SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

PLUS: THE LATEST NEWS & PRODUCTS FOR THE **PLANT HIRE & CONSTRUCTION SECTOR**

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September/October 2026

BUILT ON SERVICE

Celebrating 60 years, Vincents tell us why the time was right to break ground on a new brand and how they are confident for the future

40 YEARS OF INNOVATION

Campey Turf Care mark milestone with special event

CELEBRATING 175 YEARS

Arthur Ibbett Ltd hold commemorative open day and consider both the past and the future

100 AND BEYOND

STIHL award dealers in recognition of centenary

CEREALS & HILLHEAD

Reports from ag and plant machinery shows

Letter from the editor

Steve Gibbs

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Welcome to the September/ October 2026 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

You may have noticed that this issue has become somewhat of an anniversary special. Not through any great design on our part, I might add; simply through recent industry events.

Taking the features we present in these pages in ascending order of age we have Campeys marking 40 years, Vincents with 60 clocked up, STIHL with a nice round century, and top of the shot, Ibbetts, with an eye-watering 175!

When you see numbers like that together, it's tempting to conclude that ours is an industry built mostly on tradition. And of course, heritage does count for something. Customers like dealing with businesses that have stood the test of time and earned their reputation over decades rather than months.

But if there's one thing that became obvious while putting this issue together, it's that none of these companies is content to merely live on past glories.

Our cover story on Vincents is a perfect example. Rather than resting on six decades of success, the business is investing in a new branch. At a time when we can be told that everything is moving online and will only involve androids speaking to cyborgs, they're making a significant commitment to bricks and mortar because they believe customers still value having somewhere to visit, somewhere to see products and, perhaps most importantly, somewhere to talk to knowledgeable people.

That's not to say these businesses are ignoring change. Quite the opposite. All these companies, like the rest of the industry, are deeply involved in robotics, battery technology, digital systems and AI. They are embracing new ideas where they add value, while recognising that technology works best when it's backed up by human expertise and genuine customer service.

Perhaps that's the real story behind all these anniversaries. Longevity doesn't come from doing things the way you've always done them. It comes from knowing what should never change – enduring principles like trust, service and relationships – whilst at the same time having the confidence and the skills to evolve where it's needed.

If that's the secret to reaching 40, 60, 100 or even 175 years of trading, then our industry seems to have more than its fair share of businesses that have mastered it.

THE TEAM

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Series of changes to Case dealer network

Following G. & S.J. Johnson Ltd deciding to scale back operation

Pontesbury Tractors Ltd

Startin Tractors Ltd

Case IH has announced a series of changes to its dealer network in Staffordshire which they say will strengthen customer support and ensure long-term continuity of service across a key region.

These moves come following G. & S.J. Johnson Ltd taking the decision to scale back its business operations and relinquishing the Case IH franchise. Consequently, the territory previously served by Johnsons has been integrated into the surrounding Case IH dealer network, with three established dealers expanding their coverage areas.

The updated territory allocations are as follows:

- **Pontesbury Tractors Ltd** - will expand to cover the west of Stafford, including Market Drayton.
- **Startin Tractors Ltd** - will extend its area to include the east of Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and north into Derbyshire.
- **Lloyd Ltd** - will assume responsibility for the north west section of the territory, operating from its Holmes Chapel depot.

The manufacturer says this expansion builds on the strong foundations already established by Pontesbury Tractors Ltd, Startin Tractors Ltd and Lloyd Ltd within their existing territories. The coverage ensures that Case IH customers will continue to receive reliable access to sales, service, and technical support across the region.

David Rapkins, commercial business unit director UK & Ireland, said, "We would like to thank Gary, Susan, Les and all the team at Johnsons for their dedication and support for the Case IH brand over many years, and we wish them well in their future endeavours. This change represents an important expansion for the three surrounding dealers, who are committed to delivering outstanding support to our Case IH customers."

Lloyd Ltd, Cheshire

DEALERS

Balmers appointed main dealer for Ransomes Jacobsen

Significant development for professional turf care across the territory

Balmers GM has been appointed as a main dealer for Ransomes Jacobsen and Cushman, part of the Textron Group.

The dealership described this strategic expansion as marking a significant development for professional turf care across their territory - bringing renewed visibility and access to the Ransomes Jacobsen range.

Balmers says that turf professionals across their territory have had limited opportunity in recent years to see, demonstrate, or evaluate the latest Ransomes Jacobsen equipment which is manufactured in the UK and known worldwide. With themselves now supporting the wider territory, they say that gap is now firmly closed.

The dealership said turf managers, golf courses, local authorities, and sports venues will once again benefit from hands on demonstrations, expert product guidance, and full access to the complete portfolio. Balmers GM has strengthened its offering with a dedicated team of specialist golf and commercial sales representatives, who they say each bring extensive industry experience and deep product knowledge.

Andrew Meeks, group sales manager at Balmers GM, said, "Ransomes Jacobsen has a heritage that means something in this industry. The build quality, the engineering, and the finish these machines deliver is genuinely impressive.

"What's exciting is that many professionals in our region haven't seen Jacobsen equipment in years – and the reaction when they do is fantastic.

"We're proud to represent a British built brand with such pedigree, and we're already seeing strong interest from turf managers who want performance they can trust."

Balmers concluded that this appointment reinforces their position as one of the UK's leading groundcare machinery specialists and marks an exciting new chapter in their 47 year history.

INDUSTRY

STIHL & Kärcher launch battery alliance

L-R: Michael Traub, chairman of the executive board of STIHL AG and Hartmut Jenner, CEO & chairman of the board of management of Alfred Kärcher SE & Co. KG

With AllPro system as the technological foundation

Alfred Kärcher SE & Co. KG and Andreas STIHL AG & Co. KG have announced the launch of a joint battery alliance.

The companies say the aim of this strategic partnership is "to offer professional users a common, high-performance and future-proof battery standard."

The alliance is based around the AllPro battery system developed by STIHL, which will be used in the professional equipment of both brands in future.

Michael Traub, chairman of the executive board of STIHL AG explained, "Professional users need more than just high-performance tools. They need systems that cover a wide range of tasks, reduce complexity and ensure their investment pays off in the long term. This is exactly where AllPro comes in. The partnership with Kärcher expands the scope of our battery system to include further professional applications, thereby creating added value in our customers' day-to-day work."

Hartmut Jenner, CEO & chairman of the board of management of Alfred Kärcher SE & Co. KG, added, "Through the synergy between our equipment, we are creating far more than just a technical solution: we are consistently driving forward the electrification of professional applications, thereby securing a decisive competitive advantage for our customers."

Professional users will in future be able to use the same batteries and chargers for both their Kärcher cleaning equipment and their STIHL power tools. STIHL customers will have full compatibility with the existing AP system - and existing AP batteries can also be used with the new Kärcher battery-powered devices. For Kärcher customers, AllPro is an entirely new platform. However, Kärcher say they continue to guarantee full service, spare parts and battery availability for existing devices from the previous Battery Universe.

The result, say the two companies, is a working environment for professionals in which they can cover the entire spectrum of daily landscaping, forestry and cleaning tasks with just one battery system. The new batteries will be available from STIHL specialist retailers from 1 August 2026. Kärcher will launch the new batteries and the new tools on 1 January 2027.

In addition to these two companies, numerous other partners - including those specialising in forestry winches, equipment carriers and mobile refuelling systems - will be incorporating the AllPro battery system into their equipment. This means that users in the forestry and landscaping sectors, the construction industry, facility management and aid organisations have access to a range of more than 120 devices, all powered by the same battery packs. A charging and energy management system rounds off the offering.

DEALERS

Hamilton Ross Group to acquire again

Henderson Grass Machinery to be bought

Hamilton Ross Group has announced that it has entered into Heads of Terms to acquire Henderson Grass Machinery Ltd, with the transaction expected to complete on 30 September 2026, subject to due diligence and the execution of final agreements.

Henderson Grass Machinery is a long-established family-run business based in Haddington. Current owners Alasdair and George Henderson are now looking towards retirement after many years serving customers across the region.

The company says the proposed acquisition forms part of their long-term strategy to strengthen their regional dealer network and further enhance customer support. The addition of Henderson Grass Machinery would expand the Group's groundcare presence, reinforcing its representation of brands including Kubota, Baroness and Honda.

This move follows the developments earlier this year of firstly bringing all their operations together, followed by the acquisition of Ancroft Tractors Ltd.

Following completion, Henderson Grass Machinery will operate as part of Hamilton Ross Group. The Group also plans to consolidate its existing Macmerry operations into the larger Haddington site, creating a stronger presence across the Lothians while maintaining Henderson Grass Machinery's well-established local identity.

The business says that customers can expect continuity throughout the transition, with the same teams continuing to provide sales, service and support, backed by the additional resources and technical expertise of Hamilton Ross Group.

Commenting on the proposed acquisition, Jamie Gardiner, managing director of Hamilton Ross Group, said, "Henderson Grass Machinery is a long-established name with a loyal customer base. Our focus is on giving those customers the parts, technical support and long-term backing that come with being part of a larger group. We look forward to welcoming the Henderson team into Hamilton Ross Group and building on the excellent reputation they have established over many years."

DEALERS

T Alun Jones & Son expand territory

For New Holland in South East Wales

New Holland has announced an update to its UK dealer network in South East Wales.

From July 2026, T Alun Jones & Son have expanded their territory to South East Wales and will become the exclusive New Holland dealer in this area from July 2027. The dealership will continue to provide sales, service and parts support to customers across the region, and in their new area.

David Rapkins, commercial business unit director for UK and ROI, said, "We would like to thank David Evans Agricultual Ltd for its valued commitment and service to New Holland customers over many years. Our priority throughout this transition is to ensure continuity of support for customers in South East Wales.

"T Alun Jones & Son has a strong reputation for customer care and technical expertise, and we are confident the team will provide the high standards of sales, service and parts support that New Holland customers expect."

OBITUARY

Scott Grieve

Shock death of GGM Group's marketing manager

Scott Grieve, marketing manager at dealership GGM Group, was taken ill at work on Friday July 10th 2026, and despite the best efforts of the company's first aider and the ambulance crew, passed away that afternoon. The company are deeply shocked and saddened by his loss.

Scott had worked for GGM / PSD Groundscare for 12 years and was responsible for organising many of the company's shows, events and other marketing activities as well as many staff social events throughout the year.

Chris Gibson, GGM's managing director, said, "Our thoughts are with Scott's wife Grace and their boys Zach and Theo as they come to terms with their loss."

He continued, "The loss of Scott to us all as a friend and work colleague is very painful but we are very fortunate to have a close and strong team and we will support each other and Grace and their two sons through this - and when the time is right, we will do something special in memory of Scott.

"Hilary and I want to personally recognise and thank the team at Colne for their calm, caring, and professional response to a terrible situation. I never want another Friday afternoon like that again. It was tragic.

"We don't know what happened, that will be determined by a postmortem but I'm taking some comfort from the fact that nobody could have acted faster or done any more.

"We had our first aider with him immediately and paramedics on site within 5 minutes and the air ambulance (who we'd been fundraising for the last couple of years) within 20. Sadly, all to no avail.

"The reaction from our supplier and dealer partners has been incredibly supportive, and the messages of condolence have helped us deal with his sad passing.

"At times like this I think it makes us all reflect on how fragile life is and what is important."

INDUSTRY

Forty dealers now signed by Boss ORV

To represent Aodes

Boss Off-Road Vehicles has appointed Baggleys Machinery as an Aodes dealer for the East Anglia region.

This appointment brings the supplier's count to 40 to provide national coverage for the range of UTVs and ATVs.

Baggleys, based in Norwich, was started by Solly Baggley in 1999, working from a garden shed, and he is well known in the industry for his personalised approach towards his customers. The business has grown and required continuous expansion over the years to become one of Norfolk's largest garden machinery businesses. Solly says he is most proud of having his two sons in a joint partnership in the company, illustrating the true definition of a family-run business.

Phil Everett, Boss ORV managing director, said, "We have worked with Baggleys previously with some of our other brands such as Faunamaster ApS and really value the quality of service and customer loyalty they bring. We are really looking forward to working with Solly Mansfield, Oliver Mansfield and all the Baggleys team again."

L to R: Jddela Miah, Toby Mansfield, Oliver Mansfield, Steph Brooks, Solly Mansfield of Baggleys with Neil Everett of Boss ORV

DEALERS

TNS invest £24,000

Extending discounted tractor servicing

Thurlow Nunn Standen (TNS) have announced that farmers running mixed machinery fleets can now take advantage of discounted servicing and repairs through their expanded TNS Plus programme, following a £24,000 investment in multi-brand diagnostic technology.

TNS Plus servicing and repair programme was originally launched in November 2025 to provide discounted maintenance for older, out-of-warranty AGCO tractors and machinery. Following strong uptake from farmers across East Anglia, TNS say they have identified the opportunity to broaden the scheme to include all machinery makes and models.

The investment in multi-brand and multi-system diagnostic technology now enables them to offer discounted servicing and repairs across a range of manufacturers, including John Deere, New Holland, Claas, Kubota and other brands, in addition to AGCO equipment.

With the scheme, machinery aged 10 years or older qualifies for up to 30% off labour and parts, while equipment aged between six and 10 years receives 20% off labour and parts. The discounts apply regardless of manufacturer.

Adam Cuttridge, head of service and branch operations at TNS, said, "Farmers are under real financial pressure right now, and replacing machinery is simply not an option for many. Keeping older equipment running reliably and cost-effectively is what this programme is all about. It has been great to see so many new faces coming through the door as a result of this initiative. Around a third of those using the scheme are farmers we have not worked with before, or not for a long while. That tells us there is a real appetite for this kind of support, and extending it to all makes and models should open the door to even more."

News in brief:

Read these stories, and more, in full at:
www.servicedealer.co.uk

Pro dealership's new HQ opens

Wildwood Machinery has formally opened a brand-new headquarters at Fair Oak, near Winchester.

"The new headquarters is an important part of our growth plan," said md James Bastian. "We have a team of top-class mechanics supporting our manufacturer partners."

Yamaha extend ATV network

Yamaha Motor UK has officially announced the appointment of Southwest Powersports as the newest authorised dealer for both ATV, motorcycle, and scooter ranges. Based in Bude, Cornwall, the dealership will serve agricultural, utility, and road-riding customers across the Southwest region.

GroundsFest Academy & Kress show innovations

GroundsFest Academy recently held an event for landscaping professionals in partnership with Kress.

Held at Reading FC's training facilities, the free day combined expert presentations with practical demonstrations of the latest advancements in battery-powered equipment, robotics and commercial landscaping technology in a real working environment. The GroundsFest show takes place September 16-17.

Celebrating 175 years of service

Arthur Ibbett Ltd, the Cambs dealership best known for sales and support of Mercedes-Benz Unimogs and of horticultural equipment, marked its 175th birthday with a June open day at its Great Paxton premises. MARTIN RICKATSON spoke with owner and director Tim Ibbett about the past and the future.

It's rather apt that Thomas Ibbett, founder of the business that still bears his surname, should have established his company at a time of great infrastructure development in the area around Huntingdon and St Ives. Today, the expansion of the Cambridge suburbs, the A428/A1 upgrade and the creation of the east-west Cambridge-Oxford rail link are driving the area's economy, but back in the late 1840s it was the construction of nearby sections of the Great North Railway between London and York that was doing the same.

Having worked on the project, Thomas invested his earnings in a blacksmith's shop and forge at Bell's Yard, in St Neots' South Street, developing the business as an agricultural engineer and implement maker. When he died in 1904, his third son, Arthur, took on the business, which was then renamed Arthur Ibbett Ltd.

"My grandfather didn't go to war for medical reasons, so worked on armaments production in Woolwich Arsenal during WW1, and developed lathe skills which he later brought back to the business," says Tim Ibbett, who today is the fifth generation of the family to run the company.

"As the business developed from its early origins, we used to sell just about any agricultural product from any maker through the first half of the 20th century. Cyril, Arthur's son, later expanded this venture, bringing in International Harvester, John Deere and Allis Chalmers equipment from the USA."

In 1968, by which time the company was also selling UK-made David Brown tractors and Claas harvesting equipment from Germany, Cyril's son Val - Tim's father - moved the business to its present 2.6-acre site, as the company and its equipment were proving too big for the town centre premises.

"This was a bare field, and I have vague memories of the first building being constructed here," says Tim.

"I was eight then, and at weekends if there was concreting to do I'd lend a hand. As a small boy, getting involved had a big influence on me. I can remember the first workshop and how massive a little grey Ferguson TE20 looked in it.

"We had some good years during the 1970s, and investments included a new building to the rear of the site. At this time, we developed an association with Lely Import, which was based locally and used some of our yard for additional storage for farm implements."

Tractor franchises

When David Brown and then International Harvester's agricultural divisions were absorbed by Tenneco, Arthur Ibbett had to find a replacement

Tim Ibbett's own MB-trac 800 from 1978 was supplied to a local farmer, and bought back in part-ex for a new MB-trac 1000 in 1983

tractor franchise. The next decade saw the business sign a sales agreement with Mercedes-Benz, and Arthur Ibbett sold one of the first Unimogs in the UK, as well as many MB-trac equal-wheeled tractors.

After Mercedes-Benz ceased MB-trac production in 1991, Ibbetts remained a Unimog dealer, and stayed in the tractor market first with Zetor, and then with Landini, before moving to Renault, and later Kubota.

"With Renault Agriculture being absorbed into Claas in 2003, and then Kubota changing its marketing strategy, we were then absent from the tractor market for a time, but we felt we needed a tractor franchise as part of our strategy to remain diversified and even-out the peaks and troughs of our other sectors," says Tim.

"Earlier this year we found McCormick were looking for dealers, and a space had formed in this area. Its parent firm, ARGO Tractors, is filling gaps in its UK network and its strategy is different to others, appointing small independent dealers and focusing on service satisfaction. We got talking at LAMMA, and latterly signed a franchise agreement.

"Building strong sales will be a challenge - we have a lot of local big arable units favouring main franchises. But we'll focus chiefly on the smaller farms which have remained independent, or have perhaps sold or let their land and need a tractor for light duties. Then there are other potential markets: equestrian, caravan sites, solar farms, environmental agencies. Larger dealers can

Ibbett Unimog customers include utility firms, power networks, municipalities, water and energy businesses, airports, construction, agriculture and arboriculture

Ibbetts signed with McCormick in early 2026, and is targeting markets including smaller farms, equestrian facilities, caravan sites, solar farms, environmental agencies and more

sometimes forget about these other markets, but I feel we have survived as a single outlet company as we've always sought out diversity and new opportunities."

The business holds just a small number of other agricultural franchises, focusing on suppliers of innovative products, says Tim.

"The challenge with these is that in the first year you're finding the market, in the second things take off, in the third you start to get competition, and the fourth and fifth year becomes more challenging as the competition catches up or trends change."

Unimog focus

Today, Ibbetts remains one of a small number of Mercedes-Benz Unimog dealers in the UK, selling and supporting the 4wd tractor/truck hybrids across a wide area of England. Power and utility firms and forestry businesses are the core users, while a small number of large-scale agricultural businesses use Unimogs for tasks such as high-speed haulage, the vehicles offering better on-road characteristics and fuel efficiency than tractors. In addition, through other suppliers such as Hauer and Fiedler, Ibbetts sells complementary equipment including front loaders and various rear platform attachments.

"We cover an area stretching from the A1 to the east coast out to the Wash down to the Channel," says Tim.

"But with large utility firm and power network customers, the Unimogs we look after can be working right out to Cornwall and south Wales. And they are machines that can take us into a whole range of different industries, from utilities, municipalities, water and energy businesses to airports, construction, agriculture and arboriculture."

Annual Unimog sales can vary widely, with larger customers replacing fleets at a time, Tim explains.

"Utility firms may make orders of as many as a dozen, but are likely to not replace them for five or six years, or potentially longer in tough financial times. In between, annual sales average 10-15 units, perhaps dropping to single figures in more challenging times.

"In addition, the Unimog is also in demand as a military vehicle, and the world is not a peaceful place at the moment – things like this can affect supply and delivery times."

It's this product and sector diversification that has been a key contributor to Ibbetts' longevity, believes Tim. The company prides itself on still being able to provide customers with everything from nuts and bolts – a speciality retained since the days of its old hardware shop in St Neots – to a £200,000, 350hp Unimog.

"Different aspects of the business can peak and trough due to the seasons, but we've always tried to have a diversity of products that counters this," says Tim.

Garden machinery growth

"Our outdoor power equipment business is focused on STIHL, Ariens, AS Motor, Weibang, AL-KO and Stiga Mountfield, giving us a strong platform. We've stayed outside the ATV sector, though, as I am wary of the distribution strategies among the main manufacturers.

"We've always been involved in grass and garden machinery – our founders used to make line marking equipment for sports pitches and offer cylinder regrinding. As the agricultural market contracted and the big makers were merging, leaving us fewer options and meaning we were gaining and losing franchises every so often, this and the Unimog business have been a constant.

"We're fortunate that we're 60 miles from the centre of London, from where people move to find more space, and hence need garden equipment. And with the advent of battery power we're developing this sector quickly, selling a range of equipment to fit one power pack, which goes someway to countering the reduced service demand.

"But despite this, our grass machinery workshop remains very busy. That's partly due to the unfortunate closure of other local dealerships such as Mark Weatherhead at Hardwick and Collings Brothers at Abbotsley, while other local independent repairers have stopped repairing outdoor power equipment, and many bigger dealers appear to be less interested in this service sector.

"It doesn't matter how hard you try to encourage garden machinery owners to book in machines for preventative maintenance – they have less money in autumn coming up to Christmas, so the spring period is still very busy with service and repair demands, followed by sustained work into the summer as the season gets into its swing, and then a potential peak again if autumn conditions encourage further grass growth. As with every dealer, the weather has a big effect on our business, and we do a lot of head-scratching pre-season trying to make stocking predictions. And with sales affected by the same factors, it's a challenge to educate your bank manager about this industry as they don't necessarily understand the peaks and troughs of different seasons and years, and their impact on income."

With the core professional turfcare franchises all having long-term relationships with other local dealers, Ibbetts' management has purposely concentrated on machinery for other areas of grounds maintenance, supplementing its expertise in garden machinery.

"But we supply a lot of lighter equipment to local councils including Cambourn – a new town nearby – plus Huntingdon, St Ives, Biggleswade, St Neots and the Cambridge University colleges," says Tim.

"Louise Danbury-Peters, who won the Star of the Dealership award at the 2025 Service Dealer Awards and in 2026 won the Star of the Dealership at the STIHL 100 dealer awards, leads our sales efforts in this area, and while she is relatively new to the sector, she has developed it very quickly.

"She is one of a staff of 20, with one other in horticultural sales, one on Unimog sales – plus me – and four parts people. There are five in the Unimog workshop, and four in horticultural service. We have a great team, and with the combination of road, rail and town/city development in the area, plus a large rural business sector, I'm confident we have a great future supplying the demand for the equipment all this requires."

The Ibbett team – including Tim (centre) and Louise (on his left) celebrating their 175th anniversary event

Managed by Louise Danbury-Peters, a Stihl and *Service Dealer* award winner, outdoor power franchises include Stihl, Ariens, AS Motor, Weibang, AL-KO and Stiga Mountfield

Built on service

(L-R) Nick, Alec & Paul Vincent celebrate breaking ground on site at Vincents' new purpose-built Cullompton branch, just off the M5, opening spring 2027

In the dealership's 60th anniversary year, independent and family-run South West business Vincents, have chosen to expand, breaking ground on a new branch. Alec & Nick Vincent, third generation managing directors, tell *Service Dealer* why the time was right and how they are confident for the future.

South West agricultural, construction and groundcare machinery dealer Vincents broke ground in June this year on a new purpose-built branch in Cullompton, marking a major milestone in its 60th anniversary year.

The third-generation, family-run business supports customers across Cornwall, Devon and Somerset and is investing in a new long-term base just off the M5. The company says the Cullompton branch is due to open in spring 2027.

Designed to support continued growth across Devon and Somerset, the new freehold branch will include larger workshops, improved staff and customer facilities and a showroom showcasing an extensive range of machinery from brands including Kubota, Merlo and Kverneland. It will bring together Vincents' existing Smithaleigh and Wellington operations into a single, modern, permanent site and will operate alongside its established branches in Fraddon and Holsworthy.

Vincents say the new location in Cullompton places the business close to established rural retailers such as Mole Valley and on key routes used by many of its customers, strengthening access and regional connectivity.

Following the announcement of the new depot, *Service Dealer* posed a series of questions to brothers Alec and Nick Vincent, third-generation managing directors of the family-run business to discuss the dealership's longevity, why now was the right time to invest and what the future looks like for their dealership.

Service Dealer: Vincents at 60 years is a significant milestone. Looking back, what do you think has been the biggest factor in the company's longevity?

Alec & Nick Vincent: Without question, service. It has been the constant throughout our history – it was our grandfather's founding principle "service at the centre of everything we do" – and remains the foundation of the business today. From the very beginning, our focus has been on supporting customers properly, being available when they need us and standing behind the products we sell.

Alongside that, we have been fortunate to have an incredibly loyal team. Many of our colleagues have been with us for years, even decades, and those long-term relationships with both staff and customers have played a huge part in getting us to this milestone.

SD: The business is now in its third generation. How do you balance respecting the company's heritage while making decisions for the next 20 or 30 years?

A&NV: We are very conscious of respecting the values that have brought us this far while recognising that the industry is constantly evolving. Our rebrand in 2023 is a good example. Moving from Vincent Tractors to Vincents better reflected our broader offering and diverse customer base, particularly in the construction, groundcare and specialist turf sectors. It modernised the business and better represented what we do today, while remaining true to our heritage and who we are.

We have always preferred evolution over revolution. Agriculture, construction and groundcare are industries that value trust and continuity, so change must happen at the right pace. We are fortunate that both our father, Paul, and grandfather, Ken, remain closely connected to the business - their experience and perspective are invaluable.

SD: How has the role of a machinery dealer changed in the past decade compared to the previous 50 years?

A&NV: Customer expectations have increased significantly. The pressures our customers face have grown, whether that is rising costs, labour challenges or tighter contract requirements, and that pressure naturally filters through to dealerships.

Customers expect faster response times, quicker parts delivery and more technical expertise than ever before. We have responded by stocking more than 2,000 parts, offering an overnight parts service, investing in mobile support teams and developing increasingly sophisticated diagnostic capabilities.

Technology has been one of the biggest drivers of change, and we try to be at the forefront of it. We have customers who still prefer to work entirely offline, while for many others we can remotely diagnose issues on some machines before an engineer even arrives on site. The dealer's role today is far more consultative than it used to be. We are not simply selling machinery; we are helping customers improve efficiency, reduce downtime and make informed decisions about technology investments. As part of this, training for our sales and technical teams is absolutely critical. With the introduction of any new product line, we always make sure that the right aftersales training is in place to make sure we can fully support it.

SD: Breaking ground on a completely new branch is a major commitment. Why was now the right time to make that investment?

A&NV: We have been looking for the right opportunity for some time. As the business has expanded across Devon and Somerset, it became increasingly clear that a long-term investment in the region was needed. The new Cullompton site allows us to create a new permanent home for our Devon operations – which will run alongside our Fraddon, Cornwall and Holsworthy, Devon branches - and deliver an even higher level of service to our customers. It is a long-term commitment both to the region and to the industries we serve.

SD: Why Cullompton?

A&NV: Cullompton offers excellent access to the key routes across the South West, making it ideal for supporting customers throughout Devon. From a logistical perspective, it allows us to improve efficiency and responsiveness, while giving us the visibility, alongside other complementary traders, and accessibility, just off the M5, that are important for future growth. It was simply the right location for where we want the business to be over the next several decades.

SD: You've chosen to invest in bricks and mortar at a time when many businesses are cautious about capital expenditure. Does that reflect confidence in the future of the dealer model?

A&NV: Absolutely. The investment is as much about operational efficiency as it is confidence in the future. By bringing our two existing operations in Smithaleigh and Wellington together into one purpose-built facility, we are simplifying the business, reducing duplication and creating a stronger platform for growth.

The new site has been designed with efficiency and sustainability in mind, incorporating modern facilities and renewable energy technologies. From a family business perspective, owning a strategic site also makes more sense than relying on leased premises in the long term. Most importantly, we continue to see dealerships playing an essential role in supporting customers, particularly as machinery becomes more advanced.

SD: How do you see the changing role of the dealer?

Vincents say being their region's only full-line Kubota dealer is a significant strength

L-R: Nick, Ken, Paul and Alec Vincent

A&NV: As technology evolves, the role of the dealership becomes even more important. We may see fewer physical locations across the industry over time, but dealerships will increasingly become centres of technical expertise, training and customer support. More issues will be diagnosed remotely, and mobile service teams will play an even bigger role. We already see 90% of sales and support delivered directly at customers' premises, but when it comes to making significant investment decisions, customers still want to see products and ranges in person. The showroom, customer service and expertise will continue to have their place. Customers will still need trusted partners who understand the machinery, can provide expert advice and can support them throughout the ownership cycle. Technology does not remove that need; it enhances it.

SD: What will customers notice that's different when the Cullompton branch opens?

A&NV: Customers will benefit from larger workshops, improved infrastructure and a bigger combined team working under one roof. That gives us greater flexibility, faster response times and more capacity to support customers when they need us. The customer experience will improve across every aspect of the business, from sales and parts to service and aftersales support. The location also places us close to key agricultural and commercial centres, making it even easier for customers to access our services.

SD: What opportunities does it create for the business?

A&NV: Its visibility and location improve our reach across Devon and Somerset, while the larger facilities provide room for future growth. It also strengthens our ability to attract and retain talented people by giving them a modern, well-equipped working environment.

SD: How are you approaching the challenge of recruiting for the new branch – and indeed all your facilities?

A&NV: Recruitment remains one of the biggest challenges facing the industry. Fortunately, the new branch will bring together two established teams from our Wellington and Smithaleigh branches, giving us a strong core from day one. Beyond that, we are focused on building our reputation as an employer and creating opportunities for people to develop long-term careers with us. Having strong manufacturer partnerships, quality facilities and an expanding product portfolio helps. The recent addition of brands such as Merlo also creates exciting opportunities for technicians and sales professionals looking to broaden their experience.

SD: What do you think younger people are looking for in an employer today, and how does Vincents try to meet those expectations?

A&NV: People want opportunities, flexibility and a positive working environment. We offer a wide variety of roles across different sectors, whether that is agriculture, construction, groundcare, parts, service or sales so there is a lot of opportunity to develop and diversify.

Training and development are a major focus because people want to feel they are progressing in their careers. As a family business, we also understand the importance of work-life balance. Many of us have young families ourselves, so we are conscious of creating a supportive and flexible environment where possible. For example, we choose our product range carefully, focusing on reliable, quality products, so the likelihood of evening or weekend callouts is rare.

We have also worked hard to build a culture where people enjoy coming to work. We work hard, but we believe it is important to maintain a friendly and inclusive team atmosphere. Nearly half of the 55-strong team have been with Vincents for three years or more and over a third for more than five, with many long-serving colleagues spanning decades – two of our senior engineers were recently recognised with long-service awards by the Royal Cornwall Agricultural Association having each worked with us for over 40 years.

Alec and Nick Vincent are the current managing directors

SD: How are each of your customer sectors - agriculture, construction, groundcare – currently performing for you?

A&NV: The year started relatively slowly across all sectors, but activity picked up considerably from April onwards. Construction and groundcare have both been performing particularly strongly, while agriculture is tracking close to expectations. The markets continue to change quickly, but our focus over the last five to seven years has been maintaining a stable, consistent business through the ups and downs. At present, workshop activity, parts sales and machinery sales are all performing positively.

SD: Have you seen customer buying habits change over the past few years?

A&NV: Definitely. Customers are increasingly looking at finance packages, service agreements and leasing options when making decisions. Particularly in the groundcare sector, leasing has become far more common than it was previously. Many customers are looking for simplicity and predictability. Machinery has become more advanced, and customers often prefer the reassurance of fixed costs, warranty protection and ongoing support rather than taking on all of the responsibility themselves.

SD: Groundcare continues to evolve rapidly, particularly with battery-powered equipment and robotic mowing. How important is that sector becoming for your business?

A&NV: Groundcare is becoming increasingly important, and robotics is currently one of the fastest-growing areas of the business. Commercial robotic mowing has accelerated significantly during the past year, particularly within the golf sector. Many customers are now actively evaluating robotic fleets as part of their replacement programmes. From pedestrian battery equipment through to large commercial robotic mowing systems, we see substantial growth potential in this sector. We are investing heavily in training and support to make sure we are ready for that transition.

Vincents are celebrating their 60th anniversary in 2026

Vincent Tractors at the Royal Cornwall Show 1966, where they have exhibited every year for 60 years

Vincents has been a family-run business since it was founded by Ken Vincent, pictured here in 1966

SD: How much of an advantage does being your region's only full-line Kubota dealer give you?

A&NV: It is a significant strength and reflects a strong relationship we have held since 1987. Many of our customers operate across multiple sectors. A farming business may also have construction activities or commercial groundcare interests, so being able to offer a broad range of equipment under one brand creates real value.

Being a Kubota engine service dealer also gives us additional technical expertise and capability. It strengthens

Merlo telehandlers have recently been added to the dealership's range

our aftersales offering and creates opportunities to support customers across a wider range of applications. Our ambition is to become the dealer of choice across the South West, and having access to the full Kubota range is a major part of that. It sits alongside a wide-ranging product portfolio that includes Kverneland, Joskin, Marshall Trailers and Nugent Trailers across agriculture; Trimax, AS Motor, Trilo, Cramer and Baroness in the groundcare sector; Mecalac and Dynapac in the construction sector and the recent addition of Merlo telehandlers.

SD: What are the biggest challenges facing dealerships now?

A&NV: People and cost pressures. Recruitment, retention and rising labour costs remain significant challenges for dealerships across the country. At the same time, businesses are facing increasing pressure from all directions, including manufacturers, customers and broader economic and legislative conditions. Stockholding costs are at least 50% higher than they were before Covid, which places additional pressure on the balance sheets. The industry as a whole is having to adapt to a fundamentally different cost base than it operated with five or ten years ago.

SD: OK, and what about bright spots? Where do you see reasons for optimism?

A&NV: Technology is probably the biggest reason for optimism. Whether it is robotics, telematics, remote diagnostics or AI, there are huge opportunities to make customers more efficient and help dealerships deliver even better service.

We are also encouraged by the talented young people entering the industry. We have had some great success developing the next generation of technicians and specialists, and that is vital for the future.

Alongside that, we are incredibly excited about the opportunities created by the new Cullompton site and what it means for the business over the coming years.

SD: Looking ahead five to ten years, what do you think the machinery market you operate in will look like?

A&NV: Robotics, autonomy and AI will have the greatest impact. Self-driving technologies, remote diagnostics and telematics will all become more commonplace. Machines will increasingly be able to identify faults before they become serious problems, allowing customers and dealers to respond proactively. One of the most interesting developments will be the combination of traditional engineering skills and digital expertise. Younger technicians entering the industry are incredibly technology-savvy, while experienced engineers bring invaluable practical knowledge. We have seen real success in combining both, and we look forward to continuing to do so.

SD: Finally, if we were sitting down for Vincents' 70th anniversary, what would you hope the business looks like by then?

A&NV: I would hope we would still be known for exactly the same thing we are today: outstanding service.
At the same time, I would expect the business to be at the forefront of emerging technologies, providing expert advice and support across increasingly sophisticated machinery platforms.

If we are celebrating our 70th anniversary while also recognising more long-service milestones for our employees, that would be a fantastic achievement. It would show that we have stayed true to our values, continued investing in our people and remained relevant to our customers for another decade.

SD: Thank you.

40 years of innovation

Campey Turf Care Systems held a special open day to celebrate their 40th anniversary in July

As Campey Turf Care Systems celebrated its 40th anniversary, founder Richard Campey spoke to LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR at their special event to reflect on the machines that transformed sports turf maintenance, the challenges facing today's machinery dealers, and why people will remain at the heart of the industry.

In July I was fortunate to attend Campey Turf Care Systems' 40th Anniversary celebration open day event at their Bosely depot in Cheshire, a short distance from the company's original Marton headquarters. This facility was established to expand beyond sports turf into the agriculture, horticulture, and professional landscaping sectors, while also increasing stock capacity and creating room for further growth.

The company has also acquired some fields around the depot to utilise for demos and storage of equipment, making it an ideal site for their event that attracted well over 400 people.

The informal day centred around several presentations, machinery demonstrations and the opportunity to speak to many companies who had stands to promote their goods and services – including the likes of Makita, Trimax,

A special 40th anniversary livered New Holland tractor

Howardson Group, BIGGA and the GMA to name a few.

Throughout the day Campey staff were on-hand to provide demonstrations of their vast range of machinery. During my time there I caught up with Lee Morgado, a long serving employee having joined Campey Turf Care Systems in 2006 as a mechanic, progressing from the workshop to the company's leadership team in 2019.

Lee mentioned some of the challenges facing all industry companies, specifically that of recruitment and retention. Lee told me, “We really run a tight ship with only 39 employees and currently have a couple of apprentices beginning their careers. But finding the next generation of experienced technicians and mechanics is becoming increasingly difficult for all businesses.

“However, working in this industry has been a revelation for me, giving me many amazing opportunities especially in my role of director – including leading product demonstrations, educational renovation tours, international dealer support, and customer training across the UK and Europe.”

Other leadership changes in recent years at the company have seen in 2019 Richard Campey appointed chairman while Julia Campey stepped into the role of managing director, supported by her brother John Campey, with Lee, being promoted to directors. A new management structure to take the company forward and continue their values and work ethics. That year also saw Campey introduce the first Fleischmann electric mower to their portfolio. In 2020 Nick Brown joined the company as exports manager to oversee all overseas sales.

Machinery was on display from a variety of manufacturers

A milestone achieved

I got the chance to speak to Richard and Julia on the day, before the event started. They were both proud of achieving this milestone and being able to celebrate it in a manner that reflects the way the company has been driven for the past forty years - working with innovative companies and people to launch new machinery products to maintain sports surfaces across the globe.

Richard stated in a recent special edition of Campey News, “I have been incredibly fortunate to have worked with so many talented people, loyal customers and trusted partners who have all played a part in this journey. Together, we have seen tremendous change in our industry, and it has been a privilege to contribute to that progress. As we celebrate this milestone, my thanks go to everyone who has supported Campey along the way. The future of turfcare is bright, and I am excited to see the next generation continue to innovate, educate and push boundaries.”

Richard also expressed his thanks to many of the grounds professionals who helped him develop some of his most innovative products - namely the KORO FTM fraise mower that came to market in 1997. He specifically mentioned the late Steve Braddock, head groundsman at Arsenal FC along with the likes of turf professional legends Paul Burgess, Darren Baldwin and the late Eddie Seward of Wimbledon, who all could see the potential of this pioneering machine.

Q&A with Richard Campey

I started by asking Richard in the last 40 years of trading which have been his top five game changer innovations or machines that he believed had made the greatest improvement to how we manage and maintain turf surfaces?

Richard Campey: Without doubt the top five Campey products that have helped improve pitch maintenance regimes have been the Koro FTM, Dakota Disc spreader, Vredo disc seeder, Air2g2 and VGR Top changer.

SD: Which one are you most proud of bringing to market?

RC: The Koro FTM. It has really changed the way we renovate and repair sports surfaces, with football clubs predominantly using this machine to annually renovate their pitches.

Its introduction in 1997 marked a turning point not only for Campey, but for modern sports turf management. We have been involved with Koro from the very beginning and played a major role in bringing the Field TopMaker to market. Through close collaboration and practical experience within the sports turf industry, we helped introduce and establish the machine as a revolutionary renovation solution for natural turf surfaces worldwide.

As for the others, they all complement one another. Once you have cleaned off the old vegetation with the Field Top maker, you are able to apply top dressing or straight sand accurately with the Dakota Disc spreader, overseed with the Vredo direct Over Seeder and aerate using the Air2g2 prior to or post seed establishment to decompact the ground.

All these game changing products have revolutionised the ever-changing mindset of grounds professionals, thus helping them to be more efficient when undertaking end of season renovations and regular maintenance operations.

SD: What is the timescale generally, from sourcing a new product to readying it for sale?

RC: The timescales can differ massively. We are always looking for potentially new products, especially when we attend shows abroad. It all depends on the size and durability of the product and what we come across.

If we think it's worth investing in, we will have one on test and really try to make sure it's right for our offering and fits in our portfolio. We then start promoting the product and, depending on the interest, it can take anything up to two years to get it established.

SD: In your role as a machinery dealer, which issues make your job more difficult?

RC: Stock control is one of the biggest concerns, in that it can have a massive impact on cashflow and also take up a lot of storage space if you are not able to sell it quickly enough. At the same

Campey staff were on-hand to provide demonstrations of their vast range of machinery

Julia and Richard Campey

time it can restrict sales if you are not able to store enough products. It's quite a balancing act.

Finding staff is also becoming increasingly difficult. Not just for us, but for our industry in general. We run a tight ship with a current staff of 39. We are currently looking for some more staff and have recently taken on some apprentices.

The other issues we face are the constant rising costs of energy, fuel, wages and national insurance. At the end of the day like most businesses, we end up having to pass on these costs to the customer over time.

SD: Do you believe UK dealers get a fair deal from manufacturers?

RC: Most of the time yes, but it can differ with each manufacturer. We try to build long term relationships with our suppliers. Of course, everyone would always like more discount and longer payment terms but you have to work with the deal agreed.

SD: Can UK dealers learn anything from the way overseas machinery dealerships work?

RC: Generally, both home and abroad machinery dealerships work in a similar way. They need to listen to their customers and provide an efficient service. All dealers can vary. Some retain stock, some don't. Some demo more, but in some countries it's not in their culture to do demo days etc. We like to demonstrate our products so we really encourage our distributors to do this.

However, our overseas colleagues do seem to find time to reward staff with more social togetherness, organising works events BBQs and the like to help build a corporate culture. Something I think we do well at Campeys is we try to involve all our staff and make sure they feel part of the company.

SD: How can our industry improve its profile to recruit the next generation into our diverse industry?

RC: BIGGA are promoting the First Green initiative that encourages school children the chance to learn about all the skills required to work on a golf course and allowing then to see at first hand the role of the greenkeeper and the GMA are doing similar programmes to promote our industry. I don't think there is an easy way to get the next generation aware of the opportunities we all offer? However, it is really about time our whole industry came together and run a national campaign to offer a new career pathway into our sector.

SD: Can we learn anything from overseas dealers in terms of recruitment and retention?

RC: Just being visible and letting people know the opportunities available within the industry has got to help. Not every country or dealership does this, but we should.

Regarding retention this doesn't seem to be too much of a problem for us, as most of our employees have been with us for many years. I would say it is not all about paying the most, you need to have a good working environment as well as having the opportunity to enjoy and have the freedom to do your job.

SD: Will you be delving more into robotic and battery driven products in the coming years?

RC: We are in a small way with some smaller robots. We're also looking to bring in the Pickr later in the year which is a productive robotic ball collector from Canada.

SD: Where do you see the industry going in the next five to ten years?

RC: Expectations are still extremely high and depending on legislation regarding the use of chemicals, we may have to re-adapt our management regimes to cater for the loss of any potential banned chemical active ingredients.

Also, a lot more robotics will begin to flood the marketplace. But for me, you cannot beat the eye for detail of a skilled sports turf operator who is on hand to solve any occurring problem during the maintenance and management of their amenity and sports facilities.

SD: Thank you

To sign off, I believe that it is thanks to innovators like Richard Campey that we have been blessed with such a plethora of machinery coming into our sector since the mid-1980s. It goes without saying that many sports clubs back then had limited kit, with most tailored around mowing grass. Since the conception of Campey Turf Care Systems we benefit from a fine range of tailored machinery, focused on renovating, aerating and top-dressing sports pitches.

Well done to Richard, Julia, Lee and John for putting on yet another fabulous open day. On behalf of those attending, I'd like to say that we all had a relaxed and enjoyable day celebrating your 40th anniversary.

Campeys said they were proud of achieving this milestone and being able to celebrate it in a manner that reflects the way the company has been driven for the past forty years

100 and beyond

A century after Andreas Stihl set out to make hard work easier through engineering, the manufacturer brought dealers together not only to celebrate its history, but also to explain how investment in marketing, aftersales support and battery technology will shape the future of the business. *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS reports.

As well as looking back, the event considered the future for the company and its dealers

While much of the country wilted in the late-June soaring temperatures, around 200 STIHL dealers were enjoying rather more comfortable conditions inside the air-conditioned surroundings of Contra House in Camberley.

They had gathered from across the UK to celebrate the manufacturer's 100th anniversary. But while the centenary naturally provided an opportunity to reflect on the company's history, there was an equally strong emphasis on where the business, and crucially, its dealer network goes next.

The event itself struck a good balance. Dealers were able to tour the headquarters and distribution facility, hear from the senior management team and enjoy an awards ceremony hosted by television gardener Joe Swift that was split between the afternoon conference and the evening celebrations. (you can find details of all the award winners on page 30).

A century of partnership

Managing director, Kay Green, opened proceedings by reflecting on the journey from Andreas Stihl's original vision in 1926 of making hard work easier through engineering and innovation, to the global business the company has become today. While she highlighted the importance of product development, reliability and long-term support, one theme surfaced repeatedly throughout her presentation - the role of the dealer network.

Kay spoke about dealers as the people who bring the brand to life, providing the advice, technical expertise and customer service that builds trust and loyalty. Looking ahead, she outlined plans for increased marketing investment over the next two years, continued development of battery products, expansion into new customer groups and markets, and an ongoing commitment to sustainability. Her message was that building greater awareness would generate more demand, which she said would create more opportunities for their network.

Channel sales manager, Tim Rogers, then took delegates through the history of STIHL GB itself. Beginning with the establishment of the UK subsidiary nearly 50 years ago, he charted the company's growth through successive premises, warehouse expansions and key product introductions, arriving at today's purpose-built Contra House facility.

Along the way he highlighted landmark machines, the arrival of battery technology, significant turnover milestones and the steady growth of the business. As with Kay's presentation, dealer partnerships featured prominently as a

Technical training manager, Ben Beaumont showing off a chainsaw powered by a new AllPro battery at one of the roadshows

constant throughout that development.

Head of marketing, Simon Hewitt, provided an entertaining trip down memory lane, using decades of advertising campaigns to show how STIHL has evolved its marketing alongside changing customer behaviour. From colourful campaigns in the 1960s and 70s, to the launch of the company's first website and the growth of dealer e-commerce, there were plenty of nods of recognition around the room.

His broader point, however, was a serious one. However good the products may be, customers first need to know the brand exists and, crucially, where to buy it. Marketing, he explained, has always been about raising awareness while directing customers towards the dealer network. Today that increasingly means television, digital advertising and supporting dealers' own online sales channels.

Also touched on by Nathan Kelly, technical services manager, was the concept of the STIHL Premier Servicing Dealer initiative which the company is undertaking. I asked for some more information about this post-event and was told that to qualify, dealerships must meet a series of standards designed to ensure high-quality aftersales support. These include carrying out an initial inspection of any STIHL product within two working days of receipt, using a digital booking system to manage repairs, maintaining a dedicated handheld repair area equipped with the required STIHL specialist tools, and ensuring workshop technicians are trained to the manufacturer's highest standards or are progressing through its training pathway.

Dealers must also hold a good stock of routine service parts, operate a compliant battery recycling system, clearly promote their Premier Servicing Dealer status, provide customers with online information about servicing options, and take part in twice-yearly service performance reviews with STIHL.

For dealers who meet these criteria and once status is agreed and assigned to a dealership, that specific location will be entitled to an elevated warranty labour rate. I have been told that this equates to around a 10% uplift on standard warranty rates.

Next generation battery power

Another key presentation on the day came from product manager Paul Hicks, focusing on the evolution of the manufacturer's battery portfolio and their plans for the next phase of its development. He outlined how each of the brand's battery platforms has expanded in recent years, from additions to the AS range through to the continued growth of the AK system, which he described as an important route for attracting new customers while retaining existing users within the STIHL ecosystem.

Much of the attention, however, centred on professional battery equipment. Paul reflected on how the AP platform has developed since its introduction, with a growing range of tools, batteries and charging solutions providing an alternative to petrol-powered equipment for both professional users and owners of larger properties.

Looking ahead, he introduced delegates to AllPro, the manufacturer's next-generation 40-volt professional battery platform. Describing it as a significant step forward for the company's battery offering, Paul explained that it has been designed to build on the existing AP system while creating opportunities for further product development in the years ahead.

After the event, STIHL announced a partnership with Kärcher for the new battery range that you can read about in this issue's news pages.

And perhaps that's what stood out most across the day. Yes, there was plenty of history. A century in business is undeniably a significant achievement and one worth celebrating. But the emphasis undoubtedly was on what comes next for the company and their dealers - whether that meant investment in marketing, new technologies, changing customer expectations or the opportunities presented by battery equipment.

Taking AllPro on the road

To underline this, after the big day at Contra House, the company took its AllPro roadshow around the country, giving dealers and professional end-users the opportunity to see the new battery platform first-hand and understand where it fits within their businesses, keeping their offering fresh.

Following the 100 event, the manufacturer took their new AllPro batteries on a series of roadshow dates for dealers and end-users to learn more

Kay Green addressed the delegates

I attended one of the days, back at Contra House, where technical training manager, Ben Beaumont, outlined what the company believes is its most significant battery development to date.

Central to his presentation was the introduction of six new AP batteries. Two are updated versions of the existing AP 20 and AP 30, retaining the same lithium-ion cell technology but with refreshed branding, while four new Performance Series batteries introduce tabless cell technology designed to deliver higher power output, faster charging and significantly longer service life.

Ben was keen to reassure dealers that the move to marketing the range as a '40V Max' system does not represent a change in voltage or compatibility. The batteries remain part of STIHL's existing 36V AP platform and continue to work with current AP tools, with the revised terminology simply bringing marketing into line with much of the wider cordless equipment market.

The biggest technical advance, Ben explained, comes from the new tabless cell design used in the Performance Series batteries. Compared with the existing AP 300 S, the flagship AP 300 P offers substantially higher power output, increased energy capacity, faster charging and more than double the expected service life, while adding only around 100g in weight.

A major emphasis throughout the presentation was reducing the overall cost of battery ownership. Ben suggested the combination of rapid charging and extended battery life means professional users may need fewer batteries in daily use, rotating just two or three batteries rather than carrying a much larger fleet. Using STIHL's new AL 1802 high-speed charger, the AP 300 P can be recharged to 80% capacity in around nine minutes.

Longevity was another feature emphasised. Ben said the new Performance Series batteries are designed for more than 3,000 charging cycles before falling to 80% of their original capacity, which is more than double the lifespan of the previous generation. For many professional users, he suggested, this could mean the batteries outlasting the tools themselves.

Rather than encouraging customers simply to buy the largest battery available, STIHL has also positioned the range around different applications. The lightweight AP 100 P is aimed at equipment such as hedge trimmers where operator fatigue is critical, while the AP 200 P is intended as an all-round professional battery. The AP 300 P is designed for the most demanding handheld equipment, including high-performance chainsaws and blowers where sustained power is essential.

The roadshow also introduced a revised charging range, including the new AL 1802 dual-bay fast charger and updated multi-charging options. Ben stressed that the different chargers do not affect battery health, with the choice coming down simply to charging speed and the operational requirements of the user.

Throughout the presentations, the company's message was that AllPro is intended to offer more than just incremental improvements. By combining greater power, quicker charging and significantly longer battery life within a fully compatible AP platform, the company believes the range offers dealers a stronger proposition as professional users continue their transition towards battery-powered equipment.

For those who made the journey to Camberley for the 100th event or to one of the roadshow dates around the country, the days served as both a celebration of what has come before as well as a look ahead to what can be achieved during century number two.

Dealers and invited guests gathered at STIHL's Contra House hq in Camberley for their 100th anniversary event

Dealers awarded

As part of century celebrations


Winner of the top STIHL 100 Award was Ron Smith & Co. L-R: Tim Rogers, STIHL GB channel manager; Mark Smith, md Ron Smith & Co; Kay Green, md STIHL GB; and TV gardener, Joe Swift

STIHL GB also celebrated the achievements of its dealer network at the Conference.

The STIHL Dealer Awards were hosted by garden designer, broadcaster and writer Joe Swift, who presented awards recognising excellence across the dealer network.

Among the major winners were **Sam Turners & Sons**, who received the Marketing Excellence Award, **Gammies Groundcare**, who received the Leading Battery Dealer award, and **Louise Danbury-Peters from Ibbetts** who was recognised with the Star of the Dealership Award. Additional awards were presented across a range of categories celebrating outstanding business performance, customer service, and technical expertise.

The final award of the night, the STIHL 100 Award, was presented to **Ron Smith & Co.** for all-round excellence, recognising their consistent growth and commitment to the highest standards across every part of the business. As well as the award itself, director Mark Smith was presented with a Centennial Edition MS 500i chainsaw, which was launched in May to celebrate the company's anniversary.

After the event, the dealership reflected on its success, posting on their website, "Winning this award reinforces something our customers already know. Buying a machine is only part of the story. Benefiting from expert guidance, ongoing servicing and long-term support is equally important."

They went on to say, "Our relationship with STIHL has always been based on shared principles. Those shared values have helped shape the way we do business for many years.

"Like STIHL, we believe that investing in people, maintaining the highest standards and continually improving the customer experience are all essential for long-term success.

"Whether someone is buying their very first hedge trimmer or investing in professional forestry equipment, they deserve knowledgeable guidance from people who genuinely understand the products. That is exactly what our customers receive every day."

They concluded, "Being named STIHL's 100 Year Dealer and Leading Garden Machinery Dealer reflects exactly what we aim to deliver every single day.

"We are incredibly proud of this recognition, but even more proud of the trust our customers place in us every day."

Kay Green, managing director of STIHL GB, added, "As we celebrate 100 years of STIHL, it is fitting that we recognise the people who have played such an important role in our success. Our dealer network has always been at the heart of the STIHL business, providing customers with trusted advice, expert support and exceptional service.

"The STIHL 100 Dealer Conference was a fantastic opportunity to get together, reflect on our shared achievements and celebrate the outstanding individuals and businesses that continue to set the standard across the network. Congratulations to all of this year's winners and finalists on their well-deserved recognition."

The full list of award winners

- Marketing Excellence Award
  Sam Turner & Sons
- Leading Parts & Accessories Dealer
  Hire Services (Southern)
- Customer Service & Aftercare Award
  Sam Turner & Sons
- Leading Retail Experience Award
  Balmers
- Technician of the Year
  Wayne Bodinnar, Tudor Environmental
- Star of the Dealership
  Louise Danbury-Peters, Ibbetts
- Leading Garden Machinery Dealer
  Ron Smith & Co
- Leading Battery Dealer
  Gammies Groundcare Ltd
- Leading Commercial Solutions Dealer
  Denbigh Plant Services
- Leading Forestry & Arb Dealer
  Gustharts
- STIHL 100 Award
  Ron Smith & Co

Plant Hire & Construction

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Latest news for the sector *Edited by Dan Gilkes*

Dan Gilkes, editor of *Service Dealer's* plant hire and construction machinery section, says tax reforms have sent UK pick-up sales into freefall, but for dealers who rely on these versatile workhorses, the latest generation of electric, hybrid and commercial-spec trucks could provide a welcome way forward.

Rumours of their demise...

It is probably fair to say that the majority of plant and equipment dealers, plant hire companies and contractors have a number of double-cab pick-ups in their roadgoing vehicle fleets. A combination of reasonable on-road manners, rough terrain off-road capabilities, plus the ability to carry a tonne of equipment and to tow a 3.5-tonne trailer, make the humble pick-up a must-have.

This is particularly true for dealers of compact equipment, as smaller mini excavators, compact wheel loaders and skid steers, can all be delivered to customers behind a pick-up, offering major fuel savings over a full-size truck.

However, there is no doubt that as specification levels improved and ever-more luxurious pick-ups arrived on the market, many people moved across from regular company cars to trucks, in part to avoid growing Benefit-in-Kind company car tax, as pick-ups were taxed as commercial vehicles on a flat rate. That all changed in April of last year, as double-cab pick-ups were reclassified as cars for BiK, which meant that a driver's monthly car tax was directly related to the CO^2 output of the truck.

In addition, as the double-cab trucks were no longer classified as plant and machinery, they became ineligible for 100% Annual Investment Allowance, so had to be written down on the books as a car.

Prior to that date, a pick-up had a fixed taxable benefit of £4,020, which worked out as £804 a year for a lower rate taxpayer and £1,608 for a 40% taxpayer. Under the new rules, the taxable benefit rose to 37% of list price, with a basic taxpayer now coughing up £2,960 a year and a 40% taxpayer looking at a bill of around £5,920 a year on a £40,000 truck.

Unsurprisingly, the pick-up market has been decimated. It fell by 57.6% in June alone versus last year and now represents just 3.7% of the light commercial vehicle market. For those who really need a pick-up though, there are a couple of possible solutions.

As with a car-derived van, if you don't have seats or side windows behind the driver, a pick-up reverts to being taxed as a commercial vehicle. All manufacturers are therefore offering a version where they remove the rear seats from their double-cab trucks, panel over the rear side windows, fit a compact load bed where the rear seat used to sit and add a bulkhead between the driver and this new storage area. If you don't need to carry more than one passenger, this is an ideal solution, providing the driver with a secure storage area as well as lowering monthly tax.

Another alternative is to lower the vehicle's CO^2, by moving away from diesel power. Over the last two months I have been driving a fully electric Isuzu D-Max EV, a Toyota Hilux BEV and a KGM Musso EV. I've also had Ford's Ranger PHEV, with its combination of petrol engine and battery electric drive, in for a week. This month BYD also announced the Shark pick-up, which uses a hybrid drive with a battery powering front and rear electric motors and a compact petrol engine working primarily as a battery charging generator.

Full electric trucks will pay a flat BiK rate of just 4%, while the hybrid pick-up tax rates vary from 7-16%, depending on how many miles can be driven on the battery alone. It would seem that rumours of the pick-up's demise, have been somewhat exaggerated.


Full electric trucks will pay a flat BiK rate of just 4%, while the hybrid pick-up tax rates vary from 7-16%

Hillhead delivers on all fronts

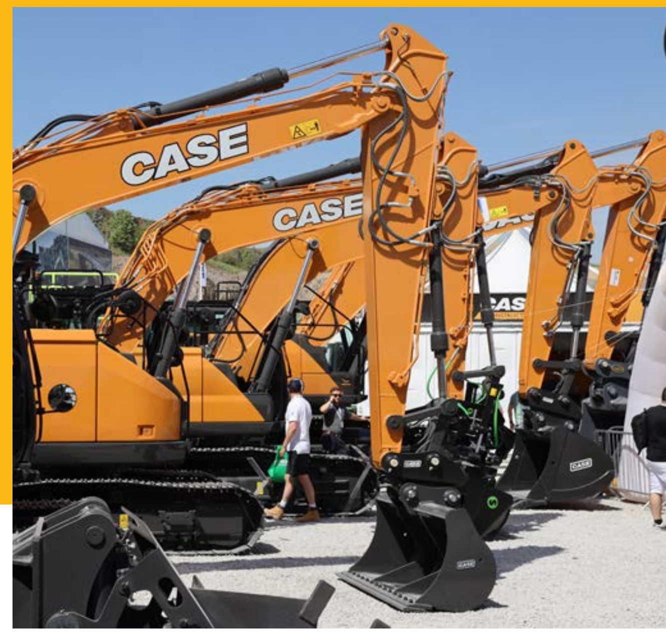
More than 20,000 visitors descended on Hillhead 2026 to see the latest construction machinery in action, but alongside the headline launches it was clear that dealer support, technology and aftermarket services remain just as important as the equipment on display, says DAN GILKES

Despite having to endure three of the hottest days of the year so far, around 20,000 visitors made their way to the Hillhead Quarry, near Buxton in Derbyshire, in the last week of June. They came to see the latest equipment, technology and services available from more than 600 exhibitors, as the UK's largest dedicated quarry exhibition once again took over the site, recording the biggest attendance in the show's 44-year history.

While heavy aggregate extraction equipment remains the biggest draw for visitors, with working displays of excavators, loading shovels, dump trucks and a wide range of crushing and screening equipment taking place around the live quarry face, the focus for the show is actually wider than being solely on aggregate quarrying.

What happens to those aggregates, once they have been dug from site or created from recycled material, has become equally important. Many exhibitors are more involved in cement and asphalt production, road and rail construction or general civil engineering and plant hire.

In a year that has seen the majority of construction equipment manufacturers launching new and improved machinery at the Bauma exhibition in Munich, in April, Hillhead offered a chance for UK contractors and plant hire companies to see the latest machinery in action. Quarry owner Tarmac prepares the working face of the quarry prior to the show, creating freshly blasted rock for a wide selection of excavators and loaders to work in. Manufacturers add their demonstration equipment to a working fleet throughout the event, digging and loading into competitive haulers and crushing equipment as they show off the capabilities of their latest models. This year the organisers had also created Hillhead TV, putting the spotlight on individual machines in a curated display, while sales teams provided a commentary with specification highlights of the machines in action on giant screens in the working area.



Loaders

Certainly, the range of equipment on show couldn't have been wider, with the likes of JCB and LiuGong, Case and Sany all showing new or upcoming wheeled loading shovels. **JCB's** new flagship 480 and 490 loaders are not yet for sale to customers, but the machines, which boast payloads of 8-tonnes and 9-tonnes respectively, point the way to future JCB models.

Powered by a 250kW (335hp) Cummins X12 diesel engine, the machines drive through a ZF continuously variable transmission (CVT) for maximum efficiency in load and carry operations.

The company has also patented a new loader arm design, combining the breakout force of a conventional Z-bar linkage, with the visibility and parallel lift characteristics of a tool-carrier set-up. Both machines are offered with standard or high-lift loader arms, with the longer 5m pin height design providing easier loading into high-sided tipping trailers.

Chinese company **LiuGong** had its 838TE electric wheeled loader on display, among a range of battery-powered models. This 14.6-tonne machine boasts a 193kWh battery pack, promising an eight-hour run time. Standard bucket capacities are 1.9-2.4m^3 and the machine has a rated payload of 3.8-tonnes. Also on offer from LiuGong were the 925FCR short-radius 25-tonne excavator, the 924FE electric excavator, the 40-tonne capacity 8110TE wheeled loader, the DR50CE electric mining truck and a 4280DE full electric motor grader.

There was an electric loader on show at **Sany** too, in the shape of the SW956E. This 20-tonne machine is powered by a 350kWh battery and it offers a 5.8-tonne rated payload with bucket capacities of 2.7-5.0m^3. At Case, the company was showing both its compact 421G wheeled loader and the larger 921G+. The firm's 1121G+ shovel was at work on the demonstration area.

Though track-mounted, rather than wheeled, **Bobcat's** T650 compact tracked loader made its first UK appearance at Hillhead. This Stage V-powered machine is powered by a 55kW (74hp) 2.4-litre engine and it boasts a 1,192kg rated capacity for its vertical lift path loader arms. Designed as a tool carrier, the tracked loader features the Bob-Tach attachment system with optional high-flow auxiliary hydraulics.

Excavators

Hyundai has added to its Next Generation crawler excavator line, with the launch of the HX210L. At around 21-tonnes the machine is based on the slightly larger HX230L, but with a specification specifically designed to appeal to the UK's plant hire market. While the machine uses the same four-cylinder Hyundai diesel engine as the HX230L, it employs a single wastegate turbo, rather than the twin turbo set-up of the larger model. Likewise the hydraulic system makes use of proven pilot servo technology, rather than the full electro-hydraulic (FEH) system used on bigger Next Generation machines.

Fellow HD company **Develon** offered UK customers a first view of its Series-9 crawler models, in the 37-tonne DX360LC-9 and the 23-tonne DX230LC-9. These models do feature FEH hydraulic controls and a Develon engine,

delivering increased power with a cut in fuel consumption across the range.

JCB's biggest crawler excavator made its first appearance at the show. The 520X is a 52-tonne model, topping the Heavyline range alongside the 370X and the 420X. Powered by a Cummins X12 diesel engine, the machine boasts 298kW (400hp). The machine is built in Earthmoving Pro trim or in Heavy-Duty Pro, with additional guards and protective plates.

Recently appointed UK dealer McHale Plant Sales was keen to show the full range of **Komatsu** machinery, including the latest PC220LCi-12. Said to be the most advanced excavator that it has yet designed, Komatsu's 22-tonne machine claims an 18% improvement in fuel efficiency, while delivering up to 7% more arm and bucket digging force.

Dump trucks

One of the more unusual articulated dump trucks at the show this year was **Hyundai's** HA45A 4x4. While the majority of ADTs have a six-wheel drive layout, to ensure that they keep moving through the roughest terrain, the two-axle HA45A is more like a rigid truck in appearance, with larger twin wheels at the rear.

The hauler is designed to work in quarries and longer hauls where there is an established hard base haul road. While this is more commonly the preserve of rear-wheel drive rigid trucks, the articulated HA45A can cope with wetter weather and its all-wheel drive layout will provide added traction on softer, slippery terrain.

JCB looks set to make a return to the ADT market, showing the soon to be launched 715 at the event. This 9.3-tonne, two-axle ADT has a $7.1m^3$ dump body and can handle a 12,750kg payload. Powered by a 129kW (172hp) JCB engine, the truck drives through an eight-speed powershift transmission with active torque lock for maximum fuel efficiency.

The company has also joined a growing number of manufacturers offering a rotating operator station in its largest site dumper. The 9T Dual Drive is a conventional cabbed 9-tonne site dumper. However, the centrally-mounted operator seat can be rotated, to allow the operator to face the direction of travel at all times. This removes the risk of poor forward visibility often experienced with larger site dumper models, where the load typically sits in front of the driver.

Crushing and screening

Aggregate production relies as much on crushing, screening and washing equipment as it does on excavators and haulers. A host of manufacturers, like **Terex, Astec, McCloskey, AggPro, Polygonmach, MDS** and **Premiertrak** all had processing machinery on display. As with the digging and loading equipment, carbon reduction is a major focus for this sector of the industry, with hybrid diesel electric, and full electric power systems an increasingly popular option.

Technology and services

Caterpillar dealer Finning made a welcome return to the show this year, but while the company had machinery on display, the focus was very much on technology, digital solutions and aftermarket support. That included the VisionLink telematics platform, the Fuel Promise initiative and enhanced Service Commitment, that includes a money back parts and repair guarantee.

Indeed, while heavy equipment working at the quarry face is always impressive, service, back-up and dealer support remain an essential consideration for any equipment operator. And, despite the increasing digitalisation and automation of the industry, face to face meetings between manufacturers, dealers and customers, at events like Hillhead, remain an equally vital part of the business.

Apprenticeship and training funding rules change yet again!

KEITH CHRISTIAN revisits a subject that has been subject to change once again, following Andy Burnham becoming PM. Here he looks at what funding opportunities are currently available to dealers.

Sometimes you feel like you are in a washing machine or tumble dryer just going around and around, bashing your head against the sides, and when you come up for air there is a new or changed government or a new prime minister with new ideas and new ways of wanting to do things. For crying out loud, why couldn't the previous lot get it right!

I am sorry to do this to anyone who reads about apprenticeship funding or needs to understand what is going on with changes being made by our new prime minster. This all may have moved on more by the time this edition of *SD* hits the streets though?!

Recruitment, training and apprenticeships have been a backbone of the content in this magazine and I myself have written a number of articles on this in an effort to keep the dealer network aware of what is going on and hopefully to help with recruitment across all ages and skills levels. Most recently in the *May/June 2026* edition of *SD* I provided a piece about the changes being made by the Labour Government of the time. I will use some extracts from that in this piece that are still relevant but changes are being made with the shake up within the government since the arrival of Andy Burnham.

For anyone in our industry looking to recruit staff or take on an apprentice it is important that they understand what is available in terms of funding and support, and also for them to use resources that are available within the industry or from training providers.

Launched in April 2026 the Growth And Skills Levy is the new name for the old (2017) Apprenticeship Levy or National Training Levy. This was and still will be funded by businesses that have a pay bill of over £3 million and they will continue to pay a 0.5% tax of their pay bill into the levy. The old levy was used to fund apprenticeships only. Changes were made early this year for half of this levy to be used to fund training outside of apprenticeships. The Growth And Skills Levy is said to provide greater flexibility for employers in how they spend their training funds.

There is a lot of detail to cover and my article in *May/June 2026* goes someway to providing some of the relevant detail. However, some of this has now changed again and I hope it is to the betterment of dealers wanting to employ apprentices and upskill their existing staff. There are certainly better funding opportunities for dealers to employ apprentices and bring in new blood to the industry.

APPRENTICE UPDATE

In a press release published on the 28th July 2026 it was announced that;

"Government invests in young people with more opportunities close to home"

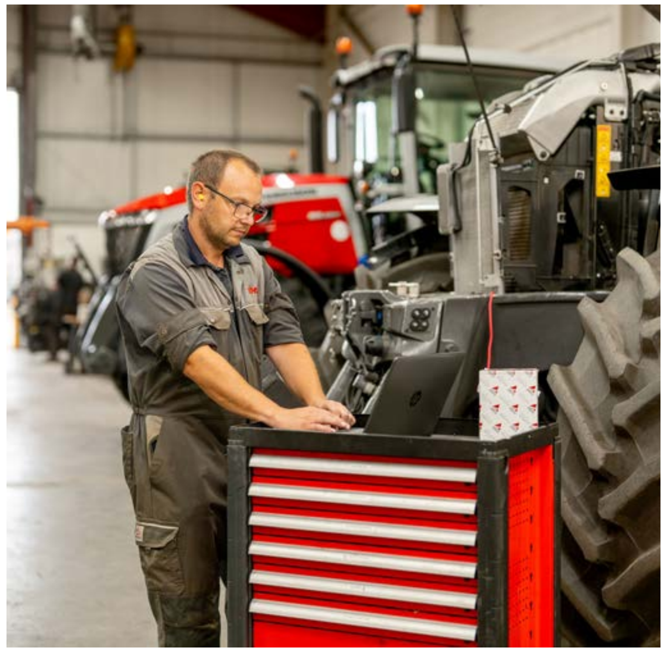
This explained -

- New bursary supports young people by removing a key financial barrier to apprenticeships.
- Thousands more college places to expand access to skills and training close to home.
- Free apprenticeship training for all eligible under-25s from August, up to £8,000 in support for SMEs hiring young apprentices, and NICs relief for apprentices under 25 will help deliver 50,000 new youth apprenticeships.
- Through new financial support, more college places and greater access to apprenticeships, the package will help more young people develop the skills local employers need, connect to the technical pathways being created in their area, and access the opportunities needed to build successful careers.
- Building on today's wider reforms giving 14-year-olds greater access to technical learning and meaningful work experience, these changes will help more young people aged 16 to 19 continue developing practical skills and real-world experience as they move into the next stage of education and training.
- A new bursary, worth up to £4,500 per year per household, will remove a barrier that can otherwise discourage young people from taking up an apprenticeship, helping them build the skills and independence that lead to long-term, well-paid work. Targeted at certain families on Universal Credit and is funded through a £1 billion investment in the Growth and Skills Levy.

It was said that this announcement *"is part of the biggest overhaul of support for young people in a generation. Alongside greater technical learning, more work experience, new vocational qualifications, and wider reforms to help young people into work, it will create a clearer journey from the classroom into a skilled career."*

This is being done to reduce the one million unemployed young people in the country and get more of them into work. That is one in eight young people are not in education, employment or training aged 18 to 21.

The announcement confirmed, *"The Growth and Skills Levy will also prioritise additional apprenticeship funding for employers to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to hire apprentices. SMEs who do not pay the Levy will have 100% of apprenticeship training costs covered by the government for apprentices under 25, phasing out the 5% employer investment that was previously required."*



Eleanor Chambers, who is part of Youth Employment UK's Policy & Research team said, "If your organisation is an SME, start learning how you can benefit from 100% funding to bring on a young apprentice. If you have previously assumed your business was too small to run an apprenticeship programme, the new full funding options could be a game-changer."

Taking a short piece from this magazine's mystery columnist, The Sprocket's article in *SD* in March 2024, he wrote, *"Don't be frightened by investing in an apprentice or a trainee. Make it a part of your longer term strategy and accept the cost of it as a longer term investment in the future of your business. Some may not work out but if you don't try, the future may be bleaker than you think. If you need help check out Government websites for apprenticeships or contact one of the industry trade associations, BAGMA, IAgrE or the AEA and try your local college as well as they may have suitable candidates at some point in time."*

The more recent changes made by the government should encourage more employers to look at apprenticeships to help them futureproof their businesses. Talk to a neighbouring dealer who has an apprentice or two if you have not gone down this route. Talk to your local agricultural college who may be able to help you now or with a later intake of students.

There is also talk about returning to the previous culture of work experience for younger people, maybe from 14 and above, to help them to decide on careers or further education. Steering younger people toward a career using work experience is nothing new. Certainly, influencing a young person's understanding of careers could start from the age of eight or so. There are many rules surrounding this area but if it is to be encouraged by government policy it becomes easier to take on work experience candidates and help them out with their future careers.

The scene at Cereals

John Deere used Cereals to show updated 6R and 6M tractors, plus its new front-cab 500R SP sprayers

Taking place beyond eastern England for the first time in many years, June's Cereals event was hosted by a Cotswolds farmer whose TV fame may have helped draw a few extra visitors. Much else remained unchanged, though, including the show's role as a launchpad for new machines. MARTIN RICKATSON rounds up some key developments of interest to dealers.

From the sprayer demo arena to the crop plots and the machinery lines, there was little to differentiate this year's Cereals event from those previously - until visitors looked down at their feet.

The Cotswold brash soils of Curdle Hill Farm, at Chadlington in west Oxfordshire, provided an illustration, if one were needed, of the additional challenges some arable farmers have faced this year on top of rising input costs and underperforming commodity prices – namely the impact of a drought year on poorer soils in particular. Growers on clay saw lack of rain impacting crops by late spring, but those on less moisture-retentive ground were even harder hit, and at an even earlier stage.

Many will, of course, know the venue by its title for television, Diddly Squat - still an accurate description for what many farms are earning from their arable enterprises, given the widening disparity between input costs and commodity prices, plus diminishing government support. Some 700 exhibitors, though, attended Cereals 2026, despite the arable industry downturn impacting marketing budgets. And with around 25,000 visitors seeking out new developments - many of whom have been in a mood to invest judging by recent tractors registration figures - there was a fairly buoyant mood among standholders.

John Deere 2027 updates

Cereals was the UK launchpad for multiple 2026-27 John Deere products. New 8R/8RT/8RX tractors follow the launch of larger models of up to 634hp, with 280-410hp wheeled models and 310-410hp 8RT twin-track and 8RX four-track versions available with e23, AutoPowr or eAutoPowr (on 370 and 410 models) transmissions. An updated CommandView 4 cab has soft-close doors, push-button start with pin code protection, 320° wiper and wireless phone charging. The new seat has electronic controls for both seat and CommandArm armrest, and the latter is available with either CommandX Plus or CommandX Pro joysticks. On 8RX models, a new CommandView 4 Plus cab option removes the right-hand console, for greater legroom and visibility. New Reactive Command Steering provides adjustable return-to-centre functionality, while variable steering ratios based on tractor speed cut required steering effort.

There are also four updated 'Large Frame' 6R 180-6R 240 models, and two 'Xtra-Large Frame' 6R 230 and 6R 260 variants, the latter producing up to 305hp with boost and incorporating a new e19 transmission, blending the 24F/24R PowrQuad with dual clutch technology to create a 19-speed full powershift. Power-to-weight ratio of the 6R 260 is 30.5kg/hp, and wheelbase is 2,800mm. Meanwhile, updates to the 17-model 6M 95 to 6M 220 'standard spec' line include a revised cab layout and – for six-cyl models – optional e19 full powershift.

Also new from John Deere is an HDX 15m/50ft draper header for its X9 combines. Developed specifically for Europe, it is hinged in three sections, and features 1.2m belts and a fully-fingered top auger. Lastly, Deere debuted its 500R series front-cab self-propelled sprayers, made at its Dutch factory and spanning 4,000-6,000 litres. Key components include the X9 combine cab and the 6.8-litre engine from larger 6R/6M tractors. The CommandDrive variable speed hydrostatic transmission uses one hydrostatic pump for the four wheel motors, each connected to a heavy-duty planetary final drive hub. Electronic monitoring provides anti-stall and anti-slip functions.

John Deere used Cereals to show updated 6R and 6M tractors, plus its new front-cab 500R SP sprayers

Zetor unveils 6 series

One of the show surprises was the UK debut of the new Zetor 6 series tractors, represented by the flagship 171hp 6170. There are three further models in the range: the 130hp 6130, 141hp 6140 and 156hp 6160, and all use a four-cylinder Deutz 4.1-litre engine plus ZF six-step automatic powershift.

A new suspended cab incorporates a new air conditioning unit, swivelling air-suspended seat and touchscreen terminal for key functions and data. Up front, there are two suspended Carraro axle options, rated at either 4.7t or 5.3t, with the latter permitting an increase in gross vehicle weight from 10t to 11.5t. At the rear, specification includes a 9.7t lift capacity, four-speed pto package and 120l/min of oil flow. A 3.5t front linkage is optional. Zetor recently announced that, while its Brno facility in the Czech Republic will continue to be its HQ, R&D base and spare parts centre, its Zetor India business – a joint venture with VST – will be its future main production home. The business plans to continue using established components including Carraro front axles, transmissions from ZF and Carraro, Fritzmeier cabs, and powerplants from Cummins and Deutz, but with many of these now manufactured in Asia, the move will enable it to reduce costs and maintain competitive pricing without cutting quality, suggests Zetor.


One of the show surprises was the UK debut of the new Zetor 6 series tractors, represented by the flagship 171hp 6170

Dieci builds network

Italian materials handler specialist Dieci is aiming to take advantage of recent major brand franchise shifts among agricultural dealers with a renewed push to break more fully into the farm handling sector, and fill gaps in its ag dealer network. Recent signings include RC Boreham and Cranworth Farm Services in East Anglia, and KP Agri in south Wales.

Founded in 1964, when it began producing concrete mixers, the firm has been building telehandlers since 1983. It was present at Cereals with a pair of ag-spec machines, comprising a 2.6t/6.0m Apollo 26.6 and the largest in its mid-size Agri Farmer range, the 3.4t/7.0m Agri Farmer 34.7. The firm is one of the few that also makes

Dieci is aiming to take advantage of recent major brand franchise shifts among ag dealers with a renewed push into the farm handling sector

full-scale articulated telehandlers, and also offers a full range of construction machines. Last summer, Dieci opened a new UK subsidiary at Grantham, Lincs.

Agroma and Knight side by side

For the first time at a UK show, sprayers from Knight Farm Machinery and Agroma were displayed side by side on a single stand, resulting from the creation of a new UK import business operated jointly by Brian Knight and the directors of the Greek manufacturer. The aim is to supply UK dealers and customers with a range of simpler, lower-cost mounted, trailed and

A new Agroma UK joint venture between Brian Knight and the Greek sprayer manufacturer offers dealers and customers lower-cost alternatives to high-spec Knight machines

orchard models to complement the higher-tech, higher-spec Knight range. The 800-1,500 litre/12-15m Millenium SM and 1,000-1,500 litre/15-18m Millenium M mounted lines both feature electro-hydraulic boom control and 180 l/min four-piston diaphragm pumps. Trailed options comprise the 3,000-litre/15-18m Millenium ST with tracking drawbar option, the higher-spec 3,000-litre/20-28m Millenium ET with bigger capacity

Nexus Chafer, the reborn Lincs sprayer maker, showed a new 8,000-litre version of the trailed Sentry, extending the existing 4/5/6,000-litre range

260 l/min six-piston diaphragm pump, and the Millenium T, in 3,000/4,000 litre capacities, with 20-28m boom options and a 300 l/min pump. The latter's stainless steel 3/4in spray line is fitted with four-way Quadri-Jet anti-drip diaphragm nozzle bodies, and there is an auto recirculation and prime and purge system. Options include ISOBUS control and axle steering.

Chafer returns

Lincs sprayer maker Chafer returned to Cereals under new ownership as Nexus Chafer, which also incorporates the applicator products made by sister brand Horstine. With around 500 Chafer sprayers calculated to be working on UK farms, the new company is promising to continue with full service and spares support through its reappointed dealer network. Manufacturing has recommenced at Chafer's Gainsborough factory in Lincs, and among the firm's new

New 'Gen 2' versions of Fendt's 600 series Rogator sprayers feature improved OptiNozzle drift reduction automatic selection technology

developments is an 8,000-litre version of the trailed Sentry, extending the existing 4/5/6,000-litre range. New mechanically- or electronically-controlled plumbing uses fewer moving parts, cutting the number of valves from 11 to four.

Rogator updated

New 'Gen 2' versions of the Fendt 600 series Rogator self-propelled sprayers feature multiple updates and a warranty that can extend up to eight years. Boom widths from 24-36m are available with four or six height sensors. Improved OptiNozzle drift reduction automatic selection technology uses different nozzles to maintain pressure while minimising drift but maximising possible forward speed, via new Altek electro-pneumatic nozzle bodies. Options include a single line Hypro five-way rotary body and Altek twin-line or quad-line arrangements. The cab gets multi-stage Category 4 filtration with carbon filters, while the touchscreen terminal uses the FendtOne operating concept from other Fendt machines, allowing data to be shared between them, and transferred automatically to the FendtOne online portal.

Sprayers from Opico

Opico continues to expand and diversify the range of imported products it offers its dealers, and is now the UK agent for German firm Rumex and its range of spot sprayers. Its 6.0m


Lincs-based Opico is now the UK agent for German manufacturer Rumex and its range of spot sprayers

and 9.0m models use AI technology to accurately identify weeds regardless of size. The larger model features six cameras, with their imaging aided by a pair of 43,200-lumen spotlights. There are 222 individually-controllable flat-fan nozzles spaced at 40mm to target the smallest weeds, and the adjustable chassis can work across bed widths from 1.5 to 3.0m.

Rumex suggests the AI system is able to reliably identify weeds in poor light or shadow, negating the need for a hood and allowing the machine to be fully observed when at work. Bespoke nozzles produce a precise narrow spray jet, allowing the boom to be positioned lower and closer to the target, minimising drift.

GreenTec seeks more dealers

Danish vegetation management machinery specialist GreenTec says its new Mantis 570S flail has been designed specifically to meet UK hedge and verge management requirements, and results from its acquisition of vegetation management equipment designs from Razorback. GreenTec, which is keen to grow its UK dealer network, offers the machine with 1.2m or 1.5m heads equipped with C-flails. Reach is 5.7m, and the Mantis design incorporates a 90-degree slew. Mounting to the tractor is via a patented four-point design said to keep installation time down to ten minutes, with a close-coupled format that aids tractor/trimmer stability.


Based on Razorback technology, mounting of GreenTec's new Mantis 570S to the tractor is via a patented four-point design

Big drill from Weaving

Centrepiece of the Weaving Machinery stand was its largest ever drill, the 12m Sabre Tine 12.48 low-disturbance model. The machine comprises four 3.0m sections to aid contour-following, while longitudinally an automatic coulter pressure system from Weaving's GD drill keeps drilling depth consistent. Across the four sections there are 48 Sabre Tine coulters, with 250mm standard spacing and a 200mm option. At the coalface are a single row of cutting discs, two rows of seeding tines – which run either side of the seeding coulters to create tilth and aid drainage in wet conditions – and a double following harrow at the rear.

The 6,000-litre seed hopper is pressurised, and can accommodate one, two or three products, being split 50:10:40. The stainless steel metering system feeds two distribution heads supplying each 6m side.


Centrepiece of the Weaving Machinery stand was its largest ever drill, the 12m Sabre Tine 12.48 low-disturbance model


The Cousins Switchblade is a lighter-land alternative to its heavier-duty, heavier-land Patriot tine/disc/press combination cultivator

Lighter Cousins cultivator

Cambs-based cultivation equipment specialist Cousins used Cereals to launch the Switchblade, a lighter-land alternative to its heavier-duty, heavier-land Patriot tine/disc/press combination cultivator. A simpler build means a 0.5t weight reduction, reducing required tractor power – a minimum of 160hp tractor is said to suit the 3m model in most conditions, compared to 200hp for a similarly-sized Patriot. The Switchblade is fitted with Step Change low-disturbance loosening tines that can work down to 300mm. Behind these are two rows of staggered wavy discs individually mounted on rubber suspension units and featuring on-the-move hydraulic adjustment. At the rear is an open-channel soil-to-soil ring press.

BUSINESS MONITOR

Dealers' franchise choice priorities remain consistent

Although manufacturer support is climbing the agenda

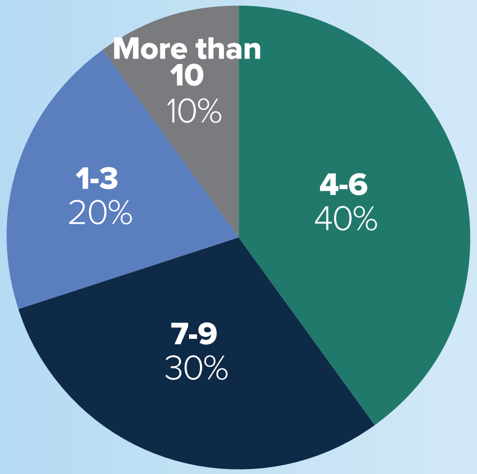
We recently asked our independent dealer readers once again what influences their decisions when it comes to the brands they choose to represent - and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the results suggest that dealer attitudes have changed very little over the past 12 months.

As with last year, most respondents told us they prefer to represent several manufacturers rather than put all their eggs in one basket, with the majority saying they have no plans to significantly alter the number of franchises they hold over the coming year.

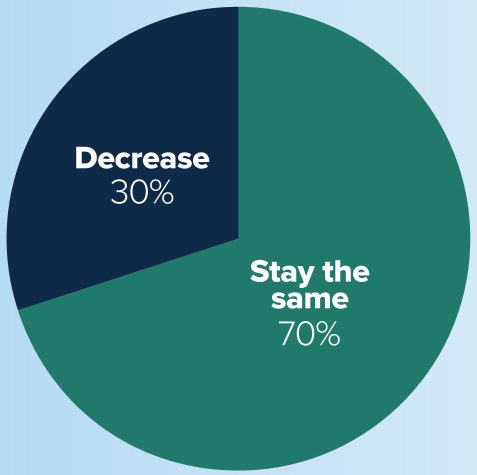
When it comes to deciding whether to take on a new brand or walk away from an existing one, the same key themes continue to dominate. Product reliability, healthy margins and dealer loyalty remain high on the list of priorities, reinforcing the fact that the fundamentals of a successful manufacturer-dealer relationship have changed little.

One area that did stand out, however, was the growing importance of back-up support. More dealers this year rated manufacturer support as a key factor in their franchise decisions than they did in our previous survey, suggesting that the quality of aftersales assistance, technical help, training and communication is becoming an increasingly important differentiator.

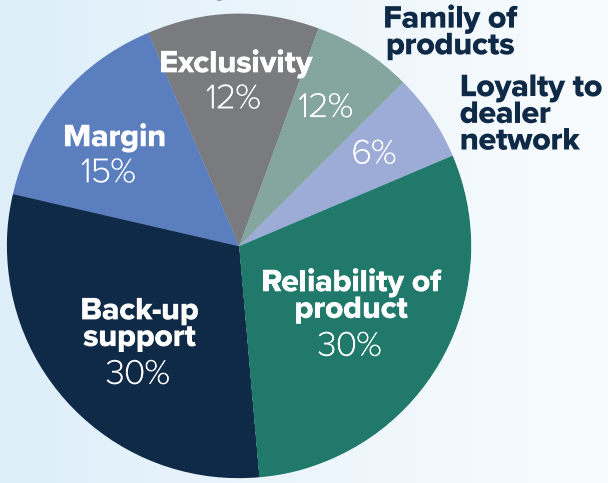
How many different manufacturers do you represent in your dealership?



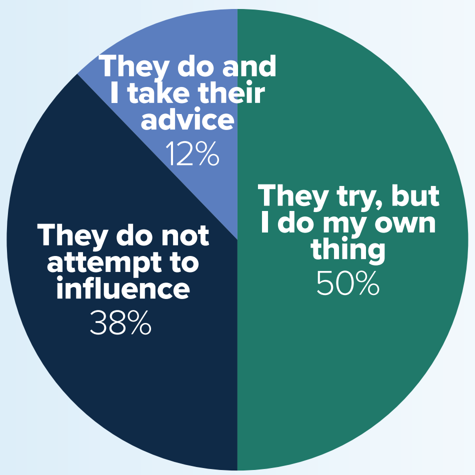
In the next 12 months, do you expect this number of manufacturers represented to...



Which of these factor most influences your choice of which manufacturers to represent?



Do your suppliers attempt to influence your choices of brands to represent?



Your say...

We asked you to describe the circumstances that have or would prompt you to either drop a held franchise or decide to take on a new brand?

"First and foremost, the most important aspect is having a good and reliable product - but that alone is not enough. A good product is no good without the back-up and support from the manufacturer to go with it. There are some brands we have turned away from because, although the product is good, the support is shocking. Margin is also a contributing factor. A level playing field in terms of discount from supplier is important so that the smaller dealer is not at a disadvantage to the larger dealer. If the product is a race to the bottom with prices then this is usually a negative, however with franchises like Stihl, I find I can price sensibly and still get sales as people are more often appreciating face to face support. In 2019, Honda L&G dropped us as we were about to drop them."

"Communication makes a huge difference."

"The most important, deciding factors to our dealership that would make us reconsider stocking a brand are proximity of appointing another dealer; margin erosion; stock availability; and aftersales support."

"Factors that would make me give up a brand include poor availability of product or parts; lack of technical advice and low warranty payments or time-limits on repairs. Also uncontrolled selling eroding margins, as well as unrealistic stocking commitments. New ones might move in if they address the above problems and have a good product range that suits our customers."

"Customers expect us to have parts quickly. If a supplier can't consistently deliver it's our reputation that suffers, not theirs."

"Profitability is the most important factor."

"Recently a big brand moved their business, losing most of their workforce, leading to chaos. Also, a lack of communication. These are factors for dropping a brand."

"If a manufacturer appoints another dealer too close by, it affects confidence in the relationship and makes you question your investment."

Raising your service labour rate

Sara Hey, president of business 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: Sara considers the thorny issue of when to raise your service charges.

Your dealership service labour rate is the hourly rate you charge customers for technician time on a repair invoice. It's printed on your wall, it's quoted at the counter, and it's the single biggest lever in your service department's profitability. A £5 increase across one technician working forty billable hours a week is £10,400 a year. Across four techs, that's roughly £41,600.

If you're reading this in season and wondering whether you should raise your labour rate this week, the answer is almost always no. Not because your rate is right. But because in-season is the wrong time to make that change, and the better play right now is fixing the leak that's costing you more than a rate increase would gain.

Here are some frequently asked questions I've received from the dealerships we work with in the States on this subject.

What is the average dealership service labour rate?

Posted labour rates vary widely by region, equipment type, and service complexity. OPE and small-engine rates tend to run lower than ag, marine, RV, or construction rates. The average matters less than whether your rate covers your fully-loaded cost per billable technician hour plus your target margin. A rate that's competitive but doesn't cover your costs is the wrong rate, even if it matches everyone else in town.

Should I raise my service labour rate in busy season?

Almost never. Raising your rate in season asks customers to pay more during the most stressed version of your service experience, and your team doesn't have the bandwidth to defend the change well. The exceptions are if a competitor has just dropped, or if you've added significant capacity. Otherwise, plan rate changes for January or end of slow season.

How do I know if my service department labour rate is too low?

Three signals:

- Your service department is consistently busy but margin is flat or declining
- Your fully-loaded cost per billable technician hour is within £10 of your posted rate
- You haven't raised the rate in more than two years.

If two of the three are true, your rate is probably below market and below cost.

What is recovery rate in a service department?

Recovery rate is the percentage of available technician hours that get sold to customers as billable, completed work. Available hours are what you pay your techs for. Billable hours are what shows up on a customer invoice. The gap is where your service department is leaking money. Healthy range is 75-85%.

Is it better to raise the labour rate or fix recovery rate first?

Fix recovery rate first. Recovery rate can be moved in season; labour rate generally shouldn't be. A 10-point improvement in recovery rate typically produces more revenue than a £5 labour rate increase, and it doesn't put price pressure on your customer relationships in the middle of your busiest months.

How often should a dealership review its service labour rate?

Annually at minimum, with the review happening in slow season so any change is rolled out in January or at the end of slow season. Don't review and change the rate in the same week. Build a 60-day window between the review and the rollout to give your team time to prepare for customer conversations.

Déjà vu...

As another hot, dry summer tests demand for garden machinery, Kelly Burgess reflects on the challenge of balancing investment, diversification and long-term planning while preparing Buxtons for another busy APF.

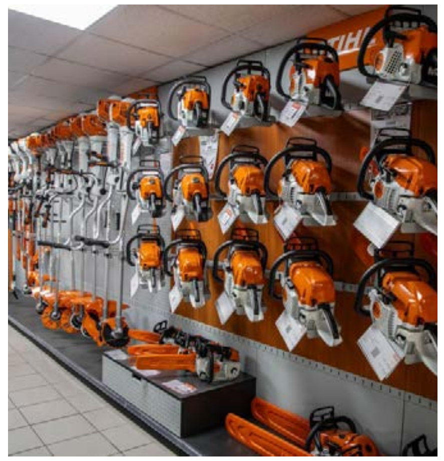
The current spell of hot, dry weather has brought back some very vivid memories of this time last year. It's amazing how quickly the weather can transport you back twelve months. Brown lawns, dusty fields, and conversations that seem to revolve around the same topic wherever you go - the lack of rain. For those of us selling garden machinery, it's impossible not to notice, and while we all enjoy a bit of sunshine, there comes a point where you start looking hopefully at every weather forecast.

Despite the dry conditions, there's certainly no shortage of activity here. Planning for the APF Forestry Show is already in full swing. Although the event still feels some way off, the amount of preparation involved means the work starts months in advance. Every detail, from stand layout to logistics, needs careful thought if everything is going to come together as planned. Considering our marquee is larger than our arboriculture side of the showroom, it's no small feat!

One project I've been giving a lot of thought to recently is our showroom. We're incredibly fortunate to have such a large showroom, and it's something visitors regularly compliment us on. In an industry where many products are still sold from catalogues or behind a trade counter, having the space to properly display machinery is a real asset. That said, since taking over the business I've wanted to put my own stamp on it. Not because it isn't good already, but because I think there's an opportunity to make it even better and ensure it reflects where the business is today.

Like many things, it's easier said than done. Being situated on Green Belt land brings its own challenges, with planning restrictions limiting what can and can't be altered. Then there's the balancing act of deciding where investment is best placed. While the showroom plays an important role in representing our brand and creating the right first impression, the reality is that much of our growth isn't coming through customers walking through those doors. More and more business is generated digitally or out in the field, so every investment must be carefully weighed.

Thankfully, diversification is proving its worth. While the prolonged dry weather has inevitably softened demand in some areas of the business, we've continued to see encouraging growth through both our commercial and website sales, helping to offset some of the impact. Commercial robotics is an area that's gathering real momentum too. In fact, as I write this, the team is out installing another robotic solution at a local golf club - a reminder that even during challenging trading conditions, there are still plenty of opportunities for businesses willing to adapt and embrace new technology.



That balancing act probably sums up much of business life at the moment. There are always exciting ideas and projects you'd like to push forward, but the challenge is knowing when to invest, when to wait, and how to make every decision count.
A skill which involves enthusiasm, measured confidence and a hint of prudence - one that I am keen to get right.

Hopefully, unlike last year, this spell of dry weather won't be the story of the whole summer. Either way, there'll be plenty to keep us occupied as APF draws closer and the business continues at full pace. Whatever the weather decides to do, we'll keep planning, preparing and making the most of another busy season.

SME DIGEST

Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

Edited by Adam Bernstein

COMPLIANCE

Health and safety - employers on the hook

Health and safety responsibilities extend far beyond avoiding accidents. **SME Digest editor Adam Bernstein** explores why employers remain firmly in the frame when things go wrong, and why robust systems, training and documentation are essential protection.

Health and safety law is a trap waiting to spring on employers. As Michael Cordeaux, a senior associate at Walker Morris, outlines, "the Health and Safety etc. Act 1974 (HSWA) imposes a general duty on employers to ensure, 'so far as is reasonably practicable,' the health, safety, and welfare of employees at work." He adds that "this includes, but is not limited to, ensuring safe systems of work, adequate training and supervision and a working environment free from unnecessary risks."

Cordeaux continues. "The phrase 'reasonably practicable' is defined by case law as a balance between the quantum of risk and the sacrifice required to avert it." This, he says, sets a high standard for employers, as many safety measures can be employed for a modest cost.

From a regulatory and prevention standpoint, the law sets a deliberately high bar because its purpose is to prevent harm. The principle of 'reasonably practicable' acknowledges that not all risk can be eliminated, but places on employers a clear burden to demonstrate that they took proper, proportionate steps to manage foreseeable hazards.

It covers all employees, visitors and contractors.

Notably, the law places a responsibility not only on the employer but also the employee to ensure that the work being carried out is conducted, in the safest possible way.

Employers have duties

In terms of employer obligations, under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 Cordeaux explains that "employers must carry out risk assessments and implement control measures to eliminate or reduce identified risks; failing to conduct an assessment, failing to identify a particular risk, or failing to control a risk, can all give rise to liability."

He also notes that employers must also take effective measures to prevent access to any dangerous part of machinery or stop its movement before any part of a person enters a danger zone.

Firms need documented guidance, risk assessments, safe systems of work, templates, and policies. These documents must be created by a competent person, with health and safety and industry experience, who is able to identify hazards and recommend suitable and sufficient controls to ensure compliance.

Employees have duties also

Naturally much of the burden is placed on the employer, but Cordeaux warns that employees also have responsibilities to take reasonable care for their own safety and that of others and to cooperate with employers and follow safety protocols.

While failure to comply can lead to criminal liability, the duties imposed on employees are narrower than those imposed on businesses.

Logic would lead us to think that any individual wanting to cause (self) harm may be of poor mental state.

Indeed, the statistics bear this out. The average rate of work-related stress, depression or anxiety across all industries was 2,770 cases per 100,000 workers in 2024/25. Suicidal thoughts affect around one in four, one in ten will self-harm, and one in thirteen attempt suicide at some point in their lives. What is clear from the evidence is that anxiety and depression are closely linked to suicidal thoughts, and mental health cannot be separated from workplace safety.

This is why the HSE explicitly treats mental health as a core component of an employer's duty of care. Employers are legally required to protect both the physical and mental wellbeing of their workforce, which means assessing and controlling risks linked to stress, poorly designed workloads, inadequate support, bullying, role ambiguity and badly managed organisational change. Where risks are identified, employers must take reasonable, documented steps to reduce them.

Even so, Cordeaux details that "there are public policy reasons why regulators' enforcement priorities are predominantly directed at employers - it is they who have the means both to control safety culture, workplace design and implement safe procedures."

An incident occurs

The reality is that there is a root cause to every accident – something that employers should be able to foresee.

Further, it's fair that employers assume rational behaviour – that every employee wants to return home, unharmed.

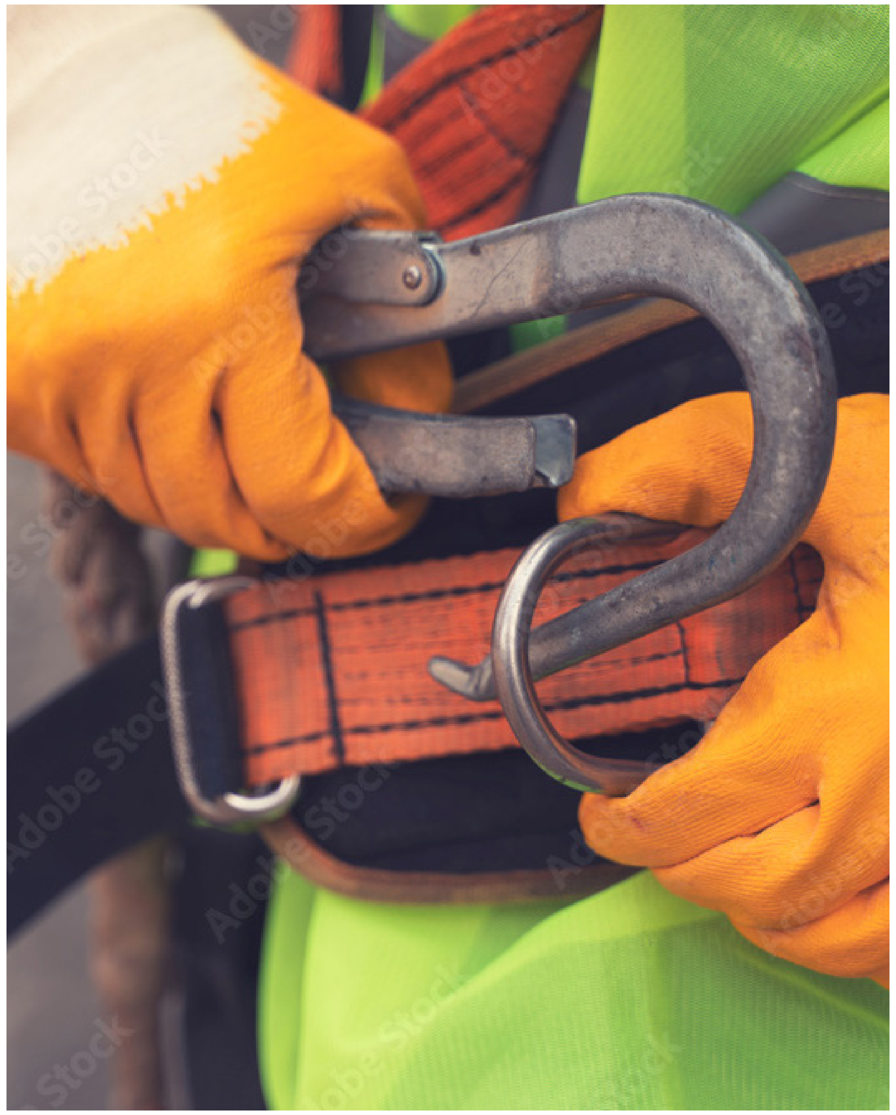
But what if an employee does something deliberately dangerous?

Here Cordeaux points to a legal defence of volenti non fit injuria (consent to risk). But for this to apply he says that "it is necessary to prove the injured party had full knowledge of the risk, voluntarily accepted that risk, and agreed to waive legal rights."

The problem for employers is that, as Cordeaux highlights, "in a workplace context, these conditions are almost impossible to satisfy. Courts will not accept volenti as a defence because of the inherent imbalance of power in employment relationships and because Parliament through the HSWA has imposed a duty of care that cannot be waived by agreement."

Nonetheless, he says that section 7 HSWA requires employees to take reasonable care of their own safety and section 8 specifically prohibits a person intentionally or recklessly interfering with or misusing any safety equipment.

Cordeaux adds that "the courts recognise that the foreseeability of employee actions is relevant, and it remains possible to defend prosecutions on the basis that the employer did all that was reasonably practicable to ensure safety and an employee acted contrary to their instructions and training."



But whether a prosecution can be defended due to the actions of an employee all comes down to evidence. This means, Cordeaux explains, that it is not possible to demonstrate that an employee acted contrary to instructions and training, for example, if there is no adequate evidence of what they were told. Logically, in fatal cases, "without a firsthand account from the individual involved, it can be difficult for an employer to prove what actions the deceased actually took, or why."

And it's more problematic for Cordeaux that even if such evidence is available, if the employer cannot demonstrate that they took all reasonably practicable measures to ensure safety, it will be liable.

So, "in HSWA cases the prosecution does not need to prove causation, that is, that the acts or omissions of the employer caused injury or death. In fact, no harm needs to occur at all. Under the HSWA, an employer is liable due to the presence of an avoidable risk of harm and prosecutions are frequently brought in cases where no injury was caused."

Cordeaux does acknowledge that there may be a situation with no blame - a true accident. However, he comments that they are rare.

Summary

Health and safety law can feel draconian, especially when employers face liability for events caused by others. But this reflects a political and legal commitment to prevention, even when human behaviour defies prediction; the UK has one of the safest regimes with workplace death and serious injury at lower levels than most.

TAXATION

Getting the most from selling your business

The sale of a business is a complex area, with a range of tax-planning options, **writes Helen Thornley, a technical officer at the ATT.**

Anyone who has built up value in their business will want to maximise their return when it comes to a sale. While tax issues within the business will depend on the structure of the deal, when the plan is to move into retirement, a successful exit is not just about maximising the price but also minimising any personal tax costs.

From the owner's perspective, this means reviewing the Capital Gains Tax (CGT) and Inheritance Tax (IHT) position.

Maximise Business Asset Disposal Relief (BADR)

BADR is a relief from CGT which can apply when an individual disposes of an interest in a business which is wholly or mainly trading.

Where BADR applies, it allows for a lower rate of CGT on up to the first £1m of gains. From 6 April 2026, this rate is 18%. Without BADR, an individual making substantial gains can expect to pay 24% on most, if not all, of their gain. This gives a maximum potential saving of £60,000 if all the conditions for BADR are met.

Serial entrepreneurs need to be aware that the £1m allowance is a lifetime limit. It may be restricted if the

individual has previously claimed BADR - or its predecessor Entrepreneurs Relief - on disposals after 6 April 2008.

Tip 1 - Make sure that the business definitely is eligible for BADR

For BADR to be available, there needs to be a 'qualifying disposal' of an interest in a business. This can include disposals of shares in a 'personal trading company'.

To be a personal trading company the shareholder needs to have held 5% or more of the shares and associated voting rights for at least two years prior to disposal. They must also have been an officer or employee of the business during that time.

The conditions for BADR are complex, and advice should be sought well in advance of any disposal, given the minimum periods of ownership needed.

Tip 2 - Involve a spouse

Where the vendor is married or in a civil partnership, it may be possible to transfer shares to them and use their BADR allowance too. A well-planned transfer could double the tax savings if the gain is large enough.

But this isn't last minute planning. As the spouse must qualify for BADR in their own right, any transfer needs to happen early enough that they can satisfy the minimum two-year ownership period. Where a company is involved, any unrelated shareholders also need to be comfortable with the spouse being appointed an officer or employee.

Tip 3 - Consider alternative exits

It's not always possible to find the right purchaser so sometimes the business has to be passed on in a different way. An increasingly popular way of exiting a trading company involves an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT).

Provided all the conditions are met, only 50% of any qualifying gain on disposal to the trust will be chargeable to tax. Although the remaining 50% chargeable won't be eligible for BADR, this could still represent a significant saving in CGT costs.

In addition to tax savings, this approach can help to facilitate an exit where there are no family or third parties to take on the company. The current owners can even stay involved after the transfer if they wish. But vendors need to be confident that the business will continue to be profitable so they can be repaid.

The structure involves the creation of a discretionary trust to benefit the employees of the business. The current owners sell their shares to the trust for no more than market value. To qualify for the tax benefits, at least half of the company must be transferred. As the trust itself is unlikely to have any funds at the start, the purchase cost is paid out of the future profits of the company received by the trust.

Once the debt is fully paid off, the company can keep its profits to reinvest in the business or benefit the employees. Companies in an EOT can pay tax-free bonuses of up to £3,600 a year to their employees.

Tip 4 - Consider a Family Investment Company

The simplest way of selling a trading company is to sell the shares. However, many new owners would prefer to buy the trade and assets out of the company to make a fresh start in a new company. This leaves the vendors holding shares in a company which holds a pot of cash.

One way to extract the cash is via the voluntary liquidation route. The shareholders will have CGT to pay on the difference between the proceeds they receive and the cost of their shares, but for a trading company, providing certain conditions are met, BADR may apply to reduce the rate of CGT that is charged on up to the first £1m of gain. Although there is an upfront tax cost, this gets the cash to the hands of the owners, with full flexibility on how they use this in future.

Alternatively, the company can continue as a Family or Personal Investment Company. This avoids the upfront CGT on liquidation and, as companies can receive dividends tax free, the company can invest the proceeds tax efficiently, while the shareholders only pay tax on any dividends they take out.

However, investment companies come with ongoing administrative and compliance burdens. It is unlikely that BADR would be available on a future winding up and further steps would be needed to manage any IHT liabilities.

Tip 5 - Don't forget the Inheritance Tax consequences

Business Property Relief (BPR) is a valuable relief which can exempt up to 100% of the first £2.5m of qualifying assets from IHT. Where there are more than £2.5m of qualifying assets, the relief is limited to 50%.

Qualifying assets can include shares in a company which is wholly or mainly trading or an interest in a sole trade or trading partnership which the individual has owned for at least two years.

The lower 50% relief can also apply to business premises which are owned personally (outside of the partnership or company), whether the owner and their spouse/civil partner controls the company.

After a business sale, assets which may have qualified for BPR to cash or investments are replaced with non-qualifying cash - with the result the individual's IHT liability can increase substantially overnight. So, any sale should automatically trigger an IHT review.

Summary

The sale of a business is a complex area, with a range of tax-planning options. The key to all these decisions is to start planning early and get good advice.

Products

COMMERCIAL

Robot reaches more confined areas of course

Toro introduces the Turf Pro 200.

Toro has expanded its autonomous mowing range with the introduction of the Turf Pro 200.

Designed for smaller, more confined areas of the course, including areas around the clubhouse, tighter landscaped spaces and other sections of turf that require regular maintenance, the manufacturer says the new robot provides an autonomous mowing option for areas where larger machines may be unnecessary.

Andrew Ihrke, senior international marketing manager at The Toro Company, said: "The Turf Pro 200 delivers consistent performance in tighter spaces where maintaining presentation standards can be more labour-intensive. It is designed to integrate into existing maintenance programmes, giving greenskeeping teams a practical, autonomous option that complements their wider mowing operations.

"Combined with the wider Turf Pro range, Range Pro 100 and Greensmaster eTriflex with GeoLink Mow, it gives operators more flexibility when building an autonomous mowing approach that reflects the needs of their individual site."

The Turf Pro 200 joins the Turf Pro 300 and Turf Pro 500 as part of the company's autonomous mowing range. With the 300 and 500 models addressing larger open turf areas, course managers now can match the right unit to specific site requirements and mowing frequencies.

Alongside the Turf Pro range, Toro say their GeoLink Mow system supports autonomous mowing across larger, high-use turf areas such as fairways. The range is available in the UK through distributor Reesink Turfcare.

COMMERCIAL

Stadium show for Cobra

New professional cylinder mower released

Cobra has announced the arrival of its new Fortis Stadium 34 machine, a new professional cylinder mower designed specifically for semi-professional and professional sports turf environments.

Engineered for football pitches, cricket squares, golf facilities, bowls greens and sports academies, Cobra says the new model marks a major step forward for themselves as it fully enters the professional sports turf category.

To meet the evolving needs of modern grounds teams, Cobra is launching the machine in two configurations; a Honda-powered petrol model, and an EGO battery-powered model offering the same 34" cut with reduced noise, zero emissions at the point of use and lower running costs. The manufacturer says, offering both power options provides facilities with the flexibility to adopt battery technology at their own pace while maintaining operational reliability. For large pitches and extended mowing sessions, it can be fitted with an optional premium trailer seat, helping to reduce operator fatigue while maintaining precise control.

At the heart of the Fortis Stadium 34 is a precision-engineered cylinder cutting system.

The mower is fully compatible with the Fortis Turf Management Cartridge System, enabling operators to switch between interchangeable lawncare cartridges. This allows grounds teams to carry out a wide range of essential turf maintenance tasks with one machine, including aeration, scarification, verticutting and brushing.

The company says this launch signals their strategic move into a key segment of the professional turf market: the mid-tier professional user. This includes organisations such as grassroots and championship football clubs, universities, sports academies and professional grounds maintenance contractors. These facilities often require professional-grade turf equipment but seek a more accessible alternative to elite stadium machinery.

Peter Chaloner, managing director of Cobra, said, "Our new Fortis Stadium mower bridges the gap between traditional professional turf capability and practical operational flexibility - ideal for grounds teams transitioning from petrol to battery or needing both. We have designed them with the operator in mind, giving ultimate control and comfort during long mowing sessions with precision cutting and all while keeping budgets in mind."

FORESTRY

High performance and low weight

Promised by STIHL for new battery chainsaw

STIHL has launched the MSA 260 C-O that they describe as a lightweight, powerful battery chainsaw engineered to reduce operator fatigue during thinning and maintenance tasks.

The new chainsaw, which offers 2kW of mechanical power at an operating weight of under 6KG, pairs high cutting power with a compact build, making it easier for professionals to manoeuvre when delimbing, felling small trees and processing timber.

To minimise downtime the saw's interchangeable sprocket allows for quick switching between chains (with 3/8'P and .325' pitch), making it easy to swap out components on the job, with minimal disruption.

To support cost efficiency, for simple delimbing tasks, the saw's integrated oil pump's flow rate can be adjusted to suit the user's requirements, reducing oil consumption.

The manufacturer says that tried-and-tested features, such as side chain tensioning and a captive nut, also make changing the saw's chain easy for users, and the saw's externally mounted filter allows for simple cleaning, for maximum productivity.

It also comes with an LED display built in to monitor machine status while on the job. To further support professionals, the tool's splash-proof design makes it suitable for use in all weather conditions.

The new chainsaw is recommended for use with STIHL's AP 200 P battery, powered by STIHL's new ALLPROsystem. When combined with STIHL's new AL 1802 MO High-Speed Dual Charger, it can be charged to 80% in nine minutes, even when working remotely, by combining with the STIHL PS 2000 power bank.

AGRICULTURAL

Special edition to mark 50,000th landmark

Limited edition 900 Vario model from Fendt

Fendt has launched a limited edition 900 Vario model to mark production of 50,000 900 series.

30 years on from the first 900 Vario, the latest anniversary model features an engraved '50,000' door sill, embroidered floor mats with an anniversary logo, super comfort seats trimmed in titanium leather and an anniversary badge on the chromed bonnet.

Fendt's Ed Dennett, said, "This special edition 900 Vario is limited to 300 models which are available to order from Fendt dealers now. The 900 Vario was unveiled at Agritechnica in 1995 and was the world's first tractor to feature continuously variable, power-split transmission. Since that launch it has proved remarkably popular worldwide for a wide range of applications."

The anniversary model reflects on some of the past models, with paintwork reminiscent of the 2005 Design Line. Four colourways have been released, including the trademark black that led to the 2005 model being christened the 'Black Madonna', steel blue, black/red and nature green.

"The 900 has long been the tractor of firsts. A true pioneer, it was the first to feature the electronically controlled fuel injection system and the first to benefit from Fendt's Vario Terminal. The subsequent 2003 model was the first Fendt operated with the new Tractor Management System (TMS) which electronically linked the engine and transmission and automatically adjusted the revs to match the power requirement," says Ed.

He continued, "The 900 Vario has always transcended agriculture to be a valuable machine for other industries like construction and forestry. Its versatility, economy and power have offered a perfect mix and it has won countless awards for its innovation."

The current sixth generation, on which the special edition is based, was released in 2019. It took the latest single mode VarioDrive with four-wheel drive from the larger 1000 series, and the range topping 942 has 415hp provided by a 9.0 litre MAN engine. Two years later, the operating system was updated to run the now widely used FendtONE system which has transformed workflow between office and tractor.

AGRICULTURAL

Kverneland replace flail choppers

Say new Tersus 4000 models will bring several improvements to market

A new range of flail choppers has been introduced by Kverneland, as it updates the portfolio of models available for residue management.

Called the Tersus 4000, the new models will replace existing FRO versions, and the company say that with it the range brings several improvements to market. These include a fixed driveline on the gearbox to replace a telescopic shaft previously used with side-shift; manual adjustment of the multi-vee belt drive; and the option of a rubber stone guard that sits behind the rear roller.

The Tersus range includes three models - Tersus 4023, 4028 and 4032 - offering working widths of 2.3m, 2.8m and 3.25m respectively. All models include 500mm of hydraulic side-shift delivering 250mm either side of centre and are suited to tractors from 80-170hp.

Maintaining the same balanced rotor, flail tip speed and hood design from the out-going FRO series, the company

says the improvements introduced on the models have been engineered to boost durability. Doing so affords a simpler and more robust driveline, along with easier maintenance.

Tersus models can be front- or rear-mounted without need for any conversion, and the introduction of an optional, full-width rubber guard behind the rear roller offers greater protection from flying stones and similar tough debris often encountered during operation.

Kverneland's Tersus flail choppers can be equipped with conventional hammer flails, or universal Y-type flails.

COMMERCIAL

Sandstorm seen on course

Self-powered topdresser from Redexim

Redexim has introduced the Sandstorm, a self-powered topdresser designed to operate without a tractor, PTO or hydraulic connection.

Powered by its own 14hp Vanguard engine, the Sandstorm can be towed by a range of utility vehicles, including the Toro Workman, John Deere ProGator and Cushman Truckster XT.

It has an 800-litre hopper capacity and can spread material across widths of up to 12m, making it suitable for golf greens, tees and sports pitches.

The company says the lightweight design helps minimise ground pressure on sensitive turf, while a ribbed belt and hopper shape are intended to maintain a consistent flow of sand and other topdressing materials. Operators can adjust belt speed, spinner speed, gate opening and travel speed from the driver's seat using the Vision X Pro digital control system, with up to 20 operating profiles able to be stored for repeatable settings.

Battery v Petrol and the rise of the robot mower

Talking to one of the country's major suppliers of outdoor power equipment and following on from the editor's comments in July 2026 about the balance between battery and electric equipment, our mystery columnist The Sprocket considers how the subject is creeping up the agenda.

There are many obvious reasons for using battery power with today's modern systems and technology, but what are the overall effects on the environment and on the profitability of dealerships?

I wanted to explore this subject further and perhaps generalise on some of the issues it raises. I am sure dealers and suppliers alike will be aware of the pros and cons, but some issues are more far-reaching than some people may appreciate.

Service Dealer covered 'A Battery Revolution' in the January/February 2025 edition. This article covered the new development of sodium batteries for some uses. The rise of the battery has been covered in this magazine in fact, on plenty of occasions and remains one of the dilemmas of current business practices. The problems raised by the environmental issues surrounding the mining of rare minerals and the storage and disposal of lithium batteries are yet to be overcome. There are of course issues with the extraction of fossil fuels and the emissions caused by petrol and diesel fuels. But is there a fine line between which one is more environmentally friendly?

Electric vehicles

In most cases, battery-electric vehicles (EVs) are less harmful to the environment overall than petrol or diesel vehicles, but the full picture depends on how the electricity is generated and how the battery is made.

Here's a comparison in the table generated by AI.

Factor	Battery Electric	Petrol/Diesel
Tailpipe emissions	None	Produces CO_2, nitrogen oxides, and particulates
Manufacturing	Higher emissions (especially battery production)	Lower emissions than EV manufacturing
Driving emissions	Depends on electricity source; often much lower	Always burns fossil fuel and emits CO_2
Lifetime emissions	Usually lower over the vehicle's lifetime	Usually higher over the vehicle's lifetime

Some important points:

- Battery production requires mining materials such as lithium, nickel, cobalt, and graphite, which has environmental impacts including energy use, water consumption, and habitat disruption.
- Petrol and diesel require continuous extraction, refining, and burning of fossil fuels, producing greenhouse gases throughout the vehicle's life.
- As electricity grids use more renewable energy (such as wind and solar), EVs become even cleaner over time.
- Batteries can increasingly be recycled and, in some cases, reused for energy storage after they are no longer suitable for vehicles, reducing the need for new raw materials.

Overall

Most independent studies conclude that an electric vehicle produces lower total greenhouse gas emissions over its lifetime than a comparable petrol or diesel car, even after accounting for battery manufacturing. In countries with relatively low-carbon electricity, the environmental advantage is larger. Where electricity is generated mostly from coal, the advantage is smaller but is still often present.

So, while battery-powered vehicles are not environmentally impact-free, they are generally considered less harmful overall than petrol and diesel vehicles, particularly in terms of climate change and urban air pollution.

So, I think it seems fair to assume that the same conclusions can be drawn for garden and groundcare machinery in the way they use battery or petrol. From my research it seems clear that lithium-ion batteries are not a long term sustainable solution due to the rare minerals required for their production. It also still seems to be the case that the recycling of lithium batteries is still not being carried out in the volumes that are needed and these batteries are piling up in the supply channels. Safety, as always, is also an issue with lithium powered products generally and their related chargers.

Now, to the matter at hand. Unfortunately, I am not privy to industry figures that break down the various categories of equipment being currently sold and all I can do is summarise from conversations with dealers. Domestically LME's, light mains electric, will be suffering because of the growth of lightweight battery powered products with good levels of performance. For the same reason the smaller petrol mowers are being replaced by similar sized battery mowers. It was suggested to me that there is as much as a 12% decline in petrol mower sales in the last few years.

So-called modern fuels with a bio content (E5 and E10 in the UK) have proved to be problematical in small petrol engines and alternative fuels are expensive, although a profit opportunity for a dealer. Collecting and storing fuel for most domestic users is a nuisance, making battery powered equipment more convenient. This will also be the case for most handheld products.

I am told that the move to battery power in the larger size of mowers, 47cm and above, is slower due to the need for better battery performance. That may well come in the near future as technology moves on.

However, the march toward robotic mowers and the newer autonomous machines, combined with increased cutting widths, is throwing a spanner in the works for all sizes of petrol and diesel powered mowing equipment - with battery powered robots starting to replace larger commercial machines in commercial grass cutting areas.

Wider cutting widths, better battery systems and improved guidance systems using AI seem to be able to offer users alternatives to larger petrol/diesel machines and save the need to have an operator on board. Talking to a few dealers it seems that three or four large autonomous mowers can replace more traditional machines on, say, golf courses at a lower purchase price and with lower operating costs.

My background is in large area cylinder mowers so the thought of a bunch of robots running around a playing field or golf course does boggle the mind and makes me wonder how dealers will cope with this sort of change and how workshops will adapt to the need to cover both the robotic and petrol/diesel side of servicing.

Interestingly: *Unmanned or robotic commercial mowers are legally permitted and often utilised on steep slopes or public parks, provided they have active remote supervision or built-in fail-safe safety sensors.*

One wonders if this legislation will have to change in the future as more and more robotic mowers are used freely in areas where people are active.

We are seeing many changes in equipment to match changing technology and customer demand. Manufacturers must be way ahead of the demand and have the resources to future proof their businesses. The big concern for our industry is how these changes will affect the dealer network and the way dealers need to adapt to meet what is a fast-moving evolution in powered equipment and subsequent changing consumer demand.

With dealers being customer facing and the providers of after sales service, how much does their business have to change to satisfy the new demand and still support what is already out there? With remote access and minimal servicing will the robotic revolution eventually minimise the need for the dealer to be there between the suppliers and the customer and just be used as a 'go to' if someone has a problem? It is already happening with smaller equipment!

To me at least, it does seem that petrol/diesel will still have a place for some time to come as there is a huge population of petrol and diesel powered equipment out there which has a long life to run. The problem with new lithium batteries is they do need to be replaced periodically and disposal or the recycling of them is still not keeping up with the discarded product. This does present some safety issues but are they any more unsafe than using petrol?

I guess we all know the pros and cons of petrol or diesel and that they are widely used and will be for some time to come. Emission regulations and controls go some way toward minimising the overall environmental impact and the equipment that uses these fuels can usually be nearly fully recycled.

Modern lithium batteries seem to have a stunted future due to the rare minerals used to make them and the difficulties in fully recycling them like a lead acid battery. However, battery technology is moving on fast and will eventually provide alternatives to lithium. One hopes the alternatives will be produced in a way that they can replace lithium batteries in the products that use them rather than create a whole new genre of battery powered equipment making the current products obsolete.

There can be no question that battery power will continue to replace petrol and smaller diesel machines. The need to protect the environment and reduce global warming is paramount but consumer demand is likely to lean toward the most cost-effective and convenient solutions which dealers need to be prepared for. Cost and convenience will be the key factor in how this all balances out.

What's on?

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

SEPTEMBER 2026

Steinexpo, Germany	www.steinexpo.eu	2-5
Moreton-In-Marsh Show	www.moretonshow.co.uk	5
Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC	www.autumnfair.com	6-9
Glee 2026	www.gleebirmingham.com	8-10
UK Dairy Day, The International Centre, Telford	www.ukdairyday.co.uk	16
GroundsFest 2026, Stoneleigh Park	https://groundsfest.com/	16-17
Tillage Live	https://tillage-live.com/	18
APF Exhibition 2026, Warwickshire	www.apfexhibition.co.uk/	24-26

OCTOBER 2026

Equip Exhibition, Louisville, USA	www.equipexposition.com/	20-23

NOVEMBER 2026

FTMTA Farm Machinery Show, C Kildare	https://ftmta.ie/	10-12
EIMA International, Bologna	www.eima.it/en	10-14
GMA Saltex 2026, Birmingham NEC	www.gmasaltex.co.uk/	11-12
AgriScot 2026, The Royal Highland Centre	https://agriscot.co.uk	18
Midlands Machinery Show	https://www.midlandsmachineryshow.com/	18
Royal Welsh Winter Fair	www.rwas.wales/winter-fair	30-1/12

DECEMBER 2026

***Service Dealer* Conference & Awards, Stratford-Upon-Avon**	www.servicedealer.co.uk	3

JANUARY 2027

Oxford Farming Conference	www.ofc.org.uk	6-8
Golf Industry Show, New Orleans	https://gcsaaconference.com/	15-21
LAMMA 2027, Birmingham NEC	www.lammashow.com	20-21
BTME 2027, Harrogate International Centre	www.btme.org.uk	26-28

FEBRUARY 2027

Doe Show 2027, Ulting	www.ernestdoe.com	2-4
Dairy-Tech, Stoneleigh Park	https://dairy-tech.uk/	3
Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS), York Auction Centre	www.yams.uk.com	3
Spring Fair 2027, Birmingham NEC	www.springfair.com	7-10
World Ag Expo, Tulare, California	www.worldagexpo.com	9-11
Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry	www.executivehireshow.co.uk	10-11

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