

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

July/August 2024

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A WATERSHED MOMENT?

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AN EVOLVING AND GROWING MARKET

Robotic mowers Q&A

TREND OR HICCUP?

Dealership closures



FROM A CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

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WELCOME

Letter from the editor
Steve Gibbs

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Welcome to the July/August 2024 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

Firstly, apologies for the lateness of this magazine. With the developments at STIHL, we felt we simply couldn't run with an already printed version that spoke solely about what the manufacturer said at that event – and not reflect our dealer readers' views following the surprising Screwfix news. So, I hope you understand why the delay.

Before that news broke, and following that spate of dealership closures this spring, matters appeared to have quietened down in the network. Earlier this year there was a five-week period there where our **Weekly Update** reported on a dealer shutting their doors for the final time in all but one edition. Which frankly in my 20+ years tenure on the magazine, was unprecedented.

Thankfully, as you can read in the News pages this issue, one of those businesses was subsequently bought out of administration and reopened.

This did lead to an interesting debate amongst our readers though, as to what could be described as the overriding cause of these collapses. What was clear

from all who got in touch is just how much of a Herculean effort it is for any small businesses, in the current circumstances, to remain sufficiently profitable.

One theme that several dealers cited for failure, was the struggle with margin on products. Another thread taken up by commentators, took aim at the bottom end of the sector for skewing the marketplace for traditional servicing dealers.

Other factors raised were a lack of succession planning on behalf of dealers themselves, whilst others pointed the finger at supplying manufacturers, saying some blame must be shouldered for over-burdening dealerships with excess levels of stock.

This issue we hear the considered opinions of industry expert, Keith Christian, who continues the discussion in his article, aptly named 'Trend or Hiccup?'

Open debate on all industry topics and the gathering of a range of opinions from industry commentators, manufacturers, and especially you, our dealer readers, is something *Service Dealer* takes seriously. So please always feel free to join the debate on the *Weekly Update* – or get in touch directly if you have a view on an industry topic you'd like to share.

THE TEAM

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DEALERS

Balgownie purchased out of administration

Continued employment of 15 secured



Mike Singer, of Balgownie, with Douglas Fraser, finance director of MacGregor Industrial Supplies

After entering administration in March – and as reported in the May-June 2024 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine – it was announced that MacGregor Industrial Supplies (MIS) successfully acquired the business and assets of Aberdeen-based Balgownie Ltd from administration.

In a statement, MIS said: “The acquisition marks a strategic move for MacGregor Industrial Supplies, further enhancing our position in the Aberdeenshire market, introducing our offerings to Balgownie’s valued customers, and expanding Balgownie’s expertise and product offerings across the MIS network.”

The statement also confirmed that the deal had secured the continued employment of 15 employees from Balgownie Ltd, “ensuring continuity and support for customers during this transition.” The BBC had reported that, when Balgownie initially entered administration, 24 employees had immediately lost their jobs.

MIS reopened both Inverurie and Turriff branches on April 29, trading

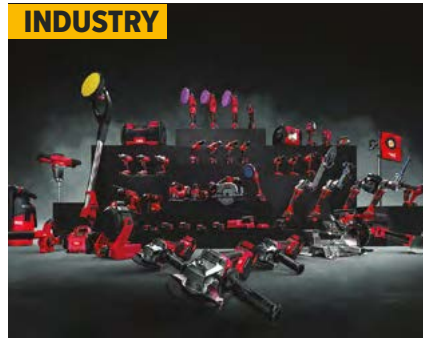
from these premises as MacGregor Industrial Supplies Limited incorporating Balgownie.

MIS are maintaining the legacy of brands Balgownie had been associated with, whilst also incorporating the brands supplied by themselves. “Due to our partnerships in the Highlands with Brian James, Bateson and Debon trailers, Balgownie will now include these brands in their offering,” MIS said. “Nevertheless, we are dedicated to maintaining and servicing all trailer brands, and look forward to introducing a new collection of trailer products to the Aberdeenshire area.”

MacGregor Industrial Supplies’ managing director John MacGregor said: “This acquisition is in line with our mission to grow MacGregor Industrial Supplies Limited. Balgownie Ltd is a good fit for MIS, as it shares the same values and core purpose. We believe the company and its customers will benefit from this acquisition, as we continue to strengthen our product and service capability throughout Aberdeenshire and the MIS branch network. It is our goal to continue providing the highest level of customer service during this time and in the future.”

Mike Singer, of Balgownie, added: “We are delighted to be joining forces with MacGregor Industrial Supplies, and to be able to continue serving our loyal Balgownie customer base. This exciting new chapter sees us teaming up with a leader in the industrial supplies sector in the north of Scotland, and opens up a large array of brands and products to further serve our customers.”

INDUSTRY



EGO owner acquires

Chervon purchase Scandinavian power tool company

The Chervon Group, who own the EGO brand of cordless machinery, announced recently that they have acquired the former Flex Scandinavia AB from the Ahlsell Group, with effect from June 1, 2024.

With this acquisition, Chervon say they have expanded their presence primarily in the Swedish and Scandinavian markets, strengthening its position as a supplier in the power tool and outdoor power equipment industry. A spokesperson for the company confirmed to *Service Dealer* that these products will be solely for Swedish and Scandinavian markets.

In an official statement, the company said: “By integrating Flex Scandinavia AB into the Chervon Group’s global network for the Flex and EGO brands, the company will be able to extend its reach, improve the efficiency of its supply chain, and bring new products to market even faster.”

The statement continued: “The acquisition of Flex Scandinavia AB is in line with both brands’ commitment to maintaining the highest quality standards and continuously improving customer experience. Professionals can look forward to a growing selection of high-quality power tools and cordless garden equipment tailored to their needs. An in-house repair workshop and a large warehouse with its own repair service also increase service and product availability.”



GGM's Haydock showroom

GGM reports growth and expansion

New staff, franchises, website and refurbished showroom

Grounds care specialist GGM Group has reported growth and expansion as the business enters its busiest season, with the introduction of a series of new initiatives designed to benefit customers.

The organisation, with sites in Colne and Haydock, say they have expanded their team with the appointment of new members of staff throughout the business, including in the

parts, workshop and accounts departments, in a bid to support business growth and offer job opportunities in the local area.

The new roles come after what they describe as a busy first quarter for the business, which has unveiled a refurbished showroom in Haydock.

GGM say they have launched three new franchises in recent months. Last year, they announced their appointment as a Honda-licensed dealer for the lawn and garden range. They have also taken on the new expanded range of TP Chippers, as well as the FSI range of stump cutters.

The business also says they have experienced a “huge uptake” in the recently-launched LANTRA-accredited training academy, which provides delegates with the skills and knowledge required to safely operate and maintain machinery. All training can be carried out on customers’ premises, using the equipment that team members will be using on a day-to-day basis or at the dedicated GGM training centre.

The business has also launched a brand-new website, designed to further enhance the customer experience. GGM say the navigation makes it easier for customers to find products and access services.

Managing director Chris Gibson said: “While many businesses have struggled over the past 12 months, we are delighted that GGM has continued to thrive. We have done this thanks to our fantastic team, and our focus on innovation, always keeping us one step ahead of the game. In addition, we decided to recruit for these roles to help the local job market, as well as to facilitate business growth and our future plans.”

DEALERS

Double A expanding pro turf business

Building new premises



Artist's impression of the new facility

Dealers Double A have started construction on a new purpose-built outlet for their expanding professional turf business in East Kilbride, Glasgow.

The two-acre site will consist of a main building housing offices, a training room, sales area, parts department and service workshop, alongside a large storage building and yard area.

The new outlet in East Kilbride joins the company’s other outlets in Kintore, Aberdeenshire, and Cupar, Fife, providing new and used turf equipment along with aftersales service, parts and technology to professional turf customers across Scotland.

Double A founder and chairman Sandy Armit said: “We really appreciate how customers in the west of Scotland have put their faith in Double A, and this exciting new building will give our staff and our customers confidence in our company and a fantastic workplace experience. We look forward to seeing the building take shape over the coming months, and welcoming customers to see exactly what we have created when we open next year.”

Established in 1996, Double A has grown steadily to become one of the UK’s largest John Deere turf dealers. They are also Scottish dealers for Campey, Ferris, Greentek, Grillo, Lastec, Reform, Timberwolf, Tru-Turf and Ventrac.



Sam Dixon and Stuart Chick (centre) collected the award on behalf of STIGA, seen here with host, Jimmy Mcghie and Kate Murphy managing director of Brookes & Co

Honour for STIGA product

At DIY Week Awards

STIGA's SC 100e Kit cordless pruning shears won 'Garden Tool of the Year' at the DIY Week Awards.

Marketing coordinator Sam Dixon and national account manager Stuart Chick were on hand at the awards event which took place in Covent Garden on May 17, 2024.

The judges said, "The design and quality of this tool really stand out, and mean it should perform well and last a long time. An all-round great product!"

Amanda Kincaid, marketing manager at STIGA UK, said: "We are so chuffed to bits to have won this amazing award. Our designers have really shown their amazing skill with the ergonomic design of the new STIGA SC 100e, which makes this battery pruner both functional and comfortable to use, allowing you to work efficiently and quickly. We know that many gardeners and florists are really thrilled with this handy gardening tool, and we have had some super feedback already from them."

The DIY Week Awards is a scheme for the recognition of excellence from across the DIY, home improvement and garden sectors, organised by DIY Week publisher Datateam Business Media.

INDUSTRY

Handy announce their biggest ever GM dealer event

Set for September

Handy have announced that they will be showcasing their product ranges – and highlighting their support for dealers – at what they describe as their biggest-ever garden machinery event, Handy LIVE 2024, which will be held at Moulton Grange Country Estate in Northamptonshire on September 5.

The first event of its kind for Handy, the company say it will combine an expo of their garden machinery with a full day's entertainment, whilst also providing guests with exclusive on-the-day offers and bespoke point-of-sale opportunities to "help dealers/retailers maximise earning potential."

Handy's brands - Webb, The Handy, Greenworks and AVA - will be on display and available for guests to get hands-on with. In an exclusive preview, the new Webb Eco 20V Cordless Battery range will also be launched on the day.

Live demonstrations from gardening experts Adam Woolcott (a Chelsea multi-award winner) and Tommy Cross (TV presenter) will run throughout the day. Guests will also be able to experience air rifle shooting and axe throwing.

Mark Moseley, Handy's sales and marketing director, said: "This event gives us the perfect opportunity to showcase our fantastic product range, and highlight the extensive support and service we have in place to help dealers to get the most out of our products."

The company says tickets are limited, and can be booked via their website.



The event will take place at Moulton Grange

INDUSTRY

SABO returns to UK and Ireland

PSD announce new partnership

PSD Groundscare have announced a new partnership with German manufacturer SABO, who are re-entering the UK and Irish market.

SABO produce battery and petrol walk-behind collection mowers for both residential and commercial markets, and have traditionally enjoyed a high market share in the specialised dealer channel.

PSD say they will be focusing on the sale of the walk-behind mowers, which for many years were branded John Deere. However, in October 2020, Deere decided to exit the WBM market, and sold SABO to private equity company Mutares SE & Co - who subsequently, in September 2023, agreed to sell the company to a management buyout led by managing director Lars Daniel, finally returning SABO Holding GmbH to private ownership. The range of new collection mowers take the original design, but are now produced in a distinctive red colour.

SABO say they chose to partner with PSD due to their track record of taking specialist landscaping equipment to market - in addition to PSD's comprehensive list of carefully-chosen specialist dealers.



PSD sales director Stuart Mercer said: "We're extremely excited to add SABO to our portfolio and lead the reintroduction of this fantastic product line, and we look forward to being able to offer the UK and Ireland the best range of collection mowers available. We have the infrastructure in place to be able to support customers with first-class aftersales, including spare parts, and can't wait to get going with the new range."

Lars Daniel, SABO's managing director, added: "We are delighted that we have been able to secure this partnership with PSD to distribute our range throughout the UK and Ireland. They have a first-class reputation, and we look forward to a long and successful partnership."

DEALERS

Thorncliffe expands into groundcare sector

Added to Can-Am dealer network

Bombardier Recreational Products (BRP) is continuing to grow its Can-Am off-road dealer network in the UK with the appointment of Thorncliffe, a Rhyl-based family-run business.

The addition of the brand to the dealer's portfolio means it is expanding its workforce with the addition of two new sales staff and one technician – and more employees are scheduled to join in 2024.

Thorncliffe, who recently bought a local groundcare and machinery business, say they are committed to

meeting the growing demand for utility ATVs and SSVs across multiple sectors ranging from agriculture to ground care.

Rachael Turner, BRP commercial manager for the UK and Ireland, says: "Wales is a growing market for Can-Am ATVs and SSVs, and the addition of Callum and his team will assist our expansion within the region."

Callum Jones, site manager for Thorncliffe, added: "We recently acquired a local groundcare and machinery business, so we started looking for an SSV that would be



Callum Jones, site manager

suitable for use in the groundcare sector. Through word of mouth, we came across Can-Am. From there, we looked further into its offering, and there were two distinct factors that made Can-Am stand out from the crowd. The first is the high-quality vehicles it produces, and the second is the breadth of the lineup, which gave us the confidence to know that we could provide customers with an ATV or SSV to meet their needs and requirements. We are excited about what the future holds with Can-Am."

DEALERS



L-R: James Hibbert, Julie Dougal, Clive Brickell, Alan Jarrett, Lilly Draper, Alan Jarrett, Sam Thorby, Arthur King, Harry Hollands, Albert Green, Alfie Hookway, Sam Cronin, Alan Johnson, Jeremy Kerswell

Crawfords team up with Plumpton College

Ensuring modern tractor access for students

A strategic partnership between AGCO dealer Crawfords Group - comprising Crawfords, Agwood and Crawfords Automotive, and Plumpton College in East Sussex – has announced that they say will ensure that students and apprentices gain practical experience and training on modern tractors with the latest technology, fully aligned with the needs of the industry.

Crawfords represents Valtra and Fendt from four depots, looking after customers in east and southeast England. The network also includes three Agwood depots, representing Massey Ferguson in Kent and east and west Sussex.

Plumpton College provides land-based and environmental education and training to 5,000 students on full and part-time courses annually.

The initial three-year agreement between Crawfords and Plumpton means that students will have three of the latest Valtra tractors always available for technical and operator training, based at the college farm. The first delivery, in mid-May this year, included two N5-series models and a

G-5 series, two with powershift transmissions and one with a Direct CVT, unit allowing operators to become familiar with both types of system. One tractor has Valtra's SmartTouch Extend GPS guidance system fitted, which will be transferred to new tractors as the fleet is updated twice each year.

"We already enjoyed an excellent relationship with Plumpton College, as some of our own staff were trained there," explained Crawfords Group business director Alan Haines. "There are currently two apprentices from the college working at our Billingshurst, West Sussex depot. They are excellent, and clearly benefit from the mix of college and dealer workshop-based training.

"The Crawford family and business managers all believe strongly that working with and encouraging young people is key to the future success of our agricultural industry. For many years, we have worked with colleges employing apprentices and engaged with Young Farmers Clubs."

Alan stressed that the partnership with Plumpton College will be

mutually beneficial. Students will gain experience operating the latest AGCO tractors, and the industry will benefit from operators and engineers already familiar with state-of-the-art technology when they leave education and start work.

Crawfords Group dealer staff will also have access to the college-based tractors for customer demonstrations and operator familiarisation on the college farm, and college facilities – including the well-equipped meeting rooms – will be used for staff and customer presentations and training.

Plumpton College principal Jeremy Kerswell said: "Industry partnerships are critical. We have worked with Crawfords Group and other dealers for many years, but this long-term strategic partnership is different. The dealer has similar values to us, and we see it as a perfect match. Regular access to the latest machinery means that our students will be 'current,' equipped with skills at the forefront of these technical advances and making them more attractive to modern farming operations and dealers."



COBRA

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Cylinder Mowers



Chippers





PEOPLE

A 'legend in machinery sales' retires

Laurence White steps down after 34 years' service

After 34 years of dedicated service in machinery sales, T H White have announced that Laurence White has bid farewell to their machinery imports division, leaving behind a legacy of "passion, dedication and unparalleled salesmanship."

In a statement on the company's website, T H White said that Laurence's illustrious career spans over three decades, during which he has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to excellence. Joining T H White Machinery Imports eight years ago, Laurence brought with him a wealth of experience, and an infectious enthusiasm that energised the entire team.

The statement continued: "Throughout his tenure, Laurence's passion for machinery sales never waned. Even in his final week, he remained at the forefront, actively engaging in selling and demonstrating machinery with the same fervour as he did on his first day. His dedication was exemplified by a remarkable feat in his last days, where he successfully sold nine Ferris zero-turn mowers to a local authority - a testament to his

unparalleled salesmanship and deep industry knowledge."

Beyond his professional achievements, T H White said Laurence is known for his passionate demeanour and genuine care for his colleagues and clients. "His approachable nature and willingness to go the extra mile have earned him the respect and admiration of all who have had the pleasure of working with him," they said.

Laurence says he now plans to spend more time with his beloved family, indulge in his passion for motorbikes, and navigate the tranquil waters aboard his narrowboat.

The dealership's statement concluded: "To Laurence, we express our sincere gratitude for his invaluable contributions to T H White Machinery Imports. His dedication, enthusiasm and unwavering commitment to excellence have made a lasting impact on everyone fortunate enough to work alongside him. As he begins this new chapter, we wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement. Farewell, Laurence, and may your future be as fulfilling as your remarkable legacy."

News in brief:

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



PEOPLE

New managing director named

Catalyst Computer Systems have announced the appointment of Rob Patrick as their new managing director.



DEALERS

Dealership's decade delight

First established in 2014, ABA Groundcare based in Tiverton, Devon, celebrated 10 years of selling Yamaha's ATV range in April.



PEOPLE

Managing director to step down

Amazone Ltd have announced the retirement of their managing director, Simon Brown, with Matt Smith, previously national sales manager, taking over the role.



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INDUSTRY



Increased demand to be met by new factory

Club Car has opened a new 3,300sqm factory in Poland to, they say, meet increasing demand for its electric vehicles.

DEALERS



Dealer network expands

Boss ORV has announced the appointment of dealer J&R Agricultural Engineering Ltd in Cornwall as the latest to join the Corvus team.

PEOPLE



Appointment confirmed

CNH Industrial has announced the appointment of Gerrit Marx to the role of CEO, effective July 1, 2024.

INDUSTRY

Kuhn in partnership to improve agri-plastic recycling

Alongside APE UK

Kuhn Farm Machinery say they are the first machinery manufacturer to partner with Agriculture Plastics Environment UK (APE UK) to support responsible management of agricultural plastics and improve the recycling from farms.

APE UK is a non-profit organisation focussed on improving the management of agricultural plastics, by engaging with farmers, core members of the supply chain and the agricultural industry, to support recycling and sustainability when disposing of the products.

Ian Creasey, APE UK's CEO, says the goal is for industry-wide collaboration. "Less than 30% of used agri-plastics are recycled in the UK, and APE UK's objective is to build a national plastics recovery and collection scheme to increase this to 75% within five years. We are engaging with the farming sector and government to incentivise agri-plastics recycling and support the development of cost-effective recycling services for farmers and growers. As an industry, we can't continue to ignore the impact managing plastic waste incorrectly has on the environment."

The initiative requires a collaborative approach, and Kuhn say they have already taken steps to ensure waste plastic is easier to manage, with film binding introduced on its standard and combination balers. By removing net binding and creating one waste product, farmers can save time and be more efficient when sorting the waste.

The manufacturer's grassland product specialist, Rhodri Jenkins, say the company is committed to making the recycling process easier for farmers. "Our wide product portfolio means users are handling plastics daily, whether that's chemical cans, baler twine or bale wrap. If we can help promote more efficient and cost-effective ways to manage these waste products off farm, then we can start to make the current problem part of the solution."

Rhodri continued: "Through innovative technology, such as our 750mm stretch-film rolls that have a much higher pre-stretch ratio compared with wider conventional rolls, we can cut film costs by up to 37%. This has a value to the farmer at both ends of the chain, as it is more cost-effective to buy and there is less waste to dispose of."

Building awareness around the initiative in agriculture and horticulture, while engaging with farmers and government, will create buy-in across the whole industry. APE UK has partnered with agri-plastic producers, as well as distributors such as Carr's Billington, Mole Valley and Wynnstay.



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STIHL's new 11,500m² Contra House facility in Camberley, Surrey

A watershed moment?

Following STIHL GB unveiling their massive investment in the UK market with the opening of Contra House, the manufacturer announced a new partnership to sell their battery tools through Screwfix. *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS, reports.

It was at the end of April that STIHL held a grand opening of their new Contra House headquarters in Camberley, Surrey.

Dealers from around the country were joined by press and invited guests at the event which was presided over by Dr. Nikolas Stihl, chairman of the Supervisory Board of the STIHL Group. Guests heard Dr. Stihl say the opening marked a significant milestone in the company's long history. Named Contra House in homage to the iconic Contra chainsaw invented by founder Andreas Stihl, the company said this 11,500m² facility reflected their dedication to providing "unparalleled support to our dealers and end users".

At the heart of the operation lies a 9,000m² distribution centre, which boasts next-generation picking and storage systems. STIHL said this

consolidation of logistics onto one site enables them to streamline operations, resulting in a speedier and more efficient delivery service.

GB managing director Kay Green addressed those in attendance on the day, saying, "The unveiling of Contra House symbolises a significant step forward in our commitment to product innovation and providing exceptional service to our customers and dealer network. We are thrilled to unveil the new facility, which not only embodies our rich heritage but also stands as a testament to our vision for the future."

Dr. Stihl himself described the new building as "the cornerstone of our future" and gave a "firm commitment" to the dealers that this future was dependent on having "you by our side."

Flash forward to Wednesday June 26th and STIHL GB informed

their dealer network that from July their electric and battery powered tools, along with a selected range of accessories, would be sold by omnichannel retailer, Screwfix. This deal was not signed when the Contra House opening event took place.

The company announced that their battery and electric range would be available in store, online and on the Screwfix App for Click & Collect from over 880 Screwfix stores in England, Scotland and Wales. In addition, it was confirmed that Screwfix would feature a STIHL display system and offer a handover service at its Yeovil, Lysander Road store.

In addition to sales, STIHL also announced that warranty support and repair would be offered through Screwfix's own repair service and that customer advice and support

would be available from the company's contact centre.

In an official statement upon the announcement, Kay Green said, "We know from our market data, that a high proportion of prospective customers of battery tools are already shopping online and many of their home and garden project purchases are already made at Screwfix."

"This new relationship with Screwfix represents an opportunity for STIHL to grow its consumer battery footprint as well as further increasing our brand exposure. It will offer a complementary new dimension to the business we have built with our

Approved Dealer network over the last five decades."

What happens now?

Service Dealer spoke to STIHL GB at the time this news broke. We thank them for their time to keep us, and consequently our dealer readers, informed.

The question for us as a trade journal in a nutshell, was how would this decision affect our dealer readers?

We were therefore keen to hear the voices of those specialists on the front line and reflect what they shared with us in these pages – to gain a sense if dealers really did consider this a

watershed moment for the industry?

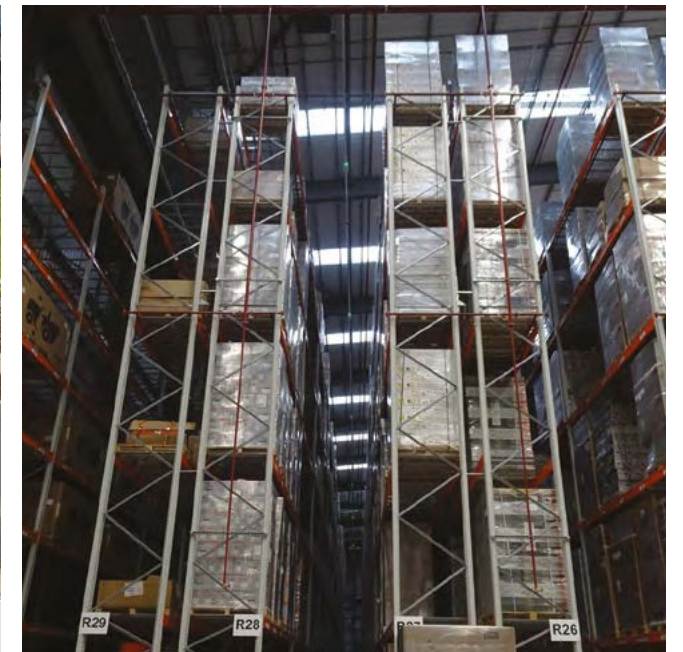
And thank you, you did not disappoint with your feedback. We spoke to dealers on the phone, received emails and collected your thoughts via the comments section of our *Weekly Update*.

For personal reasons, almost everyone we heard from, requested that we keep their names anonymous, which we are, of course, happy to honour.

For balance, we showed the comments to STIHL before publication, and where they chose to respond, we have included what they said in italics underneath.



Invited guests on the Contra House opening day included STIHL dealers from around the country



The huge warehouse



Some of the products included in the Screwfix partnership

Dealers have their say

Dealer: This is turning STIHL into a basement brand, and it will disrupt the loyal servicing dealer network.

STIHL: Screwfix is a quality retailer that has agreed to work with STIHL in the same way as other independent garden centres selling STIHL battery and electric products do. This means they invest in staff training, customer service and warranty support for example.

Dealer: Why would we invest further in STIHL? They need to show loyalty to the dealer network.

STIHL: The dealer network is and will continue to be STIHL's top priority. Dealers are the top destination for the professional customer and Screwfix will not sell any petrol tools. All the benefits to the STIHL Approved Dealer network will continue including training and technical support.

Dealer: It's a watering down of territory if anything. This will have huge impact on our cordless sales. With Screwfix open 7 days a week, all hours, dealers just can't compete.

STIHL: Screwfix's customer base is very different to that of STIHL Approved Dealers. STIHL's robust research shows that the vast majority of potential domestic customers of battery tools do not currently visit dealers. They only buy tools from DIY stores, online stores or even supermarkets. STIHL sees the business models as being complementary.

Dealer: How are small independent retailers expected to compete with a box shifting giant, when we have the overheads of showrooms, workshops, and parts departments?

STIHL: STIHL Approved Dealers should leverage the service and breadth of range they can offer customers.

Dealer: Screwfix will order huge quantities which STIHL GB clearly need to fill that FR Jones hole.

STIHL: At the time of starting to work with Screwfix, there were no significant backorders. Any items that were on backorder at the time, were not offered to Screwfix. Stock is offered to all dealers and Screwfix on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Dealer: It suits STIHL to describe this as complimentary to the dealer network but that just isn't the case in my view. I genuinely don't believe that STIHL couldn't raise their brand awareness

in a way more conducive to supporting the dealer network.

STIHL: Screwfix's brand awareness is huge, and their marketing will make many new customers aware of STIHL for the first time. STIHL sees the business models as being complementary and not threatening to dealers.

Dealer: Another major brand shafting the dealer network. Vote with your feet and chequebook and move to dealer-only brands.

Dealer: STIHL has lost a lot of respect; they've cheapened their brand. If they wanted to get their name out there then advertise on TV!

STIHL: STIHL is the only premium garden tool brand to advertise its domestic battery system year-on-year across national TV in the UK. However, we need to have exposure where the majority of domestic customers are if we are to continue to be successful in the battery tool world. The retail presence Screwfix can offer STIHL, will open-up our brand awareness to many new consumers. The benefits of which will be felt by dealers.

Dealer: As a STIHL dealer for over 30 years, I am disappointed, annoyed and quite concerned. Our battery sales have increased dramatically in the past few years across the STIHL range, especially the AK tools, but with a Screwfix not far away, it is likely we will have to listen to many customers saying 'I can buy it cheaper in Screwfix'.

STIHL: STIHL Approved Dealers should leverage the service and breadth of range they can offer customers.

Dealer: Nail in the coffin for dealers who have supported STIHL for a long time.

Dealer: With the time, money and skills investment dealers put into this product range, this is a kick in the teeth. We have 6 Screwfix outlets within a 15 mile radius! One is less than a mile from the door.

Dealer: A very poor show STIHL. A company that was held in very high regard by the dealer network.

Dealer: Don't even think about coming to my shops for warranty issues. I estimate that I have a maximum of 3 years left in this industry and then the dealer channel is finished. It's a sad day.

STIHL: Screwfix has already established a STIHL service area within a designated service centre which is relevant to battery and electric tools.

Dealer: We might as well empty our showrooms out right now because it's game over.

Dealer: STIHL have become the competition, not a partnership as they like to think of it, and yet dealerships have to take thousands of pounds worth of stock in forward orders.

Dealer: I initially thought this would have a terrible impact on our business but the more I thought about

it the less I think it will trouble us. We do not sell products online only. I think this move will have more of an impact on the online retailers.

STIHL: This move is about bringing new customers into the STIHL brand that potentially have a lifetime value to STIHL and our dealership network. More customers who own STIHL, means more opportunity for dealers to sell parts and accessories down the line.

We also received some specific questions from dealers that we put to STIHL GB's management which we print in full below...

Q: Is Screwfix click and collect only?

A: Click & Collect is the popular way that customers buy from Screwfix. They can also buy products in store or for home delivery.

Q: Will they be assembling and PDI-ing machines and offering a full personal handover? If not, are they still claiming the handover fee?

A: The majority of Screwfix's sales will be online. As in all cases, where handover isn't done, then no handover fee is paid.

Q: Are Screwfix going to invest time and money in training all their counter staff on all the STIHL battery technology?

A: Training has already commenced. STIHL and Screwfix are working together on training for store staff and contact centre staff.

Q: Are they going to build designated service counters or workshops for testing and repair?

A: Screwfix has already established a STIHL service area within a designated service centre which is relevant to battery and electric tools.

Q: Are they going to hire designated technicians or train their existing staff?

A: Technicians have been trained and the service centre is equipped with necessary tools and other equipment.

Q: Are Screwfix having the admin burden of registering product sales?

A: Screwfix has their own product registration system and will use their own robust system in the event of a recall.

Q: Will they have a sign outside?

A: Signage is offered to STIHL Approved Dealers' to help increase their visibility by leveraging our brand. The Screwfix model is different, whereby their shop window is their app and website, both of which will have a STIHL branded page.

Q: Will they watch the product expert videos?

A: Screwfix in conjunction with STIHL has a thorough training programme for all colleagues.

Q: Will it soon be in B&Q?

A: STIHL GB has no current plans to offer STIHL to other retailers.

Q: How much stock have Screwfix already got and does that explain STIHL's current stock shortages on cordless equipment?

A: At the time of starting to work with Screwfix, there were no significant backorders. Any items that were on backorder at the time, were not offered to Screwfix. Stock is offered to all dealers and Screwfix on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Bright future for dealer

Earlier this year, garden and turf care equipment dealership, Devon Garden Machinery (DGM) Ltd, officially opened its brand-new facility in Torquay – and took the opportunity to invest in solar technology.

Established 40 years ago, DGM's family business is a dealer for such brands as Toro, Iseki, Honda and Husqvarna, and is well-established as one of the largest robotic mower centres in southwest England, serving commercial and private customers across the region.

The company moved earlier this year to a new premises adjacent to its original site in Kerswell Gardens, as part of a new development featuring an Aldi store and a Costa Coffee branch.

As well as providing much more space and a more suitable layout, owners Steve and Charlotte Dommett say they were keen to consider the environment within the new building design. As such, they introduced a

rainwater harvesting system and a recycling wash system for the wash area. They also saw an opportunity to explore the benefits of a solar power system to reduce the company's carbon output and help to reduce energy costs.

Exeter-based Sun Energy Group was contacted, and they recommended a 75 kW solar panel system and a commercial battery storage system, with the 190 panels installed on the roof of the new building saving around 13.2 tonnes of CO2 per year. The system and installation would cost £85,000, but savings would be made on energy bills to help offset the cost over time.

To help with finance for the investment, Carl Painter at Sun Energy introduced the DGM team to Ignition,

a South West asset finance provider based in Truro. It was able to assist DGM with a hire purchase agreement, spreading the cost of the solar power system and its installation into monthly repayments. It is anticipated that DGM will start to enjoy cost savings from its solar energy provision within five years.

Steve Dommett said: "We're delighted to be up and running in our spacious new premises. It has been designed to suit our needs as a growing business, with a dedicated showroom, training rooms and much better access for moving the machines in and out.

It's also brilliant that we've been able to take steps to minimise our impact on the environment, and make some future cost savings on energy. We were provided with swift access to finance for the solar project, and felt fully supported throughout the move."

Eleanor Smith, business development manager at Ignition, added: "It's been fantastic to see this family business flourish, and to assist them with this important milestone. The new site looks amazing, and has been carefully designed so that it's perfect for DGM as it expands, as well as meeting its ambitious sustainability goals."

Why solar?

Eleanor Smith went on to explain that she believes that there are two key reasons why businesses might consider renewable energy solutions, with it often being a combination of the two. Firstly, she said it was tied up with reduced energy costs.

Eleanor said: "As we all know too well, energy prices have been escalating in recent years, taking a huge toll on SMEs who are struggling to make their businesses profitable. Many are faced with the dilemma of squeezing their operational costs or passing the extra costs onto their customers, which could, in turn, make them less competitive.

"Opting for renewable energy is an attractive proposition, as it can provide substantial savings on energy costs for years to come and can help to protect against fluctuating energy prices."

Eleanor believes that companies are already seeing the payback period on solar investments reducing, due to an increase of providers in the market. "This healthy competition is pushing the equipment prices down. Traditionally, return on investment has been calculated at around five years, but we're now seeing some customers' systems becoming self-funding in just three years."

The second reason she believes SMEs are taking up renewable energy solutions is that it helps them to meet sustainability targets.

"Quite rightly," she explained, "many businesses are reviewing the environmental impact of their operations and are keen to make positive changes. They may be on a sustainability journey, have net zero targets, or are working towards B Corp

you navigate any issues, ensuring installation is legal and compliant."

Eleanor advises dealers to ask potential providers for thorough quotes to include installation costs, projections on energy created and CO2 saved, and a detailed breakdown outlining when cost savings are likely to be made. She said this should help anyone compare and find the right fit for their businesses.

The other major consideration, according to Eleanor, is to consider finance options. "Solar installation is a significant investment," she said, "so find a broker to help find the best finance options, and ideally one that specialises in renewable energy equipment. Brokers can save you a lot of time and research, as they have access to a whole market of funders and are not restricted to packages typically offered by the high street banks. They will find a solution tailored to you, and will know who is best placed to fund your specific project."

Eleanor says there are significant cashflow and tax benefits to using asset finance to fund solar energy. "For example," she explained, "hire purchase agreements, where you take ownership of the solar power system after an agreed term, qualify 100% for capital allowances in year one. Another advantage of asset finance is that customers can have flexibility over the term length, and can decide to pay the loan back quickly, or take a longer term to benefit cashflow."

Eleanor summed up her advice to dealers, saying that, so long as a business plans to stay on the same site for a number of years, solar power is one of the best investments business owners can make. Ultimately, she believes it will more than pay for itself.

"In most scenarios, payback is achieved within five years," she concluded, "and will be followed by significant cost savings, whilst also making a positive difference to the environment."



L-R: Charlotte Dommett, Steve Dommett, Alan Dommett and Jake Dommett from Devon Garden Machinery, with Eleanor Smith from Ignition

certification. Some of our clients have told us that sustainability policies have become a key requirement when competing for business tenders, and that they would lose business without one. Investing in solar power is a relatively simple way of making a big difference to CO2 emissions."

What to consider?

If a dealership is considering heading down the solar route, there are a couple of crucial considerations to be made, Eleanor pointed out.

Firstly, she says the right installation company must be chosen. "It is absolutely key to find an experienced solar provider with a good grasp of potential planning obstacles," she stressed, "particularly if you are leasing the premises or land you wish to add solar panels to. They will help

From a customer perspective

With two ex-head greenkeepers as sales managers, LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, revisited Charlies Ag & Turf to find out how they meet their turf professional customers’ changing needs – and how the business has progressed since expanding into ag.

In May this year, I took the opportunity to revisit Charlies Ag & Turf’s dealership in Welshpool. It had been three years since my last trip, when they were getting over the pandemic. However, since then, they have been concentrating on getting back to normal and delving into new business strategies.

Charlies Ag & Turf are part of the Charlies Stores Ltd group. Based out of their depot in Coed-y-Dinas, Welshpool, they offer a full range of sales, service and parts, covering central Wales and Shropshire. Having started with the John Deere Homeowner range in 2005, before moving into golf and turf in 2008, they are now proud to be the first ever European John Deere turf dealer to develop into a full agricultural and turf dealer - now under the new banner of Charlies Ag & Turf.



As an ex-head greenkeeper, Matt Lewis empathises with the requirements of his professional customers

I spent time with Matt Lewis, commercial sales manager, and Harry Jones, assistant commercial sales manager, who were keen to give me an insight into the work they had been doing to take the business forward. The conversation revolved around the growth and expansion of the dealership’s business, the importance of adapting to changing customer needs and market trends, and the need for quality education and training in the golf and horticulture sectors. Matt also discussed the challenges of demonstrating products in adverse weather conditions, the popularity of certain products, and the future of lawn care equipment. Additionally, Matt and Harry emphasised the importance of providing value to customers, maintaining adequate inventory, and creating personal customer connections. Charlies Ag and Turf is an integral part of a flourishing family business that was started some 30-plus years ago by the company owner, Chris Lloyd. Whilst the firm has grown, the passion and values it was founded upon remain the same. In the early days, there was only a small team, many of whom remain today. Now, though, there are about 400-plus team members and several stores across Wales and the borders. Being based in rural Powys has enabled the company to trade on many fronts. The business serves the private and public sectors of the ag, sports turf and domestic garden markets. As authorised John Deere dealers, the business has grown substantially in recent years due to the large demand for farming machinery – so much so that, in 2022, Charlies were asked by John Deere to take on additional territories and become Charlies Ag and Turf. A perfect opportunity to grow the business and expand into new areas. When I visited, Matt was keen to show me the site that

would become the new ag repairs and stores areas – as well as office space – effectively sitting alongside the current, impressive showrooms and office building. There is hope that this may be up and running by Christmas.

Service Dealer: Has the new agricultural franchise changed the way you work?

Matt Lewis: Not really, it just means we have a bigger area to cover - which is nice, as we get to meet many more new customers. We also have a larger pool of resources to help us deliver our customers’ needs in terms of sales, aftersales services and repairs.

SD: What area do you cover?

ML: We sell agricultural and ground care products in Shropshire and Wales. I tend to deal with central and south Wales, including Shropshire, whilst Harry predominantly looks after the north Wales area.

SD: When did Harry join the company?

ML: October 2023. Harry, like me, was a head greenkeeper, and was working at a Shropshire golf club. He was one of my customers, and we had a good working relationship. During his five years at the club, he had bought a lot of machinery from us, and knew the company well. The timing of the job came at the right time, as Harry was looking for a new challenge. So, after a successful interview, he was duly appointed assistant sales manager, to work with me on the pro turf side of the business. With us both coming from a customer’s perspective, we both understand their needs – in that they want a product that ticks all their boxes, is value for money, and comes with a good back up service.

SD: It was an extremely wet start to the year, has this impacted trade?

ML: Yes, it affected our ability to demo machinery. The ground conditions were so wet, we could not get out to show off a range of machines, such as Verti Drains, mowers and brushes. Organised demos had to be postponed until the conditions improved, which put us behind in our demonstration programme.

SD: Speaking of climate change, have the changing weather fronts altered customers’ service needs?

ML: Absolutely. The mowing season can often begin a lot earlier, and maybe run a lot later in the year now. If soil and air temperatures remain high, the grass keeps growing. We’ve adapted to this when it comes to servicing machines. Back in the old days, the servicing and repairing of mowing fleets was set in stone. We would usually see them sent in once the growing season has finished - so traditionally between November and March. However, we now must be more flexible and undertake this work all year round, fitting it in with the customers’ demand.



Charlies Ag & Turf dealership in Welshpool



The fleet of service vehicles



Harry Jones, who joined the dealership last year, is also an ex-head greenkeeper

DEALER PROFILE CHARLIES AG & TURF

To aid this, we have over 15 engineers and mechanics on-site and equipped to go out to repair machinery.

We have also noticed a change in the way golf courses are being managed. They can now be based around a 'little and often' approach, particularly with sand dressings. For some golf courses, gone are the days of having two annual renovation windows when heavy sand dressings were applied. We now see a different style, meaning cylinder mower blades need servicing and regrinding more often. So we have just invested in a set new of Bernhard grinders, which will speed up our servicing of cylinder mower blades.

SD: With many local authorities now faced with declining budgets, have you seen an impact on their purchasing habits?

ML: We have built up strong relationships with our local authority customers, and have worked closely with them to offer the best financial deals and machinery packages we can. They have been grateful for that, and continue to buy from us. However, what has changed in recent years is that the grass-cutting regimes have dropped substantially. No longer do you see grass-cutting on a weekly or fortnightly basis. We're now into a four-to-eight-week cutting cycle, and the councils can often be under a rewinding regime rather than a cut-and-collect programme. This means local authorities have stopped buying cylinder mowers to a degree, and have moved to rotary or flail cut machines that can handle longer grass.

SD: Are you seeing many grassroots football, rugby and cricket clubs investing in new machinery?

ML: Yes, with the recent sports' governing bodies release of funds for pitch improvements and machinery, we are seeing plenty of clubs take up the opportunity to buy new machinery to replace their old and tired kit.

SD: Are you carrying large levels of stock?

ML: We are nearly back to normal with stock levels post-Covid. Many dealers struggled to get parts, for example, during the pandemic, leading to some subsequently overstocking to try to ensure they had enough spares for their customers. It is a difficult call to get stock levels right, balancing having enough whilst not overstretching yourselves.

We need to order probably two-thirds of our stock in advance for the year. I suppose that's the same with every manufacturer now. But you sort of know what customers might be looking for in the future from discussions with them. You need to be talking to customers to have an idea of what might be in the pipeline for them. That aspect of the job, of maintaining healthy relationships with customers, is key.

Here at Charlies, we're quite blessed because of the huge backup support we receive from John Deere because of the sheer size and scale of the agricultural side of their business. The turf care side piggybacks off that. So, parts come next day from Germany, and within a week from America. The volume of parts that we hold on the shelf ready for next day – I believe that pretty much there's nobody else that can compete with that.

In the last six months, we are now seeing some product lines becoming readily available again. There's a couple that are still on relatively long wait times, but nothing compared to what we were seeing through during 2023.

SD Finally, how are you doing with the recruitment of new staff?

ML: Like I suspect many dealers are, we are all having trouble finding new recruits. It doesn't seem to matter what sort of job, whether it's mechanics, parts or sales, finding the right person is a real challenge.

However, we are probably lucky in that John Deere have a technical apprentice scheme that they run every year. That does succeed in bringing new blood into the industry.

SD: Thank you.



Matt and Harry tap into their professional greenkeeper experience to demo machinery at local golf clubs



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Striking out on their own



Mark Butcher (L) and Stewart Butcher (R) on Marst Agri's appointment as Merlo dealers, with Tom Reily (second right) and former Merlo dealer liaison manager Charlie Lane

Moving from working for a dealership to launching an independent sales, service and parts business isn't for the faint-hearted. MARTIN RICKATSON visits an East Anglian dealer that has made a success of the switch by specialising in a small core of products.

Having spent many years with the service department of the same dealer, seizing the opportunity to form their own farm machinery servicing business was a significant step for Mark Butcher and his former apprentice, Stewart Butcher. But setting up a full retail dealership when offered the franchise for the manufacturer whose machines they specialise in was a far bigger leap.

Mark and Stewart's involvement with the telehandlers made by Merlo goes back almost as far as the Italian marque's entry into the UK market in the mid-1990s, when the Suffolk dealer they were working with as service engineers took on a Merlo franchise. In 2016, they left their former dealer employer, Suffolk firm B.R.A.D. Farm Machinery, and in early-2017 formed Marst Agri. Having each been involved with servicing Merlo products since the manufacturer's earliest days in the UK 20 years previously, they chose to specialise in the Italian maker's products, and concentrated at first on

servicing machines across their Suffolk locality before adding Merlo parts supply to their offering.

"We developed an excellent direct relationship with Merlo UK, and were covering some service jobs for them," explains Mark.

"In 2017, the area Merlo franchise transferred from our old employer to a multi-depot local dealer. There was a possibility of becoming a sub-dealer, but that was out of our hands and didn't come to fruition. By 2020, though, that dealer then switched to another handler franchise, and, when we learned this was happening, we said to ourselves this was likely to be our only opportunity to give running our own dealership a go.

"We'd accumulated a lot of knowledge and experience with Merlo products over the years, and, while it's a big step from running a service business to setting up a full sales, service and parts dealership, we were confident Merlo was the right manufacturer to do it with."

Merlo UK management was

impressed with the business plan presented by Marst Agri, and granted Mark and Stewart its franchise for the Suffolk and north Essex area from September 2021, operating from the converted farm building premises at Lower Layham, close to Hadleigh in south Suffolk – where it has now been based for five years. At the same time, they took on an apprentice engineer, Tom Reily, from their former workplace.

Mark acknowledges that the business' first year was hard work – not only in terms of setting up the new company, but with the manufacturing problems that afflicted all manufacturers thanks to Covid-induced component supply issues.

Mark said: "We made our first sale relatively quickly, though, to an existing Merlo service customer, but it was sourced through a neighbouring dealer – the first machine we ordered through Merlo didn't go out until the following year. The next year, we targeted four unit sales and sold six, while, by the end of May this year, we had already sold seven machines."



The local Hadleigh Show has proven a good way to promote the business and its offerings, from telehandlers and ATVs to country clothing



An office and stores area has been created on a first floor constructed in the shed bay, with offerings developed to include own-brand Witham oils, tools and country clothing

Premises development

Developing from a service business to a full sales and support operation comes with significant finance commitments for a new dealership, and Mark acknowledges this was a steep learning curve.

"I'd admit we were a bit naïve at the beginning. Financing the machine purchase from the manufacturer is one thing, but financing the cost of buying the customer's trade-in is quite another. We learned fast, though, and have promptly sold on all the trade-ins we've had. We've also been joined by my wife Heidi as company secretary, to help oversee our financial management."

Developing the Marst Agri premises from a service centre to a customer-facing sales and parts business was a further challenge, acknowledges Mark.

"We began our mobile service from our homes using our service vans, but one day were servicing a machine on a long-term customer's farm when we were asked if we were looking for a premises. The building bay we were offered initially looked huge, and I thought it would help us to do larger jobs more easily. We moved in in April 2017, but, by the time we installed some workbenches around the outside, there wasn't as much room as we'd first thought, so we also took on the next bay.

"Once we'd taken on the full Merlo

franchise, we needed more space still, so constructed a first-floor stores and office area. Since late last year, Heidi has overseen an expansion of the stores to include tools and our own-brand Witham oils, country clothing and footwear.

"That's enabled us to develop our presence at our local agricultural show and Christmas fayre. But, while our premises work well as a service location – and for farmers who know us – we're still a bit remote. To address this, we advertise widely, and have developed a strong social media presence and a website on which all our telehandlers, UTVs and horticultural items are listed, with country store items available to purchase."

Move into grass machinery

Seeking further diversification, and following a conversation with a fellow Merlo dealer who also holds a STIGA franchise, Mark made contact with the outdoor power equipment firm, whose area manager then visited. Shortly afterwards, Marst signed as a STIGA dealer for the area.

"I was impressed with the range and build quality. There's everything from cordless pruning shears to the Park articulated out-front mowers, zero-turn mowers, garden tractors, and a line of electric kit.

"I also like their approach to providing dealers and customers with the data and facts they need. It's easy to print off

display cards for stock machines via the STIGA website, and brochures – which feature retail prices – are all subsidised, as is supporting merchandise. Things like this all help to build a reputation and seal a deal.

"We took on the franchise from January 2024, and sold 20 units in our first five months – not big numbers, but I think it's a good start, as we've not previously been known for groundscape kit and we are tucked away. Our online presence has helped people find us, but most customers have been farmers we already deal with, and they've helped push more business our way.

"We try and keep in stock a good selection of petrol and battery handheld kit, three walk-behinds and a Park, plus a robot. Our online presence has helped attract visitors, and the customer decision process tends to be faster than the more complex telehandler deals. Developing a grass machinery business will take time, but we're willing to put in the effort to ensure we become an established horticultural dealer."

Marst Agri has further diversified into offroad side-by-side utility vehicles, signing to become a dealer for Boss ORV and its petrol, diesel or battery-powered Corvus Terrain 4x4 models. A number of models have been sold since signing with Boss in spring 2023, shortly after Marst's first open day at its Layham premises.



The Marst Agri team (L-R): Stewart Butcher, Tom Reily, Heidi Butcher, Mark Butcher



Where necessary, Mark factors into his costings a replacement carriage if a potential customer is considering moving from another make

“That was another good way to make our presence known to a wider audience, through local advertising inviting people to come along,” says Mark.

“It also gave us a chance to show our other franchises, which we’ve grown to also include Towmate car and 4x4 plant and flatbed trailers, made nearby in Colchester. The company specialises in manufacturing trailer components and spares, and has developed its own trailers, building a dealer network which we were keen to join. It’s a challenging market with some big existing players, though.”

The local agricultural Hadleigh Show has proven a good way to get this expanding product line in front of potential customers, says Mark, but materials handlers remain the core of the business.

“Just last week, there were seven new and used machines here, but they have now all gone to new homes, and some were conquest sales, which is nice, especially with telehandlers. The main players in the market are very strong, and while there have been a lot of dealer changes among the telehandler franchises locally, getting people to change makes is hard because of the differences in headstocks and attachment fittings. If I’m up against another make on a sale, I’ll factor in a replacement carriage to sweeten the deal, knowing I can reclaim it with the sale of the original Merlo carriage. In an ideal

world a new customer would switch headstock type and buy a new set of attachments, but most handler dealers know that’s unlikely. Merlo’s attachment recognition system helps a little here, though – once the machine recognises the genuine Merlo attachment, the load chart is adjusted accordingly, helping the customer get the maximum from the machine. With Merlo offering a free muck grab and bucket to encourage customers to take this up, I’m hoping more will.”

Keeping trade-ins local

“We aim to sell Merlo trade-ins locally to retain the parts and service business. Nearly all the Merlos I’ve ever worked on in the area are still around, right back to models from the mid-’90s. Light-mid duty users benefit from the machines’ reliability, and we continue to benefit from parts and service income – another reason we like to resell trade-ins locally.

“We service circa 200 machines across Suffolk, Cambs and parts of Essex, a number that’s constantly increasing – particularly with a recent dealership closure in Cambs and the surrounding area. Our area manager has been very supportive since joining Merlo a year ago, helping find ways to get a deal over the line, and we’ve sold seven new machines from January-May 2024, taking our total since we became dealers to 20.

“Even with our strong team of four, we’re now at the point where

we need to expand again. We’ve recently advertised for an agricultural apprentice to take up a role based primarily at our premises, helping with deliveries, repairs and the stores. Sales is my focus, meaning I’m on the road most of the time. Stewart and Tom work from the premises and on-farm, so having an additional apprentice will help provide the service and presence we want to provide and customers require. I think it will provide an excellent opportunity for the right candidate to learn the agricultural and horticultural machinery business, and attend college to complete an appropriate apprenticeship course. I’m sure many small businesses could often do with an extra pair of hands, and that’s where we are currently.

“As a small, proactive dealer, we can react promptly, from providing a quote, to servicing or repairing a machine, to supplying parts promptly – we are more agile than a large multi-branch business. We may need larger premises in the future, but the customer comes first and we won’t let those core values change.

“Specialising in telehandlers and adding other franchises which complement our core business has worked well for us. Customers know we offer a bespoke service and won’t be prioritising tractors, combines or balers at harvest. I think there’s a future for smaller independent dealers like ours on this basis.”



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FORESTRY SELECTOR GUIDE



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GARDEN SELECTOR GUIDE



Trend or hiccup?

Recently in the *Service Dealer Weekly Update*, the editor talked about the closures of several dealers across the UK and the Isle of Man, asking readers if this was an industry trend we are seeing this year? Here, KEITH CHRISTIAN takes up the discussion...

A trend is described as 'a general direction of change: a way of behaving, proceeding, etc., that is developing and becoming more common.'

Whilst there may be other closures in the land-based engineering dealer sector, the four that were reported this Spring were unusual in that they were at the beginning of a season. Also, they were spread around different areas of the UK and the Isle of Man, involving both agricultural machinery dealers and a garden machinery dealer of differing sizes. Fortunately, one has since been bought from the receiver and will continue under new ownership, with

many jobs being saved (see our 'News' pages this issue).

Taking into account the differences in each business, their locations and the different reasons for their closures, I believe what we have seen does not really fit the definition of a trend, but could rather be considered a hiccup, or disruption, in the greater scheme of things.

Personally, I do not think that this signifies a trend of closures in the UK dealer network, but I do accept that change is inevitable, and that the 'trend' in the agricultural dealer sector, of mergers and consolidations, is or has been a genuine trend over the past 10 years or so. Dealers will inevitably come

and go, but they tend to be resilient and historically reliable. Of course there will be those that fall by the wayside for whatever reason, but that is nothing new (more on this later).

This is not a sign of a shrinking industry, but one of a changing industry where consolidation, merger and acquisition are playing the part of what may be considered succession.

Retail sector

I have had the benefit of working within a retail membership organisation, and have often looked at what goes on in the high street retail sector and how the trends in this area can affect the dealer network.

“The shifts in retail commerce over recent years are unparalleled, driven not only by global events but also by the rapid emergence of transformative technologies that quickly become expected by customers, challenging businesses to innovate and adapt continuously”

Source: Commercetools

How much is the retail consumer affected by the dramatic changes seen on our high streets in only the last few years, and how much does this affect consumer buying patterns for the LBE machinery dealers, particularly at the domestic end of the market?

Fortunately, there are now very few garden machinery or agricultural machinery dealers in or near town centres, with dealers out of town or on industrial parks. So, the issues of ever decreasing footfall in the high street retail sector, and the demise of many of the high street multiples and branch closures should not be a factor when it comes to dealer footfall.

But trends in online selling and e-commerce have affected the way many dealers do business. For those that have embraced this way of retailing, it has opened a different world that satisfies a consumer trend of buying online, shopping around online, and, in some cases, using the local dealer as an information centre rather than a specialised retailer. In some cases, it has also opened up a national market for what would have been a local dealer, and had a knock-on effect on prices and availability across the country. This can create issues for those dealers that have not embraced this way of selling and have had to deal with this relatively new way of retailing at a local level.

It begs the question of online retailing: *is it a trend that is reducing dealer margins, their effectiveness and profitability locally, and driving some out of business?*

Certainly, online retailing is here to stay and growing, but the more discerning consumer may well price match online but have the sense to buy locally, benefiting from the unique service a dealer can offer. The specialised dealers offering aftersales service and selling upmarket, low-volume ranges of equipment may well survive the onslaught of internet retailing due to their specialist nature. Trying to compete in the high-volume, low-value market online is a recipe for disaster for most dealers.

The growing trend for battery-powered products – both lightweight and heavy duty, sold online or in-store – is causing a general change in how a dealer offers their unique aftersales service. It is difficult to charge a customer a normal charge-out rate for a low-cost battery product. Also, safety issues, storage issues and disposal issues create new problems for the dealer network. These will all eat into profitability.

Robotics also affect the type of technical support that a dealer needs to offer. Increasing frustration in recruiting technical staff will also cause a dealer to consider the future of their business.

It's tough out there

I talked to Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira (the British Independent Retailers Association). He told me: "It is tough out there! For several months now, we have heard from members that it is difficult with low consumer demand. Some areas are affected more than others, with fashion taking a hit due to the lack

Why is it hard?

1. Cost of living crisis

A report by the Retail Sector Council suggested that, if the costs of essential items (food, energy, petrol) rise by 10%, disposable income drops by 70%. This is offset by wage rises, but it shows the lack of consumer confidence. Even though inflation is down, interest rates are higher, and so consumer confidence is still very fragile.

2. Large chains

Large chains are discounting longer and deeper as a result of lower consumer spend.

3. Weather

It has been unseasonal, and this impacts on behaviour.

4. Political uncertainty

We seem to be waiting for the election (confirmed as taking place on July 4)

of clear seasonality in the weather."

Andrew summarised some of the retail issues in 2023 for me, covering the second half of the year. He said that the retail sector was bearing the brunt of the challenges.

Andrew added: "We are hoping for

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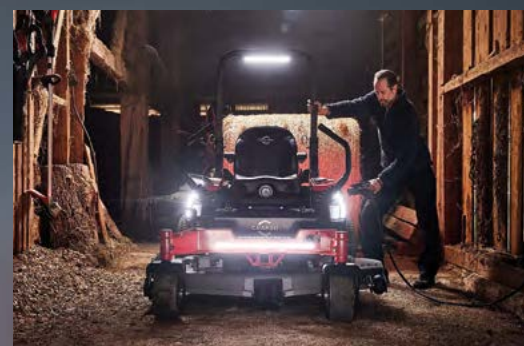
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FEBRUARY
2024

Suffolk Agri-Centre was one of the dealers to collapse this Spring. Pictured here are directors Ken Grimwood (left) and David Eley in May 2019, when the dealership returned to supplying McCormick tractors

a better 2024, as interest rates may fall, and inflation staying lower may boost consumer spend.”

Retailers have been feeling the squeeze since the pandemic, while shoppers are cutting back on spending due to the soaring cost of living crisis. High energy costs and a move to shopping online are also taking a toll, and many high street shops have struggled to keep going. Closures of high street services, such as banks, also reduce the desire to shop on the high street. Interestingly, retail parks have been holding their own, which may not be a surprise – with something like 14,000 store closures in 2023, mostly with the chain stores.

It is not all doom and gloom, though, and there were just under 9,200 shop openings in 2023, but the trend is toward more coffee shops, cafes and takeaways. Perhaps the good news for dealers is that people are now more inclined to shop out of town. As long as they can park and get a coffee, they should be happy to visit a local dealer.

So, is the biggest enemy for most dealers online selling?

What might the future hold?

If one is to look to future trends and opportunities, one needs to be able to deal with past events and whatever long-term effects these may have on future business. We must decide what is a hiccup and what is going to be a trend.

Dealers’ businesses have been affected by Brexit, the pandemic, supply shortages, inflation, energy prices, recruitment issues, political upheaval, major conflict in the world and, incredibly, a container ship getting stuck in the Suez Canal. Who saw that one coming?

All of these things will change – except, perhaps, the recruitment issues. Battery-powered equipment is ‘on trend’ right now, but will we see other power sources come to the fore, or a necessary change away from lithium-ion as this scarce resource is depleted. Get your crystal balls out and do some stargazing, in case you

can catch the next trend early and look ahead to see what is on the horizon (not the Post Office accounting system, by the way)!

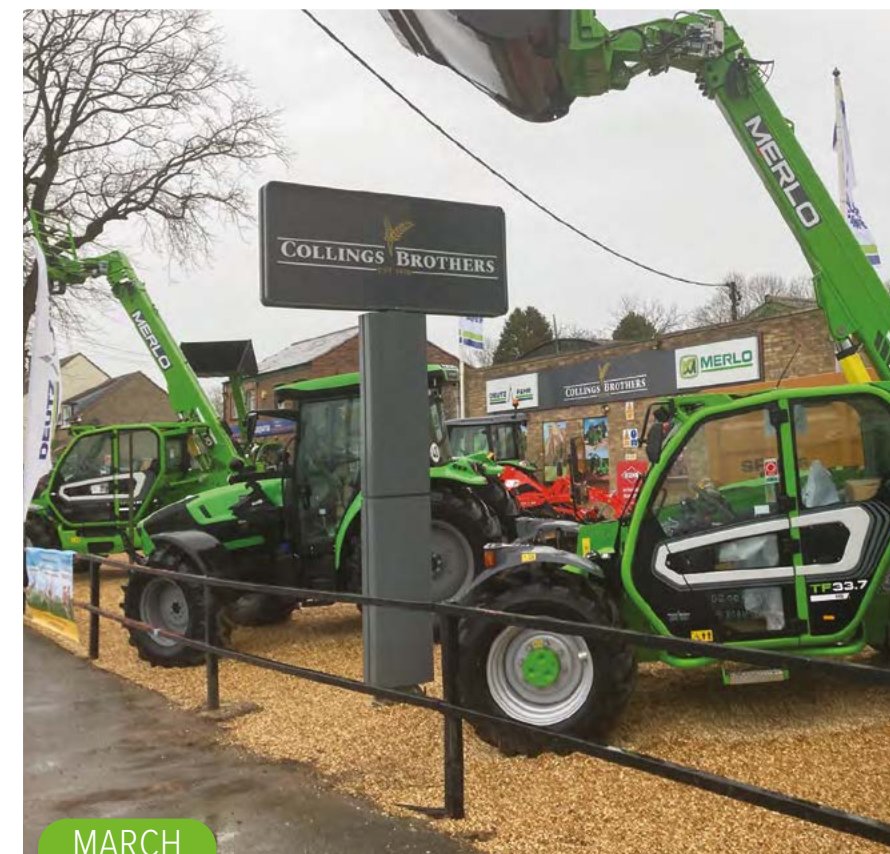
Some examples of dealer closures over the years have involved the sale of premises for car showroom development or out-of-town shopping areas. Other closures can be blamed on poor profit margins as a result of taking on high-volume distribution regionally for certain national brands with low margins. A lack of succession plans, and the inability to sell a business as a going concern, have also played a part. Some owners had simply had enough. Going back a few years, and the rise of the ‘sheds’ would have affected many dealers - but their versatility and specialist nature would have overcome this threat.

I would argue that, in terms of dealer closures, there really has been no principal historical trend or single reason that can be cited as being mostly to blame, with perhaps the exception of the consolidation that is currently taking place – but this is mostly ownership changes, not closures.

One of the major changes in the garden machinery dealer network has been the hybrid development of certain local dealers, who have turned into importers and distributors (following the demise of the companies that used to provide this service, but which did not retail). There are now only a few dedicated, privately-owned importer/distributors who do not retail. At the same time, there are a growing number of dealers who operate in the retail market, online and as importer/ distributors in many specialised areas, providing an alternative to dealing directly with a manufacturer.

The constant in all of this is change. If this can be anticipated, there can be benefits to a dealer’s business. At the time of writing this piece, it had just been announced that there will be a general election on July 4, shortly after this magazine should have landed on your desk.

A bit of a surprise, and a potential for more change and new trends - or just hiccups.



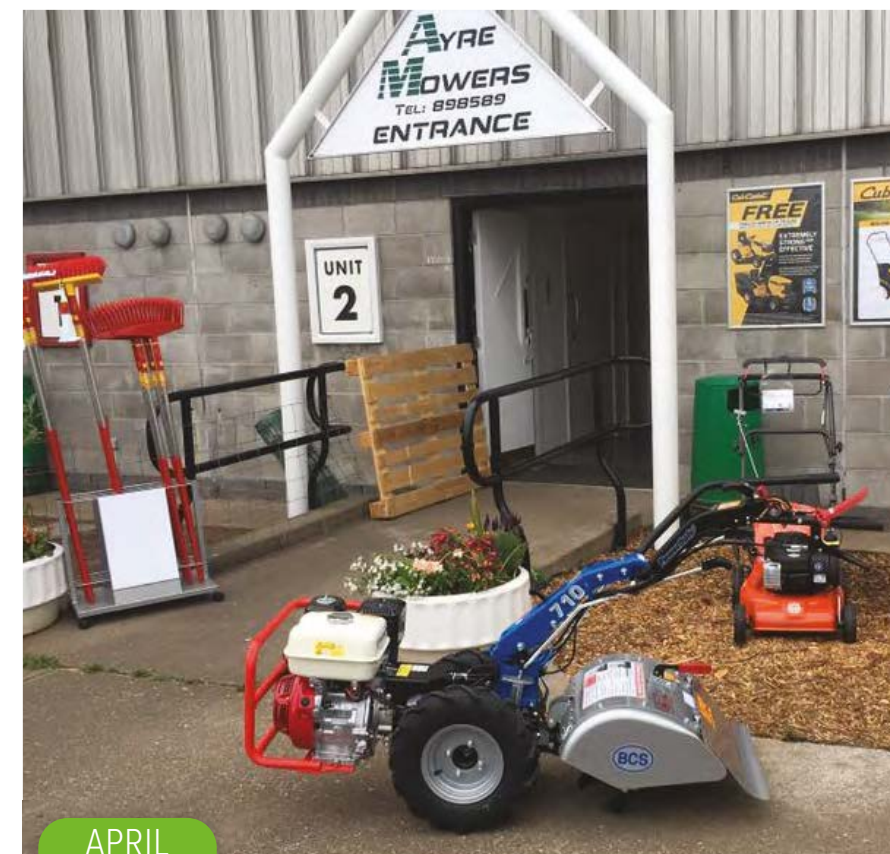
MARCH
2024

Agricultural and groundcare machinery dealers, Collings Brothers – of Abbotsley, St Neots – announced that they were ceasing trading with immediate effect



MARCH
2024

Balgownie Limited appointed administrators in March – but, as reported this issue, the dealership was subsequently purchased out of administration by MacGregor Industrial Supplies, saving the jobs of 15 employees



APRIL
2024

Ayre Mowers, who were based at Jurby Industrial Estate, in Sulby, on the Isle Of Man, were another businesses to succumb to circumstances this year

A continually evolving and growing market

That's how Phil Noble, Barrus' lawn and garden divisional sales manager, views the robotic mower sector in the UK. *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS, caught up with him to find out how their distribution of the Segway brand is going, and what dealers can expect from the technology in the future.



Service Dealer: How have Barrus viewed the UK robotic mower market historically?

Phil Noble: Having been involved with robotic mowers for over a decade, we have seen this sector as having great potential, but lacking the advanced technology to really get a hold on the mower market. With recent significant advancements in the technology with RTK positioning and AI algorithms, we have seen this really resonate with the consumer – and, of course, increased demand for these advanced cutting machines.

SD: How and why has it differed would you say, from our European neighbours?

PN: Gardens in the UK are very different to Europe. Usually, they are fairly small and contained within walls or fencing, with a diverse spectrum

of lawn layouts. Most UK consumers want the robot to cut their front and back garden if they are investing in a robotic mower, whereas in Europe they usually only have one area of grass to cut. Also, traditionally, UK customers have preferred a striped finish to their lawns.

SD: Would you agree that the market has shifted though? When did this start to happen and for what reasons would you say?

PN: Yes, the appeal in robotic mowers has greatly increased. We had very little interest from the mainstream press when we were just selling wired robots. This massively changed when we introduced the wire-free Segway range. We have received a host of top-rated reviews from the likes of *BBC Gardeners World*, *T3*, *Good Homes* and *Stuff* magazine. The sales market has also shifted

from perimeter wired machines to the RTK 4G machines capable of greater autonomy and increased efficiency. In addition to the technological advancements, the reduction in cost



Phil Noble

to the consumer has been considerable and helped to open up the market, as the RTK units are far easier to install. When we launched our first robotic mower, it was priced similarly to that of a small ride-on mower to the consumer, whereas a small ride-on is around £2k today and the Segway i105E is just £949 including VAT.

SD: Where would you say we are with the robotic mower market currently in the UK?

PN: The market is continually evolving and growing, as we see in the AEA data, and the prediction for the next five years is significant growth in this sector in the UK. The feedback from consumers and from our dealer network is that the evolution to wireless robots has really caught the interest of the consumer. I always thought the UK market would grow once there were

robotic mowers that didn't rely on the perimeter wire. I believe the market will start expanding quickly, as we have seen in other countries in Europe.

SD: What made you choose Segway? Had you considered an own-brand robot?

PN: We have been in the robotic market since 2013, with wired machines from MTD initially, and latterly as SBD with the Robomow and Cub Cadet brands. Segway's wire-free technology at affordable prices was a first in the UK, and I knew that wire-free robots would help increase this market sector. When I saw Segway announce that they had created a wire-free robotic mower, I knew we had to distribute it! I knew it would be a gamechanger, because this was the first time that a robotics company were making a robotic mower, as opposed to a mower company making a robotic mower! We are proud to be working with such a well-known brand who listen to their customers and support their distributors.

We are fully aware that robotic mowers can be seen as complex. We have seen many technical issues which you don't get with traditional mowers, which means the support and backup is critical. From our experience, Segway are first-class, whereas we know with other suppliers – who are trying to cover many different products – they cannot offer the same support. So therefore, we wouldn't entertain an own brand, because we just don't think we would get the support needed.

SD: What does that brand name offer you?

PN: We believe that having quality products from a well-recognised brand, combined with market-leading prices, will mean that many first-time gardeners can enjoy the freedom of owning a robotic mower. This can only be a good thing for dealerships and the market in general. We have seen that the depth of quality people employed by Segway, who are just

focused on robotic mowers, has meant that they are able to adapt far quicker to the market conditions than traditional mower manufacturers – which is why we have seen the expansion of the range into new model ranges far quicker than other suppliers.

SD: How has your first year or so with the brand gone? What have you learned?

PN: Sales have way outperformed our expectations, and working with such a well-regarded brand as Segway has really helped transition consumers to a robotic mower. We have learned a lot over the past decade, and one thing which has been very important to us – and even more so now – is the training and support we provide to our dealers. We hold regular in-house training, on all aspects of selling and servicing a Navimow, along with having a dedicated team working across the machines.

SD: What, in your view, makes the Segways stand out from other robotic mowers on the market?

PN: Segway build robots rather than lawnmowers. Their world-renowned intellectual property and advanced robotic technology has now been applied to the lawnmower industry. They employ people who are at the top of their field when it comes to robots, which, in turn, then gives us products that set the pace of the market. When we launched the H Series to the UK market, we weren't just competitive – we set the price point, and we were able to achieve this because of their global production of all things robotic. We had some of the best-priced wireless robotic mowers on the market, and now, for 2024, we have launched the i Series, which start at sub £1,000 – so once again setting the price for the market.

Navimow also developed the Exact Fusion Locating System that could achieve centimetre-level precise positioning, and keeps enhancing the product with ground-breaking

features. It is evident in our dealings with Segway that they aren't selling a mower, they are selling a robot that happens to cut the grass.

This means they are attracting so many new, talented robotic engineers, which can only be beneficial for consumers and dealers alike going forwards. What I do find heartening is that, although they are this hugely successful global company, they listen to our feedback and constantly evolve the machines to benefit the UK customer. We are really excited as to where this company will take us over the coming years, because they don't intend to just sit back and reap the rewards of what they have produced – they are looking to continually develop and bring new products to the market.

SD: How many dealers do you have for the product and are you looking for more?

PN: We have created a new Segway dealer network, and currently have over 90 Segway dealers in the UK. Following on from our H Series launch in 2023, and the introduction of the i Series, we are now getting enquiries, and are looking for more new dealers across the UK to represent the brand going forward.

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

PN: We want our dealers to be fully able to explain to customers the ease of setting up Segway machines, how they work and what they can expect from them. We want our Segway dealers to be amongst the top-selling robot dealers in the UK. We believe they should commit to the products, because the range will only grow.

We have provided full service and installation training to our dealers, and are always updating our hints and tips so that both the customer and dealer are getting the most out of the machine, and that we are able to provide first class support to them and their customers.

With the new product ranges coming, this will ensure that any dealer selling Segway will always be at the forefront in launching their new products to the marketplace, which will mean that they have a commercial benefit, as the consumer market is moving more and more to robotic mowers.

The Barrus distribution service, and our area sales manager team, means we are here to support our dealers in building sales of one of the best wireless robot ranges in the UK. Dealers will be supported by a full range of point of sale, brochures, and a display stand, if required. Full technical and aftersales support is also available from my team here at Barrus. We have fully dedicated and Segway-trained technicians to assist dealers – and, on top of this, the customer can gain technical advice on their mower directly from Segway within the app.



Barrus say working with Segway brand name has helped convert customers to robotics

SD: Some dealers tell us their customer base say 'robots aren't for us.' What would you say to those dealers?

PN: There will always be customers in the UK who prefer a striped finish to their lawns, or who enjoy mowing their lawns. However, in this busy world we live in now, there are a growing number of customers who want a lovely-looking lawn, but who don't have the time to spend mowing it - they would rather use their time in other ways, and a robotic mower is therefore the perfect answer for them.

There will always be the need for products other than robots – and also, even with robots, not every garden is suited for a wireless unit. However, the market is changing, and, over the last two years, we have seen rapid growth in robot mowers, and this trend is set to continue.



Navimow has developed the Exact Fusion Locating

SD: What would you say to dealers who are concerned about the level of service work they will receive from robotic mowers?

PN: We understand that there is concern from the dealer network that they will lose servicing work. However, I believe it will just change. We have seen far more consumers last winter getting their robot mowers serviced and ready for winter.

Dealers have now started to incorporate a service that has been available in Europe, whereby the dealer services the robot and then keeps it safely stored over winter for a set charge. As more and more robots are sold, this will increasingly become the norm.

Segway's app has had a big part to play, because it reminds the customer it needs to be put away for winter, and this helps the dealer because the customer has been made aware that it needs sorting out before winter sets in.

SD: What traditional market sectors, if any, do you think an increase in robotic mower sales will affect?

PN: I think we all thought robotic mowers would affect the walk-behind market. However, I believe going forwards the robotic mower market will have an effect on the tractor market, especially as the technology keeps increasing the capabilities of the machines. According to the AEA, we have seen a steady decline in tractor sales over the last three years, which has now reduced by 25% - and, although there was an increase around the pandemic, I feel the decline can be more attributed to the rise in sales of robotic mowers. We know from our own experience that many of the 3000m² robot models sold went into gardens that used to have a tractor, and I believe this trend will continue.

SD: Where do think the robotic mower market in the UK could be heading in the future?

PN: I can only see that the robotic mower market in the UK is going to keep on increasing and, with the entry of reliable wireless robots, I feel the market will start to expand at quite a rate, as it has in other European markets. According to the EGMF, by 2026 there will be more than a million units a year sold and, as yet, the UK hasn't followed this growing trend - until now.

Robots are the easiest way to a beautiful lawn with minimal effort by the customer. So the market can only increase as we see people more constrained by lack of time.

SD: Thank you.

Celebrating six decades at Basildon

In 2024, New Holland marks 60 years of tractor production at its Basildon factory in Essex. With its dealers helping the brand regularly tussle for the top spot in UK registrations over recent years, MARTIN RICKATSON looks at where their mid-range machines come from.

While names have come and gone across the dealer networks of every long-established farm machinery brand over recent decades, many of the signs above the doors of those that sell blue tractors have remained unchanged. The New Holland farm equipment UK dealer network contains some of the oldest names in



Attracting and retaining staff is central to successful product creation, which translates into customer satisfaction, suggests David Rapkins

the sector, from Doe and Russell's to Haynes, Turney and TH White.

That's not to say there haven't been a few changes of late, with Haynes taking over the business of Oakes Bros, and both Bryson Tractors and Lloyd expanding their territory in southern Scotland, while New Holland signed Rea Valley Tractors to its network back in 2022 (before RVT then acquired neighbouring Teme Valley Tractors). But many of the dealer names that were selling blue tractors when Ford opened its Basildon tractor plant in 1964 continue to do so today under the New Holland brand.

"With 32 dealers and 103 sales points, plus 15 Irish dealers with 17 outlets, we have complete coverage across the British Isles," says David Rapkins, UK and ROI sales director for New Holland.

"I'm really pleased with how we have grown our sales and market shares over the past two years across tractors, combines and our other key product areas, and we couldn't have done that without the professionalism of our dealer network."

Since its commercial vehicle activities were demerged in January 2022 as Iveco Group, leaving CNH Industrial as an agricultural and construction machinery specialist, New Holland's parent business now comprises 43 global factories and over 40,000 full-time employees. In Basildon, there is a focus on attracting the best factory and support staff and ensuring they understand agriculture and the influences on the tractor and machinery market, says David.

"We're firmly focused on bringing in the next generation to our business in order to ensure continuity for our customers, and often host students from schools and colleges to show them the opportunities in an industry that's full of technology and opportunity. We have a full apprenticeship programme to support our dealers, and we loan components and machines to colleges for training. We also have 20-to-30 placement students each year, with backgrounds not just in agriculture and engineering, but many other disciplines, with many returning to permanent positions

here. Attracting and retaining staff is central to successful product creation, something we believe translates to customer satisfaction."

The Basildon plant was developed on a greenfield site in the early-1960s by Ford, working on a £10m budget that had been stretched at completion to double that figure – numbers equivalent to £100m and £200m today. Seeking to modernise the production processes possible at its existing car

and tractor plant at nearby Dagenham, the company was encouraged to develop a dedicated tractor facility in the new town of Basildon. Work began on April 2, 1960, and was completed on February 29, 1964. The opening of the factory – with its distinctive 38m (125ft) 'onion' water tower and 414,528m² footprint on a 40ha (100ac) site – coincided with the launch of the 37-65hp Ford 6X tractor series made there, comprising the 2000 Dexta,



Harking back to the times of the Basildon plant's 1964 opening, New Holland unveiled a special T7.300 tractor in psychedelic livery



Focusing on specialist assembly of key elements built elsewhere at dedicated plants results in products of greater reliability and quality, say New Holland

3000 Super Dexta, 4000 Major and 5000 Super Major, later to be known generally as the 'Pre-Force' models following the 1968 launch of the 'Ford Force' 2/3/4/5000 tractors. In the 1970s, the plant benefitted from £5m in new machinery and £7m spent on plant improvements.

Later significant product introductions would include the 7A1 '600 Series' tractors in 1975, from the 2600 to the 7600, and the similar 7A2 versions with the new quiet Q-cab the following year. In 1981, these tractors were updated to Series 10 specification, with later Force II/Super Q (1986) and Generation III (1989) evolutions. The first factory robots were installed in 1982, for engine flywheel ring gear installation, and in 1989 the plant produced its two-millionth engine.

Late 1991 saw the launch of the all-new 40 series, a range that would later be sold with new branding following Ford's earlier decision to exit the farm machinery business and sell its Ford New Holland arm to Fiat, which adopted 'New Holland' as its brand for the future. As the decade progressed, Basildon factory investments continued under the new owners, with developments including the installation of a robotic paint floor to improve the painting process and the introduction of automated guided vehicles (AGVs) for speedier and safer movement of components.

After 44 years – and over three million units sold – in 2008 Basildon built its last engine, and the plant was subsequently wholly devoted to tractor assembly. The business' management points out that this natural evolution of manufacturing matches the method of most other modern manufacturers across all sectors, bringing together components produced elsewhere by expert teams for final assembly by specialists in each assembly process, in an environment dedicated to the purpose.

As an example, engines now come from the Italian facilities of FPT Industrial (which falls under the same overall ownership), axles and transmissions come from CNH

Industrial's plant in Antwerp, and cabs hail from the firm's factory in Croix, France, although their design is led from Basildon. Subsequently, the plant produced New Holland 60 Series, TS, TM, T6000 and T7000 tractor lines, and now manufactures the T6 and T7 ranges, spanning 125-300hp.

Role in alternative fuels

Recent developments at Basildon include significant investment in its role as the New Holland Alternative Fuels Centre of Excellence. In 2006, the firm declared its ambition to be the 'Clean Energy Leader' in the tractor sector. While elsewhere in the world it has developed a smaller Electric Power tractor based on its T4 series, in 2021 New Holland put into production at Basildon the industry's first tractor of its type, the T6.180 Methane Power LNG (liquefied natural gas), to be joined later this year by the T7.270 Methane Power CNG (compressed natural gas). To meet the legislation in place for producing gas-powered vehicles, a dedicated sub-assembly area was opened at Basildon when T6.180 Methane Power LNG production began in 2021, complemented in 2022 by a dedicated pre-delivery inspection building for methane-fuelled tractors.

While the price is around 25% greater than for a diesel equivalent,

small numbers of T6.180 Methane Power LNG tractors are now at work on UK farms that have invested in the necessary infrastructure in order to achieve a longer-term reduction in fuelling costs as well as their greenhouse gas emissions – particularly where residual waste after methane collection is returned to the soil. The business says these early adopters have tended to already be involved in biogas production and/or use, or have a significant end-customer demand for enhanced environmental credentials, and are doing high-hour workloads.

With the infrastructure to collect, process and store methane from AD plants and slurry stores now readily available, New Holland believes this will drive development of the market for its methane-powered tractors from farm businesses seeking ways to cut carbon footprints, reduce dependence on external fuel supplies, and lower machine running costs.

Early last year, in order to extend its capabilities beyond gas-powered tractors into the infrastructure and equipment necessary to produce gas power, CNH Industrial purchased a majority stake in Bennamann, a UK-based firm focused on capturing methane for energy use. CNH's relationship with the business goes back to 2019, when the parties jointly developed an LNG tank for the T6.180 Methane Power LNG, and CNH subsequently acquired a minority stake in the business. Pilot farms are already using captured methane from livestock slurry, which is purified into biomethane that is subsequently either compressed (for CNG Methane Power tractors) or liquefied (for LNG models). Launched at Agritechnica 2023 to extend the Methane Power line, the new T7.270 Methane Power CNG's larger chassis helps maximise on-board gas storage, with capacity for 1,265 litres (219kg) – or 178% more fuel than the T6.180 Methane Power LNG's 455 litres/79kg.

A tractor every five minutes

But conventionally-powered tractors look set to dominate production for

some time yet, as the market for non-fossil fuel-powered machines is developed. Today, a complete tractor rolls off the Basildon assembly line every five minutes, with over 10,000 different product specifications to meet global requirements – 85% of production is exported. Just as it has for tractor customers, technology in the plant has made procedures faster and more efficient. With only 1.4 tractors a year having the same specification, no two machines made during annual production are identical.

To ensure this tailor-making of tractors is swift and efficient, New Holland has adopted a 'smart factory' plant management system, designed to ensure the correct parts reach each tractor at every point in the production process.

"We use a radio frequency identification (RFID) system, with individual tags for each of the 3,500 individual parts boxes in circulation around the plant at any one time," explains plant director Ryan Hopkin, who came to the factory five years ago from the automotive sector.

"This 'smart technology' integration began in 2020, resulting in the gradual installation of 40 digital workstations throughout the line that ensure precision management of both processes and parts, with full traceability, so we can identify any issue. For example, in terms of cab roofs alone there, are 27 different types across different models, markets and specifications. In 2023, we installed a new bonnet and cab roof manipulator, enhancing precision movement and installation of these components.

"The same year, we also installed a new robotic painting plant and monolayer paint system – which is among the most advanced across all CNH factories – to further enhance product protection and longevity. Further investments have included improvements to our electrical connection installation quality process."

Around 300 people work on the production line at any one time, at which point there will be approximately 160 tractors at various stages of manufacture. The line has 2.2km of suspended monorail above it to support part-built cabs, until the point they are married to



T6 and T7 production requires over 10,000 different product specifications to meet global requirements – 85% of production is exported



Cabs frames from the Croix plant in France are trimmed and finished at Basildon as part of tractor assembly

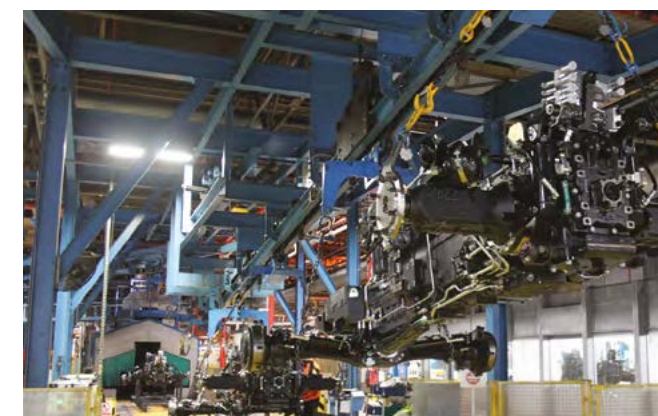
the tractor unit itself – a highly-skilled manual process. Completion of a single tractor takes around one-and-a-half days, at which point it is towed off the end of the line for its pre-delivery inspection.

Product development

Basildon is also responsible for the engineering design of the T6 and T7 tractors it manufactures, which span 125-300hp, and a team of 70 staff across multiple disciplines oversee product development. In 1987, the first computer-aided design systems were adopted, followed eight years later by the first 3D modelling technology. Software has since evolved rapidly to include more advanced digital modelling tools and the ability to work with 3D printers, allowing rapid trialling of development concepts.

Tom Kindred, of the Basildon engineering and product development team, explains that the department works particularly closely with CNH's global development teams in Chicago, USA, and Modena, Italy, to benefit from the company's worldwide expertise and ensure that the needs of different markets are met.

"While many things have changed here technologically, we still maintain important facilities established in 1964, including our test track, which



Transaxles from CNH's Antwerp factory provide the starting point of each tractor, mated to engines from Italy and cabs from France

retains an important role in testing and development to ensure quality and reliability of production machines ahead of launch. Wireless technology has replaced the traditional test truck full of data loggers attached via umbilical wiring to the tractor running alongside, and we can share data instantly with any of our global facilities. "Rolling road facilities also allow us to subject test tractors to stresses that can replicate in a few hundred hours an entire machine lifetime's workload to ensure components and assembly processes are sufficiently strong. But field testing is also important, and we have a farm in Suffolk where this takes place, plus ... we work with farmers around the UK and the world to test developments for us.

"Having the product development team based here at the factory means we work closely with other company functions, in addition to design and manufacturing. Working with product

marketing, we can respond to customer feedback. While coordinating with our service teams, we can identify and rectify issues on the production line, and, collaborating with our on-site training centre, we can assist in getting service engineers quickly up to speed on new developments."

Automation developments

Beyond alternative power, automation is one of the key current topics in tractor development, and Sean Lennon, New Holland vice-president for Europe, believes there is a clear path for its development that will not necessarily see drivers disappear from arable farms.

"For the family farms operating one or two tractors, automation doesn't necessarily present any advantages," he acknowledged.

"But on larger arable farms struggling to find good labour, automation is driven by the lack of good labour, and by requirements for less-skilled operators to be able to do a better job at high workrates, and for existing skilled operators to get the maximum from their machines. This is where we see the drivers of automation.

"I think it's first likely to be seen more commonly in 'fixed' crops, such as vineyards and orchards, which are already based on repeatability and so are simpler to adapt to automation."



Sean Lennon, New Holland's vice president for Europe, believes there is a clear path for its automation development that will not necessarily see drivers disappear from arable farms



BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

Little change in dealership recruitment

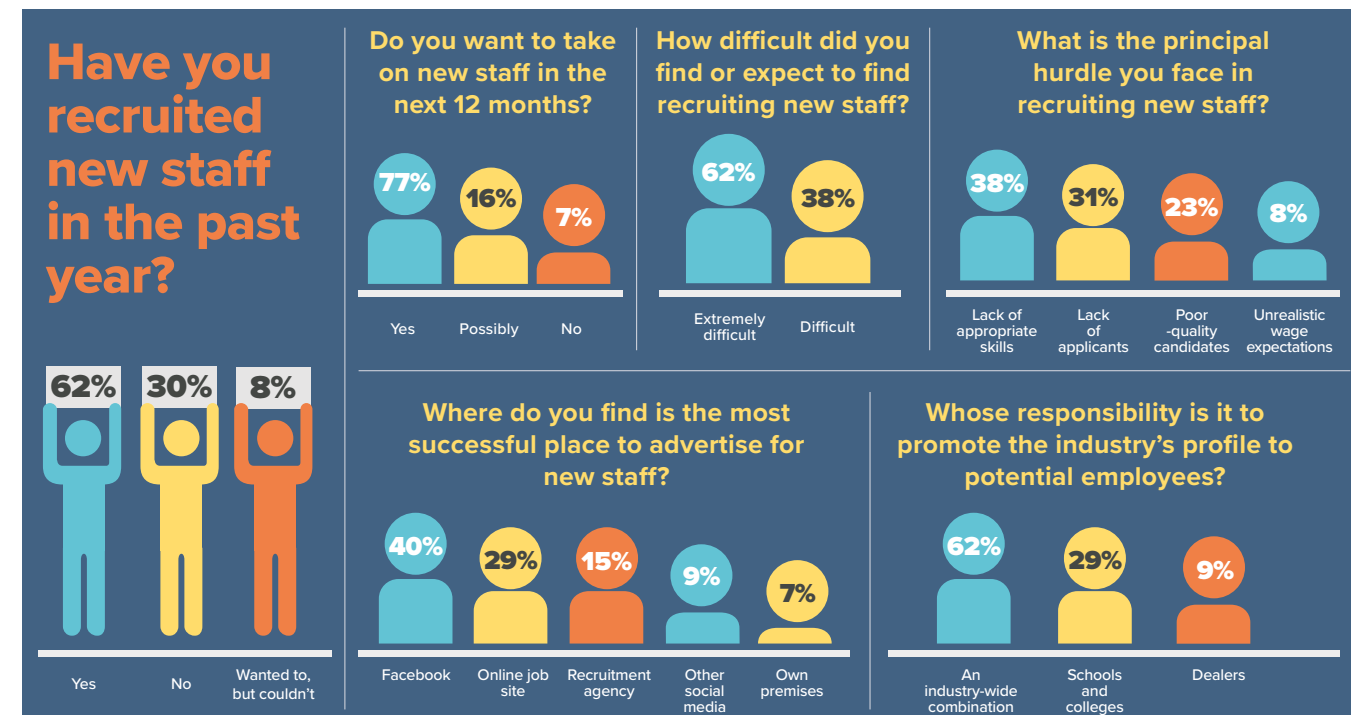
Dealers tell us of hardship in both finding and retaining staff

The message that came across loud and clear from the dealers who responded to our recent survey on how they are finding recruitment into the business this year, is that little has seemingly changed. This is despite the fact campaigns are now running specifically designed to raise the profile and attractiveness of our sector.

Like when we asked last year, 62% who responded had taken on new staff in the past 12 months – but a large proportion (77%) still wanted to find more in the coming year. Everyone who responded said they found, or would expect to find, the process of recruiting either ‘extremely difficult’ (62%) or ‘difficult’ (38%) – no answers implying the process was in any way easy were given by anyone who responded.

As to why there’s difficulties, once again: a lack of appropriate skills from candidates was the most given answer (38%) – but interestingly, unlike last year – when competition from other dealers was mentioned frequently – a simple lack of applicants in general was highly-placed. Which, if you read the news, appears to be a problem across many sectors, and not just the dealer trade.

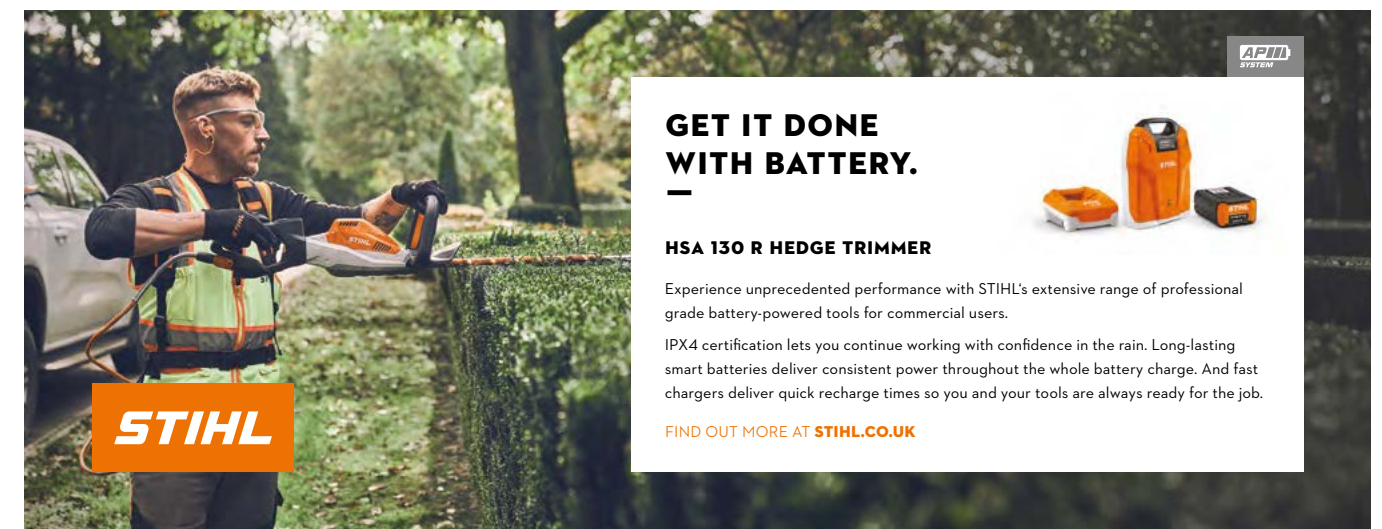
Also, just like last year, Facebook was cited by most dealers who answered the survey as the most effective place to advertise for new staff, with online recruitment agencies coming in second. And, again, it was felt that responsibility for selling the benefits of the industry was the responsibility of a combination of groups (manufacturers, trade associations, dealers, press, etc.).



Your say...

We asked for your thoughts on the current recruitment situation in the industry – and what could be done to help dealers find the right staff?

- Terrible! Now offering basic mechanics £45,000 per year and 31 days' paid holiday - and getting few applicants. Senior mechanics can command £60,000-plus. It's not too bad working on customers' high-value equipment (£100k-plus) but, with the charge-out rate required, you can't work on small, low-value stuff. I have been told by one applicant they just go to the highest bidder – and, needless to say, they didn't get a job! The problem partly stems from governments encouraging young people to go to university, where sometimes getting a degree only qualifies them to stack shelves in a supermarket. Probably the main reason, though, is a change in society, and the availability of jobs in IT. Working flexibly, in a clean, air-conditioned environment, may be more attractive than lying under a dirty machine plastered with muck and grease! I can see that, in the future mechanics (if there are any) will be the best paid workers in the country.
- We have been looking for a parts advisor for six months now. We have had a reasonable number of applicants, but none of them with any agricultural parts sales experience. You can go down the recruitment agency route, but they are expensive.
- It's still pretty hard to find quality, and also extremely hard to get people to work weekends. Basic pay is now so high that, financially, they don't need to do it.
- We have taken on middle-aged and younger candidates. They have stayed for a few weeks, then decided it is not for them due to the hours and the thought of working on Saturday mornings - even one in three shared with others. A recent recruit came from an ag dealership that had closed down. He had been with them many years, which was ideal - but, after 10 days, he decided he wanted a change of direction.
- There is still a lack of people knowing about our industry. More recruitment needs to come from schools and colleges. Lack of people coming into the industry – therefore, recruitment is hard. Seems as though people don't want to get their hands dirty (mechanics). Also, their wage expectations.
- To find people, dealers must invest in people, and create a flexible and encouraging working environment. They must also attract new entrants from other industries.



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Three tools for the efficient service technician



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

THIS ISSUE: HOW TO MAKE THE LIFE OF YOUR WORKSHOP STAFF EASIER

When visiting dealerships, owners and managers often ask me: “What can we provide the techs to help make them more efficient?” While there are plenty of things that we can provide techs, there are three key items that can prove very beneficial to the overall efficiency of your technicians.

The first one is a wash bay

A wash bay can be a costly investment. However, if done correctly, it will help your techs be more efficient, and can give your customers a truly ‘wow’ experience. Wash bays not only give us the ability to return a customer’s equipment to them clean – they also allow you to clean equipment before it comes into the shop.

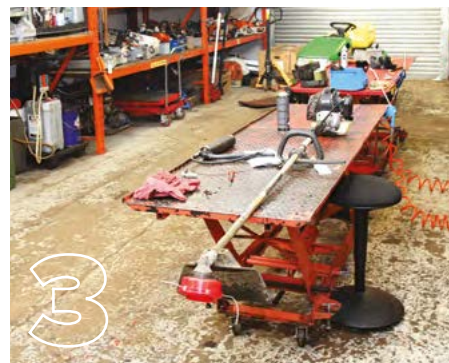
Clean equipment gives your techs clean parts to work on, and also helps them with deeper diagnosis when a unit is on their bench. Plus, it will help to keep a tech’s bay clear of mud, grass and debris, and shorten cleanup time of their area at the end of the day.



And, last but not least, is the shop toolbox or shop tool room

We all know that each manufacturer has their own set of specialty tools that are specific to each model. I know these can be expensive (and I will agree: not all of the tools are necessary), but most of them will help your techs turn work through your shop in a much timelier manner.

With specialty tools, I strongly encourage you to have a check-in and check-out list, as these tools are not cheap and can be misplaced very easily. Along with specialty tools, you should also have a few cordless impact guns available. These can be checked out just like the other tool by the techs when they might need to work on a piece of equipment away from the dealership, or out in the lot.



The second resource is a quality equipment lift

Lifts are an invaluable resource to have in a shop. Lifts help our techs have better vantage points and angles when working on equipment. When techs do not have to crawl around on the ground, or haul jacks and jack stands around, they will be less tired and fatigued. This, combined with better vantage points, will help your dealership produce more efficient and billable hours each day. Quality equipment lifts can provide a fast return on your investment.

Succession has always played a key role in our future longevity



Joanne Balmer, of Balmers GM, explains how planning and preparation has helped the dealership cope through recent times – and stresses the importance of a good home-work life balance.

So far, this year certainly hasn’t been without its challenges. The weather, the late start to the season – and, as some of you may already know, late Spring saw the passing of our founder and chief, David Balmer, following a brave and courageous battle with cancer.

With his illness being relatively long-term, as a family and business we have been fortunate (with David’s guidance) to have the time to plan and prepare for these times that we now find ourselves in.

Like many other businesses within the industry, Balmers GM are family-owned, and therefore succession has always played a key role in our future longevity, growth and success. Together, with our brilliant management team, we will continue with our short and long-term plans, just the way Dad would have wanted – although I do have to say that he could have picked a better time of the year to depart!

On a lighter and brighter note, these past few weeks have seen a change in the weather for the better, and domestic sales continue to follow an upward trajectory, with both robotics and ride-on mowers selling in equal measures. Unfortunately, we have faced a handful of manufacturer supply issues with both petrol and battery walk-behind lawnmowers – which is a little frustrating, considering we placed our pre-season orders back in the Autumn of 2023.

Thankfully, commercial sales have started to gain momentum, with new machinery deals and tenders finally coming to fruition. On the used commercial sales side of the business, machines have been heading out the door to their new homes, which is always great to see.

With the wet weather delaying the start of the season, when it was finally time (and dry enough) for people to get out mowing, our service teams have once again been ‘mowed out’ with breakdown repairs. We have approximately 20 technicians on the road and across our two depots, so, with the influx of additional work, waiting times have naturally surged – but, on the whole, we seem to be coping OK. That being said, we always need more skilled technicians. It’s a never-ending issue which I’m sure isn’t exclusive to ourselves?

As promised, when I penned my first *Diary of a Season* entry, I discussed the topic of the importance of a good home-work life balance for all our employees, which, as a management team, is something that we are continuously

looking at ways to develop and improve.

So, at the start of the year, we sent questionnaires to all staff across all departments to gather their feedback and thoughts on whether we should trial a four-day workweek – which would be the same total number of working hours, but over four longer days.

As our workforce consists of a really good mix of both youth and experience, it wasn’t a shock to receive a very mixed bag of responses, but overall, the consensus was to give it a try - so that’s exactly what we did throughout the month of February.

On conclusion of the trial, the majority decided, after all, that it wasn’t a good fit for their home-work life balance. However, some form of flexible working was preferential, and would be welcomed by most. At least we now have a better idea of what our workforce would like, and the direction that we plan to move forward with – so watch this space!

Finally, I’d like to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you from us all at Balmers GM for the lovely messages, memories and condolences received since David’s passing.

David will be forever remembered by many as simply a good man, both in business and in life.



David Balmer



SME DIGEST

Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

Edited by Adam Bernstein



STAFFING

The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023

The Equality Act (Amendment) Regulations 2023 modified the Equality Act 2010, and came into force on January 1, 2024. In practical terms, these regulations protect against discrimination which would otherwise have ceased to apply following Brexit.

They strengthen protection in relation to discrimination in a number of ways. In particular, the legal definition of disability has been extended. Similarly, indirect discrimination by association has been extended to cover individuals who do not have the relevant protected characteristic, but who suffer similar disadvantages to those who do hold the protected characteristic if the disadvantage is due to an employer's policy, provision, or criterion.

A 'single source' test for equal pay comparators has been adopted into UK law, which means that workers do not have to have the same employer, or even an associated employer, to be able to make an equal pay comparison. Also, protection against direct discrimination has been extended. Less favourable treatment on the ground of breastfeeding is now

Employment law changes in 2024

Employment law is in a constant state of flux, as it reflects the demands of the modern workplace. As a result, it shouldn't be a surprise that a number of important changes have been made that will alter the legal landscape in 2024, writes *Sophie Wahba*, associate at *Wright Hassall*.

classified as direct sex discrimination, and, at the same time, more favourable treatment on the grounds of maternity is permitted. And additional protection has been given to employees after they return from maternity leave in relation to certain types of unfavourable treatment.

Holiday pay and entitlement reforms

Introduced on January 1, 2024, changes to the Working Time Regulations simplified holiday entitlement and holiday pay calculations for irregular hours workers and part-year workers. These rules apply to relevant workers from their first holiday year, starting on or after April 1, 2024.

Fire and rehire: Statutory Code

The government announced in February 2024 a new Code of Practice designed to regulate the 'firing and rehiring' of staff. The code covers the steps employers need to take when consulting with employees over proposed changes to their employment contracts, or as part of a redundancy exercise. Failure to follow the code correctly could result in a 25% uplift to a tribunal award.

Paternity leave

The Paternity Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2024 came into force on March 8. It allows fathers and partners, where the expected week of childbirth or placement of adoption is after April 6, 2024, to take their leave in two non-consecutive blocks of a week each – rather than two consecutive weeks (or one week only), as was the case before. This leave can be taken at any point in the 52 weeks after birth, rather than the first eight weeks after adoption or birth. Also, the notice period for alerting employers of their intention to take leave has been reduced from 15 weeks before the child's due date to four weeks (other than domestic adoption, which remains as within seven days of being matched with a child).

Unpaid carer's leave

From April 6, 2024, employees who are carers for dependants with (defined) long-term care needs became entitled to take one week's unpaid leave per year. This is available to all employees from the first day of their employment. The leave can be taken as a block, or as individual days within a 12-month period.

There are minimum notice periods to be adhered to, and although employers

cannot decline a request for leave, they can postpone it within certain parameters. Employers are strongly encouraged to update their absence and leave policies to reflect this change as a matter of priority.

Flexible working: day-one right

The Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023, from April 6, 2024, removed the 26-week qualifying period to make a flexible working request. In other words, employees have the right to make a flexible working request from the first day of their employment, rather than having to wait for 26 weeks. In addition to this day-one right, employees can make two flexible working requests in any 12-month period, and they no longer have to make a business case for their request.

Employers, in turn, must respond to an employee's request within two months (rather than the previous three), and must consult with an employee before rejecting a request.

Protection against redundancy extended

Under the law, employees who were on maternity leave, shared parental leave or adoption leave have for some time been offered special protection against redundancy. The Protection from Redundancy (Pregnancy and Family Leave) Act 2023 extended this protection from April 6 to cover pregnant employees and employees who have recently returned from maternity, adoption or shared parental leave.

Pregnant employees will be protected from redundancy from the time they inform their employer of their pregnancy until 18 months after childbirth. Those on adoption leave and shared parental leave are also protected for 18 months from the date of their child's placement or birth.

TUPE consultation changes

Legislation that protects employees and their benefits when their employment changes hands is to be altered from July 1, 2024. From that

date, the Employment Rights (Amendment, Revocation and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2023 will change TUPE-related consultation requirements for smaller businesses. Businesses with fewer than 50 employees will not have to elect employee representatives, and neither will those where fewer than 10 employees are to be transferred.

Predictable working patterns

The Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Act 2023, expected to come into force in September 2024, introduces a new statutory right for employees and workers to request a more predictable working pattern subject to eligibility criteria. Workers with variable hours, those on fixed-term contracts of less than 12 months, and agency workers are likely to benefit from this new right. There are rules around the number of applications that can be made a year (two), and the way in which employers deal with requests. There are currently six grounds listed on which to refuse a request such as planned structural changes, and the burden of additional costs.

Protection from harassment

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) 2023 is due to come into force in October 2024. This will place a positive duty on employers to take reasonable steps to protect their employees against sexual harassment. The purpose of this is to make workplaces a safer environment for all workers.

If employers are found to have breached this new duty, employment tribunals will have the power to increase compensation by up to 25%.

In summary

These changes are important for employers - and employees - to get to grips with. A breach of any one of them could see an employer facing a claim in the employment tribunal. Revisiting procedures and policies is essential.

TAXATION



Greenwashing – businesses urged to clean up their act

The authorities are taking more of an interest in the 'green' claims that businesses are making about their products and services, writes *SME Digest* editor, ADAM BERNSTEIN.

Greenwashing, the practice of making exaggerated claims about a business' environmental credentials and the sustainability of its products, services, and environmental impact, can expose a firm to breaches of consumer protection legislation.

Understand the rules

To help businesses and duty holders understand how existing consumer protection law will be enforced in this area, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published guidance in 2021 for businesses, in the form of the Green Claims Code, which centres on six principles. They are that:

- ✓ **Green claims made must be truthful and accurate**
- ✓ **Claims should be clear and unambiguous**
- ✓ **Claims should not omit or hide important information**
- ✓ **Comparative claims made should be fair and meaningful**

- ✓ **Claims made should consider the full life cycle of what is being discussed**
- ✓ **Claims must be substantiated**

Aside from consumer protection from greenwashing in relation to goods, the topic is also a priority for the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) – especially where sustainable investment is involved – and the Advertising Standards Authority, too.

The ‘green net’ has widened

But as well as the shift in regulatory focus, Stuart Ponting, a regulatory compliance partner at Walker Morris, says: “Pressure is mounting on businesses in all sectors to clean up their act by virtue of the trend towards ‘green litigation’ – that is, complaints and claims brought for a range of environmental or climate-related reasons.”

In his view, for a whole host of reasons, businesses should “take action to ensure that green claims made in any and all sales, marketing, promotional, precontractual and contractual materials, and communications are accurate and can be substantiated.”

He points to the CMA’s Green Claims Code and the FCA’s guiding principles on design, delivery and disclosure of ESG and sustainable investment funds that was published in July 2021, which he recommends businesses read and understand. Further, at the end of October 2022, the FCA proposed new rules to tackle greenwashing in relation to the provision of financial services in a document CP22/20.

Minimise the potential for challenge

Overall, there are some practical pointers that Ponting thinks should help businesses minimise the risk of inadvertent greenwashing or committing consumer protection breaches generally.

He says: “First, firms should take care that all information, online and in all other forms, that is gathered and presented to consumers - potential and actual - is accurate, fair, not deceptive

or misleading, and does not leave out material facts.” This, for him, means “introducing and implementing specific safeguarding procedures” as to the currency, accuracy, and security of all such information. Before publication, he highly recommends stepping back, evaluating, looking at the evidence, and being satisfied that any claims can be backed up.

Next, he explains that firms should note that broad-brush green claims are more likely to be misleading, inaccurate, or unsubstantiated than narrow, product- or service-specific assertions. Businesses, Ponting says, ought to “create a culture that focuses on sales integrity and clearly demonstrable claims.”

In addition to this, Ponting emphasises that it’s important to tell only the truth. By extension, he says that “organisations should ensure that green claims do not contain partially correct or incorrect aspects, and ensure that any applicable conditions or caveats are clearly and prominently explained.”

Similarly, claims should accurately represent the entire life cycle of a product or service. For Ponting, this is likely to involve businesses “proactively and regularly undertaking appropriate enquiries of other parties throughout the supply chain, as well as keeping their own house in order.” This also means considering whether systems and processes are adequate to manage this monitoring requirement.

And it should not be forgotten that features or benefits that are necessary standards or legal requirements of a given product or service type should not be claimed as environmental benefits, either.

But it’s not all about the written word. As Ponting points out, “green claims can also be made via visual graphics. In fact, FCA findings suggest that logos, medals, or other visual ‘rating’ assertions carry significant weight with consumers, and can, therefore, carry a particularly significant risk of greenwashing where apparent quality and credibility cannot be substantiated.” As a result, he says that businesses should ensure that both written green claims and any visual graphics or

symbols used “are critically assessed from the perspective of what a consumer will take them to mean - businesses need to consider the whole picture.”

Of course, information is everything. And this is why Ponting’s next tip for compliance is for organisations to “signpost consumers to any additional information which might affect their decision to purchase.” By way of example, Ponting says: “Where green claims are made, say, on packaging or within media with limited space, additional, comprehensive information via website links or QR codes should be included.”

Another solution toward compliance is to train to all staff involved, directly or indirectly, with the sales and marketing - including production of hard and soft copy materials - of the business’ services, products or brand. It follows that records and evidence of training should be retained. At the same time, Ponting recommends introducing and implementing policies and procedures regarding the review, maintenance, correction and updating of marketing material and other consumer-facing information. Here, too, an audit trail of all these efforts should be maintained.

Ponting’s final recommendation is that if or when any greenwashing complaint or allegation is made, immediate specialist legal advice should be sought. He says: “Depending on the circumstances, there are usually a number of dispute resolution tools that can be deployed in defence or settlement of any complaint.”

In summary

It is patently clear that consumers and businesses are taking more time to choose and buy products and services that are causing less harm – or even promoting positive benefits – to the environment. However, when false claims are made, consumer protection law gives consumers protection while at the same time protecting businesses from unfair competition. From the CMA’s recent activity, it seems it won’t hesitate to act if there are concerns that consumer protection is being threatened.



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Hand propelled	Hand propelled	Self propelled	Self propelled	Self propelled	Self propelled	Self propelled
40 cm (16") cut width	46 cm (18") cut width	46 cm (18") cut width	51 cm (20") cut width	51 cm (20") cut width	56 cm (22") cut width	53 cm (21") cut width
25 - 75 mm cut height	25 - 75 mm cut height	6 stage cut height	25 - 75 mm cut height	25 - 75 mm cut height	25 - 70 mm cut height	20 - 80 mm cut height
123cc engine	139cc engine	139cc engine	196cc engine	196cc Easy Start engine	196cc engine	196cc engine
45 ltr grass bag	60 ltr grass bag	60 ltr grass bag	70 ltr grass bag	70 ltr grass bag	75 ltr grass bag	75 ltr grass bag
Steel deck	Steel deck	Steel deck	Steel deck	Steel deck	Steel deck	Steel deck



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Products

COMMERCIAL

Pro X mower to 'address the needs of dealers'

EGO say new model eliminates range anxiety

EGO Power Plus has expanded its pedestrian mower offer with a machine which, they say, is designed specifically to address the needs of dealers and their professional customers – the LMX5300E-SP.

The manufacturer says the backbone of the self-propelled mower is its 53cm cast aluminium deck, which offers a robust option for commercial users in a space where many have been catering for domestic and light commercial markets.

It features EGO's Peak Power

technology, which means the mower can draw on energy from two 56V ARC Lithium batteries at once, while the 1600W motor has ample torque, providing power for tough cutting conditions.

In a statement, EGO acknowledged that concerns are still raised by some dealers unconvinced of the transition from petrol to battery. They said: "Now, with the Pro X series and PGX Power Bank, for on-site rapid charging, we have resolved the issues that lead to many having 'range anxiety.' Featuring



a large-format 40Ah battery, our DC-to-DC charging unit facilitates mobile charging throughout the day – alleviating any potential issues on runtime or losing power during a job."

Getting set up for the day is now also easier, they say, with their commercial charging system, the PGX 1600W HUB. As it is a modular system, EGO say contractors could start with the three-port battery charging dock and add more docking stations – all of which fit into a van – as their business grows.

DOMESTIC

AS System expanded

STIHL launch more tools

STIHL has expanded its AS System range with the introduction of the HSA 30 and HSA 40 hedge trimmers, along with the FSA 30 grass trimmer.

The company says HSA 30 and HSA 40 hedge trimmers are designed to make light work of fresh growth on small hedges. Both models feature diamond-ground and hardened blades, ensuring a clean cut and long-lasting sharpness. Weighing in as the lightest hedge trimmer in the company's range, the HSA 30 is described as suitable for

all home gardeners. Additionally, say STIHL, these trimmers operate almost silently. With working times of 50 and 40 minutes respectively, the units also come with a lifetime supply of gearbox grease included.

For more demanding tasks, the manufacturer says the HSA 40 boasts 25% better cutting performance than the HSA 30. The HSA 40 features a 5cm longer cutting bar, 2mm larger tooth spacing, and comes with an extra AS 2 battery for extended working times.



In addition to hedge trimmers, the FSA 30 is the first grass trimmer to feature in the AS System range. Designed for small gardens, this trimmer offers balance and control with its lightweight design and adjustable loop handle. Its extendable shaft and adjustable trimming head ensure customisation for users of different heights, providing a neat and even cut for lawn edges.

With a working time of up to 19 minutes on a single charge, the FSA 30 is equipped with PolyCut blades.

COMMERCIAL



Cutting at height offered by Milwaukee

New brushless telescopic shears

Milwaukee Tool has launched the M18 Brushless Telescopic Shears, which, they say, provide fast, clean pruning, eliminating the need for manual pulling.

When compared to the manual application, the company say the shears reduce peak muscle activation completing challenging applications faster than manual solutions.

Optimised for extended reach bypass pruning, the shears provide the power to cut up to 44mm branches. The shears feature an ergonomic

adjustment collar, allowing for length adjustments from 2.1m collapsed to 3m fully extended.

The attachment-free extended reach of up to 3m enhances the ability to complete long-reach applications. When paired with M18 Redlithium high-output 5.5 Ah battery pack, the telescopic shears can complete up to 2,000 cuts in 2.5cm softwood per charge in 44mm branches.

The new unit is fully compatible with the entire M18 line, now offering more than 290 power tool solutions.

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UTILITY VEHICLES



Yamaha announce result of collaboration

Homologated UMQ Commercial Lightweight Vehicle

Yamaha Motor Europe, in collaboration with Quaddy SRL, has announced the launch of a new vehicle to its lineup, the UMQ.

The company says the new model, based on the UMX, has been adapted and approved for use on public roads. This addition to the portfolio aims to serve a wider audience more effectively, allowing for more use of electrified vehicles in the utility space.

The UMQ comes in two model variants – the UMQ-L (quadricycle) and UMQ-T (tractor) – each tailored to meet specific regulatory and application needs. The UMQ is capable of 31km/h from its 5.0 kW electric motor whilst still offering a quiet and environmentally-friendly option for users. Other features include an aluminium tipping cargo bed with one-touch tailgate, two separate seats with a central console, a 29-litre front storage box, 22” tyres with offroad thread profile, and a skid plate for non-extreme off-road situations.

While the UMQ is not a Yamaha-branded product, Yamaha and Quaddy, building on a 10-year partnership, have developed this solution together, which has transformed the existing UMX AC model into a road-legal vehicle – making it suitable for a vast range of tasks and situations.

In a statement, Quaddy SRL said: “In a sector that is increasingly focusing on ecological concerns, the introduction of an electric product, approved for both agricultural and leisure use, is set to play a pivotal role in Yamaha’s vehicle lineup. Our longstanding relationship with Yamaha, specifically in the homologation of their ATV and SSV ranges, has been a successful collaboration. The UMX project represents a significant milestone, enabling Quaddy to broaden our proficiency within the realm of electric vehicles.”

COMMERCIAL



Aeration for turf professionals

GKB Machines launch new Combislit

Recognising that aeration is at the forefront of every turf professional’s maintenance plans, GKB Machines have announced the launch of the Combislit.

Available in 1.6m and 2.0m working widths, the Combislit uses GKB’s Evolvente blades to spike and open all types of natural and hybrid surface to depths of up to 15cm.

The company says the unit allows for aeration of the top layer with minimal friction and disruption, ensuring optimal oxygen and moisture movement and linking up with deeper decompaction work conducted throughout the season.

The successor to the GKB Topair, the Combislit combines solid and robust design with simplicity of operation, making it suitable for regular passes on all type of sports and fine turf surfaces, including fairways and greens.

The Evolvente blades are designed to pierce the ground without disturbing or prying the topsoil. The result, say GKB, is a level surface, boosted with the benefits of regular aeration.

The Combislit’s frame ensures sufficient weight to penetrate compacted upper layers, with the option to add additional weight to the top of the unit if required. A rear-mounted pressure roller can also be specified to deliver extra precision to the end result. In addition, the blades can be swapped for cutting discs for linear aeration and non-chemical weed control.

COMMERCIAL

Pressurised, powerful performance

Makita’s new washer suitable for trades professionals

Makita UK has added the new cordless HW001G XGT High Pressure Washer, to its 40VMax XGT range.

A solution for trade professionals working with no access to mains power, the company say it provides mobility combined with a reliable and regular flow rate and pressure, facilitated by three different operation modes.

Alongside a maximum permissible pressure of 11.5 MPa, three operational modes allow users to control the pressure depending on the difficulty of the cleaning task at hand.

The company says the advantage of the battery operation means that, when fully charged, the washer can be used for either 60 minutes in the basic Mode 1, 30 minutes in Mode 2, and 18 minutes in Mode 3 – the hardest setting. The washer can perform with just one battery or with two in parallel.

The unit is self-priming, and water can be supplied from a tap, bucket or tank. A handy trigger lock function also keeps the water running without needing to be constantly squeezed.

The washer weighs 8.5kg, and a telescopic handle allows the height to be adjusted to 520mm, making it simple to



store. With 140mm wheels, it is also described as easy to transport and manoeuvre, even on difficult terrain. In addition, rubber stoppers secure the washer in place on small slopes.

Finally, the washer is available with a wide range of accessories, including a cyclone jet nozzle, two XGT 5.0Mpa batteries, a battery charger, connector set, trigger gun, strainer, extension set and high-pressure hose, allowing the user to reach and clean a variety of surfaces.

Makita also supplies optional, additional accessories for the machine, such as a variospray nozzle set, a foam nozzle set, a variospray lance set and a variospray lance extension set.

AGRICULTURAL

Pumpkin drill added to range

Expands Kuhn’s precision planters



A two-row KOSMA M pumpkin drill has been added to Kuhn Farm Machinery’s range of precision planters, offering patch growers an accurate option for pumpkin establishment.

The manufacturer says the bespoke drill has been specially designed to cater for the growing number of pumpkin patch diversifications across the country. It features two KOSMA row units spaced at 100cm and new seed discs, with four holes at 4.5mm diameter to guarantee 100cm between each seed, offering 10,000 seeds/ha.

A vacuum fan forces the seed onto the disc for accurate placement, and the proven row units feature a 50mm VE rear rubber roller, wide gauge wheels and mechanical drive wheels.

Edd Fanshawe, Kuhn’s arable and connected services product specialist, says: “The KOSMA M 2.5m will suit pumpkin growers across the country looking for a drill capable of accurately establishing crops for years to come. We have used well-known components from our existing machines to offer buyers a precise drill with proven reliability.”

COMMERCIAL



Upgrades made to hybrid

Toro says changes to Reelmaster 5010-H based on customer feedback

Toro's Reelmaster 5010-H, described by the company as the only fairway mower with a true hybrid drive, has been given a comprehensive upgrade.

The manufacturer says it is always listening to its customers, and has made a few improvements to this mower based on R&D and customer feedback.

In brief, more electronic components have been added. Noting that the hydrostatic drive is now electronically-controlled, Toro say they have added their SmartPower system to automatically control mowing speed and optimise cutting performance.

In essence, what this technology does is monitor the engine's RPM. Previously, the operator was responsible for controlling the machine's speed when mowing long

or wet grass or climbing a steep hill. Now, the machine does it automatically. As the RPM drops, traction speed decreases until it recovers back to the desired speed, and, by maintaining optimal cylinder and blade speed, a better and more consistent cut is produced, say Toro. The same technology also means that, as speed decreases, the traction pedal still moves an entire stroke, giving increased resolution for tight turning in tight quarters. Customers mowing training grounds, or a relatively flat golf course, can slow down the engine speed to peak torque curve, rather than the peak of the horsepower curve.

It means the same results can be achieved with the engine running at 2,600rpm on flat ground compared to 3000rpm, saving on fuel

consumption and lowering the noise level output.

With SmartPower also comes cruise control, and this, says Toro, allows for a more consistent clip rate. Rather than relying on the operator's foot to maintain a consistent speed, the machine does this automatically, as well as allowing maximum speed settings to be set.

Jon Cole, divisional business manager for Toro's UK distributor Reesink Turfcare, said: "These changes mean customers can focus on cutting, on achieving that fine mowing detail, following the clean-up edge of the fairway, for example, rather than focusing on the speed at which they're mowing. This is where everyone, including members, will see the difference – there's more precision for better presentation."

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Where does it all come from?



THE SPROCKET, our anonymous columnist, looks at the issues dealers face with stocking and supply chains.

At last, as of the time of writing, we have had a few days of sunshine and have been able to get out into the garden – which, I hope, has boosted dealer sales after a slow start to the season.

In a seasonal business, with the weather playing such an important role regarding sales, it can be very hard to get it right in terms of ordering and manufacturing - especially in this age of just-in-time supply. Sales may well catch up as the weather improves, but the effect on farmers looks like it may be a lot more long-term, as crops are not being planted, or are rotting in the fields.

Food supply could be another major issue for suppliers and consumers, and will affect agricultural machinery sales, which may have an adverse effect on the dealer network as a whole.

We have experienced several years now of supply chain disruption, with Brexit, the pandemic, inflation, container shortages – and one container ship getting stuck in the Suez Canal holding up billions of pounds worth of deliveries. It does show how fragile the supply chain really is, and how it lacks global resistance. Even last year, dealers were receiving pre-season orders as late as September, and being asked to place their 2024 orders sometimes before the previous year's one was delivered.

Stocking conundrums

Pre-season or winter stocking has been around in our industry forever.

The principles essentially remain the same. If you want to sell a recognised brand, you must commit to their pre-season programme, delivery schedule, and a payment schedule. If it doesn't go to plan, the dealer could be stuck with stock they have to pay for, or could end up with nothing because of supply issues. No sales equals no profit, which means no business. Hard to overcome, but dealers seem to manage it, somehow.

It used to be the case that manufacturers made product out of season, ready for delivery at the beginning of the appropriate season. Nowadays, it seems that, generally, it is a just-in-time policy, or a build-to-order to reduce supply chain costs. Inevitably, these savings become a cost for the dealer, who also has a reduced amount of flexibility in how they can order and are at the mercy of the supplier's policies.

Interestingly, during the pandemic, the serious supply issues saw waiting times for cars stretched to many months (if not a year), and caused the price of second-hand cars to rocket, leaving car dealers with little or nothing to sell. I am sure that many dealers and suppliers in our industry had a chance to clear out most of the stock that had been hanging around for a while.

Swings and roundabouts, I guess.

Dealers are the customer-facing end of the supply chain, relying on their suppliers to get it right. But it is not plain sailing for suppliers, either, as their route to market is hugely complicated (although in many cases a well-oiled system).

The problems faced by manufacturers in the second year of the pandemic were exasperated by a bucketful of other issues that resulted in material shortages, increased freight costs, port congestion, container shortages, changing consumer attitudes, factory shutdowns and inflation, to highlight a few issues.

It doesn't matter how simple or complex a product is – if one part is missing, it cannot be shipped, and manufacturers pull in components from all over the world. I was shocked to learn that combine harvesters were being held up because the wiring looms were made in Ukraine, and the war there had affected the factory. One manufacturer was hedging against the lack of new combines by holding onto second-hand units for their customers, so they could go ahead with the harvest. This proved a huge cost to the manufacturer, which would probably have spread over several years – but it was a solution, nevertheless.

It remains to be seen if 2024 will see the same problems as 2023, and if the supply chain will generally return to its previous *modus operandi*. Much would have been learnt over the last few years, and changes will have been made. But when the supply chain is affected by complex global issues, it may be some time before normality returns - if at all.

How best to cope?

It is probably not rocket science from a dealer's point of view, so forgive the obvious nature of these comments – but diversification within dealerships needs to be addressed. Where possible, reliance on one manufacturer or supplier should be reduced.

Make sure you have some alternative suppliers, and maybe look at handling some lesser-known brands. If you can, improve your

demand forecasting and learn more about what your regular customers are thinking about.

Keep some liquidity in your business, and make sure you have flexible access to capital. There are plenty of companies out there that can offer financial support away from the usual high street options. Stay flexible and resilient.

Make sure you have good contacts with your suppliers, and know who you have available to deal with. During the pandemic, it seemed that communication channels were badly affected because of furloughing and other issues that caused a lot of frustration for dealers. Keeping these channels up to date and open could help. You may need information, so don't go beating up the wrong person if you cannot get it. Get to the higher-ups – after all, they get paid to get the odd rollocking from a customer.

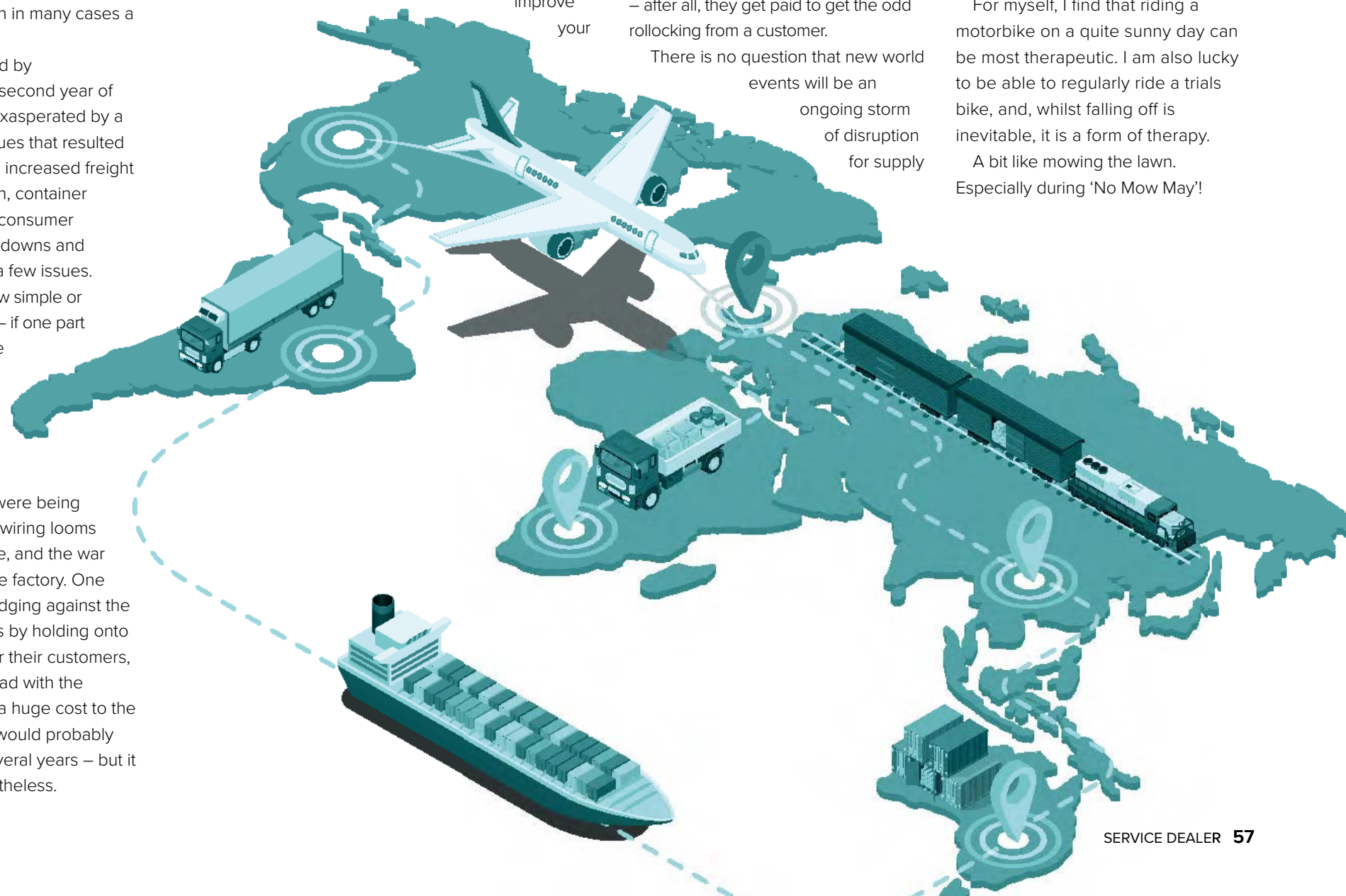
There is no question that new world events will be an ongoing storm of disruption for supply

chains. Manufacturers and suppliers will be working hard to overcome these issues. Let us hope that 2024 sees a return to some sort of normality. In a digital age, and with the increasing use of AI, it would be interesting to learn if suppliers can develop better ways of keeping dealers up to date with deliveries and availability, so that the just-in-time system can be better managed.

Anyway, enough of all that! I hope you bikers have been out and about with the better weather recently? I have had a few runs out, and have been to a couple of bike events. It never ceases to amaze me how many bikers turn up on a sunny evening just to gawp at other people's bikes, and to queue for ages for a beer or a burger. Better than an NEC bike show sometimes.

For myself, I find that riding a motorbike on a quite sunny day can be most therapeutic. I am also lucky to be able to regularly ride a trials bike, and, whilst falling off is inevitable, it is a form of therapy.

A bit like mowing the lawn. Especially during 'No Mow May'!



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.

JULY 2024

Hampton Court Palace Flower Show www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-flower-show	2-7	Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show www.valeofglamorganshow.co.uk	7
Kent County Show www.kentshowground.co.uk	5-7	Ripley Show www.ripleyshow.co.uk	11
Great Yorkshire Show www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk	9-12	Anglesea Agricultural County Show www.angleseyshow.org.uk	13-14
Norfolk Garden Show, Norfolk Showground www.norfolkgardenshow.co.uk	12-14	Mid-Somerset Show www.midsomersetshow.org.uk	18
Royal Isle of Wight County Show www.iwcountysshow.co.uk	13-14	Edenbridge & Oxted Show www.edenbridge-show.co.uk	25-26
Driffield Show www.driffieldshowground.co.uk	17		
RHS Flower Show - Tatton Park www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-flower-show-tatton-park	17-21	Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC www.autumnfair.com	1-4
Royal Welsh Show www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh	22-25	Moreton-In-Marsh Show www.moretonshow.co.uk	7
Launceston Agricultural Show www.launcestonshow.co.uk	25	Glee 2024 www.gleebirmingham.com	10-12
Border Union Show www.borderunion.co.uk/border-union-show	26-27	GroundsFest, Stoneleigh Park www.groundsfest.com	10-11
The Game Fair Ragley Hall, Warwickshire www.thegamefair.org	26-28	UK Dairy Day, The International Centre, Telford www.ukdairyday.co.uk	11
Mid Devon Show www.middevonshow.co.uk	27	Penistone Agricultural Show www.penistoneshow.com	14
New Forest & Hampshire County Show www.newforestshow.co.uk	30-1/08	Kington Show www.kingtonshow.co.uk	14

AUGUST 2024

Garstang Show www.garstangshow.org	3	Stanhope Show www.stanhopeshow.com	14-15
South Gloucestershire Show www.southglosshow.co.uk	3-4	Tillage Live, Headley Hall, Tadcaster www.tillage-live.com	18

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