

# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

May/June 2025

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## THINKING AHEAD AND BEATING THE GAME

Dealers are using their acumen and entrepreneurial spirit this season to create opportunities

### COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Local dealers come together at Farm Expo '25

### DOE SHOW '25

Expansion and diversification

### A LIFETIME AS AN AG ENGINEER

Dealer John Wiffen on his years in the industry



### "THE BUILDING AND CLOSING OF A DEALERSHIP"

Anthony Deacon shares his personal story of MKM Agri



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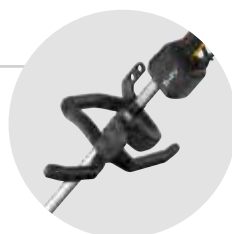
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WELCOME

Letter from the editor

**Steve Gibbs**

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Welcome to the May/June 2025 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

There are probably a couple of contenders so far in 2025 for word of the year for our industry. The one I'd choose is not tariff, although that certainly plays into it. The word I've heard repeatedly used by both dealers and suppliers alike during these opening months, is *uncertainty*. It's not the most complicated or nuanced of words, but it certainly seems to sum up the current industry experience.

In this issue, you'll find a report on a road trip that *Service Dealer* owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke, and I made, where we visited several readers across northern England, the midlands and Wales. On this trip, uncertainty amongst customers and in the marketplace was frequently cited as an inhibitor to the running of businesses to their maximum potential. Chris Gibson of GGM summed it up, telling us: "There is so much uncertainty around at the moment. Many customers are just sitting on their hands, thinking that they will just 'make it do.'"

So, what can dealers do to combat this malaise? Stand around and moan about it? That's clearly not an option. From what we're hearing, they are doing exactly what they've always done – and that's look for new

opportunities for growth.

Developing hire options is one avenue that we've been told some dealers are pursuing with vigour this year. This seems especially so as wholegood sales aren't exactly booming with commercial clients. However, there does appear to be one area that dealers are turning to in numbers – and that's robotic mowing solutions.

We have the results of our most recent survey starting on page 42 of this issue, where we asked you how your dealership is feeling about our android friends this season? And – similarly to what we were told by several business owners on our road trip – the technology is finding increasing favour with customers, both domestic and professional. Sales are up, and so is dealer enthusiasm.

Perhaps one reason for this uptick is the prevalence in the last year or so of robots that do not require a boundary wire. This seems to have really struck a chord with the high-end domestic purchaser, who might have previously favoured a lawn tractor – so much so that a couple of dealers have told us that these satellite-controlled ones have pretty much made the older, wired models obsolete, and rapidly so.

Will 2025, then, become known as the year of the robot? Well, at this stage, I suppose that's still uncertain.

## THE TEAM

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## DEALERS

# Kubota expand three dealerships' areas

Hopkins, Pallisers and Lister Wilder all benefit

**Kubota (UK) Ltd has implemented a series of changes to three of its dealer sales areas, following recent appointments that have taken place within the dealer network covering Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.**

The first involves South Wales-based Hopkins Machinery, which gains access to the manufacturer's groundcare and M-series tractor ranges through its Kilcot depot – located near Newent, Gloucestershire – creating opportunities for the family-run dealership around Ross-on-Wye, Gloucester and the western side of Cheltenham.

"We're extremely pleased to be able to provide sales, service and support for all the existing Kubota products we handle, but now through our Kilcot depot in addition to our headquarters in St Brides Wentloog, South Wales, and our Brecon, Powys locations," said Evan Hopkins, a director at the company.

The second change sees Pallisers of Hereford gain area to the east of its former territory, taking in

Upton-upon-Severn and the western side of Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, while also extending north and east toward Pershore, Hanbury and Bromsgrove in Worcestershire.

"We're pleased to be expanding our Kubota tractor business within these additional areas," said Camilla Palliser, dealer principal at Pallisers of Hereford. "We're looking forward to supporting new Pallisers customers throughout these areas."

The third development is with dealer Lister Wilder, which gains additional area in the north of its territory, extending eastwards from Cheltenham to encompass Northleach and Hazleton, and stretching north into the Cotswolds towards Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire – adjoining the area recently taken over by Hunts Engineering at Halford, Warwickshire.

"Any extension to our sales area is always going to be a positive step forward for Lister Wilder and the Kubota brand," said Lister Wilder sales director Phill Hughes. "It's an opportunity to work with and support many new customers."



## INDUSTRY

# Industry experts take to the airwaves

Well-known figures on BBC R4's 'Dough'

**Craig Hoare, sales and marketing manager for Toro UK, Yvette Henshall-Bell, president of Husqvarna's European Business Unit, and Nick Darking, general manager of BAGMA, recently took part in an episode of the BBC Radio 4 programme Dough, discussing lawnmowers.**

Broadcast on Thursday, March 20, Dough is the series that looks at the business behind profitable, everyday products and considers how they might evolve in the years to come.

In each episode, entrepreneur Sam White speaks to industry experts to find out how these products manage to



L-R: Tom Cheesewright, Sam White, Yvette Henshall-Bell and Craig Hoare

make a profit and what game-changing - and sometimes pointless - innovations they have seen in their time.

Tom Cheesewright, a technology expert and applied futurist, then offers his predictions on what might be coming beyond the current production pipeline.

Covering everything from lawn stripes to robotics, the three industry experts helped the presenters to better understand the oft-misunderstood world of lawnmowers, whilst giving some insight into the future of the industry.

**The episode is available to stream on BBC Sounds at: [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002909c](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002909c)**

## DEALERS

# Agwood brand ceases

Merged into Crawfords Group



**Crawfords Group has announced that, as part of what they describe as a "strategic merger," the Agwood brand has ceased, with all services and operations fully integrated into the Crawfords brand from March 31, 2025.**

In a statement, Crawfords said the move would "enhance the company's ability to deliver exceptional service and support to its valued customers."

This transition will not affect the staff or locations that customers currently engage with. Crawfords have assured customers that the same dedicated team members continue to provide the high level of service and support they have come to expect.

Wes Crawford, managing director of Crawfords Group, said: "This merger represents an exciting new chapter for both Agwood and Crawfords. By bringing together our teams and resources, we are better positioned to meet the evolving needs of our customers while maintaining the high standards of service they trust. We are committed to making this transition as seamless as possible, and look forward to continuing to support our Agwood customers under the Crawfords brand."

Crawfords encouraged customers to reach out to their usual points of contact for any questions or further information about the merger.





Delegates at New Holland's 2025 dealer meeting

# New Holland award their dealers

## Lloyd Ltd takes overall title

**New Holland has announced the winners of the 2024 UK and Ireland Dealer of the Year Awards, which they say celebrate the accomplishments of their dealer network across UK and Ireland.**

The presentation of thirteen awards recognises the dedication, performance and service quality across their network.

The UK awards were announced at the UK Dealer Meeting on Tuesday, February 11, at the Basildon Tractor

Plant. The Irish award was announced at the Irish Dealer Meeting on Wednesday, January 29, at the Johnstown Estate in County Meath.

David Rapkins, New Holland's business director for the UK and ROI, said: "I would like to extend my congratulations to all the 2024 New Holland Dealer of the Year Award winners. These awards are part of an ongoing program to highlight the achievements of our dealers, as well as to acknowledge their dedication and commitment to the New Holland brand."

*2024 winners of the Dealer of the Year Award include:*

**Overall, UK Dealer of the Year**  
Lloyd Ltd

**Ireland Dealer of the Year**  
M&S Machinery

**Medium Dealer of the Year**  
Agricar Ltd

**Small Dealer of the Year**  
T Alun Jones & Son

**Tractor Dealer of the Year**  
Ravenhill Ltd

**Combine Dealer of the Year**  
Russells Ltd

**Hay and Forage Dealer of the Year**  
Lloyd Ltd

**Telehandler Dealer of the Year**  
Ernest Doe & Sons Ltd

**Precision Farming Dealer of the Year**  
Haynes Agricultural Ltd

**Implement Dealer of the Year**  
Agricar Ltd

**Construction Equipment Dealer of the Year**  
Lloyd Ltd

**Parts Dealer of the Year**  
Agricar Ltd

**Customer Experience Dealer of the Year**  
Rea Valley Tractors Ltd



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DEALERS

## Carr's Billington expands dealer territory

For T H White Machinery Imports brands

**T H White Machinery Imports has announced that Carr's Billington is expanding its dealer territory to cover Northern England and Southwest Scotland.**

This strategic expansion means they can now serve customers in these regions with such brands as Ferris commercial mowers, Spider remote-controlled slope mowers and Ohashi compact tracked chippers.

Amanda Smith, branch manager at Carr's Billington, Byers Green, Spennymoor, said: "At Carr's Billington, we pride ourselves on delivering high-quality products and expert service to our customers. With Ferris, Spider and Ohashi, we can offer even more solutions to meet the diverse needs of professionals working in groundcare, forestry and landscaping across Northern England and Southwest Scotland."

Douglas Jeffrey, area sales manager at T H White Machinery Imports, said: "Their Carr's Billington's expertise and strong local presence ensure that more customers will have access to industry-leading groundcare equipment, backed by exceptional service and support."



L-R: Douglas Jeffrey, area sales manager at T H White Machinery Imports and Amanda Smith, branch manager at Carr's Billington

INDUSTRY



## FGM announce appointment

For the Sunseeker robotic mower range

**FGM Claymore has announced it has recently become the exclusive UK distributor for the Sunseeker elite X Series robotic mower range.**

Michele Belladelli, sales manager for Sunseeker Europe, said: "We are delighted that FGM Claymore will now make this technology available

across the UK and Ireland through their extensive dealer network."

Paul Butterly, MD of FGM Claymore, added: "We already have experience with ECHO Robotics – mowing technology for larger commercial spaces up to 75,000m<sup>2</sup> – so we are very excited to now offer this level of

advanced technology to the home user. We are bringing a truly innovative smart product to the UK market, and are looking forward to a busy year ahead."

FGM Claymore say they are now seeking to appoint dealers to sell the range.

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DEALERS



Thorncliffs directors Edward Roach and James Wetton

# JCB-exclusive dealer established

Thorncliffs replace G & J Peck in local area

**JCB has appointed Thorncliffs as a new agricultural machinery dealership with a well-established JCB pedigree to provide sales, parts and service support in south Lincolnshire, effective from May 1.**

The appointment follows long-standing JCB dealer G & J Peck's decision to focus on its Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk territories.

Based at modern premises in Sleaford, Lincolnshire, Thorncliffs was set up in 2018 by Edward Roach and James Wetton - who between them have many years' technical and sales experience of JCB agricultural products - to prepare used Loadalls, wheeled loaders and Fastrac tractors for re-sale.

JCB say Thorncliffs has proved a great success, setting high standards of preparation of used equipment, and is now well-placed with a comprehensively-equipped workshop and parts storage to provide customers with routine servicing and repairs of JCB machines, and to supply new machines from the manufacturer's Fastrac and materials handling ranges.

Edward Roach said: "This is an exciting opportunity to create a new retail dealership exclusively for JCB agricultural equipment, which we have grabbed with both hands to build on the success of our used equipment and hire operations.

"Over the past seven years, we

have invested heavily in new premises, facilities and staff, which will act as a real springboard to supporting new customers in the business, starting a new chapter that will allow us to grow Thorncliffs by recruiting for additional roles as our new JCB machine and parts sales develop."

John Smith, JCB's agriculture managing director, said: "As a young company with an energetic and knowledgeable team familiar with JCB products, we are confident Thorncliffs will maintain the high standards they have set as they expand into retail sales and aftersales service."

## News in brief: Read these stories, and more, in full at: [www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk)

INDUSTRY



### Robotic mower servicing days held

Barrus recently hosted a series of Segway robotic mower service training sessions for its network of dealers - which proved so popular they were held on eight consecutive days.

PEOPLE



### Aftersales coordinator joins

Cramer have announced that Luke Winwood has joined their team as their new aftersales coordinator. The company says he brings with him a wealth of experience and a strong technical background.

INDUSTRY



### Royal warrant awarded again

Hayter has again been awarded the Royal Warrant, by appointment to His Majesty the King, as manufacturers of horticultural machinery. Hayter says this honour, held until 2030, reaffirms their unwavering commitment to quality and innovation.

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# Collective success for dealers at Kent show

Held in early March at Kent Showground, Detling, near Maidstone, Farm Expo brought together agricultural suppliers from across the county, including many of the region's own ag machinery dealers. MARTIN RICKATSON visited to find out how the trade has been faring.

**F**arm Expo, reckoned to be south-east England's largest dedicated agricultural services and farm machinery show, returned for its sixth year at Kent Showground this March. Despite tough times in farming, the one-day event, which attracts most of the county's agricultural equipment dealers, enjoyed increased ticket registrations – required to obtain the free entry ticket – and trade stand numbers.

Launched in 2019, the organisers say Farm Expo aims to “connect merchants and buyers, providing a convenient opportunity for visitors to shop all their farming needs.” With county shows often now more about shopping stands and entertainment than serious displays of the latest farm equipment

from local dealers, Farm Expo is – as the name suggests – focused only on farming, and enables local farmers to talk to and view equipment from all their local dealers in one place.

## Strong attendance

This year's event saw well over 2,000 visitors come through the gates, with registration data suggesting around two-thirds of those are business decisionmakers, and that most visitors spend between three and five hours at the show. Exhibitor numbers broke the three-figure barrier, with farm equipment dealers joined by agricultural suppliers ranging from agronomists to accountants. Inside and outside pitches are available to exhibitors in a range of sizes and locations, with smaller specialist

dealers – such as those focused on the local orchard and viticulture markets – tending to take indoor stands alongside agronomy firms, accountancy companies and others.

Matthew Cullen, chairman of the Kent County Agricultural Society, showground owner and show organiser, said: “Farm Expo is an opportunity for farmers, farmworkers and all those who are involved with rural industries to come together and network, discover the latest innovations from businesses within the agri-sector, and – possibly most importantly – to socialise with fellow members of the agricultural community.

“As our community continues to face unprecedented challenges on so many fronts, events like this are an opportunity to remind

Over 2,000 visitors passed through the gates of the event, at which most local dealers were present

everyone that none of us are facing these challenges alone. It has been fantastic to walk around the event and feel the buzz in the atmosphere on a glorious spring day, as farmers and agri-businesses take full advantage of the opportunity to build new connections and renew existing ones. The importance of these connections has been at the heart of our planning for Farm Expo 2025, with the new layout seeing the creation of a buzzing networking area in the Maidstone Hall.

“As my first event as chairman of the Kent County Agricultural Society comes to a close after another successful year, I would like to say a huge thank you to all of our sponsors, exhibitors, visitors and team who helped make Farm Expo 2025 a fantastic day for all involved. We are already planning the next event on Wednesday, March 4, 2026.”

## Local dealer presence

Exhibitors included Bell Agricultural, the Romney Marsh-based dealership that is now over a quarter-of-a-century old, which recently celebrated its tenth year with Deutz-Fahr as its key tractor franchise. Robin Back, one of the

directors of the business, suggested that, although market conditions were undoubtedly tough, there was business to be had for smaller dealers prepared to back good products with dedicated personal support that recognises farmers' needs for committed service support.

“I'm 73 now, and have worked in this business since I was 15, when I started with Drake and Fletcher in Ashford,” he recalled.

“When Drake and Fletcher decided to cease selling and servicing farm machinery 26 years ago, I took on the main John Deere franchise with two colleagues, and we built up a successful dealership from scratch, based on the principle of ‘support that lasts a lifetime’ – which we later adopted as our slogan.

“But when John Deere then decided in the mid-2010s to follow a strategy of encouraging its dealers to merge with neighbours to form larger groups, we decided that wasn't the path for us, and that we could survive on the customer loyalty we had earned, and on existing and replacement franchises.

“After looking at our options, in 2015, we signed to replace our tractor offering with Deutz-Fahr, hosting a series of demo days to get potential customers behind the wheel. While we may not quite do the numbers

we did with our former franchise, we have seen a core of loyal customers choose to stay with us for their tractor needs. The product is very good, with the larger models coming from one of the newest and most modern tractor factories in Europe, opened in 2017, and we are still competing in most of the volume tractor categories, from the orchard and vineyard models that are in demand throughout Kent, right up to 340hp arable tractors.

“It's good to see SDF UK having recently committed to a new UK premises in Daventry, and we have a good area manager in Tim Laurence, who listens and responds to feedback from us and our customers.

“To replace other products lost from the full line we had under John Deere, we subsequently signed a number of other deals, including one with McHale, which has worked particularly well for us in terms of round baler business. Along with other franchises, including Weidemann materials handlers, Bailey trailers and Opico equipment – including Ovlac ploughs – this has helped us to sustain the business to the extent we retain the same staffing level of 21 team members that we did ten years ago under our previous main franchise.”

Robin acknowledged that Bell Agricultural, like others in agricultural



Lister Wither's Ashford branch took a stand at March's Farm Expo in Kent, displaying Kubota, Kverneland and Merlo equipment



Bell Agricultural's stand included an extensive display of Deutz-Fahr tractors and products from its other franchises





Bell Agricultural's Robin Back suggested that, while the current ag machinery market is tough, the flexibility and service commitment of smaller dealers was an advantage



Steve Patfield, of Ernest Doe's newest branch at Woodchurch, Ashford, reported that tractor sales were holding up, but the combine sector was tougher



Show visitors included Sally Field and Debbie Broad, from support organisation The Farming Community Network

machinery retailing, has experienced a challenging time over the past year or so, and that the turmoil in the farm machinery dealer sector is unlikely to die down for a while.

"But we have to expect that times like this will come around, and our support doesn't change. If our customers are earning less they will be spending less, and where we make a sale, we perhaps won't earn on every deal. Our focus, though, is on riding out the difficult circumstances and supporting the farming community, keeping customers happy as much as we can."

Elsewhere at the event, dealer exhibitors included Tuckwells, now the area's John Deere dealer, with two Kent branches, and Lister Wilder, which has a full-line Kubota branch at Ashford. The latter firm reported that its diversified product line (selling the Japanese company's agricultural tractors and implements, groundcare range and light construction machinery, alongside other franchises, including Kverneland arable and grassland equipment and Merlo telehandlers, was helping to even out the farming investment downturn. Haynes, the county's New Holland dealer, also displayed machines from

its JCB franchise, and was marking sustained interest in reduced-cultivation crop establishment with the presence on its stand of a Claydon Hybrid direct drill.

It may not be a new name in the business, but one of the county's newest dealerships is that of Ernest Doe Power, which, in 2021, opened a new branch at Woodchurch, Ashford, to fill a gap in the Case IH network. Steve Patfield, manager of the depot since his move from another local dealer, reported decent tractor trade despite ag industry challenges.

Steve said: "Telehandler and baler business is also okay, but the combine trade is proving tougher. We have a broad line of implement franchises to help meet the needs of a diverse range of customers, though, and help spread our business over the agriculture, horticulture and groundcare sectors, including Lemken, KRM, Maschio, Dalbo, Richard Western, Marshall, Shelbourne Reynolds, Spearhead, Sip and Bednar."

The Massey Ferguson, Fendt and Valtra products of AGCO were displayed under unified branding of dealer Crawfords, which had continued to run its Massey Ferguson

depots south of the River Thames under Agwood branding since acquiring the Agwood business in 2022. Just prior to the show, it had been announced that the Agwood operation was to be merged fully into Crawfords from March 31.

The firm has been in the Kent area since 2013 – when it opened a branch at Charing, near Ashford – and it operates a second former Agwood branch at Swingfield, Dover, in addition to its HQ at Writtle, Essex, and further depots Billingshurst, West Sussex and Ropley, Hampshire. Crawfords also recently announced the addition of Indespension road trailers to its franchise list, covering Essex, East Hertfordshire, Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, and East Berkshire.

"By bringing together our teams and resources, we are better positioned to meet the evolving needs of our customers while maintaining the high standards of service they trust," said Wes Crawford, company managing director.

"We are committed to making the transition as smooth as possible, and look forward to continuing to support our Agwood customers under the Crawfords brand."



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# Thinking ahead and beating the game

Despite challenges – including unhelpful budgets, price rises and market uncertainty – *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS, hears how five dealerships are using their acumen and entrepreneurial spirit this season to create opportunities.

**E**arly March saw *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and I embark on a road trip, to visit a handful of our dealer readers.

It's an endeavour we undertake each year, to allow us to get around a different area of the country and catch up with dealers of different machinery specialisms. It allows us to get a flavour of their company, and how business is going. In the past, we've travelled around different parts of Scotland, Wales and the South Coast. This year, it was what I, as a Southerner, would roughly describe as 'the North.'

We visited, in order, **Cutting Edge Garden Machinery** in Bromsgrove;

**Major Owen** in Penrhyndeudraeth, North Wales; **GGM Group** in Colne, Lancashire; **Balmers GM** in Burnley; and **Ripon Farm Services** in North Yorkshire.

Firstly, Duncan and I would like to pass on our huge thanks to all the dealers and their staff who we met on our travels - all of whom offered us a fabulously kind welcome, and they were delightfully open and frank in talking to us about their businesses.

In our conversations, we were not after the history of these companies - rather, we were hoping for a snapshot of how the dealerships are viewing the current market situation. These visits - that between them covered the gamut of domestic, professional and agricultural machinery - were a fabulous opportunity

to take a barometer reading of what challenges and opportunities a selection of dealers saw 2025 as offering.

Kicking things off with a couple of quite simple questions, we learned of some similar thoughts regarding where growth could be achieved this year. We also discovered some common concerns that were preoccupying several businesses - and, of course, we heard some unique takes on both, dependent on individual ambitions and direction. All answers were revealing, highlighting the pressures that small businesses in our sector are facing, but also how, with acumen and entrepreneurship, tricky times are being navigated with success.



Balmers in Burnley



Ripon Farm Services in North Yorkshire



Cutting Edge Garden Machinery in Bromsgrove



GGM Group in Colne, Lancashire



Major Owen in Penrhyndeudraeth, North Wales

The first question we asked was...

**Q What do you see as a real opportunity for your dealership in 2025?**

**A** Steve and Sarah Law at Cutting Edge told us that, for their dealership, they believed that robotic mowing solutions would present a real opportunity for growth this year. With the Segway units that they represent, they can see a real consumer shift from lawn tractors to these machines. "People are coming to us for help and advice," said Sarah. "And, with the rapid change from boundary wires to satellite control, customers are increasingly interested in this technology."

Another potential opportunity for growth for Cutting Edge, we were told, was the expansion of their hire department. They said this was especially the case with their commercial B2B customers, who may not be spending on wholegoods, but who are

willing to pay for hire of large kit.

Major Owen spoke about how exclusivity of premium ranges in their local area would be important to their business this year. Andy Jones said: "Specialising in premium brands pulls us away from the mass market, which is both a dying area and a race to the bottom. We specialise in quality machinery, and offer the backup to go alongside that. We also have that vital mix of groundcare, domestic and construction machinery, meaning any can take up the slack if the others were to dip. We also make sure our offerings cater for all customers' budgets."

Major Owen were also looking to robotics to show further growth amongst their customer base.

GGM were excited about the opportunities that their recently-announced new service centre in Yorkshire will bring this year. Chris Gibson said: "In challenging times, the fact that we're doing this creates

a positive buzz within the business. It focuses minds, and generates excitement. It really is big news for us."

Chris and his son Thomas also told us they have great anticipation for a new parts web shop they are launching. The intention is to get all their parts info up onto a new site, to make the process of ordering quicker and easier for customers - especially for those out in the field.

At Balmers GM, we spoke to Andrew Meeks and Jo Balmer, who told us that you must look at the season as an opportunity – or else you are half-beaten already. Jo told us: "I'm confident that, whatever this year throws at us, we'll find a way to successfully navigate through it."

In terms of where they were seeing potential growth, it was in alternative fuel-powered products and, once again, robotics. Andrew said they were especially excited about these developments in the golfing sector.





Steve and Sarah Law in the showroom



Jo Balmer and Andrew Meeks in Balmer's showroom



Phil Gregg with one of the large John Deere ag tractors the dealership specialises in



Major Owen's Andy, Josh and Luke Jones



GGM's Thomas and Chris Gibson

"With club managers now much more involved in the machinery purchasing decisions," said Andrew, "we are seeing a real shift towards battery tools. Robotics, meanwhile, means that, with the labour crisis, skilled greenkeepers can be redeployed away from laborious grass cutting."

Balmers also told us that, as the supply chain is in a much healthier state than it has been in recent years, they can get back to demoing and selling tools, rather than having customers order machinery 12 months in advance.

Phil Gregg at Ripon, meanwhile, was also enthusiastic regarding the golfing and professional turfcare sector. The dealership has recently had a big win with the home of English golf, Woodhall Spa, converting their entire machinery fleet to green and yellow - but Phil told us he feels they can push on their pro-turf side to even greater successes. He told us: "We've established a great commercial grasscare machinery team. I can genuinely feel their energy and a real enthusiasm. There's a lot to be said for having that camaraderie in a team,

so I feel there's a good time to be had in turf this year."

Phil also believed that the agricultural sales, which have been notoriously slow for everyone lately, will eventually have to pick up again, because it's simply been too long for farmers to not reinvest in their machinery options.

The next, inevitable, question that we ran past our dealer hosts was:

**Q What are you most concerned might inhibit the running of your dealership to its maximum potential in 2025?**

**A** Cashflow was the principal concern that Cutting Edge say they have found themselves dealing with recently. Steve Law told us: "When turnover is lower, cashflow becomes a problem. With all our stock - which is a huge commitment - if we have a few quiet months, it can be a killer." Steve and Sarah both felt that if new dealerships were wanting to start up today without a huge reserve of cash in the bank before they began,

the situation with cashflow would make survival a real battle.

Major Owen were one of several dealers who we spoke to who had considerable concerns about the changes for business coming into effect following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's most recent budget. The increased costs to employers in terms of National Insurance contributions is going to be something that all small businesses will feel. Andy Jones summed up the situation, saying: "Instead of encouraging you to invest in your business, it's been the opposite."

GGM shared these concerns stemming from the budget, with Chris Gibson also talking about a "general lack of confidence in the market." He explained: "There is so much uncertainty around at the moment. Many customers are just sitting on their hands, thinking that they will just 'make it do.'"

Balmers also cited this uncertainty that the market is experiencing. Not helping with this, Andrew Meeks told us, are "the rises in costs of machinery

that end-users have had to endure." He explained: "The costs related to running a golf course, for example, have spiralled - but club subs have not responded to match these."

Phil Gregg at Ripon explained to

us just how hard wholegood sales in agriculture have been in recent times. "Customers just keep putting off purchases," he told us. "It can't continue like this forever, but there's just so much uncertainty in the

market, it makes things difficult. Also, farmers are quite simply strapped for cash." Phil also spoke about how the business would need to work leaner due to market circumstances.

## Further discussion points:

Discussions with our dealer hosts branched into other topical areas. Following on from what several mentioned as concerns stemming from the Chancellor's recent announcements, we asked:

**Q Would the autumn budget specifically impact recruitment into the dealership?**

**A** Major Owen's Josh Jones confirmed that it already has. "We did have a couple of staff we were ready to bring in," he told us. "But the autumn budget put a spanner in the works for that. It actually affected quite a lot. It made us rethink pay increases, and rethink our overall people strategy across the board." It had also knocked Cutting Edge's plans directly, with Sarah telling us: "We might have employed someone to do more sales, but I think we'll definitely be holding off on that and doing more in-house ourselves. It's a concern."

Phil at Ripon informed us that it has undoubtedly influenced the decisions they have made regarding how to maintain profitability. "Times are difficult in farming," he said, "and it's difficult for us as a business off the back of that. We service and look after the farming community, and, when they find it difficult, we find it difficult, too."

Chris at GGM, however, told us: "It's made us reflect on some of the things that were on the fringes of what we were going to do. But what we're doing with our new opening in Yorkshire ... we're getting on and recruiting for that."

This was a philosophy that Andrew at

Balmers agreed with, saying: "I don't think you can let the budget affect recruitment decisions. I just believe trying to get the right people is even more important."

Jo did add that the dealership is being more mindful, because they had a plan of employing a robotic mower specialist to be on the road demoing. But, she said: "Getting an extra person in has been put on the backburner. We're now thinking of how we can use the staffing resources we already have better, rather than adding to employment costs."

Another area we touched upon is the topic of succession that we have spoken about extensively at our conferences and in the pages of this magazine (*for recent examples, see Keith Christian's article last issue, and Anthony Deacon's piece in this edition*). We asked:

**Q What are your thoughts on succession in your business plans?**

**A** GGM's Chris Gibson confirmed it is one of the bigger things that he is dealing with, saying: "It's not just about Thomas, it's not just about father to son. It's about the whole team. We're trying to create a team of tomorrow." Thomas agreed with his dad, explaining: "It's making sure that the right people are on the bus, and are ready to go to the next stop with you."

Andy at Major Owen told us that succession is going to have its ups and downs, but that he was very pleased when his boys confirmed they wanted to take the business

over. "I couldn't ask for anybody better to do that," he said. "I'm very proud of the fact that they want to do it, and to move it forward - and I'm relieved that I'm passing it into very, very good hands."

At Cutting Edge, Steve said that he and Sarah's eldest is 13 this year, and that he is already talking about coming to work at the family business. "He sees us working hard, and he's picking up on that work ethic," Steve proudly told us. "So, it's nice to think that you've got someone to come along and take over the business. My only concern is that is the industry still going to offer enough for him." With that word of caution, he also confirmed that they believe that planning for succession is key. He said: "It's not just going into it last minute and then realising you've got nothing planned ahead of you. You've got to really think about what you want to do."

Finally, we were interested to hear:

**Q How have you evolved your dealership over the years?**

**A** Andrew at Balmers told us that, whilst commercial customers make up a large proportion of their traditional customers, they do see a lot more high-end domestic purchasers now. He said: "You get a lot of people coming in who've made their money, who say to us: 'I've always wanted a ride-on mower.'" Jo added that, as a business, they feel they are more selective now with who they want to work with. She explained: "We get approached by quite a lot of non-mainstream manufacturers, but





STIHL products at Balmers GM



Cutting Edge have been finding success with the Segway robotic mowers



Major Owen stock an extensive range of Kubota machinery



GGM's wall of *Service Dealer* awards



Each January, Ripon holds a popular show at the nearby Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate

we feel we've already got everything covered in terms of products with the suppliers we already work with. We've only got so much wall space!"

For GGM, explained Chris, they place ever-increasing value on their own brand and what they do with their end-customer. Due to this, he said: "We need to have partners that we can work with, so that, when we do sell something, we can make a margin out of that product." Thomas went on to explain how this belief plays into their long-term strategy, saying: "The thing about us is we're not trying to think about what's next week, or the week after - we're thinking what's five years, what's 10 years - or even what's 15 years down the line. So, when you look at a manufacturer, that's what you've got to consider."

Andy at Major Owen conveyed how they have elevated many layers of the business. He said: "We've tried to enhance the customer's experience

with ourselves, from the initial sale of the machine through to the after-sales. We are certainly more proactive now with servicing and parts requirements."

At Ripon, Phil explained how they have brought their farming customers with them though the inevitable price rises that all dealerships need to implement to evolve. He said: "I think in order to give the level of service that we have, and to be able to train our staff to repair the machinery, you can't afford to not have a service rate that's applicable to deliver the standards that are required. I do think farmers recognise the fact that they are paying for a level of service and a level of skill."

Finally, Sarah at Cutting Edge said their dealership had evolved with the type of work they taken on, such as developing their commercial machinery partnerships and doing more with hire. Steve also said that, in recent years, they have looked to fill the gaps that are missing in the

mowing season by taking on more arb customers. "We took on more arb engineers, and we were fortunate to become a GreenMech service centre," he told us. "Bringing those arb customers in has been great, as they really do fill the voids when you're quiet with mowing."

Steve concluded: "We just try to think ahead and beat the game a little bit."

I think Steve sums up the entrepreneurial spirit we encountered amongst all the dealers we visited this spring with this philosophy. Indeed, it's one that, through feedback and conversations, we know that all our dealer readers must demonstrate to thrive and survive.

Once again, Duncan and I would like to offer our thanks to all who we spent time with for both their hospitality and their candour - and we look forward to where our adventures take us next time.

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# The building and closing of a dealership: My story...

ANTHONY DEACON recently closed his business, MKM Agriculture. Here, he shares in his own words, the reasons why – explaining the challenges he faced, both personal and professional.



Ant Deacon outside the now-closed MKM Agriculture in Bedfordshire

I grew up on Grandad's small family farm in rural Bedfordshire. It was a working farm with a herd of around 35 cattle, a few sheep and some pigs. Grandma and Grandad also owned the village milk round. Dad started his business, MKM, in 1986 (the year after I was born). It specialised in repairing agricultural machinery - mainly Ford tractors and Claas combines. From a young age, I showed a keen interest in the farm and the agricultural machinery repair business, spending any spare time before and after school feeding the cows, and weekends and school holidays repairing agricultural machinery. I remember changing a clutch on a Fordson Major on my own, at the age of 14. I was chuffed to bits.

I finished school in 2001, and, in the same year, we decided to sell the cows and use the buildings for the machinery business. This was a sad time and challenging, as this was around the time of the UK foot and mouth outbreak – moving livestock wasn't easy. Nevertheless, it had to be done.

I joined the business, and it was just me and Dad. A small yard and one van, with a couple of equipment franchises. In 2002, we were approached by Harvey Day



Three generations – Ant with his grandad and dad



MKM specialised in ATVs and utility vehicles

from Suzuki to take on the ATV franchise. Dad and I spoke at length. At the time, we committed to holding £15,000 of stock – a huge investment for us. The following year, we made the decision to take on the franchise, and this was to be the start of our journey in the ATV/ UTV sector. We stayed solus Suzuki until 2013, when we were awarded the Yamaha franchise, as the local dealer was retiring with no succession plan. This was when the business really started to grow.

We began to develop departments, hiring a dedicated parts specialist, more technicians and more franchises, with Kawasaki joining the party in 2015 and Honda in 2016. At that point, this made us the only company in the UK to hold franchises for all four leading Japanese brands under one roof. Sales were strong, and we very quickly developed a good reputation in the area as the go-to place for any ATV/ UTV requirements.

The business was still relatively small. We had one parts person, around three technicians (one of which was my dad), and myself. I was responsible for all the sales, purchasing, workshop control, HR, marketing and accounts, including payroll. I developed a passion for growth, and created offices and positions for a salesperson, service manager and accounts administrator to take the workload off myself. This enabled me to focus on the business direction (tomorrow, as I liked to call it).

## Opening of a second branch

In 2018, the Honda dealer in Suffolk lost the Honda franchise due to financial reasons, and, while the area laid dormant, I began to poach some of the larger customers in the area. One of these customers wanted to deal with us, but, due to their environmentally-friendly ethics, they didn't like the idea of us travelling from Bedfordshire to the sites across



Ant in 2005-ish

Norfolk and Suffolk. I was keen not to let this business go, and, two days before my son was due to be born (August 2018), I contacted Honda and told them I would like to apply for the franchise in the area. Within an hour, I put together a business plan and sent it across to them. I had lined up some staff, and had a good idea of the kind of area to locate and the premises to run it from.

In November 2018, Honda awarded me the franchise off the back of a business plan. I had no premises, and





How things have changed!

only a verbal agreement from two members of staff that they would come on-board if I was successful with Honda. On March 1, 2019, we opened the branch, and very soon developed the strong customer base. During this same year, we won the *Service Dealer* 'ATV/Quad Dealer of the Year,' which was a very proud moment for me.

## COVID-19

The following year saw the world go into meltdown with Covid-19. At first, like everyone else, I was unsure if we could continue to trade. But, as the days passed, we made a few adaptations to remain safe and keep our doors open. I avoided closing the branches and furloughing any staff throughout the whole pandemic.

The pandemic suited our trading style, as we did not operate 'on-the-road' salespeople. My philosophy was to use our marketing skills to bring our customers to us, sell over the phone, WhatsApp, FaceTime, video calls and emails, then send the delivery driver to deliver it. Like many businesses in our industry, we saw huge growth in demand during this time. I purchased a dedicated flatbed van for deliveries, and employed more staff to cope.

## The Fire

On April 7, 2021, at 4am in the morning, I received a phone call from Grandad, who lived on-site. He said: "Ant, the workshop is on fire." Little did I know, but my job role was about to change. I rushed to site, calling Dad on the way, and arrived to see something I hope I never have to go through again. The whole experience is possibly a story for another time, but I quickly had to put together a plan to keep the business going and the staff motivated. I spent the next three months managing the recovery full-time. We cleared the site, put down fresh concrete, and erected a temporary building to enable us to continue to trade.

The fire couldn't have come at a worse time (if there ever could be one), as the industry was also suffering with supply shortages, and I had to find replacement machinery for 54 customers who had lost their machines in our fire. It was very difficult, but, somehow, I got through it, and, after months of work, we were able to put it all behind us.

## The planned new building

The fire gave us the opportunity to reassess the site, and we decided to make a planning application to erect a new modern purpose-built facility to run our growing business from. I wrote my journey through 2022 in *Service Dealer's* 'Diary of the Season,' so I won't go into much detail again here, but we had resistance from the ecological department within Central Bedfordshire Council and our application was rejected in favour of the Great Crested Newt.

The application expired, at a cost of around £20,000. Along with 2023 not being the most profitable year, I decided not to reapply at this time.



The aftermath of the devastating 2021 fire

## 2024 – The Final Year

2024 started well for MKM. Sales were good, and profits were, too. We now had two branches and 25 employees, and were on track to hit a £5 million budget at our year end in March. But I had created a monster, and it took a lot of managing.

I'm sure many of you reading this will be with me when I say: 'It's lonely at the top' - and this was the case for me.

The business had consumed me, and I felt trapped, with very little support from anyone in the business – least of all my father. Dad had gone through a very difficult time personally, with a marriage breakdown, and he was not in a very comfortable financial position. As he neared retirement, he wanted more time off. This left me feeling unsure of my future, and how we could work together. I had been to many conferences over recent years, and succession planning was always a much-discussed topic. I had tried to discuss this with Dad, but he would always do his best to avoid the conversation and leave me even more confused. All I wanted to know was what he wanted or needed, and how much it would cost me - but I never knew. In the end, I had enough, and, last summer, with the support of my wife, I decided I needed to make a big change.

I'm not yet 40, and I still have enough time to be engaged in a new career. I felt that, if I continued the way I was – without the security I needed – then, in another 10 years' time, I could be in an extremely vulnerable position (and that was if the stresses and pressures of running the business hadn't got the better of me). I approached Dad, and informed him of my decision. He was happy, because he could rent the site out and retire on the income.

At first, we closed our second site in Suffolk, with the aim of consolidating and looking to possibly relocate our Bedfordshire HQ away from the current site, which was owned by Dad as a result of my Grandfather gifting it to him around 20 years ago. I could then take on the business myself and focus on continuing to run it without the pressures of not knowing my dad's next move. I looked at some possible site options, did the maths on the cost to move, the disruption to the business, and decided it was not an option, as we did not have the cash.



The MKM premises in Suffolk were closed first last summer

So, on November 26, I announced to our staff that we had decided to close the business, and everyone was to be made redundant. There was a public announcement the following day that was a shock to all. It did trigger some interest in buying the business, and I spent the next couple of weeks in meetings with two interested parties. The issue was that there was no business without me - and I didn't want to be there anymore. So we could not come to any agreement. I never planned to sell the business, and therefore never put anything in place for this.

We organised a closing down sale to sell off all the stock in December, planning to sell the remaining assets in January / February, once the staff had left. Despite best efforts to close and remain solvent, I received professional advice, and instructed an Insolvency Practitioner to enter the company into voluntary liquidation. The balance sheet was monitored closely, and, although this process was not one I had undertaken previously, I believe we did everything possible to carry out a successful closure in very difficult circumstances.

Most of our suppliers were supportive. However, some made it difficult to trade. We were unable to complete some of our work in progress while fulfilling outstanding stock orders due to our supplier accounts being closed early. We also had creditors appearing from areas we had not considered, and some demanded overinflated early termination charges for existing contracts. Staff morale was expectedly low, customers with outstanding debts were reluctant to pay, and the whole experience was challenging, to say the least.

For me, I now feel free, relieved, and no longer have the pressure that I have not been able to escape for a very long time. I walked away with no money, but I have a freedom which is priceless. It's not 100% over yet, as I am still assisting the liquidator with queries and issues, but it's very nearly there.

I can now focus on myself, as I no longer have the responsibility of looking after my dad, all the staff, and keeping the business going.

I was desperate to be employed, which nearly every employed person couldn't understand. However, most employers I spoke to could completely understand, and they may have envied me for what I had done. I wanted a role with a challenge, which would give me the stimulation I needed without the hassle I didn't want. I wrote a CV and applied for some jobs, and I'm delighted to now be a dealer manager for woodchipper manufacturer Timberwolf - keeping me in the industry I have loved for my whole life.

My advice for anyone reading this and possibly sharing the same challenges is: 'Look after number one – YOURSELF.' Anything is possible. You are not alone, and, if you feel stuck, get out, make a change, and enjoy your life. You are only here once.

**If you would like a chat and feel like I can help, then reach out. You can find me on LinkedIn, Facebook, or email me at: [ant.deacon@yahoo.com](mailto:ant.deacon@yahoo.com)**





The 65<sup>th</sup> Doe Show attracted a number of new visitors, thanks to Ernest Doe's expansion into Lincolnshire

# Expansion and diversification

For Ernest Doe – the eastern England multi-branch farm, turf and construction machinery dealer – the past year has been especially eventful on the ag side, with new branches acquired and new markets entered. MARTIN RICKATSON discovered more at its 65<sup>th</sup> February show.

**W**ith the customers of its core farm equipment business seemingly coming under the cosh from multiple directions, the turnout on the ag front at Ernest Doe's annual Doe Show back in February could potentially have been understandably quiet, even if turf and construction visitor numbers held up. But, as the three-day event concluded, the proven formula of new and used equipment show deals, plus the addition of a broader range of visitors thanks to the acquisition of two new

branches in a new area, and the entry into new machine sectors, all contributed to strong visitor numbers and some decent trade.

Although the show has always attracted visitors from beyond its branch reaches, part of this year's success was undoubtedly down to the acquisition last summer of two new depots in southern Lincolnshire formerly operated by Burdens Group. With the Sutterton and North Kyme branches came not only the opportunity for Ernest Doe to extend its territory for its CNH main franchises – with Burdens having been

a New Holland dealer – but also a new set of franchises focused on the machinery required for the field-scale vegetable production widespread in the region's highly fertile silt soils.

"Our focus is on maintaining the strong customer relationships cultivated by Burdens, while introducing the quality and service that have defined Ernest Doe and Sons for over 125 years," said Angus Doe, managing director, at the time of the acquisition.

"We're looking forward to serving the local community and supporting our new customers with the expertise and

dedication that those who have been with us for a long time have come to rely on.

"Customer contact points remain unchanged, and we've worked hard on investments and improvements, while furthering our understanding of customers' needs within the area."

### New equipment sector

The acquisition introduced a further specialist area to the show, alongside established agriculture, groundcare and construction sections, and the more recently introduced fruit and viticulture zone. Ernest Doe's new vegetable machinery department displayed an extensive range of products tailored specifically for salad, vegetable and root crop growers, supported by technical advice from the firm's new depots and their specialist suppliers. The lineup includes planting, spraying, harvesting and processing equipment, and bespoke customised machinery solutions tailored to specific needs, covering everything from modifications to existing equipment to completely new designs. Headquartered at the Sutterton branch, the specialist vegetable machinery division sells and supports machinery not just in the Ernest Doe area, but across the British Isles.

"The Burdens deal has given us

access to a dozen new franchises in specialist vegetable machinery, including names such as Bauer, Samon, Tong and Tumoba," said Graham Parker, Ernest Doe sales director.

"The show presence of these names undoubtedly helped further boost visitor numbers, and I think we have further sales potential among vegetable growers in areas we already cover, like east Suffolk and Kent. We even sold a Samon onion harvester off the stand."

### Groundcare kit draws attention

On the groundcare front, Eddie Jack, turf field sales manager, reported strong interest in the new Ransomes Aurora lithium-powered out-front rotary mower. Manufactured at Textron's Ransomes Jacobsen facility in Ipswich, it was joined by Jacobsen's Eclipse greens mower and SLF1 fairway mower, which all use the same Samsung battery pack.

"With customers seeing that it's easily possible to get six-to-eight hours' runtime from these packs, lithium power has really taken off," Eddie said.

"Signed just before the show, our latest groundcare franchise addition, with Amazone, also attracted significant interest. There is a range of flail collectors and two Profihopper self-propelled flail mowers for heavy rough, all well-proven in the marketplace."

Steve Bush, Ernest Doe used

groundcare equipment manager, reported good enquiries on equipment – including golf buggies, of which the business handles considerable numbers when contract hire deals are concluded and renewed.

Steve said: "Special offers on ex-demo machines and clearance items from our hire fleet, as well as used turf equipment trade-ins, from utility vehicles to chain harrows, also attracted good interest, and we're pleased with enquiry numbers."

### Recruitment drive

Ken Smyth, Ernest Doe general service manager, was present on a dedicated show stand along with service managers from each Doe branch, not only to illustrate his department's role in keeping customers' wheels moving, but also seeking to attract new recruits into his particular sector.

"Our presence at the show is designed to highlight to customers how we support the products they buy long after the sale," he explained.

"But we also had a stand at the entrance to show potential trainees our apprenticeship schemes, run at Writtle College alongside CNH for ag engineers, and – a new development for us – with the Construction Industry Training Board for our construction equipment business trainees.

"Typically, our ag trainees – currently we have 27 – start a three-year



With the acquisition of two south Lincs Burdens branches has come a new venture into vegetable machinery



block release course at 16 or 17 years old. Trainees get regular training at the Basildon tractor plant and its international training centre, benefiting from the instructors there. It's a big investment, but one that has a big payback, and it's great to see the trainees' progression out into the field. Three-quarters of our senior management started this way. We are already recruiting for 2026, and are especially keen to find more female applicants passionate about agricultural, turf and construction engineering."

Ag highlights

In terms of farm machinery, there was lots new to see in terms of products introduced at the most recent national and international shows. On the Case IH stand, highlights included a 699 maximum horsepower 645 model from the recently-revised Quadtrac range. David Carver, Case IH brand manager for the Ernest Doe Power-branded branches, reported a recent resurgence of interest in the large articulated crawler tractors.

"I think that's primarily due to growing focus on soil health and compaction, and the benefits of articulated tracked steering.

"We've also been able to make the first UK dealer display of the new Case IH AF10 single-rotor Axial-Flow combine flagship," he said.

"Equipped with a 13.5m/45ft MacDon header, we plan to run a demo unit this summer.

"But it's not all about big farms. We've also been able to show visitors the diversified products we can offer, including a Puma tractor in forestry specification and the smallest Case IH tractor, the 55hp Farmall 55C, with potential in applications from stables to horticultural enterprises.

"In recognition of the pressures farming is under currently, we also focused on the financial offering to help customers get these machines working for their businesses. As well as 0% finance on all 2021/22/23 ex-hire tractors, with the help of Case IH, we devised a scheme for five annual payments at 0% on any new in-stock tractors. We don't believe anyone else in the UK tractor market is offering a deal like this."

Ian Roberts, New Holland brand manager for Ernest Doe, also revealed a number of new products making their dealer show debut. Among them was the latest New Holland T5 range of 100-140hp tractors.

"Models in this power bracket are being sold to a variety of users in farming and other sectors, and are increasingly being sought with the features and comforts of larger tractors," he noted.

"The new T5 is available with cab and front axle suspension to enhance

driver comfort, plus more hydraulic capacity and even full connectivity, telematics and guidance features.

"We're also showing a new Dromone pick-up hitch for the New Holland Boomer compact tractors, providing greater flexibility for users who need frequently to drop off trailers."

Ian explained Ernest Doe was also offering a 0 plus 3 at 0% finance deal at the show for New Holland tractors in the T5 series and above.

"Customers pay nothing for the first 12 months, and then make one payment in each of the following three years. If they prefer monthly payments, though, we can structure things that way, too.

"At the show, we also introduced for a limited time an offer of four years' manufacturer's warranty, with the same level of coverage in the fourth year as in the first."

**Supplier award**

Elsewhere in farm machinery, for the seventh consecutive year, Ernest Doe received at the show the European Dealer of the Year award from Dalbo, the Danish specialist in rolls and cultivators.

"This is a big achievement, considering it's judged across the whole of Europe," said Dalbo UK's Steve Atkin.

"Ernest Doe became one of our first



Supplier support is central to the success of the show, believes sales director Graham Parker

dealers when Dalbo founded a UK subsidiary in 2010, and we've calculated they have sold 3.8km of rolls since then. They've done a great job across their branch network, stocking product for people to view and demonstrate, and doing the deals. They are committed, supportive and proactive – exactly what we need in a dealer."

**The verdict**

"Given the current climate in agriculture and politics, this was a fantastically well-attended show, up there with one of our best," said Graham at the conclusion of the event.

"Everything worked very well, with so many people pulling together under the guidance of Karl Last, our shows and

demonstrations manager. We were very lucky with the weather, and enjoyed three very busy days, with full car parks throughout."

Hayley Hill, Ernest Doe marketing manager, said that, given the current downturn in agriculture, the company was especially pleased with attendance, and the deals done across the agriculture, turf and construction machinery divisions.

"The Ulting showroom also did a great trade in areas like country clothing, from which we also had a large area of sale items.

"The whole show had a really nice buzz about it, and we had a lot of good feedback, especially from people who were visiting for the first time, many

from our new branch areas. Hearing from new visitors is great in helping us get new perspectives on the show."

While it takes a little time post-event to collate orders from sales staff, initial figures suggested new and used equipment sales made across the ag, groundcare and construction sectors were up on last year's show, suggested Graham.

He said: "This event is more than a series of open days, and we judge its success on order intake. First indications were that, across agricultural, construction and groundscape sectors, the numbers were up on last year, which was our second-best show, and, by the end of the week, the show yard was much emptier, which is a good sign.

"But people also come to the Doe Show to buy smaller ticket items and spares tent bargains – and simply because it is a real social event. Farming is sometimes quite a lonely industry, and we're very proud of all the roles the show fulfils, including the social occasion.

"We've been running a three-day show in the first week of February for a long time now, and our Ulting organising team is a well-oiled sewing machine, doing a great job and each time trying to make the event that little bit different. It is our suppliers and their 150 stands – and, of course, our visitors – that really make the Doe Show the success it is, though."



The Case IH display included the latest Farmall and Quadtrac models, with strong interest reported in both



In addition to names like Ransomes Jacobsen and Ferris, Ernest Doe now also offers Amazone turf machinery



The Ulting head office showroom is also a popular spot at the show for bargain hunters



# THE FUTURE OF OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT: Why professional dealers are choosing Kress

Discover why industry professionals are making the switch to Kress's revolutionary battery technology and dealer-focused business model.



For years, professional landscapers and outdoor power equipment dealers have searched for a credible alternative to petrol-powered tools. Many options have emerged, but most have represented significant compromises in power, performance, and profitability. That search is finally over with Kress's groundbreaking CyberSystem technology and innovative dealer partnership program.

## A True Alternative to Petrol Power

"The industry has been waiting for a credible alternative to petrol for several years," explains a Kress representative. "Until now, each option has been a compromise for both customers and dealers."

Unlike previous battery systems that couldn't match professional standards, Kress tools deliver the performance professionals demand without the drawbacks of petrol equipment.

This breakthrough technology is creating unprecedented opportunities for dealers to expand their customer base, grow market share, and increase profitability.

## The Kress Dealer Advantage

What makes the Kress Partner Programme so attractive to dealers? The benefits speak for themselves:

- **Industry-leading margins** that protect dealer profitability
- **No capital requirement** or pre-season orders tying up working capital



A Kress demo event at Royal Portrush Golf Club

- **Transformational growth opportunities** in both battery equipment and robotics
- **Exclusive dealer-only distribution** that prevents race-to-the-bottom online pricing
- **Consignment model** allowing full product displays without upfront investment

These dealer-focused policies represent a refreshing departure from industry norms, where legacy suppliers typically demand large pre-season orders without guaranteeing supply.

## Technology that Sells Itself

Kress's technology advantages remain unmatched even as the battery-powered market becomes more competitive. Their unique CyberSystem battery technology delivers professional-grade performance that equals or exceeds the best-selling petrol alternatives.

This confidence is backed by an extraordinary warranty program: a full 5-year warranty on tools and an 8-year warranty on the Kress CyberSystem batteries.

## What Dealers are Saying

**Chris Whincup, Hawkins Garden Machinery**



Chris at a recent demo event at Manor House Golf Club

"We're thoroughly impressed with all of the products that they have on offer. The support that we have in all aspects—from sales to technical assistance—is excellent.

What they offer with dealer terms, with everything being on consignment, allows us to display a full range without committing to big purchases upfront. Kress is an integral part of our future development plans."

On Kress RTK robotic mowers: "I have to do very little selling. It's just a case of showing the machines, demoing them, and the products do all the work themselves."

**Mark Mallon, Keys Brothers**



Mark with customers & colleagues at Royal Portrush Golf Club

"The main reason we started to work with Kress was to future-proof ourselves. When we looked at both their robotics and battery handheld products, it was a no-brainer. And then when you couple that with their business model, it was something we physically couldn't turn down."

"Kress are there to support you but they're not there to undercut you. As a dealer, it's hugely important that Kress has teamed

up with us to say 'this is your area, we're happy to support you'—that allows us to showcase the product in its best light while retaining the margin we need to run a business."

**Russ Tomlinson, Fleetmech**



Russ with other dealers & staff at a recent Golf Day

"Dealing with Kress as a supplier is a complete breath of fresh air. The ethos to approaching the market and getting the products out there to customers is so refreshing. We've completely restructured our business in the last year, very much tailored around Kress and being part of Kress going forward."

## Join the Revolution

Kress UK and Ireland is committed to partnering exclusively with OPE dealers and specialists. This dealer-focused approach ensures products reach customers through knowledgeable and trusted channels while supporting the industry's professional infrastructure.

For dealers looking to secure their future in a rapidly evolving market, the path is clear. As Chris Whincup puts it: "We first came across Kress about four or five years ago, and from that point we were really impressed with everything that we saw. We were on board very quickly, and I'll be honest, we haven't really looked back since."

If you are a dealer interested in partnering with Kress or have any enquiries about becoming an authorised dealer, visit [Kress.com/become-a-dealer](https://kress.com/become-a-dealer).







John Wiffen, owner and MD of  
Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd

# A lifetime as an agricultural engineer

KEITH CHRISTIAN recently spent time with John Wiffen, owner of dealers Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd, hearing about his years in the industry – and how diversification is key when a major franchise is removed.

**I have spent most of my career dealing with garden and agricultural machinery dealers. It has never ceased to amaze me how resilient, innovative, dedicated, passionate and – dare I say? – kind they can be.**

There are many small businesses in our sector, run by people who have had a working lifetime in the industry, and I recently spoke with one whose career has taken him from an agricultural apprenticeship, to a number of John Deere dealers, to being an owner-operator who is still expanding what he describes as a small, diversified business. He has a dry sense of humour, a quick wit, and a wealth of experience – but claims not to be a salesman. He is John Wiffen, owner and MD of Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd. His story about his career in the industry should be an inspiration for any young person thinking of joining.

## Career path

John started life on June 26 1957 at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, at 6.30pm – and he says things have gone downhill since then! His industry

career started when he left school at 16 and joined Rycotewood in Thame to do a 030 1,2 and 3, levy-funded apprenticeship and gained an Agricultural Technicians Certificate from City and Guilds.

His apprenticeship alternated between a year at college and a year on the job, and his workplace was Vale Engineers at Clanfield, home of the oldest John Deere dealer in the country at the time. He says he used to travel 20 miles to work on a little 125cc motorcycle, and had to sit in front of a hot air blower for 20 minutes to thaw out. He then went to F. Townsend and Sons, who had two branches, and handled New Holland combines at the time. Townsends opened Louth and Bourne Tractors in Lincolnshire. Louth Tractors in North Lincolnshire was a ground-up, purpose-built JD dealership.

John was in his early-20s, and spent four-and-a-half years at Townsends. He says he had the energy to work hard, and the job was fun and interesting. He moved on to R. Hunt and Sons at Newbury, another John Deere dealership, managed by Mike Lawrence – who later set up his own business and became an early casualty of the JD

consolidation policy.

John saw an advert in *Farmers Weekly*, and successfully applied for a job in Saudi Arabia, and went to work for the JD importer AIA for two years. This was a life-changing experience, working in a different country and meeting the rich and famous. He dealt with large fleets of equipment, down to a one-off compact tractor for a Bedouin tribe. He tells me a Bedouin chief offered him his daughter in marriage for work carried out on a combine harvester. John graciously declined. When he returned to the UK, he purchased a Moto Guzzi Mk11 motorcycle, and started a passion for motorbikes that exists to this day. He used the money he had saved working in Saudi to get on the housing ladder in the UK.

When John met his future wife, Stephanie, he joined Chris Tallis near Evesham, Worcestershire (yes, that is correct – another new JD dealer!). Staying with Tallis for four years, John eventually decided to go it alone, and started out as a self-employed agricultural mechanic covering most of the Cotswolds from his Evesham home - becoming an air conditioning



Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd in Birtsmorton, Malvern

specialist for most equipment and working closely with AMA of Stroud.

## Taking charge

In 1997, John joined Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd. as a partner and manager, after Gerald Dawe died and the company had been in limbo for twelve months. He encouraged Dawe's to carry on with their John Deere franchise. John knew the family and the company from work he had done with them, and helped Valerie Dawe reorganise the business. Under Gerald Dawe, the company was originally a blacksmith, ironworks and farrier. They still do most of this to this day.

John took charge of the business, which had a large overdraft, offering a steep learning curve, but he inherited an exceptionally talented team, who helped to grow the business. In all this, John claims not to be a salesman and more of pragmatist.

Unfortunately, in 2005, John's lifetime career working with John Deere changed when an appointment was made to see him by the JD regional sales manager and MD of the time. A five-minute meeting resulted in Dawe's being sacked after 30 or more years, after their best year ever with JD.

They were, no doubt, another casualty of the JD consolidation plans. John says: "How can you adapt a long-term business with policy made on the hoof and little or no notice after so many years?" He adds that he is sure many owner-operators asked themselves the same question after their five-minute meeting.

With hindsight, John says it was the best thing that could have happened, as it allowed Dawe's to move onto Claas for eight or nine years, and, for a brief time, they were the only dealer in the country to have both Claas and JD franchises simultaneously. Sadly, eight years later, in 2013, John's wife died



Timber sales have much increased over the years

after a short battle with cancer, and he asked to relinquish the Claas franchise, which was done with the help of the manufacturer. John says that the loss of his wife, Stephanie, caused him to lose his way in life, and he needed to step back and rethink what he was going to do.

## Changing up

Dawe's had always sold fencing and timber, various agricultural sundries, carried out repair work, and sold some wholegood equipment. Pete Davis had joined the company. He had worked there as a student on work experience from Hartpury College. Pete was tasked with increasing business, and achieved this with an increase of 300% for woodyard sales. This has increased even further over the years, and Pete was appointed as the manager for the business. John says it has been a great relief not having a tractor franchise and being told what to do by a supplier, down to 'what colour toilet paper to have!'

The business has diversified to broaden its customer base, and established itself as one of the main fencing and timber providers in the area, along with its agricultural sundries and some power tool brands. As with all businesses, Covid got in the way of progress, but John has now instigated his plans for a new retail store to replace the old lean-to that the cobwebs were holding up.

John tells me the process of getting planning permission to knock down an old derelict cottage on his site to





The new extension



In the workshop

make way for the new extension has been a nightmare of epic proportions – and all for a small addition to an existing building. It has taken three years, and involved umpteen surveys. These have checked the sewers; checked the archaeology, because of the age of the building; three have checked for bats, and there's an ongoing argument about paying rates on a condemned building that had no services connected to it, and which had to be left alone while the seasonal habits of the Pipistrelle bat were determined. This is the most common bat in the UK!

Having hooked up with a local company, A.J. Griffith and Co. it is hoped the building will be completed by the time this article hits the streets. Most of John's comments on the planning process and the local district council cannot be published (!), but, suffice it to say, it was frustrating, mostly unnecessary, and a barrier to helping a small business expand and provide local employment. He did add that he was assured that the bats were happy, and appreciated his financial contribution to their wellbeing - at least, those that could be found!

John is fully committed to Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd, and is full of praise for the staff. He says that, in a small business, the staff can make or break it, and that he is very lucky to have such a good team pulling in the same direction as he is, and that the business is as much for their benefit as it is his. He also states that there was nothing like good IT to be able to run the business, but



John with Peter Davis

that one must be careful not to become a slave to it.

As he reflects, John says that having a small business with ten staff and no big-ticket items to sell has many advantages, allowing for more flexibility and diversification. However, government policy and changes do not favour business at the present time. The rise and changes in National Insurance contributions has added about 10% to the salary bill. Rising costs and increased regulation can disincentivise business owners, which is not good and does not encourage a better economy.

With changes over the years – particularly since Covid – and the current trend of mergers and acquisitions, the quality of business has reduced. With the 'old-school' people retiring, business integrity has suffered. The established partnerships and shake-of-the-hand style of business is

becoming a thing of the past, and it is more important to be self-sufficient. We will see what the future will bring, but, in the meantime, John says he will enjoy their new extension and riding bikes through the summer.

John says he has really enjoyed his working life as an agricultural engineer, and the experience of owning a dealership. He has enjoyed meeting many different people, and being able to fix almost anything. Despite the frustrations, he says current plans to expand the business are exciting, and he is looking forward to the next episode with Ellis Dawe and Son Ltd.

John rang me after our chat to make sure I was not writing his obituary. I said it would be a good idea to keep the notes just in case, and to save some time if they were ever needed. Not for a while yet, John, but a good idea!

# Demo, demo, demo

That's what Cramer's national sales manager, John McGrady, says the company's philosophy has been to raise their profile since launching a UK subsidiary last year. Here, he speaks to *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS about building a dealer network, why competition is an opportunity and the increasing use of automation in the professional sector.



**SD:** How has the brand developed since establishing its own UK base last year?

**JM:** The brand is progressing well in the UK, after our start last year. As a team we are working hard to lay the foundation for Cramer's long-term growth. We are focused on nurturing existing relationships and forming new partnerships. Cramer is committed to demonstrating the quality of our products to both dealers and end-users, which will grow the brand awareness and recognition, notably for professional users.

**SD:** What have been your personal priorities since taking over as sales manager in July 2024?

**JM:** My initial priority was establishing the team and reinforcing relationships with existing dealers. As a startup, we've had to build confidence in the market, and ensure our customers know we are here to support them. I've recruited new team members to ensure we have the right support in place, and we are launching new IT infrastructure to further improve support. Now, our focus is on driving brand growth

through product demonstrations, marketing and, most importantly, dealer support.

**SD:** What has been the market's reaction to your introduction to the sector?

**JM:** The market's reaction has been extremely positive. Our key strategy has been demonstrations, as we believe seeing the products in action speaks louder than any catalogue or presentation. Our internal motto is "demo, demo, demo," and we've committed to doing multiple demonstrations for one customer if needed. This hands-on approach has shown dealers and end-users the true value of our products.

**SD:** Would you say that the battery-powered outdoor equipment market is becoming more competitive?

**JM:** Yes, the battery market is highly competitive, and I expect that to increase. However, I view competition as an opportunity. We're not here to disrupt the market, but to offer a strong alternative, particularly for commercial users who need reliable, high-performance equipment.



Cramer's national sales manager John McGrady

**Service Dealer:** What is the history of Cramer products in the UK?

**John McGrady:** Cramer, owned by Globe Technologies since 2018, initially had its products distributed in the UK by Handy alongside Greenworks. During 2024, we established a dedicated subsidiary with its own sales team, marking a new chapter for the brand in the UK. Handy continues to be a key partner, distributing Greenworks.



**SD:** How do you differentiate your battery-powered tools in the minds of professional end-users?

**JM:** Battery technology is at the heart of what we do. We push the boundaries of cordless products with high-capacity batteries that deliver precise energy to the motors, ensuring consistent performance, longer runtimes and extended product life. Our products offer competitive pricing, reliability, and sustainability - features that are important to both professional users and the environment. Our key words are 'performance' and 'reliability.'

**SD:** How has your establishment of a dealer network been going?

**JM:** Our dealer network is growing, but we are taking a measured approach to ensure we build strong, lasting partnerships. We want to work with dealers who align with our values, and are committed to long-term success. Rushing into numerous dealer relationships doesn't serve anyone. By being selective, we can ensure both parties thrive and grow together.

**SD:** What do you expect from your Cramer dealers, and what can they expect back in return from yourselves?

**JM:** We expect dealers to stock, display and demonstrate our products whenever possible. Since Cramer is still building brand recognition, we rely on dealers to be vocal advocates for the brand. In return, we offer transparency, open communication, and a strong partnership. We want to support dealers in growing their businesses through excellent customer service and a customer-first approach.

**SD:** What feedback have you received from your dealers who have taken on the brand?

**JM:** The feedback has been extremely positive. Dealers are impressed with the product quality and the strong performance they can achieve with our product range. Initially, there were



concerns regarding back-of-house support and parts supply, but we've made significant improvements. We've dedicated resources to customer service and aftersales support in the UK, and we're building dedicated spare parts stock, which is growing each week.

**SD:** Some dealers tell us they are uneasy with the transition to battery from petrol-powered tools. What would you say to them?

**JM:** I understand their concerns, but I would urge them to embrace the transition. More and more customers are making the move to battery. The question is no more "do I go move to battery?", but "with which manufacturer?" My advice is to select the right technology and the right manufacturer. There are misconceptions about battery technology, but, once dealers experience our products firsthand and see the benefits, their confidence grows. In the coming months, we will also be providing dealer days and training to help build confidence in our battery technology.

**SD:** A dealer reader wrote to us last year, saying: "Electric propulsion does not adequately replace internal combustion, yet there seems to be some blind faith that the technology will miraculously get better." How do you respond to that?

**JM:** Five to ten years ago, I would have agreed, as there were notable gaps between battery and petrol products. However, manufacturers have closed that gap significantly. The electric vehicle market offers a good analogy, there was initial scepticism, but, as the technology improved, the infrastructure followed suit. With Cramer, we have the right battery technology and charging solutions to enable all-day work. Our products, like the Optimus Zero Turns, now offer up to eight hours of runtime, equivalent to 65 horsepower petrol engines, which was unheard of just a few years ago. We have many more examples of this with our walk-behind mowers and handheld products.

**SD:** The lack of service work with battery tools is also something that some of our dealer readers have expressed concerns about. What do you say to them?



**JM:** While it's true that battery tools require less service, we still support our dealers with diagnostic equipment and offer servicing packages, especially for our more complex products like zero-turn mowers and robotic tools. Our goal is to ensure our dealers can provide excellent aftersales service to end-users, but we also offer a warranty extension which works with a maintenance program, in order to support dealer workshop business, for a better product reliability to the end-users.

**SD:** How are you helping dealers with the disposal of used, end-of-life batteries?

**JM:** We are currently setting up a collection service. That service will include suitable containers supplied to our dealers for short-term storage before they are collected and recycled. I think it's important to ensure we support our dealers on this topic.

**SD:** Cramer have had a presence at all the major professional turfcare machinery shows in the past year. What do you gain from those?

**JM:** Our primary focus has been raising brand awareness, but the real value comes from the in-depth conversations with dealers and end-users. These interactions lead to valuable demonstrations that allow potential customers to experience Cramer products in action. It's those direct experiences that help build trust in our brand.

**SD:** At these shows, you appeared to be promoting the AiConic robotic mowers quite heavily. Do you see automation playing an increasingly important role in the work of turf professionals?

**JM:** Yes, automation is becoming an integral part of turfcare, especially as labour markets tighten. Products like the AiConic robotic mowers allow turf professionals to automate routine tasks, freeing up their time for more complex duties. Cramer's focus is to provide practical, innovative solutions like these to meet the evolving needs of the industry.

**SD:** What challenges and opportunities do you see for dealers this year?

**JM:** Dealers are facing many challenges, from rising costs and recruitment struggles to global economic uncertainties. However, the dealer network remains resilient, and the opportunities are there. With the right product technology and a strong marketing strategy, dealers can attract a wider audience and drive growth. Cramer is committed to supporting dealers, which is our strategy. We will support them with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

**SD:** And finally: what do you see as the future for Cramer in the UK?

**JM:** The future of Cramer in the UK is bright. We have an exciting product portfolio, with more innovations in development. Our agile approach, dedicated team and strong dealer relationships position us well for sustained growth. Cramer is fully dedicated to OPE driven 100% by battery, and a focus on the dealer network. We are excited to see how our products and partnerships will evolve in the coming years.

**SD:** Thank you.



# Dealer feedback shaping new models

LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, recently spent a couple of days on the road, attending new product demo days laid on by two manufacturers who readers of *Service Dealer* will be extremely familiar with.

**O**ne message that came across loud and clear, as I attended two recent demonstration events to check out new products from manufacturers STIHL and Toro/Hayter, is how heavily suppliers rely on the feedback from their dealers for machinery innovations.

It is invaluable to these companies that their network of representatives have the ear of their own end-user customers. Many of the new improvements that I saw on my recent trip came from these suggestions. Manufacturers act on these comments that come from the dealers, who see daily the results of these machines being used in all manner of ways.

## New developments from STIHL

The first visit I made on my trip was to STIHL's new purpose-built head office and distribution centre, Contra House, in Surrey.

The aim of the trip was to catch up with the company's latest product developments in both battery and petrol-powered technologies. Simon Hewitt, head of marketing, and Paul Hicks, marketing and product manager, were on hand to welcome myself and other members of the trade press to the facility.

After a short introduction, we were then given a full tour of the distribution centre. We began by visiting the

training suite that was being used to update and offer refresher training for dealer technicians.

Moving on from dealer training, of great interest to myself, as a practising professional gardener, were four different workstations, where we were given talks about the specific set of products on each stand, as well as being able to try some out for ourselves.

**Stand 1** featured some of the latest battery-powered pedestrian mowers, strimmers and hedge trimmers.

The company were keen to demonstrate their most powerful battery-powered clearing saw / strimmer the FSA 400. With a high-power output of 2.0 kW, equivalent to the petrol



STIHL offered a whole range of new tools to demo



Paul Hicks, marketing and product manager, introducing a new hedge trimmer

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New chainsaw options were demonstrated on the day

FS 411 C-EM, this unit is the first AP System tool to be compatible with shredder and circular saw blades, allowing professionals to clear tough areas of dense and woody growth.

I was equally impressed with the latest new hedge trimmers, the HSA 140 R and HSA 140 T. These new machines weigh between 4.3 kg and 4.6 kg (without battery), and are comfortable to hold, balanced in operation, and feature a rotating rear handle that locks into three positions across a 180-degree range, reducing wrist strain when working for extended periods of time on the same side of a hedge.

I was also interested to look at their new mower range. An extension to the AP System, the new lawnmowers are equivalent in performance to the well-respected 7 series petrol models. With a 48cm cutting width, the RMA 750 V is the smallest of the three new models. The RMA 756 V has a larger 54cm cutting width for faster working, while the RMA 7 RV is a dedicated mulching mower with no collection bag and a cutting width of 51cm.

**Stand 3** featured battery-powered hand tools, pruners, saws, vacuums and jet washers.

Many of these tools I am quite familiar with, having purchased both the GTA 26 Cordless Garden Pruner and ASA 20 Cordless Secateurs myself. I also like



Guests could try the mower developments for themselves

the look of the new GTA 40, the brand's first dedicated battery-powered pruner designed for professional use. As part of the AS System, this is powered by two AS 2 lithium-ion batteries, making it suitable for use on the ground and in the air.

**Stand 4** concentrated on commercial solutions, something that, as editor of *TurfPro*, I'm particularly interested in. Here, we learned how the commercial solutions team focuses on promoting and selling professional-grade products – including those with battery technology and robotics – to businesses and professionals.

It was impressive to see such a wide and impressive range of battery-powered tools now being developed and produced by the company.

I suspect I'll now be seeing a lot of these new products being sold through STIHL's extensive dealer network, as I make my visits around the country for *Service Dealer*.



## Toro UK announce upgrades

The following day, on my way back from Surrey, I had the opportunity to call in at Fulford Heath Golf Club, Wythall, near Birmingham, to visit Kim Blake, the head greenkeeper. The golf club was hosting a Toro/Hayter roadshow, one of seven they undertook during the month of March.

I met up with Craig Hoare, sales and marketing manager for Toro UK, who welcomed several invited local dealers, with staff from Cutting Edge Machinery, T H White and Buxtons in attendance.

The Hayter name has been synonymous with lawnmowers and beautiful British gardens for over three-quarters of a century. What began as a small cottage business has grown to become one of the UK's largest and most respected manufacturers of rear-roller lawnmowers thanks to the pioneering vision of founder Douglas Hayter.

Having personally used older versions of the mowers on show at Fulford Heath, I can attest they have

always delivered a great cut, and leave the user with lovely stripped lawns.

At the roadshow, the company announced the launch of the upgraded Harrier Pro variants. A popular mower, it has recently been upgraded with new features – including three-speed transmission for the 56 Pro, improved grass bag design, and a lighter sail material, making it easier to see when the bag is full.

Also, a completely newly-designed roller and drive system – to enhance traction on wet and short grass surfaces – was introduced. The company spent time talking about the performance of the battery-powered products, mentioning the innovative dual-battery system that empowers professionals to mow up to 1000m<sup>2</sup> on a single charge.

They have also strengthened the drivechain to prevent it from breaking.

I am hoping to also enjoy the opportunity to test these new Hayter mower products in the coming months, and to offer a full report on their performance in due course.

So it was a fascinating couple of days for me, viewing innovations from two of our most prolific machinery manufacturers. I would like to thank both STIHL and Hayter for inviting me to two most informative events.



Lineup of new mowers from Hayter



Toro UK's sales and marketing manager Craig Hoare



Hayter have strengthened the drivechain



Hayter announced the launch of the upgraded Harrier Pro variants





# BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

## Dealers report increasing robotic sales

Market developing for many dealers – although some express reservations

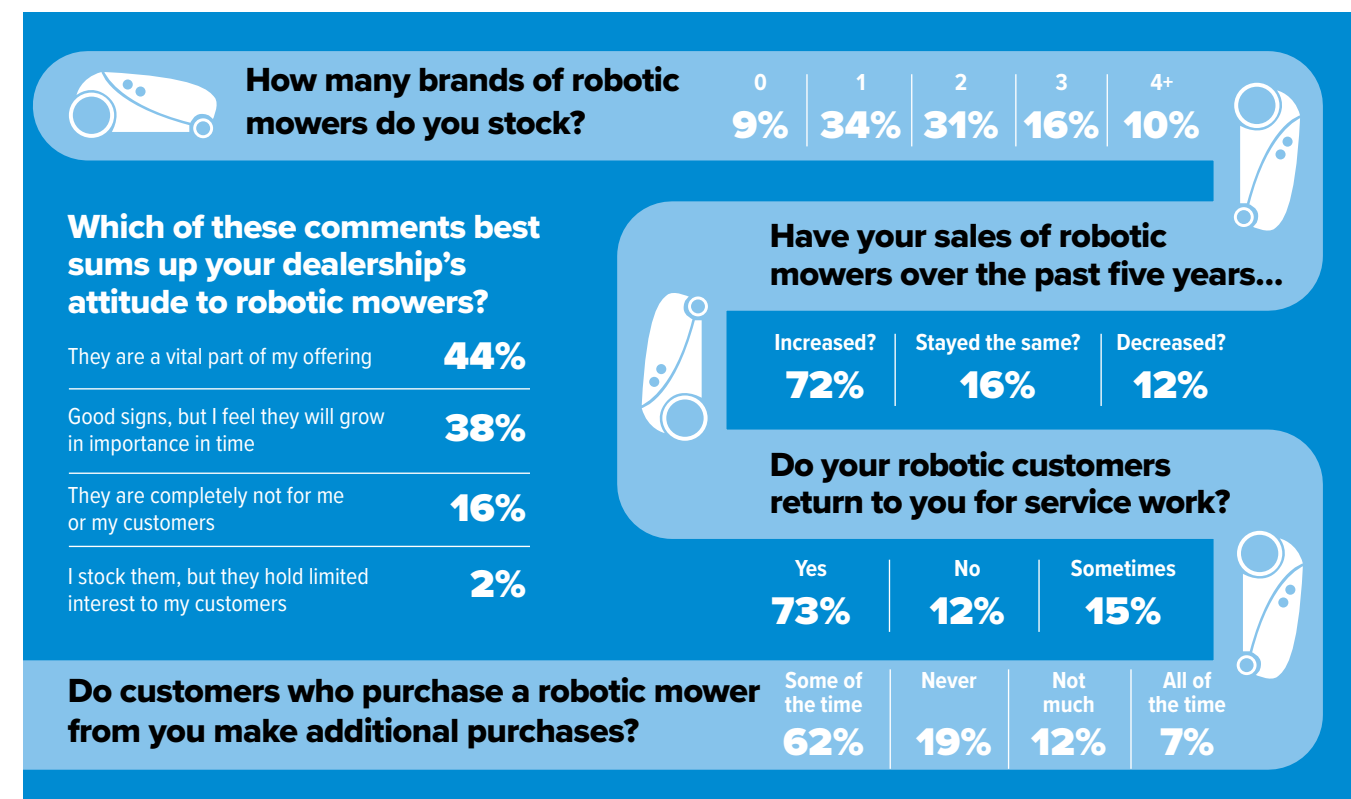
**W**e received a good response to our recent survey gauging our dealer readers' attitudes to the current market for robotic mowers.

As we'd been hearing anecdotally, dealers who have embraced the technology are finding opportunities for growth amongst their customer base. However, for some, reservations are still held.

Encouragingly, amongst the dealers who responded to our survey, a strong majority (72%) reported an increase

in sales during the past 12 months. Similarly, to the key question of attitude towards the technology in their dealership, the most popular answer (44%) was: "They are a vital part of my offering."

Also positive to hear from our respondents: when asked if their robotic mower customers return for service work on their purchases, 73% said that they did. Less positive was that 62% told us that these customers only make additional purchases "some of the time," - with the second most popular answer being "never" (19%).




## Your say...




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

- We sold our first robot in 2012, a replacement for an early adopter. We waited another three years to sell the second. Now we have a park of over 200 machines, growing every year. We have customers with multiple models around large properties, commercial and council customers, as well as the regular smaller gardens. The vast majority are back for servicing. I cannot imagine what our business would be like without automowers, but we do have to sell ourselves, and not just the mowers, as being part of the solution.
- Definitely a growing market, and those manufacturers and/or dealers who resist it will get left behind in both the domestic and commercial markets. To be in this market seriously, manufacturers need to be there now with cutting-edge technology.
- It's a market that is only going to get bigger, and it's a market where the dealer has much more of a relationship with the customer.
- A fantastic area for growth and opportunity for us, personally.
- Market is cornered by one or two brands. Some brands/suppliers don't support it very well at all, which surprises us given their support for other machinery.
- It's growing quickly, but we are apprehensive on its ceiling. We saw a similar influx of sales on electric lawn tractors in the 2023 season, but that soon diminished in the 2024 season.
- Given the relatively low profits on robots, and the amount of time spent on selling and installing them, plus the cost in time and money spent on special tools and training at locations distant from our shop, I cannot see us making much money from this sector unless sales rise dramatically. 2025 is a make-or-break year - if sales don't increase significantly, we will withdraw from the sector completely next year.
- Too many unsupported brands on social media, which waters down our selling. It is a growing part, and will continue apace, but it does need input and organising to service and install - plus margins not always enough to maintain profit.
- The danger for the independent dealer network is that this is a product that will lend itself to being sold online, as they are fairly straightforward to install / set up, with no real PDI being required by the dealership.
- Disappointed, in that market-leading brands offer such poor dealer support. Initially, they were only sold via an approved dealer. Now, they are mostly available to purchase online and the customer self-installs, creating many issues. Distributors want too many slices of the cake, in my opinion.
- Market is good, but the margin we make on servicing a robotic mower versus a petrol mower is lower. It has also had a small impact on ancillary sales (e.g. fuel, like Aspen). No doubt this will have an impact on overall ancillary sales over the years.

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# Should you focus on attracting new customers or keeping the ones you have?

**Sara Hey**, vice president of operations and development at Bob Clements International, the dealership development company based in Missouri – shares the insights she offers U.S. dealers with *Service Dealer's* UK readership every issue. This issue, Sara considers: should dealers focus more on generating fresh clients, or retaining existing ones?



**A**h, the age-old question: do you spend time wooing new customers like a lovesick puppy, or do you keep the ones you already have happy, like a dog faithfully guarding its favourite bone?

**Spoiler alert:** keeping your current customers is where the real magic happens – and here's why.

## The Golden Rule of Customers: Love the ones who already love you

**Let's start with a jaw-dropper:** it costs five times more to get a new customer than to keep an existing one. Yes, FIVE TIMES. Your current customers are not just some old baseball cards you forgot about – they're like rare holographic Charizards (Google it, kids). These people have already taken the leap and trusted you. They're your VIPs – your goal should be to keep them feeling special. When you keep current customers happy, they'll keep coming back, spending money, and telling their friends about you. That's free advertising – and guess what? It's way cheaper than running ads on Facebook.

## Your hottest leads are already in your pocket

**Here's a wild thought:** your current customers are actually your best leads for future business. They know you, like you, and have already bought from you. But here's the kicker: they don't always know how to do business with you again.

This is where timing and messaging come into play. Think about when your customers' current unit is nearing the end of its lifecycle. Maybe they've paid it off, the warranty has expired, or they're starting to get major FOMO because their neighbour got something shiny and new.

Send them a friendly message before they even realise they need you again. Something like: "Hey, your mower's been a champ, but have you checked out the newest model? It's like the one you have... but better!" Keep it casual, but keep it consistent.

## Stop asking, start giving

Nobody likes a friend who only calls when they need a favour. If all your emails to customers sound like 'buy this, buy that,' you're that friend. Instead, try giving first. Share something valuable, like advice or tips, that actually helps them use the product they bought from you better.

For example, send an email like:

*"Hey, we noticed it's the time of year when snowblowers need a little extra TLC. Here's a quick guide to keep yours running like a dream. And if you're ready for an upgrade, we've got some sweet deals waiting for you!"*

This positions you as the expert while keeping your business front and centre in their minds. Plus, people love freebies – especially if those freebies make their lives easier. Blogs, how-to videos, or even a fun social media post with maintenance hacks can work wonders.

## New customers aren't off the hook

Now, I'm not saying you should ignore new customers entirely. New customers are essential for growth, but they are not the whole pie. Think of them as the whipped cream – exciting, sweet, and a great addition, but not the whole dessert.

Make sure you're balancing your efforts. Keep your existing customers happy (so they stick around), and use their glowing testimonials to attract new ones. Remember: word-of-mouth is the original – and best – social media.

## Final Thoughts: It's a love story

Focusing on your current customers doesn't mean you're settling. It means you're smart. These people already know you're awesome, so show them why they should keep coming back. And hey – when you treat them right, they'll bring their friends along for the ride.

So, next time you're deciding between chasing new customers or loving the ones you already have, save your money and choose the latter.

**Now go out there and keep your Charizards shiny!**

# Wow, what a start to the season!

**Les Gammie**, of Gammies Groundcare, says their dealership has seen heavy traffic through the workshop and parts department – but external challenges are still impacting operations



**O**ur season has kicked off big-style, with February and March resembling our typical April/May in terms of how busy it is right across the entire depot – including lots of sales and a large amount of traffic through both our workshop and parts department. It's been a while since we have experienced such an early kick-off to the season, particularly in the north-east of Scotland, where we are currently five-to-six weeks ahead of where we typically are. This might be partially due to the unpredictability of the weather – at the drop of a hat, it can transition from a frosty spring morning to a warm summer's day. So now my crystal ball is temporarily out of order, as this is definitely not what I expected!

With this unexpected turn, there have been other challenges to navigate. Forward ordering with suppliers with staggered months delivery hasn't worked as planned for stock coming in later. This has led to us trying to bring deliveries forward, or order additional stock to meet current demand, and will consequently have a ripple effect for stock later in the year, depending on how events unfold.

A busier depot doesn't automatically translate into more profitability. External challenges still affect our operations, such as the

National Insurance rise and minimum wage effect coming into force. Recruitment for skilled staff remains a constant challenge across our industry, and will remain a worsening issue unless more is done from the UK Government to drive young people into apprenticeships to fill the gap in the future. All of these pressures will be

we are seeing.

Due to how busy the depot is, there has had to be some sacrifices made. I have been unable to attend manufacturer events. Typically set during the buildup to the start of the season to allow for maximum attendance, with this season being a straight dive in the deep end, I haven't had the time to spare away from the dealership.

With enquiries and sales being strong, we have seen a few trends in our area. UTVs seem to be taking over from ATVs, for example.

With stock farmers doing well and having the money to spend on equipment, this is now their machine of choice. In contrast, pressures on local government funding have affected orders from local councils, which we have seen a steep decline in compared with previous years.

Robotic mowers are continuing to be a large area for us, with strong enquiries continuing to grow. However, we have seen there is still a large demand for ride-on mowers across a variety of brands. Supply issues have greatly improved, although there is the occasional isolated issue, probably caused by the 'Donald effect' and worldwide conflicts!

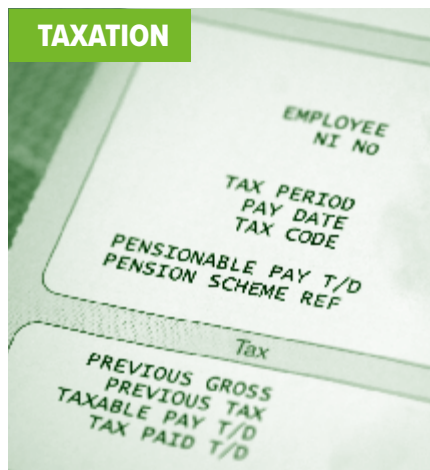
**All in all, a promising start to the season, which will hopefully continue!**







## TAXATION



# Legitimate ways to avoid tax

These are definitely taxing times. When the chancellor stood up to announce her first budget last year, it contained 43 major tax changes, and is projected to raise, on average, an extra £36bn a year from 2025/26 to 2029/30, writes *Helen Thornley*, a technical officer with the Association of Taxation Technicians.

## Payroll taxes

**In terms of additional tax revenue, the biggest change was the increase to employers' National Insurance Contributions (NIC).**

Employers' NIC is paid by employers on top of staff salaries. From April 6, 2025, this increased from 13.8% to 15%. At the same time, the threshold from which employers' NIC starts to be charged decreased from £9,100 to £5,000.

Employers only start to pay employers' NIC once their liability exceeds their Employment Allowance. Smaller employers will receive some protection from the increased NIC costs, as from April 6, 2025, the Employment Allowance increased from £5,000 to £10,500.

## OPPORTUNITIES

**One way an employer might be able to mitigate the extra costs is to look at how pension contributions are handled for their staff.** For all but the lowest-paid workers, the value of any pension payments made by the employee can be enhanced if the pension contributions are made via salary sacrifice. This means the employee agrees to accept a lower salary in exchange for higher pension contributions from their employer. This approach can create NIC savings for both employees and employers, as employer pension contributions are not subject to employers' or employees' NIC.

## THREATS

**The increase in employers' NIC comes in at the same time as increases to the National Living Wage.** From April 6, 2025, over-21s will be entitled to a minimum of £12.21 an hour, up from £11.44. The National Minimum Wage, which applies to 18- to 20-year-olds, increased to £10 an hour, and apprentice pay increased to £7.55 an hour.

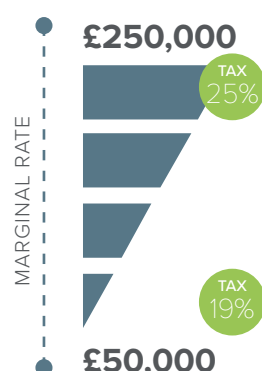
## Business vehicles

**There remain tax savings to be had from going electric when looking at acquiring cars for use by directors or employees.** The 100% first-year allowances for zero-emission cars and electric vehicle charge points have been extended to March 31, 2026, which means tax relief up front for the cost of cars purchased outright or via hire purchase. The benefit in kind rates for electric company cars also remain favourable, which keeps tax costs down for employees, although the rates are set to increase gradually between now and 2029/30, so tax costs will creep up here over time.

## Corporation Tax

**Where the business is incorporated, it will pay corporation tax on any profits.**

The current rates of corporation tax depend on the amount of profits the business makes. Very broadly, a company with profits of less than £50,000 will pay 19% corporation tax, while one with profits of over £250,000 will be taxed at 25%. A company with profits between those two figures will pay at a rate of between 19 and 25%.



## Longer-term costs

**All trading businesses need to be aware of some big changes to taxes which apply on disposal of the business.**

## THREAT - Increased tax on disposals

If you are thinking of selling your business in the next few years, then you need to know about increases to the rate of Business Asset Disposal Relief (BADR). The conditions for BADR are complex, but, broadly, if you are selling all or part of a business you have owned for at least two years – or selling assets which were used in a business that you owned within three years of the cessation of the business – you may be entitled to lower rates of Capital Gains Tax (CGT). Currently, individuals who meet the conditions pay a 10% CGT rate on their first £1m of gains. This is a lifetime allowance, so will be reduced if you have made previous qualifying gains in the past. Without this relief, CGT rates of between 18% and 24% (depending on the size of your income and the gain) would apply.

From April 6, 2025, the rate for the first £1m of gains increased to 14%, and, from April 6, 2026, it will increase to 18%. Gains above the limit will remain taxable at 24%.

## TAX ON DEATH

As it stands, most well-structured businesses can look to claim relief from IHT on the value of the business thanks to Business Property Relief (BPR). The maximum relief is currently 100%, with a lower 50% relief on the premises from which the business trades if they are owned personally rather than held in the partnership or company.

From April 6, 2026, the 100% relief will be capped at the first £1m of qualifying assets, with a lower 50% rate applying to any remaining qualifying assets. This means there will be an effective 20% IHT rate on business assets over the £1m, half the standard 40% IHT rate.

At the current time, it is not envisaged that the £1m allowance will be transferable between married couples or civil partners. If you have a valuable business, and your spouse is involved, it will be worth seeking advice to help maximise available IHT reliefs.

## Tax compliance

**FOR MOST BUSINESSES, THE BIGGEST DAY-TO-DAY RISK FOR TAX IS MAKING ERRORS OR MISTAKES.**

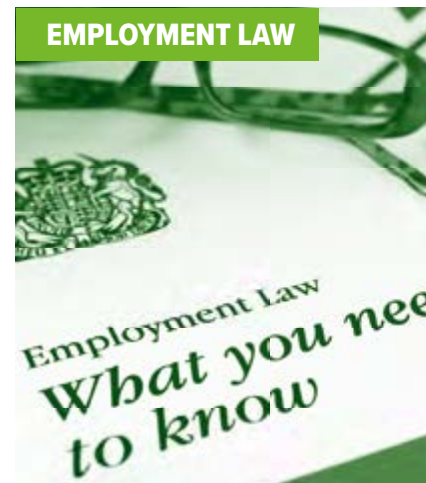
In 2024, the government announced it would be funding an additional 5,000 HMRC compliance officers over the next five years, which will likely increase the risk of an enquiry in the future.

The key with day-to-day compliance for most is good records and making sure to use a suitably-qualified adviser, with experience dealing with similar businesses. An adviser who is qualified will be best-placed to ensure you are getting all the reliefs you are entitled to. But remember: 'if something seems too good to be true, it probably is' is a sensible guide.

## Summary

**"Nothing is certain except death and taxes,"** said *Benjamin Franklin*, U.S. founding father. But, just because tax exists, doesn't mean that we cannot legitimately take steps to reduce liability. But to do that well requires good advice from a reputable source.

## EMPLOYMENT LAW



# Employment law myths that damage the workplace

Employment law is an everchanging and complex field which is often misunderstood by employers and employees alike, says *Jane Hallas*, head of team and solicitor at WorkNest

**From misconceptions about employee rights to confusion over proper procedures, such employment law misunderstandings can lead to costly legal disputes and workplace tensions.**

Debunking some of the most common mistakes – and, hopefully, setting the

record straight – could avoid problems for employers and employees alike.

**Employment contracts must always be in writing**

It surprises many that an employment contract can be verbal or implied, as well

as written – however, there is a legal requirement that employers provide certain written terms and conditions no later than the first day of employment.

Employers often fulfil this obligation by providing a written employment contract – which can include the



necessary details, such as hours of work, pay, benefits, and obligatory training.

### Employees on probation can be dismissed without notice

While employees on probation may face easier dismissal compared to those who have been with a company longer, they are still entitled to receive notice pursuant to the terms of their contract of employment. However, the statutory minimum notice for employees who have less than one month's service is currently nil.

Therefore, if contracts are drafted in line with statutory notice requirements, then technically an employee in their probation period with less than one month's service can be dismissed without notice.

### Employers must always give one month's notice to terminate an employee

The required notice period is determined by the employment contract or statutory law. While some contracts may stipulate a month's notice, the minimum statutory notice period is based on the length of service and is as follows:

- One week's notice for employees who have been employed for less than two years but more than one month.
- One week for each year of service after two years, up to a maximum of 12 weeks for employees with 12 years' service or more.

### Employees with less than two years' service have no unfair dismissal rights

While it's generally true that employees with less than two years' service typically do not have the right to claim unfair dismissal, there are important exceptions. Employees can claim automatic unfair dismissal if the reason for dismissal relates to pregnancy or childbirth, health and safety concerns, taking time off for dependants, whistleblowing, or asserting a statutory right. This list is not exhaustive.

However, it's worth noting that, under the Employment Rights Bill, the government has proposed a significant change to make the right to claim unfair

dismissal a day one right, meaning all employees would be able to claim unfair dismissal from the start of their employment, regardless of length of service. This change is not yet in effect.

### Employees who resign voluntarily cannot claim unfair dismissal

Employees who resign may be able to claim constructive dismissal if they feel forced to leave their job due to their employer's actions, such as a breach of contract or creating an intolerable work environment. In such cases, resignation is seen as a form of dismissal initiated by the employer's conduct, and, as such, the employee can look to bring a claim of constructive unfair dismissal.

Ordinarily, an employee will need to have more than two years' service to bring a claim. However, as noted earlier, some with less than two years' service can bring a claim for unfair dismissal.

### Suspension is mandatory when investigating an allegation of gross misconduct

Whilst suspension should be reserved for cases of gross misconduct, not every case of gross misconduct will call for suspension.

Suspension may be necessary if:

- There is a genuine concern that the employee's continued presence could pose a risk to the organisation, other employees, or clients;
- There is a risk that the employee might hinder the investigation by tampering with evidence or intimidating witnesses, or;
- There has been a significant breakdown in the working relationship between the employee and their manager or team.

### Zero-hour contract employees have no employment rights

Employees on zero-hour contracts still have a wide range of employment rights, including the right to receive the National Minimum Wage, protection against discrimination, sick pay (if they qualify), and entitlement to annual leave. Their hours of work are not guaranteed, which can affect their income and job security.

Zero-hour employees are still

technically part-time employees. As such, they are afforded protection against discrimination on account of their part-time status – in other words, they have the right to not be treated less favourably than their full-time counterparts. However, matters are slightly different regarding zero-hour workers rather than zero-hour employees, as they are seen differently by the law.

### Employers can terminate employees if they've been off sick for an extended period

While it may be possible to dismiss an employee for long-term sickness, it must be handled carefully. There is no definitive timescale that triggers a dismissal, and these situations must be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Dismissing an employee due to illness can lead to claims of unfair dismissal and discrimination if the employee is protected under the Equality Act 2010 (for example, if the illness constitutes a disability). Employers should consider alternative options, such as adjustments or redeployment, before pursuing dismissal.

### Employers can select part-time employees for redundancy before full-time employees

Employers cannot discriminate against part-time employees in redundancy situations. Redundancy must be based on objective criteria, like skills, experience or business needs, and part-time employees should be treated equally to full-time employees.

Employers should ensure that the redundancy process is fair and transparent, avoiding any discrimination based on part-time status.

### All employees are entitled to a statutory redundancy payment

Only employees with at least two years of continuous service are entitled to statutory redundancy pay. If an employee unreasonably refuses suitable alternative employment offered to them, they may forfeit their right to statutory redundancy pay.

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# Products

## COMMERCIAL

### Dual-battery brushcutting

Latest from Milwaukee

#### Milwaukee has introduced the new M18 Fuel Dual-Battery Brushcutter to their OPE category

The company says the POWERSTATE brushless motor delivers up to 5,500rpm to the mowing head, and sustains this power under load to prevent bogging down.

The unit also features speed adjustment technology on the control handle, which can be set at two different speed settings – low mode for light tasks and extended runtime, or high mode to deliver maximum power required for clearing high and dense grass, weeds and thick bush. The supplied trimmer head provides a 38-43 cm cutting

swathe. The brushcutter blade utilises a three-tooth design to take on more demanding applications, and includes a separate optimised guard design for material containment.

A dual shoulder strap harness provides stability, reducing user fatigue during extended cutting, and allows for optimal tool positioning. The adjustable handle means the user can quickly adjust and its ability to rotate, and fold allows for compact storage.

The new brushcutter is fully compatible with the entire M18 line, which, the manufacturer says, now offers more than 315 solutions.

## DOMESTIC

### Digital garden mapping introduced

STIGA announce enhancements

#### STIGA has announced enhancements to its autonomous robot mowers.

With the 2025 release of the latest robot software and the new STIGA.GO app interface, users can benefit from what the manufacturer describes as “a seamless and automated setup experience.” These innovations, say STIGA, enhance convenience, giving homeowners full control of their gardens from their smartphones. The latest cutting-edge upgrade is a Digital Garden Mapping feature.

With this feature, users can now create a virtual boundary for their garden, and define mowing zones remotely.

#### STIGA say it works by:

- 1 Downloading the app and charging the robot.
- 2 Following the pairing process.
- 3 Using the Google Maps-integrated platform to sketch a garden perimeter.
- 4 Saving the design - the robot receives the map instantly.

## DOMESTIC



### Makita up the pressure

18V DHW180 LXT pressure washer from Makita

**Makita has launched a new pressure washer powered by an 18V LXT Li-ion battery. The new DHW180 LXT Pressure Washer has been designed with a nozzle that allows for five different spray modes.**

Weighing 2.2kg (without a battery), the machine offers a maximum pressure of 24 bar, and a maximum water flow of 5.3 L/min, as well as a continuous runtime of up to 82 minutes with a 5.0Ah battery. As such, the manufacturer says it is convenient for a range of outdoor cleaning tasks on a single charge.

It has two different power modes to switch between, depending on the task – a five-in-one nozzle to change spray modes, as well as an angled brush to target difficult-to-reach areas. Additionally, a foam nozzle or a wheel brush can be added.

Water can be sourced via three methods: a hosepipe connection for a continuous supply of water, placing the filter tube into a bucket, or, for smaller tasks, a large water bottle can be connected to the pressure washer.

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COMMERCIAL

# Robots launched onto fairways and roughs

Toro's new range of mowing solutions

**Toro's new range of robotic mowing solutions for fairways and roughs are now available through distributor Reesink Turfcare.**

All the products launching simultaneously – the GeoLink Solutions Autonomous Fairway Mower (pictured), Turf Pro range of robot mowers and Range Pro ball picker – work on Real Time Kinematic (RTK) geo-positioning technology coming from a GPS based satellite system, offering what the manufacturer described as “ultra-precise navigation”.

This functionality allows for areas to be mapped, setting invisible boundaries in which the machines can operate autonomously. When they reach the edge of the predefined work zone based on satellite positioning, they keep within it.

Operation is through wireless monitoring, and control of the units is through a computer or mobile phone, where it is possible to customise working perimeters, no-go zones, mowing patterns, cutting height and transport paths.

No boundary wires are required, and Toro say the mowers can mow a consistent pattern with minimal overlap – and that they are accurate to two centimetres. The system can identify missed areas, and will reroute the mower to cover them later.

The GeoLink Solutions Autonomous Fairway Mower is a hybrid mower. It has a Kawasaki engine, but steering, traction, lift and lowering of the cylinder units are electric. The mower still has a seat and a steering wheel, as it has both manual and autonomous modes. In manual, it will operate just like a normal triplex, so if the operator wants to move it to a new location that is not mapped yet, or support a different area on the course, they can.

There are three fully robotic models in the Turf Pro range. There is the choice of three or five cutting heads, providing a cutting width of 63.3cm in the Turf Pro 300 and 103.3cm for the Turf Pro 500. They can mow up to 18.5 acres (75,000m²), and there is a model for use on slopes of up to 24 degrees.

They are all-electric, self-charging, and automatically return to the charging station.



AGRICULTURAL



# Safety option ploughs through

T traction bolt on Kuhn's Vari-Leaders

**A new T traction bolt safety feature has been added to Kuhn Farm Machinery's range of large Vari-Leader ploughs.**

The company says the option is aimed at growers farming light soils with low stone content. The simple T traction bolt has a share point load of 4,700kg, and provides an alternative to the nonstop hydraulic system that is already available on the Vari-Leader range.

The shearing design, as opposed to snapping, prevents broken bolts becoming stuck in the plough framework as they break, allowing users to quickly and easily replace bolts and return to work. The bolt is fixed in the direction of travel, rather than at 90 degrees to it. Therefore, when an obstacle is encountered, the bolt shears with the leg and avoids damage.

Edd Fanshawe, KUHN's arable and connected services product specialist, said: “With its high load rating and shearing design, the T traction bolt offers an established and cost-effective safety option. The design is well-proven across other Kuhn ploughs, and reduces the oval effect that traditional shear bolts create on the hole through constant movement. This improves component longevity and makes replacing T traction bolts much easier on the Vari-Leader models.”

The semi mounted Vari-Leader range is available in six-to-eight bodies, and is suited to tractors from 135hp up to 360hp.

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“As with all dealerships in our industry our management system is of utmost importance to us. We found it tricky finding something that met our diverse needs, however Pyramid fit the bill much better than all other systems available. What has been really impressive, is the support we had with areas of the software that we wanted to change or adapt, even to the extent where Jez and the team have added a complete collection & delivery module for us to utilise.

Installation was swift and initial training was comprehensive. Having the True Track team on hand to work through queries has been invaluable, always remaining pleasant and professional throughout. It has made, what could have been a stressful process, pain-free.”

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Edd Offer - General Manager Hampshire Garden Machinery

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DOMESTIC

# Striping for smaller lawns

Offered by Allett's new Cambridge 35

**Allett has launched the Cambridge 35, a new 14" battery-powered self-propelled cylinder mower designed specifically for homeowners with smaller gardens.**

Delivering the iconic striped lawn finish, the unit is powered by a 40V 4Ah lithium-ion battery.

Described by the manufacturer as lightweight and quiet, the mower offers 30-to-40 minutes of mowing per charge, suitable for lawns up to 350m<sup>2</sup>. The six-bladed cutting cylinder delivers 78 cuts per metre, giving a precise and professional-looking finish.

Austin Jarrett, managing director of Allett, said: "The Cambridge 35 brings Allett's professional cutting technology to homeowners who want a beautifully striped lawn without the complexity of petrol mowers. It's quiet, easy to use, and delivers outstanding results."

The Cambridge 35 is also compatible with all RC35 cartridges, including the Scarifier, Dethatcher, Verticut, Lawn Brush, 10-Blade and Aerator. Plus, the new rapid cartridge change system lets users switch without removing belts or the side cover - just one screw per side.



DOMESTIC



## Upgrade for Segway

New features include connectivity with smart speakers

**Segway Navimow has implemented a V3.0 software update for all machines in its i Series range, introducing a host of features.**

The Navimow X3 Series, which launched in the UK on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, will come equipped with this latest firmware update as standard.

The upgraded Weather Adaptive feature adjusts tasks automatically according to various conditions. When rain, snow, frost, strong winds, and high temperatures are detected, the mower will either pause or delay upcoming tasks.

With the new 'Doodle' feature, mowers can curate personalised messages or add pictures to their lawns with custom patterns. Users can choose from letters, numbers and a diverse range of 29 default designs to celebrate milestone occasions such as birthdays and holidays.

The Traction Control System (TCS) improves the mower's stability and mobility, enabling it to tackle wet and muddy terrains, as well as other complex garden features (such as buried garden lights or retractable sprinklers), without getting stuck or damaging lawns. The manufacturer says this is the first time a TCS has been integrated in a robot lawnmower, with off-road vehicle-grade traction control technology capable of handling complex grassy terrain and providing stability for all mowing tasks.

Also new: by adding the Navimow to Google Home smart speakers, users can now control the robotic mower via Google Assistant.

Another upgrade also permits the Navimow to communicate with its owner through the Voice Feedback functionality. This machine can broadcast its current status in relation to a specific scenario, such as if the battery is running low.

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# Mobile phones in the workplace



Or, as our mystery columnist THE SPROCKET puts it:

*what's happened to a fair day's work, for a fair day's pay?*

**I'm not really sure if this is a subject for The Sprocket to tackle, but it is marred in controversy, and it does affect our daily lives and how people perform in the workplace.**

It kicked off for me with the recent issues of children and students using phones at school, college or even university - and the discussions around mandating a ban on mobile phones in these environments, as is being done in other countries. There is also the newer issue of AI, and how this may play out in the workplace and schools.

Before I get going, there are a couple of points I should clarify to attempt to be all encompassing. Mobile phone policies in schools are not usually just directed at pupils. They may also apply to staff for different reasons, with secure lockups provided for phones and access when required.

Mobile phones can also be a benefit in the workplace as well as a hindrance to productivity. Employers should be careful not to be completely ageist. This is a problem across generations now. Especially as the industry should be encouraged to open their minds to employ younger staff where possible (to keep the industry sustainable). Gen Alpha and Gen Z will hold the answers to digital productivity and this should be acknowledged. Perhaps involving young people with digital usage in workplace policy development, could be the key to enhancing workplace productivity overall?

So let me switch this into the context of a machinery dealership. Speaking to several dealers, they tell me the use of mobile phones for private activities with younger members of staff is becoming a problem in the workplace. Common problems include lack of punctuality, poor communication, low productivity, and inadequate teamwork. Additionally, employees may struggle with meeting performance expectations, adapting to company culture, or following company policies, which can lead to inefficiencies and conflicts in the workplace.

With the rising costs of employing a person, it seems that the old adage of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay is getting bent out of shape. Worktime is being lost to the

vagaries of personal use of mobile phones during the working day. If productivity and performance is being badly affected by this use of a mobile phone, it may well be time to draw a line under it and consider implementing new company policies, if you have not already done so. It is not enough to just ask someone to back off on mobile phone use - it must be a policy that encompasses all.

It should also be noted that mobile phones are not the only devices that can act as a distraction. For example, employees may be accessing social media channels on the computer at their desks. In which case, is a 'use of social media policy' as, or more, applicable than a specifically mobile phone usage policy? One should also consider that productivity in the workplace may be heightened by using devices and AI strategically to complete tasks faster, provided they are established as a normal working pattern.

## Challenges for dealers

There are significant challenges that can arise from overuse of mobile phones in the workplace, such as workflow disruption, which can reduce focus and disturb an employee's productivity. If possible, limit phone use to normal breaktimes, and restrict personal use to these breaktimes which allow a more focused approach to the working day. If the problem is serious, and requests for restricted use are being ignored, it may be time to make sure you have a legally-binding company policy in place.

It may sound a bit extreme, but certain areas where mobile phones can be used might be considered to be dangerous to the user or others in the workplace. This could be in the yard, where there are moving vehicles, or in the workshop, where a lack of attention could cause serious injury. These potential issues should be covered by risk assessments under a company's health and safety policy. I would urge all dealers to ensure that they have covered this in their H&S assessments.

Dealers should also consider asking employees to put their private mobiles away during worktime, perhaps in a draw or a bag, out of temptation's way. Even in a small

dealership, you could be losing as much as 25% of an individual's productive time just because they are on and off their phones, and because their focus is on the phone, not the job.

Although many of us think that phones improve productivity, research indicates that this is not the case. Rather than being a tool for productivity, phones often serve as distractions, gradually paralysing the focus and reducing an employee's ability to work effectively.

Let employees know the policy on phone use during working hours, and why it is important to follow it. Explain how excessive use can affect productivity, performance and the dynamics within a team, and address any issues promptly and consistently.

An employer must follow a fair process in any disciplinary action. This means you can't just fire someone on the spot for using a mobile phone, unless it is being used to pass on company information against the terms of an employment contract.

## A changing working environment

Dealers cannot ignore that mobile phones and social media have become an extension of people's lives. This means taking a proactive approach to considering if and what you will permit in relation to mobile phone usage during working hours and in the workplace environment. Your approach should then be detailed and shared with your workforce within a mobile phone policy that sets out the rules and expectations, and the consequences of breaching these.

I do not want to tar all young people with the same brush. It does, however, seem to be a bit of a generational issue where a certain age of 'young person' seems to have something plugged into their ear and a smartphone glued to their hand, and any verbal communication is limited to the odd grunt or 'uh-huh'. If this is the case now in the new workforce of young men and women, it is going to get worse as the very young are raised on tablets and smartphones, and seem to have a better command of these

than most adults. Some internal household communication between parents and those of school, college or university age is now done by phone rather than running up the stairs and knocking on a bedroom door, or, indeed, shouting that dinner is ready. Pointless, as those little white things in their ears rarely allow the odd bellow from a parent to translate into a digital stream!

Whilst all this digital stuff and social media may have its advantages, it is clearly a game changer if normal, everyday use is expected to carry on in the workplace. Draw a line in the sand and make sure new recruits (Generation Alpha, 2010 to 2024) and maybe some of the existing staff (Generation Z, 1995 to 2009) are clear that you are paying them to work, and not to be the next season's gaming star, some social media guru, or a short-form video producer.

With dealers being hit with a rise in National Insurance contributions, as well as a reduction in the threshold levels and the increase in the National Living Wage (for over-21s) and the National Minimum Wage (for younger age groups), there is a need to ensure that staff are as productive as they can be, and that an employer does get a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. I have heard that these changes have cost a very large dealership as much as half-a-million-pound increase on their salary bill, whilst a much smaller dealer estimated the increase at around £5,000 per year. Horrendous for any business!

Some dealers are holding back on recruitment while they work out the new costs and the effect on their business, and if they can run an even leaner and meaner business. In an industry that is crying out for new recruits, it is a rather scary situation to talk about holding back on recruitment. Who knows, maybe a modern mobile phone policy will help to improve productivity?

**There are websites that can help to formulate appropriate mobile phone and social media policies for dealers and if a dealer uses a HR or H&S company, these guys may be able to do something for you. If you have nothing in place, do something about it.**





# 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.

## MAY 2025

<b>North Somerset Show</b> www.nsas.org.uk	<b>5</b>	<b>BBC Gardeners' World Live, NEC Birmingham</b> www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com	<b>12-15</b>
<b>Nottinghamshire County Show</b> www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com	<b>10</b>	<b>Royal Three Counties Show, Malvern</b> www.royalthreecounties.co.uk	<b>13-15</b>
<b>Balmoral Show, Belfast</b> www.balmoralshow.co.uk	<b>14-17</b>	<b>Royal Cheshire County Show</b> www.royalcheshireshow.org	<b>17-18</b>
<b>Hadleigh Show</b> www.hadleighshow.co.uk	<b>17</b>	<b>Lincolnshire Show</b> www.lincolnshireshow.co.uk	<b>18-19</b>
<b>Smallholding &amp; Countryside Festival, Royal Welsh Showground</b> rwas.wales/smallholding-and-countryside-festival	<b>17-18</b>	<b>Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh</b> www.royalhighlandshow.org	<b>19-22</b>
<b>Chelsea Flower Show</b> www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show	<b>20-24</b>	<b>Spoga+gafa 2025, Cologne</b> www.spogagafa.com	<b>25-26</b>

<b>Shropshire County Agricultural Show, West Midlands Showground</b> www.shropshirecountyshow.com	<b>24</b>	<b>JULY 2025</b>	
<b>Northumberland County Show</b> www.northcountyshow.co.uk	<b>24</b>	<b>Hampton Court Palace Flower Show</b> www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-garden-festival	<b>1-6</b>
<b>Suffolk County Show</b> www.suffolkshow.co.uk	<b>28-29</b>	<b>Groundswell 2025, Lannock Manor Farm, Hertfordshire</b> www.groundswellag.com	<b>2-3</b>
<b>Staffordshire County Show</b> www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk/staffordshire-county-show	<b>28-29</b>	<b>Kent County Show</b> www.kentshowground.co.uk	<b>4-6</b>
<b>Royal Bath &amp; West Show</b> www.bathandwest.com/royal-bath-and-west-show	<b>29-31</b>	<b>Great Yorkshire Show</b> www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk	<b>8-11</b>

## JUNE 2025

<b>Royal Cornwall Show</b> www.royalcornwallshow.org	<b>5-7</b>	<b>Norfolk Garden Show, Norfolk Showground</b> www.norfolkgardenshow.co.uk	<b>11-13</b>
<b>South of England Show</b> www.seas.org.uk/south-of-england-show	<b>6-8</b>	<b>Royal Isle of Wight County Show</b> www.iwcountysow.co.uk	<b>12-13</b>
<b>Cereals 2025, Roy Ward Farms, Leadenham, Lincs</b> www.cerealsevent.co.uk	<b>11-12</b>	<b>Driffield Show</b> www.driffieldshowground.co.uk	<b>16</b>
		<b>Royal Welsh Show</b> www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh	<b>16</b>



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