

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

January/February 2024

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



THE NIGHT THE INDUSTRY CELEBRATES TOGETHER

Our coveted Dealer of the Year awards were presented at a joyous ceremony following the latest *Service Dealer* Conference

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Expert advice for dealers

AN EXPECTATION OF GREAT SERVICE

We hear from top turf professionals

SALTEX '23 REPORT

Batteries and robots take centre stage



A RETURN TO NORMALITY?

Back in its regular slot, the Hanover show saw a strong contingent of UK manufacturers and dealers.

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Letter from the editor **Steve Gibbs**

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Welcome to the January/February 2024 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

Within these pages, you will find plenty of coverage of *Service Dealer's* Conference & Awards that took place at the end of November. It was the first edition in the new confines of the Stratford-upon-Avon Crowne Plaza – and I think it's fair to say that, on this occasion, bigger was most certainly better.

The new venue enhanced what has grown into a must-attend event for many dealers, who this time around were treated to a series of expert speakers addressing the subject of 'Taking Care of Business.' You can read my colleague Martin Rickatson's report of the day starting on page 20 – but what struck me as common across all the content was the notion of purpose within business. Of course, profitability is essential and, indeed, fundamental for any dealership, but, alongside this, striving for purposeful enterprise – be that in sustainability, looking after the mental wellbeing of employees, or enhancing the experience of customers – is an endeavour that increasing numbers of progressive

dealerships are looking to achieve.

Also this issue: we celebrate the companies and individuals who took away honours at the Dealer of the Year Awards on the night. A joyous ceremony (and long night in the bar afterwards!), it is genuinely such a pleasure for us here at *Service Dealer* to applaud and highlight such incredible entrepreneurship that's taking place across the network – it's something we'll never tire of, nor make apologies for.

Elsewhere in the mag this issue: we say goodbye and huge thanks to Jason Nettle of Winchester Garden Machinery for providing us with his forthright opinions last year in our *Diary of a Season* column – and welcome for 2024 Joanne Balmer, from Balmers GM, who will be sharing with us her thoughts and experience as we negotiate the next 12 months. We also warmly welcome industry legend Keith Christian, who will be contributing articles on a variety of subjects that his lifetime of industry experience will feed into. Keith starts by giving us his take on the most recent SALTEX exhibition, and his ideas on where the industry show scene might be heading.

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INDUSTRY

AriensCo cease UK production

Change to a sales and service model

AriensCo have ceased production at the Great Haseley factory in Oxfordshire.

Following a notification sent out informing their dealer network of the change, Service Dealer reached out to AriensCo for a statement to clarify the situation. They confirmed: "Ariens Company has decided to transform its UK business operation from a production facility to a sales and service model with domestic distribution.

"In the future, the UK site will act as a sales and service location for the local market, in order to be able to support dealers and customers even better. AriensCo's foremost commitment lies in nurturing and enhancing its longstanding partnerships in the region."

The official statement continued: "The products of the Ariens brand are manufactured at the world-class production sites in the USA, and delivered from there to the worldwide markets. This allows importers, dealers and customers to benefit from the high-quality and technology standards of the zero-turn production there. The

individual requirements of the local markets continue to be perceived and ensured by the European product management and marketing team.

"The production of Countax and Westwood garden tractors will be discontinued by the end of 2023. However, AriensCo remain committed to supporting these brands through the provision of spare parts, accessories and technical support."

In terms of redundancies at Great Haseley, the statement said: "In the course of the realignment, all staff were strongly involved and all measures were implemented fairly, respectfully and amicably. Of course, the departing employees were also supported in their search for new jobs."

The statement concludes: "AriensCo strongly believes in the future of its zero-turn mowers, snowblowers and the products of the AS-Motor brand. Therefore, the strategy of the Ariens Company is now clearly focused in growing these segments."

In a follow-up statement regarding the Countax and Westwood brands specifically, the company said: "We are aware of the outstanding history and

role that the Countax and Westwood brands have played, particularly for the British market.

"Nevertheless, there are currently no plans to apply these brands to Ariens and AS-Motor products."

Recent history

It was back in September 2019 that AriensCo made a major announcement that production of Ariens brand zero-turn mowers would commence at the Great Haseley facility. At the time, the company reported seeing "an exceptional growth in demand for zero-turn mowers in the UK and Europe."

Darren Spencer, AriensCo's vice president for EMEA and Asia, said in 2019: "Sales of zero-turns in Europe have experienced exceptional growth over the past three years.

"AriensCo have experienced this growth in numerous markets and, based upon extensive research with our distribution partners, we expect the growth to continue. This industry analysis points to the many opportunities to be met by producing zero-turns at our Great Haseley plant."



DEALERS

Crawfords adjusts branch network

Depot closures and new openings announced

Following their acquisition of Agwood Ltd last year, the Crawfords Group has announced some adjustments to their branch network.

The dealer group represents the three AGCO brands from six branches in southern England. In a statement to customers, the group said: "Our intention is to simplify our branch structure [and] enhance our franchise offering – all whilst improving our service and parts coverage and, in turn, improving your customer experience with us even further."

Following discussions with AGCO, and in line with their global 'Route 66' strategic plan, Crawfords have announced the following changes:

AGWOOD LTD

The landlord from the Linton Branch has notified the Crawford Group of their intention to develop the site for residential housing. Consequently, Crawfords say they will need to take the following steps:

- **The Linton Branch** will close by March 1, 2024.
- **Swingfield Branch** will become their Massey Ferguson head office for Agwood Ltd, while being responsible for sales of all Massey Ferguson equipment for Kent and East Sussex.
- Their existing Massey Ferguson technicians and parts department team members from Linton will support the Swingfield HQ Team, while being based at RW Crawford's site in Charing.

RW CRAWFORD LTD

- **The Charing branch** will become head office for the Fendt and Valtra business (RW Crawford Ltd) and the wider Crawfords Group.
- The addition of a Group Parts Delivery Service to support customers in Kent and East Sussex will commence from early 2024.
- **Billingshurst** – There are now also plans by the landlord at their Billingshurst branch in West Sussex to develop the site. Crawfords say this comes at a time where, due to the success of this branch, they have started the search for a new, larger location to the east of Billingshurst in readiness for opening in 2025. Until this time, they will continue to promote and support Fendt, Valtra, Massey Ferguson, Manitou & Isuzu from Billingshurst. *Other branches remain unchanged.*



Hayes Machinery owner, James Hayes

Hayes Machinery closes

Shut doors just before Christmas

Hayes Machinery, based in South Molton, North Devon, closed their doors for the final time on December 22, 2023.

In a statement posted to their website, the dealership said the decision to cease trading was made “due to continued market pressures and a change in business direction away from the retail and service of new equipment.”

Addressing customers, the statement said: “If you currently have an order with us or a machine in for repair/service, please don’t panic, we have NOT gone bankrupt or insolvent. We will be in contact to either fulfil your order, complete your repair, or if you so wish, you may cancel.”

Hayes went on to confirm that ABA Groundcare, who are based in Tiverton, are taking over their servicing and repairs going forward. They will also be taking over Hayes’s phone numbers, website and Facebook page.

The statement also thanked customers for their business and support - as well as thanking team members. It reads: “Whether current or past members, they have been the backbone of the company, and we take great pride in having had them as part of our extended family. New positions and opportunities have been offered or are being sorted for them all. We would never leave a member of our team stranded.”

The statement also confirmed: “Just for the record of the rumour mill, all our suppliers have been informed and are paid up to date.”

Service Dealer spoke to owner James Hayes, who confirmed that, whilst the dealership was closing, he and his team are continuing with their Machinery Nation social media enterprise. “We have bought a new property where we will be based, that has lots of space for filming,” James told us. “We will be upping our content in 2024, and look forward to producing videos with manufacturers both established and new to us.”



Les Gammie

Gammies added to Polaris network

Supplying full lineup

Polaris Off-Road has welcomed Gammies Groundcare to its UK dealer network.

Founded in 1968 and based in Forfar, Scotland, Gammies provides its products and services in the surrounding 50-mile radius, including across Angus, Fife, and Aberdeenshire.

Les Gammie, branch manager, said: “Polaris provides such a great depth of vehicle range which our customers are looking for. The product development and innovation is incredible – it is something we feel our customers would benefit from. We really like the way that Polaris vehicles can be customised with the hundreds of accessories they offer.”

Gammies Groundcare will offer the full Polaris lineup, and will provide servicing, repair and maintenance.



Peter Massey and the team collect their award

Masseys scoop top local business award

Named ‘Business of the Year’

Swadlincote-based dealership Masseys Home and Garden Store recently scooped the top award of Business of the Year at the East Staffordshire and South Derbyshire Awards dinner.

The company was classed as a medium-sized business (with between 20 and 100 employees), and the winners of all seven categories were rejudged to come to the final decision of overall Business of the Year. Masseys were judged on their history, vision, management, financial performance, customer service, and as an employer. The judges were complimentary about the dealership in all departments.

Director Peter Massey said: “When I walked into work the next morning, all my work colleagues were paying me the compliments. I had to point out it was as much about what they do, and how they look after our customers, keep the store full and tidy, and how they work with our suppliers as it is about the directors and managers.”

Peter continued: “It’s also an award

almost 80 years in the making. My grandfather started the store from a terraced shop. Over the years, each generation of staff have pushed the company forward, increasing stock ranges, delivering excellent customer service. We as a company have moved premises twice, always staying on the same road, keeping that vital link to the local community as well as attracting customers from all over the Midlands.

“We have created the need for expansion by gradually increasing our customer offering, rather than taking the ‘build it and they will come’ attitude of the large chains across all retail, then wondering why they sometimes fail and close, having no link or history with the local community. We are proud of our South Derbyshire heritage, and support several local charities.”

Peter concluded: “The award is a huge moral boost for the whole company, and a nod to our excellent suppliers. It’s also a boost for Swadlincote and retail in general at a time when the press is full of depression for the high street.”

INDUSTRY

New importer for Lovol equipment

Severn Farm Machinery take on role



Severn Farm Machinery Ltd, based in Pontesbury – near Shrewsbury – have announced that they have become the UK importer for Lovol machinery, which encompasses the full range of tractors as well as mini excavators.

Chris Willner, director at Severn Farm Machinery, explained: “The tractors range from 25HP up to 130HP. We have units in stock, and also demo units available. We keep a large parts inventory, and can supply a full range of implements.”

Chris went on to say that UK franchise opportunities are now available for the tractor and mini excavator range.

Lovol will be exhibiting at Lamma 2024, showcasing a range of tractors in varied specifications, and Severn Farm Machinery will be there to speak to visitors.



INDUSTRY

Boss Powerland

Boss ORV appointed distributors for Powerland

Manufacturer of the Tachyon fully electric ATV

Boss ORV have been appointed sole UK distributors for Powerland Agro Tractor Vehicles Pvt. Limited.

Powerland is the company behind the development and manufacturer of the Tachyon fully electric ATV in Goa, India.

BOSS ORV Managing Director Phil Everett said: "I have known Tej Naik and his family for many years, and we have been in constant communication over this time. We have watched with great excitement how the business and products have developed. The factory in Goa has become a fully independent facility, manufacturing the complete vehicles in-house, including their own chassis."

"We took the opportunity to visit their stand at the EICMA event in Milan and seal the deal with a long-term distribution contract. The Tachyon is now the complete fully electric (Li-ion) ATV, which is road-legal with tractor homologation, and the time is right to launch it into our market."

The Naik family say they had, for a long time, harboured the ambition to produce their own automotive vehicles, and decided to manufacture ATVs locally to cut down on costs and make the product affordable for Indian customers. Today, the company is rapidly growing with the production of the Tachyon, which

is now being exported to South America and the USA.

Tej Naik said: "We're excited to have Phil Everett and Boss ORV as our exclusive partner for the UK. Phil, with his expertise in the ATV/UTV business for more than 25 years, will definitely help us in scaling up the business and making better products to satisfy the requirements of customers in the offroad market."

Powerland say they expect to increase their team size to 500 employees in the next three years. The Tachyon will be exhibited for the first time in the UK at the Lamma Show 2024 on stand number 6.924.

Agriscope has territory extended

Following changes to Merlo's network



L-R: Simon Walkinshaw, sales representative, Agriscope Ltd; Craig Parkes, regional sales manager, Merlo UK Ltd; Marc Shaw, service director, Agriscope Ltd

Established Merlo dealer Agriscope have been awarded an increased territory by the manufacturer, following recent changes to the dealer network.

"Following the retirement earlier in 2023 of the long-standing Merlo dealer for Yorkshire, we took steps to ensure support was in place for existing and new Merlo customers in Yorkshire," said Owen Buttle, national sales manager of Merlo UK Ltd.

One of those steps was to increase the territory covered by Agriscope. "This increase in responsibility sees the dealer now covering a territory that extends north to York, with the A1 to the west, and Market Weighton in the east," explained Owen.

Marc Shaw, Agriscope service director, added: "We have built an experienced team of staff over the years, and, with well-equipped service vans and extensive parts stocks at both Doncaster and Louth premises, we are well placed to back up new and existing Merlo customers with a timely, efficient service."



INDUSTRY

Cramer moves from Handy

Globe Technologies takes over brand in UK

The Cramer brand of professional battery-powered tools is set to no longer be distributed by Handy in the UK.

In a statement, Handy said that "substantial investments" are set to be made in the brand by its parent company, Globe Technologies, who, they say, will now take the brand "to the next stage".

Mark Moseley, Handy sales and marketing director, said: "We enjoy an excellent working relationship with Globe Technologies, which began - and continues - with the Greenworks brand, and has seen us effectively pave the way for the Cramer brand in the UK."

"The future of commercial landscaping equipment lies in lithium-ion technology, but the levels of long-term investment required to grow and service such a large and aggressive market and growth ambitions needs a greater and direct commercial focus. With Handy's core market being consumer gardening machinery, we have decided the time is now right for Handy to pass the Cramer baton to Globe, who are now in a position to make a significant investment in the UK operations, including establishing their own operating company and distribution hub."

The Globe group recently floated on the Shenzhen stock exchange, which has enabled them to fund the future expansion of the company worldwide. The company has confirmed they will be making substantial investments in Cramer across Europe, with a particular focus on the UK. This funding, they say, will not only result in further new technologies and products, including battery ride-on mowers, UTVs, robotics, and 82V handheld products, but will also enable Globe to establish comprehensive sales and distribution support.

New premises to house distribution, aftersales, spare parts, finance, and customer services are in the process of being acquired, and personnel recruited and trained.

For existing UK dealers of the Cramer brand, the transition from Handy to Globe Technologies UK Ltd is expected to take place in early-2024. Handy and Globe Technologies say they will work together closely to ensure a smooth transition, and Handy will continue to manage and support the Cramer business until that transition is completed. Globe Technologies say they will honour the same commercial terms that are currently in place with Handy.

This latest development will not affect the Greenworks brand of battery-powered garden machinery and power tools, which Handy will continue to distribute, along with its other brands, Webb, The Handy and Q Garden.



EVENTS

GroundsFest reveal changes for 2024

And confirm this year's date

The organisers of the new GroundsFest trade show have confirmed that the date for 2024's edition will be slightly earlier than in 2023, with the event scheduled to take place at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, on September 10 and 11.

Building on the feedback received from the first edition, the organisers have also said they are working to implement improvements to the show. One of the significant changes is the introduction of what they describe as a "more free-flowing layout." They say the addition of a new entrance is intended to reduce the walk to the event.

The camping zone is set to see new facilities, and the festival area is also in for a makeover, with plans underway to introduce new attractions.

Organisers have also said that they have seen an over 90% rebooking rate from exhibitors – and, according to the post-show exhibitor survey, 93% of exhibitors generated new sales leads.

The marketing director of the show, Chris Bennett, said: "The only way to evolve GroundsFest is by listening to the industry. This commitment to responsiveness and adaptability ensures that each edition of GroundsFest is a reflection of the evolving needs and desires of the landscaping and grounds management community."

DEALERS

Claas name their top dealers

Gordons and Rickerby honoured

It was a clean sweep for two family-owned Claas UK dealers in the north of England and Scotland in the manufacturer's recent Dealer Awards, with Gordons being awarded the overall 'Dealer of the Year' award for 2023, while the 'Dealer Excellence Award - Gold' for 2023 was awarded to Rickerby.

The company's 'Dealer of the Year' award recognises the high overall level of performance by a Claas dealer in the UK and Ireland in three key areas: finance, dealer performance and customer feedback.

The award was described as a major achievement for Gordons, who were established in 1865 and are based at Castle Douglas in Dumfries and Galloway, with five branches covering the southwest of Scotland. The award assesses not only the dealership's overall performance, but the performance of each of its individual branches. The award also reflects the results of the annual Customer Feedback



Ken Conley of Rickerby (left) and Neil Montgomery of Gordons (right) were presented with their Dealer Awards by Trevor Tyrrell, senior vice president (Western Europe and Oceania) and Claas UK CEO

Survey, with the manufacturer saying Gordons scored very well in this category, underlining their commitment to their customer base and the first-class customer care service they provide.

The 'Dealer Excellence Award – Gold,' meanwhile, recognises the high level of service and support that Rickerby offer their customers, and is another great achievement for the manufacturer's largest UK dealer. With nine branches, Rickerby serve an area from Lancashire and Northumberland up to the Firth of Forth in Scotland.

The announcement and presentation of the awards to Neil Montgomery of Gordons and Ken Conley of Rickerby were made at the manufacturer's Dealer Council meeting, held recently at their UK headquarters at Saxham, Suffolk.

INDUSTRY

John Deere enrolls 86 new apprentices

In agriculture, parts and turf

An induction ceremony held at John Deere's UK headquarters recently marked the start of the journey to becoming qualified technicians for 86 young apprentices.

Since its inception, the company's programme has started the careers of more than 1,200 young people, setting them on a course to grow their experience and expertise across the dealership network and the John Deere brand.

The 2023 intake will complete their apprenticeships - provided by ProVQ - in either ag tech, parts tech or turf tech. The latest cohort also includes those working for the Wirtgen Group, which is the John Deere-owned business specialising in road construction machinery, and learners from John Deere's forestry division.

Arthur Haynes is one of the apprentices who has joined the programme. The 16-year-old works at Masons Kings' Exbridge outlet in Devon, and was inspired to pursue work in agriculture after moving to the county from the Midlands.

"When we moved to a house which also had horse stabling, there was a lot of equipment around, such as tractors, which has always interested me," Arthur said.

He found out about the apprenticeship programme after seeing a Facebook post from Masons Kings, and began working with the dealer.

"I'm working on foragers, attending call-outs to service and maintain maize headers, as well as carrying out pre-delivery inspections on machines. It's absolutely brilliant – really interesting to learn about this kit which

is changing all the time. I can't wait for the rest of the apprenticeship programme. It looks great."

Another 16-year-old just embarking on the ag tech apprenticeship programme is Savannah Brown. Savannah is not from a farming background, but says that this is not a barrier for her.

"Where I come from in the Scottish Borders, I socialise a lot with farmers and countryside people," she said. "I was going to train to become a farrier, but then I had some work experience at a Thomas Sherriff outlet and realised I wanted to work with engines and technology."

"The apprenticeship looks like a brilliant opportunity – a good mix of practical and classroom learning at the

training centre when we're away. I'm looking forward to the challenge."

John Deere branch training manager Allan Cochran said: "In the three decades our esteemed apprenticeship has run, we have produced many cohorts of talented individuals who have gone on to have exciting careers across the John Deere dealership network."

"Our aim with the apprenticeship programme is to help young people make their first step on the career ladder, and to nurture and mould those with the skills and desire to work in our industry."

Allan concludes: "Our apprentices will learn the valuable knowledge and skills for them to work their way into a career anywhere across John Deere's worldwide dealership network."

DEALERS



GGM's Haydock depot

GGM expands with Honda appointment

Showroom and people investment

GGM Groundscare have announced that their depot in Haydock, which has been established for five years, has been appointed as a Honda-authorized dealer for the lawn and garden range.

The new Honda business will serve customers in Warrington, St Helens and Wigan, and has just invested over £50,000 in a new customer experience as part of the appointment. They have also redeveloped their showroom and storage facilities at the premises.

As a result of this announcement, GGM say they will be recruiting for several new roles, including sales,

service and admin.

The development of the new Honda franchise and newly-improved Haydock showroom has been overseen by Thomas Gibson. He said: "This is an extremely exciting time for the business to coincide with our five years at Haydock. As a customer- and staff-centric organisation, it gives us the means to offer new opportunities to local people in the form of both job opportunities and service levels. We're looking forward to developing the Honda brand and welcoming customers into our showroom."

Stuart Edgar, Honda dealer manager, said: "We are delighted to establish

this franchise with GGM Groundscare.

As a forward-thinking organisation, we are confident that they are a great choice to represent our lawn and garden product range, drawing on their expertise and knowledge of garden machinery and their excellent customer service reputation with customers."

Chris Gibson, managing director of GGM, added: "This is an extremely exciting time for the GGM Group. We already have a strong and competent team that is capable of delivering first-class customer service and support with professional groundcare machinery – and the Honda business will only add to this."



Arthur Haynes and Savannah Brown are two of the new apprentices

INDUSTRY

EGO say more must be done on garden machinery noise pollution

Calls made by their Challenge 2025 campaign group



According to research conducted by battery tool manufacturer EGO Power Plus as part of its Challenge 2025 initiative, gardening professionals could be putting themselves and their customers at risk due to excessive noise pollution created by their equipment.

The company say their research has found that noise pollution generated by petrol-powered outdoor equipment, notably those used in gardens, “heavily exceed the daily exposure limit of 87dB(A) set by the UK Government’s Health and Safety Executive (HSE).”

The independent tests conducted by EGO and Earlsmere, a vibration and noise testing company, compared noise levels emitted by both petrol- and battery-powered rotary mowers – hedge trimmers, grass trimmers, leaf blowers and chainsaws. They found that the petrol tools were up to three times louder than their electric counterparts. In fact, they say, of all the tools tested, four petrol-powered tools exceeded the daily noise exposure limit of 87dB(A), with two generating noise levels of more than 100dB(A). Meanwhile, two battery-powered tools operated below or within the recognised limits.

Decibels are measured logarithmically. This means that decibel intensity

increases by units of 10, so each increase is 10 times the lower figure. Therefore, 20 dB is ten times the intensity of 10 dB, and 30 dB is 100 times as intense as 10 dB. As a rough guide, an increase of 3dB doubles the loudness.

Emma Gayler, ambassador for Challenge 2025, said: “Our latest research is clear evidence of the potential damage petrol-powered outdoor tools could be having on people’s health and wellbeing.

“Many gardening professionals are still working with petrol-powered tools for hours upon hours every day, and, without the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) to help reduce the impact of the noise levels these tools generate, or switching to a quieter battery alternative, many could be doing more damage than they realise - not only to themselves, but their colleagues and customers, too.”

Other reports, say EGO, have found that in some cases, noise pollution can be linked to cardiovascular troubles, cognitive impairment, and can even cause mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety and depression.

EGO also quoted recent findings published by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee

that found that noise pollution increases the risk of stroke and heart disease, while the equivalent of 130,000 healthy life years are lost from noise pollution each year in Britain. Furthermore, its report shows that more research is needed to update its understanding of exposure to noise pollution, and states that the government accepts the need to regulate noise pollution – but there are no specific targets to do so.

Emma continued: “Far more awareness needs to be made across the industry to help protect gardening professionals from the dangers of being exposed to high levels of noise pollution. A viable alternative exists, with battery-powered tools providing the same level of performance – and [being] up to three times quieter.

“Furthermore, HSE advises employers to consider at an early stage how new or replacement machinery could reduce noise levels in the workplace – set a target to reduce the noise levels if possible. EGO’s recent testing shows the clear disparity between petrol- and battery-powered outdoor equipment, with battery-powered tools offering a much quieter and safer alternative, helping to protect gardening professionals today and in generations to come.”



COBRA

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The night the industry celebrates together

OUR COVETED DEALER OF THE YEAR AWARDS WERE PRESENTED AT A WONDERFUL CEREMONY FOLLOWING 2023's SERVICE DEALER CONFERENCE.

The evening of November's Service Dealer Conference, the winners of 2023's Service Dealer Awards were announced and presented at a joyful awards ceremony, held for the first time at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Following a rip-roaring set from stand-up Rob Rouse, the awards were hosted once again by comedian and actor Charlie Baker. Organised by the team behind Service Dealer magazine for the 19th time, the

Awards recognise outstanding sales, service advice and support by dealers in the garden machinery, professional turfcare machinery, farm machinery, ATV and forestry equipment industry.

The awards categories were judged by an expert panel who carefully considered the nominations, which, as ever, were submitted by dealer principals, dealership staff, supplying manufacturers and valued customers. Dealerships large or small, multibranch or single premises, were able to enter, and all entries were judged meticulously and with utmost fairness.

Steve Gibbs, editor of Service Dealer magazine, said: "Each year, Service Dealer is delighted to celebrate the very best in specialist local dealer expertise. Our winning companies and individuals exemplify how exceeding customer expectations is standard practice in their working lives."

"In these times, when the consumer journey can be increasingly depersonalised, our Dealer of the Year winners prove that friendly, highly-skilled, one-to-one service is both vital and to be cherished."



Stewart Carter, Forest & Garden Division UK country manager at sponsors Husqvarna collected the award on behalf of MowersUK, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

GARDEN MACHINERY DEALER OF THE YEAR

Winner: MowersUK

Tadley, Hampshire

Finalists: Celtic Mowers Ltd, Gammies Groundcare, Devon Garden Machinery

Sponsored by: Husqvarna

Presenting award: Stewart Carter, Forest & Garden Division UK country manager

The judges said: "MowersUK are all about putting customers at the heart of their business. In the light of the cost-of-living crisis, they considered how best to serve their community during troubled economic times. They chose to do so by switching focus and expanding their offering towards the more value end of their range." "They have also emphasised the importance of increased local footfall into the showroom to highlight their personal service, introducing In-Store Only Deals and Deals of the Month to help cash-strapped customers."



Arwel Evans and Georgina Cornock-Evans are presented with the award by Paul Bown, account manager at sponsors Ibcos, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

FARM MACHINERY DEALER OF THE YEAR

Winner: Arwel's Agri Services Ltd

East Cowton, North Yorkshire

Finalists: Battlefield Machinery Ltd, Crawfords Group

Sponsored by: Ibcos

Presenting award: Paul Bown, account manager

The judges said: "A relatively young company, Arwel's expanded during the Covid period, successfully taking on the Krone franchise. They subsequently went a step further, making a major change with the Fendt dealership - a move that has gone from strength to strength." "A successful open day this year was a business highlight, acting as an opportunity to generate some serious customer buzz. The business is blessed with a strong team who are always happy to face whatever challenges the farming market presents."



Jason Nettle and Neale Hopley are presented with their award by Steven Davies, head of agriculture at sponsors Societe Generale Equipment Finance, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

FORESTRY MACHINERY DEALER OF THE YEAR

Joint Winners:

Buxton's Ltd

Penkridge, Staffordshire

Forest and Arb

Winchester, Hampshire

Sponsored by: Societe Generale Equipment Finance

Presenting award: Steven Davies, head of agriculture

The judges this year were unable to separate two exceptional forestry machinery dealerships, therefore jointly awarding Buxton's and Forest & Arb.

The judges said: "Buxton's have one of the largest showrooms in the UK for forestry and arboricultural products, with an ever-expanding range. They have recently completely overhauled their premises, which has coincided with the next generation of Buxton's taking over increased responsibility in the dealership."

"Forest and Arb place great value on meeting customers face-to-face, creating new relationships, hence their attendance at both major arb shows this year. The dealership pushed through continued stock difficulties in early-2023 to ensure sure they had the right equipment available – whilst at the same time expanding into new product areas."

PROFESSIONAL TURFCARE DEALER OF THE YEAR



Steve Dommert is presented with the award by Craig Hoare, sales and marketing manager UK at sponsors Toro UK, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

Winner: Devon Garden Machinery

Torquay

Finalists: Stuart Taylor International, Garden Machines Northampton Ltd

Sponsored by: Toro UK Ltd

Presenting award: Craig Hoare, sales & marketing manager UK

The judges said: "Devon Garden Machinery pride themselves on helping their professional end-user customers thrive throughout their careers. They are focused on training, offering guidance to both young apprentices and to mature students with their continuing professional development. "The company go above and beyond to keep turf professionals working at all times, caring passionately about their customers and the service they provide."



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Anthony Deacon is presented with the award by Gareth Sloane, power products manager at sponsors Yamaha, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

ATV/QUAD DEALER OF THE YEAR

Winner: MKM Agriculture Ltd

branches in Bedfordshire and Suffolk

Finalists: Wilsons Of Rathkenny

Sponsored by: Yamaha

Presenting Award: Gareth Sloane, power products manager

The judges said: "MKM have invested heavily in their marketing ambition this year. They have employed a new marketing manager, held a major open day and upped their social media engagement significantly. "Always looking to enhance the customer's experience, MKM are currently exploring several new endeavours including projects such as the establishment of a utility vehicle test track."



Craig Harper, Sara Paoloni & Andrew Walker are presented with the award by Simon Hewitt, head of marketing from sponsors STIHL, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

BEST NEW INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

Winner: B&B Group for their total rebrand

Finalists: GGM Groundscore

Sponsored by: STIHL GB

Presenting Award: Simon Hewitt, head of marketing

The judges said: "B&B Group's total rebrand is a major overhaul, completely reinvigorating their whole business. Expanding their company into four divisions - B&B Tractors, B&B Machinery, B&B Plant, and B&B Groundcare – the change ensures they can effectively meet their customers' diverse requirements. "Way more than simply a name change, this initiative was undertaken to ensure their image, values, and market position perfectly align with their vision for the future."



Nathan Jones is presented with his award by David Hart, managing director at sponsors Kubota, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

NEW TECHNICIAN OF THE YEAR

Winner: Nathan Jones

Edwards and Farmer Ltd, Shrewsbury, Shropshire

Finalists: Josh Harrison, Pallisers, Milan Clifton, Hunts Engineering

Sponsored by: Kubota

Presenting Award: David Hart, managing director,

The judges said: "Nathan Jones exceeds the expectations set by customers, colleagues and college lecturers. His passion for the industry is unmatched and his ambition to continuously improve is admirable. Nathan worked immensely hard throughout his AGCO Apprenticeship, where he achieved distinctions in every module, and continues to push himself in the workshop. "Involved across all aspects of the dealership, his skill level, eye for detail and keenness to finish a job to the highest of standards is a commendable attitude, and a benchmark for others."



Duncan Waitland is presented with his award by Jason Webb, manager, of national aftersales commercial, UK & Ireland at sponsors AGCO, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

LEADERSHIP AWARD

Winner: Duncan Waitland

Crawfords Group, based in Writtle, Essex

Finalists: Paul Vincent, Vincent Tractors & Plant

Sponsored by: AGCO

Presenting Award: Jason Webb

manager, national aftersales commercial, UK & Ireland

The judges said: "In his role as Group Parts Manager for Crawfords Group, Duncan Waitland has consistently demonstrated exemplary leadership. One of his remarkable contributions is the collaboration with the sales department to develop parts contingencies for sold machines. He has also recently played a pivotal role in the company's IT system development, as well as acting as a vital element in the successful integration of Agwood into the company. "Duncan's leadership qualities, dedication, and numerous accomplishments have had a profound impact on the success and cohesion of Crawfords Group."

STAR OF THE DEALERSHIP



Les Gammie collects the award on behalf of Jennifer Scrymgeour from Peter Melrose, managing director at sponsors EGO, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

Winner: Jennifer Scrymgeour

Gammies Groundcare, Forfar, Angus

Finalists: Sara Paoloni, B&B Tractors

Sponsored by: EGO

Presenting Award: Peter Melrose, managing director

The judges said: "Jennifer Scrymgeour has been working at Gammies for over 14 years, starting out as an office junior, progressing to office manager. She is the focal point of the day-to-day running of the business and helps all departments across the dealership. "Never too busy to assist a colleague or customer, Jennifer's extensive knowledge of stocking, purchasing, and accounts means she always comes up with a solution, no matter the circumstances. A vital help to everyone around the dealership, she uses her initiative to offer creative solutions to all issues encountered."

OVERALL DEALER OF THE YEAR 2023



Arwel Evans and Georgina Cornock-Evans are presented with the award by Tony Macer, national sales manager UK & Ireland at sponsors Kress, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke, and comedian/comper Charlie Baker

Winner: Arwel's Agri Services Ltd

Llanwrda, Carmarthenshire

Sponsored by: Kress

Presenting Award: Tony Macer

National Sales Manager UK & Ireland

The judges said: "As a business Arwel's has not only taken on exciting new brands, but have also helped expand what their loyal staff can do with their skills. The young team do not only undertake their everyday work, but also look for further exciting projects to help build on the business's image and help promote the company's ethos. "Working together as husband and wife is never easy, but having the incredible staff around them at Arwel's Agri, ensures that Georgina and Arwel have the perfect platform to allow the dealership to thrive."



Taking care of business

A new Stratford-upon-Avon venue saw the 2023 *Service Dealer* conference refreshed and renewed, but with a focus still firmly on speakers experienced in areas of increasing importance to dealers in today's ag and grass machinery trades. MARTIN RICKATSON summarises their standout points.



Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke hosting the panel Q&A session

Whether applied to customers, employees or the local and global environment – or even the company bottom line, which tends to benefit in all cases – ‘care’ was the core of the 2023 *Service Dealer* conference, back in November. From how to nurture and develop a dealership's brand, to looking at business as a force for good, ensuring the best possible customer experience, and

monitoring the mental health of employees, the thread ran through every presentation. Duncan Murray-Clarke, Service Dealer's owner, welcomed delegates to the eighth conference, and acknowledged the support of sponsors Kress, AGCO, Ego, Husqvarna, Ibcos, Krone, Kubota, Societe Generale Equipment Finance, STIHL, Toro, Yamaha, Catalyst, Garden Trader, Milwaukee and TAP. "Although 2023 was perhaps a

slightly more 'normal' season, without the previous summer's long drought, the dealer sector and the wider world around it clearly continues to face some significant challenges," Duncan acknowledged. "From the wet autumn to machinery price increases, dealers and their customers continue to have plenty to deal with. That's why, this year, we focus on care, and the health of businesses, their employees and the environment."

Building your business by bothering about your brand

The day's keynote speaker was branding specialist Daryl Fielding, who has worked in-house with names from Vodafone to Cadbury. The need for a dealership to develop its brand, she suggested, centres on the fact a strong one helps potential customers distinguish between businesses, and choose who to deal with based on impression.

"Those customers can choose other companies and other products. Similarly, staff have a right to work for someone else, and a strong brand will make them proud to work for you.

"Growing a strong brand also positively impacts your business's finances. Coca-Cola's brand value is estimated at almost twice that of its tangible assets. Just think about the apology you often get for being offered Pepsi when you asked for Coke."

Beyond this, a brand also holds a business accountable, suggested Daryl, being a beacon for characteristics such as quality and safety.

"A strong brand supports your products and service with your reputation. It's what you do, what you're known for, and what people think about what you do. But remember that social media also means your reputation can change in a heartbeat."

The process of brand creation begins with assessing your product and service offering and quality, and your customer type, suggested Daryl.

"Then ask where you want to take your products and business. There's little to differentiate many firms and products nowadays. What can you offer customers that someone else cannot? This will depend on your customer insight and differentiation,



Branding expert Daryl Fielding

and how you show your 'right to win.'

"At Vodafone, our customer insight highlighted their increasing dependency on our services. The introduction of smartphones created a reliance on the devices to do more than simply make calls. But Vodafone is a service provider, and, because you cannot see a network, we decided the best thing we had to market in addition to our service was the people in our stores.

"Vodafone's roots were military, in the Rascal naval radio company, and we adopted a 'get it done' military culture, developed a heroic archetype, and worked on becoming heroes for our customers, but with humble undertones, using strength as our 'right to win' by making a massive investment in our network to ensure we provided the coverage customers expected."

The next focus should be on what makes your business, and what it offers differently, suggested Daryl.

"This is often done badly, with many businesses doing nothing to set them apart. It might be an unusual quote for a machinery dealer conference, but Coco Chanel had a point when she said that, to be irreplaceable, one must be different.

"Creating your brand should involve finding something in your culture that affirms who you are. Lead by it, hire by

it, train by it, sack people by it. Make it more than a statement or document – ensure it's reflected in what you sell and the service you provide. Then ensure your product is presented in the best possible way.

"Stores should be laid out in customer-friendly fashion. At Vodafone, we found moving the tills from the rear to the centre-front boosted staff-customer contact, and the number of people who thereafter said they would recommend us.

"We also invested in our customer database, combining their enquiries, billing and all other data, making one internal info point on each customer."

In terms of extending branding across all media, from print to online, Daryl's advice included remembering the need for modern-day logos to fit smartphone apps.

"And a consistent tone of voice across all customer touch points – including your stores, websites, staff and more – is essential to your brand. Ensure also your staff are trained in what to say and not say, and how to say it. It's about how you engage with customers, and present a brand that helps people choose you. And, if you're going to support your brand with a slogan, think carefully about it – make slogans make sense, as most are rubbish!"



Sophie Brooks speaking in the break out sessions

Sustainable strategies for business growth were the focus of Sophie Brooks, from Fit for Purpose, and Camilla Barnes, from Better Business, Better World – both consultants in helping firms achieve the B Corp sustainability standards.

With surveys suggesting many believe businesses should have a legal responsibility to the planet and people (alongside maximising profits), a 'business with a purpose' meets this demand by seeking, alongside profitability, to create a better world and societal improvement, suggested Sophie.

"This is nothing new – organisations like the Quakers understood that healthy communities were important for healthy businesses," she said.

"Purpose articulates why your business exists, and identifying its purpose can help boost financial performance, give you competitive differentiation, motivate staff, help connect with customers, and convert customers to fans of your brand, while tapping into the market for more

ethical goods and services. It can allow you to innovate and lead, get ahead of likely legislation in ethical and environmental areas, and leave a positive legacy.

"Good examples include Timpson, which gives opportunities to people with challenges, the Co-Op, which gives all involved a say in its management, and John Lewis, with its staff ownership structure."

Once you've defined your business's purpose, you can determine your mission (what you do), vision (where your impact is) and values (the way you operate), Sophie suggested.

"In your sector, there are obviously some key challenges – such as fossil fuels – and opportunities – such as zero-emission electric machines.

Having these properly recognised provides multiple opportunities, from encouraging more connection and awareness of land-based businesses to encouraging more people into using turf areas and gardens for mental health. Many of these benefits

also apply to recruiting and retaining employees."

There are now 7,700 B Corp-certified companies worldwide across 161 industries, noted Camilla, with 1,700 of those in the UK, the second largest national population (after the USA).

"The majority are small businesses with turnovers of less than £1m. There are none yet, though, in the farm or turf machinery trade, so there are big opportunities to lead the way, especially as the ag and turf sector has a strong environmental connection.

"Qualifying is focused on a large-scale questionnaire, with points earned in areas such as resource conservation, environmental commitment, employee involvement and workforce development, and supported with a legal commitment to stakeholders.

"B Corp certification avoids greenwashing, by making proof a must. It helps attract young people who are environmentally-aware, helps benchmark and improve performance, and can help raise capital."

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SCAN ME



Regenerative farmer, Michael Kavanagh



Ex-Rugby School head groundsman, James Mead

What do farmers and turf managers want from dealers?

Michael Kavanagh, Shropshire farm manager and founder of the Green Farm Collective, is perhaps typical of many arable farmer dealer customers who have expanded, diversified and environmentally enriched their businesses in recent years. This, he pointed out, has helped shape what he wants today from his machinery dealers.

"We've tripled our acreage to 1,700, grown our spring cropping and introduced grass and livestock into our rotation," he explained.

"We're on sandy loam soils, which suffered significantly in 2022's drought. Rather than aiming for maximum yields, we're looking to minimise costs, reducing inputs such as nitrogen and shifting focus from chemical to biological.

"This means I'm seeking from dealers a recognition of this shift. As my farming's carbon footprint has become more important, I need dealers who understand the need for less power, new technology and combined systems to establish cover and companion crops."

James Mead, recently-retired head groundsman at Rugby School, echoed

some of Michael's comments, noting a trend among some ground managers to move towards biological answers to turf challenges, such as stronger varieties, liquid feeds and new drainage technologies.

"But with the investment necessary in today's machinery, we still need good dealer advice to choose the right machines for mechanical jobs," he emphasised.

"You get one chance to make the right machinery decision, so a dealer who researches and demonstrates the best solution for the customer's situation, and what they need from the machine and the dealer, will win the deal in my book, particularly if it solves a problem, and/or is multipurpose, improving results, efficiencies and workloads.

"Deals are about relationships as much as business, though, and I always valued friendship over salesmanship, and keeping investment local, spending budgets on the right things with the right people, and including all staff in discussions."

Creating a 'wow' experience

Ask yourself how you can make your customer experience better, suggested Adrian Swinscoe, who advises companies on that very topic.

"We see examples of poor service all around – lack of communication/ follow ups, poor service, poor product, being lied to," he pointed out.

"The opposite is what keeps customers coming back – punctuality, doing what you say you'll do when you're going to do it, respect, understanding, prompt responses, and taking responsibility and ownership of issues.

"There's no magic to this, but it requires effort. What drives loyalty is being brilliant at the basics – not what you think they are, but what your customer thinks they are.

"Customers will often remember

incidences of good service for a long time, even if just small details. Conversely, bad lightbulb packaging again, no matter how good the bulb. And remember the customer complaint iceberg – you only tend to hear from the really happy or really hacked-off. Working to improve the experience of the middle majority is essential. Be brilliant at the basics, and remove the annoying little gripes that spoil some customers' overall experiences. Ask: "Is there anything we do annoys you slightly?" Acting on the response is how you build better customer relationships."

He also urged delegates to remember in their marketing planning that human attention spans are short, and that, while we like choice, too much can be confusing.

"People find choice more interesting, but when shopping, they stop less, and buy less, because it increases our cognitive load. The reverse also holds true.

"But research also shows people will



Adrian Swinscoe ran a breakout on the customer experience

pay more for better service and travel further for a better experience. Loyalty is earned around what happens during the buying experience, even if things go wrong but are addressed well. Reactive customer service is no longer good enough, and delivering a great experience is a team sport."

Looking after employees' wellbeing

With mental health having become an increasingly important workplace topic in recent years, the presentation given by Graham Ashford, of the Farming Community Network, struck a chord with many. He noted how influences from financial to legislative were exacerbating the traditional pressures faced by agricultural and rural businesses.

"Through 30 volunteer groups and 400 volunteers across England and Wales, using face-to-face, online and phone contact, we support farmers and families through difficult times," he explained, noting how the higher input prices and the withdrawal of subsidy support are making things particularly tough right now.

"Factors influencing mental health

include psychological, physical, economic, environmental and social pressures. We aim to help people before their problems grow, finding them the health, financial and legal expert advice they need.

"Look out for signs of poor mental health in your staff and colleagues, including isolation, changes in personal hygiene and care, extreme fatigue, changing moods and risky behaviour.

"If you feel you can help initially, set time aside with no distractions, give them the time they need, and don't try to diagnose or second-guess their feelings. Listen carefully to what they tell you, and offer them help in seeking professional support, but know your limits. Remember, also, that one way to improve your own wellbeing is to give back to society, so look after yourself and think about how that could work for you."



Graham Ashford from the FCN charity

An expectation of great service

That's what *Service Dealer* contributor and *TurfPro* editor LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, heard that a panel of leading commercial machinery end-users wanted from their relationships with their local machinery dealers.



Birmingham parks, notably Cannon Hill and Kings Heath, the only machinery we had in those days were a few pedestrian cylinder mowers. These included some ATCO, Zephyr, Ransomes, Dennis, a fly mower and a Victa rotary mower - along with a tractor and trailer. I fondly remember using a Wrigley three-wheeled truck to transport ourselves and our materials around. I also remember using a Patterson spiker and Ryan Turf Cutter at Cocks Moors Woods GC.

During the late-'70s to mid-'80s, we started to see a larger choice of machinery come to market in the form of more rotary-type mowers, ride-on triple-cylinder mowers, and a range of transport vehicles.

It goes without saying that we now have a wealth of machinery at our disposal. Just on grass-cutting tools alone, we can call on a vast choice of products, from a plethora of manufacturers.

These range from all sorts of handheld tools to pedestrian and ride-on mowers that offer a wide range of cutting options, including cylinder, rotary and flail-cutting equipment.

Predominantly, most of this equipment is still being powered by petrol or diesel engines. However, in recent years, we are now seeing more

and more manufacturers producing battery-powered mowers and handheld products.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of robotic mowers coming to market, with several golf courses now starting to use them to mow their fairways - the aim being to free up some labour to help improve productivity.

You just need to look at the cost of machinery investment that golf courses now have to commit to, in order to deliver a viable playing experience. We are looking at budgets well over £500k that will hopefully see them productive for several years.

The importance of our dealer network

However, we all must remember that this equipment comes at a cost, and requires looking after. We are lucky that we have in this country a robust machinery dealer network, operating the length and breadth of the UK. I know that you guys reading this go out of your way to look after your customers.

During my time as a contributor to *Service Dealer*, and as editor of our sister title *TurfPro*, I have had the opportunity to visit plenty of machinery dealers up and down the country,

Without a doubt, the job of a turf professional would be made much more difficult and demanding without the aid of today's efficient machinery, equipment, and the multitude of hand tools we now have available to help us deliver the expectations of commercial end-users.

When I started my working career back in the early-1970s, the selection was quite limited compared to what you can find in a turf pro's shed today.

During my early days as a parks apprentice working in a number of



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and have found them to be a most valuable asset to our industry.

Many of the dealers I have met are long-established family business that have grown their companies over many years, and, more importantly, have built a reputation for looking after their customers, thus ensuring the machinery they sell is fit for purpose and able to do the job commercial end-users expect it to.

I personally have been in a privileged position over the years, in that I have had the chance to try out all sorts of equipment and machinery in both my roles as a turf professional and as a journalist. Over the last couple of years, I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to trial products from many different manufacturers.

Whilst, in my role as an editor, I've been afforded the opportunity to visit an array of top sporting venues. This has enabled me to witness the extensive range of specialist machinery in action, which has revolutionised the way we maintain high-quality playing surfaces.

To help me get a better understanding of the thoughts of top-level end-users on this whole topic, I took the liberty of asking a panel of leading turf professionals to answer a few questions. I wanted to find out what they think about the importance of having the right machinery in the shed – and, more importantly, what they expect from their machinery dealers? I spoke to:

ED MOWE

Head groundsman at Leicester Tigers

BOB STRETTON

Sole groundsman at The West Warwickshire Sports Club

MARK SMITH

Head greenkeeper at Olton Golf Club, Solihull

VIC DEMAIN

Head groundsman at Durham County Cricket Club

Laurence Gale: How important is it to have the right machine for your work?

Ed Mowe: This is very important, as we rely on our machinery to enable us to do our job maintaining the surfaces and surrounding areas. We do not have spare machines, so when faults occur, this has to be repaired or rectified quickly so we can be back maintaining the surfaces and not letting standards drop. Grass doesn't stop growing, and teams don't stop playing!

Bob Stretton: To deliver a high standard of playing surface, whether natural or artificial, it is vitally important to have the right type of machinery or equipment in order to carry out specific work.

Mark Smith: Each golf course has different needs with regards to machinery. Without the right equipment, how else are you expected to present and maintain a course to the good standard. Simple answer is: you can't! The difficulty is the continued rising costs of golf course machinery, and the maintenance related to it. Many golf courses are priced out of their ideal fleet. Having the right machinery is vital to meet the rising expectations that members have with regards to the way the golf course is prepared year on year.

Vic Demain: It is absolutely vital to have the right equipment to do the job – otherwise, it makes work so much harder.

LG: How much do you rely on machinery to help you achieve your goals and objectives in turf management?

MS: I think all clubs need reliability in their machinery, so that they can produce surfaces fit enough to meet the required standard. It still is all budget- and staff-dependent. Some courses must keep machinery running as long as possible, due to financial restrictions. We are lucky that the golf club has invested well, and we have improved the fleet massively over the years.

BS: Reliability in turf management is the key to a successful end product. Time management is important to achieve the best possible result. Too many clubs rely on antiquated machinery that breaks down at inopportune moments, thus being unable to finish the job, because they can't afford to purchase new or decent reliable second-hand equipment - resulting in poor presentation, performance and sustainability.

VD: We rely totally on machinery. Without it, the quality would be so much reduced, and tasks would take so much longer.

EM: Without machinery, both our goals and objectives simply cannot be met, so they are heavily relied on.

LG: Are you moving towards battery-powered equipment, or are you happy to stay with traditional fuels for the time being?

BS: I have been looking at battery-powered mowers, but the cost of them is very off putting. It would be an expensive exercise to replace all the machinery in the shed, and to set up a battery charging station. So, at the moment I'm staying with petrol-powered equipment till the time is right to replace it.

MS: Battery-powered equipment ticks a lot of boxes, but, in my opinion, is still under close review. Rising fuel costs, emissions, and noise, to name a few reasons why customers need to take into consideration battery-powered options – but, for me, the reliability still isn't quite there. We are surrounded by housing on certain parts of the course, and so noise is a big issue, but I still need some convincing that the reliability and longevity with battery-powered equipment is there.

EM: I feel battery-powered is the future, and am looking forward to seeing the continued technological advances with machinery.

VD: I am happy to stay with traditional fuels-powered machinery at the moment, mainly due to initial purchase costs. Also, because the battery-powered machines are still in their infancy - no one knows how long the batteries will last, and what problems can be encountered over time.



Bob Stretton of the West Warwickshire Sports Club



Preparing the wicket at Durham CCC



Ed Mowe giving a talk at Leicester Tigers



Vic Demain and his team at Durham CCC

COMMERCIAL TURFCARE CUSTOMERS

LG: What do you expect from your relationship with your machinery dealer?

VD: I expect great service from my dealerships. Honesty is paramount, providing the right machine for the job, allowing long demonstration times, competitive pricing and great back-up service.

EM: An honest, reliable service that are always willing to help out at short notice.

BS: It would be fair to say a good service on technical specification and information would be paramount. In the old days, dealers used to send salesmen out to see customers who have purchased from them and provide a follow-up service, but not so much today. I don't think there's enough effort put into demonstrations, and dealers can expect buyers to rely on other groundsmen's experiences and comments.

VD: Good communication. Being kept up-to-speed with new products, orders, pricing, parts availability or repairs – the more information, the

better. It's so important to keep in good relations, and to be able to pick the phone up at any point and have confidence that your sales rep will be able to discuss and help with any issues that may arise.

LG: What can a dealer do to win your business?

EM: Demonstrate a good machine that is fit for our purpose and is not overpriced.

MS: It's not all down to pricing. Obviously, it plays a big part, but the end-user has to have confidence in the reliability of the fleet and in the service and back-up of the dealership.

BS: Dealers need to get out in the field and promote their products. Personally, I like to shop around for the best deal. The only problem is I'm on my own, and don't have time to travel miles to different dealers, so attending trade shows is the only way one can get to see new technology.

VD: A dealer must win my trust by providing all of the above.

LG: Finally, what are the most important factors to you when considering what dealer to use?

VD: For me, the most important factor when choosing a dealer is the relationship with the salesperson, and having the trust that they are doing the best for me.

MS: Confidence in their product they are selling. And does it do the job you require? The dealership needs to provide the service and back-up to meet your club's needs. A good solid line of communication in place between you and your rep/parts/service needs to be there.

BS: The important factors in what dealer to use is how important are you to them, keeping good communication and customer satisfaction, getting the best deal, and their ability at solving problems with machinery and equipment.

EM: Honesty, reliability and support service.

LG: Thank you.

It goes without saying that the above statements from some of our leading grounds professionals emphasise how the need for the right machinery is critical – and, more importantly, the relationship with their machinery dealer is vital for the smooth running of their facility.

The cost of machinery and equipment is now a serious investment, and it is important for turf professionals to make the right choice – both in terms of kit and, indeed, dealer.

I personally think that turf pros need to find a dealer that suits their needs and, over time, build up a long-lasting relationship that helps ensure their equipment and machinery is well-maintained and kept running.

This should hopefully give both the end-user and you, the dealer, peace of mind and the ability to fulfil both your roles efficiently and with confidence.



Mark Smith, head greenkeeper at Olton Golf Club in Solihull

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A return to normality?

Being at Agritechnica in the November of an 'odd' year for the first time since 2019 brought back some sense of familiarity to the farm machinery calendar last autumn, although the impacts of Covid and the Ukraine war continue to be felt. MARTIN RICKATSON joined a strong contingent of UK manufacturers, farmers and dealers at the show.



With a record 470,000 visitors from 149 countries reckoned to have attended the 2023 event in November, the successful return after four years of Agritechnica, the usually biennial international farm machinery exhibition held in the German city of Hannover, appeared to answer

the doubters who suggest the days of large shows are numbered in the digital age.

Despite the understandable lack of Russian exhibitors and visitors, and a noticeably reduced Chinese contingent, some 2,812 exhibitors from 52 countries packed the 24 vast halls, and the event's organiser, the DLG, suggested that stand space was sold out. DLG figures showed

the visitors came from 149 countries, illustrating the fact that this is much more than a German or European show, with a particular increase from Central and South America. With new features, such as a 'Drive Experience' area, it was good to see the show organisers incorporating new ideas into the event – and there was plenty else in terms of new developments for visitors to see.



New Holland CR 11 combine

New Holland unveiled one of the major surprises at Agritechnica 2023, previewing a new combine design that takes its CR Twin Rotor technology to the next capacity level. Development focus at the brand's Zedelgem plant in Belgium – where the new CR11 will be produced – has been on minimising losses, improving residue management, maximising reliability and reducing harvesting cost. Power is provided by a 775hp FPT C16 engine, while threshing and separation are dealt with by a pair of 24in rotors. Grain tank capacity is 20,000 litres, and unloading rate is 210 l/sec. A double cleaning shoe arrangement has been developed to meet the minimal losses aim, with two upper sieves, two lower sieves, two clean grain augers and two sets of pressure sensors to measure cleaning shoe load. Full automation is said to guarantee even cross distribution of the cleaning shoe, which, New Holland claims, maximises capacity at loss levels close to zero. The new residue management system comes with a new chopper and chaff spreader, designed to spread at up to 18m/60ft – a 15m/50ft MacDon-sourced header was fitted to the machine on the stand.



Fendt 600 series tractors

Key features of Fendt's new 149-209hp four-model 600 series tractors – the 614, 616, 618 and 620 – include its latest VarioDrive transmission. All are powered by a new four-cylinder, five-litre AGCO Power Core50 engine. As a performance example, the 620 Vario can reach 50km/h at 1,250rpm and produce 950Nm of torque from 1,200-1,600rpm. Power-to-weight ratio is 34.4kg per hp, while turning circle is 10.2m, depending on tyres fitted.



Massey Ferguson 9S tractors

With its 8S range now well-established, Massey Ferguson chose Agritechnica to release the long-awaited successors to its top-end 8700S tractors, launching the six-model 315-425hp MF 9S line. An updated six-cylinder, 8.4-litre AGCO Power engine with Engine Power Management (EPM) offers up to 30hp extra for all models, apart from the flagship MF 9S.425, which gets a constant 425hp. Engines use a single variable-geometry turbo in place of the former twin arrangement, and there is no exhaust gas recirculation. All feature MF's Dyna-VT CVT as standard. Maximum rear lift capacity is 12t, while a new dual hydraulic pump arrangement provides 340 l/min of oil at 200 bar.



John Deere SP sprayers

Having retained the Mazzotti brand and yellow livery since purchasing the Italian sprayer maker in 2017, John Deere chose Agritechnica to unveil a new marketing strategy for its self-propelled, front-cabbed machines, launching the Deere-branded 300M series. Comprising the 3,200-litre 332M and 4,000-litre 340M, the range has gained a number of JD modifications beyond the paintwork. The smaller machine features a 175hp four-cylinder John Deere engine and boom widths up to 28m, plus 3.8m turning circle. Comparative figures for the 340M are 225hp, six cylinders, 36m and 4.2m.



Claas Xerion 12 series

Sitting atop the existing Xerion 4200, 4500 and 5000 models, the new Claas Xerion 12 series comprises the 12.590 and 12.650, with 585 and 653 respective maximum horsepower provided by 15.6-litre Mercedes-Benz engines driving through standard CMatic CVT transmissions. While wheeled models are available for North America and Australia – key growth markets Claas is targeting with the new tractors – for Europe, Claas-developed tracks will be standard fitment, retaining full 4WS functionality. Elsewhere, Claas marked the return of the Axos name, with two new 92hp and 103hp tractors slotting in below its Arion 400 series. The 3.6-litre FPT-powered Axos 230 and 240 feature a five-speed transmission with the company's clutchless ReverShift shuttle and TwinShift two-step powershift. SmartStop clutch-braking is optional. Claas also showed its two new five-walker Evion combines, which succeed the Avero and smaller Tucano models and are targeted at smaller family farms. Grain tank capacity is 5,600 litres on the 204hp Evion 410 and 6,500 litres on the 231hp Evion 430.



Case IH Axial-Flow

Case IH has replaced its three-model 150 series entry-level Axial-Flow combines with the new two-model 160 series. FPT Industrial 8.7-litre engines power both the 6160 (400hp peak power) and the 7160 (460hp peak power). Crop intake capabilities are boosted by new feeder chains, standardised 85mm feeder cylinders, and a new in-cab fore/aft header interface adjustment, giving 15 degrees of hydraulic movement to aid crop feed and header attachment. Case IH also previewed its coming Axial-Flow 260 series, which will be available with Case IH's Agritechnica silver medal award-winning Advanced Feedrate Control system. It uses forward-looking radar sensors to scan and assess density of the crop before it enters the machine rather than during the intake process, adjusting engine power and rotor speed for the crop volume the machine is about to ingest.



Kubota autonomous tractor

Based on its M5112 production tractor, Kubota's 100hp Agri Robo KVT is an autonomous model powered by the Japanese firm's V3800 four-cylinder engine. The machine shares many other components with its conventional cousin, including the cab, but the KVT continuously-variable Kubota transmission has been engineered specifically for autonomous operation. The tractor can be operated conventionally or autonomously, allowing users to drive the machine as normal on the road between jobs. A Farm Management Information System allows real-time monitoring of the tractor, while radar and lidar technology takes care of the safety aspects of autonomous operation. A production date is yet to be confirmed.



JCB handler introductions

In addition to showing a hydrogen-fuelled four-cylinder engine with potential ag applications, JCB displayed a number of new machines, including this Teleskid 3TS-8W, a telescopic boom skid-steer machine with Stage V engine, improved cab visibility and more set-up functions available through a new touchscreen display. There was also a Loadall 542-100, an all-new high-lift machine with more lift capacity, extra reach and, in Agri Pro form, more power (173hp) and travel speed, plus a Loadall 560-80 in Agri Pro spec, with 173hp engine and a 40kph version of the DualTech VT transmission.



Nexat gantry tractor

It's unlikely to find homes on UK farms, but German firm Nexat reckons it has a number of serious buyers lined up for its monster gantry tractor development in regions ranging from its homeland to Eastern Europe and both North and South America. Where 60-80% of many fields are driven over using conventional systems, the gantry reduces this to just 5%, claims Nexat, minimising compaction and enhancing water infiltration and plant growth. With two 550hp Liebherr engines powering electrical drive systems, the 'widespan carrier vehicle' features an end-mounted cab rotatable by 270 degrees to provide the best view of the work in progress, and has a working width of 14m, for which manufacturers including Väderstad and Damman having helped develop slurry tanker, drill, sprayer and combine attachments. The company was created in 2017 from a father-and-son business which had been involved in machine development for other manufacturers, including Krone. The latest machine, which has a 3.5m end-on road travel width, is the third design incarnation, and full production is expected in 2025.



Telescopic Stoll loader

While the lift height of most mid-high range tractor loaders maxes out at around 4.0m, Stoll's medal-winning X-Tra Lift telescopic tractor loader increases lift height by 1.45m. It does this in two parts, the first being a movement of 0.5m before swivelling joints straighten the forward boom element, extending reach to 5.45m. The feature will be an option on Stoll Profi-Line loaders, which are designed for tractors from 100-200hp.



Tedders from McHale

McHale is rounding out its grass equipment line with a new range of tedders. The two ProPel machines – a six-rotor M6-770 mounted unit and eight-rotor trailed T8-1020 model – have respective working widths of 7.7m and 10.2m. An optional Headland Management System allows operation at full working width at all times, as the crop is deflected away from the edge of the field.



100 dealers visited during the open days

Kramp opens its warehouse doors to dealers

A hundred dealers gathered for an open day at the Kramp headquarters in Biggleswade in November 2023. It formed part of a series of events for agricultural, forestry and grass care dealers and farmers.

K ramp moved into their Biggleswade site in 2021. With 150,000 sq ft at its disposal, the company says it has space to stock up to 80,000 products.

The site is divided into three sections. Dangerous goods are separated from the rest of the warehouse with automatic fireproof doors. The bulk of the floorspace houses their large items, accounting only for 20% of the total lines, and is managed by a team of forklift drivers. The remaining 80% are in smaller racking and picked by hand.

During a typical week, the company says 9,000 boxes are shipped, involving picking 20,500 lines. Around

seven outbound arctics are sent to Kramp's customers nationwide daily. They say they aim for next-day delivery wherever possible.

A full-time operations team of 63 is augmented with temporary labour to take it up to 100 at peak times. With Biggleswade home to a thriving distribution industry, finding good staff is challenging.

"It can be difficult to find the right people, especially at peak times," says Martyn Hall, training coordinator at Kramp. "Once new employees start, we find they stay for a while. One team member has worked for the business for 45 years. He has seen almost every iteration of Kramp, and even

has his name in the rafters of the new warehouse."

As each order comes in, the system will decide whether it needs a 60- or 30-litre cardboard box, which begins its journey around a conveyor belt system in the warehouse. There are three floors of small racking, and the box will stop at a floor if an item for the order is located there. A picker is allocated to the order, and they are given a list sorted to provide them with the most efficient route for collection.

A completed box moves on the conveyor to the packing area, and is weighed by a quality control system, which flags if the box is not the expected weight. Reducing picking errors is a

priority for the operations team.

Delivering a same-day dispatch and – where possible – next-day delivery also remains central to Kramp's offer to its customers. With most dealers waiting until they close before they send their order in, the warehouse's peak activity is between six and ten o'clock in the evening.

Among the businesses demonstrating their products to visitors on the day were Kärcher, NGK Ignition Parts, SKF, 3M and the British Fluid Power Association. It allowed the dealers to interact with the suppliers' technical experts, and learn more about their products.

Coming off the back of the recently-announced distribution partnership, the Kärcher team talked through their industrial cleaning solutions portfolio. Only nine weeks since the arrangement began, the team are delighted with how it has started. Dealers have been keen to access the Kärcher products, and sales have been very positive.

"Kramp can access parts of the agricultural market that we cannot," says Sophie Herbert, key account executive at Kärcher. "Kärcher is never standing still. We are continuously adding to our range, so dealers can expect to see more items added in the future."

Facing up to competition

Kramp field sales manager Leo Copping highlighted significant competition emerging outside the industry. Many consumables that farmers purchase when they visit a dealer are available through online next-day delivery, which can reduce visits to depots, dealerships, and stores.

"We are increasingly seeing the additional business go from dealers to online competitors," says Leo. "Kramp is committed to growing its dealers' business because if they succeed, we grow. Our research shows that the UK is the most price-competitive market in Europe, and it will be difficult for the dealer model to compete on price with Amazon or Screwfix."

"However, we know that farmers value the dealer's expertise, and are willing to pay a premium to access this. We focus on how we can support our dealers to leverage this."

Kramp is attempting this in three different ways. Leo explains how the Kramp webshop is a priority for investment within the business, especially the search function, so any of the 150,000 items that are stocked can be easily found. This makes a dealer's life easier, and provides

opportunities for their customers to place orders directly into the Kramp system to be serviced by themselves.

Kramp has two retail sales specialists focusing solely on the Powered by Kramp (PBK) store partnerships. This is a complete retail design and fitting service. There are 13 PBK stores nationwide, and discussions are ongoing to add more soon.

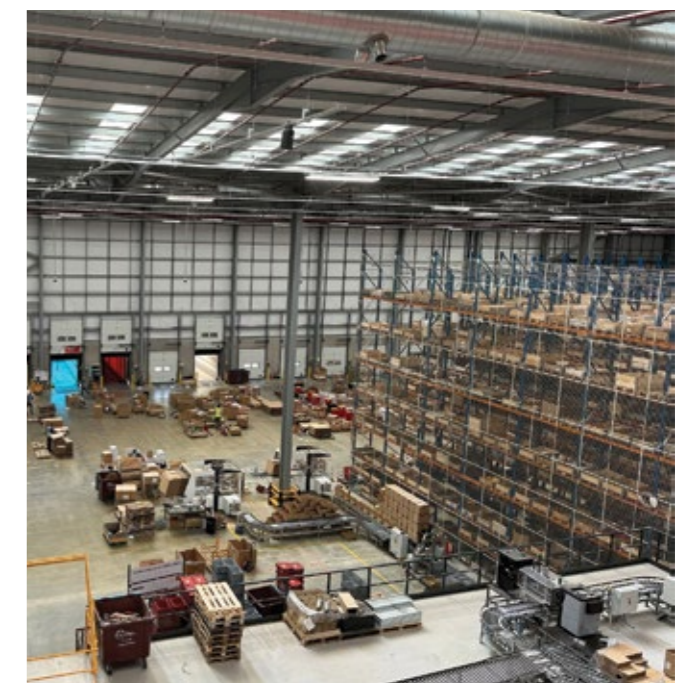
"PBK is a partnership with the dealer – Kramp does not propose taking over the store," says retail sales specialist John Sumner. "We encourage stocking other suppliers' products as well as Kramp's. We intend to guide the dealer through the retail experience for their customers, devising a layout and stocking products that increase sales."

"A typical PBK store doubles its retail sales in the first 12 months. All stores that have chosen to use the PBK service have been delighted with the results."

The jump to an entire PBK store can be a big one for dealers to make. Because of this, Kramp also offers a retail bundle. This single unit focuses on one area with a full range of stocked items. Currently, these are available for clothing, boots and machinery lighting.



Kärcher were among the businesses demonstrating their products to visitors on the day



Kramp say their warehouse can stock up to 80,000 products

Garden machinery: buying in to sustainability

MARK MOSELEY, sales and marketing director for Handy, argues that, whilst a garden machinery tool's power source is the most common method used to assess its sustainability, it's not the whole story.



Mark Moseley, sales and marketing director of Handy

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Move on a few decades and this previously little-used word is now part of our everyday vocabulary. A Google search of it brings up a whopping 3,280,000,000 results.

We most commonly refer to something as being sustainable if it avoids the depletion of natural, finite resources. In the UK gardening world, this has taken several forms, such as the increasing popularity of organic gardening, the drive for peat-free compost, the reduction of plastic, and a move away from fossil fuel-powered garden machinery. Whilst the power source is by far the most common method consumers adopt to assess a machine's sustainability, it's not the whole story - other factors come into play. In this article, I will look at the different sustainability aspects that I believe really matter, to help with informed purchasing and marketing decisions.

Power to the people

Any rational person will be able to

work out the sustainability hierarchy of garden machinery as being manual/ no power at the top, battery or electric next, with petrol at the bottom.

The ultimate sustainable power source is ourselves, so manual machinery that requires no added power is by far the best for the environment. Examples include hand-push cylinder lawnmowers and push lawn and leaf sweepers in place of blowers. These are also light on the pocket, which is proving very appealing in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis. If you're not convinced, then I'll let you in on a secret: our Handy 30cm push cylinder mowers completely – and unexpectedly - sold out in 2023! So, customer demand is there.

For those wanting an easier, powered option, but still emission-free, then both corded and battery-operated machinery are the best option. Both are powered by electricity one way or another (unless you have a renewable energy source!), one directly via cord and the other indirectly via rechargeable battery.

Corded garden machinery is slowly on the decline - who wants the inconvenience of a power lead getting in the way and restricting your movements? In its place has been



Improvements in battery life and charge time have been a driving factor in its growth

the inexorable rise of battery-powered garden machinery, which does away with the cord altogether.

Improvements in battery life and charge time have been a driving factor in its growth, but, when it comes to sustainability, the aspect that customers really like are interchangeable batteries. Many brands, including our own Greenworks, provide customers with the option to buy machinery with or without a rechargeable battery. As their batteries are interchangeable across garden machinery and power tools, such as lawnmowers, line trimmers, hedge trimmers and garden vacuums, customers can avoid the waste - and expense - of extra batteries.

Further benefits of battery-powered garden machinery are that they are quiet, lightweight, easy to use (the cumbersome throttling mechanism and starter cords have been replaced with the easier and safer-to-use start button), plus cheap to run and maintain when compared to petrol equivalents.

When it comes to petrol appliances, things don't look too rosy on the sustainability front.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency has calculated that a single petrol-powered lawn mower can produce the same amount of air pollution as 11 newer cars driven for an hour. Some states have looked to ban new petrol-powered small off-road engines, as found in certain

lawnmowers and leaf blowers. Whilst there are no similar bans on the cards in the UK, awareness of the environmental impact of petrol gardening tools is growing. The Royal Horticultural Society states that an average petrol power tool emits 0.848 kg carbon per litre of petrol used. They're all for moving away from fossil fuelled appliances, stating on their official website: “If the 21% of UK gardeners who use power tools switched from fossil fuel to green energy electric-powered tools, it would save enough carbon equivalent to drive around the planet 29,820 times.”

Not only do petrol devices emit harmful emissions and use up valuable resources when in use, but users also add to this by having to drive to petrol



Handy sold out of 30cm push cylinder mowers in 2023

stations to purchase fuel for them.

So, does this mean the death knell for petrol garden machines?

You would think the answer to this would be a straightforward 'yes,' and certainly some retailers have ceased to stock petrol lawnmowers, or have reduced their stock. But the figures don't lie: in 2023, 20% of our top 25 products were petrol lawnmowers. There is an older, traditional garden enthusiast type - typically men 50-plus with large lawns - who are committed petrol appliance users, and are unlikely to be persuaded otherwise.

Listen above the din

Whilst emissions are the main concern of customers looking for more sustainable garden machinery, let's not forget another form of pollutant: noise.

Petrol lawnmowers, especially ride-on models, make the most noise - 85dB is common. Without carburettors or generators, electric corded and battery-powered mowers emit significantly less noise pollution, averaging 70dB and 55dB, respectively. Of course, the larger the lawnmower, the bigger the noise.

Repairs and spares

The 'Right to Repair' movement has gained traction, and, whilst its focus has been on reducing electronic waste, this has fed through into other areas, including domestic appliances. Garden machinery that can be readily



Benefits of battery-powered garden machinery include quietness, light weight and simplicity of use



Improvements in battery life and charge time have been a driving factor in its growth

repaired or refurbished has become popular. We saw a significant increase in demand for refurbished products during the lockdown, and that demand remains, driven by greater awareness of sustainability and, more recently, by the cost-of-living crises.

For retailers, stocking garden machinery that has a readily-available source of spare parts and accessories is important here. Also, check to see if manufacturers offer a refurbishment service. At Handy, for example, we have experienced in-house engineers, so refurbishing garden machinery is straightforward for us. It reduces waste. Why throw away a perfectly good lawnmower because of minor damage?

Electric and battery-powered models

score well here, as they have fewer parts to wear out or replace than petrol-powered tools, and no need for oil changes or spark-plug replacements.

Make it last

Repairing and maintaining garden machinery will certainly extend its working life, which is an important consideration in sustainability, but even more important than that is investing in quality machinery in the first place.

Like most things in life, you get what you pay for. A budget lawnmower that costs under £100 is most likely made from relatively low-grade - often plastic - components that won't stand the test of time and will end up in

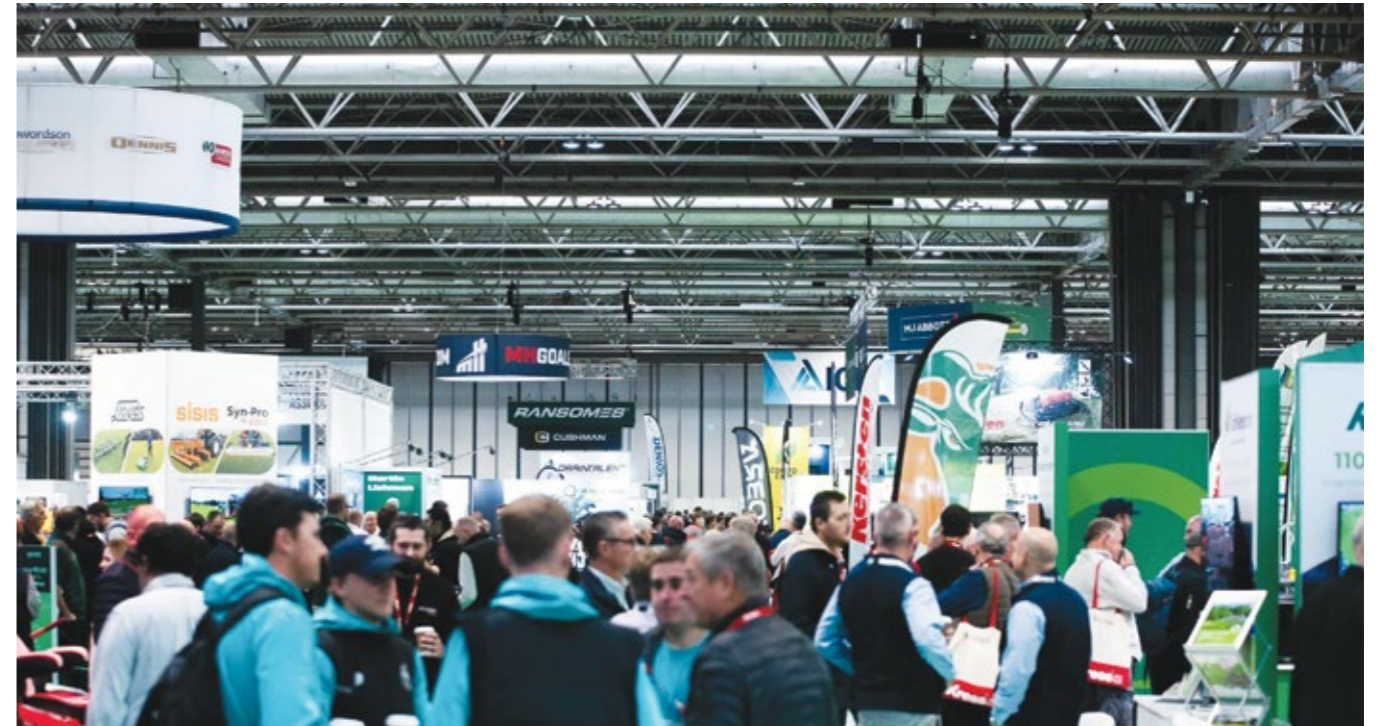
landfill. Quality equipment – our Webb brand, for instance - is designed to last.

Sustainability: gaining traction

Whilst for all the environmentalists out there I would love to say that the majority of purchasing decisions have sustainability high up in the mix of considerations, this is not necessarily the main factor. Buying decisions are a complex mix of price, power, convenience, ease of use and, yes, environmental factors. However, with greater awareness of what it means to be sustainable, and with new, younger generations discovering the joy of gardening, sustainable garden machinery will only continue to gain in importance.



Repairing and maintaining garden machinery extends its working life



Battery power and robotics take centre stage

Service Dealer's new contributor, ex-BAGMA head honcho and industry legend KEITH CHRISTIAN, offers his thoughts on trends seen at the GMA's latest show – and where our industry exhibition landscape might be heading.



Service Dealer's newest contributor, Keith Christian at SALEX (right), with Kubota's David Hart, plus *Service Dealer's* Duncan Murray-Clarke

'm back! Having retired in April 2023, it was always my intention to have a bit of a cooldown and catch a few shows in 2023 just to keep in touch and see what was happening.

I went to the Royal Highland Show by invitation of BAGMA, which was wonderful as always, with attendance upward of 200,000 people over the four days. I also went to GroundsFest with my son Jack, who has just started his own business, Bizvision, and who wanted to check out the groundcare industry for future prospects. Great to chat with people - even from under umbrellas!

I also attended SALTEX early in November just for a mooch around. Steve Gibbs, *Service Dealer's* editor, had come down with Covid and could not attend, so I stepped in to cover his editorial role and ended up spending a couple of days at the show, doing a few casual interviews and trying to get to grips with product trends and new introductions.

My tenure in the industry goes back as far as the old Motspur Park days and the local Groundsman show,



Kubota unveiled their new battery-powered, zero-turn mowers



EGO's stand exemplified the proliferation of battery tools on show

moving onto the heady days of Windsor Racecourse and the in-between times of the IOG at the East of England Showground and the (sadly) one-off GMA Show at Kempton Park. That is the Garden Machinery Association Show – not the current Grounds Management Association, as the IOG have become. So that is my 'show' credentials. Travelling the world during my career, and going to many shows in different countries, I guess I became a bit of a show groupie.

Visiting or exhibiting at an NEC show is relatively expensive. Floorspace for the exhibitors is costly compared to most of our industry shows, and parking and food and drinks costs for visitors and exhibitors are on the high side. The benefits are being able to park and being inside, out of the weather in reasonably comfortable surroundings. Compared to outdoor shows, indoor shows may lack a

certain amount of atmosphere, but being out of the cold and wet in November must be a bonus.

So, all things considered, well done to all the exhibitors for supporting SALTEX, and for creating some impressive stands and showcasing an interesting and diverse range of products. For the visitors, a big well done for attending. Well done to the GMA as well for sticking to the show format and venue. Overall, numbers seemed to be in the region of 7,900 over the two days, and it did come as a surprise to many that it was well-attended, with good-quality inquiries over the two days. With many attendees being early risers, the mornings were busy and the afternoons fell away fairly quickly.

I was able to wander around the show freely and catch up with people, and check out some of the new products on display. Apologies now to those I did not see, or where I have missed new product introductions. I was influenced by who had time to talk and what caught my eye.

Laurence Gale, of *Turf Pro* - sister mag to *Service Dealer* - reported on certain aspects of the show, and some new products in *Turf Pro's* Weekly Briefing. It was nice to get a different perspective from somebody who worked in the industry in the past as a groundsman.

Show trends

There were some clear trends at the show, both in garden products and commercial machines. No surprises, but battery-powered is the current big development across all sectors, alongside robotics in all shapes and sizes. The 'rise of the machines,' powered by batteries, is most certainly taking over from petrol for now. There may be some advantages in this, but it does not seem to be reflected in price, with some of the battery-powered commercial machines being way higher in price than the petrol or diesel predecessors they have been developed from.

Worryingly, talking to dealers, there still seems to be a problem generally with the disposal and recycling of batteries, and, in particular, lithium-ion battery disposal - but this will be something for a later time. Dealers should be aware of the dangers of storing these batteries, and make sure they understand what to do should one explode or short out.

There seemed to be plenty of new battery-powered introductions in the commercial grass-cutting walk-behind and ride-on machine areas. If a manufacturer had a diesel or petrol previously, they pretty much all now have electric versions. **Kubota** showed off a trio of battery-powered machines that demonstrate the variety that is available. A battery-powered compact tractor, the RT210-2e, a 48V articulated loader with two motors, one for the drive and for the hydraulics. Interestingly, they had a zero-turn ride-on with a 48-inch side discharge deck, the ZE-481, with a running time of four hours (or around 3.5 acres) of cutting, estimated to be the equivalent of 20hp. This will be available in 2024 with a 42-inch side discharge deck option. I will leave Kubota to publish the price, but they did give an indication.

Grillo were to show the new FK 700 diesel-powered ride-on professional brush-cutter, but there were some



Canycom from PSD, with its distinct colour scheme

delivery delays – and, annoyingly for the show, their large posters were stolen off the stand. The picture I saw looked good, and it had a real diesel engine in it. An electric version is expected in the New Year.

Bonnie, from **Weibang**, took me through their new introduction in the Velocity range. Model 77TBP is an offset twin-blade mulcher for high-end domestic and professional users. It is a three-speed walk-behind mower, powered by a low-vibration Loncin 300cc engine. My years of promoting mulchers drew my eye to this machine, as well as it being displayed so well on a well-presented stand. Speaking to Stuart Anderson, MD of Weibang UK, on the second day of the show, I was told: "It was the best show we have ever had. Very positive."

PSD's Canycom was not to be missed, with its rather aggressive colour scheme. A 90cm brush-cutter ride-on four-wheel drive machine, with an 18hp Briggs Vanguard and shaft drive to the cutter deck, it sported swinging blades with a toolless blade-change system. This machine stood out amongst a stand that was full of 'specialised' machines, including products from Eliet, Stella, Köppl, Grin and Ecotech. A veritable cornucopia of professional machines for all occasions - and all in one place.

Chris Gibson, MD of PSD, commented: "We enjoyed GroundsFest and being outside, and came to SALTEX with no great expectations, but it has turned out better than we expected - and we have seen a lot of dealers."

Iseki's Alan Prickett, sales director, told me that, in his view: "The first day of SALTEX was the best in many years. Quality and quantity, with good leads."

I managed a quick look at **Allett's** C34 Evolution electric-cylinder mower, with a rack of four 82V lithium batteries to drive its turf maintenance system as well as cutting the grass. Got to be one of the quieter ways to mow grass.

SALTEX is not all about mowers, though - it is just my particular interest. I saw **Catalyst**, who are offering software systems to the dealer network alongside their **IBCOS** cousins. I spoke to my successor at **BAGMA**, Nick Darking - just to make sure he was looking after the dealer network! Nick said: "BAGMA were delighted with SALTEX and the turnout, and being able to see so many members and potentials - many of whom were interested in BAGMA's training." Keep up the good work, Nick!

Future events

Lots of talk about future shows - BTME in January 2024, GroundsFest, SAGE, and SALTEX. It could be interesting what suppliers and manufacturers decide to do - and which to attend, if any? Some firms really want to support both the GMA and BIGGA, others just want to be where the potential customers are, with the organisers of these shows wanting to make money out of them.

Many in the industry want a reduction in shows, whereas we now have one extra. There is no doubt they will all run for at least the next year, and only the economics (lack of profit) will be the factor that brings any of them together at one show.

For me, they all serve a purpose, but do water down a not-so-large industry following and spread it a bit thin. We have the proof that, whilst venues are much-criticised, the time of the year can be beneficial to a certain target audience, and what each show offers can be attractive to visitors in different ways.

I am looking forward to visiting BTME in Harrogate this month. An okay venue in a great town, with plenty of diverse entertainment. What else are we going to do in January?



Weibang featured an offset twin-blade mulcher

Setting off-season goals

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



THIS ISSUE: TAKING TIME TO ASSESS ALL ASPECTS OF THE DEALERSHIP

The start of a new year can be chance for dealers to catch your breath for the first time. While – hopefully – you have grabbed some much-needed rest as you end your 2023 seasonal journey, it's also the perfect time to reflect on the season just gone while it is still fresh in your mind.

This is the time that we begin working with the dealerships we consult with to get their sales goals and dealership objectives set for the next year.

- Were things flowing well?
- Did you have a quick turnaround time for your customers?
- Did you notice an unusual number of comebacks or redos?
- Did your techs improve their efficiencies?
- Were you able to deliver the customer experience you had hoped to deliver during your busiest time?

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, your offseason goals should be to develop new or better processes to fix those issues before the 2024 season starts in earnest.



The same is true of both your parts department and your sales department. In your parts department:

- Did you have a good fill rate out of stocking inventory?
- Were you maximising your margins on parts that are captive, while making sure you are competitively priced on items that are price-sensitive?

- What was your transaction time at the parts counter?
- Is it possible for your parts people to move the fastest-moving parts closer to the parts counter, to cut out a few steps for the customers they are taking care of?
- Do you need to reset your parts displays so that each display is producing enough gross profit per square foot per year?
- Is it time to give your parts counter a fresh look by replacing old or dated signage?

Again, your offseason goal for your parts department is to make changes to fix any issue that needs to be addressed.



Finally, in the wholegoods side of your dealership, look at your display areas inside and out.

- Are there any changes you would make to how you display your equipment?
- Are there better ways to 'showcase' the new models your manufacturers are building for the new season?
- Can you improve on your follow-up with leads you are getting?
- Can you improve your margins by offering service packages as a part of the equipment sale?

The off-season is the time to make the changes you need to improve your profitability and customer experience as you move into the 2024 season.

I would encourage each of you to not waste any time, and to get laser-focused on improvements you can make that will help drive you and your dealership to a strong and profitable 2024.



Promoting the business to prospective employees

In her first diary entry of 2024, **Joanne Balmer**, of Balmers GM, says gone are the days of candidates 'selling themselves' to the dealership – the tide has now changed.



Firstly, I'd like to start off by thanking **Jason Nettle of Winchester Garden Machinery for his *Diary of a Season*, which I thoroughly enjoyed reading throughout 2023. It's always interesting and insightful to hear about the trials, tribulations and challenges faced by others who are working within the same industry as yourself.**

When I was approached by the team at *Service Dealer* to pen their diary for 2024, I was, of course, honoured – which, as the deadline approached, quickly turned to panic, as I found myself wondering how on earth am I going to find the time to get this done?! Should be easy, as we're out of season, and things have quietened down, right? Erm, wrong!

Traditionally, the winter months are the time of year where we find ourselves knee-deep in all the frankly crap jobs that must be done to keep the business operating throughout the year – things like insurance renewals, energy contracts, accreditation audits, business audits, accounts audits, and any other naff job that lends itself well to the word 'audit' being added to the end of it.

That being said, the winter months are the time of year where we, as a management team, like to catch our breath, take a step back and take an overview of the whole business. Put simply: what worked, what didn't work, and what direction we're planning to take the company in over the coming months and years ahead.

Like many of you, I work within our family business, and again, like many of you, I have a young family at home which leaves you with nowhere near enough time in the day to get everything done - even in the winter months. So, as I sit here in my kitchen at 4am on a Monday morning, penning my first diary entry (which is two weeks overdue – sorry, Steve!), it leads me nicely onto something that we've been putting a lot of thought into recently: home- and work-life balance.

This year, staff recruitment and retention has been a real

challenge for us – in fact, it has been an ever-increasing problem since the Covid years, where the cost of living rocketed and the working population realised that, actually, there are better ways to work than the way they had been working previously.

As an employer, gone are the days where you would put out a job advert, shortlist candidates, interview and make your decision based on whoever did their best 'selling job' of themselves to get that contract of employment at your company.

Now, as a business, we find ourselves in an unfamiliar situation where we're the ones 'selling ourselves' to prospective employees as to the reasons why they would want to come and work with us at Balmers GM.

As a management team, we want to work with the best people out there, and – not only that – retain them, too, which has led us to some real 'out-of-the-box thinking' and coming up with some new initiatives that we'll be trialling very soon, and which I hope to be able to share with you over the coming months.

Another area of our business that we are extremely focused on is technology, connectivity and how we can use it to automate and integrate more of our internal business processes and practices - CRM, POS, AI, apps, the cloud. Are they a good fit for us? Can we utilise these further? Only time will tell, and I plan to get back to you over my future diary entries.

Equally, machinery fleet connectivity and management are an exciting area for us, particularly for our after-market team who have already got on-board with manufacturers' tech tools, such as JD Link, STIHL Connect and Husqvarna Fleet Services. The potential and scope for us is huge, particularly as we run quite a large commercial hire fleet.

So, for now, I'll sign off. I look forward to sharing more with you during this year. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all a most prosperous 2024.





TAXATION



Five VAT mistakes that land businesses in trouble

Making a VAT-related mistake can end up being costly – not only will HMRC expect any outstanding VAT to be paid, but it might also levy penalties and interest. Below EMMA RAWSON, technical officer at the ATT, offers five common VAT mistakes that could easily get businesses into hot water.

1 Not registering:

A fundamental, but common, error is not registering for VAT when required to.

Very broadly, a UK based business is required to register for VAT if the total VAT taxable turnover in the last 12 months was over the VAT registration threshold (currently £85,000), or is expected to go over the threshold in the next 30 days.

The first 'backwards-looking' test has to be considered at the end of every month.

The second 'forward-looking' test has to be considered every day, and is worth keeping in mind if, for example, the business receives a particularly large order or contract.

Once either of the tests is met, the business needs to register for VAT with HMRC within 30 days. If it's late, HMRC will not only ask it to pay VAT on any sales made since the date it was supposed to be registered, but can also charge a penalty of up to 100% of the unpaid VAT.

2 Claiming without a valid invoice:

Generally, a business can't reclaim any VAT it has paid unless it has a valid VAT invoice.

This needs to contain specific information, including the amount and rate of VAT charged and the VAT registration number of the supplier. Importantly, it can't claim VAT back using an invalid invoice, a pro-forma or a delivery note. It's therefore important to check that it is receiving the right kinds of invoices from its suppliers. Otherwise, HMRC could ask the business to pay them back any VAT it has reclaimed, along with interest and penalties.



3 Reclaiming more than the business is entitled to:

A common error made by VAT-registered businesses is to assume that they can reclaim VAT on all of their expenses.

However, some expenses won't have VAT charged in the first place because they are zero-rated or exempt. Common examples include insurance, and bus and train travel. There are also special rules which block the business claiming VAT back on certain expenses - for

example, it can't claim VAT incurred on entertaining clients.

One area where there are lots of special rules is motoring expenses. As a general rule, a business can't claim VAT back when it buys a car (unless it bought the car to sell on or hire out as part of the business, are a taxi driver or driving instructor, or can prove that the car is never available to employees or anyone else for private use). If, instead of buying a car, it is leased, then, generally, only 50% of the VAT charged on the lease payments can be recovered. Recovering VAT on petrol or diesel is also tricky – broadly, the business can either choose to only claim the VAT back on fuel used for business miles, or it can claim all the VAT back and pay a fuel scale charge to account for any private use. Whichever option is chosen, it must be applied across the whole business fleet.

And where the business is a sole trader or partnership, it also needs to watch out for the rules on personal use. If an expense has both business and personal uses, it can only claim the VAT on the business element. For example, if there is a mobile phone where a quarter of the calls are personal, it can only reclaim the VAT on 75% of the costs associated with that phone.

4 Missing bad debt claims:

If a business has supplied a customer with goods or services and they haven't paid, the business may be able to claim the VAT back from HMRC.

It must have already paid the VAT over to HMRC and written the debt off in its books – if there's a good chance that the business might still be paid, it is unlikely to be able to get relief. The debt also has to have been unpaid for at least six months.

One thing that's easily missed is that these rules cut both ways – if the business has purchased goods or services and not paid the supplier six months after the due date, HMRC will expect the repayment of any VAT recovered on that purchase. Failure to do so could result in interest and penalties.

5 Keep track of points and payments:

In January 2023, the previous 'default surcharge' regime which applied to late VAT return filing and late payment of VAT was replaced by a new penalty system.

Broadly, under the new late filing penalty regime, a business will get a penalty point each time it files a VAT return late. Once the points reach a certain threshold (four points for quarterly returns), a £200 penalty will be charged. Each subsequent late submission will also incur a further penalty, until the points expire following a period of good behaviour.

Unlike under default surcharge, a business can now receive a late filing penalty even if it usually files nil returns, or claims a repayment of VAT.

It's therefore important to keep track of any penalty points to make sure the business doesn't end up with a penalty.



Summary

VAT is a quagmire ready to swallow up all who come across it. With so many quirks, foibles and traps set up, it's important to take good advice. Even those who consider themselves au fait with VAT can make mistakes which are expensive to resolve.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS



Garden leave is an essential contractual term

Garden leave - many will have heard about it, but not really understood what it means and what it can do, writes Alex Kleanthous, consultant and employment solicitor in the dispute resolution and commercial litigation team of Gannons.

In essence, garden leave is the usual term given to clauses in an employment contract that give an employer the right to require the employee to work his or her notice period at home.

The reason that employers use these clauses is because they want to distance an employee from clients and colleagues to minimise the risk of poaching when the employee actually leaves. They are generally used in conjunction with restrictive covenants.

Why employers might need a garden leave clause

Garden leave clauses are usually found in a senior employee's or director's employment contract. The clause typically entitles the employer, after notice has been given by either party, to require the employee to stay at home and not work or contact colleagues, clients, and suppliers.

Doing so also removes the employee's ability to access confidential databases, information, and business-critical systems. An employee can be given notice and immediately put on garden leave, and their access to systems cut off.

Garden leave clauses are not just important for contracts for senior employees. Where any employee has valuable and transferable client relationships, employers can use garden leave to protect their relationships with clients before the employee leaves. Many employees will also have access to important business 'know-how' and data. Garden leave can significantly mitigate the risk of data theft or misuse in the lead-up to an employee leaving.

While restrictive covenants (for example, prohibiting working within a certain distance of the firm, or from soliciting or working for clients for a period) will be helpful, there are often issues of enforceability. However, if a departing manager is on garden leave, they cannot work elsewhere, and this can be enforced if they try to break that obligation.

Advantages of a garden leave clause

The key advantages of garden leave are that the employee continues to owe all their contractual duties, including implied terms such as the duty of trust and confidence, to the employer; it can allow for a useful handover period; a paid period of

non-competition may be more palatable to an employee than an unpaid period; and garden leave clauses are much more easily enforceable than restrictive covenants such as a non-compete clause.

Disadvantages of a garden leave clause

There is no real disadvantage to having the clause in the contract – it will always be up to the employer whether to implement it or not. If it is implemented, the flipside, and key disadvantage, is that the employer needs to continue to provide all contractual pay and benefits during the period of garden leave.



However, the employer can expressly exclude the obligation to provide benefits in the employment contract, and it is open to the employer to implement the garden leave clause for only part of the notice period.

It needs to be said that employees have a right to work. So, in the absence of the garden leave clause, an employer might not lawfully be able to place an employee on garden leave. Isolating an employee, or failing to provide them with work without the express power, could be regarded as a breach of contract, depending on the circumstances.

This would entitle the employee to resign and claim constructive dismissal on account of the employer's breach of contract. This can enable the employee to avoid any restrictive covenants owing to the breach of contract.

Garden leave clauses are often combined with restrictive covenants


Garden leave clauses are often used in tandem with restrictive covenants. And the reason is simple: employees often acquire confidential information, such as trade secrets and knowledge of sensitive business interests.

It can be tempting for employees to use information acquired through their employment after their employment has terminated, either in business for themselves or to further the interests of their new employer, who may be a competitor.


So, the protection provided by putting an employee on garden leave may need to be combined with restrictive covenants applying post-departure. Also, the lack of comprehensive protection in employment contracts can make it more difficult to sell a business.

The employee breaches garden leave

Lastly, where an employee refuses to comply with garden leave, clauses can be enforced with a court injunction, often preceded by a cease-and-desist letter. But this is expensive. The remedy is also discretionary, but a court is highly likely to enforce a contractual garden leave clause, whereas a restrictive covenant is usually much more arguable. The strength of a garden leave clause usually means that an employee will comply when threatened with an injunction and offer undertakings to comply.



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BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

Dealers still voicing frustrations at warranty claims

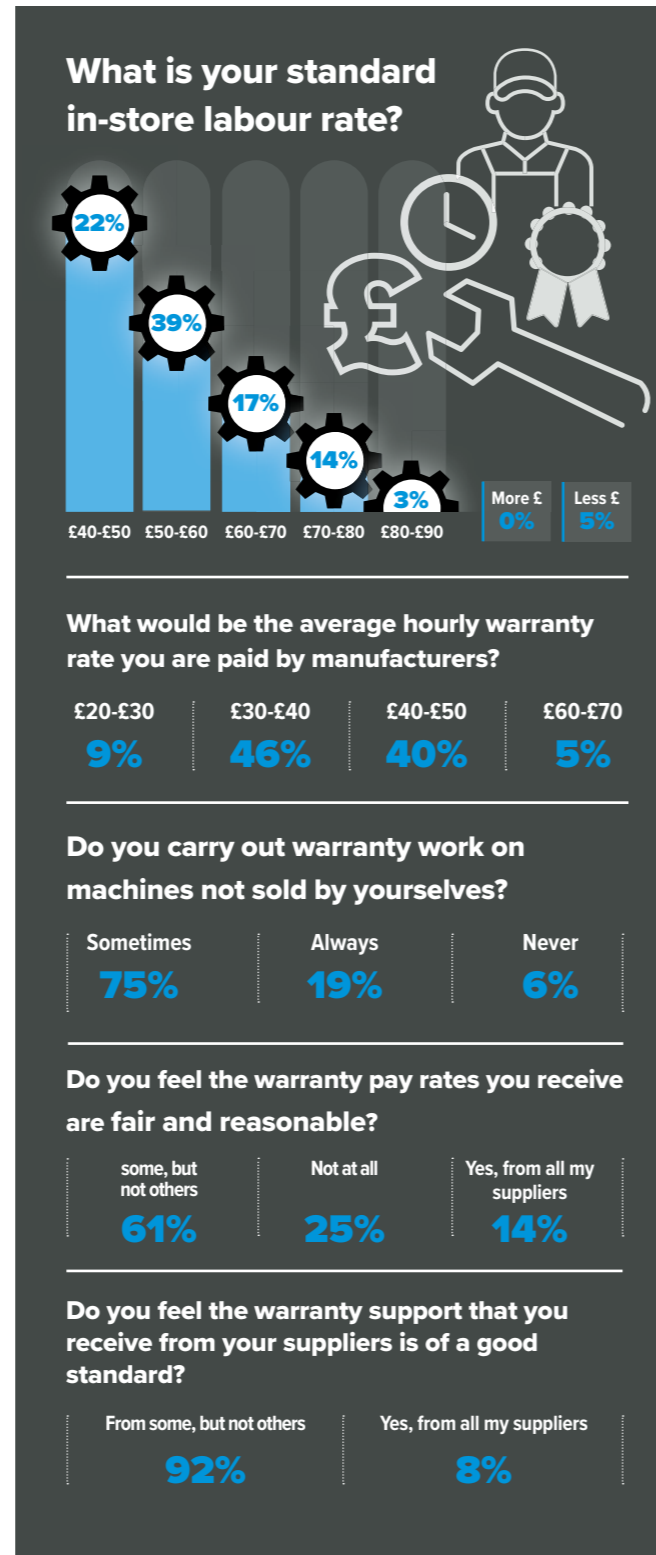
Dealers respond to survey with dissatisfaction with certain suppliers

The results received from dealers who responded to our warranty claims survey, which was held at the end of 2022, once again voiced frustrations against certain supplying manufacturers..

To the key question of 'do you feel the warranty pay rates you receive are fair and reasonable?', only 14% of respondents felt that it was by all their suppliers. Most (61%) said it was by some, but not others.

Also disappointing to report is the lack of enthusiasm heard in response to the question of whether dealers felt that the warranty support they received from suppliers was of a good standard. A massive 92% of those who responded could only say it was from some suppliers, but not from others.

Reading through the many comments received from our dealer readers, whilst some improvements might have been seen since last year's survey, most dealers who chose to respond certainly believe there is a long way for some suppliers to go before all their requirements are satisfied.



Your say...

We asked: what is your take on the warranty situation this year?
Are there any changes you'd like to see the manufacturers' make?

- Warranty labour payment rates are never going to be enough, unless the manufacturers pay our retail rate and pay a fair time for repairs. Our workshops are under more pressure than ever before, due to a lack of skilled engineers in the industry and a rapidly shrinking dealer network, with closures of businesses nationwide on a monthly basis. To take hours out of our hectic schedule to take on underpaid work is a bitter pill to have to swallow! I understand that warranty is a cost to the manufacturers, and they feel that they only need to reimburse us for our costs, but all that is doing is shifting the cost burden to the dealers. There has been positive change from some suppliers, but there's a lot of work still needed.
- Certain manufacturers seem to make claims as long-winded and awkward as possible to put a claim in, often requiring copious quantities of information quite irrelevant to the problem, or using difficult and confusing-to-navigate websites which were clearly designed by someone who didn't ever plan to use them - meaning it can take 30 mins or so just to put a claim in, which makes putting small claims in quite unworthwhile, which I presume is part of the overall plan. By the time I've uploaded a copy of the receipt, uploaded a photo of the serial number plate, found and inputted the invoice number for the ordered parts, added the parts used, description of the problem, customers' info, etcetera, it's just not worth it for a claim on a £10 part. You just accept the loss and move on, which is not acceptable.
- Better! But dealers should be able to surcharge claims where manufacturers request dealers to support distance selling.
- Pay our current rate or close to it. Pay for the time it takes to do the job, not what time it's technically just possible to do it in. Cover admin costs realistically, if not covering our full rate. Allow us dealers to decide whether we only do our own warranty claims, without penalising us for not doing internet sales warranty – or make it enticing to do it. Let us make some (more) profit on parts - we all know what labour and parts margins we need to make to keep the business going.
- We have noticed a drop in the ability of manufacturers to help with technical issues, coupled with an increase in reducing or refusing totally claims for repairs on their machines. Plus, repeatedly being asked for copies of sale invoices and servicing records - if you can't trust us to do the job as quickly as possible, and don't believe us when we say it's been serviced, then perhaps you need to open your own repair facilities, and we will stick to chargeable repairs? Some suppliers will have noted our dissatisfaction with the reduced or non-existent winter stock orders placed this year.

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Products

AGRICULTURAL



Electric new offering from Fendt

Designed for vineyard work

Fendt has launched a new electric tractor designed for use in vineyards, orchards, greenhouses and urban areas.

The battery powered e107 V Vario benefits from the manufacturer's Vario transmission and the FendtONE operating system. The power unit produces 90 horsepower, which enables it to reach up to 40km/h.

The company says the 100kWh battery will power the e107 V for between four and seven hours, and it will charge from 20% to 80% in 45 minutes. AGCO have announced they are already working on a 'range extender' to offer longer operating times in the future. However, they say the tractor already benefits from a foot switch that enables the tractor to regenerate and recycle power.

At 1.07 metres wide and 2.45 metres high, the unit is compact and quiet, making it suited for use around livestock and in public areas.

It has three operating modes – Eco, Dynamic and Dynamic+. Eco is for lower-power applications, while Dynamic is for more power-intensive work, with the + function only used to make additional power available for a limited

period when the tractor is under strain. The battery also benefits from Fendt's thermal management, which prevents extreme temperatures affecting tractor performance.

The e107 V is compatible with all current Fendt implements, and there is both a front and rear PTO. There are three fully-fledged attachment spaces, and up to six independent hydraulic valves in the centre, as well as four hydraulic valves in the rear.

The four-post cab offers plenty of headroom, and the large door gives easy access. There is no exhaust pipe, which, the manufacturer says, provides better all-round visibility, and operators will also be able to preheat or cool the cab and take advantage of heated front and rear windows to offer better visibility in cold conditions.

For the first time, all machines in a series are connected to the Fendt telemetry system, which feed speed, hours, battery life and service data to the FendtONE offboard system.

The e107 Vario can be ordered now, and will be produced at the Marktobendorf tractor factory from the fourth quarter of 2024.

COMMERCIAL / AGRICULTURAL



Power in compact packages

New Avant 635i and 640i loaders

Avant Tecno has introduced two new loader models in the Avant 600 series: the single-speed Avant 635i and the double-speed Avant 640i.

Both models have the all-new Kohler KSD engine, which, the company says, provides more usable power because of its electronic injection and simple operation, with no exhaust after-treatment necessary.

The 635i travels at 12 km/h, and the maximum speed of the 640i is 23 km/h. Both models are equipped with a certified ROPS/FOPS canopy as standard. A GT cab enclosure, with ergonomic design, is also available, providing more safety and operator comfort.

The new electronically-controlled Kohler KSD 1403 engine is a common rail diesel engine, with a displacement of 1.4 litres and an output of 26 hp / 19 kW. The engine was designed with the requirements of the latest Stage V and Tier 4 Final emission standards in mind. Its power and other features have been optimised to 19 kilowatts, eliminating the need for a particulate filter.

Due to the new engine, the auxiliary hydraulics' previous output of 50 l/min has been increased to an oil flow of 66 l/min.

The company also says both models have a safety-enhancing electric power distribution unit (PDU), where most of the fuses and relays are

located. The safety features of the loader are now controlled by a separate electronic control unit of the loader (VECU).

In the cab, separate gauges have now been replaced by a multifunction display. It provides the user with varied information on the loader, such as engine speed, oil flow of auxiliary hydraulics, fuel quantity, current fuel consumption, outside temperature, hydraulic oil temperature, load alarm, total operating hours, maintenance info and fault codes.

The new 635i and 640i models replace the previous models, Avant 635 and Avant 640.

DOMESTIC



Garden cutting from STIGA

New CS 100e cordless chainsaw

New from Stiga is the CS 100e cordless chainsaw.

This new chainsaw is designed for chopping and cutting jobs in the garden. It is the first Stiga 20V chainsaw and weighs 3.7kg.

It is driven by a 700 W motor, and has a 4 Ah ePower battery. It can reach up to 14.5m/s of chain speed, and has a 160mm cutting width, which, according to the manufacturer, means that it can perform a minimum of 80 cuts on 100mm diameter logs (on one charge).

Safety is ensured due to the trigger, the inertial brake and – placed at the end of the cutting bar – the tip guard, which reduces the risk of kickback.

Designed with two ergonomic handles, side and rear, the company says users can care for their garden in a comfortable and easy way. The chain can be easily tensioned via the Stiga quick tensioning system.

The company also says there is less noise and vibrations, due to the ePower 20V battery.

AGRICULTURAL

Specialist spraying for narrow areas

John Deere launches new 300M



The new 300M expands John Deere's self-propelled sprayer portfolio in the compact segment.

Featuring the latest precision ag technology, a minimum turning radius and two types of boom – with or without air sleeve – the 300M is described as the new specialist sprayer for narrow areas and high-value crops.

With the 332M and the 340M, two model variants are introduced. The 332M offers a tank size of 3,200 litres and a 175 hp four-cylinder Deere engine. A boom width of up to 28 metres and a turning circle of 3.8 metres are suited for work in narrow areas.

The 340M has a tank size of 4,000 litres and a working width of up to 36 metres. This width, the 225 hp six-cylinder Deere engine, and a turning circle of 4.2 metres facilitate high performance and compact operation at the same time, says the manufacturer.

Both variants are said to be suited for narrow roads and field work in any situation. Automatically-adjustable track width from 150-180cm, 180-225cm and 225-300cm allow flexible use in all types of crops, including high-value

crops. The 50:50 weight distribution reduces soil compaction and makes work possible, even under difficult conditions.

The 300M is equipped with StarFire Receiver, the G5Plus Universal Display, and JDLink. The new cab position provides all-round and boom visibility. The suspended and heated seats provide comfort, and the new CAT 4 cab is equipped with the latest filter technology.

Both models of the 300M are offered with a steel boom and a stainless-steel boom with air sleeve. Both are available with Individual Nozzle Control.

The PowrSpray two-circuit liquid system design is also a key feature on the 300M. It offers fast filling of up to 600L/min and a highly precise output of 750L/min at three bars.

UTILITY VEHICLES



Yamaha Motor Europe N.V. Branch UK has revealed its 2024 line-up of lightweight vehicles, which includes golf cars, light utility vehicles and personal transport vehicles.

Lithium-ion battery power dominates the offering, with power units from the manufacturer RoyPow.

Lithium battery models dominate lightweight line-up

Yamaha reveal range for 2024

The line-up includes:

Golf Cars

The Drive² AC Li golf car offers a 3.3 kW motor and an optimised independent front suspension, tailored to harmonise with Yamaha's lightweight lithium-ion battery. Furthermore, says the manufacturer, its redesigned longer-stroke rear suspension enhances comfort, enabling golf course proprietors to offer an elevated experience for their members.

Light Utility Vehicles

The UMX AC is designed to handle an array of tasks in commercial, industrial, agricultural and leisure environments. At its heart, the UMX AC features a 5.0 kW motor. Yamaha says it delivers smooth, flexible power that takes the operator just about anywhere.

Personal Transport Vehicles

The Drive² PowerTech Li, designed for personal transport, offers a 5.0 kW electric motor, comprehensive independent suspension front and rear, a comfortable interior, and enhanced performance. Its extended battery lifespan ensures more time and reduced charging intervals.

Throughout the company's lightweight vehicle collection, the colour palette spans a diverse range of models. Four new shades have been added to the personal transportation segment, including Pearl White, Arsenal Red, Matte Titan and Acid Green. New colours Pearl White and Leaf Green also feature in the Golf Fleet segment.

A positive outlook

(with underlying concerns)



Our anonymous columnist, THE SPROCKET, compares the dealer sector to another industry close to their heart, considers the past year's fortunes, and looks again at the difficult area of recruitment.

It is always difficult to start a piece like this a month or so ahead of publication. Deciding on what to cover is not so easy when considering what has happened can affect what may happen in the future. The usual topic would be to summarise the past year and look forward to the next one.

I should talk about SALTEX perhaps, but I know it will be covered elsewhere in the mag so for now, suffice it to say that there were some pleasant surprises, and the numbers and quality of attendees seems to have surprised most exhibitors' expectations. There was also some relief that GroundsFest had not deterred people from visiting. Speculation about next year for both shows is inevitable, though.

I also recently attended Motorcycle Live at the NEC, and, whilst it is totally different than our industry, it was an interesting show, and I felt it was a lot better than the previous year, despite some of the big brands missing.

There was a huge increase in all types of electric and battery-powered bikes, across all types of riding – offroad, on-road, bikes, scooters, and a few things that may leave the actual use to the imagination. The reintroduction of the BSA brand by an Indian manufacturer was a welcome sight,

following on from the trend set by Royal Enfield – with similar low pricing. However, some of the more popular brands seem to be going above the £20k mark, and are looking increasingly more untouchable for most of us. Judging by what is on offer, this market segment must be doing fairly well.

As The Sprocket, I am allowed a bit of a mention about motorbikes, and, throughout my career, I have always thought that a motorcycle dealership is similar in many ways to a garden machinery or groundcare dealership, comprising wholegoods, parts and service. The big difference would be the customer base, as most tend to want a motorcycle rather than *needing* to have one. It is after all, what brings Catalyst to our industry, as a result of their large customer base with motorcycle dealerships.

Mixed fortunes for dealers

The past year seems to have been one of mixed fortunes for the dealer network. I hear positive comments all the time, but with underlying concerns about the future. Much has changed because of Covid, such as working practices, supply chains, customer habits, recruitment and the expectations of those who are looking

for employment. It all stacks up, and can create a different working platform for any retailer, including machinery dealers. Being aware and going with the flow seems to be the best way forward - but don't be shy to take advice from professionals for certain areas of your businesses.

Catching up with high street retail, I asked Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira (British Independent Retailers Association) what he thought. I saw him being interviewed on one of the news programmes, and thought a comment about retail may be interesting for the dealer network. Andrew provided the following quote:

“Independent retail is facing many challenges, the biggest being the reduced consumer expenditure on non-essential items as a result of high interest rates and the cost of living crisis.

The smaller retailers will have to rely on all their resilience and creativity until consumer confidence returns. The business will also need to work even harder on customer communication, so that the shoppers know what is available in the smaller local shops.

Retailing has never been easy, and, at the moment, it is challenging, yet I believe that indies have the skill and determination to succeed.”

Now, I would draw some parallels from this for our industry and the dealer network. There are many challenges ahead, and many that have been conquered in the past. Certainly, higher interest rates and the cost of living may affect buying patterns for the outdoor machinery sector, particularly with the domestic market. There is no question that our industry is resilient, and Andrew's comment that “indies have the skill and determination to succeed” is very true of our industry, and underlines the back bone of the sector and its rather unique selling points.

Recruitment (again!)

All industries and businesses are struggling to recruit staff at all levels currently. Recruiting skilled staff is even more difficult, as those that need them are competing with better packages and higher salaries. There is no question that this situation for our industry is a bit of a bummer, as we simply are not attractive enough and do not pay enough, generally speaking.

Efforts have been made (and are being made in the background) to

make careers in our industry, land-based engineering, more visible, and to highlight the variety of job roles and the exciting nature of the technology the industry encompasses – and to dispel the old-fashioned vision of working on a dirty old machine in a farmyard. Electronics, robotics, drone technology, autonomous machines, field mapping, GPS systems and security systems are all a part of most modern-day dealerships, but are undoubtedly taken for granted when trying to encourage a new recruit.

If you need help recruiting, to encourage new recruits, young and old, look on the We Are Landbased Engineering website (www.wearelandbased.engineering) This has some very good information to help people better understand what the industry has to offer. There are also several government sites that can help with apprenticeship recruitment, and the rules and incentives to employ apprentices. Apprentices are not just the sole responsibility of the big industry manufacturers – they can be recruited by smaller businesses, as well.

Ben Turner, managing director of Ben Burgess, said in a very good recruitment video on YouTube some years ago (“The Day in the life of an Agricultural Technician”): “Apprentices are very important to us, as they are the seed corn of our business.” I thought the video was fantastic, and the star of the show, Adam, did an excellent job walking the audience through his daily routine. Sadly, industry did not really pick up on it, as it was a John Deere dealership with lots of JDs being used. What a shame, as it was an excellent recruitment tool, and could have worked for all. Recruiting needs to be an industry effort, and not just something for individual companies. Everyone needs to pull together to make sure that the ‘seed corn of the future’ is available and fertile.

Now then, it is a cold day today, but reasonably dry. Got to go and rake up the leaves and get the brown garden bin out for that big green monster to collect in the early hours of the morning. A great wakeup call, but too early, really. Then, maybe an hour or so on the bike, and try out my new heated jacket ...



What's on?

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

JANUARY 2024

Oxford Farming Conference www.ofc.org.uk	3-5	Harrogate Spring Flower Show www.flowershow.org.uk	25/28
LAMMA 2024, Birmingham NEC www.lammashow.com	17-18	East Anglian Game & Country Fair, Euston Estate, Thetford www.ukgamefair.co.uk	27/28
BTME 2024, Harrogate International Centre www.btme.org.uk	23-25		
Golf Industry Show, Phoenix, AZ www.gcsaaconference.com	29-1/02		

FEBRUARY 2024

Spring Fair 2024, Birmingham NEC www.springfair.com	4-7	North Somerset Show www.nsas.org.uk	6
Doe Show 2024, Ulting www.ernestdoe.com	6-8	Nottinghamshire County Show www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com	11
Dairy-Tech, Stoneleigh Park www.dairy-tech.uk	7	Balmoral Show, Belfast www.balmoralshow.co.uk	15/18
Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS), York Auction Centre www.yams.uk.com	7	Hadleigh Show www.hadleighshow.co.uk	18
World Ag Expo, Tulare, California www.worldagexpo.com	13-15	Smallholding & Countryside Festival, Royal Welsh Showground www.rwas.wales/smallholding-and-countryside-festival	18/19
Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry www.executivehireshow.co.uk	14-15	Chelsea Flower Show www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show	21/25

MARCH 2024

Low Carbon Agriculture 2024, NAEC Stoneleigh www.lowcarbonagricultureshow.co.uk	6-7	The Commercial Vehicle Show, Birmingham NEC www.rwas.wales/smallholding-and-countryside-festival	23/25
Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London www.idealhomeshow.co.uk	22-7/03	Shropshire County Agricultural Show, West Midlands Showground www.shropshirecountyshow.com	25
		Northumberland County Show www.northcountyshow.co.uk	25

APRIL 2024

AEA Conference 2024, One Great George Street, London www.aea.uk.com	9	Suffolk County Show www.suffolkshow.co.uk	29/30
Newark Garden Show, Newark Showground www.newarkgardenshow.co.uk	19/21	Staffordshire County Show www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show	29/30
		Royal Bath & West Show www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show	30-1/06



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