with both customers and colleagues.

However, what was noteworthy, was that both Ruth Bailey, Director General of the AEA, and the newly elected President, Adrian Winnett, Argo Tractors's Head of Operations in the UK and Ireland, both chose to touch upon recruitment in the industry as part of their addresses.

Ruth opened the day's proceedings, welcoming the delegates and admitting that a top priority as an Association is going to have to be Brexit. Beyond that though, Ruth saw some challenges that we as a sector must face up to.

Firstly, she talked of the challenge of the new industrial era – Industry 4.0 – which she said will bring radical changes with concepts such as automation and robotics, AI, cyber activity, social media, digital communications and The Internet Of Things.



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“As a sector, we’re well equipped,” said Ruth. “We have all these elements at our fingertips. In fact, we lead industry’s advances in areas such as autonomous vehicles, robotics, UAVs, precision agriculture and interconnectivity.”

It’s how we as an industry introduce these concepts to the marketplace which is going to prove a challenge argued Ruth.

She then addressed the recruitment issue, which is dominating industry discussion lately, saying, “We need to raise the perception of our industry.

“We have to promote the technologically exciting innovations that we deliver,” she explained. “We must ensure that the relevance of what we do as an industry is fully understood by a much wider audience.”

Ruth continued, “I also want to highlight the challenge of the skills gap. We must recognise the talents of our people. In a world of accreditation and CPD, it’s no longer adequate to just pay lip service to experience. We have to show we value it in some way and improve our capacity to retain our technicians and our skills.”

Crucially, said Ruth, we also must encourage the younger generation and engage with young talent.

“We must bring diversity into our sector with vocational technical abilities,” she said. “Never more

so than now, has the uptake of the new land-based engineering apprenticeships been more important than in today’s working environment.”

Adrian Winnett picked up on this theme in his inaugural speech as the Association’s new President.

He spoke of how the UK agricultural engineering industry needs to continue finding ways to retain and attract young talent, not just from within but also from outside the industry.

He said, “It’s a terrible shame that beyond our own circle neither of the words ‘agriculture’ and ‘engineering’ resonate in terms of a career choice with the majority of young people.

“Yet we all know what challenging, fulfilling and rewarding opportunities there are in agriculture generally and in the agricultural and grounds care machinery sectors in particular.”

Adrian continued, suggesting there are opportunities for many in the industry, not just those with an aptitude for hands-on work with spanners, or wrenches or socket sets. “But also for the people with understanding of electronics, digital technology, data management, analysis, finance, business management, soil science, crop technology,” he said. “All of these skills are needed in the process of designing, engineering and supplying and supporting today’s modern machinery.”

Adrian suggested that from the outside, agriculture is often thought of as being another world, of being insular and open only to those already in it with personal experience of farming or at least of rural life.

“We must do our bit to help change those perceptions if we are to capitalise on the wealth of talent that, at present, is attracted to other industries and commercial sectors.

“We need to ensure that we present ourselves in a more attractive way. We must make sure that our industry is represented much more dynamically.”

Adrian also acknowledged that one of the challenges the industry is facing is the retention of talent once they have been attracted to the sector. “Things like the unsociable hours and the seasonality are always going to be a challenge for us,” he conceded.

“Therefore,” Adrian posited, “I suspect communication within our businesses will play an increasingly important role.”

The event closed out with more Brexit talk from the BBC’s Deputy Political Editor, John Pienaar, who was able to give a running commentary on the on-going saga. Delegates then rounded the day off with the traditional post-conference gathering at the nearby Westminster Arms pub.



Newly-elected AEA President, Adrian Winnett

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THROWING OPEN THE DOORS

Continuing our series of dealer open day visits, MARTIN RICKATSON visits the well-established spring event of Home Counties multi-franchise dealer AT Oliver & Sons, and more specifically its Oliver Agriculture arm which specialises in Claas equipment. Recent branch acquisitions meant this year's event drew a wider crowd than ever before

While Oliver Agriculture Ltd was formed only a decade ago, following a restructuring of its parent company's business units, that parent business is one of the oldest agricultural engineers and dealerships in the UK, with AT Oliver and Sons tracing its history almost 200 years. Based at Wandon End, on the Herts/Beds border near Luton Airport, it remains a family business

but has not been afraid to seek new blood to help drive it forward.

Archibald Thomas Oliver founded a threshing machine and engineering business in Luton in 1823, and while it later moved to more rural premises where it remains today, his business still has agriculture at its core – with successful moves into turfcare machines, pick-ups and other areas. The business's longest relationship

has been with Claas, whose products it has sold since 1947, when it became one of the first dealers in the UK for the German firm's combines and balers.

The company has long held a small core number of very successful franchises in key product areas, including not only Claas, but also JCB. Those two businesses remain key suppliers, but with JCB having entered the tractor sector some



The Olivers sales team from across its six branches, including David Jarman, centre, were present for the annual open day



Oliver Agriculture traditionally holds its one-day 'open house' in May at its head office depot at Wandon End on the Herts/Beds border

years ago and Claas similarly having begun offering materials handlers, in 2008 it was decided to restructure the company to create two distinct trading divisions to oversee each main franchise and a series of complementary franchises. Oliver Agriculture is now part of the Oliver Group, comprising ATO Holdings as the parent company and two trading companies, Oliver Agriculture to sell Claas and other franchises, and

Oliver Landpower, operating from Luton, Kings Langley and Tingewick, and marketing JCB, Isuzu pick-up trucks (from King's Langley), and Amazone amongst others, while also having dedicated staff for groundcare equipment from the likes of Toro and Husqvarna, and offering buggy hire for events.

In recent years, Oliver family members Antony Oliver and John Humphreys stepped back from

day-to-day hands-on management. Today the managing director of the Oliver Agriculture side of the business is David Jarman, with Ian Morton, Will Helliwell, Anna Barnes and recent recruit Russell Hallam as fellow directors.

While the whole AT Oliver business was a three-branch operation for many years, covering Herts, Beds, Bucks and the surrounding area from depots at the Wandon End, Luton HQ, plus Shefford further along the Herts/Beds border and King's Langley near Watford in South Herts, things have changed significantly in recent years. With farms getting fewer and larger, a decision was made some time ago to close the Shefford branch and relocate staff and operations to Luton. Just prior to this, the business was offered the opportunity by Claas to expand its presence in Bucks and Oxon and the surrounding area, and a small branch was opened at Bicester. More recently, this was replaced with a purpose-built depot at Tingewick.



Exhibitors at this year's event ranged from Claas, for which Olivers has been a dealer since 1947, to recent addition Grange Machinery

ACQUISITIONS

In 2015, Claas decided to reduce the number of retail branches it owned and offered the Oliver business the opportunity to purchase its Southern Harvesters depot at Reading, Berks. This gave Oliver Agriculture a much-expanded area from three locations: the head office at Wandon End, Luton, covering Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire; Tingewick, Buckingham, covering North Oxfordshire and North Buckinghamshire, and Cane End, Reading, covering Berkshire, East Oxfordshire and South Buckinghamshire.

More recently, last autumn Olivers concluded the purchase of the business activities of the two further Claas dealerships from Claas UK: Southern Petworth in Sussex and Western Winchester in Hampshire. This means the firm's Claas branch network now comprises five depots and covers an area from Oxon/Bucks/Northants down to the South coast.

"The agreement included the transfer of all 26 staff

members in sales, service, parts, administration and management across the latter two branches," explains David Jarman.

"We were delighted to take the opportunity to continue to grow our business with Claas. A number of our new customers from Sussex and Hampshire visited our open day at Luton in May, where staff from the new branches were also present. We hope they appreciate the long-term view we take of our service-focused business. Olivers has been serving farmers for nearly 200 years and we intend to continue doing so for many years to come. This acquisition is a key part of our plan for continued growth."

The acquisition has seen Russell Hallam, formerly of the old Claas Southern dealer group, join the day-to-day directors of Oliver Agriculture's activities as Southern Area Sales Director, alongside Northern Area Sales Director Will Helliwell and Tingewick branch-based After-sales Director Ian Morton.



Visitors were able to peruse a line-up of used machinery brought together from across the Oliver depots

“**OLIVERS HAS BEEN SERVING FARMERS FOR NEARLY 200 YEARS AND WE INTEND TO CONTINUE DOING SO FOR MANY YEARS TO COME**”

KEY FRANCHISE PARTNERS

Aside from Claas tractors, combines, forage equipment and materials handlers, the Oliver Agriculture side of the business holds a number of other key franchises, particularly in the arable sector. The company has had a long association with Horsch, and recently added the German firm’s cultivation, drilling and crop protection equipment to the offering from its Tingewick and Reading depots, meaning it is now sold through all Oliver Agriculture branches. Another recent addition is Spearhead.

“All of our major franchises supported our open day at Wandon End back in April,” notes David Jarman.

“In addition to Claas and Horsch, that included the likes of KRM, Bunning, Opico/Maschio, Dal-Bo and Spread-a-Bale, plus more recent additions such

as Samson and Grange Machinery. We have held an open day and evening for a number of years at Wandon End. We use the day to offer arable farmers the opportunity to have their grain moisture meters tested for accuracy ahead of harvest, courtesy of another of our suppliers, Martin Lishman. With support from all our key suppliers and their staff, a line-up of new and used machinery on show – including show special offers – plus sales, service and parts staff from across our branches in attendance, and free food and drink, we get a good opportunity to meet with customers old and new. Covering a wider area as we now do, this year’s event was more of a challenge, but having a one-day event that goes into the evening seems to work well for us.”



Traditionally covering Beds, Herts and Bucks, the territory covered by Claas dealer Oliver Agriculture now goes to the South coast, extending the appeal of its open day

BRANCHING OUT IN THE SOUTH-WEST

With three branches, and possibly more to come, covering the South-West of England, Masons Kings supplies machinery across the domestic, professional and agricultural sectors. Head of Homeowner and Commercial Sales, Elliot Prior, talks to Laurence Gale Msc, MBPR, about the company's philosophy, its belief in apprentice schemes and faith in developing technologies



Masons Kings is a family-run, agricultural and turf machinery dealership, plus

Country Store, with over 30 years trading experience in the industry.

It provides a wide variety of agricultural and turf machinery products and services to a broad range of customers in the agricultural, horticultural, commercial and domestic sectors. John Deere is the main franchise, covering a wide range of products, including its agricultural equipment range, Gator utility vehicles, ride-on mowers, walk behinds and robotic mowers.

The company has expanded the business model in recent years and now has three dealership outlets covering Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. A recent trip to its Somerset branch enabled me to catch up with Elliot Prior, (son of the owner Roger Prior) Homeowner & Commercial Sales Manager and Chrissie Amphlett, Marketing Co-ordinator, to find

out more about how the company operates and its thoughts on our ever-changing industry.

Service Dealer: When did your father start the company?

Elliot Prior: Masons Kings was established in 1974 as an agricultural machinery dealership. In 1985 we became one of the first John Deere dealerships in the South-West.

Further expansion to our product range came in 2000 when our turf department was opened offering horticultural machinery. My father, Roger Prior, acquired MBI (James Mason Ltd) in July 2005. This was followed in 2009 with the acquisition of Kings Farm Machinery.

Today we remain a family-run business, employing over 100 passionate staff who are the core asset to our business. We provide a high standard of service for sales and product support to all customers whether agricultural, horticultural, leisure or domestic.

We currently have three depots across the South-West and are still keen to expand and support even more customers with our premium products and premium support to grow our family business further.

Since 2005 Masons Kings has grown from £6m sales to £30m today. We believe that working within the John Deere network is great for knowledge sharing and building on success.

We are also keen to develop our sub-dealer network further, looking for new partners who share similar passions and values.

SD: What is your role in the company?

EP: My role is to oversee and support all our garden and commercial turf machinery sales teams that sell to the domestic, commercial and amenity sectors of the landscape and turf industry.

I've been working for the company for seven years now, having left Aberystwyth University with an agricultural degree. As the son of the owner, I'm certainly under some scrutiny, but thrive on the family values that we've instilled into the company that our customer is king. We pride ourselves on customer support, offering a unique and dedicated after-sales service.

Supporting me is Chrissie Amphlett, my fiancée, who helps oversee the marketing and Country Store management at Masons Kings.

SD: Do you solely stock John Deere products?

EP: Over the years we've built up quite a portfolio of products for the needs of our ever-changing and growing customer base. This includes customers who represent the agricultural, sports turf, amenity, domestic and commercial sectors of the market. We sell

WE ARE KEEN TO DEVELOP OUR SUB-DEALER NETWORK FURTHER, LOOKING FOR NEW PARTNERS WHO SHARE SIMILAR PASSIONS AND VALUES

everything from a chainsaw to a combine harvester, with the core of the products being supplied by our main franchise, John Deere. We then also stock a number of complimentary products that sit well with our JD range. This includes equipment and machinery from STIHL, Wessex, Wiedemann, Trimax, Amazone – plus on the ag side, alongside John Deere, Väderstad, Amazone, Bailey Trailers, Rolland, BvL, Opico and Kramer.

In 2018 we expanded our range, offering telehandlers, telescopic wheel-loaders and compact wheel-loaders from Kramer. We were excited to be able to offer this new avenue of material handling solutions to our customers. We also expanded our portfolio of Gators, adding the XUV 865M and XUV 855M to our range.

SD: Can you categorise your customer base?

EP: As you can imagine, selling both ag and turf machinery we have an extensive reach that covers a wide spectrum of landowners, farmers, estates, local authorities, schools, sports clubs and domestic householders. We've also recently had some success with the Devon FA, setting up a partnership to supply machinery packages to football clubs offering a gold, silver and bronze deal to their affiliated teams.

We've also built up good customer relationships with three large councils, namely Plymouth, Cornwall and Exeter.



Mason Kings' branch in Exebridge, Somerset

SD: How do you find the staff recruitment process?

EP: We have 100 employees in the company and we invest a lot of time and money keeping our staff well trained and motivated. Like a lot of companies, it is certainly getting harder to recruit experienced and committed staff.

For several years now we've been keen to train our own staff, particularly taking on young people who become involved in the three-year John Deere apprenticeship scheme. Masons Kings is part of the apprenticeship scheme, which invests in young people who want to be part of the industry. Supporting young apprentices is vital as it secures a future for Masons Kings and the industry, and ensures continuation of service to our expanding customer base.

Apprentices like ours, on John Deere's scheme, are trained in engineering, electronics, hydraulics, diagnostics, communication skills, computing, sales and marketing – which leads them to a Landbased Engineering qualification.

A couple of recent success stories for us have been Tom and Oliver, who successfully passed their courses and are now fully-qualified technicians. Tom has been working as part of our turf service technicians' team at Chudleigh for three years and is a valued and popular member of the group. He has certainly grown in confidence since joining, working very hard during his time with us to pass his apprenticeship.

Oliver has also been with the business for three years, as part of our agricultural service technicians team at our Exebridge depot. Oliver has worked hard and has integrated into the team from day one, working well in the fast-paced environment to become a real team player.

Both Tom and Oliver have done extremely well and their line managers, colleagues and all of us at Masons Kings are

very proud of them and their outstanding achievements. We are excited to see what the future holds for both of them.

We are currently looking to take on more apprentices in the coming years. We find it is the best way to recruit new staff and in the long term we can see how they buy into the culture of the business.

SD: What after-sales services do you offer?

EP: At Masons Kings, our fundamental principles revolve around the statement, 'Premium Product, Premium Support'. Many of our future projects and investments are based around how we, as a company, can help and support both our current and new customers; whether that is through optimising their existing machinery or having a stronger online presence in order for our customers to interact with us out of our standard working hours.

Without a solid product support system in place behind the sales team, customer confidence and repeat business would surely be affected. We've had many purchases throughout the years, that have been influenced more by how we can support the customer, rather than the products' features and specifications.

As an example, we've recently invested in the latest, state-of-the-art cylinder sharpening equipment from Bernhards. Our new machinery, along with our team's expertise, allows us to offer the best cylinder sharpening services to our customers. Our new precision machines sharpen all popular machinery blades so we can now straight-line grind bed knives up to 40" long at any specified angle and have capabilities for reel blade sharpening up to 36" long.



Elliot Prior with Chrissie Amphlett, Mason Kings' Marketing Coordinator and his fiancée



'Premium products, premium service' is the company's philosophy

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We're also investing in optimising technology. Farming is becoming more complex and is demanding long-term focus and dedication, no matter what the seasons may bring. We unveiled a new specialist team in 2018 to provide Agricultural Management Solutions (AMS) to support farmers and overcome their increasing demands, now and in the future. We say that our new team of AMS specialists use breakthrough technology to maximise profits for our farming customers – to bring higher performance, increased up-time and reduced operating costs.

SD: So, you are interested in offering the developing technologies?

EP: Very much so. On the domestic side for example, we're in a very exciting time where the robotic mowers and lithium-ion markets are developing at speed. Robots are getting smarter and batteries are producing more power and lasting longer. Cordless products are no longer just additional items we can offer, they are a core product group within our garden machinery portfolio.

We supply STIHL & John Deere's battery-powered products to a variety of client profiles. The robotic mowers are proving to be very popular with holiday homes or large houses whose owners don't have time to maintain their lawns – so they are offering a solution to keep the garden looking green and fresh. We've even managed to sell a robotic mower to one of our golf course customers recently, which shows there are lots of possibilities for these products.

We offer the service to carry out a site visit before installation in order to discuss the requirements with the customer and highlight any potential issues or landscaping tasks that are necessary before setting up the robot. Once

the installation is complete, we will set up the boundaries for the mower and carry out the standard procedures to ensure components are working correctly.

STIHL has focussed its research and development into producing durable, lightweight and reliable battery products which have rocketed in popularity in many markets recently – from first-time users, to the larger professional contractors.

We believe there will always be a market for petrol or diesel-powered machines in the industry, but cordless has certainly made its mark and is here to stay.

SD: Is demonstration of machinery important?

EP: We're very happy to carry out relevant machinery demonstrations for our customers, on a wide range of our products. This year the team has expanded its support to provide packages for golf courses and other commercial businesses around the South-West. For example, with successful demonstrations on a variety of golf courses, satellite guidance equipment is now being used to accurately map spraying areas, which reduces the costs of excess chemical spraying. We see this as a strong opportunity for developments in the future.

SD: What are your thoughts regarding online selling?

EP: Online retailing in our sector is not going to go away. We, like everybody else, will have to adapt and embrace it. We will not allow this to compromise our current after-sales support and servicing though. We will continue to offer the after-sales services we currently offer when someone buys a product from us. With our online presence we're always wanting to encourage customers to actually come and visit one of our physical stores.



John Deere agricultural tractors

SD: How do you see your business developing in the next five to 10 years?

EP: We're committed to the industry. The farming sector, for example, has come through difficult times and there are still challenges to come. We see the main ones being the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, the need to produce food in an environmentally-sustainable way as farming subsidies end or change, and low consumer food prices, mainly dictated by global markets.

We want to support farming by providing our philosophy of 'Premium product, premium support' and to help drive productivity by introducing and optimising technology for the industry.

The future is always at the forefront of every business decision we make. We're always asking ourselves, does this decision align with our vision of the future?

In essence, we want to become the dealer of choice for our present and potential new customers. One of our focus points for the future will be to expand the company with more branches. This will increase the product support we're already providing and make it easier for more customers to do business with us.

SD: Thank you



A John Deere robotic mower at work outside the Exebridge branch



John Deere and STIHL in the showroom

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CHALLENGES FOR CHINA'S FARMERS & DEALERS

China may be 5,000 miles from the UK, but its farmers and dealers face some similar challenges. Kent-based Foton Tractors, importer of manufacturer Foton Lovol's compact models, invited Service Dealer's MARTIN RICKATSON to visit the country to see its agriculture, the Foton business and one of its dealers

It's the world's largest country by population, but with the globe's second-largest land area it has plentiful resources to support it. And with a farming sector that is becoming steadily more sophisticated, supported by equipment supplied both by domestic manufacturers and overseas makers who have set up operations in the country, China's agriculture is making significant advances.

That means its farmers and its farm machinery dealers are benefitting from rapid development in the sector, as both government and private investment influence the adoption of new technologies. While very small farms worked with basic and/or minimal

machinery are found across wide areas, in the country's most productive livestock and particularly arable regions – such as the area around Harbin in the North, the main wheat and maize-growing zone, and the southern rice-growing regions – there are farming operations that bear broad similarities to those found in the western world. And supporting them are farm equipment dealerships that are similar to those found here in the West.

In recent years the Chinese government has encouraged farmers to grow cash crops on the small areas of land that most lease, which have traditionally been used for subsistence farming. At the same time, they have promoted the use of contractors and collective machinery groups in order to help all parties benefit from economies of scale and improved efficiencies. There is also a drive to encourage farmers to grow for markets with premium prices, rather than the basic rice, wheat and maize/corn crops they tend to produce under subsistence farming systems. As a result of these policies, while small subsistence farms remain most common in the South, in the North and West of China agricultural practices increasingly bear comparison with those in the UK and the rest of the western world.



Dong Lai Agriculture is working with Chinese machinery developments such as remotely-operated spraying equipment

DEALERSHIPS FACE UNIVERSAL ISSUES

Wang Yun Quan founded Dong Lai Agriculture, his dealership business, two decades ago, forming the operation from the basis of the 2,000ha sandy loam arable farming enterprise he oversees for multiple different landowners across 17 villages around the far eastern city of Qingdao. The collective farming approach means that each village has its own management committee, with working groups performing the tasks or booking the contractor for different areas of crop management throughout the year, enabling all concerned to take other work, often in nearby towns and cities.

Vast areas of the region are used to grow fresh produce under polytunnels, but Mr Wang's business also focuses on growing and providing equipment for producing wheat, maize/corn and rice. As private enterprise in the country has grown, such crops are now also sold to private processors as well as to the government, and with wheats producing up to 8t/ha, yields are fast catching up with those of quality crops here.

Mr Wang's business, which employs 50 staff across the arable and dairy farm and the dealer premises, has been working with Chinese manufacturer Foton Lovol since the latter began manufacturing tractors in 1998, the same year as he began his dealership. Alongside the standard Lovol range, today he also retails the higher-specification Arbos line the same maker introduced four years ago.

"As Chinese farms grow larger and more advanced, demand is increasing among managers and contract farmers for larger and more advanced tractors," explains Mr Wang.



Wang Yun Quan says government initiatives to improve Chinese agricultural efficiency are aiding the machinery market

"Although average power of tractors sold is around 40hp, we are selling increasing numbers of machines from the Foton Lovol line of up to 220hp, and special order tractors of up to 320hp. These are machines with simple specifications, but for the past four years we have also been offering the Arbos 100-130hp tractors – with larger models up to 260hp to come – built by the same maker. These have a higher specification, including features such as semi-powershift transmissions. While the European versions are assembled in Italy, the same models for the Chinese market are made here in China.



Dealership investments have included a simulator to help to train staff and drivers in the basics of machine operation

“We also supply combines and other equipment, such as small-scale self-propelled sprayers, from the same manufacturer. But equipment from western manufacturers is also important to us, especially in different implement sectors. For example, we offer cultivation and crop establishment and protection equipment from firms including Lemken, Maschio and Great Plains.”

But to give some measure of the fact that large-scale farming is still a niche enterprise and average tractor size is still small when compared with Europe – as well as an idea of China’s sheer scale – Mr Wang reckons to sell tractor and combine numbers that most UK dealer principals here can only dream of.

“In a good year we have a turnover around Y100m (£11.3m) and sell around 300 tractors, although we have had times when the government has encouraged investment and we have sold far more. While average tractor power is growing and we sell quite a few 180-220hp machines, the most popular models are around 60hp.

“We also sell around 300 combines in a good season. Most of these, though, are much smaller than European machines, being mostly of four-walker design and with 3.6m cutterbars. A key reason for this is irrigation practices commonly used here, where channels are often formed in the fields at intervals of this width to retain water and make it available for irrigation. Combines and other machinery work between them.”

A 30% government subsidy for tractor purchases to help further boost Chinese agricultural efficiency is helping to support the market, suggests Mr Wang, although it has dropped back recently from a 190,000-

unit annual average due to rising input costs and falling commodity prices.

“But government is subsidising production in a number of sectors – not only cash crops such as wheat, rice and corn, but also maize and grass for dairying. Demand for dairy products is increasing, and in the North and Mongolia the dairy sector is expanding. Irrigation is also being developed widely, particularly for vegetables, maize/corn and rice. These initiatives are aiding machinery investment.”

With farm businesses becoming more technology-minded, but workers increasingly being drawn to cities in search of better-paid work, Chinese dealers and the farmers they supply are facing similar problems to their UK counterparts in attracting and retaining staff, Mr Wang suggests.

“We have made considerable investment in our premises to not only make them efficient and attractive for farmers who may want to buy from us, but also to attract people to work for us, particularly in parts and service. We have even invested in technology such as simulators to help train staff and drivers in the basics of machine operation. And we are also working with the latest in Chinese machinery developments, such as remotely-operated spraying equipment. But it is harder for private enterprise firms such as ours, who benefit from less government support than current or former government-owned businesses. Other technology investments we have made include telemetry-based diagnostic systems developed for combines and larger tractors made by Foton Lovol.”



Dong Lai Agriculture was founded 20 years ago from a farming business that today oversees some 2,000ha of sandy loam around the far eastern city of Qingdao



With a high volume of annual sales, a well-stocked parts store is central to supporting the machines sold by Dong Lai



The business sells both the standard Lovol tractor range, which stretches up to 320hp, and the premium Arbos line, which currently encompasses 100-130hp

FARM BUSINESSES ARE BECOMING MORE TECHNOLOGY-MINDED, BUT WORKERS ARE INCREASINGLY BEING DRAWN TO CITIES IN SEARCH OF BETTER-PAID WORK

APPOINTING UK DEALERS

Founded in 1998, and Mr Wang's key supplier, Foton Lovol is now also wholly privately-owned. A \$1.8bn revenue company in 2018, it now employs 13,000 across eight plants on six factory sites, and more than half are involved in tractor production. Tractors of 80-220hp and combines are produced at the Weifang plant, the largest in Asia and the firm's HQ, while the business has other factories for production of axles and transmissions, engines, construction equipment, Arbos tractors for the Chinese market, and construction machinery. It also produces Arbos and Goldoni tractors, and Maternacc equipment in Italy.

The 100,000 sq m Weifang factory produces around 380 tractors/day, some 130 being under 80hp, plus 40 combines/day. Potential annual production is 100,000 tractors and 20,000 combines, and while most remain in China, the firm has 400 importers across 120 countries. In an enhanced effort to boost international sales, the company has not only introduced higher-spec Arbos tractors above 100hp, but has also rebranded its smaller machines, originally sold under the Foton name, as Lovol, its international brand, with the former moniker now reserved for its trucks.

As a result, the three models brought to the UK by Kent-based Foton Tractors now wear Lovol branding

and have been upgraded for 2019. The third generation 25, 35 and 50hp models all meet the required Stage 3A emissions regulations, come standard with four-wheel drive and are available with either a roll bar or cab.

Key upgrade on the two smaller models, the M254 and M354, is a four-speed, two-range synchromesh transmission with side-mounted levers, replacing the former constant mesh unit with central straddle-type transmission tunnel, thereby creating a flat-floor platform. There is also a dash-mounted synchro-shuttle.

Built on a larger platform, the M504 also now has side-mounted gear levers, but benefits from an additional speed range to create a 12 forward/12 reverse synchromesh transmission, again with synchro-shuttle. As on the smaller tractors, cabled versions gain a new cab designed by Lovol's European technical team, incorporating side console controls, upgraded air conditioning, improved seating and full steering wheel adjustment.

"The M254 and M354 tractors have been our main sellers here in the UK," says Tom Curtis, of Foton Tractors UK.

Having been selling the manufacturer's tractors for over a decade, a park of around 900 units is now reckoned to have been retailed here, calculates Mr Curtis.

"While in recent years we've retailed between 60 and 80 units a year, our aim is to double this to in the region of 120-150. To do that, while until now we've sold and supported tractors all over the UK – and will continue to do so – we've begun over the past three years to appoint sales/service agents, and this year have signed our first dealers.

"We're now the exclusive UK importer of Lovol tractors and have demonstrated our support by increasing our parts stocks to around £30,000-worth of common spares – and we can obtain any less-common parts within 5-7 days."



Alongside Lovol tractors (left), Dong Lai Agriculture also sells the maker's combine models for cereals, rice and maize/corn

BUSINESS MONITOR

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RECRUITING STILL EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR DEALERS

Little has changed in past 12 months

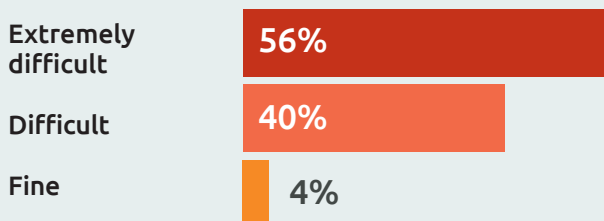
Unsurprisingly perhaps, once again this year when we canvassed our readers on how they are finding the recruitment process for their dealerships, the overwhelming majority who responded described it as either 'difficult' (40%) or 'extremely difficult' (56%). As last year, not a single respondent claimed recruiting was easy.

The factor most frequently cited as a hurdle to taking on a new member of staff among dealers who answered our survey was a lack of appropriate skills (33%). This was followed by a lack of applicants (17%) and unrealistic wage expectations (12%). A proportion (29%) chose to answer 'other' to this question and went on to list a combination of the given factors.

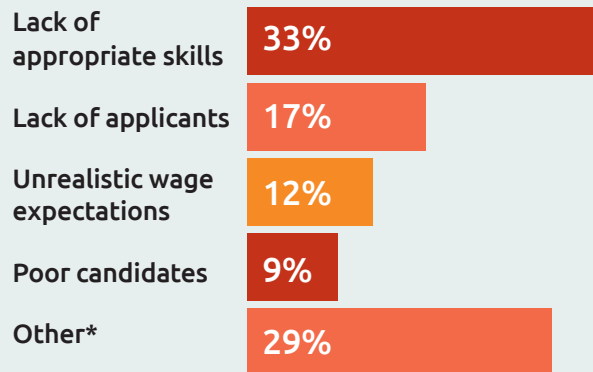
New media this year trumped traditional channels when looking to advertise roles, with the single most popular answer given to where to look for applicants being Facebook (32%). The local paper only received (14%) of respondents' endorsement. 'Other' was a popular choice here (36%) with 'word of mouth' getting several mentions, along with combinations of the given answers. Interestingly, not one single respondent reported using a high-street recruitment agency, which last year was very popular.

Most respondents (68%) agreed that to tackle this difficulty in the recruitment market, it's a responsibility which needs to be burdened by all sections of the industry. Dealers, manufacturers, trade associations, schools and colleges all need to somehow play their part.

How difficult are you finding recruiting new staff?

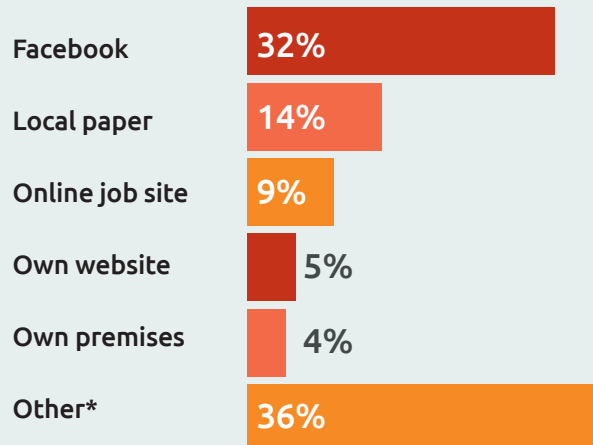


What is the principal hurdle you face in recruiting new staff?



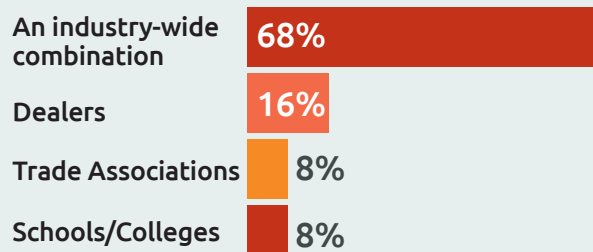
**Other' answers mostly included combinations of the above factors*

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



**Other' answers included 'word of mouth' and combinations of the other answers*

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



YOUR SAY

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

- The recruitment situation is dire. There are two problems. Firstly, our education system is not supporting those youngsters who do have a mechanical and engineering interest. Secondly, as an industry, the value of the products we sell is not high enough to support increased service and repair charges which means that the wages we can afford to pay are lower than our recruitment competition can pay. So, what few interested youngsters there are, are often swayed by the higher pay elsewhere. It's the same with more experienced people. There are very few experienced people to choose from and pay is often a sticking point. Nothing much has changed over the last 12 months. We'd really like manufacturers to get together to come up with industry-recognised qualifications for technicians, parts and sales staff, but we also need their help in keeping up the value of the new machinery we sell to help support higher wages to help improve recruitment and retention.
- There is a real shortage of experienced staff. Plenty of people are applying for the jobs but it seems that they don't read the job description – going from Tesco deputy manager to skilled technician in the click of a mouse button! Still the same issue as 12 months ago. We are going to careers evenings and trying to interest the school leavers with a subsidised scholarship scheme within our own workshop.
- If anything, recruitment has become more difficult over the last 12 months and I believe will continue with that trend as the older members of staff retire. The key is staff retention, but in addition we need a positive take-up of apprenticeships.
- Difficult to find the right people that are interested in working the extra hours that can be involved and know enough about agriculture. Needs to be more awareness of the benefits of the job such as variety, travelling in the countryside and job satisfaction.
- As an industry we are not good at promoting the industry we operate in. We need to be educating schools and careers advisers of the level of technology that we deal with, the value of items and the career paths available. The whole industry is perceived by the layman as archaic when it couldn't be further from the truth – with GPS, telematics, variable rates, software upgrades, robots etc.
- It has become worse in our area. There is a skill shortage and the only way to combat this is to keep taking on apprentices.
- Our policy is to grow our own by advertising for apprentices. This has its own downfalls where their expectations are not realistic. A national apprenticeship scheme backed by the government might help?
- The industry needs to start making the ag and turf industry more interesting to people looking into jobs in mechanical engineering, as many have a perception that it's an industry run by very old, grumpy men in freezing cold workshops. In reality it is a very interesting industry as you don't have to be always workshop bound and you may visit interesting people or places. There is also the possibility of moving up through the ranks in the dealership to different departments.
- It is very difficult to recruit the younger generation. They are not coming out of the colleges wanting to do agricultural or horticultural engineering and their expectations of salary is unrealistic. We get enough stick from the customers who say "my car does not cost that to service!" To increase salaries and hence hourly rates would price us out of business completely.



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THE RIGHT PRODUCT, FOR THE RIGHT DEALER

When the business relationship between dealer and supplier is nailed, it's a mutually beneficial situation, writes Editor STEVE GIBBS

One element which I sense is vitally important to keep spirits and enthusiasm going for dealers, especially during challenging seasons (which let's face it is every one!) is knowing their business is dealing with great manufacturers and suppliers who can be trusted and relied upon to provide support and back-up at all times of the year.

I met one such dealer recently who seemed to epitomise how this relationship can work at its best. This dealer seemed genuinely happy with his situation, which I have to say, was delightful to see.

Blec, which is now under the ownership of Charterhouse Turf Machinery, held an event for the trade press in May, to show off its refreshed range of products for sports surface preparations at the premises of its dealer Acorn Tractors, based in Derbyshire.

Julian Simpson, the owner of Acorn, became a Blec dealer

in 2016 and I remember the manufacturer introducing him to the press at the BTME show in January 2017. Since then I have got the impression that Julian has thoroughly relished his experience acting as dealer for the range.

And it worked both ways with the manager of the Blec division, Curtis Allen, jokingly introducing Julian to the assembled press people by saying, "Blec don't have favourite dealers, but if we did, Julian would be one!"

Julian explained, "When we were offered the chance to sell Blec under the Charterhouse banner, we leapt at that. It was like a dream come true."

He talked of how confident they are as a dealership with the products they sell. He said, "We order the product, we PDI the product, we send it out and we never have problems. The quality of the build is brilliant and it's just one of those franchises which you simply love to have."

Julian admitted to having concerns when first becoming a dealer for the range, that the machines might be distributed through all existing Charterhouse dealerships. "But," said Julian, "the company very carefully decided not to do that." He went on to explain how the machines are a specialist product which require the selling skills of specialist, professional dealers. "I'm fortunate, with my lads here, to have a great team which allows us to count ourselves in that specialist area. Our expertise allows us to sell with success," Julian said.

“We’re having a great year this year and we had a great year last year.”

Blec has spent time enhancing its line-up of landscaping and turfcare equipment over the past couple of years. Under the guidance of the Redexim Group, the company has streamlined the offering and taken care over the establishment of a network of dedicated dealers nationwide.

Amongst the machines demonstrated on a rainy day at Acorn’s premises were the Blecavator, Laser Grader and Multi-Seeder, where key developments were discussed. Of note was the number of mechanical adjustments made to the Laser Grader range including new twin Danfoss proportional valves and heavy-duty finger tines, that both now come as standard.

The all-new Power Box Rake 1800 was also highlighted as the first Redexim-designed and engineered addition to the Blec offering. Curtis Allen said that whilst following the ethics of the previous versions of the Power Box Rake, this machine “has been built from scratch to be the perfect tool for cultivating, earth-moving, grading and raking”.

During the presentations and subsequent working demonstrations, Curtis and his team made it clear how machines from across the range can be used in conjunction with one another, in the process of converting bare earth into a surface ready for seeding.

Curtis summarised the past couple of years for the company saying they had worked hard to deliver across the portfolio. “We have come a long way with the range already,” he said, “and with further innovations in the pipeline we’re entering a very exciting period in the BLEC story.”

Clearly strong relationships with key dealers, such as Acorn, is very much part of this on-going story.

Julian Simpson wasn’t only pleased with the Blec relationship which Acorn Tractors enjoyed. He also talked about how he finds the Iseki franchise a superb combination of products to hold.

He said, “Iseki is a dream franchise for us too. I consider ourselves very, very lucky. It’s absolutely brilliant.”

Hearing such enthusiasm is great for the spirits. I realise it’s tempting to let all the things which try our patience and throw spanners in the works dominate the discourse, but sometimes it’s just refreshing to take a step back and say, do you know what, there’s something which is working well – and presumably will only go from strength to strength.

It doesn’t take a business expert to surmise that a great and trusted working relationship will lead to mutual benefits for both dealer and supplier.

If both parties are happy it must make life easier and business better, surely?



Julian Simpson, owner of Acorn Tractors

“WE’RE HAVING A GREAT YEAR THIS YEAR AND WE HAD A GREAT YEAR LAST YEAR”



Cultipack Seeder outside Acorn Tractor's premises



Laser Grader

TOUGH NEW APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS PASSED

By AGCO apprentices

Agricultural engineers from the AGCO Apprenticeship Academy at Moreton Morrell College are celebrating being the first in the UK to pass through the tough new national apprenticeship standards for their industry sector.

Fourteen land-based service engineering apprentices, working at AGCO dealerships across the country, were delighted to learn that they had passed through their End Point Assessment (EPA), taken with Lantra at Moreton Morrell's land-based college at the end of February.

An EPA is the final assessment apprentices undertake to make sure they are fully competent and can do the job that they have been training for. Government legislation states that a rigorous and robust EPA must be delivered by a separate body to the training provider giving employers the confidence that apprentices have achieved occupational competence. This is the first ever cohort within the agricultural engineering sector to undertake the assessment.

Apprentice Jacques Marshall, who works at Thurlow Nunn Standen Ltd in East Anglia as a trainee technician was very pleased to learn he had passed all elements of his EPA.

The 23-year-old from Norfolk said, "It feels great to achieve after all the hard work and effort put into the four-year programme. Agricultural technicians are highly sought-after so it's really good to know that I now have the skills and will give me a good career for life. College has been great, and I've definitely made some friends for life."

Anthony Linfield, AGCO's Training Development Manager, said, "I am delighted that AGCO's dealer

apprentices have become the first ever within the agricultural engineering sector to undertake their End Point Assessments, including exams. The EPA represents a key element of the AGCO land-based engineering apprenticeship scheme, and serves as demonstrable proof at pass, merit or distinction of their qualification to the employers who have invested in them."

Mark Eden, Director of Work Based Learning at WCG, said, "As their training provider it was really pleasing to see our latest group of AGCO apprentices complete their Land-Based Service Engineering Apprenticeship programme and become the first apprentices in the country to achieve this new apprenticeship standard.

"The group demonstrated a wide range of knowledge, skills and behaviours during the intense process of assessment spread over a two-week period. This is testament to all the hard work this group have committed to their apprenticeship and the support and guidance received from the team at Moreton Morrell College and the AGCO



Jacques Marshall of Thurlow Nunn Standen Ltd in East Anglia



The Agricultural engineers from the AGCO Apprenticeship Academy



KUBOTA PARTNERS WITH COLEG CAMBRIA

To train future engineers

franchised dealer network these candidates represent.

“The group achieved some fantastic results across all elements of their EPA process, so I would like to thank Land-Based Assessment Limited and the team at Lantra who have supported WCG throughout this process.”

Lantra provides expert training and qualifications for land-based industries. Its Chief Executive Marcus Potter said, “As an EPA organisation, we’re delighted that the first technical apprentices in Level 3 Land-Based Engineering have recently passed through the new assessment process with Lantra. We’ve worked closely with all parties behind the scenes to ensure the end-to-end process has run as smoothly as possible. Feedback to date has been extremely positive, providing an excellent platform for moving forward.”

The AGCO Academy Apprenticeship is now in its 20th year, and in partnership with Moreton Morrell College, part of the multi-site college group WCG, has been the starting point for some of the most highly-respected and sought-after agricultural engineers in the sector.

It combines classroom and workshop training with practical, work-based development to lay the foundations of a successful career, working with brands including Massey Ferguson, Fendt and Valtra.

- Dealerships and those interested in finding out more about the opportunities through the AGCO apprenticeship scheme can email: MasseyFerguson.apprenticeship@agcocorp.com, Fendt.apprenticeship@agcocorp.com or Valtra.apprenticeship@agcocorp.com

Kubota (UK) has teamed up with Coleg Cambria Llysfasi, based in North Wales, to train future workers in land-based engineering. Together they have launched the Kubota Apprenticeship Scheme, a three-year block release programme which will blend education at the Denbighshire facility with on-the-job experience.

Simon Parker, an Agricultural Engineering Lecturer at Llysfasi, near Ruthin, says teaming-up with the manufacturer will give their learners a head-start on entering a career in the sector.

“We are very proud to be working with Kubota on this new venture, offering a fantastic training programme for their dealership technicians throughout the whole of the UK and Ireland,” said Simon.

“The three-year block release programme will allow the trainees to enjoy full-time employment with their local Kubota dealership as well

as formal specialist training during their time in college.

“The qualification they will be studying for is the new City and Guilds Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma, so this is an excellent opportunity for any young person starting their career in land-based engineering.”

Michael Bywater, Group Training Manager of Kubota (UK) Limited, believes the union will have a major impact on the future of the industry.

“We are extremely pleased to be working in partnership with Coleg Cambria Llysfasi,” he said.

“This partnership will enable us to train the next generation of dealership technicians to the highest levels, with a view to providing the highest of standards of service to the end user.

“We are proud to support Llysfasi, at the forefront of inspiring the future of the land-based industries.”



Michael Bywater, Group Training Manager at Kubota (UK) Limited and Simon Parker, Agricultural Engineering Lecturer at Llysfasi

HUSQVARNA COMPLETES AUTOMOWER DEALER TRAINING

Successful events held across country

Husqvarna UK has completed its 2019 UK service training tour which focussed solely this year on the Automower – the company’s robotic product.

The recently concluded tour involved six venues and 12 training sessions. Sessions were split into days of basic or advanced training for its network of authorised service dealers, depending on knowledge level.

Paul Coates, UK & Ireland Aftersales Manager, said, “Take up for the training has been incredible with many sessions oversubscribed. In particular the advanced training, concentrating on our new AWD Automower, has been very well received. I’ve been heavily involved with Husqvarna Automower since 2005 and even I am impressed with how well this model performs on banks that are almost too steep to walk up.

“We will continue our dealer training throughout the year, both onsite in our purpose-built training rooms at our Newton Aycliffe HQ, and through our webinar training, which we introduced in 2018. This gives us the ability to run short training sessions direct to the dealer, even in the height of the season.”

The tour comes following the launch of the Automower 435X AWD, an AI-enabled, robotic mower with all-wheel drive and smart home connectivity. The new machine is designed to manage rough terrain and slopes with an incline of up to 70%, and works with Amazon Alexa, Google Home, IFTTT, and provides an open API for smart home integration.



Dealers at one of the training days



Productive training takes place in a classroom environment



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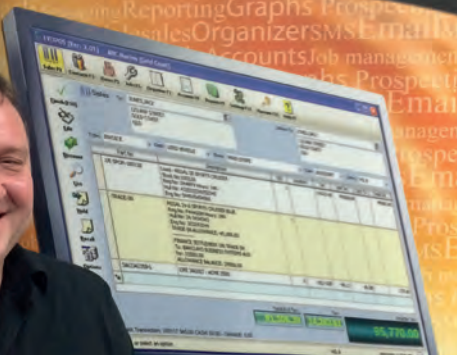
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MKM

ATV SPECIALIST DEALER EXPANDS EASTWARD

Beds ATV and UTV retailer opens new Suffolk branch, writes Service Dealer's Martin Rickatson

MKM Agriculture, the Bedfordshire-based ATV and UTV dealership, recently officially opened its second branch in Suffolk, following the firm's establishment of new premises at Ixworth Thorpe, near Bury St Edmunds, back in March this year. The development follows the departure from ATV retailing of Fieldens, the area's former Honda dealer.

While it retails all four leading ATV makes from its Beds branch, the company, which has been selling, servicing and supporting professional ATVs since 2003, and sport/leisure machines since 2006, will be focusing on Honda – whose products it has been retailing since 2016 – from its new branch.

"Not only are we selling the Honda ATV products, we are also really pleased to have just been awarded the Honda domestic grasscare franchise for this area," said Anthony Deacon, Managing Director of the MKM Agriculture business, which he runs alongside his father, Mark.

"In addition, we're also retailing a full range of complementary products for ATV users from suppliers including Logic and Wessex, giving us a full line of machinery and implements.

"At the new premises, we have a showroom, full workshop facilities and a comprehensive spare parts store. In addition, we have an off-road demonstration area where we can show what our machines are capable of and potential customers can try them out. And we're really pleased to have attracted a good number of former Fieldens staff to work with us, including Keith Collins, who is managing the new Suffolk branch."



Anthony Deacon, Managing Director of MKM Agriculture

SUZUKI



Suzuki King Quad

SUZUKI RANKED NO1 AUTO BRAND

In 2019 customer satisfaction index

Suzuki say they take a consistent approach to delivering outstanding customer service through its network of expert ATV dealers – as well for motorcycles, outboard marine engine and cars as well.

As a result of this focus, they say Suzuki GB was ranked as the best auto brand in the Institute of Customer Service's UK Customer Satisfaction Index earlier this year. A national measure of sentiment across the country, the research asks 45,000 consumers to rate their experiences of dealing with nearly 260 different companies across 13 sectors, including those in the automotive industry.

As part of the survey, Suzuki customers voted their dealers as the easiest and most open people to deal with.

HONDA



Honda ATV

HONDA PARTNERS WITH DATATOOL

To tackle rural crime

Honda has partnered with security specialist Datatool to tackle the rising issue of rural crime. All new Honda ATV and Pioneer utility machines are now fitted with state-of-the-art tracking equipment free-of-charge.

Customers have the option of adding on Datatool's TQA-approved TrakKING Adventure package, which uses GPS chip set technology to offer theft protection, instant notifications and full journey history logging. The cost to the customer is a nominal monitoring subscription of £9.95 per month or £109 for a year.

A key safety feature in the package is the 'G Sense' impact alert notifications, which use a highly-sensitive 3D accelerometer to detect rollovers or high g-force impacts and alert an emergency contact via SMS. The system also includes location-based alerts, which automatically send a notification when the vehicle leaves a specified area.

HONDA

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If you would like to join a winning team and become a Honda dealer, please contact us at nathan.syme@honda-eu.com Tel: 01344 888525



ENGINEERING FOR *Life*

ALL-NEW RANGER DIESEL ARRIVES IN EUROPE

Polaris offers brand-new diesel engine and updated chassis

Polaris has introduced the all-new Ranger Diesel for 2019, developed specifically for markets in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Debuting in dealerships this spring, the new vehicle introduces a brand-new diesel engine and updated chassis, along with superior levels of comfort, handling and driving capabilities.

Rodrigo Lourenco, Vice President and General Manager of Polaris Off-Road Vehicles EMEA, said of the new model, "It's the result of two years of research and development, fuelled by direct customer feedback and in-depth usage analysis; with a new engine and a new chassis, it is built for hard work."

The new Ranger Diesel features an all-new three-cylinder Kubota diesel engine, delivering 24.8 horsepower

and 40.8 ft lb of torque. Paired with more consistent power and better torque distribution for a smoother ride, the company says the new engine offers a lower cost of ownership due to over 200 hours between service intervals, plus a longer filter life and less oil consumption. It features a top speed of 65kph.

The exterior design boasts an aggressive style with its all-new one-piece chassis. More rugged throughout with reduced flex, the new chassis design is even more robust for an improved ride. Internally, the vehicle has enhanced ergonomics; the wider chassis seats three people with plusher seats, increased storage, and more legroom to get in and out of the vehicle easily. With all improvements being the result of customer usage analysis

and feedback, the vehicle has been developed for less engine noise in-cab and upgraded technology like a new digital gauge for a refined look and feel.

It also features 1,134kg of towing capacity, a 720kg payload capacity and ground clearance of 33cm – a 20% increase from its predecessor.

On-demand all-wheel drive (AWD), is included, meaning all four wheels engage automatically when the vehicle needs more forward traction and reverts back to two-wheel drive when it doesn't. The electric power steering (EPS) lets users ride all day with less fatigue, and Polaris-installed technology like the Engine Braking System (EBS) with Active Descent Control (ADC), controls downhill braking for smooth, controlled descents on steep declines with or without a load.



All new Polaris Ranger Diesel

CAN-AM

BRP ENHANCES 2019 CAN-AM OFF-ROAD LINE-UP

Including five new EC-homologated side-by-side vehicle models



BRP says it has achieved a “critical milestone” with its 2019 line-up of Can-Am ATVs and SSVs.

The company says it has brought its performance, functionality and capability, together with Anti-Lock Brake System (ABS) technology. There are enhancements across the entire 2019 line-up, which now includes a whole range of Can-Am SSV models featuring the ABS technology.

As of 2019, Can-Am Off-Road Vehicles that are equipped with ABS, as per the new European regulation, feature brake and traction control systems.

Steve Pelletier, Vice President and General Regional Manager for the Europe, Middle East and Africa region, said, “We found that in many cases people will circumvent the constraints of the EU regulations on speed or power

limitations, for example by tampering with the vehicle.

That puts people at risk, both in terms of overall safety and legal liability, with their insurance coverage for example.

With ABS we’ve addressed that, with machines meeting all European requirements while maintaining high standards.”


As part of the new line-up, Outlander and Renegade 4x4 ATVs feature a completely new suspension, and a refreshed appearance. Also new is an intelligent Throttle Control system that features selectable riding modes to customise power delivery and throttle response to match rider’s preferences.


Five new EC-homologated side-by-side vehicle models have arrived in Europe. Among them is the new Traxter HD5 as well as the Maverick Trail and Maverick Sport families, which feature four new T-line-up models.

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WORKPLACE REFORMS

THE GOOD WORK PLAN – WHAT DO EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW?



Edited by Adam Bernstein

2019 is likely to be an eventful year for employment law because of the Government's Good Work Plan, writes David Smedley, Head of Employment at Walker Morris LLP.

Heralded as "the biggest package of workplace reforms for over 20 years", it's the culmination of the Taylor Review into working practices. The timetable is not fully laid out but as 2019 progresses more draft legislation will be published. Most of the following will take effect in 2020.

Employment status tests

The Government wants differences between the status tests in employment law and tax law reduced to a minimum. As recent case law has shown, it can be notoriously difficult to determine whether an individual or self-employed contractor is a worker or an employee. This can lead to significant business risk and exposure to claims for back payment of wages.

More predictable contracts after 26 weeks

There will be a right for workers to request a more predictable contract after 26 weeks. It is likely that this will be similar to the current right to request flexible working; this will be clarified in future draft legislation. There is no proposal to ban the use of zero-hours contracts.

Time period required to break continuity of employment

This will be increased from one week to four weeks. Effectively, this could mean that someone

intermittently working for an employer once a month could gain continuous service. Continuous service determines certain rights such as to claim unfair dismissal or a redundancy payment.

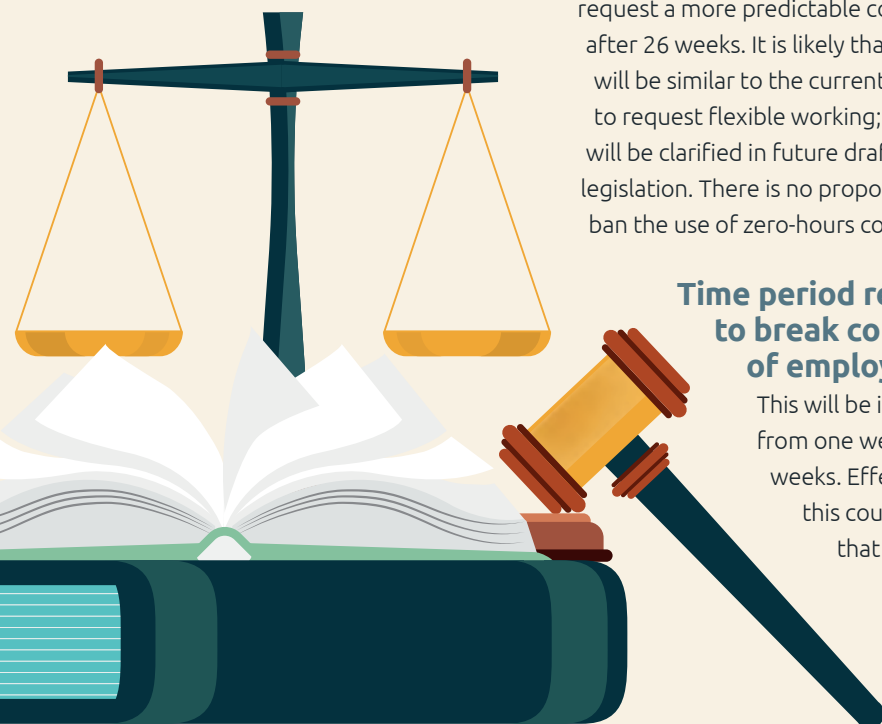
Threshold to request information and consultation arrangements

The Government wishes to encourage higher levels of employee engagement in business. It has issued draft legislation reducing the threshold required to request information and consultation arrangements from 10% to 2% of the workforce from April 2020.

Ending the "Swedish derogation" for Agency workers

The Swedish derogation excludes agency workers from the right to equal pay with permanent employees in the same role if they have an employment contract which guarantees pay between assignments.

The draft Agency Workers (Amendment) Regulations 2019 are due to come into force on 6th April 2020 and will remove this derogation from the Agency Workers Regulations 2010, to give agency workers a right to pay parity with permanent comparable employees after 12 weeks.



The right to a written statement of terms to workers

The Employment Rights (Employment Particulars and Paid Annual Leave) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 are due to come into force on 6th April 2020. This:

- Brings in a right to be provided with a written statement of terms on the first day of employment, rather than within the first two months.
- Adds to the amount of prescribed information which a written statement must contain.
- Amends the Working Time Regulations 1998 to increase the reference period for determining an average week's pay (when calculating statutory holiday pay) from 12 weeks to 52 weeks. This will protect workers with no normal working hours whose pay fluctuates.

In addition, all workers must be provided with an itemised pay statement from April 2019. The Employment Rights Act 1996 (Itemised Pay Statement) (Amendment) Order 2018 will require itemised payslips to contain the number of hours paid for where a worker is paid hourly.

Improved enforcement

The Good Work Plan proposes new measures designed to improve enforcement, including a process for publishing the names of employers who fail to pay tribunal awards on time and an increase (from £5,000 to £20,000) to the financial penalties for employers who commit an "aggravated breach" of employment rights.

What next?

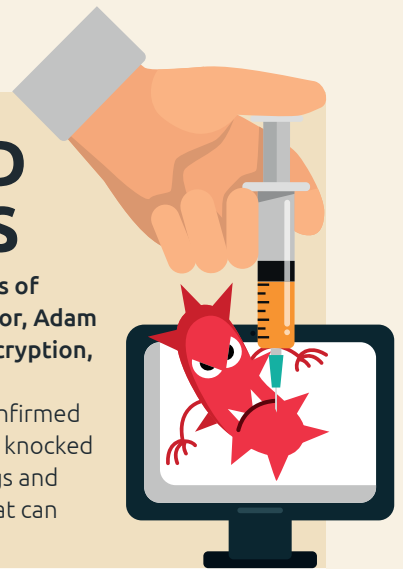
Now is a good time to identify which of the various measures will most impact your business. Firms should plan ahead and carry out preparatory work to enable their businesses to meet any challenges that arise.

ONLINE SAFETY

TAKING A JOB AND AVOIDING A VIRUS

In recent years computer viruses and other forms of attack have wrought havoc, says *SME Digest* Editor, Adam Bernstein. From keyloggers to ransom-based encryption, firms are at risk.

At the end of January (2019) tyre fitter Kwik Fit confirmed that its network had been infected and its systems knocked offline. The company was forced to cancel bookings and customers vented their anger on social media. What can firms do to stay virus-free?



1. Install protection

Some viruses are irritating but others are a serious threat. No form of inoculation can ever be perfect, but installing an anti-virus package is a crucial step to take. Some suppliers charge but free versions are available from the likes of Avast and Microsoft.

2. Update and scan

A computer virus will morph as designers seek to work around the protections that security software puts in place. Regularly scanning a computer or network for downloaded or installed threats is an absolute must. It ought to be done daily, but should be carried out at least once a week. Scans are intensive so should be timed for an off-peak moment.

3. Update the operating system.

Computer systems need regular updating. These systems are hugely complex and are riddled with vulnerabilities; it's the reason why developers perpetually issue software updates and fix security issues. Turn auto update on.

4. The network is at risk

Failing to secure networks can leave online devices permanently under threat. The problem is exacerbated when devices are left with both default names and default passwords as this guides hackers and their attack. The advice is to change the device name and password as soon as it's connected. WiFi, once set up, should not broadcast its existence. This means turning off what is called the SSID. Passwords should be strong – select at the minimum WPA or WPA2 encryption. If visitors are to connect to a network, ensure that you're using a router with a guest network which allows access to the web and nothing else.

5. Strong passwords

Another huge risk is passwords. It is essential that they're never reused. Those that have been compromised will find that other accounts are also at risk. As to how to create a strong password, avoid names, places, pets or dates of birth. Use a long mixture of upper case, lower case, numbers, and symbols. Passwords should be changed frequently and when an employee leaves.

6. Put sites off limits

Staff policies should cover what can and cannot be done online. This means detailing which websites can be visited and that no software is to be downloaded or installed.

7. Be private

Staff should be made aware of 'social engineering' where a plausible caller persuades staff to give away private data. Staff should never give any private information out without being certain of the person or organisation asking. The same applies to social media posts.

8. Staff devices

Threats come from staff connecting devices to the company network or their computer. Thought should be given to limiting access to the firm's Wifi or physical network. The same applies to USB devices – fraudsters have been known to drop an infected USB stick in a car park so that an individual will pick it up and connect it to their computer to see what's on it.

9. Back up

Planning for disaster should be part of regular housekeeping. Backing up data onto several separate devices regularly and keeping them off site at different locations is critical. Consider a combination of methods such as external hard drives, off site computers and cloud storage services; encrypt the devices in case they fall into the wrong hands.

ADDRESSING FAKE ONLINE REVIEWS

It can be difficult for businesses to identify, prevent and respond effectively to fake reviews, writes Gwendoline Davies, Head of Commercial Dispute Resolution at Walker Morris. However, a recent landmark case saw an Italian court sentence a man to prison for 'paid review fraud' (the act of selling fake reviews to businesses). This is the first case of its kind

Effect on the marketplace

Buyers have become increasingly reliant on user-reviews and the weight given to reviews of a business in general when deciding whether to make a purchase is often greater than that of traditional advertising. This trend in buyer behaviour has opened the door for those looking to exploit their popularity by selling favourable reviews.

Further, the marketplace is also increasingly experiencing indirect unscrupulous practices, including sellers offering free goods or refunds in return for positive reviews.

How can UK firms take action?

Broadly there are two practical ways in which firms can deal with fake reviews. Some businesses respond to reviews directly, others hire marketing firms to help them do so. Marketing firms might also respond to reviews and/or they might apply wider strategies for improving a business' image and ratings.

Another important practical tip, especially for smaller firms, is to ensure that customer service is excellent at all times. Dealing positively and effectively with issues or complaints can help to minimise the potential for disgruntled customers airing their grievances online. There are, however, also a number of legal options and grounds under which a firm and/or a consumer may take legal action in respect of fake reviews, depending upon the specific circumstances:



- The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) – a number of unfair commercial practices are excluded under the CPRs, including misleading consumers into buying a product.
- Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 (BPRs) – this legislation includes, among other things, a general prohibition on misleading advertising. False reviews which are made in order to promote the sale of a product could be considered advertising and could therefore fall within the ambit of the BPRs.
- Defamation – although a seller may have no legal recourse against a genuine review which makes it look bad, the tort of defamation can be used to take action against unfounded reviews which damage a business or its reputation.
- Misrepresentation – a misrepresentation is an untrue statement which induces a party to enter into a contract. If when purchasing goods or services a party has relied on a fake review which has been solicited by the seller, then this may be actionable.
- Fraud – where a claimant is able to actually prove the dishonest intentions of the person posting (or, potentially, inciting) the fake review, then it may be able to pursue a charge of fraud by false representation under section 2 of the Fraud Act 2006, which could be pursued by a referral to the police (Action Fraud) or the SFO (if sufficiently serious), or a private prosecution.
- Providing fake reviews can also constitute a criminal offence under various other statutory provisions and can be punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment depending upon how the offence is classified.

SME NEWS

Guidance for businesses

The Office for Product Safety and Standards has published new resources for business regulation. The guidance and tools cover several areas that businesses need to be aware of including product safety and enforcement services. The guidance aims to aid businesses understand the law and ensure compliance in specific areas.

The guidance covers product safety, weights and measures, primary authority, enforcement services, gas and electricity meters, NMO technical services, and UK quality infrastructure. There is also new government guidance on gender pay gap.

Next stage of reform set out for modernisation of tribunals

The Courts and Tribunals Judiciary has published an innovation plan from Sir Ernest Ryder, the Senior President of Tribunals, relating to the report *The Modernisation of Tribunals 2018*. The Innovation Plan for 2019–2020 applies the aims, principles, design concepts and solutions identified in the modernisation report to the tribunal's projects and plans during the next stage of reform. The innovation plan summarises the purpose of these projects and the work that has already been done. The plan covers tribunals that are within the unified structure as well as the employment tribunals in England, Wales and Scotland.

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YOUR MARKETING MONEY PUT TO WORK



Sara Hey, Vice President of Operations and Development at Bob Clements Inc, the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers US dealers with Service Dealer's UK readership every issue. This issue, how better understanding who your customers are will aid your marketing activities

Who is your typical customer? Do you know? Grab a piece of paper and write down the answers to the following questions about your 'typical' customer.

What is their gender? What is their average age? What is their favourite radio station?

Got it? Now, next to that I want you to write your gender, your age and your favourite radio station. Do the two look anything alike? If you are like most owners or managers, your typical customer is simply a reflection of you! The same is true if you were to ask any other employee in your dealership to describe the typical customer; most likely you will get a description of that employee. You might be thinking, "As long as my customer gets great service, what does it matter that we have the correct view of who our typical customer is?"

It does matter! At Bob Clements International we like to measure everything by numbers – so, let's do that.

Our rule of thumb is this:

- 5% of your projected gross revenue should go towards marketing if you have been in business for five years or less.
- 3% of your gross revenue should go towards marketing if you have been in business for five years or more. (It's also important to note, our goal is to get half of the marketing budget co-opped. You should reach out to your manufacturer's rep to find out what is available.)

As an example, if you have been in business for over five years and produced £1,000,000 of gross revenue, you would set aside £30,000 for marketing or roughly what an entry level employee would cost you. Is your marketing producing enough impact to justify it as an employee?

Recently, we visited with a dealer at home in the US who mentioned that he had been doing ads on the local country station. But, upon realising that his typical customer didn't listen to the country station, he changed where he was spending his money and saw a substantial increase in sales.

How do you determine who your typical customer is? Well, it's easier than you think. Next to your point of sale, simply have a sheet where your employees can write down key information such as the customers gender, age (over 40 or under 40) and their favourite radio station. That's it. You might want to ask a few different questions to help narrow in on where you might best market such as, "Do you subscribe/read the local paper?" or "How often do you drive down certain areas of town?" Find out where they spend their time and what they are interested in. Once you understand who your customer is, you can start doing a better job of marketing to them.

Understanding your typical customer gives you confirmation that your marketing budget is going where it should go, but also allows you to serve your customers all the better!

A ROLLERCOASTER TIME OF YEAR

General Manager of Briants of Risborough, Chris Starling, reports on a wildly varying period and considers manufacturers' sales incentives, cordless stocking and cutting waste

As we approach the height of summer, we've found ourselves riding a bit of a rollercoaster, with extreme peaks and troughs in sales and footfall that vary day to day and week to week.

By the mid-season point we're seeing positive results from our marketing and tech projects, but at the same time we're being hampered by consumer buying patterns that possibly coincide with the start-stop process of bungled Brexit decision making. The weather at the point of writing in late May is a significant improvement over 2018, but I say that tentatively as there's still a distinct lack of rain.

Our very lively wrapped van has arrived, so we're delighted to be out on the road in a vehicle more be-fitting of installing high-end robotic mowers and delivering new machinery. Amusing as our drivers would have found it delivering a John Lewis customer's lawn mower on the back of a fencing lorry, we wanted a more professional upmarket look.

Over the last few months we've had mixed success with

manufacturers' marketing strategies and sales incentives. The money-off campaign by a certain large Japanese manufacturer has worked successfully with both petrol and robotic mowers. £400 off a robotic mower, which is rebated in full, is a huge lure to both us and the customer. With a few trade machinery exceptions, we've not had to give away any more discount than that marketed in the campaign, knowing that 50% minimum of that is coming back as a rebate – a very pleasant change.

Other manufacturers have opted to run Sales Team incentives again this year, the success of which is questionable. A few manufacturers opting to do the same now negates any advantage over the other and as a manager its divisive between sales, marketing and technical staff. In our business they all have a part to play in the sale of the machinery.

We're also pondering an interesting conundrum: cordless is still growing, but how far do we look to increase next year's winter stocking and at what cost to its petrol stablemates? Personal opinion is that we're nearing

the tipping point. We're seeing an ever-increasing proportion of cordless going out across all business sectors and with large pro machines on the horizon where do we place our chips?

Cutting waste and its associated costs has moved up the agenda. The plastic waste from the packaging, PDI process and end of life of the machine is becoming more difficult to handle and there's ever more evidence of where it ends up and the ecological damage its inflicting. Out have gone small cartons of oil and in have come 200-litre re-fillable drums. Massive cost saving per litre and zero plastic bottles to contend with – granted we should have done that years ago!

What about all the plastic fitted to machines ready for the scrap heap? A few of us sit pondering what the company, network and manufacturers could be doing to promote recycling of its own waste. Maybe worth sparing a few minutes to Google the work of Tom Szaky, owner of Terracycle, for some inspired ideas!

Until next time.



Chris Starling, General Manager of Briants of Risborough, with Rebecca Briant, Managing Director



Briants' lively new van

PRODUCTS

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DOMESTIC

BLUETOOTH CONNECTIVITY FOR NEW HUSQVARNA

Battery walk-behind offers 70min runtime

Husqvarna extends its range of cordless lawnmowers with the LC 353iVX, a new battery walk-behind designed for demanding domestic use in medium to larger lawns.

The mower is equipped with Husqvarna Connect (which offers Bluetooth connectivity to a smart phone), variable speed self-drive, a 53cm composite cutting deck and dual battery slots. Powered by high efficiency brushless motors, the company says the mower is quiet and without direct emissions.

Due to its Bluetooth connectivity, the LC 353iVX can be paired with Husqvarna Connect, allowing users to get information and tips on maintenance and troubleshooting as well as finding guides and manuals. Furthermore, with the



Husqvarna LC 353iVX

mobile app, it is possible to see battery status. The app also allows direct contact to a local Authorised Husqvarna dealer.

With a runtime of up to 70 minutes coupled with a lightweight 53cm composite cutting deck, the company says the unit is designed for medium to larger sized domestic gardens. The product features variable speed digital drive allowing the ground speed of the machine to be adjusted to suit the walking speed of the user. For increased safety, it has a transport mode which stops the blade from turning and leaves the engine running, enabling off-turf traversing and convenient stop-and-go operation.

The mower has dual battery slots with a feature that automatically switches battery if one of them is out of power, letting the user continue mowing without having to stop to switch batteries. It can be used with a single battery or a combination of the BLi integrated batteries.

The company uses a compatible battery system which means it's possible to use the same batteries for all Husqvarna battery powered products of the same voltage, such as lawnmowers, chainsaws, trimmers or blowers.

COMMERCIAL



TS Industrie Panther 56DS shredder

TS INDUSTRIES WALKS LIKE A PANTHER

56DS shredder offers more efficiency in green waste shredding

TS Industrie has extended its current range of Green Series Shredders with the new Panther 56DS shredder, which it says offers more efficiency in green waste shredding.

The new machine positions itself between the GS/Jaguar45DS and GS/Cobra 75DS, and is suited to the needs and requirements of communities or landscape companies. The GS/Panther allows the reduction of waste volume up to seven times compared to a conventional chipper.

Equipped with a Kohler 56hp diesel stage 5 engine with particulate filter, combined with a power mixed rotor, a large hopper for team work and a 500mm feed belt to optimise its performance, the company says the Panther 56DS achieves an average yield of 36m³/h, with a material diameter of up to 19cm.

It also plays its part in the comfort of its users and the environment, says TS Industrie, with its DRI Soundproof Cowling, its CO₂ reduction option, its parallelogram drawbar adjustable by a simple crank and its computerised pilot control system – Swing.

AGRICULTURAL

PRESSES AND PACKERS ADDED TO KVERNELAND RANGE

Additional options offered



Kverneland packer

Kverneland says options for consolidation have become wider after an extensive portfolio of additional packer and press options have joined its range.

In addition to the plough-based Packomat system, the expanded range now includes single and double packers up to 4.35m wide, plus single packers in combination with turn-around crumbler packers from 2.1 to 3.7m wide. A range of front-mounted 3m, 4m, 4.5m and 6m packers are also available.

Press rings can be 700mm or 900mm diameter, with a range of shoulder profiles offering 38-degree, 45-degree and 50-degree angles to suit a wide variety of soil types. Options include 20mm harrow tines, soil knives and lighting kits.

Rear packer linkages can be folded for transport, enabling them to be moved via a tractor three-point linkage.

Prices start from £6,827 for a 3m front packer.

DOMESTIC

ECHO'S ELECTRIC TRIM

58V battery hedge-trimmer launched



Echo electric hedgetrimmer

Echo claims its new HT-58V2AH offers petrol performance from a battery-powered hedgetrimmer.

The company says the 58V unit has the same professional build quality as its petrol models and the power the lithium-ion battery-powered motor produces is equal to a petrol model's output.

The hedgetrimmer is lightweight, has a runtime of 90 minutes and comes with a quick charger to help reduce down time. The standard 2Ah battery is fully charged in 30 minutes and the battery powers a brushless electric motor. The machine features an ergonomic front handle for greater manoeuvrability and user comfort, with low vibrations.

Echo says the 610mm double-reciprocating, precision-cut blades offer a cleaner cut, regardless of the angle, and are self-sharpening due to the action of the double-sided cutting teeth. Anti-jam technology ensures continuous cutting. The extended reach of the blades reduces user effort and the need for frequent repositioning.

The unit is part of the new 58V range which also comprises a lawnmower, chainsaw, power blower and trimmer, with two battery types: 2Ah or 4Ah for greater runtime. The hedgetrimmer uses an interchangeable lithium-ion battery system which enables one battery to fit multiple tools.

Echo offers a one-year professional use or two-year domestic warranty on the hedgetrimmer and the batteries themselves have a two-year warranty.

KUHN TAKES IT TO THE MAXX

New belt merger grass windrower

Aimed at large-scale grassland farms and contractors, the Merge Maxx 950 from Kuhn uses two adjustable, variable width and bi-directional merger belts to give a maximum grass pick-up width of 9.50 metres in a single pass.

The bi-directional design of the twin belts provides multiple windrow delivery options: forage can be delivered into a single central windrow, a single lateral windrow (left or right side), two lateral windrows (one either side) or a central and left or right lateral windrow. With this degree of versatility, the company says the machine can collect up to 18 metres into a single windrow from two passes, or – in light crop situations such as a multi-cut silage system – collect up to 27 metres of grass into one windrow from three passes.

Pick-up and windrow width can be adjusted to suit the quantity and type of forage material being harvested, thus enabling the number of passes and associated costs to be reduced. For lateral windrows, the windrow width

can be varied between 1.00 and 1.50m. For central windrows, the windrow can be up to 2.20m in width.

Auto-regulating rollers at the front and side of the pick-up unit self-adjust their position according to crop thickness. These in turn pass a consistent and constant supply of forage to the merger belts, thus enabling the Merge Maxx to produce a uniform, airy and faster-drying windrow which makes it easier for the subsequent baler or chopper to collect large volumes of grass: for forage harvesters this can equate to a 2-3km/h increase in forward operating speed.

As with any rake, says Kuhn, clean grass pick-up and the ability to produce a swathe which is free of stones, soil or other impurities, is reliant on the ability to follow ground contours accurately. On the new unit, this is controlled by three key design elements: articulated pick-up skids, powerful lift-control springs, and pivot points that provide vertical and angled ground clearance.



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COMMERCIAL/DOMESTIC

SPRAYER SHOWS GREEN CREDENTIALS

Acuspray from Techneat controlled by unique wheel-driven pump

As part of a drive towards developing environmentally-friendly and sustainable products, Cambridgeshire-based manufacturer Techneat Engineering offers the Acuspray, a pedestrian sprayer aimed at the professional grounds-person and keen gardener.

"It's a major step forward in design technology and one we're justifiably proud of," said Techneat's Technical Support Manager James English.

"There's no battery or engine, so the application rate is controlled by a unique wheel-driven pump that remains consistent throughout the day and produces zero carbon emissions. The machine's plastic construction makes it lightweight, durable and completely recyclable."

For operator comfort, says Techneat, the Acuspray is an extremely quiet machine with very low decibel noise emissions. Its lightweight construction means it is also very easy to push. Output varies according to forward speed, ensuring the correct application rate is always achieved. Its tank enables it to cover up to 625m² before refilling is required.



Techneat Acuspray

DOMESTIC

WEBB TO BRING LIFE TO THE WORST LAWNS

New petrol scarifier launched



Handy Distribution have announced the arrival of its new Webb 40cm Petrol Lawn Scarifier model. Powered by a high-capacity 212cc air-cooled four-stroke engine, the unit boasts a 45-litre thatch catcher to ensure the garden is left neat and debris free.

The WELS40P is a 2-in-1 machine. It comes with a fully adjustable 18-bladed aeration reel and a sprung claw scarifying reel for demanding dethatching chores. Managing Director Steve Bartlett said, "We truly believe this new model will provide customers with a superb performance and take any hassle away from this very demanding chore. The New Webb Lawn Scarifier will bring back to life even the worst of unkept lawns."

EVENTS 2019

JULY 2019

- 2-7 **Hampton Court Garden Festival**
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-garden-festival
- 5-7 **Kent County Show**
<http://kentshowground.co.uk>
- 6 **Monmouthshire Show**
www.monmouthshow.co.uk
- 9-11 **Great Yorkshire Show**
www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk
- 13 **Newport Show**
<http://newportshow.co.uk/>
- 17-21 **RHS Flower Show – Tatton Park**
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park
- 22-25 **Royal Welsh Show**
www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh-show/
- 26-27 **Border Union Show**
<http://www.buas.org/>
- 26-28 **The Game Fair, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire**
www.thegamefair.org
- 27 **Mid Devon Show**
www.middevonshow.co.uk
- 30-1/08 **New Forest & Hampshire County Show**
www.newforestshow.co.uk

AUGUST 2019

- 1 **Honiton Agricultural Show**
www.honitonshow.co.uk
- 1-4 **Countryfile Live, Blenheim Palace**
www.countryfilelive.com
- 3 **Garstang Show**
www.garstangshow.org
- 3 **Emley Show**
www.emleyshow.co.uk
- 3 **Dumfries Agricultural Show**
www.dumfriesshow.co.uk
- 7 **North Devon Show**
www.northdevonshow.com
- 9-10 **Shrewsbury Flower Show**
www.shrewsburyflowershow.org.uk
- 11 **Ripley Show**
www.ripleyshow.co.uk
- 13-15 **Pembrokeshire County Show**
www.pembsshow.org
- 14 **Gillingham & Shaftesbury Show**
www.gillshaftshow.co.uk
- 15-18 **Countryfile Live, Castle Howard**
www.countryfilelive.com

SEPTEMBER 2019

- 1-3 **spoga-gafa 2019, Cologne**
www.spogagafa.com
- 1-4 **Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC**
www.autumnfair.com
- 7 **Alresford Show**
www.alresfordshow.co.uk
- 7-8 **Dorset County Show**
www.dorsetcountysshow.co.uk
- 14 **Usk Show**
www.uskshow.co.uk
- 10-12 **Glee 2019**
www.gleebirmingham.com
- 10-12 **Salon du Végétal, Nantes, France**
www.salonduvegetal.com/pro/en/

OCTOBER 2019

- 2 **The Dairy Show, Bath and West Showground**
www.bathandwest.com/the-dairy-show
- 16-18 **Green Industry & Equipment Expo, Louisville, USA**
<http://gie-expo.com>
- 19-20 **Countryside Live, Harrogate**
www.countrysidelive.co.uk
- 30-31 **IOG Saltex 2019, Birmingham NEC**
www.iogsaltex.com

NOVEMBER 2019

- 10-16 **Agritechnica, Hanover, Germany**
www.agritechnica.com/en/
- 21 **Service Dealer Conference & Awards**
www.servicedealer.co.uk
- 27-28 **CropTec 2019, East of England Showground**
www.croptecshow.com



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EXTINCTION 'MOTORIST'?

Not if business opportunities are reassessed



It's been on the horizon for years: a perfect storm that could see the end of garden machinery specialists – as we know them. You don't need me to tick off the contributing elements. First, the big-box stores, technology in transition, the internet (of course), smaller gardens, environmental concerns, regulations, young consumers with different priorities, the demise of servicing, pressures on the household purse, advances in the artificial grass market... the list could go on.

Garden machinery dealers (I wish we could wrap them into a single word such as '*motorists*', as in Germany) are a loose collection of scattered and unconnected businesses.

I've long thought it strange that nobody from the franchise sector looked at selling and servicing garden machinery as a business opportunity, providing the business support and marketing clout to create a national network of specialist outlets under a single recognisable name and logo.

That would still provide independence for new entrepreneurs whilst potentially creating a national brand.

It has certainly worked in the parallel business of lawncare with national franchises such Trugreen, GreenThumb and others.

Perhaps it's because those in the franchise industry looked at the current business model and concluded that it was too risky – or too difficult.

So are we in 'doomed Captain Mainwaring' territory? Am I being unduly pessimistic?

Possibly, but for every set of challenges and threats there are opportunities to respond positively. We Brits love our lawns, but the days of finely-manicured swards created by the cylinder mower are long over. I recently saw a huge pile of unwanted cylinder mowers at a warehouse owned by Brian Radam, curator of the British Lawnmower Museum. Many of them had been donated by people who could not bear to simply scrap wonderfully engineered machines, mostly made by the UK's heritage mower makers.

ANSWERS

We're now in a different era, facing a different clientele with different means of purchasing equipment.

The rise and rise of the robotic mower market, rather than creating a threat, has provided new opportunities for those dealers willing to embrace the new technology with support for consumers who are excited by the product, but naturally cautious about how to install and operate.

What is clear, from the ongoing clear-out of the store chains on the High Street, is that it's providing opportunities (that word again) for small, independent, flexible businesses to flourish (not that the garden machinery community ever populated the High Street).

But maybe dealers will have to re-think their 'modus operandi'. I've long held the view that they should be marketed as Lawncare Centres, rather than as garden machinery dealers, and be able to provide the answers and solutions to people who want to make the most of their outside space.

Could that mean providing artificial grass as an option. If it makes money, why not? Lawncare services? Many dealers dabble in hire, why not with an operator?

Over the years, many consumers have been completely ignorant of the fact that specialist garden machinery dealers even existed, because of fragmentation and lack of national identity.

But the market is there. Fads and competitors will come and go, but history, traditions and a demand for service (in its broadest term) will remain.

Sometimes we have to step back, reassess and regroup in order to move forward, and that time is surely upon us.

JIM GREEN



SPREADING THE WORD

THE GREATEST VIRAL MARKETING

Word of mouth from satisfied customers is invaluable



You may remember that in the last issue I was discussing how bad customer service is rare in this industry, and when it does occur, stands out like a sore thumb.

Well, it prompted some readers to get in touch with the editor of this esteemed journal to point out that when you do spend your working day doing the right thing, like the vast majority of dealers in this

country, there are customers out there who genuinely appreciate your efforts.

One email, received from a dealer chap, detailed an example of one of their satisfied customers. This unsolicited response from a customer talked of entering their store to buy a chainsaw and the service received from two members of staff.

The customer talked about knowing very little about anything and how the dealer went through the range of chainsaws, indicating their pros and cons. He explained how the dealer wasn't pushy and offered to leave him to think about it, resulting in him buying a new STIHL chainsaw – with guidance then given on how to sharpen and care for its chain and bar.

A different member of staff then took the customer outside and showed him the correct way to use and care for his chainsaw.

The customer finished off his message saying, "I know these are only a few lines and it doesn't portray the whole event, but I would like you to know that I have not been dealt with so politely or professionally for many years. These two men are a credit to your company, and I am so pleased to see that this good, polite service still exists out there.

"I have already spoken amongst my friends as to how

impressed I was. It is word of mouth that brought me to you, and I shall spread that word further. Please forward my thanks to your staff and long may your ethics continue."

We here at Service Dealer Towers know from collating customer feedback comments during the running of the Dealer Of The Year awards, that customers around the country are receiving care and attention such as this from independent dealers all the time. It's heartening to read. And whilst if old chaps like me did our jobs solely for the praise and adulation, well, we'd be waiting around until Godot arrived. However, it is undeniable that hearing feedback like that is gratifying and gives you encouragement to keep going.

I think one of the most telling comments from that satisfied customer is: "It is word of mouth that brought me to you, and I shall spread that word further." That is such a valuable tool for independent, specialist retailers. Treating every customer to the highest level of service will go a long way to making sure this form of viral marketing is always bubbling along in the background for your business.

The next step, of course, is doing all that you can to guarantee that the customer will return to your store again and again. Interestingly, I read a great blog post on this very subject just recently from Bob Clements, big cheese at Bob Clements International, the Missouri-based dealer development specialist – who will be speaking at this November's *Service Dealer Conference*

In a brief blog entry called *Building Long-Term Relationships* (tinyurl.com/yypzqafa) Bob explains that successful salespeople understand that the only way to consistently generate orders and increase business is through customer loyalty. This loyalty, he says, is built by continuing to monitor and cultivate the customer's satisfaction.

He then goes through a series of procedures which he believes will aid dealers in this quest.

If you've got five minutes, give it a read. You might pick up a practical hint you hadn't considered before.

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