

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

MAY / JUNE 19

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE

Service Dealer visits dealers in the North of the country, including Argyll Engineers, to see how business is faring this year

The year of the robot?

Interview with a manufacturer, new developments and dealers' views

Putting on a show

Ripon Farm Services on how it stages an 'open house'

SIMA report

Latest developments seen at Paris show



DEALER Q&A

HUW OWEN TELLS US THAT TO SURVIVE, DEALERS MUST BE ONLINE

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IN ROBOTIC
MOWING

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to May/June 2019's edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

We devote a proportion of the magazine this issue to robotic mowers. I asked in a recent *Weekly Update* whether 2019 was indeed the year of the robot and as ever you, our readers, can be trusted to give us your opinions. You can see the results of our robotic mowing survey on page 36, as well as a selection of your thoughts on the subject. As you might have guessed, viewpoints range from the enthusiastic to the sceptical. What seems undeniable though, is there's certainly plenty of buzz around the automated machines this year – and that appears to be a worldwide trend, with very similar discussions to what we're having in this country also occurring between the manufacturers and dealers in the US.

Talking to Husqvarna's Head of Operations, Caraline Robinson, her opinion is that the UK is going to see exponential growth in robotic solutions. One imagines that other manufacturers agree with this, considering the efforts currently going into promotion of the units. I think all the suppliers will agree, however, that for them to really take off, the dealer network needs to support them with their full advocacy.

Elsewhere in this issue we hear from dealers around the UK who tell us how business is faring for them so far this season – plus we welcome back *Service Dealer's* founder, Chris Biddle, who'll be sharing with us his sage-like wisdom once again for the *In My View* column.



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DEALERS

RIPON FARM SERVICES ACQUIRES RBM AGRICULTURAL

Neighbouring John Deere dealer bought

Agricultural machinery specialist Ripon Farm Services is set for significant expansion following the acquisition of neighbouring John Deere dealer RBM Agricultural Ltd.

The enlarged company will trade as Ripon Farm Services, with all current Ripon Farm Services and RBM branches, as well as all branch staff, being retained.

Based in North Yorkshire, Ripon Farm Services is a long-established agricultural machinery dealer, serving customers across Yorkshire, the Humber and Teesside. It also supplies parts, provides support, servicing and sells used equipment. The company employs 190 people at its nine

depots and has a turnover of £70 million.

The acquisition of RBM Agricultural will enable Ripon Farm Services to expand its geographical presence into Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. RBM is a £45m turnover business, employing 84 staff at its five branches in Market Weighton, Malton, Retford, Brigg and Louth.

Both companies celebrated 50 years as John Deere dealerships in 2017.

Geoff Brown, Managing Director of Ripon Farm Services, said, "This acquisition represents considerable investment in our business and our

skilled workforce and fits perfectly with our growth ambitions. It provides us with a great opportunity to expand our reputation for delivering high-quality products and services to a much wider customer base."

Adrian Denner, Managing Director of RBM Agricultural, said, "Ripon Farm Services shares our values for providing premium brands backed by expertise and excellent standards of service, a combination which delivers best value to customers."

You can read more about Ripon Farm Services starting on page 38 of this issue.



L-R: Geoff Brown, Managing Director of Ripon Farm Services with Adrian Denner, Managing Director of RBM Agricultural

DEALERS

ROBOTIC TRAINING FOR CUB CADET DEALERS

More than 100 participate

More than 100 dealers recently attended two Cub Cadet robotic lawnmower sales training days held by EP Barrus at Warwick Racecourse.

Phil Noble, Sales and Technical Manager, and his team launched the new range of robotic mowers to dealers. During the day, dealers were given a formal introduction to each of the new ranges: the XR1, XR2 and XR3. Phil and his team then went through the features and benefits of each robotic mower – aided by step-by-step videos.

Then, the dealers were given the opportunity to get hands-on with each mower, learning to install the robots and gain a real in-depth understanding of how to help the customer with set-up and installation.

James Scott, owner of AutoLawn, robotic lawnmower specialist based in Maidenhead, said, "It's great to see that robotics are being embraced by Cub Cadet. Personally, I enjoy coming to days like this as it gives me the chance to understand the set-ups of each robot in detail. It also lets me see which machine can work for each of my customers. Once we, as dealers, get more comfortable with a product, we're then happy to push it out."

Describing the new robots, Cub

Cadet says the XR1 is the only model on the market with a patented mulch cleaner that automatically cleans the clippings out of the mowing deck, improving performance and reducing maintenance. It says the XR2's edge mode means that the blades cut beyond the wheelbase, reducing the need to use a lawn edge cutter or trimmer, while the XR3 has all the features of the XR2 but also has high-performance brushless motors that operate at 2x200 watts and can mow up to 5,000m².

All the robots can also be used at a second location without the need of an additional charging station, due to the RoboZone signal transmitter.

Discussing the success of the events, Phil said, "We're thrilled with how much our dealers have supported our two training days. It's clear that robotic product sales are growing year-on-year and customers are beginning to see them as a serious alternative. We've seen that robotic mowers are now being sold to replace traditional Cub Cadet tractor sales. Our mowers are cutting-edge with features including voice-control Alexa."

You can read much more about robotic mowers in this issue, starting on page 28.

PEOPLE

AL-KO GARDENTECH UK APPOINT NEW ASM

For the North of England



AL-KO Gardentech UK (Rochford Garden Machinery) has announced the appointment of Amanda Shepherdson as an Area Sales Manager for the North of England. Stewart Anderson, Managing Director said, "We've spent considerable time recruiting to find the best and most suitable candidate for this area. We're very pleased to welcome Amanda to the team. Amanda is an experienced Area Sales Manager used to working with specialist dealer networks."

When asked about her new role Amanda said, "I'm over the moon to have joined such a fantastic company that has a great history within the industry and to work alongside some very knowledgeable and friendly people. Although I'm from outside the garden machinery industry, my background is in business development and sales account management within dealer networks."

"I've already met some dealers from my area during my induction who have all been very welcoming and I look forward to meeting everyone else very soon."

Amanda can be contacted on 07970 174051 or *Amanda.shepherdson@rochfordgm.co.uk*



Cadet X range

INDUSTRY

KUBOTA ACCELERATES LARGE TRACTOR BUSINESS

OEM agreement with Buhler Industries



Buhler Industries produces machinery under the Versatile brand

The Kubota Corporation has announced its decision to utilise the development and production capabilities of Buhler Industries Inc, which is headquartered in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, for a new series of tractors.

Buhler Industries is the manufacturer of machinery distributed under the Versatile and Farm King brands. It has entered into an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) agreement with Kubota Corp to develop and produce a new tractor platform in the mid-range front-wheel assist segment.

This new agreement enables Kubota to add tractors in a horsepower range greater than that of its currently largest 170-horsepower line to accelerate its large tractor business in the North American market. Commentators in

the States see this as another step for Kubota into the 'big ag' arena.

In a report in the *US Farm Equipment* magazine, it said, "Under the terms of this long-term agreement, Buhler Industries will manufacture this tractor at the factory in Winnipeg. This will enhance the product line currently offered by Kubota as the largest tractor available. This will increase overall production at the Versatile facility at 1,260 Clarence Avenue in Winnipeg, which will reduce overhead and increase efficiency."

Grant Adolph, Chief Operating Officer of Buhler Industries is quoted as saying, "This agreement is exciting for both companies. The Versatile brand has a global reputation in agriculture for building high-horsepower tractors that are reliable and well-built. As Kubota Corp expands its presence in the farm machinery industry, these brand qualities are in line with its core values."

Grant continued, "The result of this agreement is an increase in production at the factory in Winnipeg which will bring additional stability to the supply chain and employees. Buhler Industries is committed to continuous quality and efficiency improvements."

Development of this new tractor platform began nearly five years ago and production will begin immediately.

It is believed that the tractors will be launched in the US and Canada in the second half of this year.

PEOPLE



Graeme Simpson

HUSQVARNA APPOINTS

New Area Business Manager

Husqvarna has expanded its UK team with the appointment of Graeme Simpson as Area Business Manager – North East and East.

The company says Graeme's support and

experience will prove key to achieving the business' 2019 growth aims.

Graeme joins Husqvarna with 20 years of field-based account management knowledge, working with both multi-site and stand-alone dealers in the UK and Europe. His prior experience comes in the motorcycling industry where he held roles with

Michelin (five years as Area Sales Manager) and EVS Sports (two years as European Brand Manager).

On his new appointment, Graeme commented, "I'm delighted to be joining Husqvarna and looking forward to working with the dealer network at such an exciting time in the development of the Automower and battery categories within the company."

UK Commercial Director, Ken Brewster added, "We're very pleased that Graeme has joined the UK team this month and his experience will benefit our distributor and dealer networks alike. We've experienced tremendous growth over a number of years now and by investing in the right people we're committed to continuing that trend."



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DEALERS

NEW HOLLAND NAMES ITS TOP DEALERS

Celebrate excellence in performance and service quality

New Holland has announced its top dealers of last year in its Dealer of The Year Awards, which celebrate excellence in performance and service quality across its UK and Ireland dealer network.

The awards include new product-line categories that reflect the further expansion in product line-up, with the introduction of the new T5 and T6 DCT Tractors and New Holland Agriculture-branded grass and cultivation equipment.

The company says the winners represent the best of its 53 dealers, which cover 125 locations across the UK and Ireland.

MAIN CATEGORY WINNERS:

Overall dealer of the year: Agricar Ltd of Forfar

Large tractor and harvester dealer of the year: Ravenhill of Elgin

Medium tractor and harvester dealer of the year: Robert D Webster LTD of Kilham, Yorkshire

Small tractor and harvester dealer of the year: T Alun Jones of Dryslwyn, Carmarthen

PRODUCT LINE CATEGORY WINNERS:

Tractor dealer of the year: Lloyd Ltd

Combine dealer of the year: Ernest Doe, Ulting branch

Hay and forage dealer of the year: T H White Agriculture

Service dealer of the year: Fife Tractors Ltd

Construction equipment dealer of the year: T Alun Jones Ltd

Telehandler dealer of the year: Agricar Ltd

Pat Smith, New Holland Business Director for the UK and Ireland, said, "2018 was a successful year for New Holland with the introduction of several new product lines and strong performance across our entire dealer network. These awards are a demonstration of the achievements of individual dealers but also serve to highlight the high levels of service provided to all our customers.

"We work closely with dealer businesses of all sizes across the UK and Ireland to ensure farmers, contractors and amenity businesses receive the very best standard of service and product choice.

"I congratulate all of the winners for delivering an outstanding performance and look forward to another busy and successful year in 2019."



Large tractor and harvester dealer of the year were Ravenhill of Elgin. L-R: Graham Anderson, Gordon Morrison, Stephen Hay, Stewart Davidson, James Hutton and John Wills

DEALERS

SHARROCKS TAKES ON PELLENC

Latest battery-powered products dealer

Etesia UK, the exclusive distributor of Pellenc battery-powered equipment in the UK and Ireland, has announced Sharrocks as a new Pellenc dealer.

Current Etesia dealer Sharrocks, a family-owned business that specialises in the supply of machinery for agriculture, grass care and other land management requirements, will now be distributing Pellenc battery-powered equipment to the areas of Birmingham, Shropshire, Staffordshire, South Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire.

Sharrock' Managing Director James Sharrock said he is delighted with the new dealer agreement and believes that Pellenc equipment could well be the future.

"We're taking Pellenc onboard for the first ever time and I'm



Sharrocks Pellenc

really excited about it," James commented.

"We have been trialling the Pellenc products and have evaluated them over three months and for us it is the future of electric-powered commercial equipment.

"They are astounding products and

they complement the Etesia products so well."

The complete range of Pellenc equipment is now available for both hire and purchase from Sharrocks, which will also take on responsibility for all parts, servicing and warranty for current users.

DEALERS

DUXFORD HIRE & SUPPLY CALLS IT A DAY

Malcolm Evans retires after 50 years

Cambridgeshire-based dealership Duxford Hire & Supply has closed its doors, with Dealer Principal Malcolm Evans retiring after 50 years in the industry.

Having started the business in 1969, Malcolm said he is pleased to get to his 50th anniversary, but now is the right time to step away.

Speaking to *Service Dealer*, Malcolm said, "I'm grateful to the industry for giving me a living for 50 years and I've made many great friends amongst the dealer community.

"I've been able to travel the world and meet many wonderful people on

dealer trips with the likes of STIHL and Husqvarna over the years, but the industry is changing now and the time is right for me to depart."

Duxford, like many dealers, had a tough time last year – which was made even more difficult by suffering three break-ins within three months.

"That didn't make the decision for me," said Malcolm, "but that sort of hassle does get to you."

Malcolm's eldest son, Paul, is opening a new company in new premises, taking on the servicing side of the business, with a little bit of machinery supply too. The new



Malcolm Evans and his wife Julie outside the Duxford Hire & Supply premises shortly before they closed up shop

concern is called Cambridge Garden Machinery.

Malcolm says he is looking forward to enjoying his retirement and all of us here at *Service Dealer* wish him the very best.

DEALERS

KUBOTA APPOINTS JA BLOOR AGRISERVICES

Stocking tractors and ag equipment

Kubota UK has partnered with JA Bloor AgriServices Ltd to sell its range of tractors and agricultural equipment to customers in Staffordshire, Derbyshire and surrounding areas. Located in Hollington, Staffordshire, JA Bloor AgriServices Ltd sells and hires a range of tractors and farm machinery.

Founded by Managing Director Jason Bloor in 2004, his team of experienced farm machinery professionals provide a reputable, hands-on approach to understanding and responding to the buying and hiring needs of their customers. JA Bloor AgriServices Ltd will be stocking the L1/L2 Series of sub 50hp tractors, a full range of M Series tractors, including models from the M4, M5, MGX and M7 series, along with the RTV range of utility vehicles.

Kubota UK says it is committed to investing in and growing its dealer network in order to support more businesses like JA Bloor.

Jason said, "We are delighted to take on Kubota. Our onsite management team is armed with years of relevant experience, recently equipped with Kubota-specific training and fully prepared to sell and support our growing current and new customer base. We have an excellent reputation and are continually investing in our people and business infrastructure to ensure the very

best service at all times for all of our customers."

Rob Edwards, Business Development Manager, Agriculture, Kubota UK, added, "Jason is a born and bred farmer as well as a highly ambitious businessman. His trusted team at JA Bloor AgriServices Ltd are committed to providing high-quality machinery and brilliant customer service to farmers and so the company is a perfect fit for our growing agricultural dealer network. We're excited that the company is adding Kubota."



DEALERS

SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR C&O TRACTORS

Takes on Opico brands

Opico Ltd has expanded its partnership with C&O Tractors to include Sky grain drills and HE-VA cultivation machinery.

C&O Tractors serves customers across Dorset, Wiltshire, West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Commenting, Charles Bedforth, Opico Sales Manager, said, "We're delighted that the Opico, HE-VA and Sky brands will be represented by C&O Tractors in the South of England. Operating out of four branches, with a sales team of 10, a fully trained network of service engineers and backed-up by a knowledgeable parts team, I'm certain they will do an outstanding job."

Dick Spencer, Sales Director, C&O Tractors added, "We've been selling and servicing Opico grain dryers and grassland machinery for a number of years and



Charles Bedforth, sales manager, OPICO with Dick Spencer, sales director, C&O Tractors

have always received excellent back-up and service.

"Opico has product specialists dedicated to the HE-VA and Sky brands who will provide our team and customers with first-hand technical knowledge and support, and we look forward to introducing our local customers to these excellent product ranges."

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DEALERS

NEW MD FOR OAKES BROS

Following Edmund Lindley's retirement

Oakes Bros Ltd, the agricultural dealership covering Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Wiltshire, has appointed a new Managing Director, Richard Haines.

Richard steps up from his role of Business Development Director to assume the position of Managing Director vacated by Edmund Lindley, who has taken retirement after 19 highly successful years at the helm of Oakes Bros.

Commenting on his successor, Edmund said, "I'm sure he'll bring strong and fresh leadership to Oakes Bros for years to come."

A graduate of Harper Adams University College in 1999, Richard originates from the Wantage area in Oxfordshire and has strong family ties with Oakes Bros going back over half a century. Throughout his career, he has worked in several key positions at dealership and manufacturer level, working in prominent roles within commercial sales and marketing departments in both UK and European positions.

Richard's career experience also includes several years

in farm management giving him the ideal foundation to continue the future development of Oakes Bros' business operations.

Richard, who joined the company in 2013, said, "I'm tremendously pleased to be taking over the role of Managing Director. Edmund has been incredibly supportive during my time at Oakes Bros and I owe him a huge debt of thanks."

He added, "Edmund will be missed enormously but I welcome the challenge ahead which is to continue the growth and progress of Oakes Bros after his departure."

Established in 1825, the company is an authorised reseller of agricultural equipment from New Holland, JCB, Amazone, Kuhn, McConnel and other leading manufacturers.

The dealership operates from four regional depots offering expert, practical advice on purchasing new and used agricultural machinery, along with comprehensive aftersales and service packages, as well as tailored finance solutions.



Richard Haines

INDUSTRY

STIHL PRESENTS NEW PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS

To members of the trade press

STIHL GB used Westonbirt, The National Arboretum as the location to introduce a selection of its new professional products to the trade press recently. The invited audience included representatives of titles read by professional arborists, tree care specialists, groundstaff and greenkeepers.

The company also took the opportunity to show off a couple of exciting previews of machines coming out later in the year which are under embargo for the time being. Suffice to say these certainly raised the excitement levels of some of the specialist journalists in attendance.

Gathering the trade press together allowed the company to reinforce that all of its products have now transitioned over from green to orange. Paul Hicks, STIHL GB's Marketing and Product Manager, said, "STIHL now has a tool available for every professional and domestic challenge."

A selection of products was introduced, both petrol and battery powered, all of which were available to test around the grounds of the arboretum.

One new product on show was the BR 800 C-E blower. Described by Paul as the most powerful blower on the market, offering 17% more power than its previous top-rated blower. The new unit is designed with a starting system on the side of the machine, allowing users to start the blower while wearing it. The simplified starting system also features an automatic choke reset and a switch position on the control handle that is always 'on', ensuring that the professional user can start the blower easily.

Coming this month (May 2019), but available at Westonbirt, was the MS 500i, which Paul said was the world's first chainsaw with electronically-controlled fuel injection and offered "the best power to weight ratio of any production chainsaw on the market". He went on to explain that the injection technology employed in the saw not only provides it with incredible torque, but also ensures rapid acceleration of the saw chain from 0 to 100km/h in just 0.25 seconds.

A new mulching mower was also seen. The RM 4 RTP features a 53cm deck which can cover areas of up to



Paul Hicks, STIHL GB Marketing and Product Manager

2,500m². A self-propelled model, it has single-speed drive for simplicity, ensuring that the mower sets itself in motion with the pull of a lever.

Previewed ahead of its launch this August was also the STIHL Connected system for professional users. The system comprises three central components: a Smart Connector, an app, and the pro portal. When used in conjunction, the system enables professional users to analyse key machinery performance data.

With this event, STIHL was able to convey the message to the trade press that while battery product developments are very important to it as a company, it is still very much in the petrol engine game – albeit with the constant development of cleaner, more efficient machines.

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TAKING THE TEMPERATURE

Early February saw myself and Service Dealer owner Duncan Murrery-Clarke hit the road to get a snapshot of how a particular area of the country is getting along, following the difficult season that was 2018, writes Service Dealer editor, Steve Gibbs

We were northern bound, Oban on the West coast of Scotland our ultimate destination, with visits to an agricultural and a garden machinery dealer in our sights.

On the way, though, we made several stops to catch up with a major manufacturer, attend a trade event and make a couple of flying dealership visits.

First off, we paused briefly in Hexham, Northumberland, dropping in on David Dixon Garden Machinery. A well-established dealership which has been serving the community for 37 years, David Dixon himself sold the store which bears his name, three years ago. Last year, the new owners decided to move the premises to a new facility just around the corner from where the business has been based since 1981.

Salesman Michael Heads told us how trading had been tough last year, what with the weather conditions and the inevitable turmoil which had been caused by the move. "We've been in these premises 12 months," he said, "and we've still got some plans for the site which haven't quite happened yet. There's still some building work to do.

"There's no denying it was a difficult year last year, but there's never a good time for a move really, is there?"

This year seems to have started quite brightly for David Dixon though. The winter servicing side of the business was ticking over nicely and prospects were looking encouraging for the robotic mowers that it stocks. Concentrating on Husqvarna's Automower and Gardena machines only, we were told they were seeing good business from the

installation and servicing of the robots, as well as increased sales.

Moving on and crossing the border into Scotland we were heading to Stirling to attend BAGMA's annual curling event, which is always a great opportunity to catch up with dealers and industry representatives.

Before we hit the ice though, we took the opportunity to meet up with Bob Bruce at Action Lawn & Leisure whom we'd visited a year ago.

Bob agreed that 2018 had been difficult. "Last year was tough for us too," he confirmed. "It would have been the worst cash flow we'd had for a very long time. But we survived it, which is the main thing."

Bob, who specialises in John Deere and STIHL machinery, said he was looking forward to the complete change over to orange from green by the German manufacturer.

"We still want to encourage the customers locally who have Viking products to bring them in for a service though," he said. "We're down to our final Viking products that we have in stock now."

Following the curling we carried on North and West to the coastal town of Oban. We were heading there to visit agricultural dealer Argyll Engineers Ltd and garden machinery sales and service company JB Services.

Over the following pages you can read how these two very different dealerships are making their businesses work for them in a part of the country which offers its own unique challenges.



Service Dealer Owner Duncan Murrery-Clarke and Editor Steve Gibbs



Michael Heads, Salesman at David Dixon Garden Machinery



Bob Bruce of Action Lawn & Leisure with Duncan

ARGYLL ENGINEERS LTD

Diversification is key for Oban agricultural machinery dealership

Established in 1989 by Cameron McFarlane as Argyll Agricultural Engineers, the Landini and McCormick tractor dealership which lies in an industrial estate just up the hill from the harbour-side in Oban, is now known as Argyll Engineers Ltd.

Cameron previously worked as a workshop manager in a Massey Ferguson depot in Perth, before he realised there was an opening for someone to service the needs of Argyll. Initially he worked mainly as a mobile repairer until renting an industrial unit to facilitate larger repairs and an increasing workload.

The current premises were purchased in 2006 at the same time as taking on the Landini and McCormick franchises. The business has since grown to include the Polaris, Takeuchi, Krone, Fleming and Teayle brands.

When we visited, Cameron was busy building a new out-building which will be used to specifically show off the company's increasingly valuable Polaris business. He told us that ATVs and utility vehicles had proved to be particularly successful since they began with them in 2012, so much so that the vehicles now required their own dedicated space to do them justice.

I asked Cameron who is buying the Polaris vehicles. "We're seeing purchases from people like gamekeepers, farmers, utility companies – a wide spread of customers really," he replied.

Cameron explained that in their area, the company couldn't rely upon agriculture alone to sustain the business. "The biggest problem in this part of the country

is that there're not enough folk on the ground. Over on the East coast they might have big estates that need multiple vehicles, but over here it tends to be one per estate. It's just the nature of the area we're in.

"We simply couldn't survive on the ag customers by themselves," he continued. "That's why we do the ATVs as well as equipment for fish farming."

As it is in many parts of the UK currently, Cameron described the traditional agricultural sector in their target area as somewhat on the back foot.

"But we can't complain," he said, "we get our share of what's going on."

Unusually for retailers of Landini and McCormick tractors, Cameron deals in both the blue and red machines, which helps.

"There's a lot out there for us to look after," he says, "and we're certainly busy at the moment."

"There's always something going on with Polaris, always something going on with our tractors. The problem we face here is there's no volume. Dealers in other parts of the country will simply shift more units because of the customer base they have in their area. However, my market share will tend to be larger."

Are you under pressure from the manufacturers, I ask Cameron?

"They're always looking for more sales," he says. "Polaris for example, is very target orientated. This is part of the reason why we're developing our new display area for the products. But of course, in terms of targets, when you hit



Cameron McFarlane with an example of the fish farming equipment that the company services

them, they are inevitably raised again the next year.”

Asking Cameron how they sell themselves to customers, he explains how they've got a website, which is useful, “but probably the most valuable way we find that people hear about us is via word of mouth.

“We also do a bit of advertising, putting an advert in the local paper. However, because of what we're selling, we don't find that achieves all that much. If someone wants us, they'll find us.”

Cameron doesn't exactly face much competition from other local dealers. “The nearest one would be in Campbeltown, which is about 95 miles away,” he explains. “There's nowhere within 100 miles of here where someone could get a pto shaft repaired.”

Their customer area is therefore quite extensive. They will extend their reach out to many of the West coast islands such as Mull and about half-way through central Scotland.

“But as I say,” says Cameron, “even with this large area there wouldn't be enough in just agriculture to keep us going. Looking after both agriculture and fish farm people is necessary. With the fishing customers we get good business caring for boats, pumps, generators, power packs, that sort of thing.”

Having diversified out to sea, I wonder if Cameron might ever consider moving into other areas to support the business, such as say, consumer machinery?

“Well, it might develop into that at some point,” he replies, “but you'd have to be able to run that type of operation really well and keep on top of it. There would potentially be space for that sort of thing in the new Polaris display building. But it's not in our current planning.”

Other than a limited customer-base, Cameron



Cameron's team of technicians comprises young men and women

“IT'S IMPORTANT TO MY BUSINESS THAT MY STAFF ARE FULLY TRAINED”

believes the biggest obstacle his business faces is in the recruitment of new staff.

“It's very difficult around here to find new people,” he points out.

“Actually, I should think it's probably difficult anywhere to get people to want to do a practical job. We had this discussion in a BAGMA meeting just recently. Talking to other dealers in Scotland, it appears very tricky for anybody to recruit people in the current climate.”

However, on the day we visited Oban, Cameron had a small group of noticeably quite young men and women busying away in his workshop. I commented to him on how the age demographic was perhaps a little unusual but nevertheless, encouraging. He replied that he believes in recruiting young people where he can for mechanical roles and training them up his way. Some of his staff had an interest in agricultural engineering, he said, as they had come from family farms, such as engineer Iain Campbell, but in general getting anyone to show an interest in the industry is most definitely a struggle.

So what techniques does Cameron use to attract applicants?

“Social media seems to be the most effective,” he says. “That seems to get people's attention. Someone will see something online and maybe speak to somebody else.

“But it's very hard. We put a post up on Facebook to get someone to join us over last summer, but we only had one single person respond.

“The whole recruiting process is so difficult, I can see it becoming the biggest hardship we face in this industry.”

Asked why he thinks the business of employment has reached this current situation, Cameron says, “I think a lot of young people, come into the workplace from school and they've never failed at anything before. In the working world they find themselves in a situation where they've got to get a move-on and actually do something – and they struggle. “

“We need to get the message out there that this is a progressive, attractive industry, so that we can find the right calibre of people.”

Cameron is keen to stress that on the whole, business is going well for Argyll Engineers.

“There are six of us working here altogether,” he says. “We have four mechanics, as well as my wife who works in the office, plus myself. Yes, it can get a bit stretched at times, but we cope.

“There can be times where we’ve got people out on the road, in one of our three vans and we can have customers asking for stuff, but that’s just the way things are.

“Our vans are equipped for hose fitting and I certainly wouldn’t want to be without that side of the business.”

Asked where he thinks the industry is heading in the future, what with technology constantly changing, Cameron admits the real challenge will be to make sure that they keep up with all developments.

“My staff are going out on courses all the time,” he says, “to make sure they are on top of it all. If like us, you’re not doing volume, some of that diagnostic stuff can be quite difficult to take on board. Especially if you’re a mechanic and not a computer guy. But it’s important to my business that my staff are fully trained.

“If you don’t do all these things, you’ll find yourself left behind.”



Some staff, including Iain Campbell, had come from a family farming background



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JB SERVICES

Customer service is key for Oban garden machinery dealership

Stuart Campbell, who runs JB Services in Oban, looks after garden machinery of all descriptions in his workshop and deals in EfcO as well as Oregon, Westwood and Lawnflite products. The business, which he took over from its previous owner back in 2016, used to be a sub-dealer for Husqvarna, but no longer as the manufacturer doesn't go in for those kinds of arrangements anymore. Stuart therefore knows that for the business to continue to do well, he must play to his strengths – and that is in his expert knowledge and providing superb customer service.

"I try to keep the customers happy," Stuart says. "I spent a number of years in a Fiat dealership and I must admit I liked the way that industry worked on the customer satisfaction score. I try to bring that into this business."

Stuart's whole philosophy is that if you look after the customers you get them coming back. "If they come back then you know you're doing something right," he says, "and touch wood, it seems to be working."

In his relatively small premises in an industrial estate, up high on the hill overlooking Oban, Stuart says he has quite a wide base of loyal customers who return to them time and again. A mixture of homeowners and contractors.

"Golf courses are starting to come back too, which is good," he explains. "The more irons you've got in the

fire, the better."

Stuart says as a business they try to pick up new customers from wherever they can as they go along.

"I used to advertise in the local paper," he says, "but it's a bit of a waste of time really. I didn't really get much from that as everything is online now. I've put a website together which people are finding. "We just pick up people here and there. Last year was definitely busier than the year before, so that's a good sign."

Unlike many parts of the UK, because of the weather conditions around Oban and the nearby islands area, the grass growing season wasn't particularly badly affected in 2018. "Last year wasn't so bad for us here," confirms Stuart, "because it never really stopped raining! The season was a wee bit slow in starting, because many farmers were complaining about putting sheep out and there was nothing for them to eat. However, once it got going, we were alright. There was plenty of grass up here."

A principal focus then for JB Services was making sure that they kept their customers satisfied and returning – as well as building a strong reputation locally to attract new people.

"I think if you treat people the way you want to be treated yourself, you can't go wrong."



Stuart Campbell (right) with workshop/field mechanic, also called Stuart Campbell, outside JB Services' Oban premises

“IF YOU LOOK AFTER THE CUSTOMERS YOU GET THEM COMING BACK!”

“We’re here to try to help people” Stuart says. “If my customers are away happy, then I’m happy. They’ll leave here and tell someone else what a great experience they had, which is a very helpful consequence of being based in a small town. We receive a lot of our new business through word-of-mouth recommendations.”

Being a small business there are, of course, problems which need to be overcome. One issue that Stuart is often battling with is quite literally to do with his premises’ size.

“Just recently we’ve had a few issues with folk not coming in to pick their machines up,” he explains. “I end up getting lumbered with machines hanging around here, taking up valuable space. It’s still happening. If we’re not careful we can end up getting used as a storage facility, especially over the winter time.

“When we get garden tractors in for services, we have to carefully juggle them coming in and out so we don’t get overrun with our limited space. As we collect machines from up to about 40 miles away, we need to constantly monitor the situation.”

The other issue, which Stuart says affects his business, is one that many dealers will be able to empathise with. “A big problem I find is some manufacturers letting a dealer down South sell online to someone on one of the islands up here, cheaper than what I can buy it for,” he explains.

“Sometimes customers can buy equipment online only £20 dearer than I can buy it. But I’ve got to put it together, put oil in it and try to make some money! It’s great for the consumer, but it’s hard for us.”

I asked Stuart if he felt that was the trickiest element of

running his business. “I’d say so,” he agreed, “because in terms of our customers, 99.9% are great and don’t give us any hassle.

“The only other thing which can sometimes be frustrating is the price of getting kit delivered up here. 90% of my stock comes from down South and we can spend a fortune on delivery charges. Also, sometimes people mistakenly think we’re on one of the islands.”

With it just being Stuart running the business, I ask if he’s ever considered having more people work with him?

“I have,” he says, “but at my age can I be bothered with an apprentice again? I don’t have the space to expand, but it would be nice for someone to carry the name on since it has been established since 1996.

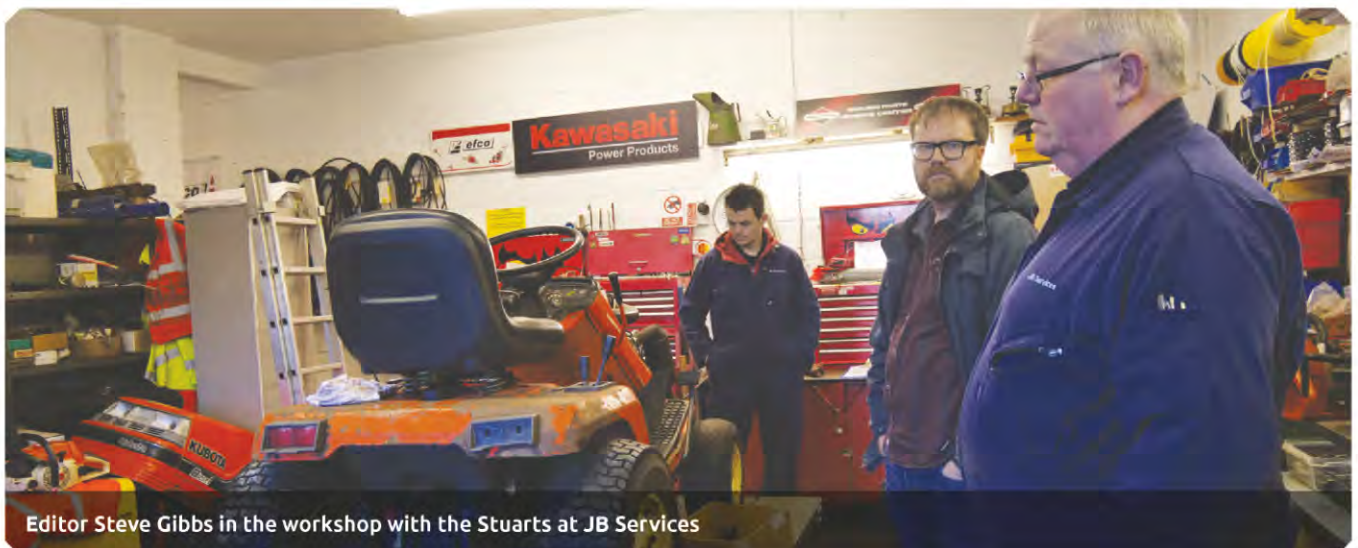
“Also, I hope I’m wrong, but it does seem to me that a lot of young people don’t want to get their hands dirty these days. They’re more interested in computers.”

Thinking ahead, Stuart says he worries that the service side of the industry could go the same way that TV servicing did. “When I was a kid we had four television repair shops in town,” he reminisces, “but no one does it now.”

However, Stuart is upbeat and optimistic in general. He can see areas for possible growth in the business, saying, “Things are moving more towards battery now. I have a few customers who swear by them.”

And with his philosophy of exemplary customer service, he should have customers returning for years to come.

As Stuart says, “Every one of them coming back, that’s another pound in the bank.”



Editor Steve Gibbs in the workshop with the Stuarts at JB Services

DEALERS CANNOT SURVIVE WITHOUT ONLINE

That's the view of Huw Owen who won the ATV/Quad Dealer of the Year Award at the Service Dealer ceremony last year. The family business now comprises two branches – one in Ashbourne, Derbyshire and the other in Pwllheli, North Wales. Lawrence Gale Msc, MBPR caught up with him recently to discuss his thoughts on online selling and the differences in trading between garden machinery and ATVs

A recent trip to Derbyshire enabled me the chance to catch up with Huw Owen, Director of Owen ATVs & Garden Machinery and Llyn ATVs & Garden Machinery, which is based in Pwllheli, Gwynedd.

Huw's association with machinery dealerships started during his teenage years when he used to help out at Will, his father's, machinery shop in North Wales. When he left school he took the opportunity to take up a three-year mechanical apprenticeship with Honda in London.

Once completed he decided to take some time out to travel, spending a year in Australia and

South-East Asia. On his return he opened a new machinery repair and servicing business in Ashbourne, renting out a small garage space in 2013 for repairing domestic and professional grounds maintenance machinery.

With the business thriving, he needed to find larger premises which resulted in him renting a larger unit on the nearby

industrial estate on the outskirts of Ashbourne.

By this time Huw had managed to secure several mainstream suppliers, namely Mountfield, Husqvarna, STIHL and Suzuki.

In three short years he had grown the business to a point where he needed to find a newer larger building to

accommodate both a workshop and a showroom for an ever-increasing range of stock.

Hence his move to his current premises on the same industrial estate, a prime location and easy access for many of his growing customers.

Service Dealer: When did you start the company?

Huw Owen: I started the company in 2013 when it was just me in a small garage, fixing and selling garden machinery. I was on my own fixing and selling mowers to local domestic customers.

However, I soon needed a larger workplace and moved onto the Ashbourne industrial estate which gave us the ability to take on more work and build up the range of products we now sell. With the business continuing to flourish, it was soon becoming apparent that we now needed larger premises to store, repair and sell our ever-growing range of machinery.

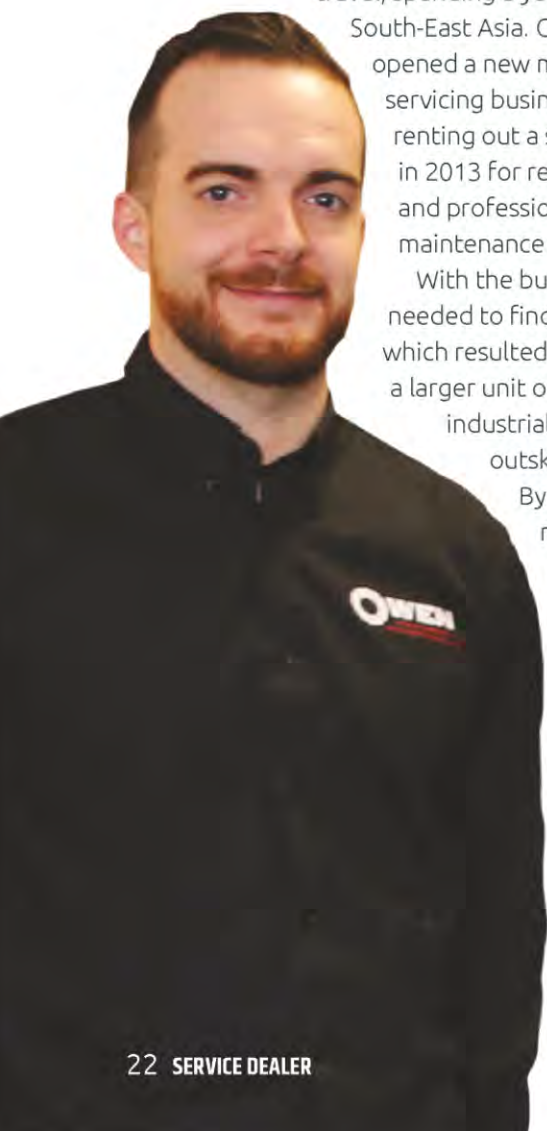
We're now an authorised dealer of new and quality used garden machinery and ATVs. We're a family-run company and pride ourselves on giving a fantastic service to our customers. This service not only involves the buying and selling of ATVs and garden machinery, but also the all-important aftersales that we're very proud of.

SD: What is your role in the company?

HO: My role is basically a director and I'm responsible for overseeing the running of the business – however, I still find myself involved heavily in sales and marketing activities, coupled with an increasing number of staff to manage. In total we now have 14 employees based between the two shops.

Our online sales are also increasing, so a fair bit of my time is also spent helping to develop this area of the business too.

SD: What products do you stock and sell in your stores?



HO: We are a stockist for a number of leading brands such as STIHL, Husqvarna, Honda, Suzuki, ISEKI, Mountfield, Stiga, Westwood, Hayter, Toro and Suzuki ATVs. Our showroom and workshops are based in Ashbourne, near Derby, in the heart of Derbyshire. Our other branch is in North Wales and is run by my father Will. With over 20 years of trading experience, we now have the relevant skills and expertise at both shops to look after a wide range of customers' needs, both in the domestic and professional sectors.

SD: Who is your customer base?

HO: My customer base encompasses the whole range of domestic, agricultural and professional users. If I had to put a percentage on it, I would say 60% domestic, 30% ag and 10% professional.

We have a lot of wealthy estate and land owners within a 60-mile radius of Ashbourne that generate a lot of business. We have over 5,000 customers on our database ranging from contractors, schools, local authorities, farms, smallholdings, industrial sites and numerous sports facilities. We will collect, service and return garden machinery to all areas throughout Derbyshire.

SD: In terms of the ATVs you stock, do they pose different challenges from dealing in garden machinery?

HO: Yes, the ATV market in general is completely different but it compliments well garden machinery. For instance, when winter arrives, and the season slows down on the lawn and garden side, it then picks up for ATV and ag. It can get a bit crazy when spring and lambing season hits with both the garden machinery and ATV sides busy.

Regarding customers, they are more or less the same. Everyone is after the best price or the best deal these days.

SD: Any difference between the suppliers?

HO: We're finding that many garden machinery manufactures are awarding their franchises to dealerships that are located closer and closer together, therefore competition is fierce. That's a benefit to the ATV side as there's more of a distance between other dealers compared with garden machinery.

SD: So, the ATV side is very important to you?

HO: The ATV side is a very big part of our business especially in our Welsh depot. Winning *Service Dealer's* ATV/Quad Dealer Of The Year award last year hopefully shows that we are one of the best in the area for customer service and aftersales. I think our volume with Honda speaks for itself.

“ WE HAVE ALL BECOME QUITE SAVVY TO THE POTENTIAL OF ONLINE MARKETING AND USE OF VARIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ”

SD: Will you be looking to do more with ag machinery?

HO: We're expanding more and more into agriculture through the ISEKI range of compact tractors, and through this we have also become agents for Wessex International attachments. So, I see us delving more and more into the agriculture side of the business over the next few years.

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

HO: We market heavily on social media, Google, and through local newspaper and radio. We've all become quite savvy to the potential of online marketing and use of various social media sites.

The beauty of it all is the fact that it's instant, and we get quick responses and interest from a wide range of potential customers.

SD: What new technologies do you see having an impact on our industry

HO: I see robotics and cordless equipment taking over the industry in the near future – that's why we're investing a lot online over the next few years.

Sales of robotics have gone up year-on-year. We sold over 40 robotic mowers last year. They're becoming

more and more popular, mainly due to the recent advancements in battery technology and software controls. The ability to set running times via phone apps and monitor performance, along with better cutting performance, has escalated an interest in and sales of these devices.

We're currently looking at supplying a golf course with several robotic mowers, thus saving them a lot of money in terms of reduced labour plus fuel costs, and at the same time reducing a costly annual service.

We also offer a gold, silver and bronze servicing package on robotic mowers. This would range from a basic winter overhaul to a full singing-and-dancing package that includes a winter service, software update, winter storage and re-installation, plus five customer visits per year.

We've also started a robotic trial scheme, whereby a potential customer will be given a robotic mower for a month's trial before purchasing. The proof's in the pudding, with 99.9% of the customers committing to a sale after the trial.

As for cordless products, they're becoming more and more popular with our customers. We are finding, though, that if it breaks the customers seem happy to buy a new one instead of getting it repaired.

SD: What are your thoughts regarding online selling?

HO: Due to the vast growth in robotics and cordless equipment, nevermind the eCommerce society as a whole, I think as a medium to large-sized business in our

trade, you can't survive over the next few years without contemplating going online. Yes, the competition is tough and there are so many out there that sell online, but if you don't join them, you'll be left behind.

We're investing a lot in online sales. Our spares and accessories eCommerce site is live now and is doing exceptionally well with nearly 3,000 orders a month. We're also nearing the completion of our second eCommerce site which will sell whole-goods, in the coming months.

Increasing our range and volume of sales via online selling allows us to command better delivery charges, hence making online selling more profitable.

We're now at a point where we're confident in selling whole goods such as battery-powered trimmers, saws and mowers online. As for larger, heavier products, we will restrict delivery to up to a 50-mile radius, which allows us to keep costs down and ensure the customers receive the full aftersales service with those larger value items.

It's been an exciting time for us. We're also noticing that a number of our online customers, once they have shopped with us, are now appearing in our premises to see at first-hand the range of stock we have on offer.

SD: Do you see any drawbacks to online selling?

HO: The only difficulty I see at the moment is competing with other online prices. I'm seeing that we sell well, but our margins are decreasing every year due to us trying to compete with some of the online prices out there. Our plan over the next few months is to put some real effort



STIHL mowers in the showroom

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into trying to get the volume of our online sales higher to make up for the lower margins involved these days. I hope this will also generate a lot of new business locally, which will mean more work through the workshop.

SD: What's the hardest aspect of running your dealership?

HO: The hardest part I think is to get the staff these days, especially technically-minded people for the workshop. It appears that many kids these days, when they leave school, do not go out to look for a skilled trade. This is another factor as to why we're investing heavily online – it's easier to find the staff to control this side of the business than to find good qualified technicians.

It's taken most of the last few years to establish a good working team together. When I'm recruiting, I tend to advertise in local papers, on the web and even on the radio. Invariably, like most businesses, we tend to get some good responses from word-of-mouth and reputation.

SD: How do you see the future for your business?

HO: I'm honestly taking one step at a time, but I wouldn't say they were small steps. I'm hoping to see the industry growing stronger as the future goes on and alongside this our business would grow continually over the next few years.

We recently completed a deal to sell Iseki products, which I think is a fabulous range of products and a great company to deal with. We'll also be looking to increase the sale of ATVs, along with increasing our range of robotic mower products as and when they develop in the coming years.

We've definitely seen a rise in customer trade via our newly-launched websites and can only see this aspect of our business growing. We're also seeing a growth in online selling of spares, accessories and attachments.



The Ashbourne, Derbyshire premises



L-R: Alan Carter, Dominik Garela and Ben Tomlinson



ATVs are an important element of the dealership's business

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ONE BORN EVERY MINUTE*



Caraline Robinson,
Husqvarna UK,
Operations Director

****Actually, every 69 seconds to be precise. That's how regularly a new Husqvarna Automower rolls off the line, at its worldwide home of production in Newton Aycliffe. The person in charge of making sure this march of the robots runs smoothly is Operations Director, Caraline Robinson. Editor Steve Gibbs caught up with her recently.***

The reputation of manufacturing in the UK has suffered somewhat lately. Stories of factory closures and job losses have frequented our news feeds. However, in the North-East of England there's a success story to be proud of, which is absolutely thriving.

Husqvarna's facility in Newton Aycliffe is the main production base worldwide for the manufacture of the company's robotic Automowers. There is a sister facility for the automated machines in the Czech Republic too, but it's Aycliffe which calls the shots. When *Service Dealers'* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and I visited in February, they were flat out, producing a new Automower every 69 seconds. That time of year wouldn't usually be peak, that would be March, but with the B-word fast approaching, Operations Director Caraline Robinson had been tasked this year with producing a very high percentage of the seasonal production by the end of Q1.

Caraline, who has been with the company for 39 years, started as an electrical technician apprentice, working on the early days of robotics in the 1980s. She has had various roles within the company, including running the moulding facility for a couple of years, before moving into her current job about 10 years ago.

We caught up with her to talk investment in British manufacturing, staffing requirements and the future for the robotic mowing sector.



Automower software installation



One Automower was rolling off the production line every 69 seconds during the early part of 2019

SD: It's great to see equipment being made in Britain.

CR: Absolutely and especially the interesting products which we make. We're obviously building up to Brexit at the moment, stockpiling lots of products.

SD: How much investment has gone into this plant lately?

CR: In recent years I would say about £20 million and it's still coming in.

SD: There's another plant making Automowers as well in the Czech Republic?

CR: That is our sister plant when it comes to robotics. All the new launches happen here in Aycliffe though. Managing that is a huge process, in terms of industrialising the products. We take the design and bring that to a product which is manufacturable.

I'm then responsible for strategic planning, working out the capacity we have in the two factories – and I must say, there is good cooperation between both facilities. People here don't see the Czech operation as a risk or as a threat. They understand we can't have all our eggs in the Aycliffe basket alone. We do a lot of work here along the lines of risk management and continuity planning – and what we've got in the Czech Republic very much backs us up. If, for example, we were to have a fire here, we'd be able to put effort into making the Czech operation quickly ramp up on producing products.



Boxed and stacked Automowers ready for dispatch

“THE ROBOTICS WE’RE PRODUCING NOW FEATURE OVER 300 COMPONENTS PER-PRODUCT”

SD: Where has the investment gone in the Aycliffe facility?

CR: We've installed some new machines here in recent times, in the moulding department for example. In fact, we use this capacity in that department to produce moulded products for some other companies to keep the line busy when we're not producing for ourselves. You see we're incredibly seasonal as a business. We go from at our peak producing 35,000 products a week, down to virtually nothing.

SD: Why is it so seasonal? Why can't you manufacture all year round?

CR: Because of the high value of the product and because of the infrastructure. It's working capital being tied up. We've looked at it, of course, but it just doesn't make sense for us.

SD: So that obviously reflects the staffing levels you have at any time?

CR: Absolutely. It drives our need for using a recruitment agency. We've just started using a new agency this year, so it's a different challenge for them. We are up to about 720 temporary employees currently. When it comes to our staff however, all our technical skills, maintenance, tooling expertise, engineering – those are a permanent function on site.

Because I've worked here for so long, I find it hard to get my head around how other companies cope with a level-line production. For us we go from a six-month period where we're producing, three months where we're making all the changes we need to be better next season, and then we go into the final three months of the year where we start to ramp up again.

SD: Do you ever struggle to fill all those temporary roles?

CR: It's always a challenge. I think our new recruitment agency, the most people they've ever supplied to another site was about 350 – and we've obviously asked for more than double that. What we can do, obviously with good planning, is give them good visibility about the numbers required and when we need people – almost to the week in fact.

SD: Where do you see recruitment problems?

CR: Our challenges are with engineers, particularly with automation engineers. We've got some great people, but we'd like to be able to increase our numbers. One of the concerns I have is that universities are not necessarily developing the right courses. They are not keeping up with industry – they can be a little behind on what we require. We do have some links now with universities to hopefully change that a little bit.

SD: Do any staff members start temporarily with you and then work their way up?

CR: They certainly do that. We've had apprentices that have come from temporary people, moving up through the business via that route. We are in the process now of making 50 direct operators permanent in the site. This is probably the first time in 20 years that we've been able to do that – which is a direct result of the expansions we've got coming.

SD: Do you see the robotic mowing market increasing in the future?

CR: Absolutely, yes. We just need the weather to be in our favour this year. 2018 was difficult for everyone. In terms of the finished product, we put a lot of quality assurance elements into the lines. Every single product is thoroughly tested. It's quite a complex, expensive product. There's a lot of electronics in there, a lot of sensors, high quality motors, elements like that. So, every product has been tested throughout its production.

SD: Why did head office choose Aycliffe to invest in the production of robotics in the first place?

CR: It was the fact that we were seen as a high-volume manufacturer of lawnmowers through our history here with the Flymo products. At that point in time we were

producing hundreds of thousands of Flymos every year. It was the vision of the management that this is what robotics was going to become in the future. It was going to need a site which was capable of high-volume manufacturing. Our track record in terms of quality was also very high, plus our ability to both mould and assemble here was very important. There are around 60 plastic parts in a product so that association is vital.

SD: How do you see future investment here in Aycliffe?

CR: Increased automation in the lines would be a large element of that. Being able to automate more of the processes will make us less reliant on the temporary labour. Essentially, robots built by robots.

SD: How important will the human element remain in what you're doing here though?

CR: It will remain vitally important. Just practically, there are some elements of the production which we know we would really struggle to automate. You can see just how dexterous some of the people on the line need to be – so there's always going to be jobs for people. There is certainly no vision of 100% automation.

SD: In terms of Brexit, how have you been preparing?

CR: We've been to seminars which have offered advice, but it's all been so vague. How does anyone know what the right thing is to be doing? For us the real backstop has been to make sure we've built ahead in terms of finished product volume – and to make sure that those have been exported. Because in terms of the robotics, 95% of what we make is for export.

SD: Can you see that figure of 95% exports changing?

CR: We have seen very strong growth from the UK over the last three to four years, and that continues at pace. This is particularly pleasing given that the majority of the range are produced here in the UK. The Husqvarna UK team have been extremely proactive in promoting the products, raising awareness with end consumers and this has been supported by an ever increasing number of Husqvarna dealers.

The growth rate we are seeing in the UK is exceeding that of other European markets, so naturally we expect the percentage figure of Automowers sold in the UK to continue to grow exponentially. Long may it continue.

SD: With all that's going on, how confident are you that Aycliffe is part of Husqvarna's future?

CR: In terms of robotics, 100%. I'm very confident that we do a fantastic job. The enthusiasm is there from Sweden for the product and the enthusiasm is there for the team that we have. I'm very proud of what we do as a site. We are receiving a lot of new investment, so when people see things like that it gives them a lot of confidence that Aycliffe is here to stay.

SD: What's the most difficult part of your job?

CR: Every day is a challenge, but it's having the right strategic planning in place – making sure we have the right path ahead of us, which we are all able to follow. I need to make sure that the objectives of the business are clear to people. I'm just going through a procedure now where I meet with all members of my management team, so they are up to speed with what their objectives are for the rest of the year. Probably 80% they already knew, but there will be some updates for them, some new information and some better information. It's all about having that focus to get people doing the right thing. We're a relatively lean organisation, we haven't got unlimited resources around us, so we need to make sure we're doing things correctly. But as I say, I'm really pleased with the successes we've had.

SD: If the robots are selling more and more, do you have enough capacity and space to keep up with that demand?

CR: This is my job to make sure that we have got that space. We have recently persuaded our parts supplier tenants, who were located on site, taking up in total about a sixth of our floorspace, to move out. Gaining back that space will allow us to create more space in production. We've also erected three massive tents for warehousing space.

SD: You are obviously passionate about the set-up here.

CR: I love it. Every day is different and there are good people to work with. We went through some difficult years. A lot of the Flymo which used to be produced here went over to China – all of the small, boxed product moved. We saw a lot of redundancies in those years. So, anyone who has survived that has done pretty well – and there are a lot who have.

Many people who work here have a long service history with the company. Sometimes we tot up the experience of the people in the room who are working on a project, and it is hundreds of years of experience.

SD: What do you see as your biggest challenges over the next few years?

CR: I'd say making sure we've got the continued investment in the site. We would like to be able to produce quicker than we are currently able. Having the right number of people is an on-going challenge, but hopefully the future increased automation plans will offset that to a degree. It's all about looking three years ahead all the time, trying to predict what's going to happen to attempt to avoid any pain points. I can also see us opening into new markets and there will be more products coming along which will mean increased complexity. The complexity of this business now from a manufacturing point of view is absolutely huge compared with Flymo products of old which featured 40-50 components. The robotics we're producing now feature over 300 components per-product. So, I believe that complexity management will be a challenge that we shall need to keep on top of.

SD: Thank you.



The Newton Aycliffe production facility is the worldwide home of Automower production

ROBOTIC DEVELOPMENTS

GARDEN TRADER ADDS ROBOTIC MOWER CATEGORY

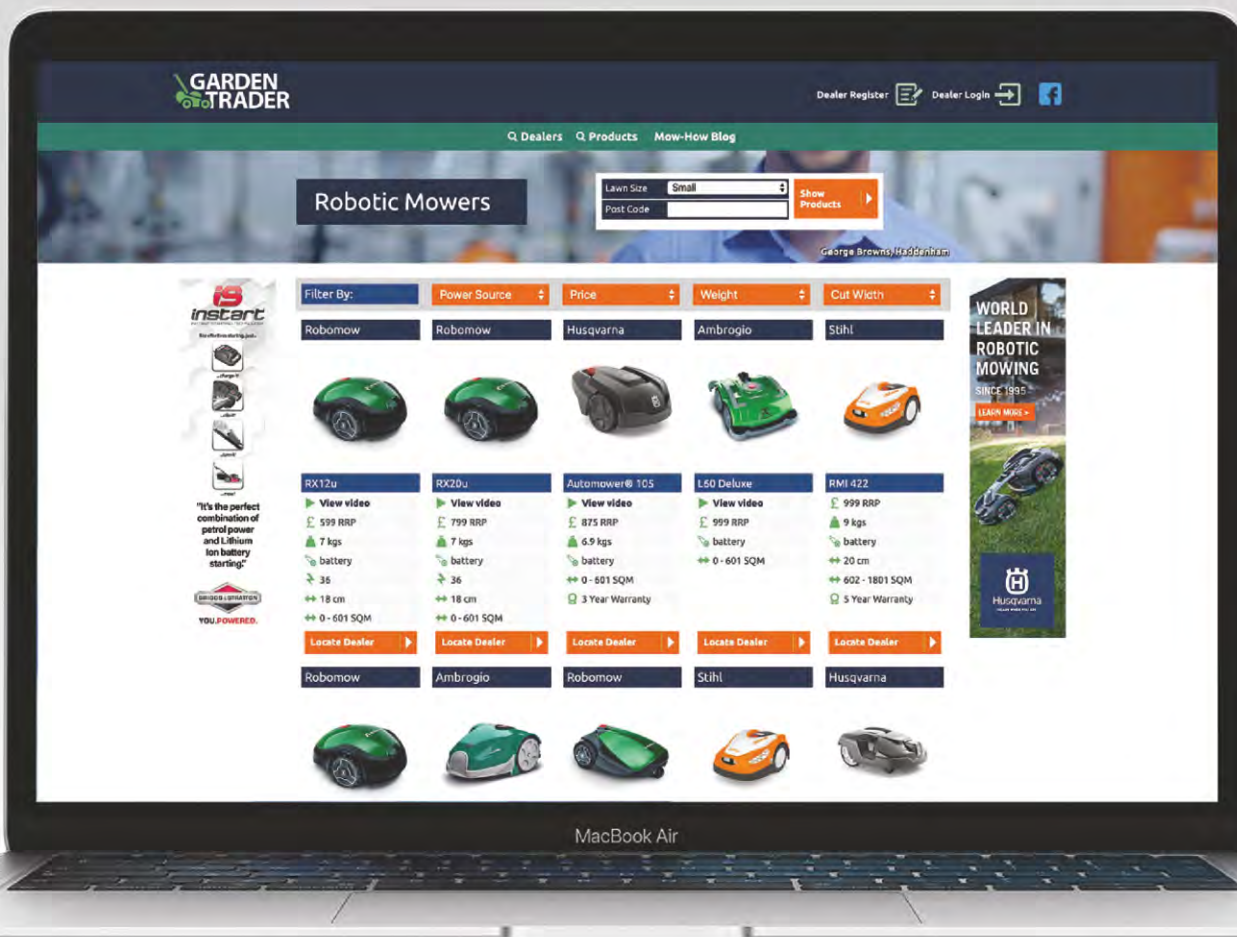
Reflecting consumer demand

Reflecting what appears to be a surge in popularity this year, Garden Trader has announced a specific category dedicated to robotic mower products.

The website, which puts the specialist dealer in front of buying consumers at the point of purchase, is already well populated with robotic products from Ambrogio, Husqvarna, Robomow, Honda, STIHL and John Deere. The site's owners say that no doubt more will soon follow.

Garden Trader's founder Duncan Murray-Clarke, who also owns *Service Dealer*, said, "If you take the trends in some parts of Europe, it's clear what a huge opportunity there is in this sector for dealers specialising in robotic mowers. Looking at site visitor data, many searches were for robotic products as opposed to generic mowers, so it made complete sense to separate these products out."

Visit www.gardentrader.co.uk to find out more.



MOWBOT GOES UNDER COVER

Cobra debuts fully customisable models

Cobra has launched the new Mowbot, which it describes as one of the first fully customisable robotic lawnmowers on the UK market. Reflecting users' personal style, the new robot lawnmower is available with several standard cover designs.

"Personalising and creating your own unique design for your Mowbot is a first," said Peter Chaloner, Managing Director of Cobra Garden Machinery. "We feel that people will really like the concept and enjoy making the Mowbot theirs."

Features such as automatic recharging and rain sensors are standard across the Mowbot models being launched this year. For medium sized lawns, with a cutting area of under a tennis court, the



Mowbot400 is described by the company as the suitable solution, priced at £599.99.

The Mowbot800 is designed for larger lawns of up to 800 sq metres and is priced at £699.99.

Installing multiple Mowbots in larger gardens is also an option.

The range also offers Bluetooth connectivity, allowing control of the lawnmower from a smartphone or tablet.

IMOW NOW AVAILABLE IN ORANGE

STIHL's robot makes the change

Following the phasing out of the Viking brand, the STIHL iMow is available in the company's orange livery this year.

The new robotic mower is powered by a high capacity lithium-ion battery and is supported by what the manufacturer describes as 'intelligent technology' to ensure that energy is managed efficiently and



the battery is charged at different speeds according to the mower's needs.

All of the iMow models feature double sharpened mulching blades to mow the grass and ensure a precise cutting pattern. Also weather is no issue for the machines as they will automatically react to changing circumstances like rain or a user cancellation and intuitively make up the lost time on another day.

On connected models it will also check the weather forecast so if it's likely to rain tomorrow, it can do some extra mowing today.

The iMow features simple intuitive programming via an NLCD display so users can amend mowing plans or send the unit out to mow, or back to the dock with a few clicks. It also features adaptive slope speed so it can cope with hilly terrain of up to a 45% gradient.

There are seven iMow models available, catering for small gardens to larger gardens; from 800m² to 5,000m² in size.

NEXT GENERATION AMBROGIO ARRIVES

4.0 Elite introduced

Ambrogio has introduced its latest model robotic mower, the 4.0 Elite. The company boasts that it features the latest software innovations, electronics and mower technology to give outstanding performance and a high-quality cut within the least possible time.

With a background in industrial electronics, the company says the 4.0 Elite is built and tested to the highest standards. To prove its confidence, Ambrogio is offering a six-year warranty as standard.

The new design robot features a unique deck that is jointed in the middle, allowing it to precisely follow a lawn's natural undulations, while keeping the drive wheels in firm contact with the ground at all times. Double width flex-grip tyres spread the load of the robot much like an ultra-low pressure pneumatic tyre, reducing lawn wear and increasing grip in all conditions.

The new models are fitted with electronic height of cut adjustment so users can change the cut height from the app. They are also fitted with a full GPS system, which the company claims goes further than most. Not only can gardeners use this to track their robot but also to set geo-fence alerts, so they are notified if their mower moves outside a set area.

Ambrogio has also utilised the GPS to run advanced GPS-enhanced navigation algorithms. The mower knows exactly where it has been and alters its mowing pattern to focus on areas that have not been mown as recently. The GPS is also used to help the mower return home quicker, allowing it to charge and head out more often.

For larger lawns the intelligent GPS also allows the robot to work with one, or several, others, sharing their locations to coordinate how they mow a larger lawn together.

The company also says that it understands how pet protection is important to some users. To this end it has developed Amico, a small tag to fix to a pet's collar, which switches off the mower's blade as it approaches the animal – allowing the mower to pass by safely. The tag is fully waterproof.

The 4.0 Elite is controllable via Amazon Alexa and Google Home voice activation. It is also adaptable so it can be upgraded in the future for additional features or specification.

The 4.0 Elite Medium is for lawns of up to 2,200 sq metres, while the 4.0 Elite Premium is fitted with a larger power pack unit allowing it to mow up to 3,500 sq metres.



NEW COMPANY FORMED TO DELIVER AUTOMATED STEERING *On professional Toro mowers*

Royal Reesink, the parent company of Reesink Turfcare, has formed a partnership with Vincent Achten to create TurfTroniq, a company that will develop and deliver the technology for automated steering of Toro mowers to the UK and Ireland.

The collaboration with Vincent, who has more than a decade of experience in robotising mowers, is in response to customer interest for automated steering for Toro.

TurfTroniq has developed two types of system, both have been supplied to customers in Europe and ongoing trials continue: the Assisted Mowing System (AMS) is an advanced mowing aid and the Robotic Mowing System (RMS) is a fully automatic system which enables the machine to mow independently.

David Cole, Managing Director of Reesink Turfcare UK, said, "We've watched with interest the progress of this technology so far and it's ever-evolving. TurfTroniq has developed a real understanding for where GPS control technology is, how it works and what needs to happen to deliver a reliable, safe and quality product to our customers."

AI-ENABLED AUTOMOWER WITH AWD LAUNCHED

Latest development from Husqvarna

Husqvarna has launched the Automower 435X AWD, an AI-enabled, robotic mower with all-wheel drive and smart home connectivity.

With an all-wheel drive system and a new unique body design with two connected bodies, the company says the robot can climb steep slopes with an incline of up to 70%. To put the number in perspective, a black downhill ski slope has an incline of approximately 40-60%, and the incline of a ski jump hill measures about 70%. The new robotic mower from Husqvarna can manage areas of up to 3,500m² and operates at 62db.

“Husqvarna Automower 435X AWD sets a new standard for robotic mowers, combining a perfect cut in ‘impossible gardens’ with multiple product interactions, including conversational AI for Amazon Alexa and Google Home integration,” says Olle Markusson, Director Product Management at Husqvarna.

Starting this spring, the 435X AWD, and all other Husqvarna robotic mowers with Husqvarna Automower Connect, will be able to use voice commands via Amazon Alexa and Google Home. Via these voice-controlled speakers, the user can manage the mower. Advanced users can design their own program for the robotic mower via IFTTT or the open API.

In addition, Husqvarna Automower Connect also works with GARDENA SmartSystem, adding irrigation to the smart garden.


Voice interaction will first be available in English, followed by German and French. Additional languages will follow.

The units also feature new safety features. In addition to the built-in feature that automatically stops the mower if it is lifted up or turned over, the new product is also equipped with several new features to increase safety.

With Ultrasonic, a remote object detection feature, the 435X AWD reduces its speed as soon as it senses a nearby object. Together with a front rubber bumper, Ultrasonic ensures a soft impact when the robotic mower comes in contact with an object.

It also has automatic passage handling and LED-headlights.

There are several optional accessories also available, including replaceable top covers in white and orange, as well as a brush kit that keeps the wheels clean to improve traction even more.



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ROBOTIC MOWER SURVEY RESULTS

Most dealers who responded stock robots and most say sales have increased

We had an excellent response to our recent survey, canvassing our readers' thoughts on the current state of the robotic mower market.

The headline takeaway is that most dealers who responded are stocking the autonomous machines and those that are tell us that sales have increased over the past year.

In terms of number of brands of robots stocked, most respondents just had the one (38%), although some (29%) did say they don't stock any.

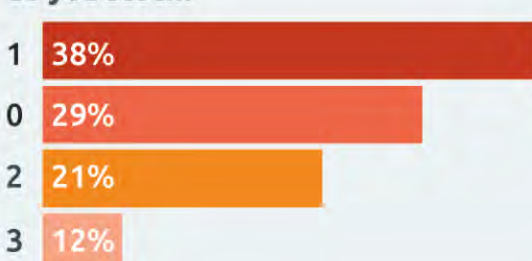
Of those that do sell the machines, a majority of 64% said they saw sales increase over the past year. Tellingly, literally no one said they saw sales decrease over the past year.

As you might expect, enthusiasm for the units from both dealers and customers isn't exactly through the roof just yet. Steady is the word which springs to mind when we find most dealers who responded saying they only recommend them occasionally (45%); customers only specifically request them occasionally (54%); and additional sales are made after their purchase just some of the time (58%).

However, an encouraging sign is that a majority of dealers (47%) who responded told us that robot mower customers do come back to them for servicing of the machines.

Asked where they believed their robotic sales might take sales away from, 58% thought it would be from ride-on mowers.

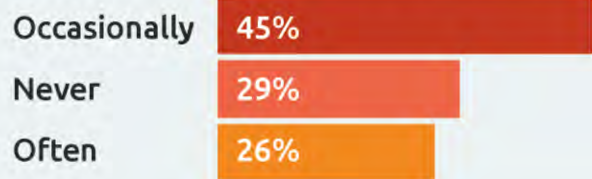
How many brands of robotic mowers do you stock?



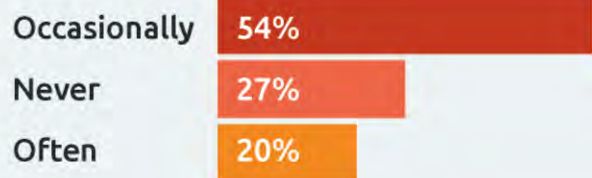
Have your sales of robotic mowers over the past year...?



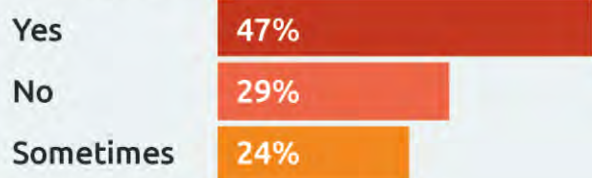
Do you recommend a robotic mower to a customer over a conventional mower?



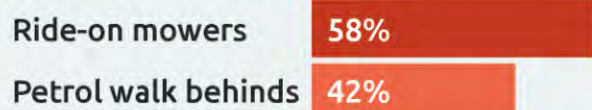
Do you have customers specifically asking for robotic mowers?



Do your robotic customers return to you for service work?



If any, which machines do you see robotic mowers affecting the sales of?



YOUR SAY

We asked you how you feel about the robotic mower market and how it relates to your dealership?

- Robotics are growing year-on-year. Having just taken on a second franchise there is quite a significant disparity between brands! One you have to actively sell, the other generates its own interest and enquiries. So far, every robotic sold has been returned for servicing at the end of the year – how often can you say that for either walk behinds or cordless products? The caveat, however, is that you need to learn the product very carefully or you could end up being called out to site regularly, which quickly eats into the profits from the sale and installation charge.
- Automowers have and will continue to become a significant part of our business in the coming years. Sales are profitable, despite the best efforts of the box sellers, and the machines are proving reliable. Our youngest mechanic has picked up the baton regarding installation and servicing which bodes well for staff retention as he enjoys it over standard servicing. Our industry struggles to shake off its “oily rag” image and this technology helps with that image. I am currently having an appraisal on my marketing and PR from someone out of industry – she said, “Automowers are definitely the sexiest of your products – use them!”
- I feel it’s generally over-hyped in a similar way to battery products which are also being pushed hard by manufacturers currently. They suffer similar problems – ie expensive battery replacements every few years and high levels of complexity to repair. We get some interest in them but mostly from the elderly who can prove challenging with their lack of tech savvy and over expectations of the product.
- Robotic mowers are a fantastic opportunity for the dealer network to supply a product that can be sold with an installation and thus bring some profitability back. I view a robot mower installation as similar to supplying a fitted kitchen, in that each installation is bespoke and requires a specialist to plan and carry out the work properly. For that we can charge a premium. What we don’t need is heavy online discounting or manufacturers setting up non-dealer franchises simply to grow their market share.
- We haven’t had much luck with selling robot mowers in our area. This might be because of a price factor, lack of display both off and online or because we need more input from the manufacturer to help promote the brand we sell. We have recently built a purpose-made stand that can be moved around to display the robot mowers so they don’t get lost in the showroom and overlooked, and we have recently updated our website to include the models we sell. Hopefully we might add some videos on the website of the machines working as we haven’t the space to show one running.
- Customer expectations are for a robotic mower to cost them slightly more than a premium pedestrian mower, rather than that of an entry-level ride-on mower. Still think that there is a pride of ownership with a ride-on that is not replicated with a robotic, but the market for robotic is obviously increasing and we need to be active in this.
- Robotic mowers are good but not many breakdowns. Petrol machines keep the workshop full, requiring lots of parts which is good for everyone. Just had in a robotic mower, seven years old, with 22,000 hours of use. I supplied it from new, and it’s only the second time we have seen this machine. Not much profit for the workshop.
- Increasing sales in robotic mowers must not be missed. It seems the future is electric.



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PUTTING ON A SHOW

'Open house' events have become a common way for dealers to connect a wide audience with their services and suppliers. Martin Rickatson discovered how one of North-East England's biggest farm machinery retailers puts on a show

Traditionally, there have been two ways for agricultural equipment dealers to put the full array of their franchises and products in front of potential and current customers. One was to go to the people, by attending the traditional county agricultural shows. With a few notable exceptions, though, these have become more suited to shoppers seeking garden ornaments and kitchen knives than possible buyers of tractors and equipment.

The other was bring the people to the premises, and get them through the dealership doors by holding an open day or evening, a format that works successfully for a number of UK dealers.

However, with many UK dealer networks growing in size and coverage as they decide – or their

major franchises dictate – that economies of scale are the only way forward in a market where farms are growing larger in size and fewer in number. The logistics of getting lots of people from a wide area into a single depot over a day or two become more of a challenge.

With a coverage area that spans eight branches and most of Yorkshire, agricultural equipment dealer Ripon Farm Services adopts a third way of doing things. By hiring a large part of the Great Yorkshire showground at a time of year – mid-January – when it is otherwise underutilised, it makes use of the Yorkshire Events Centre's extensive halls to offer all of its key franchises warm and weatherproof stand space, benefiting both staff and customers. And by laying on free and full catering, as well as coach travel

from outlying branch areas, it brings in a keen audience.

"This year's show was our 15th, and one of the busiest yet," said Phil Gregg, the company's Group Operations Manager.

"It's a format that works well for us. Of course, there's a certain amount of additional effort and expense involved in using an independent central venue – we bring in a number of lorry loads of used equipment as well as new machines, for example – but we find that's fully justified by the responses we get, whether from enquiries, orders or sales agreed on the day.

"Visitors are attracted by a warm, dry, central venue where they are well catered for, and at a time when most are generally quieter in their workloads, so can spare the time to visit."



A tractor test-drive area proved popular with visitors throughout each day at the Great Yorkshire showground



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MANUFACTURER SUPPORT

As well as John Deere, for which RFS retails consumer grasscare equipment and agricultural machinery, supporters of the show include all of the firm's main franchises. These include Kramer, Kuhn, Bunning, Sumo, Dal-Bo, Bailey, Bomford, Lynx, Ifor Williams, Cherry Products, Albutt and Portek. Chainsaw and mower brands include STIHL, Stiga and Mountfield, while RFS also stocks spares and sundries from Kramp and Vapomatic.

"Each manufacturer staffs its own area of the show, giving visitors the chance to talk directly to them as well as to our own sales teams," explained Phil. "We also reserve show areas to promote issues ranging from trailer safety and testing to the recruitment of new entrants into the business, and provide an outdoor test drive area. This year we also added a technology zone, to bring together the latest developments for those who may be looking into precision farming for the first time, or are looking to move on to the next stage in what it can do for them."

While its show is a relatively recent

business development, the company traces its roots back to before the Second World War. In the 1930s, Glovers of Ripon was selling Morris cars from premises in the town, before diversifying into agricultural equipment in the following decade with Nuffield and Massey Ferguson. Present-day Managing Director Geoff Brown joined Glovers as an apprentice in 1961.

The loss in 1965 of the second generation of the Glover family left a very young son and his grandfather, neither of whom were able to develop the business. It was taken over by Appleyards, primarily a Nuffield tractor and BMC car dealership, but retained the Massey Ferguson franchise at its newly-acquired Ripon premises until the following year, when it was withdrawn. In the same year, John Deere set up a UK arm, and Appleyards became one of its first UK dealers, selling the marque alongside Nuffield. Soon afterwards, Geoff Brown was promoted to become the dealership's first John Deere demonstrator. By 1973 he moved into branch management,

overseeing Appleyards' Ripon branch and another at Wetherby.

By the late 1970s, Appleyards had added another branch, at Darrington, to its network, but the early 1980s saw it withdraw first from car sales and then, in 1982, from farm equipment. Shortly afterwards, Geoff Brown, together with Maurice Hymas, Bill Houseman and two other directors, set up Ripon Farm Services and took on both the John Deere and Land Rover franchises, beginning with 19 members of staff and soon doubling their initial business plan target.

In 1985-86, Ripon Farm Services was invited by John Deere to open the Tadcaster branch on a brown-field site. The following year it acquired the Calvert John Deere dealership in Ottringham, and by 1992 RFS had added a further branch, taking on the Darrington John Deere dealership of Yorkshire Farm Machinery.

The closure in 1996 of a car dealership next to the firm's Ripon HQ enabled RFS to double the size of its premises. Three years later, a further branch was added, with



Ripon Farm Services chooses to hold its open days at a central location, the Great Yorkshire showground



Geoff Brown, RFS Managing Director (left), with Phil Gregg, RFS Group Operations Manager

the acquisition of Smith Bros, near Keighley, and by 2012 another acquisition was made, this time of the EA Clayton business at Carlton, Stockton-on-Tees. In 2016, the decision was taken to exit the car sector, which by then was focused on Land Rover, and concentrate on the development and expansion of the agricultural and associated business, although RFS remains involved in accident repair and also has a dedicated Ifor Williams trailer sales arm.

In 2017 the most recent agriculturally-related acquisition was made, with the purchase of Kevin Walker Plant Services, bringing the Kramer telehandler franchise to the business.

Today, the company has a turnover of around £100m and employs 182 staff across its branches at Ripon – where the trailer centre and body shop are also based – Darrington, Keighley, Leyburn, Ottringham, Pickering, Stockton and Tadcaster. Among the staff are 26 certified parts advisers looking after £5m of parts stock, plus 49 service engineers and technicians.

TODAY, THE COMPANY HAS A TURNOVER OF AROUND £100M AND EMPLOYS 182 STAFF ACROSS ITS BRANCHES

EXPANSION

As a footnote, just weeks after the show RFS announced further expansion with the acquisition of neighbouring John Deere dealer RBM Agricultural. The purchase extends its operations deeper into Yorks and on into Lincs and Notts, with RBM adding £45m of turnover, 84 staff and five branches in Market Weighton, Malton, Retford, Brigg and Louth.

Both companies celebrated 50 years as John Deere dealerships in 2017.

“This acquisition represents considerable investment in our business and our skilled workforce and fits perfectly with our growth ambitions,” said Geoff Brown. “It provides us with a great opportunity to expand our reputation for delivering high quality products and services to a much wider customer base.”



Among the exhibitors at the Ripon Farm Services show was Portek, with a wide range of products including electric log splitters and laser-based bird scarers



Howard Marshall Engineering displayed a number of its accessories for John Deere's Gator vehicles, including this roller-sided top



PARIS LAUNCHES PROVIDE DEALERS WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES

February's SIMA show in France saw new names, new product lines and new models launched across the ag equipment sector. MARTIN RICKATSON reports from the event on what farm machinery dealers may soon be selling

While its German equivalent may have become more prominent, France's SIMA still holds its own among major international farm equipment exhibitions. Driven by one of Europe's largest domestic agricultural machinery markets, a number of key global farm equipment makers and factories being based in the country, and a high proportion of visitors coming from across Europe and the wider world, it remains a key exhibition for manufacturers of all sizes.

While the last event in 2017 was somewhat subdued by what had been a tough prior season weather-wise for the country's farmers, this year's show appeared more buoyant. That rubbed off on the 1,800 exhibitors, who had plenty to reveal, from new models and ranges to entries into completely new sectors and markets.

TRAILED SPRAYER AND NEW RTV FROM KUBOTA

Kubota is replacing its RTV-X900 utility vehicle with the RTV-X1110 (*pic 1*). Powered by a 24.2hp in-house three-cylinder diesel engine with dynamic engine braking, drive is put to the wheels through a three-range hydrostatic transmission with selectable 2/4WD and a top speed of 40km/h (25mph). Specification includes adjustable front and rear independent suspension, ground clearance reckoned to be the highest on the market, and the ability to carry 540kg in its hydraulic-lift cargo bed, as well as tow up to 590kg. There are both frame and fully-glazed cab options.

The firm also continues to expand its arable equipment line for large farms by rebranding machines acquired through its ownership of Kverneland (*pic 2*).

In the UK it currently focuses mainly on forage equipment and twin-disc spreaders, but across much of Europe the implements include a wider array of cropping machinery, including ploughs, cultivation equipment, drills and mounted sprayers. Now it is also in the trailed sprayer market, following the SIMA launch of the XTS range. With nominal capacities of 2,600 and 3,200 litres, there are 18-30m steel or 21-24m aluminium boom options. The machines can be specified with features already established on Vicon/Kverneland-branded sprayers, such as the IsoMatch Tellus Pro terminal screen or IsoMatch Grip joystick control, plus fully-automatic iXclean Pro liquid management.



NEW NAME FROM OLD FACTORY

There has been a tractor factory in St Dizier, western France, since 1949, when it was founded by International Harvester. By the late 1990s it was focused on producing components and transmissions rather than whole machines. After the merger between Case IH and New Holland, it was sold in 2001 to meet competition rules, and came under the ownership of ARGO, parent of McCormick and Landini. When ARGO restructured its operations almost a decade ago, it put the plant up for sale, and in 2011 it was purchased by Chinese farm equipment and small tractor specialist YTO. The company carried on making transmissions, for its own use and by others, but was most recently thought to be winding down production.

It surprised many at SIMA, however, by announcing it would be switching part of the plant's focus to once more manufacturing whole tractors. Aimed at helping YTO to gain traction in the western 100-200hp arable market, in a move reminiscent of fellow Chinese firm Lovol's Arbos operation, YTO has chosen to create a new brand, Mancel, and a new design rather than an upscaling or carryover of existing Chinese designs.

However, while the rear axle and four-step powershift are YTO's own, it also claims 80% of the components are made in Europe.

The Mancel F5 Series (*pic 3*) consists of four models from 110-145hp, powered by four-cylinder, 4.5-litre FPT Stage V engines. There are suspended front axle and suspended cab options, although the firm says the current cab layout is not yet finalised and will change before production begins in 2020.





SMALLER CVT TRACTORS AND NEW TECH FROM CASE IH

Offering an alternative to the similarly-sized powershift-equipped Luxxum (pic 4), Case IH introduced four 100-130hp Versum CVXDrive models. Until now its smallest tractors available with its CVT were the larger, more heavily-built four-cylinder 116-145hp Maxxum tractors. Powered by 4.5-litre four-cylinder Stage V FPT Industrial engines, the tractors have a maximum speed of 40km/hr, and an Active Hold Control feature which allows stopping on hills and at road junctions without using the footbrakes. Up to seven mechanically- or electronically-controlled hydraulic remote valves are available, plus a power beyond function. Hydraulic flow comes courtesy of a 110 l/min closed-centre load-sensing system.

Part of a suite of new precision technologies to be marketed by CNH Industrial's agricultural businesses, Case IH (and New Holland) dealers may also soon be selling a range of precision farming equipment sourced from a number of external developers and badged under the AgXtend brand. This includes tractor-mounted biomass sensor and soil mapping devices (pic 5), plus XPower, a 'digital herbicide' technology developed by Swiss firm Zasso Group. Designed for non-selective/complete weed control, or situations such as potato haulm destruction, the 1.2-3.0m XPower units are mounted on a tractor's front linkage, and apply high voltage electric current on contact with the weed leaves, damaging the chlorophyll.



TURKS ENTER AG TELEHANDLER MARKET

Turkish firm Basak chose SIMA to show off its in-house entry into the ag telehandler market. The Perkins-powered machine (pic 6), which drives through a hydrostatic transmission, has a maximum lift height of 8.7m and a lift capacity of 3.5t. Meanwhile, it also gave a full launch to the final version of its first Stage IV tractor line, the four-model 95-120hp 5100 series, which was previewed at November's EIMA in Italy. At that event the cab was locked, windows darkened and interior incomplete, but at SIMA the machine displayed was the finished version. The tractors are Basak's first to meet EU emissions legislation, a key factor behind a plan to expand export markets, including the UK. Powered by Deutz four-cylinder engines with DEF/AdBlue after-treatment, they drive through a four-speed/three-range unit incorporating a two-step powershift plus powershuttle.

NEW TRACTORS AND EQUIPMENT FROM NH

New Holland has added a second six-cylinder tractor to its 116-145hp (rated) T6 tractor line (*pic 7*), which otherwise comprises four-cylinder models. An alternative to the four-pot T6.165, the new 135hp (rated)/165hp (max) T6.160 model delivers up to 12% higher torque than the four-cylinder model, producing a maximum 740Nm at 1,500rpm, compared with the 700Nm of the T6.165, and greater engine braking.

While Kongskilde equipment continues to be marketed under its own brand and livery, New Holland continues to expand the lines of both tillage and forage machinery it offers in its blue and yellow colours. On the tillage side it showed a new side-mounted CombiWheel, available for both brands' heavy-duty plough models, which works inside the plough frame to allow ploughing to the edge of the headland. Its mower line has been extended with three new entry-level DuraDisc mowers of 2.0-2.8m and the 8.6m (max) Mega Cutter triple mower (*pic 8*), while there are also three new entry ProTed tedders plus five ProRotor rakes, comprising three single-rotor and two double-rotor models.



ELECTRIC TELEHANDLER FROM FARESIN

Italian diet feeder and telescopic handler maker Faresin was another firm giving a second airing to a machine previously show in prototype form (*pic 9*). Based on its conventional 6.26 model, its electric telehandler can, like its diesel-powered equivalent, hoist 2.6t to 6.0m. The firm sees significant markets for the machine in applications such as livestock units and packhouses, due to the lack of emissions and noise.



MANITOU BROADENS WHEEL LOADER LINE

Manitou has extended its wheeled loader range to now encompass eight models, covering capacities to 5.0t and lift heights to 5.2m. The firm also unveiled a new MLT 961-145 V+ L telehandler, a high capacity model aimed at large grain stores and straw operations, with maximum capacities of 6t/9m, and there was the first showing of its High View feature for its MLT NewAg telehandlers (*pic 10*). Using a camera fitted to the boom head, this automatically sends images to an in-cab screen. Lastly, the firm provided information on EcoStop, which, when activated, automatically shuts off the engine after a specified period of idling, configurable from one to 30 minutes.





DATA PROTECTION

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON COMPLYING WITH DATA PROTECTION LAWS



Edited by Adam Bernstein

Late last year, a motor industry employee was given a six-month prison sentence for accessing thousands of customer records containing personal data without permission, using his former colleagues' log-in details to access a software system that estimates the cost of vehicle repairs, writes Carl Johnson, Partner and Head of Regulatory at Stephenson Solicitors.

And supermarket Morrisons has recently been found vicariously liable for a data breach that saw thousands of its employees' details posted online, even though it did nothing wrong.

Following the implementation of new data protection law from Europe, the GDPR, there are now huge financial penalties available to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for cases of non-compliance, with fines of up to 4% of a company's annual global turnover or the equivalent of around £18 million, whichever is greater.

For many businesses, ensuring full compliance with the law is a sizeable task, however, taking the following steps should provide a good starting point:

Audit data processing activities

Firms should consider where, when and how they process personal data. They should then seek to ensure that they have a lawful basis for each type of processing that they are conducting. The lawful bases for processing are: 'consent', 'performance of a contract', 'legal obligation', 'vital interests', 'public interest/exercise of official authority' and 'legitimate interests'. Additional conditions also apply to any processing of 'special categories' of data – such as information about a person's health – which is prohibited unless further conditions are met.

Review contracts/service agreements with 'data processors'

Data processors are those who process personal data on someone else's behalf. A good example of this is where a

company outsources its payroll to an external company. The law requires data controllers to ensure that they only appoint data processors who have provided sufficient guarantees regarding their GDPR compliance. The law also requires that this relationship be governed by a contract that sets out the parties' data protection obligations.

Review direct marketing activities

Those that market directly to individuals must ensure that they have a lawful basis in order to use personal data for marketing purposes. An example of this is where firms send marketing emails to a person with their consent. It is not always necessary to have consent before marketing directly to people; however, this will depend upon the specific circumstances. Firms must comply with the GDPR and other legislation.

Make sure 'fair processing information' is provided

Businesses should ensure that they provide a privacy notice to individuals when they first collect their data. The notice should explain who the business is, provide its (and the Data Protection Officer's) contact details, purposes for processing people's personal data and details of the legal basis upon which the business relies upon for processing the data. It should also set out the details of any transfer of personal data that might occur to other countries and inform individuals about the rights they have under the GDPR.

Register the business as a data controller with the Information Commissioner

If the business processes personal data, then it should register with the Information Commissioner at ico.org.uk

Implement policies and procedures to meet GDPR rights

Individuals have numerous rights under the GDPR, such as the right of access, the right to rectification and the right to erasure. If a firm receives such a request from an individual, it will be important for it to ensure that it responds to the request appropriately and within the one-month time limit. Policies can demonstrate compliance with the law.

Implement appropriate security measures

Businesses should ensure that their systems for processing personal data – both off and on-line – are physically secure and utilise appropriate technical and organisational measures. This is critical for Johnson who notes that systems should be

tested regularly, possibly via a reputable IT company to test the security and integrity of the firm's IT systems. It's fundamental that data should be password protected with a secure, hard to crack, key.

Conduct staff training

The vast majority of data breaches are the result of human error. This is why Johnson considers staff are trained in relation to data protection issues – "the business must be able to demonstrate this in the event of a data breach... it is a critical step towards preventing a breach from occurring in the first place and may help in avoiding a financial penalty from the ICO in the event of a breach."

Consider whether it is necessary to appoint a Data Protection Officer (DPO)

This is mandatory in some instances – particularly if the business's core activities consist of regular or systematic large-scale monitoring of individuals. However, even if it is not mandatory, the business may still wish to appoint a DPO in order to ensure that a single person takes responsibility for ensuring compliance.

Conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment when necessary

If a proposed data processing activity is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals and where a type of processing utilises new technology, the business must conduct a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) before it begins that processing. A DPIA is a risk assessment aimed at identifying potential risks in the proposed processing of personal data in order to enable a data controller to address and minimise those risks if it is appropriate to conduct the proposed processing proposed. A DPIA must be documented.

To conclude

The law is quite clear on what it expects and the punishment that it will mete out if the rules aren't followed. As recent cases have shown, both individuals and companies alike can face action.

EMPLOYEES WITH CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS

A recent study, conducted for the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice, found that 11 million people in the UK have a criminal record and that 75% of employers admit to rejecting a job applicant once a criminal conviction is disclosed, writes Mark Stevens, Senior Associate at VWV

The law

It's important to note that an employer can obtain information on a person's criminal record. They can do so in one of two ways – either by asking the candidate or employee directly, or by requesting an official criminal record check by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

The treatment of individuals with criminal records is set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA 1974). This Act provides a system for the records of people with convictions to be cleared.

Subject to certain exemptions, a person whose conviction is spent is entitled to hold themselves out as having a clean record – only 'unspent' convictions need to be disclosed. However, even with unspent convictions it is worth bearing in mind an applicant may not disclose this information.

If an individual has a spent conviction and they choose not to disclose it when questioned, subject to certain exemptions, they cannot be subjected to any liability or prejudice for their failure to disclose, and this would include an employer not hiring them. Failure to disclose a spent conviction is not a lawful ground for dismissal or exclusion from office, and so an employee dismissed on these grounds may bring a claim for unfair dismissal.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 identifies that in certain cases spent convictions should be disclosed. The Order sets out certain occupations, offices and professions where the disclosure of spent convictions can be required:

- Professions such as medicine, lawyers, accountants, vets, chemists and opticians
- Those employed to uphold the law, including judges and prison officers
- Certain regulated occupations, including the financial services
- Those who work with children and vulnerable adults
- Those whose work could pose a risk to national security.

A person can be asked about their spent convictions under the Exceptions Order as long as the question is for the purposes of assessing suitability for a role. At the time of asking it should be made clear to the applicant that they are obliged to disclose spent convictions. If an applicant fails to disclose a spent conviction in these circumstances an employer will have a valid reason for withholding or withdrawing an offer of employment or dismissal.

Disclosure and Barring Service

There are two main types of DBS checks, standard disclosure and enhanced disclosure. Employers should remember when considering requesting a DBS check that this can only be requested if the individual in question is to undertake a role set out in the Exceptions Order.

That said, if the role is not one set out in the Exceptions Order, there is now the option for an individual to request a basic certificate from the DBS which includes details of unspent convictions and cautions. However, an employer cannot force an employee to get this information.

If a DBS certificate discloses convictions, employers should be careful not to respond in a knee jerk manner when deciding if the individual is suitable for a role. Employers should always exercise independent judgement in considering what weight to attach to any disclosed conviction or caution.

An applicant has a criminal record

If a conviction, spent or unspent, is disclosed an employer's response should depend on the individual circumstances – regardless of how the information is obtained.

If the conviction is spent and the position applied for does not fall under the Exceptions Order the employer may not refuse to employ the individual on the basis of the conviction.

If the conviction is spent, but the position falls under the Exceptions Order, then an employer may refuse to employ the individual. When dealing with positions which fall within the Exceptions Order, due regard should be given to industry and sector specific guidance as this will often set out how an employer should proceed.

If the conviction is not spent the employer may refuse to employ the individual, but again, appropriate regard should be given to any sector specific legislation.

A current employee did not disclose

As before, an employee is entitled to withhold a spent conviction, subject to the exceptions, and it is likely that if an employee with qualifying service is dismissed for this reason the dismissal will be unfair.

If a person has deceived their employer about a criminal record and they were not entitled to withhold the information, ie they have an unspent conviction or the exceptions to ROA 1974 apply, then the employer may terminate their employment contract for breaching the implied term of mutual trust and confidence. Care should be taken where an employee has sufficient qualifying service to bring an unfair dismissal claim as an employer will need to show that dismissal was within the band of reasonable responses. In considering this an employer will want to think about the employee's performance record as well as whether or not the conviction was relevant or particularly serious.

In summary

Employers can continue to reject applications on the basis of a criminal record without taking these steps. However, giving more thought to the situation may open up a wider range of suitable candidates for a role.

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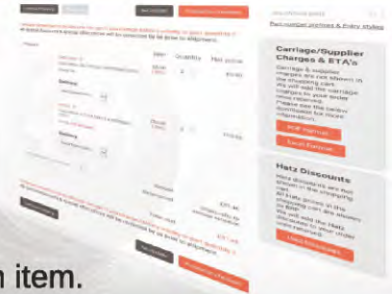
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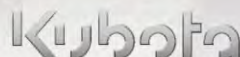
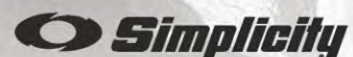
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AVOIDING CHAOS

Sara Hey, Vice President of Operations and Development at Bob Clements Inc, the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers US dealers with Service Dealer's UK readership every issue. This issue, some thoughts as to how to equip your business to handle difficult situations



I recently heard a fireman share how he and his fellow firefighters work to avoid disaster. He explained that the best way to deal with a serious problem was to be proactive in order to eliminate or minimise the problem before it occurs. His department invests its time in doing regular checks on the businesses in the area to make sure they are up to code, that the fire extinguishers are working and in the right place, and that the smoke detectors are all functional. That way, a major fire can be completely avoided or, at the very least, minimised.

The more I thought about this, the more it made sense. The better you are at prevention, the better the outcome when a difficult situation arises. If you are in business, you know just as well as I do that it's just a matter of time before an issue comes up.

As you think about your business, there are a few things that are important to address so that when a situation comes up you are equipped to handle it and you have the ability to minimise the chaos it creates.

In regards to your employees what should you do ahead of time that will allow you to maintain control and calm when an issue arises?

- Put into writing what your process will be if you have an issue with an employee. This process should be outlined in your employee handbook and you should emphasise to your employees, at least yearly, how you will handle these difficult situations. Both you and your employees should be clear as to how unwelcome issues will be handled.

Take time to make sure you have an employee handbook which is up-to-date and communicated annually to all employees.

In regard to your customers what should you do ahead of time that will allow you to maintain a good relationship and avoid misunderstandings?

- Establish a solid customer contact process to make sure that your customers are followed up with within a specific amount of time. This applies to service, parts and sales. Each department should have a system in place for staying in contact with customers and updating them on the progress of their service, parts or new product orders. Make sure your customer response time is a part of your store policy or, at the very least, a key value of your organisation. Have it printed and placed on the wall as a reminder and a promise of your commitment to keeping the customer up-to-date on their equipment or part. The better you are able to communicate your process with your customers and your staff, the better you will be at eliminating chaos from your store.

Spend time with your team and talk about communication processes. Make sure that everyone is on the same page regarding how customers should be communicated with.

It's true, difficult situations will arise. It's your job to make sure the processes are in place to minimise issues and problems, allowing you to create a better experience for your employees and customers.

SPRING IS A TIME FOR PLANNING AND PROJECTS

General Manager of Briants of Risbough, Chris Starling, reports on an exciting new launch for the dealership, plus embarking on a different kind of apprenticeship

For a number of years, we've stuck with supplier-run websites and signed up to support manufacturer e-commerce campaigns – a helpful revenue generator but too far detached from our own brand to set the world on fire. In spring this year, we finally took the plunge and launched our first in-house e-commerce website. With the product diversity we handle, plus manufacturer handover constraints and selling conditions, it's a project that has been some time in the making.

Our reason to go e-commerce is not to join the bunfight of online discounting but to offer customers the convenience and service they desire. There is a growing volume of customers whose time is precious and who work during the times we are open. There are also a significant number of customers who are nervous of social interaction, or as hard as we try, may still be intimidated at coming into stores like ours. We've had to concentrate hard on meeting customers' expectations and buying habits while maintaining a high level of contact and aftersales support.

We quietly rolled out with a soft launch so that any gremlins could be ironed out prior to actively promoting.

The few staff involved in the e-commerce project have extensive experience within the company and working with the products, supported by a web developer we've used for nearly a decade. They now operate an entirely new department which we anticipate will only grow. It's an arm of the business with much scope for growth and development. Already the team's day is spent refining, adding content and processing orders. The customer engagement has been one of the surprise elements to date. The Click & Collect facility appears to bridge the gap between customers who love to order online and our desire to drive customers to our door. We talk quite openly to customers coming to the counter to collect their purchase, in a bid to form the trust required to guarantee future orders. Not only that but the feedback given is often invaluable.

To complement our online adventures, we decided to involve ourselves with a local apprenticeship scheme – but not the sort we're normally associated with in the servicing industry! In April we took on our first Digital Online Marketing Apprentice. A 20-year-old who's grown up with a smartphone glued to one hand and a presence on every social media platform the rest of us have never heard of. They will work closely with the website and instore sales and service staff to learn the business and products. Given their tender age, it's going to be a carefully managed project to ensure they complete the study element of the apprenticeship. With the right nurturing we hope thereafter they will build a career with us. In the meantime, we're sure we'll end up teaching one another new skills in equal measure.

Speaking in general terms about the season so far, we've seen a buoyant first quarter. The weather has for a change been favourable for us in general, with warm spells followed by prolonged storms and wind. This has maintained a high flow of footfall through the showroom. Our fencing sales counters are within the machinery showroom, so even if the customers were only coming in for a panel blown down by the wind, they are always strategically navigated within a few metres of the entire range of lawnmowers.



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

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DOMESTIC/COMMERCIAL

BATTERY-POWERED LAUNCH FROM ALLETT

First-time lithium-ion cylinder offering

Allett has launched a range of lithium-ion battery-powered models known as the Liberty range.

The company has been producing cylinder mowers for more than 50 years and until now, its mowers have traditionally been powered by petrol, with some products also available as electric models

Discussing the new additions, Managing Director of Allett Lawnmowers, Austin Jarrett said, "At Allett we are incredibly proud of our roots and the tradition associated with our lawnmowers, however that needn't mean we don't evolve our offering.

"Battery-powered products have significant benefits – not just for the environment but also for users. They are incredibly convenient and offer significant power without compromising on the cut quality that our machines are famed for."

Available in three different sizes, 30cm, 35cm and 43cm, the Liberty mowers combine the classic five- or six-blade cartridge cylinder system with modern lithium-ion technology. The self-propelled mowers are described as being suitable for all small to medium-sized gardens and all feature a rear roller for striping.

The Liberty 30 push mower is the entry level option for small to medium gardens featuring six speed options. A fully charged battery allows for up to 400m² of lawn to be mowed.

Also suited to small to medium gardens, but offering more features, is the mid-range **Liberty 35**. Powered by a 40V lithium-ion battery, it is a 14" self-propelled cylinder mower equipped with a five-bladed cutting cylinder. This mower is capable of delivering 88 cuts per metre.

The final mower is the **Liberty 43** (pictured below) which is the top of the range model. With a self-propelled feature, steel front roller and double-section rear roller with geared differential, it also benefits from a 62-litre grass box collection.



T5 SERIES EXTENDED WITH AUTOCOMMAND MODELS

New Holland unveils new machines

New Holland Agriculture has extended the T5 Series with the new T5 Auto Command range, featuring its award-winning continuously variable transmission.

Sean Lennon, head of the tractors product line, said of the new tractors, "The new T5 Auto Command is ideal for mixed farmers, medium-sized dairy operations and professional farmers where loader work is key. The new range caters for those who need a highly manoeuvrable and versatile tractor designed for high PTO work such as mowing, baling, light tillage, ground preparation and transport."

The new T5 Auto Command range was awarded a mention by the jury panel of the Technical Innovation Contest at the EIMA International exhibition, which particularly appreciated the innovative life-long exhaust gas after-treatment system.

The AutoCommand continuously variable transmission delivers the T5's all-round performance in those jobs where exact speeds are critical, says the company.

The three-stage acceleration and deceleration setting matches the performance to each task: the soft setting is for gentle direction changes, suitable during high-speed transport or when working on slippery surfaces; the standard setting for normal field activities; and the super-fast aggressive setting guarantees near instantaneous direction changes.

The extreme manoeuvrability, together with the smooth shuttle shifting, makes the T5 AutoCommand

suitable for loader work.

The well-proven NEF four-cylinder, 4.5-litre engine developed by FPT Industrial offers maximum outputs ranging from 110 to 140hp – up to 20hp more than the current T5.120 ElectroCommand™ model.

The T5 AutoCommand meets Stage V emissions standards with the NEF engine and the new Hi-ESCR2 technology developed by FPT Industrial. This after-treatment system is a maintenance-free solution that minimises operating costs, and is all packaged neatly under the hood, allowing maximum visibility.

Its compact size, lack of EGR and simple layout add to its extreme reliability.

The new tractor utilises the Horizon cab, which New Holland says offers an unprecedented feeling of space, remarkably low in-cab noise levels, superior ergonomics, plus the features of the SideWinder armrest allow the new models to offer exceptional operating comfort.

The all-round visibility, provided by the single-piece front screen and ample glazed areas is further enhanced by the enlarged wing mirrors with an adjustable top section.

The T5 AutoCommand range will be offered in four models, ranging from 110–140 maximum horse power.

For those users who are looking for the ultimate in comfort and exclusive features, the top-rated T5.140 model will be available in the Blue Power version.



CAMPEY OFFERS PROFESSIONALS AN ELECTRIC DECK

Fleischmann Electric 5 Deck mower

Campey Turf Care Systems is introducing the Fleischmann Electric 5 Deck mower.

The mower has five 2.20 metre cutting decks with six spindles per deck, giving a 10-metre overall cutting width. The machine features a braked steering rear axle and the two-point pivoting front mount hitch provides high maneuverability, enabling cutting speeds of up to 20kph to be achieved.

Each blade on the five cutting decks is powered by a low-maintenance electric motor, leaving behind traditional gearboxes and PTO shafts and eliminating the risk of oil leaks. The six high tip speed blades in each deck give more cuts per metre and offer excellent clipping dispersal.

The modern generator used to power the mower is very efficient and offers low PTO requirements, low

engine revs and lower noise output for quiet operation.

The mechanics of the operation are enhanced further by the five low ground pressure castor wheels. Each deck has five wheels which are designed to follow contours and iron out bumps in the surface without leaving any marks. The wheels are also used to easily set the height of cut with all other operations controlled from the in-cab control box.

The 25 castor wheels are joined at the back of the machine by two steerable braked tyres on the rear axle. These tyres improve the turning circle and prevent any marks being made, and make the machine safer when travelling at high speed on the road.

Transporting the mower is simple, with hydraulic folding wings reducing the width of the machine to a three-metre transport width.



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COUNTAX C40 AND WESTWOOD T40 ARRIVE IN STYLE

Introduction for consumers looking for a premium platform

AriensCo says dealers whose prospective customers have around an acre of lawn could fully appreciate the new Countax C40 and Westwood T40 garden tractors.

The company says the machines offer an introduction to a premium platform and a dealer opportunity to upsell a garden tractor with full Countax and Westwood specifications. Designed and manufactured in Britain using the latest technology, the tractors have features which the company believes customers would usually expect to find only in top-of-the-range ride-on mowers.

Fitted with the optional 300-litre powered grass collector there is the ability offered to cut and collect the grass, even in wet conditions, while the integrated roller leaves behind the classic, neat striped finish.

The 97cm (38") reinforced cutter deck is a suitable size for one-acre lawns and situations where there may be access limitations.

Both the C40 and T40 feature the single-cylinder Ariens 546cc engine which AriensCo describe as smooth-running, high-torque, economic and durable. Also the double skin bonnet offers low noise operation and the cut and collect system minimises air disturbance from the blades, further reducing unwanted sound.

These garden tractors are ergonomically designed with easy-to-use controls including a geared deck-lift system that enables changing the cutting height with ease. The pedals and levers are all positioned within easy reach and are engineered to be lightweight in use, with one-pedal hydrostatic control.

The dashboard display with running hours, cutter deck and Powered Grass Collector status indicators is visible at all times.

Don't let the customer try starting the tractor if the hand brake is not engaged because they won't be going anywhere. This safety device is fitted as standard.

Access on and off the tractor is made easy with a shaped steering wheel and adjustable seat position. The company also boasts the heavy-duty cast axle is able to withstand the stresses of uneven terrain, while the strong, durable, single-pressed body is built for longevity.

In terms of maintenance the machines feature with easy access to the engine area and a translucent seven-litre fuel tank for checking fuel levels.



Ariens Countax C40

EVENTS 2019

MAY 2019

- 6 North Somerset Show
www.nsas.org.uk
- 11-12 Nottinghamshire County Show
nottinghamshirecountyshow.com
- 15 Scotgrass, Dumfries
www.scotgrass.co.uk
- 15-18 Balmoral Show, Belfast
www.balmoralshow.co.uk
- 16-18 Devon County Show
www.devoncountyshow.co.uk
- 21-25 Chelsea Flower Show
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events
- 25-26 Herts County Show
www.hertsshow.com
- 27 Surrey County Show
www.surreycountyshow.co.uk
- 29-30 Staffordshire County Show
www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show
- 29-30 Suffolk County Show
<http://suffolkshow.co.uk/>
- 29-1/6 Royal Bath & West Show
www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show
- 31-2/6 Gardening Scotland, Royal Highland Centre, Edinburgh
www.gardeningscotland.com

JUNE 2019

- 2 Rutland Show
www.rutlandcountyshow.com
- 6-8 Royal Cornwall Show
www.royalcornwallshow.org
- 6-8 South of England Show
www.seas.org.uk/south-of-england-show

- 12-13 Cereals 2018, Boothby Graffoe, Nr Lincoln, Lincs
www.cerealsevent.co.uk
- 13-16 BBC Gardeners' World Live – Birmingham NEC
bbcgardenersworldlive.com
- 14-16 Three Counties Show, Malvern
www.royalthreecounties.co.uk
- 18-19 Cheshire County Show
www.royalcheshireshow.org
- 19-20 Lincolnshire Show
<https://lincolnshireshow.co.uk/>
- 20-23 Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh
www.royalhighlandshow.org
- 23 Derbyshire County Show
derbyshirecountyshow.org.uk
- 26-27 Royal Norfolk Show
royalnorfolkshow.rnaa.org.uk
- 30 Cranleigh Show
www.cranleighshow.co.uk
- 30 Royal Isle of Wight County Show
www.rivas.org.uk

JULY 2019

- 2-7 Hampton Court Garden Festival
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-garden-festival
- 5-7 Kent County Show
<http://kentshowground.co.uk>
- 6 Monmouthshire Show
www.monmouthshow.co.uk
- 9-11 Great Yorkshire Show
www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk
- 13 Newport Show
<http://newportshow.co.uk/>
- 17-21 RHS Flower Show - Tatton Park
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park

- 22-25 Royal Welsh Show
www.rwales.wales/royal-welsh-show/
- 26-27 Border Union Show
<http://www.buas.org/>
- 26-28 The Game Fair, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire
www.thegamefair.org
- 27 Mid Devon Show
www.middevonshow.co.uk
- 30-1/08 New Forest & Hampshire County Show
www.newforestshow.co.uk

AUGUST 2019

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

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THE SILENT SERVICE

We need to spread the message ourselves, nobody else will

Recently the National Farmers Union (NFU) organised a terrific initiative for primary school pupils. Its Farmvention competition invited young children to design tractors of future.

There were attractive cash prizes and a visit to the House of Commons for the winners.

Guess what? Two of the three winning teams were from inner city schools, one in the London borough of Wandsworth, the other in the heart of Manchester – hardly farming country.

It has always been accepted that, apart from those brought up in a rural or farming community, our industry is largely unknown and under-publicised.

As pupils make their way through school and start to develop their thoughts about further education or learning on the job through an apprenticeship, how should our industry go about 'setting out its stall'?

For a start, we have to forget about the way machinery was made and maintained in the past. We're in a completely different technological age today. Those who would never have dreamt of working with tractors, combines or precision turf machinery could now be enticed into our world – almost by accident or default.

I recently interviewed Robin Jackson, a young robotics engineer as he put Tom, an agri-robot, through its paces, mapping a field on the Waitrose-owned Leckford Estate in Hampshire.

Robin had gained a Masters Degree in Mechatronics and Robotics at Leeds University, before joining a team at the Small Robot Company (SRC) developing a range of prototypes for SRC's robotic farming platform.

"That makes you an agricultural engineer," I said. "Oh yes, I suppose it does," he replied.

Therein lies the challenge. Just as the perception of groundsman is wildly misunderstood, so the term agricultural engineer fails to mean much to those outside our immediate world.

While we should not discard the teaching of engineering skills and protocols, which are just as important as ensuring that the three Rs form the basis of education, new skills are increasingly in demand.

The trick will be to build on the early enthusiasm of those young primary school pupils when they were considering the design and role of the tractor of the future.

In the end, the answer lies in our own hands. We need to get ourselves organised, not leave it to others. The 'tools' are there for us to use through organisations such as STEM Learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) www.stem.org

Take Nigel Summerfield of John Deere and JCB main dealer Rea Valley Tractors (RVT); he says, "After 30 years in the industry, I wanted to put something back".

About six years ago, he came across the opportunity to become a STEM Ambassador, so he could provide an insight into engineering in general, and agricultural engineering in particular. He now attends career fairs, school assemblies and specialist seminars promoting career opportunities in the agri-tech industry.

Nigel is attached to a STEM Hub, Entrust STEM based in Stafford, which provides opportunities to address teachers, pupils and others.

"I can choose what I go to and how many events I attend during the year," he says. "When I go to careers events, it's clear that agricultural engineering is noticeable by its absence – very few people know anything about our sector.

"Initially it can be a tough challenge to explain how, what and why the agricultural machinery sector operates. But when you start to get into all the technology and innovation in tractors and machinery of today, their jaws drop open!"

Our industry has a host of knowledgeable people at its disposal. Nobody will do it for us. It's up to us to spread the message!

JIM GREEN



CUSTOMER DISSERVICE

FAWLTY BEHAVIOUR

It stands out like a sore thumb in this industry

Everyone knows that every single dealer in this industry is a happy-go-lucky, shining beacon of sunshine and flowers, with a smile on their face and a song in their heart – every single second of every single working day!

Why wouldn't they be? It's not like they are constantly under pressure from customers and suppliers, not to mention the bank manager and HMRC?! Nope, nothing to see here, except a swan-like serene calmness.

Of course, we all know what goes on with swans below the surface! Seriously, dealers are under immense pressure all the time, which makes it all the more remarkable the amazing reputation the network has for

being friendly, cheerful and entirely customer-service focussed. One could understand if some were prickly from time to time, but on the whole, this just isn't the case at

all. Other sectors could learn a lot from visiting dealerships up and down the UK.

What it does mean though, is that when one hears tale of a dealer getting it wrong, and acting all Basil Fawlty, it stands out like a sore thumb. This magazine's owner and editor had first-hand experience of this rare phenomenon just recently.

Naming no names, word got to them of a particular retailer whose customer service was so bad a dealer up the road was thinking of buying them a bottle of something for Christmas to thank him for all the customers that were sent their way due to this fellow's rudeness!

It beggars belief that an independent business can act in this way, especially in this climate where retention of customers is so vital for small firms. But it was a fact, customers were walking out of this store, vowing never to return – simply because of how badly they had been treated.

You can hold franchises for all the best equipment and have the swankiest showroom, but if you have an aggressive, rude, disinterested or surly attitude, there's simply no need for a customer to deal with you. There's always another option relatively nearby.

Of course, dealers are going to come up against, let's call them 'difficult' customers from time to time. But there are well-worn methods for dealing with these types

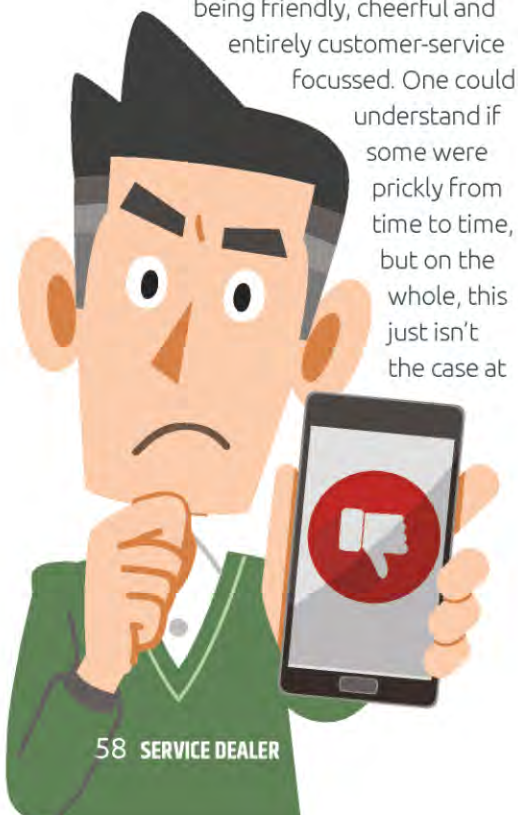
to diffuse the situation. Sales experts will tell you to never argue; to listen and let the customer vent; to show the customer you care; and to look for solutions that can rectify the perceived problem.

All good dealers worth their salt know this. What you don't do is act offhand and uncaring as soon as someone walks through your doors – which is precisely what happened to my esteemed colleagues when curiosity got the better of them.

Yes, they couldn't resist seeing for themselves if what they'd heard was true, so they took the opportunity to pop into this particular business. They tell me the welcome they were given didn't feel dissimilar to when Basil Fawlty feels he's got a lower-class guest daring to darken his doors! The monosyllabic grunts and complete lack of interest in engaging had them on their heels within a minute. It would be funny if it wasn't so tragic.

As I say, businesses like this are almost unheard of in this sector. Those that do choose to act like that, well, the dealers nearby will be benefiting from an exodus of their customers. Such an unprofessional manner will inevitably cause a small business to be unsustainable for any length of time.

If you are in the exceedingly rare position to have a dealer like this up the road from you, be prepared for an increase in your workload!



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At STIHL, our goal is simple. To make sure our dealers' customers benefit from the ultimate sales and service experience. So, we support you with an industry leading

delivery and logistics network. We keep you up to date with all the latest service related developments. And we have a customer service team always on hand to deal with any enquiries.

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business and drive STIHL sales forward. There are also regular product training sessions and access to unrivalled marketing and promotional support, including the kind of instore merchandising support that has helped Huw create a hugely impressive STIHL display wall to wow his customers.

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www.becomeastihldealer.co.uk

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