

# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

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

March/April 2022

Doe Show returns in-person with successful modifications

## THE FUTURE OF FARMING

### WEED CONTROL FOCUS

Lemken shows dealers where it believes the sector is heading

### LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS

Rea Valley Tractors on the secret of their success

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Hertfordshire Garden Machinery on why they chose to reopen their showroom following 16 months of closure

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## Letter from the editor **Steve Gibbs**

[steve@servicedealer.co.uk](mailto:steve@servicedealer.co.uk)



### W elcome to the March/April 2022 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

Hearing from our readers during the first couple of months of 2022 and it appears there's two major issues causing problems to how dealers would ideally like to be operating. These are supply, both of parts and wholegoods – plus recruitment of workshop staff.

In the results of our Winter Servicing survey, which you can read beginning of page 42 this issue, it's these factors that crop up again and again in comments received by readers.

One element, which unlike this time last year, readers aren't telling us is having a directly adverse effect on their dealership though, is the pandemic. Yes, there have been difficult periods to negotiate with staff absentees due to the spread of Omicron but cast your mind to the early months of 2021 and it was back to studying the wording on

government websites to discover if dealerships were even allowed to open! I don't think it's too controversial to state that the avoidance of another harsh set of restrictions this winter, will have been welcomed by businesses everywhere.

Related to this, we have a fascinating story this issue regarding Hertfordshire Garden Machinery, whose showroom remained closed for 16 months following the lockdowns. For a time, it looked like they would change to being a service-only firm, doing away with sales entirely. But this January they have revamped and reopened their retail space – and tell us they are optimistic for the future.

It's this resilience and ability to adapt to the prevailing circumstances that makes the UK dealer network so admirable. *Service Dealer* is proud to act as a platform to tell these stories every issue and each Friday in the *Weekly Update*. So please do keep us informed with any developments at your dealership. We'd love to hear from you.

### THE TEAM

**Publisher:** Duncan Murray-Clarke

**Editor:** Steve Gibbs

[steve@servicedealer.co.uk](mailto:steve@servicedealer.co.uk)

**Agricultural Editor:** Martin Rickatson

[jmr.agriculture@gmail.com](mailto:jmr.agriculture@gmail.com)

**SME Digest Editor:** Adam Bernstein

[adam@adambernstein.co.uk](mailto:adam@adambernstein.co.uk)

**Contributor:** Laurence Gale

[laurence.gale@btinternet.com](mailto:laurence.gale@btinternet.com)

**Redesign** Marco Crisari

**Design & layout:** Iain Robinson

**Produced by:** The Ad Plain Ltd

Pipe House, Lupton Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 9BS, UK

Telephone: 01491 837 117

[www.theadplain.com](http://www.theadplain.com)

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**Advertising sales:**

**Nikki Harrison**

[nikki@theadplain.com](mailto:nikki@theadplain.com)

**Telephone: 01491 837 117**

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### CONTENTS

- 4 **News**  
Latest industry developments
- 14 **Echoes heard around UK**  
Q&A with Paul Buttery of FGM Claymore
- 18 **Doe Show '22**  
Back in-person this year, Martin Rickatson visits Ulting
- 24 **Full Circle**  
Herts GM tell us how they've reopened their showroom after 16 months
- 28 **Dealer profile**  
With Rea Valley Tractors
- 34 **Weed control focus**  
Lemken shows dealers where it believes the sector is heading
- 40 **Sprayer training**  
Options advanced with web-based initiative
- 42 **Business monitor**  
Winter servicing '22 survey
- 44 **SME digest**  
Information for small businesses
- 47 **View from across the pond**  
With Sara Hey
- 48 **Diary of a season**  
With MKM Agriculture
- 49 **Products**  
Coverage of new equipment to hit the market
- 56 **In my view**  
With Chris Biddle
- 57 **Events**  
Shows & industry events update
- 58 **Jim Green**  
His view from the edge

DEALERS



# Depot takeover expands C&O's territory

Into new county for first time

**C&O Tractors is expanding its operating area across the south west of England with the opening of a new depot in Somerset.**

The new site at South Petherton will support customers in Somerset with tractors and machinery from Massey Ferguson and Kverneland.

In making this move C&O is taking on the site and Massey Ferguson trading area from MST. The existing staff from South Petherton will be joining the C&O team.

C&O managing director Andy Coles said, "It is really exciting for C&O to move into Somerset for the first time in our 20 year history. Customers in Somerset will benefit from the resources and experience

we have within the C&O Group, not just with tractors but the wider Massey Ferguson range, including combine harvesters, balers and haytools. Added to that we will also be delivering Kverneland machinery in south and central Somerset.

"2022 marks 175 years of Massey Ferguson heritage and C&O are really proud to be continuing that legacy. I'm looking forward to getting to know the customers in our new business area and supporting the agricultural industry in Somerset," added Andy.

William Judge, brand manager at Massey Ferguson UK/Eire & ME said, "We are delighted that C&O Tractors Ltd has expanded and will

be opening a branch at South Petherton, further strengthening its services throughout the area, offering continued, excellent customer service, aftersales and product availability."

Kverneland managing director Joe Bell said, "This expansion creates an opportunity for new business in addition to supporting existing Kverneland customers in the south and central Somerset area."

C&O is run from headquarters in Blandford, Dorset and serves customers across the South coast from depots in Wilton in Wiltshire, Funtington in West Sussex and Newport on the Isle of Wight.

DEALERS



MD of Tuckwells, James Tuckwell

# Tuckwell and JCB to end dealer agreement

Dealership take on Kramer's full line

**JCB Agriculture and Tuckwells have announced that their dealer agreement for Suffolk and Essex will not be renewed when it expires at the end of the year.**

The two companies have enjoyed what the manufacturer described as a 'successful partnership' since 2007 when the company was first appointed as a JCB Agriculture dealer. The dealer agreement will end on December 31st, 2022.

Following the announcement of the split, Tuckwells confirmed that they will become full line Kramer dealers across their entire trading area, including the branches in Essex and Suffolk that were previously selling JCB.

Commenting on the decision to part ways with JCB, MD of Tuckwells James Tuckwell said, "This has been a very difficult decision for both companies. We will continue to support JCB agricultural products until the end of 2022 and we will work closely with JCB to ensure a smooth

transition for all customers."

JCB Agriculture Managing Director John Smith added, "Tuckwells have done an excellent job for JCB customers, and we have enjoyed a very strong working relationship with James and his team. It's a relationship that has ensured customers received professional support for JCB products from Tuckwells' sales, service and parts teams.

"We have reached agreement with two existing JCB Agriculture dealers to cover the territory, and from January 1st, 2023, G & J Peck Ltd will cover Suffolk and Oliver Landpower Ltd will cover Essex. Further details of the new dealer arrangements will be made available in the near future. Both JCB and Tuckwells would like to assure customers that the partnership is ending on very amicable terms and our jointly agreed aim is to continue supporting our loyal customers, now and in the future."

**New partnership**

On the move to Kramer, James Tuckwell said, "We are extremely excited to be entering this new partnership with Kramer who are a very well-known and respected global manufacturer producing leading material handling products. Their design, innovation and German build quality is of the highest quality, and they are the perfect fit for Tuckwells and our customers. We are delighted we will be able to offer Kramer products across our entire dealer network.

"While our focus and future is now with the Kramer brand, we will still be supporting JCB products in the field throughout 2022 and beyond, in order that we give our customers the smoothest transition possible.

"The future for the Kramer brand is strong and exciting and we are proud to be adding another world leading franchise to our already extremely strong portfolio."

INDUSTRY

# B&S exiting product markets in U.S

According to local media reports

**Reports in U.S media say Briggs & Stratton will be closing their Germantown, Maryland facility as they exit the North American portable generator and snow thrower markets.**

A report in BizTimes, which reports on business matters in Milwaukee where B&S are headquartered, says the corporation plans to close the distribution centre by April 1st as they stop selling portable generators, pressure washers and snow throwers to mass retail centres in the United States.

According to Lauren Vagnini, director of communications,

who is quoted in the article, the company made the decision to exit those business lines "... as we focus our resources to drive profitable growth for the company."

Lauren added, "We remain committed to supporting our retail customers throughout the spring season."

BizTimes says that according to Briggs in terms of jobs impacted by this closure, it will be "... less than 50 hourly positions".

PEOPLE

# Stiga UK appoint two

National sales manager and territory manager roles

Stiga UK have announced the new appointment of Jack Brown as national sales manager, and at the same time Gary Philpott has joined the team as a territory manager for the southwest.



**JACK BROWN**

Jack initially joined Stiga (GGP) in 2015 as a territory manager, originally covering the East Midlands and East Anglia. In 2018 the area was expanded to incorporate Worcestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Birmingham.

Jack has been involved in the lawn and garden business for 18 years, starting off as a Saturday boy whilst at school, working for a local dealership. After finishing full time education, he joined as a member of the workshop team. After three years Jack was appointed as the service manager leading the team. During this time he also became heavily involved in robotics, selling, installing, and servicing, which lead him to take over the sales department a few years after for all garden machinery.

Jack said, "I've thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many great people along the way and forging lasting relationships. I look forward to meeting more of our customers on a national scale over the coming months and years."

With over 27 years working in the outdoor power industry, Gary Philpott, meanwhile, has an immense amount of technical knowledge and experience.



**GARY PHILPOTT**

Gary joined Husqvarna back in 1995 as a technical support/warranty administrator, which evolved into both technical and sales management roles over the next 24 years. After leaving Husqvarna in December 2018 Gary set up a business installing robotic lawnmowers. Whilst this was successful, he was asked to join Anglo American Oil Company (selling ASPEN) as an area sales manager, which he took up. Unfortunately, this was just before Covid, and the role ended abruptly in August 2020.

To get back in to work Gary joined a local tree surgery company, saying, "Being involved in the trade from the other side of the fence was a fantastic viewpoint."

On his new appointment though, Gary added, "I'm really excited by this role in what will likely be a challenging year ahead. Additionally, Stiga has its sights set on being a major player in the robotic lawnmower market with its current range of 5 models for the UK."

EXHIBITIONS



Tillage Live

## Tillage Live to return this year

AEA organised show

The Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA) have announced that Tillage-Live, the national crop establishment demonstration, will return to Scotland this Autumn.

Organised by the Association on behalf of the industry, the event will take place in Dunbar, East Lothian by permission of Eweford Farm.

Held on Wednesday 28th September, the day intends to showcase machinery manufacturers, with demonstrations of crop establishment technology, including ploughs, cultivators, sprayers, conventional, strip tillage and direct drills. The event also includes a static exhibition area, which provides an opportunity to discuss new ideas with experts. This year's knowledge trail includes a look at soils and cover crops, as well as tyres and soil protection.

Kayleigh Holden, event organiser, said, "The AEA are extremely pleased that Tillage-Live will be taking place in Scotland in 2022. The site at Dunbar offers excellent facilities for manufacturers to showcase their machinery to potential customers and visitors and we would like to thank Eweford Farm for hosting the event once again. Visitors and exhibitors can be confident that every step is being taken to ensure that the event is run to the highest standard and is COVID secure."

INDUSTRY

# Toro buys Spartan Mowers

Maker of professional zero-turns



Spartan Mowers

The Toro Company in the U.S has announced it has acquired the privately-held Intimidator Group, based in Batesville, Arkansas, which designs and manufactures Spartan Mowers, a professional line of zero-turn mowers.

Sold through an established dealer network, the manufacturer says Spartan Mowers has strong brand recognition in southern regions of the United States, appealing to rural markets and large acreage customers. Intimidator Group also designs and manufactures side-by-side utility vehicles.

"The addition of Spartan Mowers to our portfolio strategically positions us to be an even stronger player in the

large and rapidly growing zero-turn mower market," said Richard M. Olson, chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Company.

"Spartan's product lineup complements our Exmark and Toro branded equipment and provides unique opportunities to further leverage technology and design, procurement and manufacturing efficiencies. We are confident the combined efforts of our teams will help advance our strategic priorities while providing unparalleled products, technologies and service to our customers."

Robert and Becky Foster, owners of Intimidator Group, said "With a shared commitment to furthering innovation,

servicing customers and supporting our people and communities, we look forward to joining The Toro Company and continuing to provide best-in-class products and service to our customers."

The transaction has already received customary regulatory approvals. The purchase price was \$400 million, which was paid with a combination of cash on hand and short-term borrowings under the company's existing revolving credit facility.

For calendar year 2021, Intimidator Group net sales were approximately \$200 million.

DEALERS

# Fentons drop domestic in favour of professional

Also increase their hire department

Dealers Fentons of Bourne have said they are dropping domestic machinery to concentrate on professional equipment – as well as bolstering the hire side of their business.

As part of this change, the dealership has recently been appointed by Etesia to offer their full range of products in the areas of South Lincolnshire, North Cambridgeshire, and some parts within the Norfolk border.

Glen Bellamy, managing director of Fentons, which is a local family-owned business situated between Bourne and Market Deeping, explained how they have recently bolstered in these two key areas.

“We have stopped domestic business and have instead decided to go down the professional and commercial route,” he said. “In addition, we have also focussed on increasing the hire side of the business, and feel the Etesia brand will fit nicely into both of these.

“We are looking at targeting schools and colleges, where there is a big need for products such as those

from Etesia. Furthermore, many of our customers have older Etesia pedestrian mowers, which could do with upgrading. We feel it is time for them to see just how far the brand has developed because they will see the benefits.”

“I’ve been familiar with the Etesia brand for many years, and I have been speaking to the company for about 15 years,” continued Glen. “It now felt like the ideal time to become an Etesia dealer because it fits in perfectly with everything we do.”

As well as being optimistic about the products, Glen says that he is looking forward to working more closely with Ian Collington, area sales manager for Etesia UK.

“With Ian we know his phone is always on and he is there to support us. To be honest it is nice to see that we have an area manager that still has a van with some kit in it and is prepared to get his hands dirty! That goes a long way in my book.”



The team at Fentons of Bourne with the new Etesia range

DEALERS

# Polaris welcomes Sharrocks to network

New dealer for the North West and Midlands



Sharrocks

Polaris has appointed Sharrocks Ltd as an authorised dealer for the North West and Midlands.

Supplying agricultural groundcare and construction machinery, Sharrocks now stocks the full Polaris utility line-up, including the Ranger, Sportsman and Youth, as well as genuine parts and accessories. They also operate a full demo and hire fleet, of which the Polaris line-up is now a part.

Originally opening almost 60 years ago, Sharrocks now runs as a full-service dealer, including sales, parts and services, and specialises in supplying professional users such as universities, authorities and contractors. Looking to expand their offering, they say Polaris seemed like

the perfect fit.

James Sharrock, managing director, explained, “Polaris appeared to be a natural progression for us when looking to expand the range of ATVs and UTVs that we offer, especially with their level of dealer support throughout these difficult times, as well as their development of electric vehicles, which we know to be a highly lucrative market.”

Traditionally offering utility vehicles & golf buggies, Sharrocks will introduce recreational vehicles to their line-up, including the RZR. The Company will also campaign a race prepared RZR Turbo S in the 2022 British SXS Racing Championship sponsored by Polaris Britain.

PEOPLE

# New president of Husqvarna Division appointed

Glen Instone took position on Jan 1st 2022

Glen Instone has been appointed President of the Husqvarna Division within Husqvarna Group. He will continue to serve as the Group CFO until his successor is appointed.

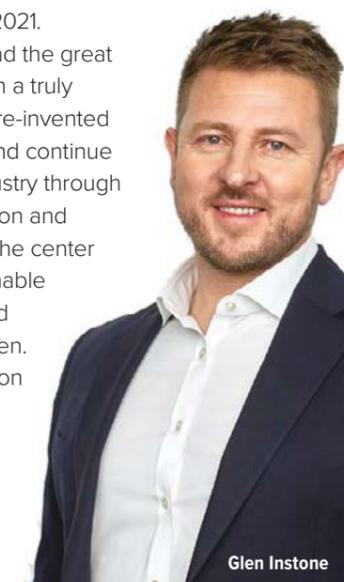
“I am very pleased to see Glen become the President of the Husqvarna Division, a role he has been successfully leading since July, combined with his CFO role. His broad experience and knowledge about our company, combined with his leadership skills, will be of great value to further strengthen and grow the Husqvarna Division” says Henric Andersson, President & CEO Husqvarna Group.

Since joining Husqvarna in 2002, Glen has held various positions, including Vice President Global Sales & Services, Husqvarna Division 2016–2018, VP & CFO Husqvarna Division 2014–2017 and VP & CFO EMEA, 2013–2014. Glen Instone has served as Group CFO since 2018, and as Acting President of

the Husqvarna Division since July 1st, 2021.

“I look forward to continuing to lead the great team within the Husqvarna Division in a truly exciting time in our history. We have re-invented ourselves for more than 330 years and continue to lead the transformation of our industry through electrification, automation, digitalisation and sustainability. With our customers at the center of what we do, we are driving sustainable growth within both the residential and professional business areas,” said Glen.

Glen took up the permanent position within the Husqvarna Division on January 1, 2022. He will continue to serve as the Group CFO until his successor is appointed. The Group CFO recruitment process has been initiated.



Glen Instone

DEALERS

# First female student to win Ag-Eng scholarship

Molly Robson is currently studying for a BEng

The 2022 Claas UK Scholarship for a Harper Adams University student has been awarded to Molly Robson, who is studying for a BEng in Agricultural Engineering and is the first female student to win this prestigious award.

Now in its 16th year, the scholarship was instigated in 2005 at the personal request of Helmut Claas and is awarded annually to a Year 2 Engineering Student at Harper Adams University.

As this year's Claas Scholar, Molly will receive £3,000 towards her education costs each academic year. In addition, she will do an initial three-month placement with a Claas UK owned dealership, prior to a 12-month paid placement at the company's headquarters at Harsewinkel in Germany. Here she will be working within the Advanced Functional Testing Department, focusing on harvesting machinery.

Prior to attending Harper Adams University, Molly studied at Askham Bryan College for a Level 3 Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Land Based Engineering. Molly is from a farming background and lives with her family on an arable farm in Darlington.

Summing up on how she felt to be awarded this year's scholarship, Molly said, "To be a Claas scholar and have my placement with the company, is something I have wanted to achieve since I started my journey in the world of agricultural engineering. I am beyond excited for this opportunity, and I cannot wait to start this experience!"

The manufacturer has enjoyed close ties with Harper Adams for many years, both through the Claas Foundation, but has also sponsored PhD thesis and research work at the University, as well as providing work placement opportunities for a number of students each year. The company says many of these have gone on after graduation to be awarded training and career opportunities with themselves.



Molly Robson

INDUSTRY



# Iseki reports a record year

And announce further investment

Iseki UK & Ireland has announced further investments in the business to support the record sales levels achieved in 2021.

Commenting on what the company describe as continuous year on year achievement, David Withers, managing director added, "2021 was a strange year with Covid and the global supply chain issues but despite some of the challenges Iseki UK & Ireland had an amazing year with sales rocketing up and market share increasing as more and more people see the significant benefits of investing in Iseki products.

"To support the on-going growth we have also purchased a second lorry and hired Simon Grove to support higher levels of deliveries and an increased demand for demonstrations across the UK. As the business continues to expand we need to ensure we are supporting our dealers and customers to the same if not higher standard than before, making sure we offer the best product, pre-purchase and aftersales support."

David also added, "As we look to the future we see opportunities to continue this growth trajectory and are optimistic that in 2022 we can get close to our original target of having doubled Iseki sales over a five-year period.

"People are responding positively to our 'can-do' attitude, increased dealer network and the excellence of the Iseki product range."

INDUSTRY

# John Deere knocked off top spot

CNH new leader of the tractor charts

The AEA recently announced the market share data for 2020 tractor registrations.

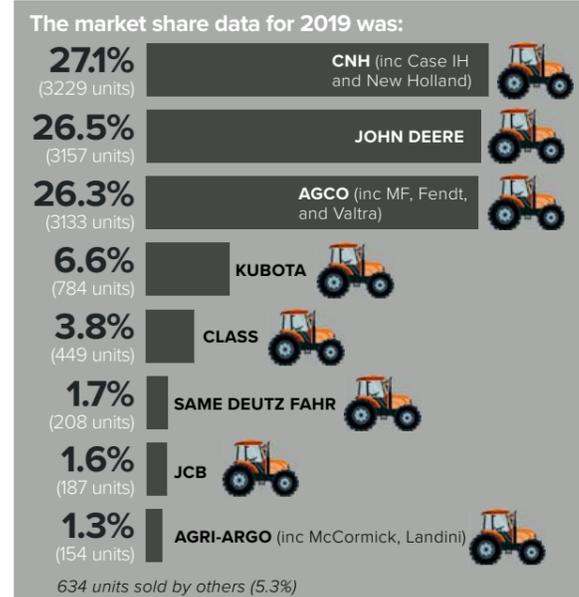
The total number of tractors registered in 2020 was 11,935, including both agricultural tractors (over 50hp) and compact tractors (50hp and below).

The information below shows the number of machines and market share recorded during that year by brand. As always, data is released after a one year delay due to competition law restrictions. Figures for 2021 are due to be published in early 2023.

The leading brand in 2020 changed after many years from John Deere leading the pack to CNH, comprising New Holland and CASE IH. They moved up from second place, increasing their share to 27.1% from 26.0%.

Deere dipped into second position with its market share contracting from 28.1% to 26.5%.

All the other companies listed on the leaderboard maintained the same position they held in 2019 – except for Same Deutz Fahr jumping up a place over JCB.



CNH made tractors topped the charts in the most recent year that data is available for, 2020



INDUSTRY

## Search underway for voice of land-based engineering for '22

Still time to enter the Technician of the Year competition

LE-TEC say, "Whether you're an apprentice technician just starting out, or a master technician with years of experience under your belt, we're looking to hear from you."

LE-TEC say it doesn't matter if it's a selfie-style video, or a blockbuster production, it's the story they want to hear and it's that which could win you the prize. Submit your video to [info@letec.co.uk](mailto:info@letec.co.uk) by March 28th 2022.

LE-TEC have launched their annual Land-based Technician Of The Year competition.

This year they have two categories to enter, one for someone who is just embarking on their career and one for someone who has a successful career and seen their vocation develop. A host of prizes are on offer for the winners.

To enter, candidates must record a short video telling the organisers:

- who you are and what you do,
- how you got into this industry,
- what makes it so rewarding,
- and why others should consider it as a career.

Prizes for 2022 include:

- City & Guilds certified Refrigerant Handling Course and City & Guilds Air Conditioning Course funded by AP Air Europe
- Various tool and equipment prizes

INDUSTRY

## Campey appoints 15 new international distributors

Across the Middle East and Pan-Asia

Campey Turf Care Systems has appointed 15 new dealers across the Middle East and Pan-Asia as part of their new rationalised international dealer network.

This new initiative is being led by Campey export sales manager Nick Brown. The company says the move to expand the international dealer network to 32 has been made to give customers a personalised experience from country to country and ensure they are being advised by professionals who understand their needs.

Nick explains: "We've put in 15 new distributors since July of 2020 with more to come, and we've enhanced the sales channel. We haven't taken anything away. I've looked at areas where we haven't had representation and put a



Campey on tour in the UAE December 2021

distributor in to work the market instead of just leaving it to one individual who lives in the UK to understand all the different cultures and scenarios."

Nick continued, "I think after spending 18 months at home looking after the export region for the business, going back in front of customers is great for us because it is what Campey does best.

"I hope as we visit more people in different countries, we can offer a different perspective and deliver practical alternatives with innovative, reliable products. Campey's great customer service will continue to make a difference in these new markets."



Photograph: Cobra MX3440V, T3 'Best Lawnmower' 2019.

# COBRA

## Why Not Become a Cobra Dealer in 2022?

With over 170 products in the Cobra range including the largest range of award winning lawnmowers in the UK, Cobra is fast becoming a market leading brand in garden machinery. Contact us today to join the growing number of Cobra Dealers across the U.K. For information on becoming a Cobra Dealer contact Andy Marvin: 07771 581 296 or call: 0115 986 6646 today.

- Increase your business and bottom line profits.
- Exclusive special offers on selected products.
- Extensive local & national Cobra marketing support.
- An evolving range of over 150 gardening products.
- No unreasonable Cobra stocking commitment.



<p><b>Cordless Mowers</b></p> <p>From Just £136.02*</p>	<p><b>Petrol Mowers</b></p> <p>From Just £111.55*</p>	<p><b>Blower Vacs</b></p> <p>From Just £90.69*</p>	<p><b>Brushcutters</b></p> <p>From Just £84.93*</p>	<p><b>Cultivators</b></p> <p>From Just £109.86*</p>
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Cobra reserves the right to change models, specifications & prices without prior notice. E & OE. \*Warranty period based on domestic use.

\*Stocking Dealer Price ex VAT

# Echoes heard across UK

From January 1st this year, FGM Claymore have taken on the distribution in the UK of the Echo and Shindaiwa ranges of machinery. Editor STEVE GIBBS caught up with MD Paul Butterly to hear how FGM have fared the past two years, how the new arrangement came about and what it means for themselves and their dealers



Paul Butterly photographed at SALTEX 2021 by Service Dealer

**Service Dealer:** As a business, how have FGM Claymore coped with the extraordinary circumstances of the last two years?

**Paul Butterly:** I'd say it's been quite buoyant for us when it comes to sales. Initially at the first lockdown when a lot of the hardware and superstores were closed, there were a lot of people at home who were looking for ways to purchase garden machinery. Most of our dealers found ways they could safely open, with outdoor serving areas and the like, so they found ways of completing orders as they came in.

We ourselves managed to stay open throughout, although we were on skeleton staff on occasions – so we were able to service these guys who had a demand for machines. Also of course, any of the internet sellers they just boomed as they already had the infrastructures in place.

So coming off the back of a relatively bad 2018 and a very average 2019, 2020 and 2021 were back on track in terms of sales.

**SD:** Did you find your dealers who hadn't done much internet sales before getting involved in that?

**PB:** There were people trying to get in on it, but obviously the guys that were already well established, it was so much easier for them. A lot of these internet retailers, they invest a hell of a lot in their brands and their sites themselves.

At the regular dealer level though, the ones that remained open and were able to get supply, they benefitted. I'd say the whole industry benefitted in fact, because the public weren't going abroad on holiday, meaning there was more demand and more money



Paul believes the range encompasses products that can appeal to both domestic and professional users

available to be spent on homes and gardens. We also must consider that 2021 was a very favourable grass growing season. We can't underestimate how greatly that played into our and the industry's hands.

The biggest problem of course was trying to replace stock.

**SD:** What would you sum up then as the good and bad points of the past two years?

**PB:** The good points are that we were always traditionally stock-heavy. That was favourable for us because we had the availability on hand ready to go.

However, the biggest challenge, which remains, is trying to replace that stock. That has been getting more difficult as time has been going on. I do believe it will remain as the biggest problem that we'll all face this year. This is being caused by production delays in factories due to shortages of components and local shutdowns of cells due to Covid. And then when products are produced there's a shortage of containers, there's an increase in price of containers, there's shipping delays, when it gets over here there's port congestion – and then on top of that when they get cleared in the UK, there's no drivers! It's a catalogue of challenges.

We do, however, have good suppliers and we are seeing our stock coming in now. It's just not as quick as we'd like it. I do believe that this year is going to be very positive for our industry again.

**SD:** Moving on to your recent Echo deal, were you actively on the lookout for a new brand to represent?

**PB:** Ever since the fall of Tanaka, and Hitachi who had bought them deciding to cease all production of OPE, we definitely were. Tanaka had been a long, historic part of our business. We started with them in the early 70s and we saw a lot of changes. Ever since they disappeared though, we were looking for a strong brand that would fill the gap.

**SD:** How did the deal come about?

**PB:** Echo have a strong history in the UK. They were with the Heron Group back in the 80s, then Heron/Suzuki into the 90s, then I believe they had a brief spell with Allen Power. After this it went to Countax who then became part of Ariens.

In recent times though, the instigator for this latest move to ourselves is that Echo's owner, Yamabiko Europe, were looking for a more independent distributor to take on the products. They were looking for somebody to give it primary attention. They always figured that when they were part of a bigger organisation, they may not have had quite the focus they desired. They therefore saw the benefit of someone more independent handling their range.

FGM Claymore have a history with the machines because we took over the distribution of Echo in Ireland in 2017. Since then, it has really taken off to exceptional figures, becoming very popular in the Irish market.

Therefore, I believe it was this success we've achieved in Ireland, combined with the fact that we have been very involved in handheld products since the 70s that won it for us.

**SD:** Since distributing the brand in Ireland, was it always the intention to win the brand for the UK too?



A battery-powered chainsaw is part of the offering

**PB:** Well, never say never! It did fall into our hands somewhat because we were well up on the list of candidates due to our history. But Yamabiko made the decision and on the back of that we were there.

**SD:** What do you believe the brand now offers yourselves and your dealers in the UK?

**PB:** With Echo it's a comprehensive range of products, from consumer to high-end professional. They put huge emphasis on their X-Series products, which they would consider as best-in-class. They are also intensifying their cordless business. We have a 56-volt professional line-up, and within that for example they have what they describe as the world's lightest professional top-handle chainsaw, the DCS2500. They also boast that with their battery products you get as much cutting time as you would out of an engine product.

Alongside this we are also introducing their new 40-volt consumer product range, which is a line-up of lawnmowers, hedge trimmers, blowers, chainsaw and a grass trimmer. They are all price-pointed for the homeowner market.

**SD:** Is there a robotic offering?

**PB:** They own Belrobotics, so Yamabiko do have professional robots, branded Echo. However, at the moment we are not getting involved with those in the UK. We do those in Ireland – but for now we really need to evaluate the handheld business and promote that. We'll be concentrating on existing dealers, and of course new dealers.

**SD:** What customers will the Echo products target?

**PB:** Both consumer and professional. We have several Echo homeowner products that are suitable for premium users – whilst the pro gear is aimed at contractors, local authorities, tree surgeons, hire business and we even have some construction products too.

**SD:** What do you think the supply situation will be like for the products you are kicking off with this year?

**PB:** It's going to be slow in the first quarter to get stock in. We have given healthy orders though to Yamabiko and they have upped their production schedules. I do think there's going to be some delays, but I do believe overall we should reach our goals for the first year.

**SD:** Will this be the same for spare parts?

**PB:** Yamabiko are very good with spare parts and on that side of things we've just invested in a new business-to-business portal. Called EPIC, we've recently launched this, and most of our dealers are already using it to order spares. As well as offering parts look-up and parts details, it can also be used to order machines, register products, process warranties and access technical data.

**SD:** Are you planning on any roadshow or live events to promote the products to dealers?

**PB:** We are going to have a sort of constant roadshow,

traveling round to dealers with the new machines. We're going to be doing that throughout the year. We've not decided yet if we'll be doing anything else come September, but for now we'll be continually visiting dealerships around the UK. Also in the autumn we'll be exhibiting at the APF show and SALTEX.

**SD:** What is the situation with the Echo dealer network – are you looking to expand?

**PB:** All existing retailers who were already Echo dealers, we're taking them on. There are areas where we will be looking for more specialist dealers too. Echo is a premium product and it's sold through premium outlets. We've found that dealers who do have it as part of their portfolio, do feel quite strongly about the product.

The dealer network is so important for us, and we feel like we can provide them with good products and good service.

**SD:** Do you see Echo sitting alongside other similar brands in dealerships, or perhaps being more of a solus offering?

**PB:** Traditionally we share a lot of dealers, with some dealerships cherry-picking certain Echo products to sit alongside other makes they carry. But we're trying to sell across the range, to get dealers to focus on the entire spread of products, instead of just picking one or two items.

One thing that we do emphasize is that we really encourage dealers to protect the margin. We think a

healthy margin for dealers is important. We'd like to help them to value the brand and to retain retail margins. We are encouraging dealers not to discount heavily and not to sacrifice margins.

**SD:** Have you had much reaction since going public with the deal?

**PB:** Absolutely. We've been inundated with dealers calling up. Also, because at the end of last year there were issues with supply, we have lots of back-orders that we're ploughing our way through. But we've certainly been very welcomed. Our new parts look-up system has been very well received and the products stand for themselves really, being well respected in the marketplace. We just want to continue to build on that respect and offer a premium service at the same time.

**SD:** Finally, what are your hopes and expectations for Echo in the UK?

**PB:** We plan for Echo to be well up there with the other major manufacturers of handheld products. We like to think that with some brands such as Hitachi and Tanaka leaving the sector and people like Makita leaving the petrol-engine market, Echo can become a premium brand in handheld. Hopefully it can be right up there with the other well-known brands.

**SD:** Thank you.



Traditional petrol products are part of the Echo lineup

# Modifications make Doe Show return a success

The Doe Show has been a first-week-of-February fixture for those involved in agricultural, groundscre and construction equipment since 1960. While the 61st edition of the show, in 2021, went fully 'online', winning a Service Dealer award in the process, the 62nd event was a physical one. MARTIN RICKATSON was there



Tractors, telehandlers and cultivation equipment all played a part on the demonstration fields as usual



Fine weather on the first day in particular helped the turn-out at the 2022 Doe Show in the first week of February

**A**fter a year's absence in which it won the Best New Initiative category at the 2021 Service Dealer Awards for the development of its online 'Doe Show with a Difference', south-eastern agricultural, groundscre and construction machinery dealer Ernest Doe reintroduced its annual 'physical' event with a few changes to keep coronavirus spread at bay. Visitor turnout would suggest the firm made the right call.

The fine February weather undoubtedly helped, but doing away with temporary buildings and opening up the shutter doors on the permanent ones of the site at Ernest Doe's Ulting, Essex, headquarters branch

allowed the firm to make changes that minimised the risk of Covid spread and gave all present plenty of space to keep a distance. At the same time, it still retained the established atmosphere of the show.

Writing in the show guide foreword, company managing director Angus Doe said: "Planning for this year's event was made especially difficult by the ever-changing Covid situation. As a result, we made changes to the layout to minimise enclosed spaces, whilst still providing some overhead protection in the event of weather."

Following a successful first collaboration during the previous year's online 'Doe Show With A Difference', Ernest Doe was pleased to again be working with auctioneer Cheffins, he said, providing the

opportunity to sell off trade-in agricultural, construction and groundscre machinery via a timed online auction.

"We made it possible to view all the listed lots on the show site, with a large screen on the Cheffins stand at the show to monitor the bids. Anyone new to the system of bidding was able to talk to staff on the Cheffins stand at the show, and bidding carried on online until the Monday after we closed the physical Tuesday-to-Thursday show. There was no buyer's premium, and free delivery within our Doe trading area for all sales over £2,500 plus VAT."

Speaking on the show's weather-blessed first day, sales director Graham Parker said: "We've been really pleased with the turnout, and with the response of both the visitors and our suppliers.



Sales director Graham Parker said visitors and suppliers had responded well to the revised format. New Holland put its new T7 HD tractors on display



The firm's Ernest Doe Power division recently opened a new branch at mid-Kent to serve Case IH customers



Opening up the sides of the site buildings allowed groundcare customers to peruse machines covid-safely in comfort

"There have been some very favourable comments, and it's clear that, across our agricultural, construction and groundcare customer bases, people are keen to see some return to normality. Opening up the site has really helped the visitor flow, and we've certainly learned a few things for future events."

### New products aplenty

After almost two years with few shows of any kind – dealer, regional or national – able to take place, many visitors were able to get their first look at a number of new machines. From Ernest Doe's main supplier CNH Industrial this included the new versions of the New Holland T7

HD PLM Intelligence and Case IH Optum AFS Connect 250/270/300hp tractors with new cab designs, plus the New Holland 1290HD and Case IH LB436HD big square balers. New Holland exhibits also included the production version of the T6.180 Methane Power tractor and a range of ploughs and cultivation equipment.

Other agricultural suppliers included the likes of Shelbourne Reynolds, with a new S-Touch screen-plus-joystick control system for its flagship HD8000 hedge trimmers, and muck spreader and trailer maker Richard Western, which displayed models including its BTTA16/28 bale trailer with hydraulic 'Safe Lock' clamping system.

Ernest Doe offers a choice of suppliers in most product categories,

reflecting the New Holland/Case IH branding split of its branches under the Ernest Doe/Ernest Doe Power banners, and further exhibitors included Marshall with its trailer range, Spearhead hedge trimmers and vegetation management equipment, and both Lemken and Opico/Maschio with plough and drill lines.

Many suppliers, including Case IH, New Holland, Lemken and KRM, demonstrated machines on the adjacent land of the Doe family farm, drawing significant crowds alongside those looking out across the vintage tractor ploughing plots, on which there was a good selection of old Doe-supplied tractors, including the firm's own 1960s Doe Dual Drive or 'Triple-D' twin-tractor conversions.

On the groundcare front, both Stihl and Husqvarna were able to show a full range of wares under cover this year, and there was a notable focus on lithium-ion battery-powered equipment. Highlights from the latter firm included the CEORA, its large-scale autonomous mower. EZ-Go, Weidenmann, Ransomes-Jacobsen, Trilo, Wessex and Iseki also had major displays in the covered 'Groundcare Zone', which proved a popular draw for visiting turf professionals.

As usual, the firm also encouraged visitors into the large showroom of its Ulting flagship premises, where there were 'Doe Show Deals' to be had among a large selection of clothing, footwear, tools, spare parts and more. A bargain tent on the showground

also provided an outlet for old 'clear-out' spares stock from across Ernest Doe's 19-strong branch network, which covers an area from Norfolk down to Kent and across to Sussex and Surrey.

### Marketing team more than pleased

Hayley Hill, Ernest Doe marketing manager, said the company team were very pleased with the visitor turnout at the February event.

"Even the final day's visitor figures were looking very strong. But what was also pleasing was the sustained interest in the online show features we developed to replace last year's coronavirus-cancelled event and decided to continue with this year

alongside the physical show.

"We had over 17,000 views on the auction site by the time I left the office on the final day of the show, plus over 6,000 views on our doeshow.ernestdoe.com microsite, which I was thrilled with, given that we also had the physical event this year. It showed that there was also plenty of interest in the show from people who could not attend.

"Judging by the feedback from visitors – and the smiling faces as people arrived on site, particularly on the first day, which was very sunny – everybody seemed happy to be back on site in Ulting and spoke warmly about the show. As a company, we were very keen to get 'back to business' as much as possible. We



Ernest Doe once again teamed up with auctioneers Cheffins to dispose of trade-in stock, with the auction held online over a number of days

dispensed with the usual marquees and enclosed areas to create a fully open air event, and the wind did an excellent job in bolstering ventilation!

"The new layout was very well received. We did a couple of polls on social media, and there was a resounding 93% in favour of the new layout.

"To make a full judgement we need to wait for the financial results to come in, which usually takes a couple of weeks post-show to reconcile orders, and there was also the online auction still running until the Monday after the show week. The general feeling, though, is extremely positive. Order levels at the end of day two had surpassed the previous year's figures, and our sales teams and manufacturers seemed very buoyant, so we are quietly confident that the figures will be among our best ever for a Doe Show. That said, our online Doe Show with a Difference in 2021 was a record event, so may take some beating!"



The outdoor/indoor arrangement allowed Stihl to move its demonstration area under cover

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# Full circle

Hertfordshire Garden Machinery closed the doors to their showroom for 16 months following Covid lockdowns, thinking perhaps they would permanently become a service-only business. However, in January this year following a refurbishment and a rejig of brands, they have opened their doors to customers once again. Editor STEVE GIBBS spoke to sales director Edward Wall to find out about their change of heart



L-R: Sales director Edward Wall with Tim and Lyndsey Wall, directors of Herts GM

**T**he past two years have seen dealers around the country forced into fundamentally changing the ways in which they run their businesses. From the end of March 2020, working practices had to adapt pretty much overnight. Showrooms were closed to the public, colleagues were furloughed, outdoor serving areas built, remote collections and drop-offs instigated and getting to grips with the digital business world, all had to be rapidly embraced. It's no exaggeration to say that the way dealers worked was turned on its head.

Hertfordshire Garden Machinery, based in Bramfield, exemplify this turbulent period for dealerships. After some stop-start shutting and opening again following the initial lockdown, the business, run by husband and wife directors Tim and Lyndsey Wall, took the tough decision to permanently close their showroom in September of

2020. Those doors remained shut for 16 months, with it looking like the company would change to a solely service-providing enterprise. However, in January this year following a refurbishment and a rejigging of stocked brands, customers have been once again welcomed back into the retail store.

I spoke to sales director Edward Wall, brother of Tim, in early January to hear about the dealership's journey full circle.

## Service only

Thinking back to that decision to close the showroom Edward Wall recalls the difficulties that were imposed on the serving of customers at the time. "People didn't have free rein to wander round the showroom," he says, "so it brought problems straight away. The business had to make a decision regarding what to do.

"I myself wasn't involved in the dealership at that point, it



The newly refurbished showroom

was my brother Tim and his wife Lyndsey. They had to work out what they could do to continue running the business when they weren't allowed the public to enter.

"At the time the workshops were busy – and were getting even busier – with people at home, furloughed, gardening in the good weather."

Due to this sharp increase in the demands placed on the service side of the business, Tim and Lyndsey made the choice to dedicate their efforts there, taking the significant step of closing the showroom. "We were still able to sell items, but it had to be on a click and collect basis," explained Edward. "It was a case of adapting very quickly to what we could and couldn't do. Working out how we could continue running the business and supply our customers with the products they wanted – but obviously following the guidelines put in place by the government."

Initially the showroom was still full of stock, so extra space for the workshop didn't become available immediately. However, as time went on and as stock was sold, Herts GM wasn't replenishing goods, which meant more space was freed up.

This period of concentrating solely on the service side, offered the dealership the opportunity to take stock and to look at how things were going overall – in order to make a choice of what direction to go in.

"Initially it was a decision that could have potentially become permanent," Edward confirms. "We could easily have just concentrated on being a service and spare parts business – doing away with sales completely.

"However, over a period it became clear that there was still definitely a demand there for products. It was apparent that customers still wanted to come in and physically look, touch and play around with machines. Yes, there was a huge switch in society to people buying from the internet – but we've never been, and never will be, a solely internet supplier."



The retail space was closed to customers for 16 months

## Coming back to sales

Edward says it was a combination of factors that started to make them feel that they may want to return to having a showroom and selling wholegoods. As well as local homeowner customers showing an interest with them, it was the professionals that the dealership served that were playing into their thinking.

"We deal with a lot of contractors," Edward said, "and they are traditionally in and out once or twice a week. If they are dropping off or picking up a machine, they tend to enquire about replacement machines, spare parts and consumables. All of a sudden there wasn't that option available to them – and we were missing on that business."

Edward was made redundant from his previous role where he worked in June of 2021 and with a strong background in sales, his brother Tim invited him to join the family business. "He said to me, 'if we're going to reopen the showroom, do you want to come here and run it?' And I thought why not?"

"I've got a background in this industry. The first ten years of my career was in garden machinery, funnily enough working in this facility when it was Bedwell Garden Machinery. So, it was a good opportunity for me."



**The Herts GM Team - L-R: Edward (sales director); Alan (workshop engineer); Tim (director); Steve (workshop assistant); Lyndsey (director); Dave (workshop engineer); James (driver and workshop engineer)**

It was from then that thoughts truly focused on reopening the showroom.

“Initially when I joined there was stock left over from when the showroom was previously open – so my first real target was to sell as much of that as possible. I managed to sell through the majority of stock, meaning we then had a clean slate to start from.”

During the months leading up to Christmas 2021, HGM began to refurbish and change up their showroom. “Doing this allowed us to take a real good look at it,” says Edward, “and make a decision that we didn’t want to just be the same as before we closed. This was a great opportunity for us to switch things up in terms of suppliers, what brands we stock, what the showroom looks like regarding space and what our priorities might be for the capacity we have.”

One of the major changes that Herts GM has made with their reopening is to rationalise the suppliers that they represent in-store. Edward explains, “My brother admits that one of things he used to do was try to please everybody by having every brand in stock. We came to realise that holding too many makes can perhaps be a bit confusing for customers and the shop can become a bit of an Aladdin’s cave.”

For HGM today it’s about choosing the brands that are profitable and that fit with the customers within their territory. “Crucially though,” says Edward, “it’s about being great at the ones we have, rather than dabbling a bit in everything.”

The dealership has re-started by representing Stiga, encompassing Atco and Mountfield, with Hayter, Weibang, Toro and Echo. “Working with brands we previously stocked gives us consistency and allows our customer base to come back to what they know.”

Edward says that part of the reason for choosing not to go with some brands this time around, was due, in part, to the

backup they had been receiving, but also the onerous battle over pricing because of the heavy discounting seen online. “You can end up being a busy fool for the manufacturer, shifting a lot of products, but actually not really earning a lot of profit from it,” he confirms. “Yes, the volume is there, but you’ve got to sell three times more than the other brands to earn the same amount of money, which is senseless.”

“Some of the other manufacturers seem to have a little more control over selling prices, which helps to retain margin – which let’s face it, is what it’s all about.”

### A new beginning

Reopening the showroom afforded the opportunity to make some physical changes to Herts GM’s available space, meaning they can capitalise on the increased service work they have acquired over the past two years. Due to representing fewer brands, mowers, handheld and tractors can all be displayed in the same space, so an area previously used for display can now be used for both warehousing and an increased workshop footprint.

“These changes mean we’ll have space for another lift-ramp and more working area,” says Edward. “It will also enable us to employ further staff in the future.”

In the revamped showroom they now boast a new counter constructed from used pallets and crates with a countertop of repurposed wood-flooring. “It’s all got a bit of story to it,” explains Edward. “It ties in to the eco-aware, environmentally friendly ethos we’re trying to convey throughout the business.”

“All of the lighting we’ve put in is now LED low-energy which both adds to the message but also, helpfully, reduces utility bills. There’s a lot of quirky things that we’ve done that are a talking point when customers come in.”

Alongside touches such as this, the store now features a dedicated area for battery machinery – which is a side to their business that they believe has huge potential with both domestic and professional customers. “We’re really investing in the battery side of things,” says Edward, “We benefit from being located around affluent areas, so we’re finding that a lot of our customers have electric cars. We feel if that’s their mindset for their vehicle, they will probably consider a battery tractor or handheld tool as well.”

“Our pro customers are definitely starting to think about cordless options too, as a lot of the contracts that they tender for now are specifying that they must have battery tools.”

As mentioned, the reopening also means the dealership is looking to recruit – specifically a new engineer. Edward says of this process, “It’s never easy because in this industry there’s very little training and support offered through colleges, unis, or even manufacturers – and I suppose it’s not the sexiest sector to be working in. A lot of trainee mechanics now want to be in the automotive industry, as opposed to coming into lawnmowers and garden tractors. It’s difficult to find the right people and we’re in an aging industry, I suppose.”

As well as this recruitment hurdle to overcome, like dealers everywhere, Edward’s other major concern for this year is supply. “We’ve got a good level of stock in at the moment,” he says, “but the worry is if that is able to continue. We do know that certain items that we ordered as part of our winter stock, we won’t see until March. This is tending to be battery machines, which obviously feature a lot of electronic components. But even petrol-powered equipment is a slight worry as well.”

“Our suppliers are reassuring us that they have shipments on the way, with boats on the water, stock at ports – that kind of thing. We’re being told that supply is there or thereabouts, it’s just physically getting our hands on it.”

“To be fair, our suppliers are communicating any delays pretty well with us. Sometimes we’ll get customers chasing us, asking how much longer, so we’ll chase them up. But overall, who we deal with have been pretty good – which was part of our thinking when we were selective regarding who we are going to represent this time around.”

When asked if they have any further worries for 2022, Edward says like everyone else, it’s the on going effects of Covid. “A future lockdown would not be good news,” he states. “But I have to say we believe that customer interest is still there. If anything, there is a lot of pent-up demand. I think there are customers who put off purchases last year and the year before, who are going to get to a point this year when they really need to go out and buy new. Also, we are witnessing a huge level of winter servicing work being booked in.”

“If things carry on the way they are, it’s the perfect recipe for being busy and selling plenty of product this year. What could upset that of course is lack of stock, and for the workshop, lack of parts. When we finished for Christmas, for example, we had 50 jobs sat in the workshop that we couldn’t complete, because they were all waiting for spare parts to come in. Shipment and courier issues just meant we couldn’t finish them off.”

Despite these worries, when I ask Edward if himself, Tim and Lyndsey are all happy they have done the right thing in reopening the showroom, he answers quite simply with a single word. “Definitely.”



**“The new counter constructed from reused crates and pallets, with a countertop made of repurposed wood flooring”**

# Listening to customers

LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, visited three depots of dealers Rea Valley Tractors, based in the counties of Shropshire and Derbyshire, to discover how they are embracing new technology, encouraging apprentices and maintaining customer satisfaction

I began my visit travelling to the borders of Derbyshire to meet up with the Rea Valley Tractor's group marketing and promotions coordinator, Laura Jones, at their Sudbury depot, one of the largest of their four premises.

RVT is part of The Dunstall Holdings Group, which contains two business streams that are involved in agricultural and industrial applications – these being RVT and Altegra Industrial Solutions. The Group has seven different locations in the UK, with a turnover of over £100m and employ over 270 team members.

Established for well over 30 years and covering Mid-Wales and The Midlands, RVT boast as their main franchises John Deere, JCB, Kuhn, Bailey Trailers, Joskin and Isuzu. The four depots are based in Shrewsbury,

Newport, Sudbury and Welshpool.

Each depot has its own team of manufacturer-certified service technicians and offers an extensive range of parts and specialist parts advice. The dealership says that optimum uptime of machinery for customers is achieved through connected service support. The machinery is consistently monitored in the service hub with the intention being that any preventative maintenance that flags up, can be carried out before issues occur.

In essence, RVT's principal business is focused on the supply of large agricultural machinery for farmers. However they do also supply a wide range of mowers and handheld tools for the domestic, landscaping and amenity sectors, with their sales being managed at the Sudbury branch by



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# STIGA

Mick Reeves, horticultural sales manager who has been with the company over 20 years.

The Sudbury Depot covers a large area of midland counties that including Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

My first impression of the depot was the sheer scale and size of the machinery on offer – it was staggering to say the least.

### Products and apprentices

At Sudbury, Laura introduced me to the depots services manager, John Preston, who has been with the company 18 years, and we spent time talking about his role and the products he deals with.

“In the main we sell a complete range of agricultural machinery products,” John told me, “from combines, foragers and tractors, through to cultivators, ploughs, fertiliser spreaders, along with some precision ag tools and software packages.”

“On the gardening and groundcare side of things we sell mainly John Deere ride-ons, Hayter push mowers, Grillo and Stihl equipment – plus a range of handheld items. Within the last couple of years, we have also seen a rise in the sales of our STIHL robotic and battery powered products.”

Within RVT’s large trading area they see a vast array of farming requirements that is often dictated by the topography of the land, size of fields and whether they are growing crops or managing animals. “These factors directly have an influence on the farmers needs when it comes to purchasing machinery,” John confirms.

Across the four depots, RVT have over 140 members of staff, including 46 fully trained and qualified technicians, 22 parts specialists and 10 new apprentices.

“Our apprentices undertake the revered John Deere apprenticeship scheme that combines training, problem solving and teamwork,” explains John. “During the three or

four year programme, the candidates learn on the job whilst spending time at the John Deere Apprentice Training Centre and at John Deere’s head office, both near Nottingham.”

John believes there’s never been a better time for young people to consider an apprenticeship. “As the agricultural and turf machinery business becomes more technologically advanced, utilising satellite navigation systems, Formula-1 transmission technology, computerised controls and advanced, fuel-efficient engines, the need for skilled people working in the industry becomes ever greater. It’s not just about the machines either. Sophisticated parts and service systems require the same skills too. The John Deere dealer of tomorrow is a challenging business, with a wide range of opportunities and exciting prospects for the right people.”

John says that most of the apprentices they have trained have remained loyal and committed to working for RVT. This was confirmed by Laura, who stated that the culture of the business is to look after its staff. This was borne out by the fact that many of the staff I spoke to during my visit were long-standing employees with over 15 years’ service.

### Working through Covid and customer satisfaction

Following my time at Sudbury, I travelled back to Shropshire to meet up with the company’s operations director, Matthew Mulligan, and his colleague in aftersales support Paul Delehay, who are both based at the Shrewsbury branch.

Both Paul and Matthew were keen to enlighten me on the importance of the after sales services the company offers and talk more about how the company is embracing new technologies and adapting to new working practices.

“Agri-businesses are predominately influenced by the weather,” Mathew told me, “with farmers having to work through tight weather windows and crop rotations throughout the year. The choice and selection of the right machinery is



Laura Jones, marketing and PR coordinator



L-R: Paul Delehay and Matthew Mulligan



Mick Reeves, horticultural sales manager, Sudbury depot



John Preston, services manager, Sudbury depot



The Shrewsbury depot

crucial to their success in bringing a crop to market.

“Therefore, it’s important we listen to our customers and offer them a range of machinery that suits their needs and budgets. In recent years we have seen dramatic development in ag machinery in terms of the size, power and performance of tractors and implements that now all come with service and monitoring software packages. These enable us to work more closely with our customers to help them achieve optimum performance and reliability from their machines.”

I asked Matthew how RVT managed to fulfil their customers’ needs throughout the pandemic? He said, “RVT offer over 9,500 lines in stock and are supported by a dedicated John Deere parts distribution network, which enabled us to continue business and offer parts throughout Covid. At the start, the depots closed their doors and a parts collection service was available at the gates. It was paramount for us that key working customers and their businesses were supported.”

Matthew says that safety of their staff has also been paramount these past two years. “We initialised a strict protocol of sanitizing and ensured we worked in small groups and provided appropriate PPE,” he explained. “Where possible we also increased digital communications

between staff, using Zoom meetings.”

Now with things getting back to a normality, RVT is keen to get their message out to their local community that they are open for business. “We have an inhouse marketing department that works with all areas of the business,” says Matthew. “We have over 40,000 followers across our social media channels and we publish a hard copy, quarterly RVT magazine for our customers.

“It’s also nice the shows will be back on this year,” Matthew continues, “and we’re looking forward to a busy year of attending local, regional and national events. The shows are of great value to us and after such a long time with no events it will be nice to catch up with our customers again.”

### Recruitment and new tech

Our conversation turned to that perennial issue for dealerships, the recruitment of staff. I asked Matthew if they find the process difficult.

“We believe that RVT’s company values create a supportive working culture throughout the company,” he said. “We strive to become a ‘employer of choice’, with our employees driving the company forward. We strive to engender an environment where their skills, knowledge and expertise are at the heart of all that we do.”

## DEALER PROFILE RVT

Matthew continued, "I think the industry needs to promote the extensive opportunities and varied careers available in our sector more. By marketing this further, offering greater insight to those from outside the industry, this could help in increasing the desirability to come and work in our sector."

Matthew told me RVT work with Dunstall Holdings Group to support all employees with the continuous opportunity to train throughout their careers. Technicians are all fully qualified with continuous manufacturer training to keep up-to-date with new technologies. RVT also take full advantage of the training options offered by suppliers including John Deere and JCB.

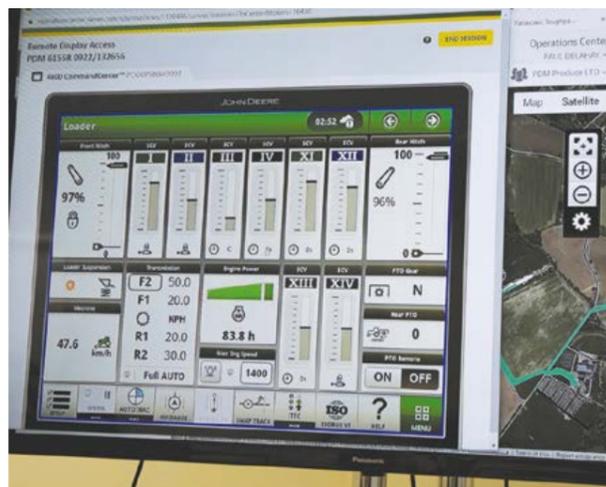
RVT's staff certainly need to keep abreast of all the latest developments due to high level of tech in play across their depots. Not only are they seeing a growing demand for battery and robotic products on the domestic side, but to support their agricultural customers they have a dedicated RVT precision team to offer sales, service, and support of precision farming products.

I was shown a demonstration of the remote support systems they use to monitor the performance of the latest John Deere and JCB tractors and implements. The dealership can actually predict maintenance issues and possible breakdowns before they happen. "Using GPS and data analysis programmes," Paul explained, "we can proactively monitor the performance of the vehicles when in operation."

"We have over 1,700 customers signed up to the data support system and it helps coordinate repairs and services. It saves a lot of time and keeps things running smoothly."

Matthew sees this specialisation as a key element to the future of their company.

"We strongly believe that precision ag technology can help improve the performance and efficiency of our local agri-businesses. The strong foundations of RVT enable us to continue to offer these new technologies, products and



Using GPS and data analysis programmes, RVT can keep an eye on the performance of the vehicles when in operation

services to our customers – and crucially, to support them with specialist advice and expertise."

Matthew continued, "It is surprising how current political issues and increased costs of commodities can lead to change in working practices. Just the simple rise in the cost of fertiliser products, for example, which have essentially trebled from £180 per tonne to nearly a £650, is driving farmers to change their farming practices. No doubt in the coming years farming practices will be under constant review. It is certainly going to be interesting to see how the government's new environmental schemes will change the needs of the farmer in terms of which machinery they choose to invest in."

I would like to thank the staff of RVT for sharing their valuable time, especially Laura who made me feel very welcome and gave me great insight into the running of their modern dealership.



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# Lemken shows dealers new weed control focus

Lemken's 2020 departure from the sprayer market took some dealers and customers by surprise. Two years on, though, the maker is keen to show the motivation behind its move: product development designed to match the way it believes weed control is headed. MARTIN RICKATSON visited its German HQ



In-row spraying via the Steketee SprayKit applicator is possible via the SprayHub front tank connected to a rear-mounted inter-row hoe

**E**ver-tightening regulation of crop protection products, pressure from supermarkets and consumers to focus on environment-friendly crop production methods, a market that remains highly competitive with multiple manufacturers chasing a shrinking pool of buyers – it's not hard to find sound reasons behind Lemken's decision to leave the sprayer market. But while the move left its dealers without a sprayer line, the company's recent product introduction shows it has readjusted its business to account for the direction in which it can see agriculture is being forced to move.

Lemken's 2018 purchase of Dutch hoeing technology company Steketee predated the closure of its sprayer business by two years, but shows the way in which it saw the sector headed, according to Anthony Van der Ley, Lemken CEO.

"We have not necessarily left the spraying market completely. With crops grown on wide rows we have been able to develop combinations of Steketee weeding technology and Lemken's spraying knowledge to blend mechanical weed control with precise, selective band spraying or spot spraying, bringing environmental, cost and time benefits when compared with full-field spraying."



The Steketee automatic intra-row hoeing IC-Weeder uses artificial intelligence for guidance in removing weeds between sugar beet rows

## Artificial intelligence aids hoeing

In the first of such developments, Lemken, via Steketee, has developed a version of the latter's automatic intra-row IC-Weeder 3m hoe that is enhanced by the use of artificial intelligence to aid weed control in sugar beet crops. This uses an algorithm developed by manually marking sugar beet plants at various stages of development, which then autonomously creates a method for identifying beet plants based on colour profile, texture, shape, size and leaf position.

Cameras for each row transmit 30 images per second to the on-board computer, producing a plant recognition ratio of over 95%. Pneumatically controlled sickle-shaped knives, which are hydraulically mounted within the parallel sliding frame hoe, remove weeds by hoeing up to 2cm from each plant.

## System combines weeding with spraying

Blending Lemken sprayer and Steketee knowledge, and launched under the latter brand, also new is the combination of a SprayHub front tank connected to a rear-mounted inter-row hoe for in-row spraying via a SprayKit applicator, to mechanically weed between rows while band spraying along them. This offers the potential to save 40-60% of herbicide volume, calculates Lemken, alongside significant time, labour and fuel-saving benefits from combining operations.

Available with 1,100- or 1,500-litre tanks, the ISOBUS-compatible SprayHub is controlled via Lemken's MegaSpray software. Features include height-adjustable nozzle holders, equipped with a scale for adjusting spraying height and position, and allowing the width of



The improved iQ plough control system is a feature of Lemken's Juwel 8i mounted reversible plough

the required spray band to be individually determined depending on row spacing, crop and type of application. Special band spraying nozzles with spray cones that ensure a uniform concentration of spray solution across the set band width are particularly suitable for combining band spraying with hoeing technology, says Lemken. Further options will allow the system to be used with drop hoses, under-root fertilisation on hoeing shares and in combination with Lemken's Azurit precision seed drill.



Lemken claims potential diesel consumption figures as low as 5.0 l/ha for the new low-draught design 4.0/6.0m Solitair DT full/min-till drill

### Precision weed burial

In its move towards new ways of weed control, Lemken has not forgotten the role of the heart of its range, its plough line. A new ISOBUS version of its Juwel 8i mounted reversible plough features an improved iQ plough control system and a redesigned user interface. On on-land models, pre-set front furrow width can be stored and displayed on the terminal, and with mechanical depth wheel adjustment, the Juwel 8i is a cost-effective entry-level ISOBUS plough, Lemken suggests.

Up to eight different scenarios can be programmed and activated as required, with only a single move necessary to ensure the last furrow is always kept shallow when ploughing the headland. In addition, hydraulic inclination adjustment can be made independently on the right and left to produce an optimal ploughing pattern under all conditions.

Lemken's Uni wheel means there is no need to uncouple the top link for road transport, or work between tractor and implement to remove it. The frame swivel cylinder is depressurised for road travel to allow it to compensate for uneven ground.

### Solitair drill DT update

Lemken claims potential diesel consumption figures as low as 5.0 l/ha in good conditions for the new low-draught design 4.0/6.0m Solitair DT full/min-till drill, which replaces the Compact Solitair.

Cultivation components comprise a full-width tyre packer followed by a compact disc harrow with 465mm diameter leaf-sprung concave discs or vertical corrugated discs for shallower movement.

Seed capacity is 5,100 litres, while a split hopper can be specified for combined seed/fertiliser sowing or for planting two different seed types. The drill is available as a single-shoot version, with fertiliser and seed placed in a shared seed furrow, or a double-shoot type, where the fertiliser is placed in a line below the seed via separate fertiliser double disc coulters. With seed placed at 12.5cm spacings, fertiliser can be delivered through the front disc coulters between the rows at 25cm spacing.

### Split seed hopper for Solitair 9+ Duo

A new Duo version of the 3m/4m Solitair 9+ drill features an 1,850-litre hopper with 50/50 or 60/40 split. In the single-shot version, seeds and fertiliser are combined after the two metering units in each of the two hopper segments, feeding the double disc coulters. Automatic tramlining is integrated into the distributor heads. In the double-shot system, seed and fertiliser flow separately to each double disc coulters via doubled distributors in two seed pipes. They can then be spread either in a single row, as with the single-shot method, or – following a quick exchange of the tramline cartridge in the distributor – separately and alternately in two rows. In addition, the placement depth of every other row can be adjusted separately

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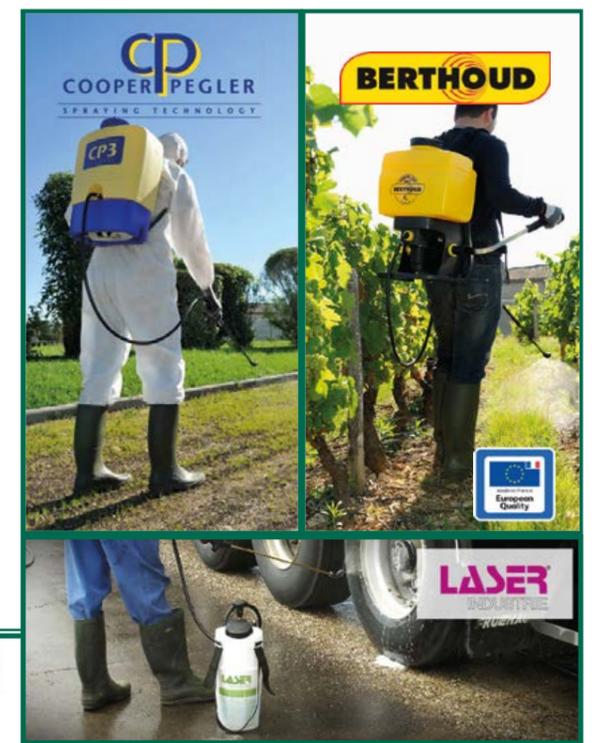
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Lemken's Solitair 23+ front hopper and OptiDisc 25 coulters bar pairing is now ISOBUS-compatible

via the pressure roller up to a difference of 5.0cm, allowing two different seed types to be placed at different suitable depths, or inter-row fertiliser to be applied while drilling.

### OptiDisc updates

Lemken's Solitair 23+ front hopper and OptiDisc 25 coulters bar pairing is now ISOBUS-compatible, meaning adjustments to, for example, seeding rate or width section control can be made on the ISOBUS screen. In conjunction with GPS guidance, it also makes possible automatic shut-off of up to four width sections.

The coulters bar features parallelogram-controlled double disc coulters with depth control rollers, a combination said to be suited to both mulch/min-till and conventional tillage. Coulters pressure can be mechanically or hydraulically adjusted independently of seed depth.

The Solitair 23+ front hopper can also be used for fertiliser, and is therefore also suited to combination drilling of maize and starter nutrients when, rather than the OptiDisc 25 coulters bar, a precision drill such as its Azurit is coupled to the tractor's rear, suggests Lemken. The company already offers 4.0m and 4.5m folding OptiDisc 25 coulters bars, but for 2022 has added 3.0m and 4.0m rigid plus 5.0m and 6.0m folding models.

### New cultivator combines low draught and versatility

Lemken's new Karat 10 three-row cultivator has a more efficient design than its predecessor, suggests the maker, with the tines now arranged symmetrically around the axis of greatest tension when the implement is at work. This is said to minimise draught,

not only enhancing traction and so allowing higher speeds to be attained for intensive mixing, but also reducing side draft, ensuring the Karat keeps in line with the tractor on side-slopes, particularly when working with auto-steering.

As before, the Karat is available with wing shares for shallow cultivation – now slightly wider than before – or narrow tines for deep loosening. New specially shaped guide plates are said to improve the mixing effect. The Karat 10 can also be equipped with Lemken's DeltaCut shares for shallow cultivation, and these are further available in carbide specification. A quick-change depth-setting system allows the setting of working depths from 5-30cm. There are also new edge-levelling tools that, where required, allow the implement to be used while folded.

Available in both mounted and semi-mounted variants, the new Karat comes in working widths from 3-7m. A traction booster and the ContourTrack system for working in hilly terrain are available for the semi-mounted models. At the rear, options include the full range of Lemken rollers and a trailing harrow.



The new Karat 10 three-row cultivator has a more efficient design than its predecessor, with tines now arranged around the axis of greatest tension in work

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# Sprayer training options advanced

A year ago, sprayer operatives began training for their PA6A(AW) knapsack certification remotely via a web-based training initiative from ProGreen. A year on the retailer reports success for the service launched in response to pandemic restrictions

**T**he impact of Covid prompted us to adapt our approach to training," says trainer and assessor Richard Wheatcroft, ProGreen's GM and head of training, "and we're delighted with the uptake in the first year."

Already a key distributor for professional knapsack sprayer manufacturer Hozelock-Exel, home of the Cooper Pegler and Berthoud brands, ProGreen say they are



Richard Wheatcroft of ProGreen explaining the workings of a Cooper Pegler knapsack

increasing the number of face-to-face courses once again as Covid restrictions lift, while still offering the live remote training.

The host of training courses that ProGreen provides complements its supply of weedkillers, moss and algae control products, fertilisers and grass seed, while specialising in stocking a full range of sprayers that includes Cooper Pegler professional knapsacks, granular spreaders and accessories.

ProGreen was said to be the first commercial business to offer the Lantra remote training and assessment for PA1 Safe Use of Pesticides – the obligatory entry level for pesticide spray training.

As the world slowly moves on from Covid, ProGreen has seen an increase in uptake of the PA6(AW) certification, which covers spray applications in and around ponds, lake and watercourses.

"It always makes more sense for operators to complete PA6(A&AW) as it completely futureproofs them for all knapsack spray applications," Richard states.

Lockdowns and tiered restrictions have given providers such as ProGreen the opportunity to promote their land-based courses to new audiences, Richard adds. "By working with manufacturers and examining boards we have been able to place remote training and education on a

fresh footing."

The PA1 remote qualification he calls "a real game-changer for the industry, as training and examinations can both be completed from home or office, at a time to suit".

Running online courses allows ProGreen to support trainees if they need it, Richard stresses. "There's no downtime travelling to and from the classroom, or overnight stays, and the course can be completed at night if necessary so operators need not take time off work, although the examination is undertaken during the day."

Trainees taking the PA1 qualification only need access to the internet, a webcam and audio to complete the examination. ProGreen stresses the importance of strict control in the exam certification process.

"The PA1 online assessment is a proctored exam, with a third party ensuring full compliance with Ofqual examination requirements," notes Richard. "Trainees switch on their webcam and mic and have up to one hour to complete 40 multiple choice questions. At the end of 60 minutes, access to the online exam form stops automatically.

"The examining body later checks that trainees had no opportunity to gain advantage."

The web-based 'remote' PA6A

and PA6AW courses are supported with real-time instruction and demonstrations using equipment such as Cooper Pegler cutaway sprayers designed to offer insight into how the kit functions.

Video clips of operating tips from equipment and Powerpoint presentations further aid training delivery. "The trainer will be on hand to run through the training workbook, utilise inset videos and photos during the training, ask questions and provide the personal touch by answering any candidate questions raised during practice.

"We firmly believe that candidates benefit from remote class discussion as much as they would from face-to-face learning."

## Rising demand

ProGreen is reintroducing PA2 certification for tractor and quad bike boom spraying. "Although we had run the course for many years, before Covid, we had to hold off during restrictions," explains Richard, "but it's now viable to restart and even increase the frequency, due to rising demand." ProGreen also runs knapsack maintenance sessions for corporates in the same way as PA6 and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for those who want to update their staff and ensure safety, while use of nematodes to control chafer grubs and leatherjackets e-learning – exclusive to ProGreen – is delivered in association with Lantra.

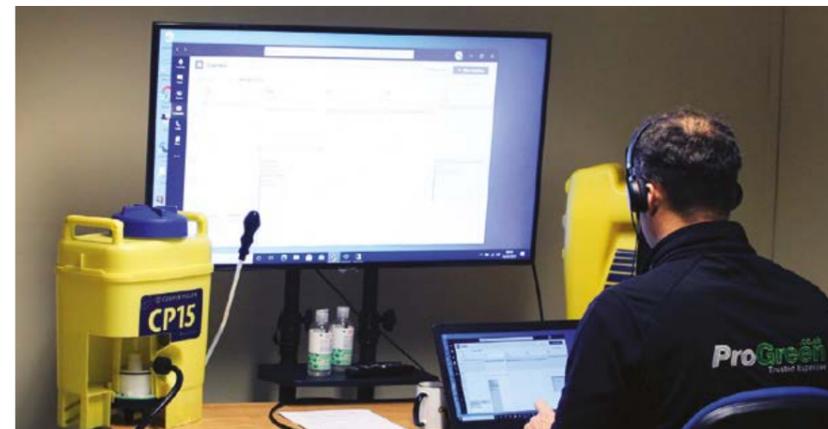
The amenity and agricultural retailer works with clients large and small and has been busy developing its market. "Training is vital across the board," says marketing manager Peter Batchelor, "and with these innovations we're attracting bigger customers."

There is another benefit to running a training arm, Peter adds: "Certified operators obviously need to use equipment and we can offer them a selection of sprayer brands and accessories.

"Some customers will choose cheaper models as they may view sprayers as throwaway items, but the more we can



PA2A on-site training



Richard prepares for live remote PA6A training

educate them about the importance of maintenance, the longer they'll keep them in service. Also, many trainees have not used sprayers before so this will be their first exposure to them."

That stance is already bearing fruit, says Richard, who also heads equipment procurement. "We've witnessed a significant rise in demand for parts and accessories," he reports. "Proof that customers are moving away from a throwaway culture. Quality shows in the long run and we can point to Cooper Pegler knapsacks over 30 years old, still in daily use."

ProGreen enjoys a strong presence in the sport, amenity and agriculture sectors but is expanding its sphere of interest, Peter explains. "Industrial and commercial customers are coming onboard increasingly as outsourcing to external contractors gives way to in-house management of spraying grounds and property surroundings. Again, Covid has highlighted the need for customers to take back control of

grounds maintenance."

BASIS-qualified technical advisors are on hand to discuss pesticide choices and to run through knapsack spraying equipment questions after training finishes, Peter adds. "Technical support and aftersales service quality is key for us in helping to keep customers onside over the longer term. They know they can phone or email our team for expert advice and guidance on any issues concerning sprayers and chemicals they have purchased from us, including dilution rates, coverage and efficacy against target pests."

Expansion of the dealer's training arm in turn creates demand for trainers and assessors, Peter says. "This is a tight-knit world and we seek experienced practitioners with the desire to inspire trainees. Unfortunately, the average age of trainers and assessors creeps up year on year, and it is encouraging that the industry is now attracting new trainers from 'hands on' sectors such as agriculture."



# BUSINESS MONITOR

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

## Winter servicing levels up

But struggles with staffing hampering some

**A**ccording to dealers who responded to our Winter Servicing Survey conducted towards the end of January 2022, workshops have been busier than a year before when strict lockdown rules were in place.

85% of dealers who answered the survey said that service levels were either 'up' or 'well up' on last year. However, the impression given by comments received is that dealers feel there is more servicing business to be had, if only they had more staff

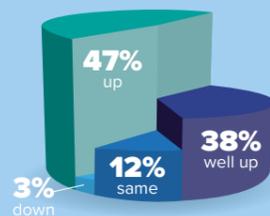
to cope. 34% of respondents cited this factor as the biggest influence on their winter servicing levels this year. Also supply of parts and that old perennial, the weather, were also mentioned. Interestingly, last year when we asked, 50% of respondents said it was the 'pandemic' that was the biggest influence – this year, zero dealers said this.

Significantly, **75% dealers who answered said they had put up their service rates this year to cope with increased costs.** Of those who had

increased, 54% had done so by 5-10%.

As touched on, recruitment for the workshop appears to be an issue of concern, with **93% of respondents describing the process of finding new technicians as 'difficult'** (nobody thought it was easy). Furthermore, training available for staff was a close call amongst those who responded, with 45% describing options as 'average' and 42% describing them as 'inadequate'.

How are servicing levels this winter compared with last?



What factors have most influenced your winter servicing levels this year?



Have you increased your labour rates in the past year?

**75% Yes**  
**25% No**

If you have increased your labour rates this past year, by how much?

**54% 5-10%**  
**38% Up to 5%**  
**8% More than 10%**

Have you increased your service staffing levels this past year?

**78% No**  
**22% Yes**

When you do want to increase service staffing levels, do you find the process?

**93% Difficult**  
**7% Moderately hard**

Do you find the standard of training courses available to your service staff?

**45% Average**  
**42% Inadequate**  
**13% Good**

## “Your say”

We asked you, are there any key issues that are currently impacting on the service side of your business?

- So many dealers are closing down (usually through retirements) that those of us who are left are having to cope with massive volumes of work without increased staffing. We cannot get service technicians. Often we are struggling to get spares, and manufacturers are giving us inaccurate delivery timescales, which adds to our problems. The machines that are waiting for spares take up space we can't spare. To say that it's awful (because of the sheer volume of work we are juggling) at the moment is an understatement and we really shouldn't be saying that just because we are busy!
- Being a dealer in Cornwall there is a very limited number of engineers out there and it is almost impossible to find decent staff.
- Main issue is finding staff with any experience. Where we are located, they are just not out there.
- The quantity of machines coming through the doors with not enough workshop staff to do the jobs. Plus spare parts, if not in the country, can take an age to come.
- Supply of parts is very slow and is holding up the flow of work. We are inundated with work, which is great, and we are enjoying a very busy January, which is most welcome!
- Very short winter servicing window. We used to have five months to do winter servicing. Now we seem to only have a month to do the same amount of work, causing a backlog in the workshop.
- Lack of parts, recruitment of servicing staff due to lack of new people coming into the industry and staff downtime with Covid all impacting.
- Too many jobs, not enough staff and hours in the day. We're booked up for weeks in advance already.
- Delays in parts availability, cost of parts, cost of heating and power, and customers inability to grasp the full implications of the deliberate destruction of the supply chain!
- Impatient and rude customers.
- It is doing fine, all things considered.

## Industry first, profit second

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## Employment practices



# 'Firing and re-hiring' employees - is it right?

The practice of 'fire and re-hire' – also known as dismissal and re-engagement – is a practice that can be used by employers to alter the terms and conditions of employees' contracts of employment. It's been slated in the press by some, but how does it work - and is it right? asks SME Digest editor, Adam Bernstein.

According to Mark Stevens, senior associate at law firm VWV, 'fire and re-hire' is generally used as a last resort where a proposed change that the employer wishes to make to a contract of employment cannot be agreed with employees. He says that, "As the name suggests, the 'fire and re-hire' process involves the employer giving notice and dismissing an employee, and subsequently offering to re-hire the employee on new varied terms." He adds that the practice itself is lawful, but because it involves a dismissal, there is, by definition, a higher degree of risk involved.

Unions have previously advocated the outlawing of this practice. Indeed, back in May (2021), Unite the Union reported that it and 19 other unions along with 140 MPs and lords joined together to campaign against it. And following its increased use by employers to vary terms of employment, particularly in response to the pandemic, the practice has been gaining increased media attention and receiving more scrutiny.

### ACAS report on 'Fire and Re-Hire'

As a result of the rising profile of 'fire and re-hire', ACAS, the government's conciliation service, was asked (by the government) to gather evidence and report on

its use by employers.

Its report, Dismissal and re-engagement (fire-and-rehire): a fact-finding exercise, took into account the opinions of various stakeholders including employer bodies, trade unions, professional bodies and networks with advisory contact with employers, covering employment lawyers, accountants, HR and payroll services, academics, and ACAS senior advisers. It was submitted to the government in February 2021 and the findings were published in June.

As Stevens highlights, "the report noted a divergence in views amongst participants as to whether or not employers were using the pandemic opportunistically as a justification to force through changes to employment terms or, rather, whether the increase in the use of 'fire and re-hire' seen over the past year was simply a fallout of genuine business pressures caused by the pandemic."

He adds that the report found that views were equally mixed as to whether the practice should be reformed, and if so, how. "Findings," he says, "ranged from feelings that 'fire and re-hire' practices are never reasonable, and should be outlawed by legislation to, those who believed that it could be useful when genuinely used as a last resort." It shouldn't

surprise anyone that there were also concerns that reforms, or a blanket ban, could lead to less flexibility for employers, which could instead lead to businesses failing and redundancies.

### The outcome

For the moment at least, the government has confirmed that it does not intend to legislate to outlaw 'fire and re-hire' practices. However, in his response to the report in the House of Commons, Paul Scully MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, said that the government's expectation is that employers should exhaust every avenue towards reaching agreement where it is necessary to change terms and conditions.

Stevens, however, noting the government's view, said that one reason for inaction was "the risk that reform in this area of employment law could result in more businesses failing if they cannot amend terms of employment due to business necessity." Instead, he says that "the government has asked ACAS to provide more detailed guidance on how and when termination and re-engagement should be used, and 'good practice' for employers." This further guidance is now on the ACAS website at: [www.acas.org.uk/acas-publishes-advice-to-help-employers-avoid-fire-and-rehire-practices](http://www.acas.org.uk/acas-publishes-advice-to-help-employers-avoid-fire-and-rehire-practices).

But this doesn't mean that the subject is closed; the government has said that it will continue to work with

ACAS on the issue – Paul Scully MP confirmed that "nothing is off the table."

### Advice for employers

As to what this means for employers, Stevens says that whilst further ACAS guidance is still awaited, "employers are strongly encouraged to be cautious when firing and re-hiring and to only adopt this approach when necessary and only if all other attempts to agree varied terms have been exhausted." He says that they should also be mindful of the increased scrutiny of the practice.

His advice is quite clear: "When moving to terminate and re-engage, employers should ensure they have followed a fair dismissal procedure – including confirming there are sound business reasons for the change; engaging with affected employees; considering alternatives prior to deciding to dismiss; and offering a right of appeal."

Also, he warns that employers should be aware that this practice may also trigger collective consultation obligations where it is possible that more than 20 employees may be dismissed.

### In summary

**'Fire and re-hire' is perfectly lawful if the process is carried out correctly. However, employers should be alive to the risks that it carries, both in terms of a tribunal case being brought against them and a judgment made in the court of public opinion.**

## Web presence

# Pump up the speed!



Life in the modern world travels at the speed of light. Or so it seems. And just as life runs at double time, so our levels of patience have fallen through the floor. If something isn't quick or responsive, we're off, says Adam Bernstein, SME Digest editor.

**When it comes to browsing websites, we get fed up with slow pages and convoluted checkouts and move on to a site where the user experience is so much better. And this is especially so when a mobile device is involved. It's for this reason alone that firms need to ensure their websites are user-friendly, and turbo charged. But speed equates to more than just the customer experience, it also means a higher placing in search rankings.**

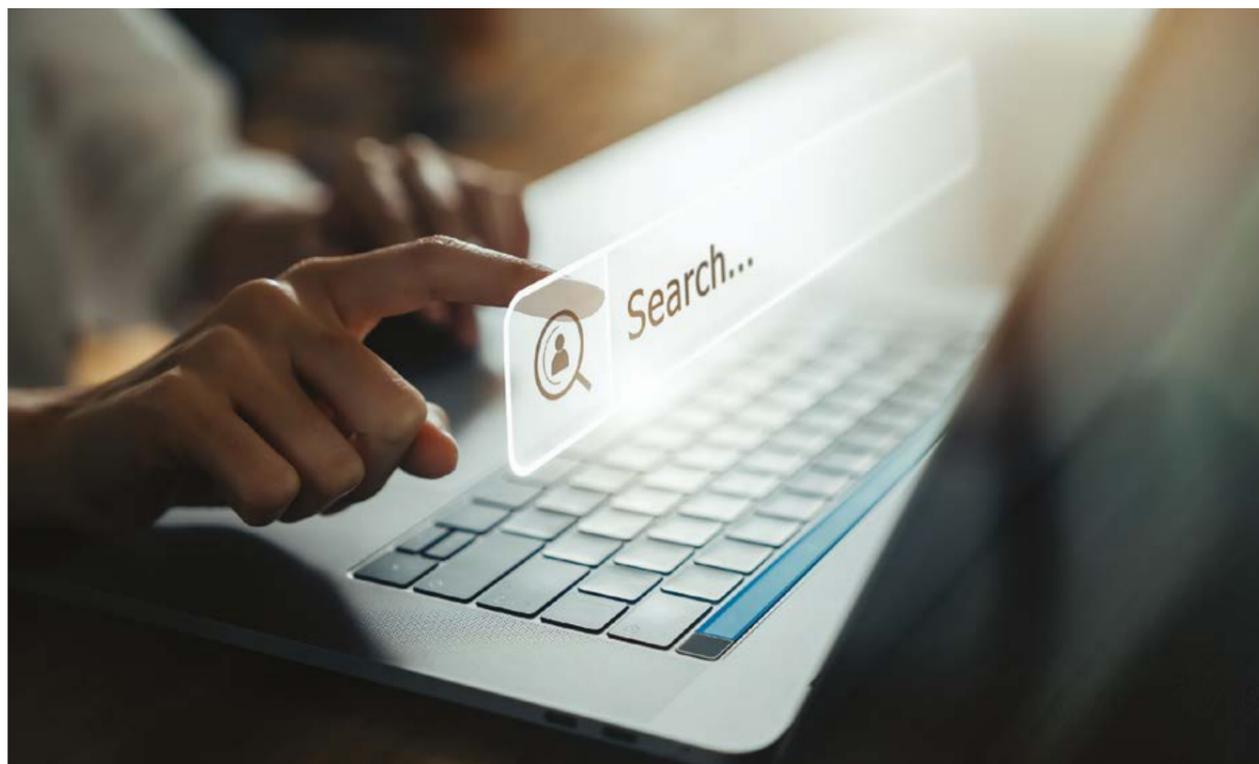
### First impressions last

Just as clean shoes can make a suit, so a fast website helps visitors get a good feel for the business. A fast-loading website creates a good impression – that the firm

knows what it's doing and has invested in the backend and servers it uses. In contrast, a website that loads slowly is automatically on the backfoot as impatience will set in before customers have even started shopping.

In fact, a slow website makes us think it's unsafe, insecure, and untrustworthy. And it's difficult to turn around that negative first impression. According to a June 2021 Superoffice report, 66 percent of 1,900 business professionals surveyed said that a "frustrating experience on a website hurts their opinion of the brand overall." Further, 40 percent complained about slow load times.

Statistics from kissmetrics.com suggested the obvious – that we now expect speed and fast loading times. Its data



reckoned that 47 percent of people expect a site to load in less than two seconds and 40 percent will give up if it takes longer than three seconds.

And the data isn't much better for the mobile experience where many of us shop now. The Superoffice survey found that 55 percent said that "a bad mobile experience makes me less likely to engage with a company." The problem is exacerbated on a mobile device precisely because we're on the move and using a small screen, which can test patience levels to the extreme.

It's true to say that popular and official websites have more leeway; the brands are either trusted or visitors have no choice but to use a given site. Small firms, however, don't have that level of goodwill.

### Give them what they want

But apart from speed, customers linger longer on websites that they enjoy, and which don't frustrate them. This means giving them what they want and giving it to them quickly. Menus and navigation should be simple and effective, and the homepage shouldn't be cluttered.

And all of this can be demonstrated using simple maths. Consider a website that has 10,000 visitors a month. If 40 percent of them give up because the site takes more than three seconds to load, it'll have lost 4,000 opportunities to sell before it's even got off the starting blocks – visitors may have been looking to buy something and may well do so from a rival.

In the context of a slow website, speed can kill. A report on Fast Company – albeit back in 2012 – noted that Amazon found that if a page took longer than one second to load it could cost the company around \$1.6bn in sales as visitors

shopped elsewhere. If Amazon could suffer that level of loss, what does that mean for a small independent?

### Don't let Google rank you poorly

There are several reasons why Google ranks one page higher than another – and one that is key is the speed at which a page – desktop or mobile – loads.

The search engine said, back in April 2010, that it would use page speed in its ranking algorithms for searches. And when Google switched to including mobile indexing in December 2017, it announced the following January that it would, from July 2018, use mobile page speed to help it rank mobile searches too. Beyond that, in May 2020, Google also said that it would use overall page experience in its ranking algorithms. Fundamentally, page speed plays a significant part of the user experience and therefore how it ranks pages.

But there's more to website ranking than pure speed. Google uses crawlers to find information on websites that help it create its rankings, and Google has said that "making a site faster improves the users' experience while also increasing crawl rate." In other words, a slow website may make it harder for Google to find new products or posts put on your website. And that's an own goal.

### The final message

**The takeaway from all of this is clear. The web is here to stay and is now the central route to business. Those firms that fail to give visitors fast and slick websites will eventually lose out as their traffic migrates to rival sites that offer the experience that all now demand.**

# Positioning and differentiation



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

## THIS ISSUE: How to strengthen your customer base

**Most people know I like to have fun when training and I work to get everyone, whether they are in service, parts or sales, to understand the dealership has one purpose, which is to make obscene amounts of money.**

Each person on your team should understand that there is nothing wrong with the dealership making great profits. This is accomplished by not only having great employees but also working to keep customers coming back every year and telling their friends about your dealership so they too become lifelong customers.

Ultimately what you are striving to do as a dealership is to build a strong customer base that gets bigger and more profitable year after year. As you think about your store, your employees and your customers, you have to ask yourself, is everything we are doing helping to accomplish that goal?

Is your service, parts and sales department doing what it takes on a customer-by-customer basis to create a strong desire in your customers mind that will make them come back time and time again?

### Building your customer base

As you work to build a strong customer base, focus on the position you occupy in your customers mind and what you are doing to differentiate yourself from mass merchandisers, internet-only retailers, and local competitors. When it comes to positioning, it's important to keep in mind that everything you do has an impact on how the customer sees you, your employees and your dealership in their mind. That position in their mind determines whether they

buy, whether they buy again or if they refer their friends to you so that they will buy. When I hear salespeople say that a good customer ended up buying from a competitor, it tells me they, or the dealership, lost that all-important first position in the customer's mind. The question that must be asked is, "How did that happen, and what can you do to regain that number one spot?"

The position change might have happened because of the other word that we need to focus on in building a strong loyal customer base: differentiation.

While many dealerships believe they are uniquely different to their competitors, the reality of the situation is that many are not. Years ago, it was easy to differentiate yourself from competitors, but today with technology and products that are very similar it has become a more difficult task. It's important to bring your teams together and brain-storm what it is, by department, that makes what you offer or how you offer it differently from your competitors.

I want to challenge you not to let your service, parts and salespeople off with the easy answer, "We are friendlier", or "We smile more than our competitors' people". While you may have a few people in your dealership that truly are the differentiators for your customers, sadly most are not.

Right now is a great time to ask questions relative to your position in your customers' eyes. Are you or the dealership the first thing that comes to their mind for wholegoods, service, rental, or parts?

And finally, what specifically are you doing, department-by-department, to differentiate yourself from your competitors?



# The right balance of security & risk



**Anthony Deacon** of MKM Agriculture, explains how he intends to grow his dealership by introducing the right brand partners at the right time

**N**ow we're into 2022 we are confident this year will bring more highs and not so many lows for MKM. We have started the year strongly. The phone is constantly ringing and every department is working at a comfortable capacity. These are great signs that this year will be another success.

At time of writing, we are still waiting for our planning application for our new dealership building to be decided. The council wrote back to us three weeks into the application to say we had underpaid the fee by £462 despite already paying the best part of £10,000. Typical! The decision date deadline is now set to 17th March. So hopefully I can share some good news with you next time.

During the planning process of the new building, we have been looking at trying to construct a building and changing our working practices to reduce our overheads and become as environmentally friendly as possible. In a bid to reduce our carbon footprint we have already set a company target to reduce our paper usage by 25% this year, we are considering solar, ground source energy, biomass and even rainwater harvesting to provide services to the new dealership. I have also been testing electric vans and exploring the possibility of installing electric vehicle charging points, for which I have found the current grant will almost cover all the cost. Our biggest problem is our power supply is only single phase and we would need to pay UK Power Networks £16,000 to get a three-phase upgrade – money which is not budgeted for. Over the next issues I will share our progress to become a carbon neutral company.

I promise to continue my 'Diary of a Season' with no mention of COVID-19 or the lack of stock – it's onwards and upwards.

## Growing the business

While we are waiting for our planning decision and the build project to commence, there are lots of groundworks being carried out at the entrance-end of our site, with all the old concrete my grandad had laid in the 60s ripped up for new (non-broken) concrete. These works have caused disruption; however, it has not burdened our appetite to continue our growth during this disruptive period. My understanding of growth is to handle it with caution; there must be the right

balance of security and risk when entering any avenue of growth. Too much security and not enough risk could lead to lots of hard work and no reward. Not enough security and too much risk could result in failure. Ultimately without taking any risk you are going nowhere.

So how do I intend to grow my business to a size large enough to fill and pay for the new dealership while working from our current premises and not breaking the bank? It's going to be tricky, but I believe the introduction of the right brand partners at the right time while continuing to grow our business with our current brands is the root to success. We will increase our demands, which require more sales staff, and subsequently also grow our service and parts departments, ensuring all the way that we offer the best customer service possible delivered by our own enthusiastic dedicated team in order to keep this level of business for many years to come.

I visited SALTEX last year with the objective of looking at products to fill gaps in our range of groundcare machinery and I soon realised there are lots of brands to choose from and some very knowledgeable and passionate people behind them. It's going to be difficult to choose the right one and introduce them at the right time, but over the course of the next 12 months we are going to have some exciting decisions to make. I will share my progress along the way. I hope you all have a busy and successful spring.



MKM Agriculture original entrance



# Products

CONTACT:  
07929 438213  
steve@servicedealer.co.uk



## Makita get Earth Auger-nised

DG001G XGT 40Vmax machine

**Makita UK has extended its XGT 40VMax range of machinery with the launch of the DG001G Brushless Earth Auger.**

The company says the machine is suitable for high performance earth boring, with even and consistent holes for fence posts, landscaping, construction and soil sampling. Comparable to a 36cc engine product, the unit has a no-load speed of up to 1,500rpm and a maximum drilling capacity of 200mm. It also delivers up to 136nm of torque. With two mechanical speeds to choose from, operators can drill into high or low resistance soil.

For improved user handling, Makita says the earth auger attachment includes a bar, which receives reaction force and an auxiliary handle, which makes drilling holes easier. The DG001G also features the company's Automatic Torque Drive Technology, which works to ensure that the machine is always working at its optimum.

As with all XGT machines, the DG001G benefits from the inclusion of Makita's brushless motor. As there are no moving parts in the motor causing friction, no energy is lost through heat production and tool run time is extended, maximising user productivity.

Kevin Brannigan, marketing manager at Makita, said: "For any construction professional, having a range of powerful cordless machines to hand is key to ensuring maximum on-site efficiency and productivity – especially when embarking on high-demand applications."



## Low Horsch power required

For Cultro TC double knife roller

**The Cultro TC from Horsch is a double knife roller with a low horsepower requirement and can be used in combination with other machines for a wide range of applications. Launched in 2019 with a 3m model that can be mounted on the front or rear linkage, the range now adds 5m and 6m working-width models to provide a greater number of machine combinations.**

The manufacturer says front and rear mounting adds flexibility to the Cultro TC's operation and allows more tasks to be done with a single pass. The 5m and 6m models, which can be folded to 3m transport widths, are also available with a 2-bar harrow. The unit can be easily combined with other machines, for example, as a front attachment without a packer and with the disc harrow Joker CT.

The Cultro TC is also available as a rear-mounted 9m model and a trailed 12m model to meet customers' requirements. These can be folded to 3m transporter widths.

The knives produce an intensive crushing effect allowing the machine to work effectively in rape or silage maize stubble and in catch crops. The compact diameter of the roller body allows for a high number of revolutions and cuts. The efficiency of the machine allows high operational speeds up to 20kph while maintaining a low horsepower requirement.

COMMERCIAL



# Kubota takes covers off new utility tractor range

## Five-model M6-001 series

Kubota (UK) Ltd has unveiled what they describe as the “cost-sensitive”, five-model M6-001 Utility series tractor range.

As the successor to the MGX models, the series spans 104-143hp, and meets EU Stage V emissions due to an improved exhaust after-treatment package that contributes to a lower cost of ownership.

Short wheelbase models include the M6-101U and M6-111U, and both use a 3.8-litre Kubota V3800 four cylinder engine. Maximum power outputs are 104hp and 111hp, with maximum torque figures of 346Nm and 379Nm respectively. These two models weigh 4.3 tonnes and use a 2.54m wheelbase.

Long wheelbase M6-121U, M6-131U and M6-141U use Kubota’s 6.1-litre V6108 four cylinder engine. Power outputs are 123hp, 133hp and 143hp, with maximum torque figures of 503Nm, 544Nm and 586Nm respectively. These three larger models weigh 4.8 tonnes, and use a 2.68m wheelbase.

Kubota say engine technology on all models has seen an improvement in

exhaust after-treatment, with DOC and DPF performance increased to deliver greater operational flexibility and lower cost of ownership. DPF regeneration can now be achieved at a much lower engine speed – typically 1,200rpm down from 2,000rpm – and using a much lower working temperature of just 50°C. The latter makes regeneration much easier to achieve with light engine loads, lower noise levels and a reduced fuel burn.

All M6-001 Utility models get a 40kph semi-powershift transmission, which uses eight powershifts in three mechanical ranges to provide a 24x24 gearbox. The option of a creeper range increases the choice of ratios to 32x32. Transmission functionality includes auto-shifting in each range, and a sensitivity dial – the latter allows operators to adjust the responsiveness of gear changes to suit load on the tractor.

Operator comfort is provided by an air suspension seat in the same cab frame shared with M6-002 and M7003 models, while front axle suspension is available as an option. A wide sunroof offers generous

visibility for those looking to equip the M6-001 Utility with a loader, of which there are two variants – 3.7m or 4m lift height to the pin, and maximum lift capacities of 1,950kg or 2,200kg respectively.

The Cat III rear linkage includes electronic linkage control with a five-tonne lift capacity on short wheelbase models and 6.1 tonnes on long wheelbase tractors. PTO equipment comprises a two-speed 540/1000 as standard, with a 540 Eco available as an option. All models can be equipped with an optional front linkage with 2.6 tonnes lift capacity, an optional 1,000rpm front pto, and the capability to run pto-powered equipment while stationary.

M6-001 Utility models also benefit from Kubota’s portal front axle with bevel gear drive, offering generous ground clearance and a 55-degree steering angle.

**The series is priced from £53,300 for the 104hp M6-101U, with the M6-141U costing £75,200.**



COMMERCIAL

# First all-electric tracked loader

Bobcat reveal the T7X at technology show

Doosan Bobcat unveiled its new, all-electric Bobcat T7X compact track loader at the CES 2022 technology event, held in January in Las Vegas.

The T7X is the first machine of its kind to be fully electric and was presented with two 2022 CES Innovation Awards in the categories of Vehicle Intelligence & Transportation and Smart Cities.

The manufacturer says the T7X was developed for the North American market initially, but internal testing and the gathering of customer feedback is planned for the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region to identify its commercial potential.

The machine is fully battery-powered, with Bobcat saying it is built to be more productive from the ground up with electric actuation and propulsion.

Inside the machine, the traditional hydraulic work group has been completely replaced with an electrical drive

system consisting of electric cylinders and electric drive motors, which means virtually no fluids. It uses just under one litre of eco-friendly coolant compared to around 216 litres of fluid in its diesel/hydraulic equivalent model.

The all-electric platform enables instantaneous power and peak torque available at every operating speed.

At the heart of the T7X is a 62 kW lithium-ion battery from technology partner, Green Machine Equipment, Inc. While applications vary, Bobcat says each charge can support common daily work operations and the use of intelligent work modes for up to four hours of continuous operation time, and a full day of operation during intermittent use. The intelligence of the power management system is programmed to sense when loads are increasing, automatically backing off power when not needed to preserve the total energy use and extend the machine's runtime.

AGRICULTURAL

# Farmers offered a Loadall more choice

JCB extend their range



The JCB Loadall has been expanded with the introduction of the mid-range 538-70, a seven metre machine that slots into the Loadall Series III line-up with 3,800kg maximum lift capacity and 7.01m of lift height, placing it between the current 532-70 and 542-70 models.

At 3,000 to 3,800kg, the manufacturer says lift performance is particularly strong in the 4-6m loading-at-height zone critical for bulk loading of grain into trucks and silage into diet feeders; and there is 2,500 to 2,750kg of capacity available at full height, depending upon the version.

Like all mid-range machines in the Loadall range, the new 538-70 is available with a choice of four different transmissions, three power outputs and three standard feature and specification levels.

The Loadall 538-70 AGRI variant comes with the company's Torque Lock 4 transmission, featuring torque converter lock-up in fourth gear for power-efficient direct drive on the

road, coupled to a 109hp (81kW) version of the Stage V emissions-compliant JCB DieselMAX 448 engine.

The AGRI Super has 130hp (97kW) from this engine and a regular four-speed Powershift as the base transmission installation; but along with the 150hp AGRI Xtra, it is also available with a six-speed Autoshift with automatic and manual shifting modes in addition to torque converter lock-up in the top two gears.

The AGRI Super and AGRI Xtra can also be had with DualTech VT, the JCB transmission that combines the best characteristics of hydrostatic and powershift drives in one unit.

DualTech VT provides precision slow speed control for loading and other handling tasks, and direct-drive auto powershift without a torque converter for high-performance, fuel-efficient field and road travel beyond 19kph.

Switching between the two elements is performed seamlessly

without any operator involvement; but operator-selected 'power' and fuel-saving 'eco' modes are available to suit different applications, and powershift selection can be restricted for field work.

Across all variants, the standard equipment includes auto wheel alignment when switching between the three steering modes, and an auto reversing cooling fan that blows dust and debris from the air intake grille.

The 140-litre/min load-sensing hydraulics system includes gravity regeneration of oil for the retract and lower services to bring the boom down rapidly but under full control, and automatic Smooth Ride boom suspension is standard on all but the AGRI version where it is an option.

JCB's LiveLink telematics solution is also part of the standard package, providing machine data, pro-active fault identification, service scheduling, and machine location and security features.

AGRICULTURAL



# Proceed to the future of seeding

New drill concept from Väderstad unveiled

Väderstad have launched what they describe as a new drill concept called Väderstad Proceed, which they believe "could fundamentally change the way farmers operate".

The principle is based on one single machine that is capable of increasing the yield potential of a full range of crops, including wheat, barley, oilseed rape, sugar beet, peas, maize and sunflower.

Senior vice president of sales and marketing Mattias Hovner, said, "We develop new methods and from time to time we set completely new standards. Proceed is one of those leaps that doesn't happen often in the farm machinery industry, but when it does, it can have a massive impact."

"Väderstad Proceed can place the smallest of seed at the perfect depth with millimetre precision, leading to yield increases as well as less need

for tillage, chemical treatment and use of fertilisers."

At the heart of Proceed is its high-precision row units. Prior to seed placement, individual pre-drilling wheels consolidate the field to ensure same conditions for each seed. The pre-drilling wheels are individually mounted, using hydraulic down-force to ensure high performance.

When the seeds reach the row units from the central hopper, an adapted version of the Väderstad PowerShoot singulation system, takes full control of each single seed all the way down to the soil. Each seed is received by a stop wheel, which optimises seed-to-soil contact at selected depth across the full working width of the machine.

To provide the driver with full control, each row unit is electrically driven and controlled via the iPad-based control system Väderstad E-Control. Functions

include row-by-row shut-off and variable rate, dynamic tramlining, individual calibration, as well as real-time precision monitoring and control.

According to the manufacturer, field trials show that Proceed can halve wheat seed rate, without compromising yield compared to modern seed drills. Importantly the crops are stronger and more uniform at all crop growth stages.

In trials a few months after drilling winter wheat at a seed rate of 150 seeds/m<sup>2</sup>, saw a plant biomass increase of 102%, 72% in root biomass and 62% more shoots per plant, compared to a modern seed drill.

Proceed has a row spacing of either 225 or 250mm. Easy calibration and a quick change of seed discs allows the drill to switch to 450 or 500mm for crops such as sugar beet or oilseed rape, and to 750mm for crops such as maize, sunflower or cotton.

DOMESTIC

# Freedom to ride

Battery ride-on offered by Mountfield

New for 2022, Mountfield say their Freedom 28e rider is easy to use and easy to manoeuvre, being suited for use in complex gardens.

The smart batteries used are also compatible with the handheld equipment within the Freedom500 cordless range, offering the flexibility as the batteries are interchangeable. The company says the four removable 5Ah batteries synchronise when mowing to create ample power and efficient run-times for a garden up to half an acre in size.

Other features include:

- Shock absorbing cutting deck
- Two contra-rotating blades, engaged at the touch of a button
- 150-litre rear-mounted grass collector
- Cutting width of 72cm
- Low-vibration, ergonomic features and a reduced noise level
- Steering wheel can be turned easily with just one finger
- One-button start, cruise control and One Pedal Drive



- The tractor stops automatically when the drive pedal is released
- Parking brake that activates automatically when machine stops
- Washing link for easy maintenance of the underside of the deck

This model comes with 4 x 48V 5Ah batteries and charger included and is available from this month (March 2022).

# uni-power

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# March of the 'green' machines

Lawsuits and pressure groups *Chris Biddle*

**F**rom tractors to lawnmowers, changes are afoot – as ever.

In the US, the Right to Repair issue has moved a step closer to the courts with two lawsuits, both issued by farmers, against John Deere for effectively trying to monopolise the tractor servicing sector.

The first was issued by Forest River Farms of North Dakota, the second by long-time John Deere customer, Trinity Dale Wells (TDW) in Alabama. Specifically, the issue mostly relates to the onboard computerised electric control units (ECU).

What prompted TDW's complaint was a \$600 bill for a job that the farm's usual on-site mechanic claimed would take just three minutes. The farmer said that the JD dealer technician did no more than dry out a sensor, a fix that required no spare parts.

Both farms have requested that the court declares it as a class action, with their lawyers hoping to include other aggrieved farmers.

As ever, the dealer trade is caught in the middle. In 2018, the US Equipment Dealers Association (EDA) pre-empted the looming problem and committed itself to ensuring the free availability of manuals and software for the repair and servicing of tractors by 2021.

To date, nothing has been forthcoming, but with virtually every major tractor manufacturer fitting ECUs to their own specification, it is an issue that can only shift the relationship balance between main tractor franchise dealers and the independent service provider – with the farmer being the ultimate loser.

It may indeed result in long-line manufacturers ring-fencing their dealer network to a solus product range, much as it is with car franchises.

## Disingenuous

From big green tractors to small 'green' mowers and outdoor power equipment.

I couldn't miss the splash Daily Express headline in early February. "Unbelievable damage", "Worse than cars" it screamed, in a story relating to petrol lawnmowers. Other newspapers around the world picked up the story and all of a sudden, proud homeowners with a lawn tended by a treasured Suffolk Colt became Public Enemy no. 1.

The story was attributed to a pressure group, Challenge 2025. So, could we see the members of this 'pressure group' lying down in the middle of a lawn in Accacia Avenue in the Spring, or blocking the track at the British Lawnmower Racing Association 'Grand Prix'?

Probably not, for this 'pressure group' is actually the commercial marketing team at battery mower manufacturer EGO, whose marketing manager is described as a Challenge 2025 Ambassador.

It's a clever approach to support the already growing movement to shift away from petrol powered products. The message is already clear and understood, but for the 'messenger' to pose as a quasi-environmental group is disingenuous.

In fairness, EGO say in their press release that their "Vision is that by the end of 2025, battery technology becomes the principal power source for outdoor power equipment".

They may well be right. But they add that their own research found that '89% of tools used by local councils are petrol powered'. The reason for that of course is that battery power still has a run-time issue – and a cost implication.

As technology improves and production is scaled-up, those issues will be addressed – in time.

Of course, this movement is straight out of the play – book of the California

Air Resources Board (ironically CARB). The Governor of California last year signed an order banning the sale of petrol-powered outdoor power products in the state from 1 January 2024.

The numbers involved are frightening. The US National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) are supportive of the principle but highly critical of the timescale. There are 55,000 small landscapers in the state, whilst 85% of all homeowners use a petrol-powered product, they say.

To help the transition, CARB is putting up a \$30 million fund, which the NALP describes as 'disappointing', calculating that it will mean a grant of just \$15 per machine in commercial use – with nothing left over for homeowners. And they say those battery machines will cost much more for a direct replacement.

The UK has always had a much, much higher proportion of electric mowers (mostly corded) than the US, and along with Europe is well ahead of the US in the transition to battery power. But can you imagine that the Exchequer will even consider financial assistance, particularly in the current economic climate?

EGOs Challenge 2025 is a laudable proposition, but I fear it will run out of road. The Government has announced 2030 as the date to ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars and vans – and that looks a stretch at the moment. Finally, the phrase 'outdoor power equipment' is too broad-brushed. What about generators, what about high-powered chainsaws, what about equipment used in remote areas or in emergency situations?

Sometimes the commitment to sustainability or environmental causes, however imperative or well-meaning, can lack an awareness of practical applications.

# What's on?

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, we advise checking with organisers' websites and social media channels

## MARCH 2022

<b>Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London</b> www.idealhomeshow.co.uk	<b>11-27</b>
<b>BTME 2022, Harrogate International Centre</b> www.btme.org.uk	<b>22-24</b>
<b>West of England Game Fair, Bath &amp; West Showground</b> www.westofenglandgamefair.co.uk	<b>26-27</b>

## APRIL 2022

<b>Springtime Live, Great Yorkshire Showground</b> www.springtimelive.co.uk	<b>2</b>
<b>Harrogate Spring Flower Show</b> www.flowershow.org.uk	<b>21-24</b>

## MAY 2022

<b>North Somerset Show</b> www.nsas.org.uk	<b>2</b>
<b>LAMMA 2022, Birmingham NEC</b> www.lammashow.com	<b>4-5</b>
<b>Nottinghamshire County Show</b> www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com	<b>14</b>
<b>Balmoral Show, Belfast</b> www.balmoralshow.co.uk	<b>14</b>
<b>Scotgrass, Dumfries</b> www.scotgrass.co.uk	<b>18</b>
<b>Smallholding &amp; Countryside Festival Royal Welsh Showground</b> www.rwas.wales/whats-on/smallholding-countryside-festival	<b>21-22</b>
<b>Chelsea Flower Show</b> www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show	<b>24-28</b>
<b>The Commercial Vehicle Show, Birmingham NEC</b> www.cvshow.com	<b>24-26</b>
<b>Herts County Show</b> www.hertsshow.com	<b>28-29</b>

(May 2022 continued)

<b>Suffolk County Show</b> www.suffolkshow.co.uk	<b>31/5-1/6</b>
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## JUNE 2022

<b>Staffordshire County Show</b> www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show	<b>1-2</b>
<b>Royal Bath &amp; West Show</b> www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show	<b>2-4</b>
<b>Rutland Show</b> www.rutlandcountyshow.com	<b>4</b>
<b>Cereals 2022, Duxford</b> www.cerealsevent.co.uk	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Royal Cornwall Show</b> www.royalcornwallshow.org	<b>9-11</b>
<b>Three Counties Show, Malvern</b> www.royalthreecounties.co.uk	<b>17-19</b>
<b>spoga-gafa 2022, Cologne</b> www.spogagafa.com	<b>19-21</b>
<b>BBC Gardeners' World Live - Birmingham NEC</b> www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com	<b>18-21</b>
<b>Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh</b> www.royalhighlandshow.org	<b>18-21</b>
<b>Royal Cheshire County Show</b> www.royalcheshireshow.org	<b>21-22</b>
<b>Lincolnshire Show</b> www.lincolnshireshow.co.uk	<b>22-23</b>
<b>Derbyshire County Show</b> www.derbyshirecountyshow.org.uk	<b>26</b>
<b>Glee 2022</b> www.gleebirmingham.com	<b>28-30</b>
<b>Devon County Show</b> www.devoncountyshow.co.uk	<b>30/6-2/7</b>

Status of the events listed here are correct at the time of going to press.



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## No Gray areas

Dealers can feel rightfully proud of their conduct during Covid

### Playing by the rules



towards a (hopefully) prolonged period of stability. Certainly, the digital skills acquired by many will prove invaluable as we move forward. But the broader point that dealers followed the rules – however disruptive to their business – whilst those in charge flagrantly broke them, does not sit well.

The story in this issue of Hertfordshire Garden Machinery is a great case-in-point of a dealership, that despite all these past two years has thrown at it, has come out the other side, stronger and more determined than ever to succeed. At times they didn't know if their business would have to permanently change because of the restrictions put in place. That they were able to revamp, rejig and reopen is testament to their resourcefulness, entrepreneurial spirit, and business acumen. All attributes that independent dealers are renowned for.

Throughout the past two years, dealers in our sector have played by the rules. When they faced unannounced compliance spot-checks by local councils, I don't recall hearing of any falling foul. They listened to what they were told they needed to do to keep their staff and their customers safe – and they did it.

As I mentioned in my column last issue, we celebrated at the recent Service Dealer Awards those companies and individuals around the network who went above and beyond to do their absolute best for their customers – at a time when they needed them the most. They deserve to feel proud of their actions.

Their leaders on the other hand...

also quite rightly feel that they have been taken for fools by those setting the rules.

Dealerships in our sector faced an incredibly uncertain time throughout the lockdowns. Remember checking those .gov websites to see if you were 'essential' this week or not? What about immediately changing the way your company trades? Building holding pens for customers, setting up in the car park, collecting from the ends of driveways, learning how to do the internet overnight – the list goes on. All highly stressful and burdensome during a time of great worry.

Of course, out of this extraordinary period dealers will have picked up new methods of working that they will choose to continue with as we progress

### Has Sue Gray been able to hand in her completed homework yet?

At the time of going to press we've only had a 12-page PDF, containing about five pages of actual content. If I submitted something equivalent to our editor – let's say a page with around seven words on it – I'd be told not to be so silly and let's see the whole thing.

If this whole partygate fiasco is still dragging on by the time this edition has hit your desks, something has gone seriously wrong. People need to be held accountable and consequences faced.

The past two years have been incredibly tough for everyone. Clearly the bereaved have an undisputable reason to feel betrayed – no one is arguing against that. But business can



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