

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

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

- NEWS
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March/April 2026

LIGHTS, CAMERA, STRIPES!

A behind the scenes look at when the BBC shone a light on British lawnmower manufacturing

LAMMA & BTME REPORTS

Good crowds and cautious optimism

BE BETTER TOMORROW THAN TODAY

Advice from Ripon Farm Services

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WELCOME

Letter from the editor **Steve Gibbs**

steve@servicedealer.co.uk



Welcome to the March/April 2026 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine. How has the start of 2026 been for your dealership? From what we have been hearing anecdotally - and from the results and comments gathered from our Winter Servicing Survey (which you can read about starting on page 50 this issue) - a key description appears to be 'busy.' Within workshops at least, certainly.

As we move into the season proper, the focus will inevitably turn to how machinery sales will fare this year. In this issue, you can read reports from two major trade shows for the ag and turf care sectors, which could offer us some indication.

You'll see from my view of BTME and Martin Rickatson's piece on LAMMA that crowds turned out for each show. More significantly, perhaps, than simply the numbers were the vibes we picked up from the exhibitors manning the stands, the dealers walking the aisles, and, crucially, the punters through the doors that really mattered - especially for the ag show. The turf care machinery sector has held its own lately - perhaps even being the saving grace for some more traditionally agricultural dealers. But it is sales to the farming sector that we know

have been hugely concerning over this past year.

In his assessment of the record-breaking event at the NEC, Martin says he picked up on a "cautious general optimism," and perhaps even spied "signs of an upturn." That feels like decent progress, considering the mire the market has found itself in.

We have debated before in these pages if there is a direct, linear connection between well-attended and upbeat trade shows and bumper dealership sales. It is, of course never quite as simple as that, but there must be some link, or else why would all your supplying manufacturers spend huge figures on exhibiting? Yes, brand awareness is important, but that must have as its ultimate intention the driving of sales.

Should the dealer network be encouraged by these exhibition atmospheres? I think we can say a quiet 'yes' - but with a healthy dollop of realism. Improved sentiment at the shows may well hint that the worst of the sector's hesitation may be easing, but I would suspect that most industry experts would say a full rebound remains some way off.

Still - encouraging signs to kick off the year.

THE TEAM

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DEALERS

Balmers choose to end John Deere relationship

And confirm new Ransomes partnership



After more than three decades of partnership, Balmers GM confirmed that they have made the strategic decision to end their turf equipment dealership agreement with John Deere.

Jo Balmer, group marketing and operations manager for the dealership – with depots in Burnley and Wakefield – said: “This marks the end of a significant chapter in our company’s history – one built on hard work, shared success and the trust of thousands of customers across the region that we serve.

“Over the past 33 years, we have been proud to represent the John Deere brand, and to support customers who rely on its products. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who has been part of that journey.

“We will continue to provide our full dealership services; sales, parts, service, and warranty support – until the transition is complete, guaranteeing a smooth and uninterrupted experience for all of our customers.”

Following the decision to part with John Deere, Balmers have also announced the start of a new chapter with Ransomes Jacobsen.

Jo continued: “As we look to the future, we are excited to announce that Balmers GM will continue serving the professional turf, golf and groundcare sectors as authorised Ransomes Jacobsen dealers.

“This new partnership aligns with our long-term vision, and allows us to offer a broader range of innovative turf solutions. Our customers, both longstanding and new, can expect the same high standards of service, expertise, and support that have defined Balmers GM for over 45 years.”

Balmers are promising their customers a full lineup of Ransomes Jacobsen turf and groundcare machinery; continued support from their experienced sales, service and parts teams; a seamless transition with minimal disruption; and their same commitment to quality, reliability and customer care.

Jo concluded: “Change brings opportunity. We’re extremely excited by this new direction, and look forward to strengthening relationships across the turf industry as we enter this next phase.”

Deere extend two dealers’ territories following the decision

Following the news regarding Balmers GM leaving the network, John Deere announced that two turf dealerships are expanding their areas of responsibility later this year.

Ripon Ground Care and Turner Groundscare will extend their respective geographies from 9 July, 2026, when Balmers leave the network.

Part of the Ripon Group, Ripon Ground Care has been selling and servicing John Deere machinery and technology since 1982, with 13 branches located across Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Teesside.

For over 40 years, the company has supplied equipment for such industries as golf and sports turf, local authorities, contractors, caravan parks and similar environments.

Similarly, Turner Groundscare has over 30 years of experience, and offers a full range of premium John Deere equipment across Cheshire. The company has an excellent reputation for its servicing and customer support.

Chris Meacock, John Deere’s division sales manager for golf and turf, said: “With decades of experience between them, John Deere is proud to have both Ripon Ground Care and Turner Groundscare taking over operations in the Lancashire and West Yorkshire areas.



“Over the next six months before this transition takes effect, we will put everything in place to ensure a seamless transfer for John Deere customers, who will be dealing with Ripon Ground Care or Turner Groundscare in due course.

“We would also like to thank Balmers GM for their hard work and years of service with John Deere.”

DEALERS

Lloyd Ltd become dual brand dealers

Case IH added alongside New Holland

Case IH has announced a strategic expansion of its dealer network in the North of England.

Effective as of 1 January, 2026, Lloyd Ltd has officially added the Case IH brand to its operations at the Carlisle and Penrith depots.

By becoming a dual-branded dealer alongside New Holland, the dealership says it will provide farmers across Cumbria with a comprehensive “one-stop” solution for CNH’s agricultural machinery brands.

David Rapkins, CNH business director for the UK and the Republic of Ireland, said: “We are excited to see Lloyd Ltd represent both New Holland and Case

IH at their Carlisle and Penrith depots.

This dual-brand approach is a key part of our strategy to offer Cumbrian farmers greater choice and localised support. Lloyd Ltd has a proven track record of excellence, and by bringing the Case IH brand into these key hubs, we are ensuring our customers receive the highest level of technical expertise and parts availability. We look forward to a successful future, and a strengthened long-term partnership with the Lloyd team.”

George Lloyd, managing director of Lloyd Ltd, added: “Integrating Case IH alongside New Holland at our Carlisle and Penrith depots is an important step



George Lloyd

in ensuring we meet the diverse needs of farmers in the region. We recognise the deep loyalty of Case IH customers across Cumbria, and are looking forward to supporting them with a full suite of sales, service and parts. This expansion reflects the strength of our partnership with CNH, and we are eager to begin working with Case IH’s customers throughout the region.”

DEALERS

Merlo confirm major expansion of network

Significant dealership changes

Merlo UK has announced significant changes to its agricultural dealer network, strengthening their presence across large parts of the East, the South-East and Midlands.

The company says this strategic development ensures enhanced customer support, improved aftersales service and greater accessibility to their telehandler range. All new appointments officially commenced on 1st February 2026, with customers able to meet the expanded dealer teams for the first time on the Merlo stand at the recent LAMMA Show.

Farmstar Ltd joins network

Following productive discussions, Merlo UK has confirmed the appointment of Farmstar Ltd, operating from three depots in Marr (South Yorkshire), Brigg (North Lincolnshire), and Market Weighton (East Yorkshire). Farmstar serves one of the UK's most productive farming regions, encompassing large arable areas alongside livestock and root crop operations.

Formerly representing another telehandler brand for over 20 years, the dealership says they have embraced the opportunities Merlo offers, and is eager to introduce the brand to its customers.



Sam Davies, managing director at Farmstar, and Craig Footman, regional sales manager at Merlo UK



Dan Coates, operations manager; Phil Bush, managing director; Peter McFerran, aftersales manager at Turney Group; and Craig Parkes, regional sales manager at Merlo UK

Turney Group expands representation

Earlier in 2025, Merlo UK appointed Turney Group to represent them from its new depot in Bredon, Gloucestershire. Building on this successful partnership, Turney Group will now extend representation to its other two depots at Princes Risborough (Buckinghamshire) and Middleton Stoney (Oxfordshire).

This expansion reinforces Turney's commitment to delivering premium machinery backed by exceptional service.

Ernest Doe adds Merlo agricultural franchise

Just five months after taking on Merlo's construction franchise, with a strong network across 19 depots in East Anglia, South Lincolnshire and South-East England, Ernest Doe brings decades of experience and a reputation for quality and customer care. Adding Merlo telehandlers to its agricultural lineup reflects Ernest Doe's recognition of growing demand for high-performance handling solutions.



Graham Parker, sales director at Ernest Doe, and Owen Buttle, national sales manager at Merlo UK

Owen Buttle, national sales manager at Merlo UK, said: "These appointments represent an exciting step forward for Merlo UK. By partnering with respected, customer-focused dealers like Farmstar, Turney Group and Ernest Doe, we are ensuring farmers across key regions have access to Merlo's innovative telehandlers and outstanding aftersales support."



COBRA

Why Not Become a Cobra Dealer in 2026?

With over 170 products in the range including premium lawn tractors, VX petrol lawnmowers, 40v cordless machines plus the new ZT ride-on range and Fortis Stadium 34, Cobra is fast becoming a market leading brand in garden machinery. Contact us to join the growing number of Cobra Dealers across the U.K. For information on becoming a Cobra Dealer contact Andy Marvin: 07771 581 296 or call: 0115 986 6646.

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DEALERS



Brockhills and P.V. Dobson partner to supply Fendt

Whilst manufacturer announces further network changes

Brockhills of Yorkshire and P.V. Dobson have announced a new partnership as a Fendt dealership for Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North-East.

The new partnership now trades as P.V. Brockhills, with a head office based at the business' Dalton depot.

P.V. Brockhills also operates dedicated Fendt service centres from P.V. Dobson's existing sites in Levens and Skipton, with an additional centre at P.V. Dobson's Washington depot. Fendt specialists provide dedicated sales and service support in these areas, operating independently from P.V. Dobson's existing service hubs, which continue to support existing franchises.

Managing director Peter Swales and director Andrew Dobson are equal shareholders in the new partnership. Andrew Dobson focuses on the Massey Ferguson, Kubota, Manitou, Bomag and Thwaites franchises held by P.V. Dobson, and remains involved with Fendt, too.

With a combined 69 years of experience as Fendt dealers, the new partnership will supply the full range of Fendt products, including tracked and wheeled tractors, combines, self-propelled forage harvesters, sprayers, large square and round balers, and a range of grassland equipment, including mowers, tedders, and rakes.

"This partnership represents two strong dealerships coming together to provide excellent support and focus on the Fendt brand," says Andrew Dobson, managing director at P.V. Dobson.

"It gives us a wider footprint across the North, continuity of service for our customers, and the combined expertise to support the full range of tractors and machinery available from the brand," he added.

Peter Swales explained: "We are proud of our long history as a dedicated Fendt dealer.

"Partnering with P.V. Dobson allows us to strengthen that tradition while ensuring customers continue to receive the premium level of service we are both renowned for. Ultimately, we will focus on strengthening the Fendt brand in the North of England by working together."

Dealer's territory expanded

Fendt has also confirmed that John H. McNae has expanded its Fendt territory responsibilities to include Dumfries, as well as the English border to the south.

John H McNae, based in Mayfield, Tarbolton, has been a dealer for the manufacturer for over 10 years, growing the sales of their tractors and implements in south-west Scotland to impressive levels.

In a statement, Fendt said: "The dealership's reputation for service and attention to detail has made it the 'go-to' agricultural machinery dealer in the area, and first choice for many of the area's leading farming businesses.

"With a strong sales, parts and service presence across its current territory, and with plans to enhance this to cover the new area, Fendt looks forward to achieving more business together with John H. McNae."

This news followed a brief announcement before Christmas that Johnston Tractors of Carlisle, Penrith and Dumfries, had, by mutual agreement with AGCO and Fendt, decided to end their promotion, sale of and support for the Fendt brand from its outlets.

It was announced that Johnston Tractors will continue to focus on its promotion of the Valtra brand, and that Fendt would divide the previous Johnston Tractors Fendt area between the existing and surrounding Fendt dealers.

INDUSTRY

STIHL to recognise dealer excellence

In their centennial year

STIHL is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, and, as part of their celebrations, the company has announced they will recognise their dealer network with a dedicated awards ceremony at a special dealer conference, taking place in June at its Contra House headquarters.

In a statement, the company said: "Throughout its journey in Great Britain, its dealer partners have played a pivotal role in delivering expertise, service excellence and support to its customers. Therefore, as STIHL marks

its 100th year, it celebrates not only a rich history of heritage and innovation, but the dealer partnerships that have underpinned its success over the years."

The company says the summer conference will form an integral part of their centenary celebrations. The event will provide an opportunity for dealers to connect with the STIHL team and fellow partners, share best practice, and gain insight into the future direction of the business. The conference will also serve as the stage

for its STIHL 100 Awards ceremony.

The company say the awards will celebrate excellence across their dealer network, shining a spotlight on star dealers and individuals. There will be 12 awards presented on the evening, covering a range of areas. By recognising its top-performing dealers and teams, STIHL say they aim to acknowledge and reward the contribution they make to the brand's continued success.

As part of their wider celebrations, the brand will also pay tribute to the MS 500i, the world's first mass-produced petrol chainsaw with electronically-controlled fuel injection, by launching a centennial edition of the model. Featuring a black design and distinctive centenary detailing, the machine will be available to buy later in 2026 from selected dealers.

Additionally, STIHL will run a series of end-user competitions, such as sweepstakes and fan awards, designed to engage customers and support dealer activity throughout the anniversary year.

Dr. Nikolas Stihl, chairman of the Supervisory Board and Advisory Board of STIHL, said: "Any company that reaches the grand old age of 100 hasn't got there by relying on tradition alone.

"It can only stay successful for a century if it knows its roots, while also recognising when it's time to start a new chapter. With that in mind, our anniversary is not just a time to look back, but also a moment to recognise the strength that comes from our combination of heritage, engineering expertise and the courage to innovate."



Dr. Nikolas Stihl

DEALERS

Baroness award their dealers

Presentations made at January's BTME in Harrogate



The Lister Wilder team on the Baroness stand

Baroness UK celebrated 2025's achievements at January's BTME with the return of their annual Dealer Awards.

This year saw both Lister Wilder and Hamilton Brothers recognised for their exceptional performance and commitment to the Baroness brand.

Lister Wilder received the award for 'Highest Overall Baroness Machinery Sales' – retaining the title from 2025. Alongside an outstanding team performance, there was individual recognition for Lister's Stuart Venn-Dunn, who was presented with the 'Salesperson of the Year' award.

"Receiving the award for 'Highest Overall Machinery Sales' is fantastic, as it recognises the entire team's efforts throughout the year," commented Phill Hughes, sales director for Lister Wilder. "I am especially pleased for Stuart Venn-Dunn, who has been working closely with his golf customers over the last 12 months, as this recognition goes some way to reward him for all the hard work he's put in. Of course, we couldn't achieve what we have without the support of Team Baroness and our aftersales departments, so we'd like to thank them all as we

look ahead to another positive year in 2026."

Also honoured were Hamilton Brothers, part of Hamilton Ross Group, securing the accolade of 'Highest Growth in Baroness Machinery Sales.' Andy Gillies, groundcare sales manager, said: "This achievement reflects the dedication of our sales team together with the wider group, whose ongoing commitment and support underpin our performance. By educating our customers and clearly demonstrating the long-term cost efficiencies associated with ownership – including reduced running and maintenance costs – we are helping

to support informed purchasing decisions and deliver lasting value."

Adam Butler, UK sales director at Baroness, added: "All of our dealers once again delivered an outstanding effort throughout 2025, equalling our strongest year to date is an achievement that would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment of our entire network. The entire Baroness UK team congratulates the Lister Wilder and Hamilton's teams, and thanks all of our dealers and customers for their continued loyalty and support."

You can read more about this year's BTME in this issue, starting on page 41.



And the team from Hamilton Brothers

DEALERS

Record amount raised for Jason's charities

By attendees of the Service Dealer Awards



Jason Nettle completed his year-long challenge at December's Service Dealer Conference

Jason Nettle, director of Winchester Garden Machinery, spent last year undertaking the incredible challenge of 12 marathons in 12 months for good causes.

Jason's cause was the chosen recipient for the money raised from the prize draw that took place at December's Service Dealer Awards. All donations are now in from the

event and have been totted up - with the total added from the kindness of the attendees on the night being an incredible £6,185!

Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said: "What an amazing achievement from Jason, and well done to the Service Dealer Conference & Awards' delegates for their generosity."

Jason added: "It was a real privilege to have the support from Service Dealer, and to be able to finish my final marathon and run in on the day. I would like to personally thank everyone who donated on the evening. It has raised an amazing amount that will make a HUGE difference to my chosen charities. Thank you again!"

This means that, at the time of going to press, Jason's total stood at a phenomenal £27,132!

Jason's epic endeavour was all in aid of Cancer Research UK, Prostate Cancer UK, Naomi House Children's Hospice and St. Michael's Hospice.

His Just Giving page (www.justgiving.com/team/jasons-marathon-madness) is still live, with donations very much welcomed.

News in brief:

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

PEOPLE



Ibbetts take on new tractor franchise

McCormick has strengthened its UK dealer network with the appointment of Ibbetts, the well-established groundcare and agricultural machinery specialists based in St Neots, Cambridgeshire, since 1851. Tim Ibbett, managing director, said: "McCormick's product range, reliability and focus on supporting customers aligns perfectly with our values."

PEOPLE

Russells expands area of responsibility

Russells, one of Manitou's long-established agricultural machinery dealers, has expanded its Manitou agricultural area of responsibility. Assuming responsibility for the former Farmstar Marr and Brigg territory, their newly-acquired area extends from North Sheffield eastwards through South Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire to Grimsby, covering key agricultural centres – including Barnsley, Doncaster, Gainsborough and Brigg – along with the surrounding rural areas.



PEOPLE



Three more dealers take on Kramp

Auto Supplies in Newry, County Down, and RBL Shinglers, near Welshpool, are all now using the Powered By Kramp branding. They are the first Powered By Kramp stores to open in Northern Ireland and Wales. Aspatria Farmers in Cumbria has revamped its retail store under its own brand, utilising Kramp's knowledge.



Co-presenters Cherry Healey and Paddy McGuinness at the Hayter facility

Lights, camera, stripes!

The BBC recently shone a light on British mower manufacturing, with an episode of their *Inside The Factory* programme. Toro UK's CRAIG HOARE takes us behind the scenes.

When the BBC approached us about featuring Hayter on *Inside the Factory*, it was immediately clear what an opportunity this could be – not just for our team in Hertfordshire, but for the entire dealer network. As one of the last remaining lawnmower manufacturers producing at scale

in the UK, opening our doors to a national audience offered a rare chance to showcase the engineering, craftsmanship and heritage behind the Hayter Harrier range.

What followed was six months of preparation, collaboration and careful planning to ensure the programme captured the precision and pride that go into every machine that leaves our factory.

A spotlight on British engineering

The production team began with a detailed tour of our manufacturing processes, mapping out each stage of the Harrier's journey, from raw steel to finished mower. Their aim was to highlight the complexity and innovation behind a product many homeowners recognise, but few truly understand.

To help guide presenter Paddy McGuinness through the build, the producers selected senior principal design engineer Richard Carter. As the engineer responsible for the Harrier's design, Richard was the ideal person to explain the technical decisions, testing standards and engineering principles that underpin the mower's performance.

When filming began, the factory was transformed. Two crews captured the main build process and supporting footage, while a third operated drones to create the aerial sequences that will be familiar to regular viewers of the programme.

Paddy's enthusiasm was immediate. He immersed himself in every stage of production, from spray painting decks under the guidance of our paint team, to assembling components on the production line. His genuine curiosity and easy rapport with staff helped create a relaxed atmosphere, even for colleagues making their first appearance on national television.

One of the programme's highlights was filmed on our test fields, where Richard demonstrated the engineering behind the iconic Hayter stripe. Paddy's reaction, and his determination to perfect his lines, captured the pride we



Toro UK's Craig Hoare with *Inside The Factory* presenter Paddy McGuinness

take in producing a mower that has become synonymous with the British lawn.

A great opportunity for dealers

The episode offers more than behind-the-scenes entertainment. For dealers, it offers:

- A powerful story to share with customers - reinforcing the quality, testing and engineering rigour behind the Harrier.
- A reminder of Hayter's British manufacturing heritage - a point of differentiation in a competitive market.
- A national platform for the brand - strengthening consumer recognition and trust.
- A showcase of the people behind the product - demonstrating the skill and dedication of the team who build the machines you sell and service.

At a time when customers increasingly want transparency and authenticity, this episode gives dealers a compelling narrative to support sales conversations.

A proud moment for the team

Filming concluded with a light-hearted kickabout on the freshly-striped test field, a fitting end to three intense days that brought the entire factory together. Before leaving, Paddy signed the Harrier he built during filming. That mower now sits proudly in our reception, a reminder of a milestone moment for the brand.

The episode aired on 3 February, and is available on BBC iPlayer. We hope it gives viewers and our dealer network a renewed appreciation for the engineering excellence behind every Hayter mower.

For us, the programme is more than a television appearance. It's a celebration of British manufacturing, a testament to the skill of our team, and a valuable asset for dealers who champion the Hayter brand every day.



The Harrier that Paddy signed now sits in the company's reception



Paddy testing out a Hayter Harrier



Cherry and Paddy on the production line



Cobra is one of the brands that Revill specialise in

The future is out there

Decades of hard work, resilience and a willingness to adapt has brought success to Revill Mowers, who last year were recognised as a finalist in *Service Dealer's* awards and won Husqvarna's Automower Dealer of the Year. KEITH CHRISTIAN catches up with Russell Revill to explore how a family-run dealership has combined traditional values with modern technology to secure its next chapter.



Wife and husband Charmaine and Russell Revill, with co-owner Jason Revill and Molly the dog

Writing for *Service Dealer* has enabled me to keep in touch with people in the land-based engineering industry, and has kept my interest alive since my retirement a few years ago. Having the time and freedom to choose subjects to write about, and to catch up with people I used to work with and customers from my past life, is an absolute pleasure.

Late in January, I was able to catch up with Russell Revill at Revill Mowers in Coleford in the Forest of Dean. Russell and I go back a fair way in the garden machinery business, and his career is one of challenges, determination and hard work – a journey I quickly realised was well worth sharing.

At the outset, it is worth mentioning that Revill Mowers were finalists for **Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year** at the *Service Dealer Awards* last December - no small achievement in today's highly competitive market. Even more impressively, the business also secured **Automower Dealer of the Year 2025** with Husqvarna. Winning such recognition within just a few years of becoming a professional Automower dealer speaks volumes about the company's expertise, growth and customer focus.

Decades of experience

Revill Mowers is a family-owned business, led by directors Russell and Jason – a partnership built not only on family ties, but on decades of combined experience across both domestic and commercial sectors. Behind the scenes, Russell's wife Charmaine plays a vital role in keeping the operation running smoothly, while more recently Russell's daughter Shannon has joined the business to strengthen its online presence, marketing and social media engagement.

The wider team now includes a further 10 members of staff, comprising four workshop technicians and three specialists focused on robotic machinery, alongside colleagues in parts, logistics and driver roles. And, of course, the team would not be complete without Molly the dog, the much-loved head of customer relations - always ready with a wagging tail and a warm welcome.

Like many successful and expanding companies, Revill Mowers is beginning to outgrow its current premises, with clear plans already in place for future expansion to support continued growth in a structured and sustainable way.

What was intended to be a formal interview soon became a journey through the past, one story flowing into another as time disappeared and the business carried on around us. Despite

taking far more of Russell's time than planned, I came away with a fascinating insight into his career, along with many shared memories - with assurances that only the non-litigious ones would make it into print.

Establishing a business

Russell's path into the industry began as a young apprentice working with Bob Smith and Ray Woodward at Forest and Garden Machinery, choosing garden machinery over a potential career in the army. His four-year apprenticeship was completed on block release at Evesham College under the guidance of Mick Beard.

While Russell readily acknowledges the technical skills he gained, he is equally quick to highlight the life skills learned during that time, with Mick playing a particularly influential role in shaping both his confidence and career.

In his early-20s, Russell went on to establish his own business, later taking on a partner, and, over the next 20 years, the company expanded into a multi-branch dealership. During this period, Jason trained under Russell from the ground up, learning the trade hands-on alongside formal training at Evesham College.

In 2008, Jason made the decision to branch out on his own, focusing



Part of the fleet of sign-written vans



The dealership received an award from Husqvarna in 2025

specifically on the commercial sector. Over the following years, he built an extensive range of experience within professional ground care, specialising in commercial machinery and undertaking advanced training - particularly with Toro equipment. This enabled Jason to develop strong working relationships with golf clubs, greenkeepers and turf care specialists, establishing an excellent reputation for technical expertise and dependable service across the region.

When Russell left the previous business, and he and Jason founded Revill Mowers together, it marked a natural progression for uncle and nephew to reunite professionally. The partnership made perfect sense - Russell brings decades of domestic, showroom and dealership experience, while Jason brings a wealth of commercial knowledge, specialist training and long-standing industry connections.

Starting again was one of the toughest periods of Russell's career, but strong industry support helped the new venture gain momentum. Early assistance from E.P. Barrus through consignment machinery supply, alongside backing from Etesia, enabled Revill Mowers to quickly establish a reputation for quality equipment supported by professional aftersales service.

Continuing growth

Today, the business continues to grow, offering a wide product range from mid-level through to premium equipment, from such manufacturers as STIGA, Cobra Garden Machinery, EGO Power+, Mitox, Cub Cadet and Husqvarna. The Husqvarna partnership in particular has become a standout success, especially in robotic and premium machinery, reflected in strong sales growth and industry award recognition.

While domestic robotic mowers have long formed part of the business, recent expansion has been driven strongly by the commercial sector - supported by Jason's longstanding relationships within the industry. Larger professional automowers and commercial equipment now make up an increasing proportion of sales.

This has seen Revill Mowers' coverage extended across the Cotswolds, Hereford and much of Wales, supporting up to 65 golf clubs alongside many other commercial customers. As Russell jokes: "We're surrounded by forest and sheep - so we have to stretch ourselves across the country."

Customer service remains at the heart of the business, reflected in the fleet of sign-written vans, with another fully-equipped mobile workshop vehicle on the way. Technical expertise is developed both in-house and through supplier training, though Russell notes the growing challenge of recruiting skilled engineers as apprenticeship routes continue to decline.

The company has also adapted strongly to the industry's shift toward battery and robotic technology. Although Russell jokingly describes himself as a "petrol head," robotic equipment now accounts for close to half of total sales, with the business operating roughly 70% domestic and 30% commercial.

With plans already in motion for larger premises and continued expansion, Revill Mowers is firmly positioned for the future. Russell's

experience and local relationships, combined with Jason's commercial expertise and industry reputation - supported by a dedicated team - have established the company as one of the region's most respected and forward-thinking dealerships.

Russell's career with those around him is a fantastic accolade to how a business can grow with commitment and determination, with the involvement of family enabling the future of the business to be secure.

My thanks to Russell and his daughter Shannon for their time and help in getting this story and message onto the pages of *Service Dealer*.



STIGA robotic mowers in the showroom



In the yard at Revill's Coleford, Forest of Dean depot



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From greenkeeper roots to a modern ag & turf powerhouse

A major investment in a state-of-the-art new facility, a growing team of ex-greenkeepers and a clear customer-first ethos are shaping the next chapter for Charlie's Ag & Turf at its historic Coed-y-Dinas base. LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, spoke to turf sales manager Matt Lewis to discover more.



The team outside the new building at the Coed-y-Dinas facility

While at this year's BIGGA BTME Show in Harrogate in January, I was fortunate to meet up with Matt Lewis, turf sales manager for Charlie's Ag & Turf in Welshpool. During our meeting we discussed the opportunity for me to visit their brand-new workshop, offices and showroom extension at Coed-y-Dinas, which officially opened on 5 December, 2025.

In an industry where machinery is becoming ever more sophisticated and budgets ever more constrained, the real differentiator isn't just the badge on the bonnet - it's the quality of the support that sits behind it. Charlie's Ag & Turf, based in Mid Wales and western Shropshire, has built its success on exactly that principle: deep customer understanding, strong technical backup and a 'one-stop shop' mentality that runs from fairway mowers and combines right down to waterproofs and workshop consumables.

Coed-y-Dinas is one of eight stores that make up the Charlie's group. Spanning over 70,000 sq ft, it's home to their garden centre, country store and Charlie's Ag & Turf, their official John Deere dealership. Originally the 'home farm' for Powis Castle, Coed-y-Dinas played a vital role in supplying everything needed to run the estate at its peak. Purchased in 2002, this flagship store sits on land with history dating back to 1720.

After an hour's drive from my home in Shropshire, I arrived at Charlie's Coed-y-Dinas premises, and was met by Matt Lewis, who was keen to show me around their new state-of-the-art workshops, office space, and showroom, which now takes centre stage at the site.

Inside the new development

As you enter the new building, you are faced with a large showroom area and front-office space for parts and service, turf and ag sales departments. Upstairs, there are more office spaces and viewing areas, overlooking both the showroom and workshop areas at the front and rear of the building.

This new building has enabled Charlie's to restructure its operations and take on more staff – in fact, the staffing levels have doubled since the completion of the new building. This new build has allowed Charlie's to evolve its business model and develop into a full industry-wide supplier of ag, amenity and domestic turf machinery.

One of the defining characteristics of Charlie's Ag & Turf is that many of its key people have come from the customer side of the fence. Matt Lewis joined Charlie's in October 2019 after 15 years as a customer. His career began at Carden Park Golf Club, where he completed his apprenticeship and worked on the PGA Seniors Tour under Andy Campbell, before spending 12-to-14 years at Llanymynech Golf Club under his father, who was head greenkeeper there for 47 years.

That background is typical of the turf team. When Matt first came in as area sales manager covering Shropshire, Charlie's was primarily a turf-focused dealership, with a strong presence in the Gator and UTV market and a growing professional turf business in Mid Wales and Shropshire. As the market developed and demand grew, the sales team expanded.

In around 2022–23, Harry Jones, an ex-greenkeeper from Wrekin Golf Club, joined to manage the Mid Wales area, while Matt continued to look after Shropshire. Matt says that their combined efforts steadily built the customer base, driven not by hard selling, but by a clear, simple ethos: "Put the customer first, and the sales will follow."

As that growth continued, Charlie's added a third turf salesman, James



As customers enter the new building, they are met with a large showroom area

Hampson, another former greenkeeper with around 16 years' experience, including time at Llanymynech Golf Club. With Harry and James both in their mid-30s, and Matt having recently turned 40, the company now fields a relatively young but highly experienced turf team that has literally lived the challenges its customers face.

"It's not a highly sales-driven approach," Matt explains. "We're essentially retired greenkeepers. The price is the price. You haven't got tens of thousands in discount to play with anymore – what you can really add is value in the form of backup, parts supply and real-world understanding."

That philosophy resonates strongly with head greenkeepers, many of whom can feel isolated between their teams and club committees. Matt said Charlie's staff often become sounding boards for discussions about agronomy, investment and the politics of club life. Because they have no direct stake in the club's internal decisions, they can offer frank, experience-based advice that customers value.

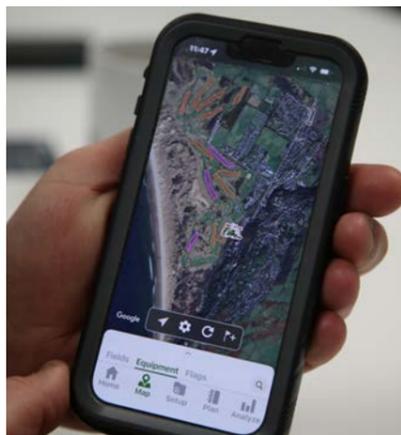
Investing for the long term

Charlie's effectively signed up to the new John Deere agricultural franchise in 2023, with the mindset that it was going to be a long-term plan. "We needed to put a solution in place that gave us longevity and future-proofed us to serve both ag and turf customers," Matt explains.

They brought in an independent consulting company, MTJ Construction, to help with the design and build of the new multimillion-pound complex. Matt praised MTJ for their professionalism: "They offered a complete package for our project, guided us through all the right channels, kept us informed on progress at each stage, and consulted as required. We are very pleased with the finished product, and highly recommend MTJ for any project of this nature or magnitude." The new complex was officially opened on 5 December, 2025.

The new building offers a range of facilities: a purpose-built agricultural workshop integrated with the existing turf operation, a new customer-focused showroom and front-of-house to improve the customer experience, and a temporary workshop initially built to get the ag franchise moving while the main building was designed and constructed. There's an overhead crane in the new workshop to handle large ag machinery safely, reducing manual lifting injuries and improving turnaround on big machines, such as combines. There is also improved office space.

Matt also highlighted sustainability and efficiency improvements, including metered oil handling and disposal systems, energy-efficient building design – with solar panels covering almost all working-hours demand – all-electric heating deliberately aligned with daylight/solar generation, high levels of insulation, automatic



Charlies advocate the rollout of John Deere StarFire guidance and precision systems across both agriculture and turf.

sensor-based lighting, and a small battery system to support critical loads.

Growing the team and the offer

With the opening of the new facility, staffing virtually doubled, growing from just under 20 turf-only staff to nearly 50, including part-time employees covering both ag and turf. Dedicated roles were added, including three turf sales staff (all ex-greenkeepers), three agricultural sales staff, one product demonstrator, and two GPS and precision solutions specialists. These roles strengthened coverage of western Shropshire and Mid Wales, and allowed on-site support teams for major events, including extra machinery and manpower.

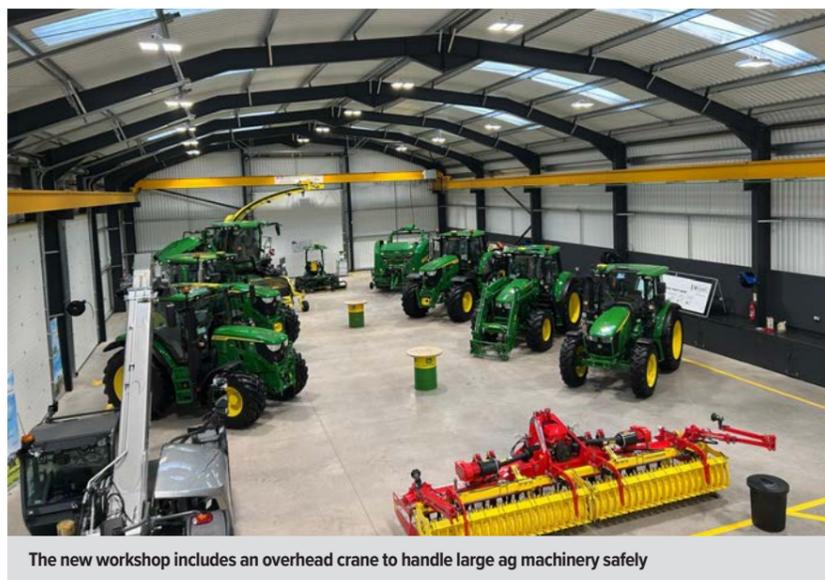
Charlie's has broadened its "one-stop shop" offer, so customers can go to a single supplier for all their needs. Matt explained: "From a turf care



Matt Lewis, turf sales manager for Charlie's Ag & Turf in Welshpool

perspective, our main franchise is John Deere, supported by Redexim for a full range – from topdressing to scarification, aeration and synthetic maintenance. We want as few suppliers to deal with as possible, so we can spend more time with customers and reduce complexity."

Other turf machinery franchises include Trimax, Weibang, Grillo and GreenTech products, alongside Yamaha quadbikes, golf buggies and lithium UTVs for golf clubs, caravan parks and more. Agricultural machinery includes John Deere agriculture, Kramer telehandlers, and supporting franchises such as Red Rock/K2 trailers and muck spreaders, Pöttinger cultivation kit, as well as other manufacturers (including Walter Watson, NC, Richie, Strymek, and



The new workshop includes an overhead crane to handle large ag machinery safely

Cherry Products). Consumables range from waterproof clothing with embroidered staff logos to workshop supplies, patio sets, fencing materials and drainage pipe, as well as third-party services invoiced through Charlie's.

Demonstrations are central to Charlie's approach. Matt says: "We are very proactive in carrying out in-depth demonstrations for our customers, showing multiple use cases for each machine. It's hard to buy a piece of machinery these days that's a one-trick pony. Customers need to see it themselves, and understand the value of their investment." Charlie's also

organises open days and facility tours at Coed-y-Dinas, and attends primary industry shows, such as SALTEX, GroundsFest, BTME and LAMMA.

On-site repair facilities include two large workshops. The new build comes equipped with an interior crane catering for very large ag machinery, such as combines and harvesters, while the older adjacent building – formerly a showroom – is now used for amenity turf parts and workshop activity. A dedicated mower blade sharpening facility houses a Bernhard grinder for cylinder mower cassettes and reels.

Recruitment remains a challenge. Matt explains: "Staff is the biggest limiting factor in any business these days. Finding the right people is difficult, and, when you do, you must

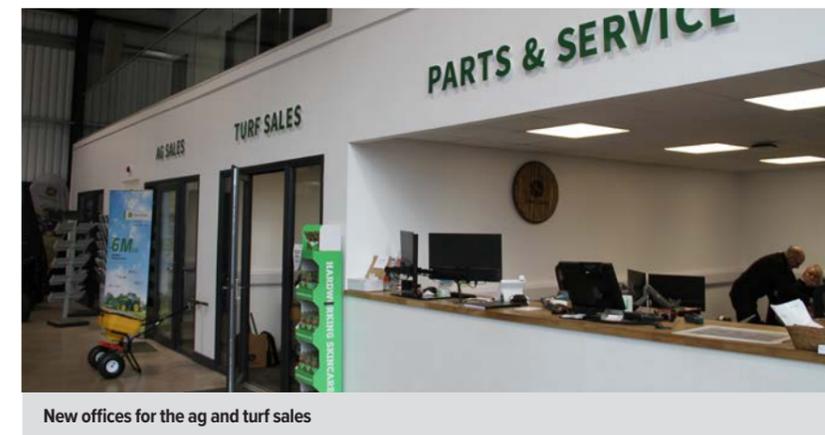
treat them well enough to keep them. Richard Branson said to train staff well enough that they could leave, but treat them well enough that they don't want to – and that's incredibly important." Charlie's participates in the John Deere apprentice programme, typically supporting two to three apprentices per year. Retention is high, with some of the first apprentices still with the company after 17 years.

Selling machinery has changed in recent years. Matt says: "Many manufacturers are highly sales-driven, but our customer-first approach ensures sales come naturally.

Territory changes and technology advances

Charlie's trading area has shifted following John Deere realignment. Matt explained: "We used to cover all of Shropshire for John Deere turf products, but now Tallis Amos Group covers eastern Shropshire, and we cover western Shropshire. We've retained many long-standing customers despite the change."

Technology is also evolving at Charlie's. Matt highlighted the rollout of John Deere StarFire guidance and precision systems across both agriculture and turf. "What started as an agricultural system is now adopted by progressive golf clubs and sports turf managers. Courses such as Royal St David's are running auto-steer fairway mowers, achieving pass-to-pass accuracy as low as 1cm. The same guidance kits transfer to tractors for verti-draining or spraying, giving



New offices for the ag and turf sales

similar accuracy benefits."

Chemical application is another key use case. When coupled with a sprayer, even non-John Deere machines can generate GPS-logged spray maps showing exactly where, when and at what rate chemicals were applied, providing auditable records in an era of tighter regulation. All of this is underpinned by the John Deere Operations Center, which enables managers to monitor machine locations, fuel levels, work history and application

data, and which opens up a new level of remote diagnostics.

Charlie's is also embracing battery and robotic technologies, continuing its evolution from a single retail store in Newtown to a multi-site, multi-franchise ag and turf business, with a state-of-the-art facility and strong precision technology offer.

Yet, as Matt consistently states, the core principle remains simple: treat people well, back your customers up properly, and the rest will follow.



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EGO say they have particularly seen increased interest in battery from the commercial market

Innovation, partnership, and the future



Celebrating 10 years since the European launch of EGO Power+, Vince Brauns, the brand's group product director, speaks to Service Dealer.

As EGO Power+ marks 10 years since its European launch, the brand's growth story is closely tied to the strength of its distributor and dealer partnerships. From entering a sceptical, petrol-dominated market with just four products, to building a European network of more than 2,500 approved dealers, EGO's rise mirrors the wider shift toward battery-powered outdoor equipment.

In this Q&A, Vince Brauns, group product director for EGO Power+, reflects on the early challenges of winning dealer confidence, the importance of long-term partnerships, and how innovation, education and route-to-market strategy will shape the next decade for both manufacturers and dealers alike.

Service Dealer: Take us back to EGO's early days in Europe. What did the market look like when the brand first launched in 2014?

Vince Brauns: A decade is a considerable amount of time in industry, and in 2014, the landscape looked very different. Confidence in battery-powered tools was low – concerns about runtime and performance left many professional users reluctant to abandon the familiarity of petrol. However, being the only outdoor power equipment manufacturer focused exclusively on battery technology, EGO stood strong with its belief that battery power would define the future.

SD: How challenging was it to establish EGO in Europe with such a limited initial product range?

VB: When EGO first launched in Europe, its offering was small – only four products, two batteries, a single charger, and no established distributor or dealer network. The brand recognised that building such a

network would be challenging. Dealers are not easily influenced, and will only sell quality products that have credibility from genuine user approval.

SD: How important was finding the right distribution partner in those early stages?

VB: A seed was planted when the brand met the UK-based distributor Henton and Chattell (H&C). EGO needed a strong partner, capable of building dealer relationships, and H&C fitted the requirements perfectly, sharing the same confidence in battery technology long before it was normalised in the industry.

SD: How has that relationship developed?

VB: What began as a small collaboration has evolved into a decade-long partnership that – alongside other major European distributors like Iseki, Brumar and Stierman De Leeuw – has seen EGO become an established global brand, with a network of over 2,500 approved dealers in Europe alone.

SD: How has the EGO product portfolio expanded since those early days?

VB: From high-performance professional tools and reliable consumer models, to the robust Pro X range built specifically for commercial users, EGO has bolstered its product portfolio to over 100 products. Its sub-brand, Powered by EGO, also supports manufacturers who wish to integrate EGO's battery platform into their own equipment – and, counting the products included within this range, EGO now powers the largest range of battery-powered equipment in the world. Central to this ecosystem is the 56V ARC Lithium battery platform, which is fully interchangeable across all EGO tools. This continual innovation is driven by significant investment in R&D, ensuring that EGO's products deliver uncompromising power and performance.

SD: But would you say there was still resistance to battery-powered tools?

VB: Yes. Despite this innovation, EGO was concerned that the popularity of petrol-powered tools still overshadowed an interest in new technology from users. This is despite the fact that petrol tools emit harmful emissions, have been known to cause health issues after prolonged use, and are disruptive due to their noise levels and strong fumes.

The brand felt that there wasn't enough information available for consumers on the benefits of battery-powered OPE, and so, in 2020, it launched a five-year campaign, Challenge 2025, which set out to educate and inform both professional and domestic users on why they should consider transitioning from petrol tools.

SD: What impact did this have?

VB: The campaign undertook countless hours of research from emissions testing, noise and vibration measurement using independent partners, and recently uncovered the widespread use of petrol tools by local authorities within the UK's so-called Clean Air Zones. All of which led to



Dealers enjoyed hands-on workshops tailored to their region at the recent event in China

its full product portfolio. The 8.0Ah battery will be quicker to charge and lighter in weight, and is the first of many advancements to come.

SD: Tell us about recent developments for the company?

VB: 2025 was a landmark year for EGO Power+. Alongside celebrating its 10th anniversary in Europe, the brand unveiled the development of its first boundary-wire-free robotic mower, the AURA-R2.

To honour these milestones, and to thank its distributor network for their ongoing support, EGO hosted its annual Distributor Conference at its global headquarters in Nanjing, China, for the first time. Currently undergoing expansion, the HQ, known as the 'New Energy Industrial Park,' boasts a total planned building area of 520,000 square metres, and was awarded as the national 'Green Factory' in 2018 in recognition of its more than 17,000 square metres of solar panels, which save more than 3 million kilowatt hours per year, becoming the only company in Nanjing to win this honour.

SD: What did the conference offer to its attendees?

VB: Held in September, the highly-anticipated conference brought together distributors from across Europe for a four-day extravaganza to

thousands of articles across Europe and widespread interest from users, playing a vital role in changing mindsets and behaviours. Organisations such as the Climate Change Committee recently advocated for the phasing out of petrol-powered lawnmowers. A huge success: by 2024, data from the European Garden Machinery Industry Federation (EGMF) showed that the use of battery-powered tools had doubled since 2019, and a clear shift away from petrol was shown in the data. As of 2024, sales for battery-powered tools made up 58% of the entire market.

SD: So, from which sectors would you say you have experienced the greatest interest?

VB: EGO has particularly seen increased interest in battery from the commercial market, and its Powered by EGO brand has also experienced growth, with more petrol brands wanting to electrify their petrol tools using EGO's established battery platform.

SD: With battery now widely accepted, where does innovation go next?

VB: Cordless outdoor power equipment is firmly established in the industry, but the question constantly on every manufacturer's mind is: how do we innovate? How do we remain on top? Today, battery is the

fastest-developing element across the industry, which makes it essential for manufacturers to always be looking for new ways to innovate their technology and keep the industry moving and progressing.

Most recently, there is the move towards tabless battery technology - an innovative lithium-ion battery design that removes the traditional metal connection tabs, instead connecting the electrodes directly to the cell's end in order to improve efficiency and lifespan. In 2026, EGO is launching its first tabless battery, the 56V ARC Lithium MAX, which is compatible with



Dealers at EGO's recent distributor conference at its global headquarters in Nanjing, China



The new AURA R2



Dealers testing out the new kit

share in the success of the last decade. Delegates enjoyed a gala dinner, factory tours, local city trips and hands-on workshops tailored to their region, and each received a commemorative plaque to acknowledge their support for EGO. The programme also offered a behind-the-scenes look at research and development operations, sharing how the products are manufactured and tested at the facility.

A full day of the schedule was dedicated to the new AURA-R2 robotic mower range, held at the brand's new state-of-the-art, purpose-built AURA-R2

outdoor testing facility. This exclusive preview marked the global launch of the AURA-R2, giving delegates the world's first look at the new models ahead of their public release.

SD: Finally, what does the next decade look like for EGO Power+?

VB: EGO is setting the next decade in motion, with 13 new products for 2026, including its new tabless battery and AURA-R2 robotic mower range. The brand is also expanding its commercial offering to support the growing shift toward battery-powered equipment by commercial users and municipalities. This includes the launch of the

LMX7600-SP 76cm lawnmower - the widest cutting width in the PRO X range - and new additions to the PRO X PGX charging range, the only solution on the market to offer all-day charging capability. With consumers increasingly choosing automated solutions to reclaim valuable time, AURA-R2 stands out as a unique entry into the category. With its PATH IQ™ intelligent navigation technologies, which provide industry-leading precision in even the most complex of applications, the launch marks a defining moment not only for EGO's future, but for the direction of the entire industry. Building on its foundations, EGO is determined to power the next decade with products that are even more efficient, powerful and technologically-advanced. As the industry continues to evolve, EGO will continue to push boundaries, delivering revolutionary solutions to the outdoor power equipment market. A key focus moving forward will be strengthening its route to market through its trusted dealer network, because the people behind the technology are just as vital as the technology itself.

SD: Thank you.



Getting hands-on with chainsaws

Be better tomorrow than today



In 2021, Geoff Brown moved into a chairman's role at Ripon Farm Services, following the recruitment of Richard Simpson.

It's seven years since *SERVICE DEALER* last reported from the winter show of Ripon Farm Services, the multi-branch north-eastern England ag and turf dealer

This January, MARTIN RICKATSON travelled to the 2026 event to catch up on happenings within the business since then.

Management additions, business acquisitions, new depots...in the space of seven years since our last visit to its winter show in 2019 it's perhaps hardly surprising there has been more than a handful of changes at a dealership business the size and scale of Ripon Farm Services. Many things remain unchanged, though, particularly in terms of the primary franchise partner and of the man at the top – although he has stepped into a new role and handed over day-to-day management to a new CEO.

According to the *Farmers Weekly* survey of Britain's biggest machinery dealers ranked by turnover, last published in March 2025 and based on the then most recently-available 2023 financial figures, the company is the fifth biggest business of its type. Shortly after our last visit, the



Ripon has developed a standardised used equipment process, which is helping to move on second-hand stock.

13 branches, 280 employees and a turnover of over £150m. In addition to John Deere, its franchises include Kramer, Kuhn, Bunning, Spearhead, Bomford, NC Engineering, Dalbo, Ryetec and Stocks Ag. Outdoor power equipment comes from Husqvarna, Stihl, and Mountfield, with tools and spares from Kramp, Milwaukee and others.

After working with predecessor dealerships Glovers and Appleyards, beginning in 1961 with the former, Geoff Brown founded Ripon Farm Services in 1982, alongside four other directors including Maurice Hymas and William Houseman. In 2021, he moved up to a chairman's role, and in 2023 his services to the rural economy were recognised with an MBE.

The reason behind Geoff's decision to move 'upstairs' was the choice made by him and the rest Ripon board in 2021 to strengthen its management to ensure the structure in place for growth and succession. As chairman, Geoff now advises on strategic direction, and after a careful selection process, Richard Simpson was invited to join the company as commercial director, and latterly chief executive officer. Today, he works alongside a further recent appointment, a new chief financial officer, Chris Northway.

The route to Ripon

From a farming background, Richard brought with him extensive experience in transforming companies of various sizes. Upon joining, he took full responsibility for the strategic development of RFS and the day-to-day running of the business. At Ripon's 2026 show, held at the Yorkshire Events Centre in Harrogate, he gave a presentation which revealed the background to his current position, the current status of the company, and some of its plans for the future.

"I grew up on a small 150-acre farm at Draughton, between Skipton and Ilkley, on the borders of North and West Yorkshire, where we had a 40-cow dairy herd and some sheep, so I have agricultural foundations, but unfortunately my parents had to sell up when my mother became poorly," explained Richard.

"When that put a stop on my farming ambitions, almost by

firm grew considerably with the acquisition of neighbouring John Deere dealer RBM Agricultural, extending its operations deeper into Yorks and on into Lincs and Notts, adding £45m of turnover, 84 staff and five branches in Market Weighton, Malton, Retford, Brigg and Louth.

Since then, in 2022 Ripon Farm Services opened a new purpose-built 6,700 sq m branch at Malton, North Yorks, which also acts as the centre for Ripon's Nugent trailer business. Then, in early 2023, Ripon made a further acquisition which took it into the professional turf care market by creating Ripon Ground Care. This resulted from the purchase of FG Adamson and Son, a John Deere turf dealer with branches near Hull and Lincoln, and a 75-year history of serving customers across Yorks and Lincs. Today, Ripon has

accident I got into sales, when a friend in that trade pitched up in a new Ford Escort and told me that a sales job was the route to a nice new car.

“So I secured a sales job and worked my way up through various organisations, latterly becoming UK vice president of sales and service operations for a North American company, Shred-It. I then spent four years as CEO of Walkers Transport, a palletised freight firm in Leeds, before seeing an advert for the CEO role at Ripon Farm Services.

“I wanted to get back into agriculture, and with my dad having moved in the early 1980s from red tractors to buying his first John Deere, an 1140 which became my main tractor, I had the main franchise already in my blood. There’s no doubt I was daunted by the job, though, despite wanting it so much. This is a big and respected dealership with a great history.”

Thirteen-depot business

With the steady expansion of the business over the years, there are 13 sites to oversee, and no day is typical, says Richard of his job.

“My responsibility is helping Ripon begin the next 40 years of its growth, and I want our future to be as good as our past has been. This is a fantastic business – everyone here cares about customer service and doing the right thing. I want to retain everything that’s good about the company and help it continue its evolution.

“What’s most important is people – ours and those we serve – and the way we conduct ourselves. We may sometimes get things wrong, but our aim is to always try and do the right thing, and retain the values Geoff has espoused over 40 years.”

Given the business’s recent growth, one of the key



A two-day indoor January event, the Ripon Farm Services annual show is held in the centre of its territory, at Harrogate.

challenges here, acknowledges Richard, is consistency across the company.

“Ripon Farm Services has always sought to be a great customer service business and help farmers and growers get more from their daily work via the things we supply to make their jobs easier and their businesses more productive. As we’ve grown, my focus has been on ensuring everyone gets the best of us.”

The past couple of years, though, have been particularly challenging for agriculture and the machinery dealers who supply the sector. But Richard believes there may be reason for optimism.

“Our order book is looking much better now, which is great, with combine business in particular many times better than it was at this point last year. But we’re still feeling the effects of low farm commodity prices and high input costs, changes in government support and the legacy of the ‘23 and ‘24 harvest weather, and even the ‘25 one on light land.

“Then, of course, were the effects of the last Budget, both on our own business – the national insurance increase cost us approximately £400,000 – and on our customers’ businesses, with the inheritance tax issue in particular affecting farmer confidence. Across the farming industry, everyone is feeling the same pain.

“Internally, we have two big issues we’ve already begun to tackle to be ready when the upturn comes – reducing costs and increasing sales. We had high levels of stock which had come in at strong prices when things were better. The upside was plenty of choice to meet different customer needs, and the ability to fairly quickly generate cash, but then there was a negative effect on our profit and loss account. But we committed early to reducing stock levels, and from net outflows in 2023 of about £9m cash, we turned this around to net inflows in 2024 of £11.6m, changing our cash position in 15 months by about £18m, a fantastic effort by our sales team.

“Of course, sales often mean trade-ins, and we also developed a standardised used equipment process. Previously our system was perhaps a little ambitious in values which resulted in high stock levels. We’re now more rigorous with the way we value used equipment, and this has helped move on secondhand stock.

“It was much tougher to address cost reduction, particularly where it affected our staffing. It’s the people side which keeps me awake at night, and while not replacing some retiring staff was difficult to manage, it was much harder to let some staff go.

“Ultimately, we would not compromise on customer service, and maintaining this has been our focus despite the changes. The values of the company don’t change, but in this industry we’re all having to think differently about how we run businesses and raise our game to be better, focusing on first-time fixes to minimise cost to us and our customers, and ensuring customers get what they need when they need it. But it’s also essential as a business to make a fair return on what we do.”

Consistent approach

It can be hard to understand the scale of the firm and the talent in it when working from any one of its branches, Richard acknowledges.

“My job is to disseminate across the business the talents within it, and focus on ensuring our people are trained to provide a high standard of service that’s consistent across the company. I firmly believe that across Ripon we have the talent to solve any problem a customer might have.

“Our key internal initiative to manage this is our ‘Always On’ customer service standard, and developing this is very exciting. It has its roots in Geoff’s commitments driving all sorts of distances to support customers back when he began the company, so it’s in our DNA. It reflects our process to get any customer with an issue up and running as soon as possible.

“In the coming years our values won’t change but our company will continue to do so – we will evolve to be faster and more efficient. Customer service is everything – sometimes we make mistakes, but our intent is to always do the right thing.”

Much of Ripon’s expansion has been driven by neighbouring John Deere dealer acquisitions, with the encouragement of John Deere Ltd, and the dealership’s partnership with its key supplier has never been stronger, suggests Richard, with associated benefits for customers.

“I believe they are the most progressive farm and turf machinery maker, with a strategy that revolves around dealer partners of scale that can cope with the market’s evolution and link customer and manufacturer. They keep us honest, and push us to be better every day in all areas. They have always been supportive of us, and therefore of our customers. We pay our own way, but they fully support us. I do take some responsibility that we haven’t communicated these things to customers well enough, but we are fully committed to the challenge of the best possible service levels that do not require manufacturer involvement.

Not just machines

“Their products go beyond machinery itself. We’re working increasingly with customers using John Deere Operations Center remote monitoring to help them maximise machine efficiency. And SmartLine is perhaps one of the most important John Deere offerings, a financial product that acts as a rolling credit facility, allowing customers to spread the cost of parts, service, precision technology and machine updates. It’s a really interesting development in the way we can transact with customers to help in tough times, allowing them to get problems fixed fast and spread the cost. It can also be used for machinery investment.”

Ultimately, though, a dealership is as much about its people as its products, believes Richard.

“Each of our branches is part of people’s communities and many employees are from farming, so fully understand the



Suppliers reported a good level of enquiries from agricultural and turf customers across the two days of the event.

sector’s needs. My job is to get the best from them and develop consistency across the group, building on our one team mentality, so every customer across every branch gets the best of us. I value making progress more than striving for perfection, and I want us to be better today than yesterday – and better tomorrow than today.”



Ripon Ground Care was formed following the 2023 purchase of FG Adamson and Son, a John Deere turf dealer with branches near Hull and Lincoln.



Driving excellence

Supporting their customers with Merlo equipment

Having recently won Merlo's Overall Dealer of the Year for 2025, managing director of ag and plant dealership Cooks Midlands, Darren Cook, tells Service Dealer about their vision, resilience and commitment to customers.

Cooks Midlands Ltd is a privately-owned family company, supplying agricultural and plant equipment throughout the Midlands area. The dealership was recently awarded Merlo Dealer of the Year 2025, a recognition that celebrates outstanding performance, customer service, and dedication to the manufacturer's brand. Upon the announcement of the award the dealership issued a statement in recognition of the accolade, saying, "A sincere thank you to our valued

customers and colleagues for your continued support. We look forward to building on this success in the year ahead. For managing director Darren Cook, the award marks the achievement of a vision he set when he took the helm in 2020. "Winning Merlo Dealer of the Year is an incredible milestone for all of us at Cooks Midlands," says Darren. "It validates years of hard work, commitment, and belief in the Merlo product. When I became managing director, I told the team I wanted us to

be the best Merlo dealer in the UK. It felt ambitious at the time, but everyone bought into that vision. This award reflects not only our sales success but also the quality of our service, our customer relationships, and the expertise of our staff."

From humble beginnings

Founded in 1993 by Bill Cook, Darren's father, Cooks Midlands started as a two-man operation serving the local farming community. Darren joined in 1996, helping Bill build the

business through hard work and a reputation for reliability. In 1996, the company became an official Merlo dealer, a bold move that they believed positioned them at the forefront of innovation in the agricultural sector. "Bill recognised early on that Merlo machines offered something genuinely different," Darren explains. "His belief in the product laid the foundation for a partnership that has shaped our entire business." Since then, the dealership has gradually built a solid and enviable reputation to become one of the

Midlands largest and most respected suppliers of telehandlers and have sold over 1000 new machines. In 2020 their efforts were first recognised by the company, being awarded with their Gold Standard – a title which they still hold to this date. In 2023 Cooks were appointed as Kioti UK's newest dealer, selling a broad range of compact tractors, from 21 to 140 hp. They also supply and maintain many makes of agricultural machinery from leading manufacturers including Viccon, McConnel/Twoose, Warwick/KTwo, Albutt, Browns Agri Machinery, Cherry Products and Strimech. As well as these they also sell other products from manufacturers such as Makita, Karcher Pressure Cleaners, Foster, William Hackett, Hotline, Electric Fencing and Tanco.

The dealership states that their aim is to provide quality machines with quality sales and service backup. They say their intention is to always be approachable and listen to what the customer needs, to treat all their customers fairly and to take pride in supporting British farmers and the British construction industry.

Navigating challenges and driving growth

Taking over as managing director in 2020 was a turning point, says Darren. He set two ambitious goals: double turnover within five years and become the UK's leading Merlo dealer. Despite challenges such as recruiting skilled technicians and managing cash flow, the company invested heavily



Darren and Roxanne Cook

in apprenticeships, training, and infrastructure to strengthen its service offering. "Skilled people are the backbone of our business," Darren explains. "We've built a team that shares our values and passion for Merlo machines." Many of Cooks Midlands' customers have been with the company for decades, continuing to replace their machines with new models. Darren attributes this loyalty to exceptional service and responsiveness. "A happy customer is the best advertisement we could ever have. We stay close to our customers and put huge emphasis on reliability and support."



The Cook's team at the Ashby Show 2025, where they won Best Show Stand - Jack, Graham, Rob, Darren, David, Emi and Ricky



General manager, David Brown with managing director Darren Cook

Looking ahead

As the agricultural and construction sectors evolve, Cooks Midlands plans to grow alongside them.

“Both industries are becoming more technology-driven and efficiency-focused,” Darren observes. “I believe Merlo is well placed to meet those demands, and so are we. Our role is to remain a trusted partner - supplying high-quality machines and supporting customers with skilled technicians and modern solutions.”

When asked about the single most important ingredient for building a resilient dealership, Darren is clear saying, “Great people and strong financial discipline.”

He expanded, “When staff feel valued and share in the company’s vision, they create an environment where customers feel supported.

That, combined with careful cash flow management, is the foundation for long-term success.”

Cooks Midlands’ ongoing success and their recent achievement as Merlo

Dealer of the Year 2025 is a testament to their vision, resilience, and unwavering commitment to customers. Theirs is story that sets the standard for excellence in the industry.



Service technician, Davern, with his fully equipped service vehicle.



Plant Hire & Construction

Latest news for the sector Edited by Dan Gilkes

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Dan Gilkes, editor of *Service Dealer’s* new plant hire and construction machinery section, says that, as the sector looks to automation to improve performance and address skills shortages, AI-assisted machinery is set to play a growing role in supporting operators onsite.

Does automation solve the skills crisis?

As equipment manufacturers continue to look for every small advance in performance, efficiency and productivity, they are increasingly turning towards automation as a way of boosting output. This has become increasingly important, as it becomes harder to find skilled operators.

With digital control taking over from analogue, it has become possible to automate a growing number of functions and machine operating systems. From simple auto-idle and auto-stop – which prevent operators from leaving engines running when a machine is not working – to far more complex machine guidance and control operations. Now, it would appear, artificial intelligence is the next step along this road.

There have been 2D and 3D machine guidance and control systems on offer for excavators and dozers for some

years, of course. Machine guidance shows the operator when they have reached predetermined depths, widths and grades, while machine control does much of the actual work for the operator, taking control of boom, dipper arm and bucket functions to let the bucket follow the engineer’s digital design to final grade.

These systems can save huge amounts of time and money. Where contractors are levelling large areas for warehousing, for instance, taking a few centimetres of additional material away from the site while excavating can result in hundreds of tonnes of additional fill material having to be imported to make up ground to meet the design. Digital site plans, transmitted directly to the machines, also limit the number of engineers required to mark out and check levels throughout a project, cutting cost and increasing site safety.

While initially skilled operators feared that this technology would replace their hard-earned experience and expertise, many have since discovered that it actually enhances their abilities, boosting productivity and reducing fatigue in repetitive operations.

Automation can also help less experienced operators to become more productive and speed up their training and knowledge acquisition.

There is no doubt that AI poses a threat to many industry sectors, yet plant operators need not resist the introduction of new technologies. Operators who understand the benefits of AI-assisted equipment will become more valuable, not less. They will be more productive, yet should experience less fatigue, letting the equipment do much of the easier work. Artificial intelligence can be a powerful tool – it need not be a replacement for skilled operators.

Hire on the agenda

The Executive Hire Show, at Coventry's CBS Arena, provides an early barometer of industry confidence and construction business health as we start the new year. DAN GILKES reports.

While the continued appalling weather afflicting much of the country remained stubbornly high on the agenda, there was a small bounce in the footsteps of many at February's Executive Hire Show. The show was certainly well attended, with plenty of prospective customers keen to see the latest equipment updates and technologies. Having walked the halls throughout the first day of the event, these were some of the stands that caught our eye.

Groundhog

Attending annual exhibitions and events can sometimes feel a bit like Groundhog Day, with companies in their usual locations, familiar equipment updated to meet the latest legislation. This year's Executive Hire Show however started with the unveiling of an actual Groundhog, or in fact an ehog.

Introduced as a working concept at present and due to undergo real site testing with Sunbelt Rentals, welfare specialist Groundhog's ehog is a zero-carbon take on the company's range of welfare cabins. Instead of a petrol or diesel generator feeding power to the cabin's office, mess room and toilet facilities, the ehog uses stacked lithium-ion rechargeable battery packs.

The welfare unit on show was equipped with 6kWh of battery storage, replacing a 6kW generator. With the batteries topped-up by 1.8kW of solar panels on the roof of the cabin, the battery could last for days to weeks, depending on ambient temperature and light. Groundhog's idea is that the battery packs, which can be easily handled by a single operative, could be changed as the toilet



facilities are emptied, with the rental company recharging the battery at base for use elsewhere.

With a growing number of customers, like National Highways, calling for zero-carbon equipment by 2035, Groundhog sees an increasing demand for an alternative to diesel generators, on off-grid construction locations. The ehog is a step along that journey.

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Maxflow

Maxflow Power Products has added the Yanmar X to its diesel pressure washer range, creating one of the biggest Stage V compliant diesel pressure washers on the market. Powered by a 19.9kW Yanmar engine, the unit meets Stage V emissions regulations with no requirement for exhaust aftertreatment, reducing cost for customers.

The machine has a belt drive to the pump, allowing a lower pump speed. Higher pressure pump units can be installed for a range of applications, including hydro demolition work.



Altrad Belle

Compact equipment manufacturer Altrad Belle has added a battery-powered mini-dumper to its line-up. Based on the BMD300, the four-wheel drive BMD 300E+ uses two interchangeable 82V batteries, already used in other Altrad Belle electric, saws, pumps and mixers. Customers will be able to charge additional batteries while the machine is in use, simply swapping them to extend run time as required.

Due to launch later in the year, the mini dumper can also be supplied with a flatbed body, rather than a tipping skip, allowing it to be used to move bricks, blocks and other materials on site. The compact machine can even be equipped with a towbar, making it easy to relocate other machinery if required.

Altrad Belle has also added the PCEL 32X to its compaction plate line, providing customers with a high-performance plate that weighs under 50kg.

Husqvarna

Husqvarna Construction is adding to its 94V range of battery powered power tools. New models include the LF75 PACE and LF100 PACE forward travel compaction plates. While the compact LF60i LAT plate uses the company's 36V battery, the larger 94V battery offers greater run time, increased performance and higher compaction. The LF75 has an operating weight of 98kg and a centrifugal compaction force of 15kN.

The company has also unveiled a range of industrial air cleaners, to be used in conjunction with its cutting, drilling and grinding equipment. With multiple fan speeds, HEPA and carbon filters, the range offers mobility and intelligent operation, ensuring that workers are not exposed to construction dust and debris, such as crystalline silica.



Bobcat

Bobcat has introduced four models in its R2-Series mini excavator line-up. The E16 replaces the previous E17, with its reduced weight of 1,612kg making it easier for customers to tow behind a van or pick-up with buckets and a breaker. The 1,712kg E17z is now a zero-tail swing model, along with the 1,980kg E20Z, while the E19, at 1,905kg, offers a model at the sub-2-tonne mark with a conventional counterweight.

The machines feature new styling, smoother SmartFlow hydraulics with a load-sensing pump and improved operator comfort, thanks to increased legroom and new seating. All four of the mini excavators are Stage V compliant and the E16, E19 and E20z can all be had with a choice of canopy or full cab. The E17z is canopy-only.



Liebherr

Liebherr might not be a familiar brand at the Executive Hire Show, but the company is entering into the portable power market, in construction and the events business. The Liduro Power Port (LPO) is a lithium-ion battery pack that is available on a trailer mount or an enclosed skid, offering peak power of 100kVA or 540kVA.

The system is scalable, to meet individual site requirements, storing 39-156kWh of electrical energy. This can be used on site to power equipment, accommodation or vehicles, when grid power is insufficient. The LPO can be dropped in to site for a plug-and-play electrical supply solution. It offers outputs from 16A to 125A and the units can be used in both charging and discharging mode at the same time, allowing users to smooth out demand in low grid supply locations.

Avant Tecno

Another company offering a power supply for its battery-powered equipment is compact loader manufacturer Avant Tecno. The Finnish company has a growing range of electric models and its battery development division Avant Power is creating a line of back-up power packs to operate with the machines.

There are two models on the way initially, the Cube 47 and the Cube 100, offering 47kWh and 100kWh of stored power respectively. For a customer using a compact loader in mixed use, that should be enough for up to four days of operation, with the smaller cube taking 4-5 hours to recharge from a grid supply.

The Cube 47 is expected in dealers by the Autumn, with the Cube 100 on offer early in 2027.



Dragon Equipment

Suffolk-based Dragon Equipment is to launch a hybrid drive compact tracked crusher. The CR550 will be capable of handling up to 25-tonnes of material an hour. The hybrid driveline, which combines a diesel engine with a battery drive system, is not intended to operate as an electric-only machine. Instead, the electric system adds power to the diesel engine when required, to provide additional crushing force and higher performance. The diesel engine recharges the battery when the machine is not running at higher capacities.

The CR550 is the company's largest mobile crusher to date. At 2.8-tonnes operating weight it can be towed behind a van or pick-up, making transportation to and from site easier. The machine also benefits from pre-set engine rpm for crushing and travel operations, ensuring maximum productivity without excessive fuel use.



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Ming Xu, senior vice president of Sany Group, and Alexander Scott, CEO of T H White

Supplying from depots in Stourport and Marlborough

Sany Heavy Machinery UK has appointed T H White as a dealer for the West Midlands and parts of the Southwest. The company will supply and service Sany equipment from its depots in Stourport and Marlborough. T H White will replace MSM/DRH, which has represented the Sany product since 2020.

“We are delighted to welcome T H White as our new dealer. Their longstanding experience, industry knowledge and commitment to customer support make them an excellent fit for the Sany network,” said Leigh Harris, business development director at Sany UK.

Major deal for Boss Plant Sales and Kubota

150 mini and midi excavators

North London rental business GGH Hire has placed an order for 150 mini and midi excavators, from Kubota dealer Boss Plant Sales.

The deal is thought to be one of the largest single orders for Kubota machinery in the UK. GGH Hire was acquired in December 2025 by St Albans-based Herts Tool Company, and the company has been quick to invest in fleet upgrades. While 100 of the excavators will be direct replacements for existing fleet models, 50 will drive fleet growth, to satisfy customer demand.

Boss Plant Sales’ key account manager Nick Anwyl commented: “It has been a privilege to support GGH Hire over the years, and to manage their investment into quality Kubota machinery. It’s fantastic to see their fleet strengthened with this new equipment that delivers the performance and reliability that their customers expect.”



Rocket Rentals accelerates expansion

With JCB fleet deal

Rocket Rentals has announced a major fleet expansion with the purchase of more than 55 new JCB machines - including a 35-strong fleet of zero tail swing excavators.

The Gloucester based hirer say they are investing in compact, manoeuvrable kit to keep pace with what they describe as “booming demand across construction, civils and infrastructure.” Its latest investment includes 145XR, 90Z 2, 50Z 2 and 25Z 1 excavators, alongside JCB Loadall telehandlers, X Series tracked excavators, and the brand new JCB CT430 140 tandem roller.

Managing director Simon Tomblin said: “We like that JCB is a British family company with a fantastic dealer network. Our relationship with Holt JCB is one of the reasons we choose JCB. The level of service we receive from them is outstanding, as they truly understand our business and our needs.

“Running zero tail swing wherever possible is now a must for our customers, and with this order we can offer zero swing options from one tonne right up to the new 15-tonne models. JCB’s new CT430 140 roller is also a superb addition, giving excellent compaction results on both asphalt and aggregates.”

Founded in 2003, Rocket Rentals has grown into one of the region’s leading plant and tool hire specialists. Its expanding JCB fleet now covers everything from one to 25-tonne excavators to dumpers, rollers, telehandlers, bowsers, generators and skid steers, supporting projects across construction, industrial and civil engineering sectors.

This latest deal signals Rocket Rentals’ intent to scale further, as demand for plant continues to rise across the UK.



CEA appoints commercial manager

Looking forward to working with members



Sharon Mughal

The CEA (Construction Equipment Association) has welcomed Sharon Mughal as its new commercial manager in January 2026, bringing more than a decade of senior experience across membership organisations and trade associations.

Sharon has held leadership roles at UKWA, the Global Cold Chain Alliance, the Cold Chain Federation, the Recruitment & Employment Confederation, and the British Security Industry Association. Her background spans membership development, retention, sector engagement, business development and partnership programmes that provide practical support to businesses.

At the CEA, Sharon will lead the Association’s commercial activity, supporting membership development, sponsorship, advertising and wider industry partnerships. She says her focus will be on strengthening member value, growing the Association’s community and ensuring that the CEA continues to offer meaningful services to businesses across the construction equipment supply chain.

Viki Bell, CEO of the CEA, said: “Sharon brings extensive experience, and a clear understanding of what businesses need from a modern trade association. She is practical, member-focused, and brings a steady hand to an area of work that underpins everything we do. We’re pleased to welcome her at a time when the CEA is continuing to grow its reach and strengthen the support we provide to the sector.”

Sharon Mughal, CEA Commercial Manager, said: “I’m looking forward to joining the CEA and working with members across such an important industry. My priority is to understand their needs, strengthen relationships and help develop services that support their day-to-day work. The CEA has a strong foundation, and I’m pleased to be joining at a time of continued progress.”

The CEA represents manufacturers, component suppliers, service providers, dealers, and resellers across the construction equipment sector.



Volvo updates short swing excavator

New main control valve contributes to a 7% fuel efficiency gain

Volvo Construction Equipment has introduced an upgraded version of its ECR355 crawler excavator. The 35-tonne reduced swing machine features an electrohydraulic control system with a new main control valve, contributing to a 7% fuel efficiency gain when compared to its predecessor.

The machine has electronic sensors that optimise hydraulic flow and pressure demand, ensuring smooth control of all boom and arm functions. The Volvo D8M engine delivers 189kW (253hp), and requires an oil and filter change at 1,000-hour intervals. With hydraulic oil changes at 3,000 hours, this is said to reduce downtime for regular maintenance.

Though a reduced swing design, the ECR355 offers a 7% increase in lifting capacity and 4% higher tractive force. Volvo's Active Control system can be used to automate boom and bucket movement for up to 45% faster grading, reducing fatigue and effort for the operator. Dig Assist apps support 2D and 3D control systems, and the machine incorporates boundary limits, boom and swing priority, plus a floating blade function to speed up many tasks on site.

The machine is equipped with Volvo's Smart View with People and Obstacle detection, using 360-degree camera coverage and radar to enhance site safety. Customers also benefit from standard CareTrack telematics and ActiveCare 24/7, providing real-time machine health data with predictive maintenance alerts.

Liebherr adds heavy telehandler

Introduces the T48-8s

Liebherr has increased the capacity of its telescopic handler range with the introduction of the T48-8s. The machine offers an 8m lift height, thanks to a 550mm longer boom than the T55-7s, with a 4.8-tonne load capacity. The machine shares its 115kW engine, hydraulics and cab with the T55-7s.

The machine has a load-sensing hydraulic system that allows rapid cycle times and ECO-Motion load-free lowering of the boom. For those using the machine with a bucket, there is an improved dump angle that is said to aid bucket emptying, and the longer boom not only increases reach but cuts the lift angle required to reach a tipping position when loading over a truck body.

A multi-function joystick is mounted directly to the operator's seat for smooth use on rough ground. Auto Power, Fine Control Mode and Automatic Telescope retraction are all designed to improve operator control and comfort. A 3.5" colour display is standard, while a 7" display is an option for enhanced operator and machine monitoring.



Optimism and opportunities

BIGGA's professional turfcare show for its greenkeeper members also attracted plenty of dealers to Harrogate in January, with much to interest them across the halls. *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS reports.

BIGGA's BTME show in Harrogate is always an event to look forward to, and it didn't disappoint this year, with a positive atmosphere pervading the halls.

The busy, buzzy show felt upbeat, with both the stand-holders and visitors I spoke to seemingly feeling good about the golf and turf care machinery sector's prospects for the year ahead. LAMMA, which was staged the preceding week (*which you can also read about this issue, starting on page 45*) had huge, record-breaking numbers attend, but the ag sector is still feeling somewhat trepidatious. Professional turf care, on the other hand, did feel a little more optimistic as the year began.

Of course, the whole Harrogate experience itself could have added to those feelings of positivity. The show is clearly well-liked by those who exhibit and those who come for a look around. I also hear only positive comments from the teams manning the stands about the service the show provides to them - all adding to what can only be described as a happy and pleasant experience.

Post-show the Association revealed

that across three show days, 4,567 visitors walked through the doors of the Harrogate Convention Centre, representing an 8.7% increase on last year. The halls certainly felt crowded quickly on the first two days, with numbers holding up into the late afternoon (there didn't appear to be that post-lunch drop off with people not coming back from the many great pubs and restaurants that the town offers). With all the educational seminars that are on offer to BIGGA's greenkeeper members, there is certainly plenty to keep them there for several days - which must be pleasing for the stand-holders.

Also in attendance in decent numbers were dealers. Lots of the exhibitors remarked to me just how important the show is to them, both for catching up with members of their network and meeting potential new ones. As for the dealers I bumped into, they seemed to be enjoying the show. Some told me of new business prospects and directions they were exploring this year, while others spoke of how hard work was paying off in

what remains a challenging market. When I asked them what was catching their eye at the show, the consensus appeared to be that there was not too much especially new or revolutionary on display, but clearly robotics and AI was in the ascendency.

The impression I took away from Harrogate was that the show delivered for its exhibitors, its end-user visitors, and the dealers who had made the trip. Whilst there might not have been a big new wow release, or any particularly juicy gossip doing the rounds, BTME lived up to its reputation as the show the industry enjoys attending.



Buxtons' Kelly Burgess and Ellis Adderley were amongst the many dealers to make the trip to Harrogate

Seen around the halls

Husqvarna, as well as showing off a selection of their pro robotic models and handheld equipment, were promoting their multi-year agreement to become the new Title Partner of the British Masters. Jonathan Snowball was interviewed on the stand alongside Angus Macleod, director of golf courses and estates at The Belfry, by Sarah Stirk (of Sky Sports' golf coverage). Jonathan spoke about the use of their robotics at the recent Women's Open, and how far the technology had come. He also looked to the future, saying: "Golf is increasing its use of robotics rapidly." In reference to the mowers themselves, he said: "It's about increasing the capabilities of the machines."



Kress' stand was busy across the show, the company's Tony Macer (pictured with Service Dealer editor Steve Gibbs) told me. He said robotics have really crossed over now in the minds of professional users, and, with their cutting-edge machines now incorporating AI into their processes, users don't need to be as reliant on phone signals. The upshot of this is simply that more grass can get cut, and the machines can now actually learn agronomy. The stand also featured a range of charging options for professionals out in the field, which are adding to the confidence of turf professionals who may be converting from petrol for the first time. Tony said that it is tech like this that sells their brand.



STIGA were at BTME for the first time, displaying their APX Pro autonomous mower to the greenkeepers visiting the show. Sam Fletcher told me this machine had found a niche, as, rather than being a fairway-focused unit (as most robots for golf tend to be), this one specialised in roughs and semi-roughs. Due to its chosen cutting deck, this machine is able to do a weekly or 10-day cut, and not just the 'little and often' cuts, as robot mowers tend to. Sam said the company had filled a gap in the market with this machine.

Overton's stand saw the debut of a 21" electric mower from U.S. manufacturer Oso. Guy Overton (pictured with Service Dealer's Keith Christian) told me he had seen the brand at the recent Equip show in Louisville, and had made the decision to bring it across for the UK market. He said its 35amp battery is long-running, giving two-and-a-half hours on a single charge. There was a powerpack available, too. Guy said he was keen to introduce dealers to the kit.



Double A's Sandy Armit said it was important to promote their company at events like BTME, as it raised their profile amongst the golfing industry. They were introducing visitors to AApproved Used, which is providing customers with high-quality, pre-owned John Deere turf equipment, tractors and utility vehicles, all fully serviced, checked, and with a 12-month warranty. They were also highlighting the fact that they have been Lastec dealers for over 25 years, and, as sole importers into the UK, can supply new Lastec trailed and front-mounted mowers and any spare parts required.



FGM's Paul Butterly told me just how popular their Echo robotic mowers are proving in the golfing sector – especially now that human resources are such a big issue at courses. He said it is the build-quality and endurance of their professional grade machines that are selling them into the industry. Dealers who are invested in golf are finding success when they demo these machine's abilities on the fairways, Paul confirmed.



GroundsFest had a presence at the show, as part of their partnership agreement with BIGGA. Chris Bennett told me they were promoting their show and their educational academy to greenkeepers - some of whom had not, perhaps, come across them before. With them being the summer show, and BTME a winter show, Chris said it made sense for this crosspollination between visitors. He also confirmed that BIGGA would have a bigger presence at this summer's GroundsFest, with the intention of this ongoing collaboration to be for the good of the industry.



BAGMA's Nick Darking and Richard Jenkins, who were promoting their services for dealers, mused on the current situation for dealers. They thought that, following a busy LAMMA, ag dealers would see some genuine enquiries, but, on the whole, the sector is undeniably depressed. There are some exceptions, obviously, but clearly everyone involved in selling to farmers is hoping for a turnaround in fortunes.

Iseki, under the new leadership of Alan Prickett (pictured with Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke), were gaining attention both for their tractor range (ranging from the TG6507 compact to the TLE4550 loader with Trimble Kit) and the Raymo machines that they now distribute. Alan said both the robotic and radio-controlled versions are finding their markets amongst commercial users, who need to operate in banked or awkward areas. The stand featured the debut of the new GPS models, equipped with a 48" Craft Deck, a 150Ah battery, and a complete range of accessories.



Allett were showing their new Omnia (Latin for ‘everything’) mower. Austin Jarrett (pictured with TurfPro editor Laurence Gale) said this launch was important for the company, as they had been working on the design for the past five years. The professional unit utilises a Briggs & Stratton Vanguard battery, and we were told that it has been developed under an ‘operator-first’ design brief - with every major design decision driven by reducing physical effort and simplifying operation. It features a dual 1000W rear roller drive system, using direct-drive motors to eliminate belts, chains and differentials, and to aid turning. A dedicated 2000W blade motor ensures consistent torque in dense grass conditions, and when operating the wide choice of interchangeable cultivation heads which are available.



Kubota said their stand, which they once again shared with Baroness, had been steadily busy. The focus for their exhibit, they said, was the innovation in their out-front mowing range, with the FC4-441 fitted with a deck offering a height of cut up to 7” taking centre stage. Also on show were compact tractors including the B2-261 and L2-452 which prove popular with golf courses.



Ecorobotix featured an eye-catching machine on their stand, with the large Alba ultra-high precision turf sprayer. Entering the turf care market for the first time, this machine uses the company’s Plant-by-Plant Care philosophy, treating only what’s needed, exactly where it’s needed. Powered by AI, the unit can identify and spray individual weeds or unwanted grasses with a 3x3cm footprint, allowing users to “spray the size of a golf ball.” With its double spray bar and 2.25 working width, the sprayer detects targets in real time and applies treatments only where required. cleanup time. The machine can also be converted into a conventional trencher by removing the conveyor, and its three-point linkage allows quick attachment and detachment for use with other implements. Also, on a separate stand, the company featured the VGR Top Changer for which they are now UK dealers.



Campey Turf Care Systems were kicking off their 40th anniversary celebrations at the show, promoting a big open day they have coming up at

their Bosley HQ on Thursday, 9th July. As well this, they featured the Fairway Trencher from New Zealand manufacturer TrenchIt, described as the ‘Swiss Army knife’ of trenchers. This PTO-chain trencher has a soil cleanup system that deposits soil onto a trailer, reducing cleanup time. The machine can also be converted into a conventional trencher by removing the conveyor, and its three-point linkage allows quick attachment and detachment for use with other implements. Also, on a separate stand, the company featured the VGR Top Changer for which they are now UK dealers.



Redexim’s Paul Langford said their stand was designed to show greenkeepers the basic tools they require to keep their courses in condition, but that they might not always think about. One such tool was the new Easy Core 4, which is a pedestrian aerator that relieves compaction, improves water infiltration and stimulates root growth for lasting turf quality. The unit runs on EGO batteries that deliver up to one hour of runtime.



LAMMA 2026 attracted 45,000 attendees, the highest attendance in the event’s 44-year history.

Signs of an upturn?

LAMMA, the UK’s major all-sectors farm machinery show, attracted strong visitor numbers across two mid-January days at Birmingham’s NEC, creating some optimism among dealers. MARTIN RICKATSON scanned the halls for new products coming available to them in 2026.

While farm input costs remain high and commodity values low, LAMMA 2026 bucked the mood that continues to cloud UK agriculture, with a circa 45,000 attendance that, the organisers say, was the highest in the event’s 44-year history. Supported by what seemed like a cautious general optimism, the farm machinery dealer sector - and the exhibiting manufacturers supplying it - appeared to spy signs of an upturn, following another tough year capped by December’s lowest monthly tractor registration figures since numbers were first recorded.

As with most multi-day exhibitions, the last day was notably quieter, but, by the end of the show, a number of exhibitors were reporting decent numbers of serious enquiries from stand visitors, despite continued pressure on grain values and recent price cuts by many milk buyers.

Some suggested that, as is usual with LAMMA’s January timing, the looming end of the tax year was having an influence, with the inheritance tax issue having reinforced a desire among some to pay as little as possible to the Treasury.

Meanwhile, bringing two additional autumn exhibitions from the same organiser - Croptec and Low Carbon Agriculture - alongside LAMMA helped swell exhibitor numbers to over 800, while developments in capacity, efficiency, design and technology encouraged visitors to consider new machines and ideas. High retail prices, though, continue to be among the key barriers to sale facing UK farm machinery dealers in a sector where commodity values have not kept pace and farmers are holding onto kit for longer. But many will be hoping that, based on the LAMMA 2026 mood, there is some light at the end of the

tunnel, particularly as those travelling from all different directions to the NEC at Birmingham will have seen some decent-looking crops, promising a potentially good harvest. That, though, is some time away...

Cultivation

Capable of tilling, levelling and pressing ploughed or cultivated land or stubble ahead of drilling, creating a



Sumo T-Press

firm, weatherproof surface, the **Sumo T-Press** was designed by Harper Adams University student Martin Darley for his final-year engineering degree research project. After spending a placement year with the York company, he now works for Sumo full-time. Available in 4.6m, 5.6m and 6.6m variants, the T-Press features 6cm narrow-point tines spaced at 25cm and capable of working down to 15cm. Hydraulically-adjustable spring-loaded levelling paddles then work ahead of a twin row of notched press rings.

Crop establishment

Opico dealers now have access to Simtech grassland and arable direct drills, thanks to a sales and support agreement signed between the two firms. The smallest Simtech gravity-fed box drills start at 1.8m, suiting the viticulture and amenity market, the range then extending through the TSG240 and TSG300 grass drills and TS300 arable direct drill to the 6m TS6004A, a front tank/rear coulters bar design. Grain-only or grain/fertiliser hoppers are available, and additional metering units can be fitted for multispecies establishment in one pass. The Simtech design features an opener disc in front of a T-slot coulters, which creates a 40mm seed channel, a design patented in 2005 by founder George Simon and said to aid drainage in wet soils and seasons. Simtech drills are eligible for grant



Opico T-Sem drills

funding through the Scottish FFIS and English FETF schemes, plus other regionally-administered support and funding.

Joining the established SR200 and SR400, **Standen Engineering's** new



Standen Engineering SR300 potato planter

trailed SR300 can plant three rows of potatoes in a 1.8m or 2m bed, or two rows with the central feed shut off. Standen claims that feed accuracy is unaffected by seed size, with minor adjustments required to handle chitted, small, cut or long tubers, and sizes up to 120mm. Specifications include automatic depth control, a three-tonne tipping hopper and pressure hood, plus in-cab touchscreen control which handles all operations, including planting density. Forward speeds of 10-12km/hr are reckoned possible.

Transportation

Among the latest ATVs on show from names as diverse as Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, Kymco and Loncin were new HiSun models imported by **Barrus** from the largest UTV manufacturing facility in China. The road-legal HiSun Stryker EV is powered by a 72-volt direct-drive battery system, with a 15kW output compared to the 5kW Sector model. Available in both two- and four-passenger configurations, Stryker EV specification includes electric power steering, dual 10-inch full-colour LCD displays, and full connectivity with Apple CarPlay, Bluetooth, FM/AM radio and integrated door speakers. Visibility and safety are enhanced through front and rear cameras, and a full cab with folding glass windscreen plus wiper/washer is standard. Further features range from a 1,600kg winch to a towbar, rear work light and a roof-mounted light bar.



Barrus HiSun Stryker EV

BRP/Can-Am also displayed electric UTV/ATV developments, with the UK show debut of the Can-Am Outlander Electric, the first fully-electric T-homologated ATV. Rotax's E-Power powerpack produces performance figures of 47hp, 53 lb-ft of torque, and up to 80km (50 miles) of range in optimal conditions. Can-Am claims a 20%-to-80% charge time of 50 minutes using a Level 2 charger. At 830kg, towing capacity matches that of its conventionally-fuelled counterpart, and it has the same 55kg front/109kg rear carrying capacities of the Outlander



Can-Am Outlander Electric

HD5 and Outlander HD7. Also displayed was the new Outlander 6x6 700 DPS T, based on a new chassis with 830kg towing and 454kg cargo bed capacity.

Targeted at contractors running high-capacity slurry applicators, **Richard Western's** NT nurse tanks also have alternative uses. Specification of the 50 cu m NT50 includes multiple inlet/outlet points, sight glasses,



Richard Western silage trailer with retention cover (left) and nurse tank

a full-opening hydraulic tailgate, and a hydraulic tipping body for efficient sediment emptying, with a single-displacement tipping ram. The three BPW axles feature standard rear- and optional front-axle steering. Recommended 600/55 R26 tyres match the large carrying capacity, which – when used as a stationary nurse tank – can represent a slurry weight of 50t in addition to the NT50's unladen 10t. The NT50 qualifies for Government funding support, and can also be used for silage transport. Richard Western also showed a new hydraulic-folding cover sheet for its silage trailers.

Livestock kit

Designed for its Fusion 4 baler/wrapper combination, **McHale's** new TerraDrive option provides



McHale Fusion 4 with TerraDrive powered wheel drive option

powered wheel drive for those using a relatively light, lower-powered tractor. Making its UK debut at LAMMA, the system is expected to appeal particularly to users in the Welsh and Scottish hills. Operated by its own independent load-sensing hydraulic valve block, the drive system is sourced from Finnish firm Black Bruin, and is ISOBUS-compatible, with automatic engagement of the hydraulic wheel motors and automated speed-matching according to tractor speed. Drive to the wheels, with their Vredestein 710mm-wide tyres upgraded from the standard 560mm units, is automatically disengaged during binding and bale transfer, and then automatically reengaged.

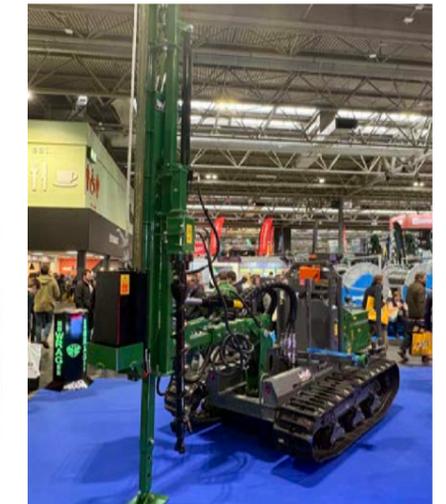


Kidd Farm Machinery 875TC bale processor

Also shown by McHale were new Mark II V6/V8 variable chamber balers, with ISOBUS compatibility and active bale density. Further upgrades include quick-release gauge wheels and redesigned chain tensioner springs, while the bale chamber now features load cells to keep the operator informed of bale progression.

The primary product of **Kidd Farm**

Machinery – whose stable now also encompasses John Harvey Engineering and WRAG – was the Kidd 875TC bale processor, reckoned to combine the chopping and shredding power of the firm's 475TC with the bale capacity of its 850. The 875TC is claimed able to chop straw to lengths suiting total mixed rations. The new model can also be supplied with an extended tailgate that can accommodate two big square bales. The retractable knives



WRAGTRACK Tow=IT self-propelled post driver

can be activated instantly according to required chop length.

Sister business **WRAG** showed the WRAGTRACK Tow=IT self-propelled post driver. Powered by a 36hp Yanmar engine, the tracked unit has a two-speed transmission and 180-degree mast swing for either-way operation. Further specification includes a 200kg hammer, with 300kg option. Maximum post height is 3.6m. An optional remote control permits operation at an increased distance.

Best-known for its vertical auger diet feeders, which now include a new



Abbey Machinery Bale Shear



Kubota bale processors

VF1900 compact twin auger model with 22mm flighting and reduced loading height, **Abbey Machinery** has added a Bale Shear product line to its livestock equipment range. Designed for splitting round bales while retaining the plastic film and netwrap, the Bale Shear features Euro brackets, and requires a double-acting hydraulic service. The maximum bale weight the implement is capable of shearing in half is 1,500kg.

Kubota implements now include bale choppers – one mounted and three trailed models, with capacities from 2.0-6.0 cu m. All can handle round and square bales, and can be loaded with clamp silage, which can be fed through the spout. A hydraulically-operated rear door permits self-loading.

Pro versions feature a hydraulically-activated belt clutch, allowing the shredding rotor to run independently of the flywheel. Activated from the cab, this allows the flywheel to reach maximum speed before the shredding rotor is engaged, reducing flywheel blockage risk. The largest model has dual shredding rotors, with others featuring a single unit. A wide-section, four-stage swivel chute provides a maximum throw of 20m.



Knight KT trailed sprayer

Crop protection

Sporting new dark-grey tanks, **Knight Farm Machinery** has revised its mounted, trailed and self-propelled sprayer ranges. A 6,000 litre example of the KT trailed range, available in sizes from 3,600 litres up to a new 12,000 litre design, represented the new models. The new KSP self-propelled range spans 3,500-6,000 litres, while KM mounted models and KFT front tanks continue to be available in 1,300-1,900 litre capacities, and KDM de-mount models come in 2,500 and 3,000 litre sizes.

Specification can include Knight Individual Nozzle Switching (KINS), a LACOS touchscreen terminal, and new SmartRinse technology, which also made its debut at the show. A fully-automated sprayer rinse system designed to ease operator workload and simplify sprayer rinse cycles in the field, SmartRinse automatically begins spray tank washing before work is complete, increasing the application rate correspondingly to account for the dilution.

Handling equipment

Best-known for its UTVs, compact tractor line and – increasingly – its larger tractors that now extend up to 140hp, South Korea's **Kioti** is now also offering European buyers its range of skid-steer loaders. Already well-established in its homeland, and its markets such as North America, the Kioti 750 series skid-steers come in SL wheeled and TL tracked variants. Options include a full cab with sliding up-and-over door, full ventilation, heating and air conditioning. Flow+ versions offer additional auxiliary

hydraulic output for those seeking to run oil-hungry attachments, such as sweeper brushes. Power comes from Kioti's own 74hp three-cylinder engine, as used in its RX tractors. Tipping load is 2,440kg on wheeled models and



Kioti skid-steer loader

2,980kg on tracked versions. Reach at max lift/dump is 1,098mm, and clearance 2,585mm.

Among the latest **JCB** Loadall models making their UK debut, the 546-70 AgriPro is a replacement for the 542-70, offering almost 10% (400kg) more lift capacity and 15% greater tear-out force, plus 50kph top speed from its DualTech VT transmission. For customers seeking



JCB Loadall 546-70 AgriPro (right) and 526-60 AgriPlus

something more suited to confined spaces, the firm also introduced the compact Loadall 526-60 AgriPlus, which lifts 2.6t to 6m, with a height of 1.97m and a width of 1.84m. Key upgrades include an all-new cab and an improved power braking system.

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BUSINESS MONITOR

Workshop levels holding up

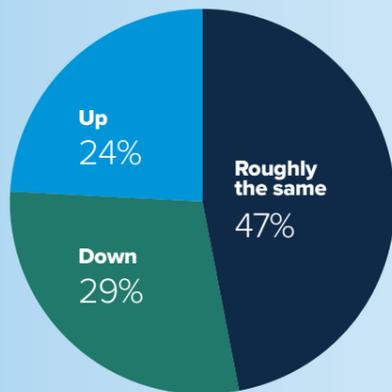
Concerns remain however, regarding staffing

Feedback from dealers taking part in our January Winter Servicing Survey – we published in our Weekly Update – suggests that a familiar picture is emerging. From what our respondents told us, service departments have once again remained busy through the winter months, underlining the continued importance of workshop activity to dealership performance – but the challenges around staffing show little sign of easing.

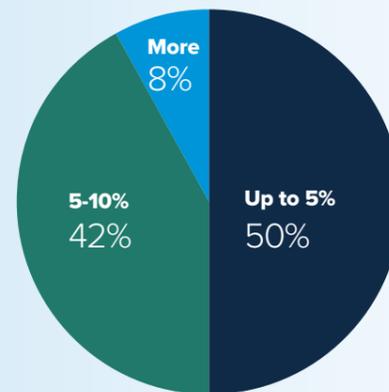
Just under half of respondents (47%) reported that servicing demand was broadly in line with last winter, although a not insignificant 29% did report a drop-off. Interestingly, at the start of 2026, the weather was cited as the factor having the most significant impact on winter servicing levels – although, anecdotally, staffing still appears to be high on dealers' agendas.

Against this backdrop, many businesses have adjusted their pricing, with nearly three-quarters increasing service rates over the past 12 months, most commonly by up to 5%. Despite this, workshop headcounts have largely stayed the same, and, with no respondents suggesting recruitment has become easier, staffing remains the standout pressure point for the year ahead

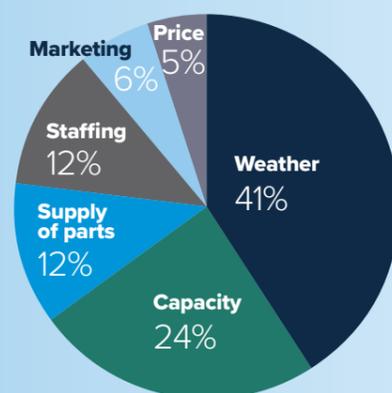
How are servicing levels this winter compared with last?



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



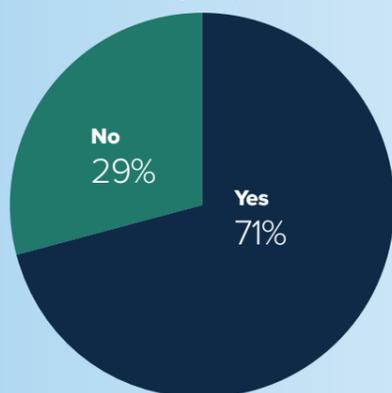
What factors have most influenced your winter servicing levels this year?



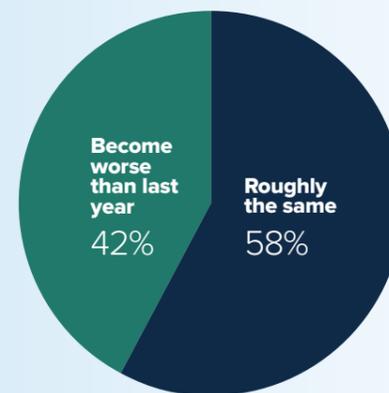
Have you increased your service staff levels this past year?



Have you increased your labour rates in the past year?



Has the recruitment process for your workshop improved?



Your say...

We asked you: how is the service side of your business faring currently? Any issues impacting your service business?

“There is less service work than last year, particularly from the private sector, as many are skipping their annual service if it doesn't link into the warranty terms, as the machinery had such limited use last year. We sold fewer ride-on mowers last year, and so will not see the service work from those. People 'made do' with machines last year they may otherwise have replaced. Hopefully this year, we will see those old machines replaced, and the subsequent service work.”

“Service work is up, but finding staff is more difficult than ever.”

“Winter 24/25 was one of the best winter servicing periods we have had. Winter 25/26 is much the same as last winter, so I'm happy with that. No issues so far.”

“Parts supply and the weather are the main affecting factors.”

“Service work has stayed pretty much the same as last year, but we've had issues with sickness which makes it difficult to turn things round fast enough. Lots to still get in, and we will have to hit the ground running next month.”

“Finding quality staff to employ is difficult. Also difficult to motivate the under-30 age group.”

“Plenty of work is coming in – it's the lack of staff that is the biggest issue.”

“We are slightly down, but have not offered any winter discounts this year, so profits are about the same.”

Is your dealership leaning too hard on one department?

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

This issue: Sara looks at the sales, parts, service balance.



I was recently asked by one of our U.S. dealers: “With everything going on in the economy right now, how do I know if my dealership can actually weather the storm?” Let’s be real: running a dealership isn’t for the faint of heart.

One minute, everything’s running smoothly. The next, everything seems like it’s on fire, and you can’t control any of it.

So how do you know if your dealership has what it takes to survive the ups, downs, and occasional natural disasters?

You look at one thing: **balance**. And no, I don’t mean balancing your chequebook (though that’s not a bad idea). I mean departmental balance, the kind that makes your dealership strong, steady, and way less dependent on a single department or season to stay afloat.

Balance = Your built-in backup plan

Here’s what we teach in our book *You’re the Problem (and the Solution)*:

“Every department should be responsible for generating enough income so that, no matter what happens, at least two of your three departments can keep you afloat.”

Think of it like a three-legged stool: sales, parts, and service.

If one leg breaks and the whole thing topples, that’s not just a wobbly stool. That’s a risky business.

But if each department pulls its weight, your dealership can weather just about anything. That’s balance. And it’s beautiful.

What balance actually looks like

Let’s break down what you should see in a balanced dealership:

- **Sales/Wholegoods:** ~60% of your total revenue
- **Parts:** ~25%
- **Service:** ~15%

Now, don’t panic if you’re off a little. These numbers aren’t the law. They’re a guide.

This doesn’t mean you should sell less for the sake of balance. It means you should grow parts and service on purpose, with strategy and strong margins.

When a dealership leans too hard on one department (usually sales), it becomes fragile. But when you strengthen the others, especially service and parts, you build in stability and profit that isn’t tied to the season, the economy, or whether or not you made your manufacturer quota.

How to check if you’re in balance

Pull your year-end profit and loss statements (or monthly, if you like to live on the edge), and calculate what overall percentage each department

contributed. That will tell you what your numbers are. If you are an overachiever, I want you to then ask yourself these questions:

- *Are any departments just barely covering payroll?*
- *Is one department covering the losses of another?*
- *If I lost all sales for three months, could parts and service keep the lights on?*

If that last question made you sweat, it’s time to work on your balance.

Why this matters

I wish I could tell you the dealership rollercoaster is slowing down. But the truth is, it’s not. Whether, manufacturers, inventory swings and economic weirdness are all part of the gig.

But the dealerships that make it (and keep growing) are the ones that built for the long haul, not the lucky streak.

Balance in your dealership won’t be created overnight. But, over time, it gives you the ability to withstand a weather event, an economic downturn, or just about anything that might come at you.

And that’s the whole point: Predictable profit. Sustainable growth. Sanity intact.

Here we are again...

In her next Diary entry, **Kelly Burgess**, managing director of Buxtons Ltd – based in Penkridge, Staffordshire – discusses the importance of preparation and planning for the dealership’s year ahead.



I can’t quite believe I’m writing this already, but here we are - 12 months on since I took over the business. If I’m honest, it doesn’t feel anywhere near that long. Somewhere between the day-to-day juggling, the constant decision-making, and the occasional head-in-hands moments, the months seem to have flown by.

People warned me that time would move quickly once I was ‘the one at the helm,’ and they weren’t wrong. It feels like only yesterday I was finding my feet. Now, as we look ahead to another year, I’m realising just how much has happened in such a short space of time - and how much more there still is to do.

As we head into the new year, preparation has very much been the theme. There’s something reassuring about planning - getting dates in the diary, talking through ideas, and mapping out what we want the year ahead to look like. Events, in particular, are a big focus for us at the moment. They take time, effort, and a fair bit of coordination, but they’re such an important part of how we connect with customers, suppliers, and the wider dealer network.

I’ve always believed that events aren’t just about selling – they’re about relationships. They give us the chance to step away from emails and phone calls, to have proper conversations, and to understand what people really need from us. After a challenging year for many in the industry, those face-to-face moments feel more important than ever.

Of course, planning for the future doesn’t mean we’ve forgotten the lessons of the past year. If my first 12 months have taught me anything, it’s that flexibility is essential. No matter how well we plan, there will always be curveballs - whether that’s weather, supply issues, or market conditions that refuse to behave as expected. I’ve learned to keep one eye firmly on the plan, and the other on reality.

Internally, we’ve also been spending time reviewing how we work as a team. Growth brings change, and change brings the need to adapt. I’m incredibly proud of how our staff continue to pull together, especially during the busier and more stressful periods. Preparing for the year ahead isn’t just about stock and sales targets – it’s about making sure we’re set up to support each-other when things get hectic.

There’s also something quite motivating about the sense of a fresh start. A new year brings new opportunities - to try different approaches, to refine what works, and to be braver where we perhaps held back before. I’m keen that we keep pushing forward, while still holding onto the values that have always defined the business.

So, as I sit here wondering how 12 months have disappeared so quickly, I’m also feeling optimistic. A little tired, perhaps - but optimistic, nonetheless. If the last year has flown by, I can only assume the next will do the same. All the more reason to make the most of it.

Here’s to being prepared, staying adaptable, and hopefully finding the time to pause occasionally and appreciate just how far we’ve come.





SME DIGEST

Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

Edited by Adam Bernstein



FUNDING

Need finance?

Decent finance is essential for any firm – whether it's in the startup phase, or mature and upgrading equipment to enhance efficiency and grow. The costs of running a firm can be substantial, often requiring external finance, as few have the capacity to self-fund, says Adam Bernstein, SME Digest editor.

Understanding the various financing options available - and the implications of each - is key to making an informed decision that supports long-term growth without compromising the financial health of either the business or its owners.

Given that finance is rarely simple, it should be no surprise that there are numerous options, including traditional bank loans, asset finance, leasing, government support schemes and alternative funding sources.

Traditional bank loans

One of the most common methods of financing large purchases is through a traditional bank loan. Here, borrowers seek a lump sum that is repaid over time with interest.

Such loans feature either fixed or variable interest rates, with loan terms that typically range from one to 10 years. However, they tend to demand collateral, such as a charge on business assets.

On the positive side, a simple bank loan with fixed repayments makes budgeting easier, the firm retains ownership of the machinery from the outset, and there is the potential for tax benefits.

However, a bank will demand a strong credit history and financials, the approvals process may be slower compared to alternative sources, and the loan facility may reduce future borrowing capacity.

It's worth noting that, if the applicant approaches a British Business Bank-designated bank with an eligible request (see tinyurl.com/2jjnvtpb), and fails with its first approach, the applicant can be referred to the other designated banks for a decision.

Asset finance

Another commonly used option is asset finance, a form of lending that is used specifically for the acquisition of tangible assets, such as machinery, vehicles or equipment. There are various flavours of finance here.

Finance lease: Here, the finance provider purchases the asset and

leases it to the business, which will make monthly repayments that encompass both the initial asset cost and the accrued interest. At the end of the lease term, the business – the lessee – will have three options. They can continue renting the asset, return the asset to the finance provider, or facilitate the sale of the asset on behalf of the finance provider to (potentially) generate value.

Operating lease: A form of asset finance that allows a business to secure equipment for a specified time span, with the added flexibility of potentially upgrading to a more advanced model within the rental period, subject to the terms of the agreement. The finance provider maintains the asset during the finance agreement.

Contract hire: This is often used when leasing vehicles. The provider sources and maintains the vehicles.

Hire purchase: This is used for assets where the end goal is to own the asset outright. Until the lessee fully pays off the asset, ownership remains with the finance provider. The lessee is responsible for maintenance, and the item cannot be sold until it's paid off.

Business contract purchase or hire purchase with a balloon payment: Similar to hire purchase, except that monthly payments are designed to only cover the interest on the loan.

However, a final (or 'balloon') payment is required to fully repay the loan. Overall, the total cost over the term tends to be higher.

Government-based grants and loans

There is limited help from government – local and national – to help businesses invest.

There's the Growth Guarantee Scheme, which can generally support facility sizes of up to £2m and which provides accredited lenders with a 70% government-backed guarantee.

Administered by the British Business Bank, it supports term loans, overdrafts, asset finance, invoice finance and asset-based lending facilities. However, not all lenders will be able to offer all products.

The borrower must be viable, pass an affordability check, not be in financial difficulty, and have a turnover under £45 million.

The government has a page on GOV.UK, Finance and support for your business, which offers a searchable directory on support available according to support type, business state, industry, number of employees and region.

While the support is variable, there are options, including, at the time of writing: 'Access to finance - Greater Manchester and Lancashire,' which offers help to those employing 249 or fewer that need help with introductions to lenders, include business angels (private investors), business plan development and more; 'BCRS Business Loans' for West Midlands and Gloucestershire businesses needing between £10,000 and £150,000, to be repaid over one to seven years; and 'Business Boost Grants – Elmbridge,' which offers up to £2,000 for businesses that benefit the local economy.

There's also the government's 'Find a Grant' page, which offers a Boiler Upgrade Scheme that can provide between £5,000 and £7,500 to replace existing fossil fuel heating with something more efficient.

Crowdfunding and Peer-to-Peer (P2P) lending

Alternative finance has matured somewhat, and offers another way to raise money – but directly from

investors through online platforms, rather than from traditional sources. There are two routes:

Crowdfunding: This is often used for niche or community-supported projects.

P2P Lending: Investors lend money to businesses through a regulated platform

Platforms for either of these can be found easily online.

As to the benefits, there are several, including less reliance on banks, faster application processes, and the potential for lower interest rates than the banks.

However, on the flipside, this is not necessarily suitable for very large sums. Investors may demand higher returns for risk, and the lending is not always regulated.

That said, they're possibly useful for startups and SMEs looking for flexible, quick funding without traditional constraints.

Self-funding

This route might seem obvious, but some businesses choose to reinvest their profits – for a while, at least - rather than seek external finance. This approach avoids debt and interest payments altogether.

The benefit of this is that it involves no debt or interest obligations, the 'borrower' has full control over the purchase, and it helps to boost investor confidence.

However, self-funding can restrict cash flow or growth in other areas, and offers a slower path to expansion if funds are limited.

In summary

Investing is essential for a business to grow and stay competitive. While it can be a significant financial commitment, there are a diverse range of funding options that can be tailored to different needs and circumstances.

Before committing, a financial advisor or accountant should be consulted to evaluate the full cost and benefits of the options.

BUSINESS COSTS

Energy efficiency practices

Running a retail-related business is an energy-intensive operation precisely because of the need to power equipment, have good lighting, and the desire to maintain a grip on 'climate control' to make life comfortable for staff and customers alike. And with the cost of energy rising and the public becoming more conscious over sustainability issues, firms cannot afford to ignore this part of their business, says Adam Bernstein, SME Digest editor.

Heating

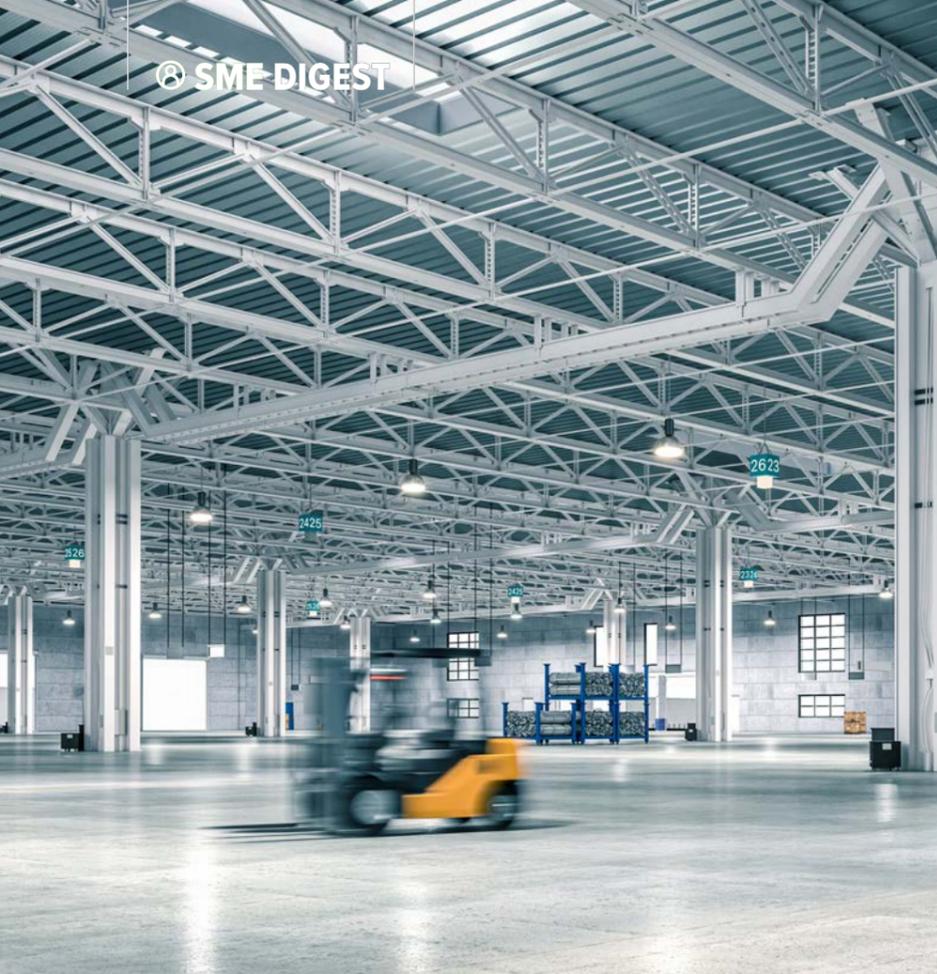
A first step to consider is to use heating, ventilation and air conditioning correctly.

Such systems - known as HVAC - tend to be the largest consumers of energy, and improving efficiency can lead to substantial cost savings.

Those looking to make changes need to think about installing programmable or smart thermostats to automatically adjust temperatures based on hours, seasons and occupancy levels.

Similarly, it helps to create HVAC zones, where the business is divided into zones (say: shopfloor, offices and storage) to avoid overheating or overcooling unused areas, or areas that need less 'intervention'.





Refrigeration systems

Refrigerators and freezers are helpful to staff, but can be energy-consuming. Install refrigeration units that are the right size for the need.

Equally, as with HVAC above, so it helps to maintain proper temperatures – thermometers and digital data loggers monitor this accurately.

Again, routine maintenance is essential. Coils need to be cleaned and seals checked regularly to ensure efficient operation.

And units need to be defrosted regularly, as ice buildup reduces cooling efficiency.

When building or refurbishing

It follows that, when renovating or building a new site, that energy efficiency should be designed in.

This means the installation of solar panels, double- or triple-glazed windows to reduce energy loss, reflective roofing materials to reduce heat absorption, and the positioning of windows and walls to maximise natural light and minimise heating and cooling needs.

Water and cleaning

As for water-saving measures, it makes sense to install low-flow taps and toilets, which can reduce water consumption by 30-50 percent. Hands-free taps can also save on water running during procedures.

Also, any leaks should be fixed immediately - a slow drip can waste many litres of water over time.

Go paperless

While the paperless office is still a thing of the future, it's possible to make some savings by using less paper overall, as it reduces the need for physical storage, printing and, of course, the energy used by office machines.

Steps to take here are to acquire software that holds electronic records - there are many options on Google. This will eliminate the need for paper files.

And use email to reduce the need for posted reminders, invoices, and promotions.

Electric vehicles

While electric vehicles cost more than internal combustion engine vehicles, scrapping fossil fuel vehicles can add to energy efficiency.

It's worth pointing out that, at the time of writing, there is the government's Plug-in Van Grant, which offers grants of up to 35 percent for electric vans, with a maximum of £2,500 for small vans (under 2,500kg) and £5,000 for large vans (2,500kg to 4,250kg). But to qualify, vans must be less than 50g/km in CO2 emissions and able to travel at least 96 km (60 miles) without emissions. The grant is applied by the seller or dealership as a discount on the purchase price. Note that, while gov.uk says that it ends on 31 March, 2026, there have been numerous reports stating that the grant will be extended until April 2027. Don't dally.

And for cars, there's the government's Electric Car Grant, which provides discounts of up to £3,750 for eligible new electric cars priced under £37,000, with another band offering £1,500 for vehicles with higher emissions.

Grants and assistance

Elsewhere, there's help and assistance for those wanting to make the business itself more environmentally friendly.

Notably, there seems to be no national help from central government – anything on gov.uk appears out of date, but there are localised government schemes, such as the 'Wiltshire – UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Fit for Net Zero Programme' via the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It can pay up to £30,000 for energy efficiency surveys and grants to SMEs in Wiltshire to reduce their carbon emissions and energy costs.

However, there may be help from local authorities. London's Borough of Islington has an energy efficiency grant for small businesses that offers up to £1,500 for works such as upgrading lighting to LEDs or upgrading equipment, and up to £5,000 for replacing a gas boiler with a heat pump. And Oadby and Wigston Borough Council has a grant of £3,000 to help local businesses "reduce their carbon footprints, increase energy efficiency and reduce operating costs."

The assistance does change, and requires some digging around, but it could be time well invested.

Wrap up

Making a firm more energy efficient isn't just about cutting costs - it's about creating a more sustainable, comfortable and conscientious environment. Small changes can add up to big savings over time.

Next, just as a car needs regular maintenance to run efficiently, so do HVAC systems. By having filters replaced, ducts cleaned and regular maintenance performed, systems will run effectively and with less power.

But while HVAC systems can run well, there's precious little point in having them do so only for the energy to be wasted. This means you must ensure that insulation is upgraded so that walls, roofs, and windows are properly insulated to minimise heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer.

Lighting

Lighting is another target for energy savings. And it's even more important if we consider that a modern LED light source can use between 75 and 90 percent less energy – and emit the same amount of light – as a traditional bulb.

The strategy for improvement here is simple, and partly free.

First off, change every light source – where possible – to LED. Not only are they cheaper to run, but they also last longer. Deploy motion sensors in areas such as storage rooms, toilets

and offices to prevent unnecessary lighting. Also consider task-based lighting so that, rather than lighting an entire room, focused lighting at tables or desks is used.

And don't forget natural light. Open blinds during the day, and install skylights or larger windows to reduce the need for artificial lighting.

Energy-efficient equipment and appliances

Modern operations need modern equipment that is energy-efficient to reduce overall power consumption.

Of course, there's the cost outlay of equipment to be overcome – but, even so, when it's time to change, firms should look for the EU-mandated energy rating label, which uses an A to G scale (A being most efficient), and the government's Energy Technology List (ETL) for those seeking high-performance products, including boilers, motors and refrigeration units.

At the same time, smart power strips cut power to devices that are not in use, eliminating phantom energy consumption from items left plugged in overnight.



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Products

ATV / UTILITY VEHICLES

Suzuki kick off with a new colour

Limited edition for 2026



Suzuki GB say their lineup for 2026 is headlined by the arrival of a new limited-edition colour for the KingQuad 500XPZ.

Landing with authorised Suzuki dealers this spring in very limited numbers is the Armoured Blue Grey 500XPZ. Complete with lightweight aluminium wheels powder-coated in black, and machined spoke and rim edges, the new colour option is described by the manufacturer as a stylish choice for businesses and operators.

Alongside this, the True Timber Kanati 500XPZ remains available for customers. Completing the 2026 lineup are the 750XP, 500XP and 500X KingQuads, all offered in Flame Red and Terra Green colour options.

To add further value for customers, Suzuki say they are also continuing their VIP Experience offer while stocks last. With every new ATV purchased, customers can claim an exclusive care package containing protective equipment – including branded overalls, headtorch and skincare kit to support them during their work.

COMMERCIAL



Cordless model offers fast chain speeds

Makita's new professional offering

Makita has released its new professional cordless UC030G 40VMax 500mm Brushless XGT Chainsaw.

Built to deliver petrol-like power – equal to or greater than that of a 50cc-class chainsaw – the manufacturer says it features fast chain speeds and practical safety enhancements, making it suitable for professional forestry work.

With brushless motor technology, three chain speed modes, and a maximum cutting speed of 29.0 m/s, the new chainsaw offers control and the power needed to take on tough hardwoods, such as oak and ash.

Makita say the UC030G is designed to work safer. For example, when the tool locks as a result of excessive load, removing the load will allow the motor to restart immediately if the trigger is held down, enabling the user to continue to make the same cut without the need to retrigger and lift the saw.

Kevin Brannigan, marketing manager at Makita UK, said: "To maximise the tool's power, it is recommended that the tool is used alongside the BL4080H 8.0Ah XGT – the largest-capacity tabless battery offered by Makita. As a result of its increased capacity and high output, the battery enables more efficient energy transfer to improve the tool's performance."

AGRICULTURAL

New Holland enters new tractor category

T7 XD high-horsepower range



New Holland has introduced the new T7 XD, a completely new high-horsepower tractor range designed to meet the demands of large-scale farmers and contractors.

Sitting above the existing T7 line-up, the T7 XD comprises three models - the T7.360 XD, T7.390 XD and T7.440 XD - delivering outputs from 360hp to 435hp. The tractors are designed around a high power-to-weight ratio and are engineered to work effectively both with and without ballast, offering flexibility across heavy draft work, PTO tasks, haulage and front/rear implement combinations.

Power comes from a Stage V 8.7-litre FPT Cursor 9 six-cylinder engine, paired as standard with a revised Auto Command CVT transmission. The transmission offers a top speed of up to 60kph, and is designed to reduce fuel use at transport speeds through lower engine rpm. Service intervals

are extended to 750 hours, while fuel capacity increases to 680 litres.

A new Terraglide independent front axle suspension, suspended cab and updated braking package aim to improve ride comfort and stability, particularly when operating heavy mounted or trailed implements. Maximum gross vehicle weight is up to 19,000kg, subject to local legislation.

Hydraulic performance is boosted with a MegaFlow dual pump system delivering up to 360 l/min, while rear linkage lift capacity rises to almost 12 tonnes. New Holland also offers an integral central tyre inflation system for the first time on this range.

Inside, the Horizon Ultra cab features IntelliView 12 touchscreen control and standard connectivity via New Holland FieldOps, enabling remote monitoring and dealer support.

COMMERCIAL

Cut and collect over large areas



Redexim launches the Turf-Tidy 5000

Redexim has launched the Turf-Tidy 5000 for cutting and collecting over large areas.

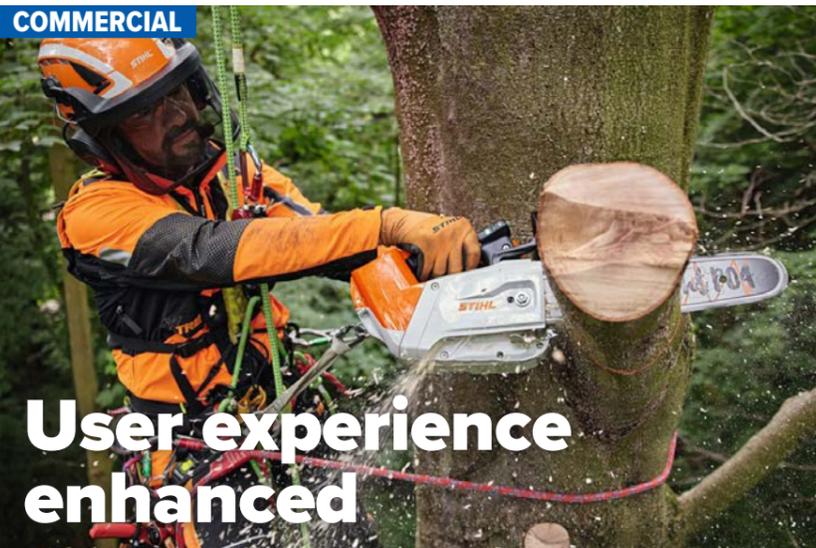
The company says the unit holds up to 5,000 litres, and features a dust suppression cover, a seat-controlled rear camera for easy manoeuvring, blades that can be changed quickly without tools, and a high tipping angle.

Global commercial director Curtis Allen said: "We are pleased to be bringing the Turf-Tidy 5000 to market, having been asked by our customers for a higher-capacity cut and collect unit which incorporates the very popular floating-head technology of the smaller Turf-Tidy 3000 along with the proven high-tip emptying feature."

The company says the unit will be well-suited to large areas, such as horse racetracks and AFL fields where hopper capacity is key.

It requires a minimum of 45HP while scarifying, and 25HP while sweeping. It has a working width of 1.8m, and a maximum working depth of 30mm while scarifying and 80mm while mowing. Its weight is 2,550kg, and its capacity is 5,000L.

COMMERCIAL



User experience enhanced

STIHL reveal changes to top handled chainsaw

STIHL have announced that their MSA 220.1 T now boasts a lighter weight and increased torque for improved productivity.

Providing 10% more torque compared to its predecessor, the MSA 220.0 T, the updated design can now be used with STIHL's AP 200 S battery, which is compatible with the MSA 220.1 T's new

'Power Boost' feature. This allows the model to temporarily draw on the battery's peak electrical output of 1.8kW, while offering a standard output of 1.25kW.

The company say the saw's compatibility with the AP 200 S also delivers an improved user experience by lightening the machine's overall

weight, reducing user fatigue. Further comfort is granted by its two-in-one strop adaptor, which also contributes to a lighter weight. For ease-of-use, ergonomic transportation on climbing harnesses is enabled thanks to the saw's comfort ring, allowing for simple attachment to a carabiner clip.

Just like the MSA 220.0 T, the MSA 220.1 T delivers 2.1kW of electrical power with the AP 300 S battery, providing up to 29 minutes of working time. For longer use requirements, the AP 500 S can also be used. Also contributing to an improved user experience, the new saw provides a longer active time upon the pressing of its ergonomic trigger system.

The new and improved model comes equipped with an adjustable oil pump and an 180° LED display, ensuring the operator always has a clear overview of the operating status of the saw and the chain brake position. In addition, it has an oil sensor that notifies the user when the chain oil tank is empty.

Other features include side-mounted chain tensioning, a captive nut on the sprocket cover, and tool-free oil tank cap.

DOMESTIC / COMMERCIAL

EGO outlines developments for '26

Including first boundary-wire-free robotic mower range

EGO Power+ has detailed a wide-ranging series of product launches for 2026, spanning autonomous mowing, battery technology and expanded domestic and professional equipment ranges.

Headlining the new lineup is their first boundary-wire-free robotic mower range, the AURA-R2. Using the brand's Path IQ navigation technology, the mower is designed to operate in complex garden layouts without the



need for perimeter wire. Control and monitoring are handled via the EGO Connect App, allowing remote operation and scheduling.

The manufacturer is also introducing Tabless Cell technology for the first time with the BA4480X 8Ah 56V ARC Lithium MAX battery. Compatible across their full portfolio, the new battery is claimed to deliver higher power output, faster charging and a longer service life compared to conventional lithium-ion designs, with benefits for both domestic and professional users.

The 2026 range also includes several updates to existing cordless equipment. New additions include the CS1810E 45cm chainsaw, HT5110E and HT6510E hedge trimmers with extended runtimes and reduced vibration, and upgrades across four domestic lawnmowers

featuring improved power delivery, grass collection and onboard displays.

For commercial users, the PRO X Series is being expanded with five new products. These include the LMX7600SP 76cm self-propelled mower with dual battery ports, the STX4200 front-mounted motor line trimmer, and the HTX7500S 75cm single-sided hedge trimmer. Supporting products include the PGX2500PB Power Bank, capable of rapid charging of EGO batteries, and the BHX2001 PRO X Backpack Harness, designed to increase runtime and operator comfort.

Rounding out the launches, EGO is extending its Lifestyle range with a three-in-one inflator, compact pressure washer and compact wet/dry vacuum, all designed to run from existing EGO batteries.

AGRICULTURAL



Low-cost G-Drill added to range

Developed in response to market demand by HE-VA

HE-VA has introduced the G-Drill, a new 3m disc drill designed as a cost-effective option for establishing grass, grain and cover crops.

Developed in response to market demand, the G-Drill is intended as a straightforward machine, capable of creating a consistent drilling zone,

accurate seed placement and effective consolidation across a range of conditions.

The drill uses two rows of 400mm Vector scalloped discs, working with replaceable coulter boots positioned in the discs' shadow. Set at a shallow angle, the arrangement produces a narrow seed slot to minimise surface disturbance, while rubber-damped torsion arms allow the discs to follow ground contours and deflect from stones when working in grassland.

Buyers can choose between 32 coulters at 9.4cm spacing, aimed at grass seed work, or a 24-coulter option with wider spacing for grass or grain. Consolidation is provided by a Star Ring roller as standard, with a flat roller option available.

Seed metering is handled by a Stocks Ag Turbo Jet system, with a choice of hopper sizes and control options, including ISOBUS compatibility. A hydraulic down-force system is fitted as standard.

AGRICULTURAL

Eye of the IceTiger shown by Amazone

Launch of new salt spreaders



Amazone has expanded its winter maintenance range with the launch of the IceTiger Inox and the more compact IceTiger S Inox salt spreaders, both featuring stainless steel hoppers and full ISOBUS compatibility.

Designed for professional winter road gritting, the new models use a base hopper manufactured entirely from high-grade stainless steel to improve corrosion resistance and extend service life when working with salt and other aggressive materials. The hopper is backed by a seven-year manufacturer's guarantee against rust perforation.

Material delivery is handled by a hydraulically-driven belt floor, providing a consistent feed to the spreading disc and making the machines suitable for sensitive materials, such as pre-wetted salt or grit. Spreading widths from 1.5m to 8m are available, with electric delivery point adjustment allowing symmetrical or asymmetrical spreading patterns via ISOBUS control.

The IceTiger Inox has a standard hopper capacity of 1,000 litres, which can be increased to 1,900 litres with extensions. An optional pre-wetted salt system is also available, aimed at reducing salt usage during precautionary gritting operations.

For more confined areas, the IceTiger S Inox offers a smaller 380-litre hopper – expandable to 920 litres – while retaining the same core technology and control features as the larger model.

Both spreaders are hydraulically-driven throughout, and are designed for year-round use, including the application of loose chippings during summer months.

DOMESTIC / COMMERCIAL



Expanded robotic range shown

By Segway at the CES show

Segway Navimow has expanded its robotic mower portfolio with the launch of five new series aimed at residential and commercial users, showcased at CES 2026.

The new lineup comprises the X4, i2 AWD, i2 LiDAR, H2 and Terranox series, covering applications from small domestic lawns through to large commercial areas of up to six acres. All new models feature wire-free installation, using a combination of network RTK, vision systems and, on selected machines, solid-state LiDAR for navigation.

At the top end of the residential range, the X4 Series is designed for larger and more demanding sites, offering all-wheel drive and Navimow's turf-safe Xero-turn technology to improve traction and manoeuvrability on slopes and uneven ground. The X4 range is rated for areas up to 1.5 acres.

The updated i2 Series brings AWD capability and LiDAR navigation to smaller lawns, with options aimed at properties with slopes, narrow passages or limited GPS coverage. The H2 Series further combines LiDAR, RTK and vision technologies to maintain accuracy in complex environments, such as shaded areas and confined spaces.

For professional users, the new Terranox Series is intended for commercial lawn care and grounds maintenance, with capacity to cover areas of up to six acres. Navimow say they will also introduce fleet management software to allow contractors to monitor and control multiple machines remotely.

AGRICULTURAL

Kuhn take it Multi-Longer

Adding to range of hedge and verge cutters

Kuhn Farm Machinery has added to its Multi-Longer range of hedge and verge cutters with the introduction of a 6.1m model.

The 6157 e-TPAL joins the Multi-Longer 7457 e-TPAL as telescopic, left-handed machines, designed specifically for UK and Irish users.

The new machine is fitted as standard with the e-ASSIST system. This maintains a constant cutting head angle on the unit for an even and consistent finish via an electronic parallelogram, using sensors to control the position. An automatic lift float in all positions for roadside mowing is also part of the feature, while a hydraulically-powered debris blower can be mounted on the rear to leave surfaces clear of trimmings.

The e-TPAL feature also includes the EP joystick, offering the control of all four proportional movements at the same time. This, combined with the company's VT 61 terminal, provides instant display of key machine data and quick access to settings, such as control of the parallelogram movement.

The machine is only available with the STABILINK axle-mounted brackets, which can be connected to the tractor in under 15 minutes, for greater assurance at full reach. A heavy-duty A-frame is in development. A standard 1.2m wide head, or optional 1.5m wide unit (24 or 28 T-flails respectively), allow users to build a machine that is tailored to their circumstances. A tractor weighing 5.5t, and a minimum of 100hp, is required.



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Shows and trends

Mystery columnist THE SPROCKET casts an experienced eye over the industry's early-season mood, weighing up what packed show halls, dealer pressures and the rapid rise of autonomous machinery might tell us about where 2026 is really heading.



Although this is getting written toward the end of January in the 2026 New Year, there has been a lot going on with shows and trends that may be an indicator for what 2026 will bring to the industry. Whilst this piece will be on your desks around March, it seemed appropriate to sum up some of the show information, and a little of what we saw in 2025. A little mild piece from the Sprocket, but it is cold and wet, and I have not been out on the bike for a while - but have been looking at some rides in the spring and later in the year.

Of course we had GroundsFest and SALTEX in 2025, and these shows have been covered well in the magazine. GroundsFest did seem to attract a lot of visitors, and was well-received by the exhibitors. SALTEX held its head high, did seem to be holding its numbers, and is still attracting a variety of machinery exhibitors. It is more likely that budgets are causing manufacturers and suppliers to make choices between these two shows, and not so much the demographic of the visitor base.

More recently, I did visit LAMMA at the NEC. Despite the woes in the farming industry, and the knock-on effect with machinery dealers, it was packed. I have been to all the LAMMA shows at the NEC, and was amazed at the numbers on the first day. With reports of 2025 tractor sales being the worst since the Second World War, the show had a very positive feel, and one hopes it is an indication of a better 2026 season for our agricultural machinery dealers.

Even from my slightly removed perch, the ag boys have had a hard time, and some have had to trim costs to meet the depressed market. Slim margins and increasing costs don't help the longevity of a dealership. Increases in NI have hit every business, and balancing the books just because of this alone has been difficult for many, as well as being a surprise. The farming inheritance tax fiasco threw the industry a curveball, and, I guess, instilled even more caution in the farming industry – at least for a while.

Then we have all the uncertainty being created by the vagaries of Mr. Trump and his Tariff Wars. Again, some of this

has come from leftfield, and, to an extent, would have been unexpected and unplanned for. Tough stuff for everyone.

Closures of ag and garden machinery dealerships continue for a number of reasons, and acquisition and mergers remain an ongoing trend – with ag machinery dealers, at least. Perhaps the ag dealers are mirroring the farmers, where the business is getting bigger and bigger and the smaller companies and smaller farms are giving way to the larger entities. No doubt this will affect machinery demand, with probably larger, higher-horsepower tractors and bigger equipment - but less of it.

I was able to do my annual pilgrimage to the BIGGA show in Harrogate – one I have attended as both an exhibitor and visitor since it started. A great time of the year to shake off the winter blues, get together with all sorts of people for a beer and a chat, and have a very pleasant day roaming the halls and catching up with people. This year, I thought the variety of exhibitors was great, and the halls seemed to be filled with visitors for most of the day. Again, a very positive vibe, with some interesting exhibits and obvious trends in the equipment being displayed.

Technological developments

What fascinated me, apart from the now-established trend towards battery-powered equipment of all sizes, was the ever-increasing size of the 'robot mower.' This market is one I have not been involved in from a sales perspective, but was around when the first, yellow robo mows came into the country. Very novel at the time, and supposedly built in Israel in factories set up to use redundant military technology. They produced robot vacuum cleaners and window washers, as well. Rumour had it that the mowers were installed with out-of-date Exocet guidance systems. Not sure how true that was, but it made an interesting conversation piece.

It was clear at the show that the robot business was moving from the hard-wired perimeter domestic robot mowers to more autonomous units which are getting bigger and bigger, and targeting commercial users and larger grassed areas more and more. Also, the remote-controlled petrol and electric units seem to be becoming more specific

to more difficult grass cutting tasks, with the larger robots creeping in for the easier areas.

Talking to a greenkeeper who is just about to purchase two large autonomous robot mowers to cut the fairways on an 18-hole course got me interested in where this was all going, and how it will affect dealers and manufacturers when it comes to traditional types of golf course equipment. So armed, I was walking around the show with a new interest in wide cut robots. There were plenty there – some from traditional equipment suppliers, and some from new companies to the market.

Having been a long-term advocate of cylinder mowing, I was intrigued by the use of a blade not much larger than a razorblade, and a machine that can, in theory, cut 24/7 without an operator sat on it. All this and a standard course only needs two of them. Half the price of a traditional fairway mower, and maybe some savings on not having a person sat on it for six hours a day. I did ask about the rough, but was told this can be dealt with using a heavier duty remote controlled machine. How things are changing.

Where next?

The crux of all this, at least in my mind, was what happens to the supply of more traditional equipment, and what pressures will be put on dealers involved in the groundcare sector. Will the big golf equipment suppliers move over to the large robots? Some already have them, others do not. So what does a dealer do if they cannot get 'fairway robots' from an existing supplier? Well, they can probably go elsewhere, but I wonder how this will affect the balance of trade with a large, dominant existing supplier?

Are we looking at a significant shift to autonomous robots (which seem to be cheaper to buy and cheaper to run than traditional equipment) in the commercial sector, or will this be one of those trends that comes and goes over the years? What I didn't get into was how the large robots will be financed by clubs that are used to five-year machine

contracts and full replacement packages. That could be interesting to learn about.

Anyway, some fascinating changes for the future. My big concern, previously reported in SD, is the use of lithium-ion batteries, the harm the mining of rare materials for these does, and the lack of disposal facilities for them at end-of-life. The environmental harm these processes can and will cause is far more damaging than most people realise, and it is one of those issues that may end up biting the world in the bum – more so than the use of petrol or diesel. Certainly, it is a debatable issue, and those amongst you who champion the need to protect our environment may want to be more aware of these issues when it comes to the environmental issues created by lithium batteries.

There may be light at the end of the tunnel, though, with research into sodium batteries and other types of battery power. Let's hope this is the case, and we don't start seeing vast tracks of ice being dug out in places like the Antarctic and Greenland to get at the Earth's rare mineral resources.

Biking parallels

As a biker, I sometimes look at what is happening with motorcycle dealers and see some very familiar outcomes to the LBE sector. Locally, I have seen a number of well-established motorcycle dealers close their doors, causing issues for customers. I asked the question about how this sector was doing on the Internet, and it threw up the following on its AI overview. Anything sound familiar?

'Motorcycle dealers in the UK are currently facing a very challenging, "turbulent" period, with 2024 and early-2025 marked by significant closures and a slump in new registrations. While some, particularly those dealing in specific, popular smaller-capacity or adventure bikes, are showing resilience, many dealers are battling rising costs, reduced consumer spending, and the aftermath of industry-wide changes.'

Enjoy your bike, have a great summer, and ride safe.



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.

MARCH 2026

ConExpo – Las Vegas www.conexpoconagg.com	3-7
The Scots Turf Show, Hamilton Park Racecourse www.scotsturfshow.com	4
GMA Conference & Awards, Edgbaston Stadium www.gmaindustryawards.uk/conference/	15

APRIL 2026

Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London www.idealhomeshow.co.uk	10-19
AEA Conference 2026, One Great George Street, London www.aea.uk.com	14
The Commercial Vehicle Show, Birmingham NEC www.cvshow.com	21-23
Harrogate Spring Flower Show www.flowershow.org.uk	23-26
Newark Garden Show, Newark Showground www.newarkgardenshow.co.uk	24-26
East Anglian Game & Country Fair, Euston Estate, Thetford www.ukgamefair.co.uk	25-26

MAY 2026

North Somerset Show www.nsas.org.uk	4
Nottinghamshire County Show www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com	9
Scotgrass, Slacks Farm, Lochmaben www.scotgrass.co.uk	13
Balmoral Show, Belfast www.balmoralshow.co.uk	13-16
Hadleigh Show www.hadleighshow.co.uk	16
Chelsea Flower Show www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show	19-23

Shropshire County Agricultural Show, West Midlands Showground www.shropshirecountyshow.com	23
Northumberland County Show www.northcountyshow.co.uk	23
Suffolk County Show www.suffolkshow.co.uk	27-28
Staffordshire County Show www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show	27-28
Royal Bath & West Show www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show	28-30

JUNE 2026

Royal Cornwall Show www.royalcornwallshow.org	4-6
South of England Show www.seas.org.uk/south-of-england-show	5-7
Cereals 2026, Diddly Squat Farm www.cerealsevent.co.uk	10-11
Royal Three Counties Show, Malvern www.royalthreecounties.co.uk	12-14
BBC Gardeners' World Live - Birmingham NEC www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com	18-21
Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh www.royalhighlandshow.org	18-21
Royal Cheshire County Show www.royalcheshireshow.org	16-17
Lincolnshire Show www.lincolnshireshow.co.uk/	17-18
spoga+gafa 2026, Cologne www.spogagafa.com	22-24
Hillhead – Buxton www.hillhead.com	23-25
Royal Norfolk Show www.royalnorfolkshow.co.uk	24-25



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- **Vision AI 2.0** – day and night vision
- **Slopes** up to 42° / 90%
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- **All-terrain capability** – 4 wheel drive and suspension
- **A 'Drop & Go' model** – 1 minute Quick Start



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