

SERVICE DEALER

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July/August 2026

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Tallis Amos on supplier relationships and customer support

AI IN THE DEALERSHIP

What influence will it have?

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Letter from the editor
Steve Gibbs
steve@servicedealer.co.uk



Welcome to the July/August 2026 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine. An important question is posed this issue by our diarist of a season, Kelly Burgess, who asks are machinery dealers the industry's forgotten asset? It's a provocative, yet necessary point to raise. In a sector where the focus can often be on manufacturers, products, technology and market trends, it can perhaps be too easy to overlook the businesses that connect all those elements to the customer. Yet as *Service Dealer* will always champion, and as is clearly illustrated by the articles you'll find in this issue, dealers remain at the very heart of our industry.

Across these pages, we hear from businesses within different machinery disciplines that are finding new ways to grow, evolve and strengthen their operations in a rapidly changing marketplace. While their individual circumstances may differ, they all share something in common: a willingness to adapt.

At Henton & Chattell, growth has come through strategic expansion. The acquisition of the former Farmstar depot at Newark-on-Trent has strengthened its position across the East Midlands and created new opportunities to serve both agricultural and groundcare customers.

Meanwhile, Tallis Amos demonstrates how successful dealerships continue to build value through strong product partnerships and deep customer understanding.

We also feature Lister Wilder, whose significant investment in a new Salisbury depot reflects confidence in the future and a commitment to supporting customers with enhanced facilities, greater capacity and expanded product offerings.

Also in this issue, last year's Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year winner, Ron Smith & Co, shares how it continues to adapt its business model to meet changing customer expectations and seize new opportunities.

Taken together, these stories highlight qualities that have long defined the independent dealer network: resilience, innovation and an ability to embrace change.

Which brings us back to Kelly's question. If dealers are sometimes overlooked, the businesses featured in this issue provide a timely reminder of just how much value they bring. They are investors, employers, problem-solvers, trusted advisers and the face of the industry in their local communities.

Far from being a forgotten asset, they remain one of the industry's most important ones.

THE TEAM

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**INDUSTRY**

Kioti UK acquired by SMT GB

Company say move will localise dealer support



L-R: Ryan Hollebhone, director - compact equipment, SMT GB; Patrick Desmond, general manager, Kioti UK; Chris Clark, operations manager, Kioti UK

Management of the Kioti dealer network has transferred from Pols Group in the Netherlands to SMT GB in the UK, with the new owners promising improved operational efficiency and localised backing for the brand's 58 independent dealers.

SMT GB has completed the acquisition of Kioti UK, bringing the distribution and technical support for the compact tractor, utility vehicle (UTV), and zero-turn mower brand onto British soil after 25 years operating in the UK.

Previously a subsidiary of the Netherlands-based Pols Group, Kioti UK will now leverage SMT GB's domestic resources. The new owners say the move is designed to streamline the supply chain by handling machine preparation and administrative support from within the UK, rather than from overseas.

They also say that Kioti UK will further benefit from their logistical, financial, and technical strengths as part of the global

SMT Group, which employs more than 2,000 people in 30 countries.

Kioti customers will continue to receive equipment, parts, and technical support as usual through the established network of 58 independent dealers in the UK. However, they will start to see the SMT GB name on transactional documentation, such as invoices and warranty claims.

Ryan Hollebhone, director of compact equipment at SMT GB, said, "The same Kioti team will support their dealer network exactly as they always have, while gaining the additional resources and stability that come with being part of the wider SMT organisation. Ultimately, SMT is here to help all of our partners grow their businesses."

Patrick Desmond, general manager of Kioti UK, added, "As we celebrate 25 years of Kioti in the UK, it's the perfect time for our next chapter. Our customers will still deal with the same team they know and trust, but with the added weight of SMT's infrastructure behind us."

SERVICE DEALER CONFERENCE '26

Keynote speaker announced

Cally Beaton to speak on business and culture

Service Dealer has announced that our keynote speaker for 2026's Conference is Cally Beaton - a broadcaster, business leader, performer and best-selling author.

Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "I am delighted that we have secured Cally for the keynote session. Cally has to date had an amazing career in the media and entertainment business (both behind and in front of the camera). She is just perfect to talk to us about business and culture during her journey, and her latest career change will no doubt put a smile on peoples' faces."

Cally's senior management positions at some of the biggest media companies in the world have included being the youngest and only female member of the ITV board. She went on to do a ten-year stint as senior vice president at US studio giant Paramount, responsible for brands including MTV, Nickelodeon and Comedy Central.

She is the host of the hit *Namaste Motherf*ckers* podcast. Her book of the same name came out in the summer of 2025, immediately becoming an instant Sunday Times Top 10 Bestseller and the number #1 self-improvement title in the UK.

Cally is one of the UK's most sought-after names for corporate, broadcasting and live work. Her keynote will include a focus on organisational culture and the

willingness to embrace change, highlighting the importance of people as the foundation of business success and the creation of environments that enable commercial excellence.



Keynote speaker, Cally Beaton

& first Insight Session speaker confirmed



Frankie Allen MBE is the first Insight Session speaker confirmed

The first Insight Session has also been confirmed for the Conference that will see GB Paralympic Gold medallist, 4 x World Champion, 3 x European and 3 x World Cup winner, Frankie Allen MBE, address delegates.

Duncan added, "We are so honoured that Frankie will be joining us. Frankie will be talking about her journey and, tying in with our Conference theme this year, how important culture is with a Paralympic crew."

Frankie, who is currently ranked number three Paralympic rower in the world, is an ambassador for Behind Every Kick, a charity dedicated to helping underprivileged children through sport. She has recently been appointed onto the Women's Sport Trust where she will be raising awareness of women's sport and disability sport. She is also involved with the Reading Water Sports Centre where she coaches local disadvantaged young girls to experience rowing and the benefits of sports.

The 2026 *Service Dealer* Conference & Awards will take place on Thursday 3rd December at the Stratford-Upon-Avon Crowne Plaze - with this year's theme announced as *Culture - Nature and nurture in business*. You can head to our website now to register your interest in delegate tickets or sponsorship opportunities. Visit www.servicedealer.co.uk.

INDUSTRY

James Buchanan takes up new industry position

Regional account director for UK and Ireland at Aptean

Aptean, the vertical AI software for industries specialist, has appointed James Buchanan as regional account director for the UK and Ireland.

In his new role, the company says James will focus on driving growth across the agricultural, construction, and heavy machinery dealership sectors. With a strong emphasis on modern dealer management platforms such as Aptean Equipment Dealer Management System, combined with AI-driven services from Aptean's AppCentral, James will support dealerships in modernising operations, improving efficiency, and unlocking new digital capabilities.

Aptean says James' appointment reflects their continued focus on growth and long-term customer commitment across the UK and Irish markets, building on the foundation established through its integration with JMA A/S, which has maintained a strong presence in the region for several years.

James has brought more than 15 years of commercial leadership experience across the agricultural and construction industries. A significant part of his career was spent at Kramp UK, where he held senior sales leadership roles covering internal sales, account management, business solutions, and retail consultancy. During his time there, he developed customer-focused sales strategies, led operational improvements, and helped dealers drive growth and enhance customer experience.

He also held senior roles at Ibcos and Catalyst within the dealer management software sector, working closely with dealerships across the UK and Ireland. In these roles, he supported digital transformation programs, strategic growth initiatives, and the navigation of evolving operational challenges within the industry.

James Buchanan said, "Joining Aptean is an exciting opportunity and one I'm genuinely excited by. The business has a strong reputation within the industry, and I'm looking forward to working with dealerships across the UK and Ireland to help them get more value through technology, stronger processes, and long-term partnerships."

"The dealer landscape continues to evolve rapidly, and I believe Aptean is well positioned to support customers through that change, particularly through modern platforms such as Aptean Equipment DMS and the AI-driven capabilities of AppCentral, our vertical AI platform."

Hauke Lamb, European director at Aptean, added, "James brings extensive industry knowledge, proven commercial leadership, and a genuine understanding of how dealerships operate. His experience across agricultural, construction and heavy equipment sectors, combined with our established regional presence and long-term customer partnerships, means we are well placed to support dealers as they modernise and grow."



James Buchanan

DEALERS



Ant Deacon

New role for Ant Deacon at new depot

Tuckwells to open new facility this year

Well known industry figure, Ant Deacon, has recently left Timberwolf for a new opportunity with Tuckwells as outlet and aftersales manager of a brand new, purpose-built depot opening later this year in Baldock on the Bedfordshire/ Hertfordshire border.

Ant told *Service Dealer*, "I feel honoured to have been asked to join the Tuckwells Group. The opportunity to manage a brand-new depot of this scale in a territory I'm so familiar with has been one I could not miss."

He continued, "We have a great team at the existing Cromer depot and I'm really excited to lead us during this transition. There is a huge opportunity here for us to grow and I'm excited for the challenge."

Managing director, James Tuckwell, added, "We are delighted to welcome Ant into the Tuckwell's team and super excited to have him leading us into our new purpose built facility at Baldock."

"I have always been really impressed with Ant's passion and enthusiasm for our industry, for business and for life and we can't wait to see the positive impact this can bring to both our team and our customers."

DEALERS

Hamilton Ross Group complete acquisition

Of Ancroft Tractors Limited

Hamilton Ross Group has completed the acquisition of Ancroft Tractors Limited.

As part of the acquisition, the Berwick-upon-Tweed, Macmerry and Kelso depots have now joined Hamilton Ross Group, extending the group's presence across the Borders, Lothians and Northumberland.

Customers across the three sites will continue to be served by the same local teams, with all staff transferring across as part of the agreement. Day-to-day operations remain unchanged, with customers still able to access parts, service and sales support in the same locations

as before.

Hamilton Ross confirmed the Fendt and Valtra franchises continue as normal and there is no disruption to existing orders, warranty work or service arrangements, with the Fendt franchise now also available at their Lanark depot for all sales, parts and service requirements, expanding their Fendt area offering.

Hamilton Ross Group now has nine locations across Scotland and Northern England including Bishopton, Tarbolton, Campbeltown, Lanark, Perth and Cupar, alongside the newly added Ancroft depots.

The addition of the Ancroft depots

strengthens the group's service, parts and sales coverage in the region, creating a larger support network for customers across the agricultural and groundcare sectors.

From an operational perspective, existing orders, contracts and service agreements will continue unchanged. Depot contact details including phone numbers, email addresses and opening hours also remain the same.



Hamilton Ross Group's managing director, Jamie Gardiner, and Ancroft Tractors' Tom Brown, who will be joining HRG's senior team

PEOPLE

Kress appoint new commercial business manager

With 15 years industry experience

Kress UK has appointed Stuart Wharam as its new commercial business manager for the North, which they say strengthens their commitment to the golf and sports turf sectors across the region.

With around 15 years of industry experience, Stuart brings extensive knowledge of the professional groundscare and machinery market to the role. He began his career at a machinery dealership in East Yorkshire before spending eight and a half years with STIHL, prior to joining Kress UK.

In his new role, Stuart will focus on supporting golf courses, sports venues and commercial customers throughout a large territory stretching from Lincolnshire across North Wales,

throughout the North of England and the entirety of Scotland. Working closely with Kress dealers, he will help introduce customers to the company's growing range of battery-powered and robotic equipment.

Speaking about his decision to join Kress, Stuart said the brand's technology and innovation were major factors. "The robotics and the technology from Kress are ridiculously good," he said. "They are really pushing the boundaries when it comes to robotic mowing and battery technology. That's what drew me to Kress."

Stuart also believes Kress stands out because of its long-term commitment to battery power.



Stuart Wharam

"From day one they've been battery-focused," he explained. "Everything is moving towards battery technology, and Kress is already there."

As part of his role, Stuart will work closely with both dealers and end-users, particularly within the golf and sports sectors.

"My role is all about introducing customers to Kress and helping them understand the benefits of the technology," he said. "At the same time, I'll be working alongside the dealer network across the region."

DEALERS

Knight sign Chandlers

Significant expansion of its network



Chandlers depot at Belton

British sprayer specialist Knight Farm Machinery has signed one of the UK's largest farm equipment dealers, in what they describe as a significant expansion of their retail network.

Chandlers Farm Equipment is now a Knight dealer, retailing the Rutland sprayer manufacturer's full range, from 1,300-1,900 litre mounted to 3,500-12,000 litre trailed and 3,500-6,000 litre self-propelled models, plus demount sprayers and applicator systems. The agreement also covers the recently-launched Agroma UK products.

Chandlers is one of the UK's largest

farm equipment dealers, with 17 depots across the Midlands and the Welsh borders, spanning Lincs, Leics, Warks, Beds, Cambs, Oxon, Wilts, Glos, Shrops, Worcs, Hereford and Monmouthshire. All except the Holbeach, Horncastle, Spilsby and RFM depots are covered by the agreement, and will sell and support the full range of Knight and AGROMA sprayers.

The Chandlers FE depot at Cirencester, Glos, will be responsible for selling and supporting Knight KDM demount sprayers for JCB Fastrac tractors across all the Chandlers JCB territory, which covers Glos, Worcs,

Shrops, Hereford and Monmouthshire.

"Adding a dealer of Chandlers' scale and calibre to our network, with its wide geographical coverage and well-established reputation in retailing and supporting quality farm equipment, shows our commitment to the market," says Paul Harrison, sales and marketing consultant at Knight.

"Chandlers has a strong track record in sprayer sales and support, and together we plan to build on that with this Knight and Agroma agreement."

Gavin Pell, managing director at Chandlers Farm Equipment, added, "This appointment has filled a recently-created gap in our product offering, and I'm really pleased we have been able to do that with a business that offers the quality and technology of Knight. It has long held a reputation for innovation, and I'm confident we now have a sprayer range that fits right across the diversity of farm types and sizes throughout the wide span of our depot area, with everything from the simpler and more specialist Agroma machines to the high technology and high capacity of the Knight models."



COBRA

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

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News in brief:

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



Yamaha partner newly established dealership

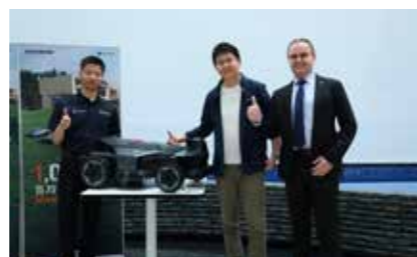
MCL Machinery who are based in Eversholt, Near Woburn, Bedfordshire have announced that they have been appointed by Yamaha Motor UK as a main ATV dealer for the Bedfordshire & Buckinghamshire region. Richard Adderson, a partner in the business told *Service Dealer*, "I'm extremely proud."

Richard retires!



Richard says he has thoroughly enjoyed his 56-years working in the industry, meeting interesting people and characters along the way and making many friends.

Overton (UK) have announced that after 34-years in business with his brother Guy, Richard Overton retired on April 30th just after his 71st birthday.



Robotic mower reaches 1M units

Segway Navimow has announced production of its one millionth unit. Commenting on the achievement, CEO George Ren said, "This milestone is just the beginning. We hope to become a model for 'new quality productivity' going global, making 'made in China' synonymous with efficiency, reliability, and sustainability in the home."



Senior manager, Paul Leader, at the Hereford branch

Keeping customers king

Following on from being named Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year 2025 at last year's Awards, Ron Smith & Co opened its doors to *Service Dealer's* LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR to explain how it continues to evolve while staying true to its core values.

During last year's *Service Dealer Conference* at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Stratford-upon-Avon, I had the opportunity to catch up with Mark Smith of Ron Smith & Co Ltd. The company had just been named Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year 2025, one of the evening's most prestigious awards.

Having congratulated Mark and his team on their achievement, I was invited to visit the company's branches in Hereford and Worcester to gain a better understanding of how the business operates. Come June 2026, schedules finally aligned to allow me to do just that.

From man with a van to multi-site success

The story of Ron Smith & Co dates back to the 1960s when founder Ron Smith learned his trade in agricultural

and machinery engineering. After working for Worcester agricultural machinery firm J.C. Baker and attending numerous manufacturer training courses, Ron decided to establish his own business.

He began trading independently in Worcester in 1967, focusing on garden machinery sales, servicing, repairs and spare parts supply. His first service vehicle was a Morris Minor van, which enabled him to visit customers and carry out machinery repairs on site.

As domestic and professional turf machinery grew in popularity during the 1970s, so too did the business. Early successes included the sale of Homelite chainsaws, Toro and Westwood ride-on mowers and regular appearances at local agricultural and horticultural shows. By the 1980s, Ron had developed strong relationships with cricket clubs, local authorities

and country estates throughout Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

The acquisition of land in Worcester in 1983 enabled the company to build a purpose-built showroom and service centre, creating a dedicated retail and support hub for both domestic and professional customers. Over the following decades the business continued to expand, developing into one of the UK's leading independent garden machinery dealerships.

Today the company operates from two branches, Worcester and Hereford, supplying professional and domestic groundcare machinery, spare parts and accessories. Both sites have fully equipped workshops, although the Worcester branch also supports a dedicated team of field service engineers who carry out repairs and servicing at customer premises.

Across both locations, customers

can choose from an extensive range of machinery and equipment from manufacturers including Stihl, Husqvarna, Kubota, Honda, Toro, Stiga, ECHO, Pellenc, Etesia, Countax, Westwood and many others.

Long-standing relationships with brands such as Toro, Kubota, Allett and Stihl have helped establish the company's reputation among turf professionals throughout the region.

Although I had hoped to catch up with Mark during my visit, the early June timing coincided with one of the busiest periods of the year. Recent warm temperatures combined with regular rainfall had created a flush of grass growth, resulting in strong demand for mowers, trimmers and associated equipment. Instead, I spent time with senior manager Paul Leader at the Hereford branch and Rob Manton at Worcester.

Embracing new technology

One of the most noticeable trends discussed during my visit was the remarkable growth in robotic mower sales. Interest in robotic technology has increased dramatically over recent years, prompting Ron Smith & Co to stock a wide range of machines from manufacturers including Husqvarna, Stiga, Segway, Honda and EGO.

The company now employs three full-time robotic mower technicians whose responsibilities include installations, repairs and customer support. As Rob explained, selecting the correct machine is critical because each model offers different capabilities in terms of slope performance, cutting quality and operating characteristics. Proper installation and customer education are equally important to ensure owners achieve the best results from their investment.

The dealership serves virtually every area of the amenity and groundcare sector, including schools, universities, councils, contractors, golf clubs, estates and professional grounds staff. At the same time, the domestic



Paul explaining robotic options to a customer

market remains extremely important. Customers are increasingly willing to invest in higher-quality machinery and powered equipment, particularly when supported by expert advice and after-sales service.

That emphasis on customer support extends to the company's growing online operation. Dedicated staff now oversee online sales across both branches and the Garden Machinery Direct business. While internet sales continue to grow, the team is careful

to ensure customers receive the same level of guidance they would expect in the showroom.

Paul and Rob noted that many customers contact them after purchasing unsuitable equipment elsewhere online. A key part of Ron Smith & Co's approach is ensuring customers fully understand the products they are considering, helping them select machinery that is appropriate for the task and ultimately reducing disappointment and



The Hereford branch of Ron Smith & Co

unnecessary returns.

The growth of online sales has been so significant that the company is actively exploring larger premises to support increased stockholding requirements. At the same time, they have noticed a slight reduction in showroom footfall as more customers choose to research and purchase online.

Like many businesses throughout the industry, recruiting skilled staff remains a challenge, particularly when it comes to trained service engineers. While the company is currently seeking warehouse and sales personnel, finding suitable candidates continues to be difficult. Both managers felt the industry must do more to promote the wide range of career opportunities available across horticulture, agriculture, amenity management and machinery servicing.

Battery-powered equipment continues to be another major area of growth. Manufacturers now offer a far broader range of battery products than ever before, requiring dealers to stock



A selection of the brands on show at Worcester

comprehensive cordless product lines. Improvements in battery performance, reduced noise levels and lower vibration have all contributed to increased customer acceptance, although many traditional users still prefer petrol-powered equipment.

The growing number of batteries

being sold has also required careful consideration of storage, testing and recycling procedures. Returned batteries are assessed and, where possible, repaired before being sent back through manufacturer recycling programmes.

Keeping customers at the heart of the business

Despite the increasing availability of online information, demonstrations remain an important part of the sales process, particularly for higher-value machinery. However, demonstrations are used selectively, with staff providing detailed product information wherever possible to ensure customers understand the equipment before committing valuable time and resources to a field demonstration.

One interesting observation from the team was that traditional seasonal trading patterns have largely disappeared. Rather than experiencing pronounced peaks and troughs, the business now remains busy throughout the year. Considerable emphasis is placed on pre-delivery inspections, with every machine thoroughly prepared before handover.

The company uses Aspen fuel

during PDI procedures and actively encourages customers to continue using it, citing cleaner operation, improved machine protection and long-term storage benefits. The investment in thorough preparation pays dividends through fewer returns and greater customer satisfaction.

Trade shows remain an important part of the company's marketing strategy. The team regularly attends events such as the Three Counties Show, Malvern Show, SALTEX and BTME, while also participating in manufacturer dealer days to stay abreast of new product developments. Networking, they believe, remains one of the most valuable aspects of the industry.

Stockholding is another area where the business continues to invest heavily. Across both branches, customers have access to thousands of product lines, ranging from hand-held power equipment and ride-on machinery to tractors, accessories and spare parts.

Looking ahead, the philosophy remains remarkably consistent with the principles established by Ron Smith nearly sixty years ago. The focus is on selecting the right machinery, investing in new technologies, employing dedicated staff and maintaining a culture built around customer service.

The company continues to offer strong warranty support, reliable after-sales service and rapid turnaround on repairs and spare parts. At the same time, it recognises the importance of embracing new technologies and adapting to changing customer expectations.

Perhaps most importantly, there remains a belief that successful dealers genuinely enjoy what they do and never lose sight of the importance of looking after their customers. It is a simple philosophy, but after spending time at both branches, it is not difficult to see why Ron Smith & Co continues to thrive and why it was recognised as Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year.



A Ron Smith & Co liveried van



Inside the Worcester branch



Paul with staff members at Hereford



Mark Smith collecting the 2025 Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year prize from Stewart Carter, managing director at sponsors Husqvarna, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

What influence can AI have on dealerships?

How might this new technology affect dealerships in a positive or negative way and how much of an expert does a dealer need to be to get to grips with it, asks KEITH CHRISTIAN.

AI is a subject that *Service Dealer* has engaged with on several occasions, most recently in our last edition, May/June 2026, when Adam Bernstein considered it in relation to its use in employee grievances and how AI can be used to exaggerate a claim. It has also been a subject covered at the last two Conferences, returning last year by popular demand (a free Digital Toolkit for dealers, based on these sessions, is available on www.servicedealer.co.uk).

I am a long way from being an AI expert and only a limited user in the most basic of senses - apart from what is now being forced on us with or without our knowledge. So, I am writing this article purely from a layman's perspective and researching as I go along to see how AI can affect dealerships in a positive or negative way and how much of an expert a dealer needs to be to get to grips with this relatively new technology.

I would like to thank and mention a friend of mine who has helped tidy this article up and who provided some insight into how AI can be used from his sales and marketing business experience. Steve Chuter, BLUE52 Consulting (www.blue52consulting.com). Steve uses AI for marketing and sales presentations and business proposals. As Steve says, "Using AI still needs to be combined with the experience and insight of individuals to maximise its benefits."

Steve also points out: "I've been increasingly seeing clients across a number of industries using AI to both support and improve their existing processes, including the information made available to their sales teams to improve their planning and presentations to grow their business."

Anyone who has followed good old Arnie in the *Terminator* films will know that in 1984 the first film started the story that involved Artificial Intelligence. In the year 2029, Skynet - an AI that became self-aware and initiated a nuclear holocaust - is on the brink of defeat by human

rebels. Desperate, Skynet uses a time-displacement machine to send a cyborg Terminator (Model 101, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger) back to 1984 to alter the past.

From what I remember of the films, Skynet was an automated self-defence system using AI which decided that humans were the biggest threat to its existence and set out to eliminate them as a self-defence. Pretty far-fetched at the time but close to a reality today as the world increasingly relies on technology to automate all sorts of systems. It seems we cannot escape AI in our everyday lives and perhaps need to embrace it more, as we have done with many technologies over the years.

The rise of artificial intelligence is reshaping every corner of the sales landscape - and the agricultural and garden machinery industry is no exception. For UK-based manufacturers and their representatives competing in global markets, the stakes are particularly high. Exchange rate volatility, post-Brexit trade complexity, shifting DEFRA subsidy frameworks at home, and intense competition from European, Asian, Far East and North American rivals abroad mean the margin for commercial error has never been thinner. Yet for those willing to embrace AI, it is not a threat. It is the most powerful competitive tool they have ever been handed.

Going back over my many years in the industry with a retailer, importers and running Claymore Grass Machinery, I continually think back to the days when communication was face to face or by phone call. I remember having to use a telex machine to deal with suppliers, then the very new thermal imaging fax machines which moved on to plain paper fax machines that could be used for legal documents. In 1986 I got my first 'mobile' phone, commonly called the Motorola Brick because of its size and weight. An expensive game changer at the time. Then the Internet arrived; wow, absolutely a game changer for the whole world. Now we have the smartphone tethered to our side that does everything. All these things are now part of our daily lives and pretty much taken for granted. It looks likely that AI will be as well - if it isn't already.



The perfect partner at work!

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Garden care.

Here is a little tidbit for you geeks out there. Did you know that most email traffic, over 99%, is carried by undersea cables with very little via satellite? A friend of mine in the cable laying business told me this and AI confirms it. No wonder certain types of ships are sitting over some of the many submarine cables that criss-cross the oceans. Just another way of spying on the world.

Is AI going to be the scary monster some predict or are we there already?

Do a Google search for something and you now get 'Thinking' then a summary of what you have asked for or an explanation and summary of what Google thinks you meant to ask. All very clever but is it getting a bit too dangerous just to take on face value?

Those that use and understand AI will probably find my musings naive but I want to try and convey the positives and negatives of using AI in a dealership. Its uses are clearly many and varied and far too many to cover all in this brief article. Uses move from simple letter writing or emails to complex presentations and proposals through to marketing and predictive maintenance programmes. AI could also run your business and help fine tune operational issues and resource management whilst improving margin retention - maybe!

From what I have learnt, one of the biggest issues with AI is losing personal contact with your customers and the ability to better understand the needs of a customer. If too much AI is being used to run the business the personal touch may be lost. Being personal with customers by phone or face to face still seems to be the best way to secure business. This also applies to dealers' suppliers needing to be face to face with their retail partners and not hiding behind technology, as some of our readers have reported.

There is no doubt AI can and will help dealers, but there needs to be a degree of caution in how it is used. Relying too much on AI or other technologies can mean that staff do not develop their own skill sets and personalities which customers would normally relate to. Salespeople could be drawn into AI speak rather than use their own knowledge to advise customers. Don't let AI make your customer-facing staff surplus to requirements.

Smarter demand forecasting is perhaps the most immediately impactful. For the agricultural dealer network and their manufacturers, agricultural equipment purchasing is deeply cyclical, driven by harvest outcomes, commodity prices, subsidy programmes, and seasonal patterns that differ dramatically by market. For UK exporters and importers navigating the transition from EU Common Agricultural Policy support to the domestic Agricultural Transition Plan, understanding how funding changes affect buying behaviour, both at home and abroad, is critical. AI can analyse all these signals simultaneously, giving production and supply chain teams far greater accuracy and fewer costly overruns.

Customer insight at scale follows closely. Manufacturers managing dealer networks across multiple export markets can use AI to identify which accounts are showing signs of churn, which are primed for an upgrade cycle, and where competitive machines are gaining ground - intelligence that was once the preserve of the most experienced export directors is now available to every account manager in every territory.

How much does this affect the way dealers are treated by their suppliers?

For a machinery dealer, AI usually has the biggest impact in inventory control, after-sales service, and

customer relationship management, because machinery is high-value and service-driven rather than purely transactional. AI can affect businesses both positively and in ways that create pressure on the business. The following quote is from a chatbot: "For a machinery dealer AI is usually more dangerous when used carelessly than when ignored entirely - but it can also be a competitive advantage if used to support human expertise rather than replace it."

The risks can be that investment in software is expensive, staff may need retraining or AI predictions may not be accurate. Personal skills may be reduced along with loss of morale due to perceived threats from using AI. If you are using it, you need to have strict policies in place.

- **Implement strict guidelines:**

Establish internal company policies for data usage, and mandate that all AI-generated content (emails, reports, client advice) is thoroughly reviewed and verified by a human expert.

- **Protect personal information:**

Ensure your team complies with data protection principles. Avoid copying identifiable personal data into any public AI tool.

- **Focus on efficiency, not strategy:**

Use AI for productivity-boosting tasks like summarising meeting notes, drafting baseline code, or formatting data, rather than delegating high-level strategic decisions or authentic customer relationship-building.

The advantages can generally be found in gathering data for potential sales or from existing customers, marketing campaigns, after-sales service and better inventory management. Time reclaimed from administration is equally significant. Voice-to-text call logging, automated follow-up prompts, and AI-generated visit summaries mean less time

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AI also enables smarter prioritisation, flagging which customers are approaching key decision points, which dealer relationships need attention before a competitor arrives, and which accounts are stable enough for a lighter touch. The travel budget works harder. Every visit counts.

No doubt much of what is mentioned is already available in your existing software systems. This would mean that you are sat on a huge amount of data that may be better analysed by AI to get the most out of it. Your software providers might be able to steer you in the right direction for this.

It doesn't seem like rocket science

as AI is an extension of what goes on in business and can be creative or analytical if guided by a human hand. This should mean that you can use it to your advantage if you are commanding it and not the other way around. People are still the best strength of any business and properly trained staff with the acumen to succeed are always going to be worth far more than any AI programme. So, invest in your staff first and work with them on any AI implementations that will help improve your business models.

As AI systems learn and evolve, they can behave in unexpected ways. These 'unintended consequences' can be difficult to predict and might lead to problems that were not foreseen when the system was created. Businesses

must monitor AI systems closely to prevent this.

Look what happened to Arnie and Skynet! I'll be back!

For more practical help on how to integrate AI in your Dealership check out our Free Dealer Toolkits.

Service, systems and supporting dealers

Zero-turns with both traditional and alternative power sources are finding favour amongst UK customers

A recent visit to AL-KO and Weibang's Wincanton home demonstrated how culture, systems and communication can be just as important to dealers as the products themselves. *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS, reports

During May, *Service Dealer* owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke and myself were privileged to be invited to visit AL-KO and Weibang's UK home in Wincanton, Somerset.

We were shown around by head of marketing Kieran Powell and md Stewart Anderson. Stewart will be well-known to many of our dealer readers - and it's quickly apparent how the company's dealer-focused culture is shaped by his vision. Also clear is how everyone who works for him shares and respects this vision, giving the company a unique feel.

A showroom for dealers

One obvious example of the operation's singularity is the facility's large, airy showroom full of their machines. It looks like a fantastic retail space, but it's not. Instead, it is set up for dealers to come visit and see the machines on display. It is in fact the old Rochfords retail space but now repurposed as a place for their dealer partners to experience the equipment. I'm not sure I've ever seen anything quite the same anywhere else? You might get a display in a distributor's foyer. But this has the feel of full-on, large

warehouse. This area has its own dedicated staff; however, everyone who is part of the small team in Wincanton can pitch in when it gets busy. Which it does each afternoon as orders go out the door to dealers around the country.

A refrain we heard repeated from Stewart was, "You will never find me in my bloody office!" We asked many members of staff as we walked around, where he'd be and the answer was always the same. Everywhere except behind his desk!

Designed around the dealer network

Stewart has a real sway with the top brass at both AL-KO and Weibang and as such has a direct influence over how the products are made. Stewart, with his engineering background, designs innovations and refinements for the products himself, with these changes then put forward to the manufacturing teams. The ideas, or requirements for a solution, can often

come from dealers feeding back to Stewart any comments they've had from their end-user customers.

Stewart's influence can then get these refinements made, all with the ultimate intention of optimum sales potential for the dealers. Every decision that Stewart and the company makes, he said, is designed to help dealers sell more machines.

New prototypes of machines are tested there in Wincanton. In the workshop during our visit, we saw work being undertaken to reduce vibrations to extraordinarily low levels on petrol engined mowers. Duncan and I gripped the handlebars ourselves and even to our layman hands, it was clear the levels were impressive.

When any new product arrives in Wincanton, Stewart and the team will take it apart entirely, stripping it down to every individual nut and bolt. They do this to both check the quality and to make sure they have every spare part that is required - and will not ship to

showroom - although one that is set-up just for the trade. There's pretty much an open invitation, says Stewart, for dealers to come and see the space for themselves. And like everywhere in the Wincanton facility, it is immaculately neat and tidy,

On show here are their key lines, including the AL-KO, Solo By AL-KO, Mitox and Weibang products - for both domestic and commercial customers. Stewart took pride in telling us "If I can't give the dealer a product at a price that they can make money on, I won't bring that product in." He also confirmed that they will never stop selling the Solo By AL-KO through specialist dealers only. He said how he wants to partner with dealers who will work with them so they can form long-term relationships.

As part of our visit, we were shown around the huge, three-part



AL-KO & Weibang's managing director, Stewart Anderson with *Service Dealer* owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke

the network until they are entirely satisfied. This level of attention to detail, says Stewart, is all for the benefit of their dealers.

This is also reflected in their parts department which like everywhere else in the business, works super efficiently. Certainly, for the commercial spare parts, they need to work accurately and quickly as the parts need to be with the dealers and their customers immediately, because as Stewart says, if these guys are not cutting grass they are not making money. If dealers order from Wincanton by three o'clock, there's a next day delivery. And even that can get pushed slightly later as they tend to stack the trucks until they are literally pulling away from the facility. It's all about speed and efficiency. The most frequently ordered spare parts are kept at the front of the parts department with regular data analysis taking place to see which parts are the most fast moving. Shelves will then be rearranged to make sure the most demanded parts are the closest to hand.

Stewart refers to all these aspects of making the business more efficient as



The warehouse is split into three large sections

simply "customer care". For example, all the parts are pre-packaged to make sure that when they're being sent out, they can be picked and put on the truck as quickly as possible. "It's all about our systems," said Stewart. "Other companies may match me on parts, but none of them will beat me." Also, he believes that what makes their business run as it does is their people. "All our teammates do their jobs well," said Stewart. "What we do differently is our accuracy and our

attention to detail. It's all about giving great service to our dealers. They are the single most important part of our company, and I would like to think that they all believe that we are above all else and straight-up and honest with them."

From our visit, it was obvious how the culture at Wincanton is one of calmness, with everyone working together for the good of the company - and as a consequence the good of their dealer partners.



Stewart with equipment ready to be shipped to dealerships



Stewart says, "Other companies may match me on parts, but none of them will beat me."

Future plans

Thinking about their dealers yet again, Duncan and I were shown a PowerPoint of new products coming for them during this year. What they have aimed to do, we were told, is fill the gaps in their ranges that dealers have requested. There are about 30 new products on their way that dealers will be shown first at GroundsFest this September, including new petrol mowers, zero-turns, robots and battery-powered equipment. These new additions reflect how Stewart has been given everything he requested from the product teams in Germany and China, with kit aimed specifically for the UK market.

Stewart emphasised how the business is built on dealers. "I need products to fill all requirements for our dealers to make them happy," he said. "I enjoy everything to do with the company, but I like the dealer business the best."

Stewart even phoned a dealer while we were there, off the cuff, to ask him how he would describe his feelings on the Weibang products and the backup received from Wincanton. The dealer said that he gets what he asks for immediately - but not only that, Stewart's team will go above and beyond to help him out with elements that he hadn't even considered yet. It's beyond good service, he said. He also confirmed that he doesn't need to offer discount on the professional Weibang machines and makes good profit on both the wholegoods and the spares.

Stewart concluded our visit, telling us that their company mantra is to not do anything on the cheap for the dealer. "It's all about giving good service," he said. "The key is keeping the machines cutting."

Duncan and I thank Stewart and Kieran for their time and look forward to their continued support of the **Service Dealer Conference & Awards** as our principal sponsor.



The showroom in Wincanton exclusively for dealers



The Wincanton base even has its own studio set up to take their own professional PR and marketing images and videos



Duncan testing out the vibration levels on a prototype mower



New ventures in retail

Beyond Kubota's range of groundcare machinery, on display were examples of its compact and larger M-series tractors, R0 compact wheel loaders and RTV utility vehicles.

A longstanding fixture in wholesale distribution of grass machinery, Notts-based Henton and Chattell last year diversified into new territory with the acquisition of a nearby successful farm equipment retail operation. MARTIN RICKATSON attended the depot's first H&C open day.



The Newark site provides a strong platform to further expand Henton and Chattell's reach and its range of products and services, says Peter Chaloner.

Five years from its hundredth birthday, Nottinghamshire's Henton and Chattell has recently undertaken one of the biggest diversifications in its history. However, its new venture actually takes the company back into territory that was part of its formative years.

The firm was founded as an ironmongers by two friends, Leslie Henton and Charles Chattell, in 1931, during the midst of the Great Depression, a time when new businesses were few and far between,

and many existing ones were failing due to the tough economic conditions. The company's first premises was at Beeston, south-west of Nottingham. Such was its success that they opened a further two shops, one in Lenton to the west of the city, and the other in West Bridgford, to the south.

In 1949 the two partners consolidated their retail premises into one, and a large house next to their existing Henton and Chattell premises on Nottingham's Radcliffe Road was converted to a showroom. At the same

time, they purchased new premises located on London Road, Nottingham. With around 5,000 sq ft of space, this was the start of the company that would become the UK's major

independent grass machinery distributor, but photographic records from around this time show the business also entering the agriculture sector with machines such as the British-built Trusty two-wheeled tractor.

It was garden machinery, though, for which Henton and Chattell would go on to become famous. Peter Chaloner, Leslie Henton's grandson, is now a director of the company, and today runs the business alongside his wife, Liz. By 2016 the firm was selling almost £24m of domestic mowers and parts to more than 1,500 retailers across the country. It offers a number of exclusive product ranges, supplying a broad range of customers from major retailers to smaller independent businesses. The company has become a leading distributor for many of the UK's major brands, including Stihl, Ego, Billy Goat, Briggs & Stratton and Allett, as well as its own brand, Cobra, which H&C launched in 2013 to maximise market opportunities and utilise its unique industry position.

Retail turf equipment

Meanwhile, for two decades, the company had also developed a major retail business in the area supplying and supporting turf and groundcare

equipment primarily from John Deere. However, with Deere's strategy of recent years to restructure its dealer arrangements across the UK to involve fewer, larger dealer groups, that agreement came to an end in 2023.

Henton and Chattell was not without a major groundcare franchise for long, though. By June that year, the business had signed with Kubota, and to sell not just the Japanese firm's groundcare machinery, but also its agricultural machinery, marking a return to the farm equipment sector.

"This brings Kubota groundcare and professional turf care products to our strong groundcare team," Peter Chaloner said at the time.

"The opportunity to also develop an agricultural machinery business to provide sales, service and support to the industry, through a partnership with a dynamic and forward-thinking tractor manufacturer, is the next logical stage of our business development."

Kubota declared the appointment a strategic one for its long-term ambition of continued growth in both groundcare and agricultural machinery. "This reinforces Kubota's commitment to its customers and the market," said Henry Bredin, general manager of Kubota UK's Tractor



Although good weather meant many farmers were busy with land work, Henton and Chattell's first Newark branch open day drew a steady stream of visitors.



Among the agricultural equipment suppliers also in attendance were Merlo, Richard Western and Maschio, which displayed this in-line conventional baler.

Business Unit.

"The appointment of Henton and Chattell will help Kubota to further strengthen its position in these important market sectors, serving a wider cross-section of customers."

Beyond Kubota's range of groundcare machinery, the new arrangement brought to the dealership Kubota's compact and larger M-series tractors, as well as its RO compact wheel loaders and RTV utility vehicles.

Full move into ag

Such has been the success of this venture that Henton and Chattell was perhaps the obvious purchaser when Farmstar, the neighbouring Kubota ag dealer to the east, chose to focus on its three Case IH agriculture and Kubota groundcare-centred depots to the north in Yorks and Lincs, and seek a buyer for its dedicated Kubota agricultural equipment branch at Newark-on-Trent.

With heads of terms having been signed on January 29th last year, an agreement was reached between the two firms for Henton and Chattell to take over the Newark depot on 25th

July, an acquisition described by the company as "the next stage in its ambitious growth strategy" and "strengthening its presence in the agricultural, groundcare, and garden machinery sectors across the East Midlands."

The Newark branch was rapidly but carefully integrated into Henton and Chattell's operations from that date, ensuring minimal disruption to service. In addition, the full team of Newark staff formerly employed by Farmstar transferred to the site's new owner.

"The Newark site provides a strong platform to further expand our reach and deliver an even broader range of products and services in the region," said Peter Chaloner.

"It now offers not only Kubota products, but on the groundcare side also Baroness, Trimax, EGO, Cobra, Stihl and Yamaha, with further leading brands set to join the line-up soon. Our investment in the site will ensure long-term growth, product availability, and expert support for agricultural and groundcare customers across Nottinghamshire and beyond.

"This represents an exciting

opportunity for us to grow while continuing the exceptional service that Farmstar has provided to customers in the East Midlands. The site supports our growth plans, offering significant synergies and ample space to expand."

Henton and Chattell rapidly re-signed with many of the agricultural supplier franchises previously offered from the Newark site, and soon added others, to form a full line of farm machinery. Just a month after taking on the depot, the company became the authorised Merlo dealer across much of the Midlands and East Midlands.

"We're delighted to welcome Henton and Chattell to the Merlo agricultural network," said Owen Buttle, Merlo UK's national sales manager.

"Their strong infrastructure and customer base, and proven ability to deliver across both professional ground care and agricultural sectors, make them a natural fit for our brand."

Peter Chaloner said his team was excited to expand its offering and support its customers with Merlo telehandlers.



The firm was founded as an ironmongers by two friends, Leslie Henton and Charles Chattell, in 1931.

"The opportunity to grow with a family-owned, engineering-led manufacturer like Merlo aligns perfectly with our values and long-term ambitions."

Full franchise set

As well as Kubota and Merlo agricultural products, the new branch also offers a full range of agricultural trailers and rear-discharge muck spreaders from Suffolk maker Richard Western, plus the complete line of arable and grassland machinery from Maschio. In addition to examples of machines such as power harrows and flail mowers, to gauge farmer and

contractor interest the latter firm brought along to the open day an in-line conventional baler, only the second such machine of this configuration to be offered in the small square baler sector.

A wide range of other farm and industrial products, meanwhile, come from franchises ranging from handling and sweeping attachment specialist Gurney Reeve to Portek, supplier of a wide range of general farm husbandry tools. All of the firm's primary suppliers were in attendance at the depot's first open day under its new ownership, held back in March, which attracted a stream of visitors throughout the day.

Other exhibitors included cross-brand diagnostic engine system specialist Jalest, part of Spanish firm Cojali.

"Although it was a sunny day, with many farmers taking the opportunity to press on with land work, we were very pleased with the support of visitors and suppliers at our first Newark branch open day," said Peter.

"I'm really pleased with the way the new branch has integrated into our operations, with a great team of staff and suppliers, and we are encouraged by the extremely positive response from the local agricultural community."



Henton and Chattell has previous form in the farm machinery sector, as shown by this post-WWII photos of a Trusty two-wheeled tractor demonstration.

Built around partnership

Dealership Tallis Amos explains how strong supplier relationships, customer support and a family-business culture continue to drive growth across its agricultural and groundcare operations.

There is very much the feel of a family business about dealership Tallis Amos, with a warmth and humour among the team that reflects a healthy staff culture, with a good relationship between sales and aftercare.

The Tallis Amos Group was founded in 2012 by the merger of Chris Tallis Farm Machinery in Evesham and Alexander & Duncan in Leominster. Shortly after this, LAS in Narberth and BS Mowers in Bristol were added to the business. There are now five depots: Alscott, Shropshire (opened in 2022), Narberth, Leominster, Evesham and Kemble.

"Alexander & Duncan was one of the first John Deere dealers appointed after the company opened its UK business at Langar," explains agricultural sales director, Tom

Shakeshaft. "Chris Tallis had been a territory manager for John Deere and when looking for dealers, came across the Evesham premises and ended up purchasing it."

The group now has 175 employees including 95 technicians; there are eight turf and 14 agricultural sales staff plus five precision farming specialists.

"Each depot also has a sales support team, who cover demonstrations and installations, which is a BAGMA certified installation to offer customers peace of mind," says Tom.

When asked the secret to their success, he comments: "It's an owner-operated business: Simon Amos and Ben Tallis are in the depots every day. We also have a really good team - getting and retaining the right staff, both on the sales and aftermarket

side, is essential."

To this end, Tallis Amos recently took recruitment in-house with Guy Bunting responsible for recruiting and onboarding of staff.

"It's a professional service which allows us to recruit and retain staff effectively. We also have 14 John Deere apprentices on the group, including parts and service apprentices, so there's an element of 'growing our own'."

Tom believes that the future for dealerships lies in a combined agricultural and turf business to allow investment in business technology and infrastructure, although at Tallis Amos two completely separate teams focus on each sector and workshops are also independent.

"But the sales teams do work together, for example where a groundcare contractor is looking for larger tractors," he adds.



The Mühling MU-M 600 flail, mulching cover crops at Cotswold Farm Park



The MU-N 600 maintaining game cover ready for cultivating and redrilling at Coombe End Estate near Gloucester

"We aim to carry on offering quality premium products and to maintain that family feel," says Tom. "We like to think that we are small enough to care but big enough to survive."

That approach is reflected in the

partnerships Tallis Amos chooses to develop, with the business forging a strong relationship with Simon Richard Ltd since starting to offer the Mühling flail mower range in 2023 and selling 50 units in that time.

Forging a relationship

Finding a brand that fits with your company ethos and meets customer needs in terms of performance and reliability is a win-win for a dealership. Tallis Amos says its relationship with Simon Richard Ltd and the Mühling range has been built around exactly those principles.

"We've found, for example, that the Mühling FM deck is a great partner for the John Deere 1580 out-front mower," explains Colin McIntyre, turf and commercial director.

"This type of mower is favoured by council contractors for demanding highways and verge work, and the Mühling has an extra wear plate inside the hood which can easily be replaced if it gets damaged by debris in the grass. As the deck is bolted rather than welded, it's also easier to repair after any collisions."



L-R: Simon Richard Ltd southern area sales manager, Will Davies; Tallis Amos turf and commercial director, Colin McIntyre; and Tallis Amos agricultural sales director, Tom Shakeshaft



The Tallis Amos depot at Allscott, Shropshire

He continues: “The front castor wheel assembly offers cut height adjustment for the varying conditions throughout the season, while the spiral rotor design reduces fuel consumption, which is obviously a concern now.”

Colin comments that while most of the John Deere compacts are sold into sportsfield applications where they are used with other implements, there’s a growing demand for larger attachments to work with 100hp-plus tractors, especially from contractors.

“We do see 40hp tractors on small holdings, but they are generally looking for a more basic mower unless it’s for a very specific task,” he says. “Councils want 100-150hp with a Mühling mower to match, or they will pair it with the Reform specialist tractor.”

The concept of a flail mower as a simple, rear mounted tool to be used for seasonal topping and tidying is changing, agrees Colin and Simon Richard area manager, Will Davies.

“Rear mounted mowers still

dominate in the groundcare market, but there’s definitely interest in front mounting as more tractors come with front linkages,” Will comments. “A front 2.5m Mühling MU is a great combination with a reach arm mower. Having the mower out front avoids running down the grass with the tractor wheels ahead of the flails and gives a more even cut as a result.”

A significant advantage for operations such as motorway verge maintenance or, at the other end of the scale, solar farm management, is stone throw certification.

“An assessment from TUV in Germany has shown stone throw of just 8m forwards and 2m to the sides, which is a big improvement on other brands,” comments Colin.

He acknowledges that with tighter budgets, purchasers might be tempted by cheaper mowers, but says, “Quality of cut, ease of use, productivity and fuel use are major considerations for commercial mowing, while operators also have a big influence: some will specify the machines they want to

work with.”

Having started out with the Mühling groundcare machines, the brand is now increasingly in demand for agricultural applications, confirms Tom.

“It’s a range that we sell on its features rather than price, such as the Vario bar and Shark Fin shredding bar, which improve cut quality and ensure that the material is shredded finely. The design has impressed a number of large farming companies locally, and they have added different models to their fleets according to their needs.”

Tom adds that with the more widespread growing of cover crops, a system that will cut them with a quality mulched finish and remain reliable has been key.

“The belt drive and internal roller bearings are very sound in the toughest of conditions; we have not had any issues. Farms are using larger tractors so it’s important that implements can take the power.”

One interesting trend has been the move away from rotary mowers to Mühling’s 6m MU-M 600 flail


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Tallis Amos say the the Muthing FM flail, paired with a John Deere 1580 out-front mower is part of their demo fleet that is proving popular with councils and contractors

for environmental and cover crop maintenance.

“Using flails rather than rotary blades means that you don’t get lines of uncut material in between, while the mulching effect also makes for a better surface for following cultivations and crops,” explains Tom. “The initial purchase price is £8-9,000 more but they are more reliable and when you do need replacement flails the cost is considerably less than for rotary blades.”

He adds that he can see demand increasing as maize growers look to improved stubble management to control corn borer, while renewed interest in orchard fruit locally could be another niche market for the smaller machines in the range.

Back-up and promotion

A stock of parts is kept at specific depots but can be moved around

by Tallis Amos’s IDT internal delivery vans, while Simon Richard also has larger items available next day from the Borders.

“Muthing mowers are supplied fully built up so no dealer assembly is required and thus there are no PDI costs,” explains Will.

Colin comments that promotion is as much through word of mouth between contractors and councils as anything else.

“There’s always feedback between customers; the mowers have a reputation for being good quality machines that will work in any conditions.”

The company exhibits at the Royal Welsh, Pembrokeshire and Moreton shows as well as a number of smaller single day events, but Colin says, “Customer demos are always important and usually clinch the sale. It’s very positive for our reps that we have an exclusive area with the brand, which means that they are not up against other salesmen price cutting to get the deal.”

He points out that the close relationship with Simon Richard Ltd is appreciated.

“You get a level of support from a smaller manufacturer that isn’t there with the bigger firms. Will is always on hand to help with any queries - it’s the personal touch that makes the difference.”



Will Davies, Colin McIntyre and Tom Shakeshaft at Tallis Amos Evesham



Plant Hire & Construction

Latest news for the sector Edited by Dan Gilkes



Dan Gilkes, editor of *Service Dealer’s* plant hire and construction machinery section, says JCB’s return to the Bonneville Salt Flats may grab headlines, but for machinery dealers the bigger story is what the company’s hydrogen investment could mean for future product ranges, customer demand and site refuelling support



Hydrogen’s high-speed moment

At a recent JCB launch event, the company announced that it will be heading back to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah later this year, to attempt a world land speed record, with a car powered by its own hydrogen engines. Wing Commander Andy Green will once again take the wheel for this record attempt, which should set speeds in excess of 350mph.

As one of the few journalists at the launch lucky enough to have attended JCB’s successful diesel record attempt 20 years ago, I can certainly confirm the professional approach and undeniable engineering expertise that the company brings to the endeavour.

We’ll get a first chance to see the JCB Hydromax car, powered by two 800hp JCB hydrogen engines, in action at RAF Wittering this month, in shake down testing. *Service Dealer*

would like to wish all involved the very best of luck with this latest record attempt.

What does this land speed attempt have to do with construction plant equipment?

At the same event, JCB launched its first commercially-available hydrogen-powered machinery, the 3CX Hydrogen backhoe loader and the G60RS H generator set. Indeed, the company has invested over £100m on the development of a range of hydrogen engines, built at its plant in Derbyshire.

Those engines have now been fully Type Approved for use in non-road mobile machinery across the EU. That means that contractors can now purchase zero-carbon emission

equipment for use on construction sites, an essential requirement for many projects in the future. The engines also match their diesel counterparts in terms of power, torque and service intervals.

Of course there is concern over infrastructure. However, JCB is working with HYKIT to develop trailer-mounted hydrogen refuelling rigs, that can be towed to site behind a van or pick-up, or carried on a truck for larger sites. The smallest refueller has enough hydrogen to power a 3CX backhoe loader for a week and fill times are similar to a diesel machine topping up from a bowser.

JCB insists that, as an alternative to battery-powered machinery, hydrogen offers a practical solution. Having a world land speed record on its side, will no doubt be an effective way of proving it.

Adapting for tomorrow

Lister Wilder is embracing heavier machinery, electrification and automation while reinforcing the dealer support network behind the machines, says DAN GILKES

Well-known construction, agricultural, groundcare and arboricultural dealer Lister Wilder, has opened a major new depot in Lopcombe, Salisbury. The site will serve construction market customers across Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, with the recently expanded range of Kubota construction machinery, a line of site dumpers and the Avant range of compact loaders.

The company has taken over a purpose-built sales and service centre, that is considerably larger than its previous premises just a few miles down the road. The workshop boasts four large bays, all capable of handling Kubota's new 14-tonne crawler machines, up from just two bays in the old yard. The facility also includes smart new offices, a showroom and a parts storage area, that is four times larger than previously.

"The opening of our new Salisbury depot marks a significant milestone for Lister Wilder," said managing director Charlie King.

"Since taking on the area in 2023, we've invested over £1m to ensure we can fully support construction customers across Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire. With 60 mobile service engineers, £3m of parts stock, inter-depot deliveries and factory-trained, knowledgeable staff, we're ideally positioned to support our growing customer base.

"We're also excited to unveil Kubota's new 14-tonne excavators and compact tracked loaders. With machines sold in our very first week at the new site, it's clear that these products are opening up exciting new markets for us."



The workshops have four large bays, twice as many as the previous depot



The team at Lister Wilder's new Salisbury depot say they are looking forward to welcoming a growing number of customers

Technological adaptation

Like many dealers, Lister Wilder is adapting to the changing needs of its customers and the new technologies and innovations that manufacturers are bringing to the market. For the Kubota construction range, that means dealing with larger, heavier machinery, as the company brings the U145 14-tonne crawler excavator and two wheeled excavators to the market this year.

"Part of this move was to improve our facilities to cope with the larger machines," said Mr King. "We will be able to handle the U145 and we have already changed two of our delivery lorries, from 26-tonne six-wheelers to 32-tonne eight wheelers, to be able to move the machines around."

Heavier equipment is not the only driver of change for dealers, however. As with all sectors of the market, the move to electrification, connectivity and automation will see even greater revolution over the coming years.

"There's a big move to autonomous mowing in the groundcare market and it's a bit daunting," said Mr King.

"The commercial side of the groundcare sector in particular, led by golf courses, is flying at the moment, as customers are seeing savings in labour and in fuel."

The groundcare market is also building the dealer's experience of electrification, as an increasing number of customers opt for battery-powered machinery. This trend could be repeated in the construction market soon too,

as contractors and plant hire businesses look to electric machinery to reduce exhaust emissions on site.

Lister Wilder was the first Kubota dealer in the UK to carry out the manufacturer's Requip retrofit on a customer's mini excavator, creating the first electric Kubota mini for plant hire firm WHC Hire Services.

Available on the 1.9-tonne KX019-4 and the 2.5-tonne U27-4 models, Kubota provides an electrification kit, that allows the dealer to remove the diesel engine from an existing machine and replace it with a modular battery pack and electric motor. This provides a zero-emission



With Kubota expanding its offer, to include a 14-tonne excavator and a compact tracked loader, the dealership required larger premises to maintain service levels

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The dealership has plenty of stock of fast-moving machines

electric solution at a considerably lower entry cost than a factory-built battery machine. Perhaps critically for the hire company, the conversion can also be reversed, allowing the company to market a used diesel model, or an electric machine, depending on demand from the market.

The company is ready for additional moves towards battery electric models. Mr King added: "We've done all of the Kubota courses and we've created our own health and safety training to deal with electric machinery."

Specialisation mix

Lister Wilder employs more than 200 staff at its six branches across the South of England. Those depots are in Ashford, Bristol, Cirencester, Guildford, Reading and the new site in Salisbury. Four of the sites specialise in construction machinery, with the agricultural and groundcare equipment the centre of attention at the other two.

Since 2022, Kubota has been the main equipment supplier, with Lister Wilder stocking construction machinery, agricultural tractors, groundcare and Kubota's engines. The business was established in 1947 as Tractors & Farm Aids, with an agricultural equipment outlet in Reading.

The company had become Lister Farm Sales by the 1980s, expanding into groundcare in 1995, when it first took on a Kubota dealership. The third-generation family-owned company adopted the Lister Wilder name in 2000, bringing together the successful Lister name from the West, with the

Wilder brand in the East.

"We've continued to grow and establish our infrastructure over the last four years," said Mr King.

That's not to say that there won't be further investment in the network. The company is currently awaiting planning permission to update and expand its White House Farm site in Reading. He is also looking for additional equipment opportunities that would add to the company's reach across the South of England.

"We've got some of the best franchises, we just want to get them out across the area," said Mr King.

"I am happy with where we are now. The focus now is on doing an excellent job to support all of our customers."















The new facility has space for a showroom and offices



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STIGA's new managing director, James Gordon

Power shift

James Gordon, STIGA UK's new managing director, spoke to *Service Dealer's* editor STEVE GIBBS, outlining the company's vision for electrification, autonomous mowing and the evolving role of the dealer network.

Service Dealer: Can you start by telling our readers a little about your career to date and what led you to take on the role of md at STIGA UK?

James Gordon: Having held senior leadership roles at global, innovation-led brands like Kärcher, Dyson, and Colgate-Palmolive, I've had the privilege of managing complex operations not just in the UK, but internationally across Australia, Asia, and the USA. Previously I spent my career concentrating on driving commercial growth and operational efficiency across both consumer and B2B sectors, and I found that the core theme was always about building strong market positions and delivering value through exceptional partnerships, which is as it should be.

What drew me to STIGA UK was the immense scale of opportunity. While STIGA carries a trusted, +90-year heritage, it's our visionary future that truly inspires me. Today, we are spearheading a major shift toward electric and autonomous gardening solutions - driven by the launch of the new ePower Pro battery system and our strategic expansion into the professional grounds management sector.

Stepping into the role of STIGA UK managing director gives me the perfect opportunity to guide this transformation: my focus is on leveraging my global commercial experience to steer this iconic brand through an evolving market, ensuring STIGA delivers the absolute best in innovation while strengthening support for our dealers and customers across the UK.

SD: What were your first impressions of the UK business when you stepped into the role?

JG: My initial impression of the UK business has been incredibly positive. I have found a company with massive potential, backed by a talented team that has shown great resilience during a period of major global change. A key part of that evolution has been our recent relocation from Plymouth to our new, state-of-the-art headquarters in Stansted. This move has been more than just a change of address; it's a strategic step forward that positions our operations for future growth.

Alongside this physical transition, STIGA is moving purposefully toward the future of garden care. We are leading the shift in battery and robotics technology, while strictly maintaining the premium quality and engineering heritage the brand is known for. With excellent products, a dedicated workforce, and loyal dealer partnerships, the foundations here are exceptionally strong. We are fully primed to build on our rich history and embrace the next generation of smart garden technology from our new Stansted home.

SD: What is your immediate priority for STIGA UK in the next 12–18 months?

JG: The growing demand for battery-powered and autonomous solutions reflects a structural shift toward cleaner, quieter, and more convenient technologies, as nowadays consumers increasingly expect solutions that deliver strong performance with minimal maintenance. With this context in mind, our immediate priority for STIGA UK is to ensure our network is fully equipped to capitalise on this evolution. We are providing our partners with the advanced tools, specialised training, and commercial plans they need to confidently sell, install, and service our ePower and autonomous robot lines. Our goal is to make this technology adoption seamless and highly profitable. Rather than a pivot away from our reliable, traditional fuel-based foundations, we want our partners to see these future-proof innovations as a powerful way to expand their market reach and build a highly profitable and more responsible business.

SD: Where do you see STIGA UK positioned within the UK market over the next five years?

JG: STIGA plans to be a leading brand in the UK market for quality, future-focused gardening technology. STIGA will continue to be highly regarded for the performance of its ePower battery range and the intelligence of its autonomous robot lawn mowers - all backed by a nationwide network of highly knowledgeable local experts. But most importantly, STIGA has built a major part of its reputation specifically around its exceptional cutting technology and deck engineering. Historically, we have differentiated ourselves by focusing on the science of the cut and precision grass management: a standard backed by more than 90 years of land care expertise. Ultimately, our reputation will remain anchored in what customers value most: top-tier innovation paired with unmatched, expert service.



James Gordon believes the tipping point from petrol to battery will be in the next three to four years

SD: Are there particular segments - domestic, professional, robotic, battery - where you see the greatest growth opportunity?

JG: The biggest growth areas are sure to be battery and robotics. Our ePower battery power is quickly matching, or beating, petrol performance. This makes it the top choice for smart homeowners and the professional trade, especially with stricter noise and emissions rules in the UK. Robotics, particularly our new VISTA line, is moving from a luxury novelty to a mainstream solution, which creates great long-term service relationships with our customers. This is why we are heavily investing in AI-driven technologies. We recently unveiled a strategic partnership with SiMa.ai, a leader in physical AI, to address a real-world challenge: gardens are unpredictable environments where connectivity can vary due to layout, buildings, or terrain. To operate flawlessly, a robot must be able to navigate intelligently and autonomously under all conditions. For STIGA, robotic mowers are not just connected gadgets; they are truly autonomous systems capable of understanding and interacting with the physical world independently, safely, and efficiently. Therefore, we see AI as a monumental opportunity to redefine the relationship between people, technology, and outdoor spaces.

SD: How central is battery to STIGA's future?

JG: Battery technology is absolutely key; it is the foundation of STIGA's future. We are making substantial global investments in our unified ePower battery range to ensure easy power solutions across all our products, from handheld tools to ride-on mowers. Our focus is on giving customers maximum convenience and performance, supported by local experts for choosing and maintaining their battery systems.

SD: Do you see a clear tipping point where battery overtakes petrol in the UK market - and if so, when?

JG: Yes, I can certainly see that point coming. It is sure to happen when battery technology clearly matches or outperforms petrol in areas like run-time, power, and overall cost. I think this will be within the next three to four years. It will be driven by stricter UK noise and emission laws, especially for commercial work, and more customers wanting sustainable, easy-to-manage options.

SD: What role then, does petrol still play in STIGA's portfolio?

JG: Petrol is still needed for those heavy-duty, commercial applications where prolonged runtime and raw power are essential. However, we are undeniably seeing a steady transition toward cleaner alternatives. Our responsibility is



The new APX Pro robotic mower for commercial applications

to manage this industry shift thoughtfully and pragmatically. We remain fully committed to supporting and supplying parts for our existing petrol machinery, ensuring our customers and dealers are never left behind. Concurrently, we are guiding our partners to capture new revenue streams in the rapidly expanding battery sector, perfectly positioning them to meet future market demands.

SD: How important is robotics to the company's growth ambitions?

JG: Robotics, especially the ground-breaking technology in our new autonomous robot VISTA range, is extremely important for STIGA UK. It opens a huge new part of the market, well beyond traditional machine sales. Robotics means a reliable, ongoing relationship with the customer through installation, annual servicing, and software updates. Crucially, this positions our local dealer partners as technology consultants rather than just hardware retailers, providing essential long-term value to the consumer. I am also incredibly proud to share that both our robotic mowers and the accompanying STIGA.GO smart gardening app were recently honoured with the prestigious iF Design



James describes battery technology as the foundation of STIGA's future

Award 2026. This global recognition underscores STIGA's commitment to merging high-tier technology with intuitive design that truly enhances the user experience.

SD: What does this shift towards battery and robotics mean for your dealer network?

JG: The transition toward autonomous and AI-powered products is fundamentally transforming the relationship between companies and consumers. Traditionally, garden machinery was largely transactional: customers purchased a machine, used it for many years and interacted occasionally with dealers for maintenance or spare parts. Through connectivity, software updates and app-based interaction, the product itself becomes dynamic rather than static, adapting to user needs and continuously improving the overall experience. Our partners will be key service centres, specialising in installing, diagnosing, and maintaining complex electronic systems. The customer relationship will become much longer-term, which is good for both the business and the customer.

SD: Do you foresee changes in the traditional dealership business model because of electrification and automation?

JG: Definitely, I see that the traditional model will change into a specialist "Tech and Service" hub. There will be much greater need for installation skill, software management, and fault finding. Partners who adapt will ensure their future success by giving customers the necessary expert setup and ongoing care for complex automated systems - value that pure online sellers simply can't match.

SD: How important is bricks-and-mortar retail to STIGA in an increasingly digital world?

JG: Physical stores are vital to the premium STIGA customer experience. For buying high-tech items like battery riders or robotics, customers need to see them demonstrated, get expert advice, and have a local place for service. Our local partners provide that essential trust and hands-on expertise - they really are the face of our brand and the best guarantee of quality customer care.

SD: What would you say to dealers who may feel uncertain about the pace of technological change?

JG: I would tell them STIGA sees this change as the biggest opportunity, not a problem. We are investing in this new future alongside our partners. While change can feel difficult, we are committed to providing the training, tools, and successful products to make sure they stay ahead of the curve and remain the local expert our customers rely on.

SD: Are you seeing shifts in consumer expectations that dealers need to be aware of?

JG: Yes, UK customers are increasingly prioritising sustainable practices, ease of use, and connectivity. They expect to be able to control their machine easily through an app. As the technology gets more complex, they rely on trusted, local experts to help them choose, install, and manage the software. Beyond that, autonomy is completely redefining market expectations. It is no longer just about basic robotic functionality; consumers want intelligent systems that actively anticipate their needs, minimise manual effort, and maximise results. This shift represents a massive opportunity for our network, and STIGA is uniquely positioned to lead this evolution through our continuous innovation and advanced proprietary technologies.

SD: What do you see as the biggest challenge facing UK dealers right now?

JG: The biggest challenge is handling the shift from petrol to advanced battery and robotics. Local service partners need to keep up with petrol servicing while quickly gaining the skills needed for electrical and software diagnostics. STIGA is tackling this by offering full, easy-to-access training programs to quickly bring teams up to speed.

SD: If we were having this conversation in three years' time, what would you hope we'd be saying about STIGA UK under your leadership?

JG: I would hope we are celebrating STIGA UK as the undisputed leader in the battery and robotics market. I'd like



The "ground-breaking technology" in their VISTA range is extremely important for STIGA UK.

us to be looking back at how our business model—anchored by our proprietary ePower range, VISTA technology, and the unmatched expertise of our local partners—solidified STIGA as a dominant force in the UK industry while securing long-term profitability across our entire network.

SD: Thank you.



The biggest challenge for dealers, says James, is handling the shift from petrol to advanced battery and robotics



Implements such as box drills are still favoured over pneumatic seeders on some farms where transport is not an issue.

Brazilian dealers benefit from market growth

One of the world's largest producers of a multitude of food, fuel and fibre crops, Brazil has a growing appetite for technology that can boost farm productivity, as *Service Dealer's* MARTIN RICKATSON discovered on a study tour of the country's São Paulo state.

Accounting for almost half the total South American land area, Brazil has transformed its agriculture in recent decades, moving from a position as a net importer of staple foodstuffs to become one of the world's largest agricultural exporters of commodities as diverse as beef, soybeans, sugar, coffee and orange juice.

Some of that has resulted from well-documented land clearance, but there are now many government-imposed environmental measures in place to try to mitigate this. There have also been multiple other factors in the country's rapid agricultural productivity improvement, as revealed by an International Federation of Agricultural Journalists study trip

earlier this year hosted by Brazil's own agricultural journalists' network, Rede Agrojor.

According to market research firm IMARC, the Brazilian agricultural machinery market was worth US\$3.2bn (£2.38bn) in 2025. As a comparison the current UK market is calculated to be worth roughly the same, at £2.5bn, despite the country being 35 times smaller - the UK would fit easily into the southern state of São Paulo, the host region for *Service Dealer's* visit. What would make UK dealers particularly envious is the predicted compound annual growth of 3.9% over the next few years, leading to a suggested projection of US\$4.6bn (£3.42bn) by 2034.

Brazil's agribusiness is behind 29% of its GDP, a contribution itself that grew by 11.7% last year, adding another 2.3% to overall GDP. A quarter of the Brazilian population, 28.5m people, work in agriculture - and the country is a significant exporter to 200 countries globally, with agricultural produce representing half of Brazil's total exports. It is the world's leading exporter of cotton, poultry meat, coffee, soybeans, sugar, orange juice and beef, and the globe's largest producer of the latter five in that list. In addition, the country has a thriving natural fuel industry, with ethanol - derived mainly from its sugar cane industry - having been blended for use with petrol in its cars and light haulage vehicles since the 1930s.

Despite these impressive figures, and global news stories regarding the deforestation that certainly takes place in some areas, sources suggest just 30% of Brazil's land area is used for agriculture, and that 66% of the native area is preserved. Part of the slowdown in clearance is attributed to increasing adoption of advanced agricultural technology, from precision farming equipment to sophisticated irrigation systems, enabling higher yield potential to be realised from existing land.

Domestic Producers Dominate

The country's strong gross domestic product figures can be partly attributed

to the Brazilian government's policy of encouraging production of domestically-made equipment, both by Brazilian manufacturers and by multinationals. Around 90% of farm machinery sold domestically is produced within the country at facilities operated by major international manufacturers, and there are also multiple domestic 'short line' implement makers. Farmers are encouraged to buy Brazilian-made machinery via government financial support schemes.

While smaller family farms are more common in provinces such as São Paulo state, the region of our visit, large-scale farming tends to dominate in the central-west of Brazil, which encompasses the states of Mato Grosso do Sul, Mato Grosso and Goiás. Here, much as in the UK, neighbouring farm acquisitions and consolidations have become common, creating large commercial fleet-buying farm businesses. Added to the familiar challenge of sourcing sufficient skilled labour, this is driving investment in machinery and precision equipment, and supporting annual tractor sales of around 50,000 units, with 2025 figures of around 52,000, up 10.6% on the previous year.

Many of the developments in this area were on display at Agrishow, Brazil's largest agricultural technology trade fair, held in late April. The country's dealers and manufacturers converged on the event, held in the

north-east of São Paulo state, near the city of Ribeirão Preto. Many exhibiting names would be recognisable to dealers here, from CNH and AGCO to John Deere, Claas, JCB and Kuhn. While the names are familiar, many of the machines on display featured some subtle differences to those that dealers here would know, being specifically built for national requirements thanks to that Brazilian government policy of incentivising domestic manufacturing.

Home Manufacturing

John Deere, AGCO and CNH in particular operate not just assembly plants in the country, but also foundries and key component manufacturing facilities. This is said to not only help protect against unfavourable exchange rate movements affecting imported equipment prices, but also aid manufacturers and dealers in qualifying for government credit programmes, with a knock-on effect of attracting customers through financially-attractive machinery.

However, as one of the world's largest farm equipment markets, it's unsurprising that newer names on the world stage are keen for some of the action. Also prominent at Agrishow 2026 were the emerging names from China that have become familiar at European agricultural and construction exhibitions, including Zoomlion, Lovol and Liugong. As with their efforts in Europe, though, their market planning and penetration is in its early stages.

The agricultural technology available to the country's farmers is as advanced - if not more so in many areas - as that in Europe and North America. Recent developments from multinational firms familiar to the UK agricultural industry have included an ethanol-powered prototype high-hp 8R tractor from John Deere. Last year the firm opened a dedicated 'Brazilian Technology Development Centre', in Indaiatuba, São Paulo state. Claimed to be the world's first such facility dedicated to R&D for equipment suited specifically to the climate, soils and practices of tropical agriculture, the site represented a R\$180m (£26.5m) investment, and is



CNH's Case IH arm offers trailed and self-propelled Coffee Express harvesters through its Brazilian dealers.



Carlos Viacava, who farms in São Paulo state, relies primarily on John Deere equipment, but also on Massey Ferguson and other makes.

sited alongside an existing manufacturing plant producing backhoes, wheel loaders and crawler excavators.

AGCO operates multiple manufacturing facilities across Brazil, and between its Massey Ferguson and Valtra brands accounts for around half of the Brazilian market. In 1960, the São Paulo city of Mogi das Cruzes saw Valtra open one of the first tractor factories developed by an overseas firm at the invitation of the Brazilian government. It went on to develop a broad range of tractor sizes and gained particular popularity among sugar cane producers seeking high-hp haulage tractors. Such is the strength of the brand in Brazil that today Valtra offers Brazilian farmers a full line of tractors, rotary combines, self-propelled sprayers, fertiliser spreaders and drills.

Producing predominantly Massey Ferguson tractors, AGCO's Canoas plant in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul is reckoned to be responsible for more than half of Brazil's tractor exports. A factory at Santa Rosa in the same state manufactures Massey Ferguson and Valtra combines, while a further plant at Ibiruba makes AGCO's Momentum precision planter and other Massey Ferguson agricultural

implements. AGCO is also building the Fendt presence in Brazil, but with German-built tractors and the Italian-made Ideal combine.

Of the other big multinational names, CNH's 526,000m² Sorocaba plant in São Paulo is its largest globally, and focuses primarily on producing Case IH Axial-Flow and New Holland CR rotary combines and components. Its main tractor production site is at Curitiba, Parana, a site which was initially founded by Sperry New Holland in 1975 to produce combines, a function it also still performs. The company also produces self-propelled sprayers and sugar cane harvesters – the latter sold only as Case IH products; the former under both CNH brands – at a plant in Piracicaba, São Paulo, while Case construction equipment is produced at a facility in Contagem, Minas Gerais. Claas, meanwhile, doesn't manufacture in Brazil, but is a prominent importer of equipment made in its plants elsewhere. Similarly, Kubota, SDF and ARGO import from their respective factories outside of Brazil. Meanwhile, big international players like India's Mahindra and Mahindra are strong players in the under-50hp sector, which accounts for almost half of Brazilian tractors, having established a factory in Rio Grande do Sul. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Germany's Nexat has sold a number of its 1,100hp gantry tractors into major Brazilian cropping regions such as Mato Grosso, complete with interchangeable seeding, spraying, fertiliser application and combine modules.

The farm machinery market is also served by a number of domestic companies across most key sectors. The likes of Agrale, founded in 1962 as maker of pedestrian self-propelled cultivators, later moved into tractor manufacturing. Today, it makes models of up to 220hp at its factory in Rio Grande do Sul. Brazilian sprayer maker Jacto, meanwhile, is a strong player in its home market, its orange-liveried trailed and self-propelled machines being a common sight across the country's key arable areas, alongside its self-propelled coffee and sugar cane



The sugar cane harvester sector is dominated by Case IH and John Deere, while AGCO's Valtra has strong position in the market for cane haulage tractors.

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Brazilian manufacturer Jacto, which also makes cane harvesters, has a strong position in the sector for relatively simple high clearance sprayers.



New Holland, Case IH, John Deere and Massey Ferguson also command sizeable slices of the self-propelled sprayer market.

harvesters. The firm recently announced an agricultural drone, the T100, developed in partnership with DJI, complete with 100-litre tank and optional 100kg solids applicator.

Farmer Viewpoint

Service Dealer visited one large arable and beef farm where John Deere was the predominant make for tractors and combines, but there were other brands on the tractor fleet, and a range of machinery from domestic makers. Carlos Viacava is primarily a beef producer, farming native Nelore cattle and operating across three farms in São Paulo state, each of around 3,000ha (7,500ac). Extensive grazing is supported by crop production primarily for the herd, with additional feed most often required in the summer months of mid-December to mid-March, when grass growth is at its lowest.

“With good irrigation, we can grow three or four consecutive crops in a year this far south, so machinery puts in the hours,” he says.

“However, most crops are direct-drilled, so machinery isn’t

worked too hard and there aren’t many passes made over the land from crop establishment to harvest. Our average field size is around 35ha, so we don’t run especially big machinery, with a John Deere S540 combine with 7.5m header used for harvest on this farm, and two 125hp tractors - a John Deere 6180J and a Massey Ferguson 6713 – taking care of a lot of the land work. For lighter field tasks such as lime spreading we use models such as an open-station 100hp John Deere 5603. Our sprayer is not from one of the multinationals, though – it’s a self-propelled Jacto.

“Labour is getting harder to find, but good machinery operators here earn a decent wage of around 5000 rials (£750) per month, and we are lucky to have good operators whose elder generations worked with our family.

“But reliability is important, and we have a John Deere dealer, Terraverde, with six branches in the locality of this farm, while there are also good dealerships in the vicinity of our other farms. There are lower-cost alternatives, but I value the technology, reliability and dealer support.”



Held in late April-early May, Brazil’s Agrishow national agricultural exhibition this year saw significant launches from multinationals and domestic makers.

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BUSINESS MONITOR

Lack of applicants and skills hampering dealerships

Efforts to recruit still proving problematic.

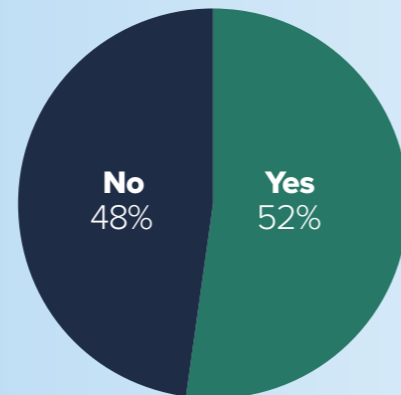
The feedback from dealers who took part in our latest recruitment survey suggests that, despite ongoing efforts to raise awareness of careers within the land-based sector, the challenge of attracting new staff remains as tough as ever.

As in previous years, many respondents reported successfully recruiting new employees during the past 12 months. However, the need for additional staff remains high, with everyone who responded still looking to expand their teams over the coming year. Unsurprisingly, recruitment continues to be viewed as a major headache, with dealers describing the process as difficult or extremely difficult.

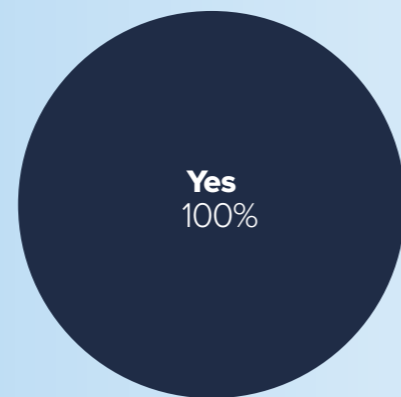
When asked about the biggest barriers to recruitment, two issues emerged neck and neck at the top of the list: a lack of applicants and a lack of suitable skills among those applying. The findings suggest that dealers are not only struggling to attract candidates, but also to find individuals with the experience and technical abilities needed to hit the ground running. Unrealistic wage expectations also featured prominently among respondents' concerns, reflecting a challenge being reported across many sectors of the economy.

As for where dealers are advertising vacancies, online job search sites proved to be the most popular route this year, overtaking social media channels and more traditional methods. Word of mouth also continues to play an important role, demonstrating that personal recommendations remain a valuable recruitment tool within the industry.

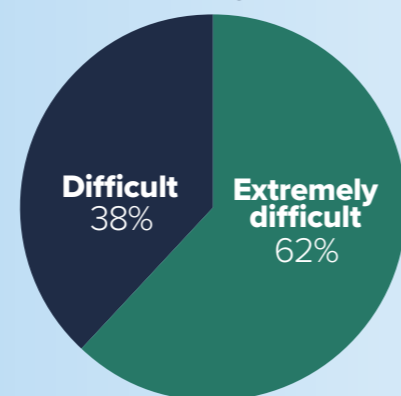
Have you recruited new staff in the past year?



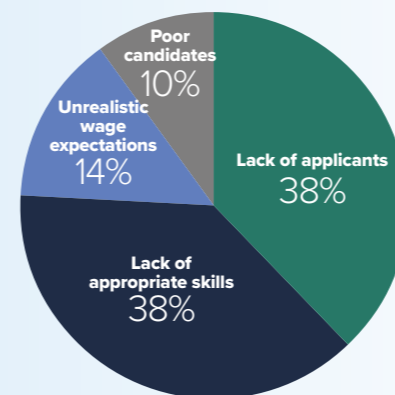
Do you want to take on new staff in the next 12 months?



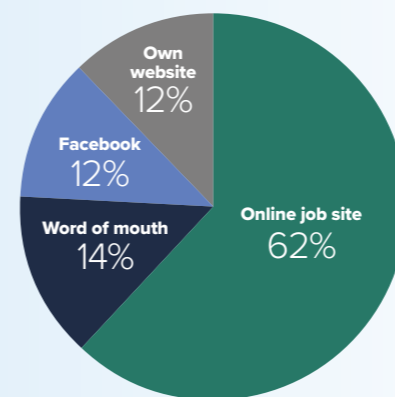
How difficult did you find / expect to find recruiting new staff?



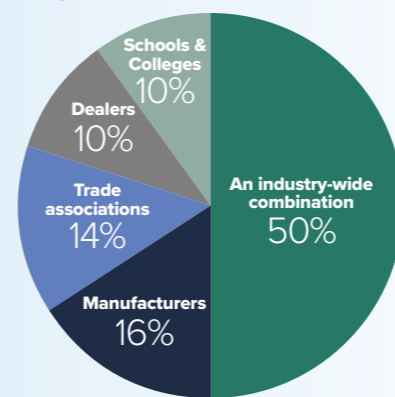
What is the principal hurdle you face in recruiting new staff?



Where do you find is the most successful place to advertise for new staff?



Whose responsibility is it to promote the industry's profile to potential employees?



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?

“We require more awareness of our industry. We should encourage government to train the asylum seekers in groundcare industries from machinery to farming. We need to think outside the box now as this has gone on for too long.”

“There is a distinct lack of interest within the age group required to fill most positions.”

“We need more dealers to be bringing new blood into the industry. Too few are taking on apprentices, and the colleges are so poor quality these days, that the staff do not want to stay there for the duration of the courses.”

“We are coming up against unskilled staff wanting extremely high wages, plus unmotivated candidates who are uninterested in our industry.”

“I use Indeed to advertise our jobs - but most people seem not to read the advert and apply for jobs they are not qualified to do.”

“We receive plenty of applications, but very few candidates have any mechanical aptitude or understanding of what the role actually involves.”

“Young people simply don't know this industry exists as a career option. Schools seem focused on university routes, while practical, technical careers like ours are rarely mentioned.”

“Manufacturers, colleges and dealers need to work together more closely to showcase the opportunities available. There are excellent careers in this sector, but too few people are hearing about them.”

How to use your customer list

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

This issue: Sara offers help to dealers unsure what to do with their customer data.



I recently had a dealer in North Dakota ask me, "Sara, I know I should be marketing to my past customers. I just don't know where to start. Our data is everywhere - I'm embarrassed by the state of it."

I told him this is one of the most common conversations I have with dealers – and that fact that he is embarrassed about it tells me he already knows it matters. That's half the battle. Here's the good news: a messy list is fixable. No list at all is the real problem. So let me walk you through exactly what we do when a dealer hands us their situation.

What is a customer list and why does it matter for dealerships?

Your customer list, sometimes called your customer data, is every piece of contact information you have collected over the years. Phone numbers, email addresses, purchase history, service records. It lives in your dealer management system (DMS), your old software, your spreadsheets, or sometimes all three at once.

This list matters because past customers are the easiest people to market to. They already trust you. They already bought from you. They are ten times easier to sell to than a stranger who has never heard of your dealership. Most dealers are sitting on tens of thousands in repeat and referral revenue and never reach out to collect it.

Step 1: Clean the list

Before you do anything, you need to know what is good and what is garbage. Run your list through a data verification

tool. This is a service that checks every phone number and email address and tells you whether it is real, valid, outdated, or just plain wrong. Most dealers think they have 3,000 good contacts. After cleaning, it is closer to 1,800. That is still 1,800 people who have bought from you, had equipment serviced by you, or walked through your door. That is gold. Stop treating it like trash. The cost is low. Most verification services charge a fraction of a penny per record.

What to do: Export your customer list from your DMS or pull it together from wherever it lives. Run it through a verification tool. Get the real number. Now you know what you are working with.

Step 2: Fill in the gaps

Most dealer lists have holes: a phone number, but no email. A name entered as "customer" because someone typed it wrong years ago. This is normal. It is fixable. A tool called Hunter.io helps you find and verify missing email addresses. You put in what you know, usually a name and a company website, and it finds what is missing. If you fill in even 10 to 15 percent of your missing contacts, that is real people you can now reach. Hunter.io offers a free version to get started, along with paid plans for higher volume.

What to do: Take the gaps in your list and run your commercial customers through Hunter.io. Do not stress about making it perfect. Make it better.

Step 3: Give your list a home

This is where most dealers freeze up. They assume they need a CRM, which stands for Customer Relationship

Management software, a tool to keep your customer information organised and usable. And that sounds expensive and complicated. It does not have to be. Not yet. A Google Sheet is a perfectly acceptable starting point. A simple spreadsheet with columns for name, phone number, email address, what they purchased, and the date of their last visit is more than enough to start marketing to your past customers. You do not need a \$500 a month software system to send an email to 800 people who bought equipment from you in the last three years. You need your list and something to say.

What to do: Build a simple spreadsheet with five columns. Name, phone number, email, product purchased, and date of last visit. That is it. Start there. Move to a full CRM later when you are ready.

How dealerships should use their customer list

Once your list is clean, filled in, and has a home, here is how to start using it. Send a reintroduction email to your full list. Let them know you are there, what you offer, and what is happening at your dealership right now. Service specials, new inventory, seasonal reminders. Past customers want to hear from you. They just haven't because no one reached out. From there, build a simple habit. Email your list once a month. One topic. One clear call to action. That is a dealership marketing plan that actually works.

The bottom line

Clean the list. Fill the gaps. Find it a home. Then use it. Your list is not the problem. Ignoring it is.

Are dealers the industry's forgotten asset?

As dealerships navigate economic uncertainty, supply chain disruption and changing customer habits, **Kelly Burgess**, md of Buxtons Ltd, questions whether some manufacturers are overlooking the value of the dealer networks that helped build their brands.



Every time you switch on the television, open a newspaper, or scroll through your phone, it feels like there's another crisis unfolding somewhere in the world. Rising costs, political uncertainty, supply chain disruption, conflicts overseas, interest rates, fuel prices - it's a lot, and whether we like it or not, it all eventually lands at the door of the dealer network.

Customers are more cautious, margins are tighter, and planning ahead feels harder than ever. We've all become used to expecting the unexpected. One minute you're worrying about stock arriving on time, the next you're trying to explain that their parts are stuck on a boat somewhere trapped for one reason or another.

I think one thing the last few years have shown us is just how resilient dealerships have had to become. We adapt because we have no choice. We wear about ten different hats every single day, and somehow still manage to keep the doors open, the workshop running, and customers happy.

What I find increasingly frustrating, however, is the feeling that some manufacturers are beginning to forget the importance of the dealer network, who have been an integral part of brand growth for decades.

The garden machinery industry has always been built on relationships; trust between manufacturers, dealers, and customers. Many dealerships have represented the same brands for generations. We've invested in the premises, the tools, the training, the demonstrations, the local events, and most importantly, the customer relationships that give those brands credibility in the marketplace.

Yet more and more, there seems to be a push towards direct sales models and online-first thinking, often with very little regard for the dealerships carrying the responsibility of supporting the product afterwards. It can sometimes feel as though the dealer is only important when a machine needs assembling, repairing, warranting, or explaining to an unhappy customer.

The reality is that dealerships do far more than simply sell machinery.

We are the face of these brands in our local communities. We are the people sponsoring local football teams, attending county shows, supporting contractors, helping homeowners choose the right machine, and answering the phone at 5pm on a Friday when someone's mower has broken down halfway through a job.

When a manufacturer launches a new product, it's the dealers demonstrating it, promoting it, and convincing customers to trust it. When there are supply issues or technical problems, it's often the dealer managing the frustration and protecting the reputation of the brand.



Of course, the industry must evolve. Technology changes, customer habits change, and online platforms absolutely have their place. We've embraced that ourselves and seen the benefits it can bring. But surely there must be a balance - one where manufacturers recognise that a strong dealer network is not a burden, but one of their greatest assets.

A good dealer network gives customers confidence. It provides aftersales support, technical knowledge, parts availability, and genuine accountability. More importantly, it creates loyalty - not just to the dealership, but to the brand itself.

Despite the challenges, I still believe this industry is full of good people who care deeply about what they do. Dealers are nothing if not determined, and whilst there will always be obstacles thrown our way, I suspect most of us will continue doing what we've always done: turning up every morning, adapting to whatever comes next, and doing our best for the customers who rely on us.

Hopefully with slightly fewer global catastrophes thrown into the mix.



EMPLOYMENT

Will £3,000 from the government encourage hiring?

Mid-March, the government announced policies “to help unlock 200,000 new jobs and apprenticeships for next generation”, writes **SME Digest editor, Adam Bernstein.**

The government is hoping that a £1bn pot of money will help create 200,000 jobs for the young, or rather, those aged under 25, and that employers will prick up their ears.

The policy announcement came after the government said that apprenticeship starts amongst the young were down 40% in the last decade and that “almost one million young people are not earning or learning - a rise of 248,000 between 2021 to 2024.”

In overview

The government is putting in place a new Youth Jobs Grant through which businesses will receive £3,000 for every young person they hire aged 18-24 who has been on Universal Credit (UC) and looking for work for six months.

There will be an expansion of the Jobs Guarantee to a wider age range, from 18-21 to 18-24.

There's also an Apprenticeship Incentive of £2,000 for each new employee aged 16-24 taken on by an SME, along with further reforms to the Growth and Skills Levy to prioritise

young apprentices.

But for small firms, it's the government's new £3,000 incentive for hiring young unemployed workers that ought to sound like a welcome boost. With tight margins and the risk and cost of taking on staff – let alone a new apprentice or trainee - it should, at least on paper, lower the cost and risks to employers.

Will it work?

But in the long run, will the incentive actually make a (lasting) difference? More importantly, what can a smaller firm do to encourage the young and keep them?

Of course, £3,000 will help, but only tangentially, as it may encourage some to take on an apprentice or nudge a hesitant employer into giving someone a chance. But on its own, £3,000 is unlikely to reverse the long-term decline in apprenticeship uptake or solve the deeper challenges facing the industry.

It's worth noting that, not unsurprisingly, opposition parties weren't overly keen on the proposals.

For the Conservatives, Helen Whately MP said that state-funded jobs were “economic madness” and “not the answer”. She added: “The best way to tackle youth unemployment is to back businesses to create jobs, not tax them out of existence to fund benefits and subsidies.” It's why the Conservatives say that they would “roll back Labour's Employment Rights Act.”

LibDem MP Steve Darling commented, in Parliament, that the

party “does not understand why the government are removing funding for apprenticeships for management. Surely managers are the people who support young people in their hour of need, as they go into work?”

Beyond the political comment is commentary from bodies such as the Edge Foundation that supports education. It acknowledges the schemes but says that “SMEs also need practical support to navigate the apprenticeship system, from understanding the full range of incentives available to finding the right training provider and identifying an apprenticeship standard that meets their skills needs... almost half of SMEs are unaware of the existing grant for 16–18-year-old apprentices...”

Helpful, but not a panacea

Clearly, any cash handout will garner attention and for a small firm, £3,000 will cover a significant chunk of wages early on while the individual is learning and not yet productive.

However, it's likely that firms that claim the incentive might have hired anyway; the money doesn't fundamentally change the financial equation. Next, as it's a one-off payment it won't address what happens after the first few months, when the real work of training, mentoring, and retaining the worker begins.

And of course, £3,000 won't deal with the real reasons why fewer young people are choosing manual trades in the first place.



While some may comment that ‘the young aren't interested’ in their trade, looking at it from a different perspective – that of the young worker – manual-related work is invariably seen as hard, dirty, unstable, and with no clear progression. It doesn't help that schools prioritise academic routes.

Small firms (should) have the advantage

Smaller firms and organisations should have a real advantage precisely because they are small and so can offer a more personal, hands-on experience. The young who work directly with experienced colleagues can learn a wide range of skills and feel part of a team. The key, then, is to communicate and structure the process effectively.

This means that the first few months are crucial. Many leave not because they dislike the work, but because their initial experience is poor.

Sometimes, new starters are thrown straight in with little guidance - they perform basic tasks without understanding how it fits into the bigger picture; they lose confidence and motivation.

The solution is simple - provide a solid introduction to the job and the company, explain what they will learn and how they will progress, assign a mentor who takes responsibility for their development, and set small, achievable goals in the first few weeks.

It should be obvious, but when young workers feel supported and can see progress, they are far more likely to stay.

Build a pipeline

Many small firms only think about recruitment when they need someone. However, a better approach would be to build relationships earlier, say, by connecting with local schools or colleges, offering short work experience placements, and inviting students to visit.

This helps the young see for themselves how the trade works and also helps firms identify potential talent well in advance of a hiring decision.

Making progression visible

University tends to have clarity of progression while trades can feel less structured, even when opportunities exist.

Small firms can address this by talking about the skills an individual will have after one year, the roles they move could into after completing their training, and what a long-term career in the business looks like.

Use the incentive wisely

The £3,000 incentive should not just be used to reduce costs. Instead, employers could use it to pay for mentoring and supervision, basic training or tools, or help with a structured introduction.

Another option is to take on more than one young worker at a time. A small group may create peer support, reduce isolation, and make the experience more engaging and enjoyable.

Summary

The £3,000 from the government is helpful and may encourage firms to take a chance on the young. But it doesn't guarantee success.

For any (small) employer, the real impact will come from what happens after the individual is taken on.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Make complainers your friend

No organisation of any standing would want to proactively do anything to lay itself open to criticism - yet complaints do get made, writes Adam Bernstein, SME Digest editor.

Complaints are not signs of failure - rather, they can be a defining moment. And the way a complaint is handled often matters more than the complaint itself. Why? A customer who experiences a problem is not

necessarily lost. But a customer who feels ignored, dismissed, or disrespected almost certainly will be.

When approached correctly, complaints become opportunities to strengthen trust, entrench a relationship, and, importantly, demonstrate professionalism. Firms that retain customers are the ones that hold their hands up and respond with accountability and a desire to care.

Change the mindset

The key to ensuring complainers stay loyal begins with a mindset shift.

A complaining customer is one that is still engaged as they care enough to speak up and want the relationship to continue if only issue is addressed correctly. In contrast, the most dangerous customers are not the angry ones, but those who leave without explanation.

A complaint is feedback in its most direct form and needs to be viewed as an opportunity to improve, to fix a problem, and show that the firm cares.

Speed is one of the most critical factors in complaint resolution. When a customer raises a concern, silence amplifies frustration. And even if a

solution is not immediately available, acknowledgment needs to be immediate. It's for this reason that a simple response that confirms receipt of the complaint which promises follow-up can prevent escalation. A tardy response communicates indifference, even if that is not the intention.

Once a complaint has been made and the resolution process begins, the firm needs to listen as many conflicts escalate not because of the problem itself, but because the customer feels dismissed. Effective listening requires restraint.

This means allowing the customer to vent and fully explain their experience without interruption. Avoid preparing your defence while the customer is speaking. Ask clarifying questions and repeat what you have heard to ensure understanding.

It is essential that you remain calm. Complaints are often delivered with frustration or disappointment, and it is only natural to feel defensive, especially if you believe the situation has been misunderstood. However, if you react emotionally, it'll rarely lead to a resolution. The issue, not the tone, needs to be the central focus. Keep emotions distinctly separate from the facts to allow you to maintain professionalism and steer the conversation toward a solution and away from conflict.

Take responsibility

Taking responsibility for a problem is one of the most powerful trust-building tools available in complaint handling. If a mistake has been made, acknowledging it quickly and directly will defuse hostility. Don't shift blame to another department, supplier, or even onto the customer; they are not concerned with internal complications only 'the right' outcome. Taking responsibility is a positive trait, even in complex situations where blame can be shared.

But where a customer is at fault, it's still important to retain the air of respectability and professionalism. Politely making them see the error will

go much further than making them look stupid.

Where appropriate, offer a sincere apology. This doesn't diminish the issue or place blame on the customer. However, it recognises that there is a problem, expresses genuine regret, and makes a promise to improve.

The key is, though, to be sincere as customers are often more forgiving than many expect — provided they sense sincerity.

Of course, you will want to explain context, but customers ultimately care only about resolution - long justifications can sound like excuses. You need to shift focus from what went wrong to what will be done to make it right. This means offering a clear, actionable solution with a timeline - don't be ambiguous.

If possible, offer choices to return a sense of control to the customer, which is often what they feel they lost when the issue first arose. Whether it is a refund, an alternative arrangement, options transform confrontation to collaboration.

Follow through

But - and this is important - promises will mean little without follow through. After trust has been shaken, reliability becomes everything. If you commit to an update, provide it even if progress is still ongoing. If you promise a resolution don't disappoint. Each fulfilled promise helps to rebuild credibility. On the flip side, failed promises will permanently damage the relationship.

Resolution of the problem should not be the end of communication. Following up after an issue has been resolved demonstrates that care goes beyond lip service to complaints - a brief call to confirm that the customer is happy will make a lasting impression. Going the extra step transforms a dissatisfied customer into one that is loyal.

Managing a complaint well requires emotional intelligence where staff need not only technical knowledge but also interpersonal skills. Recognising emotions, managing reactions, and

responding with empathy are skills that can be learned. Firms that invest time in developing this will be far better positioned to retain customers when challenges arise.

Another consideration is a clear internal process for handling complaints that ensures that nothing falls through the cracks. This means a structured approach with acknowledgment, investigation, response, implementation, and follow-up.

Beyond incidents, it makes sense to view complaints as data sources where the firms looks for patterns and weak points. Repeated concerns about delays, communications, or billing can reveal systemic weaknesses; addressing these should prevent future dissatisfaction.

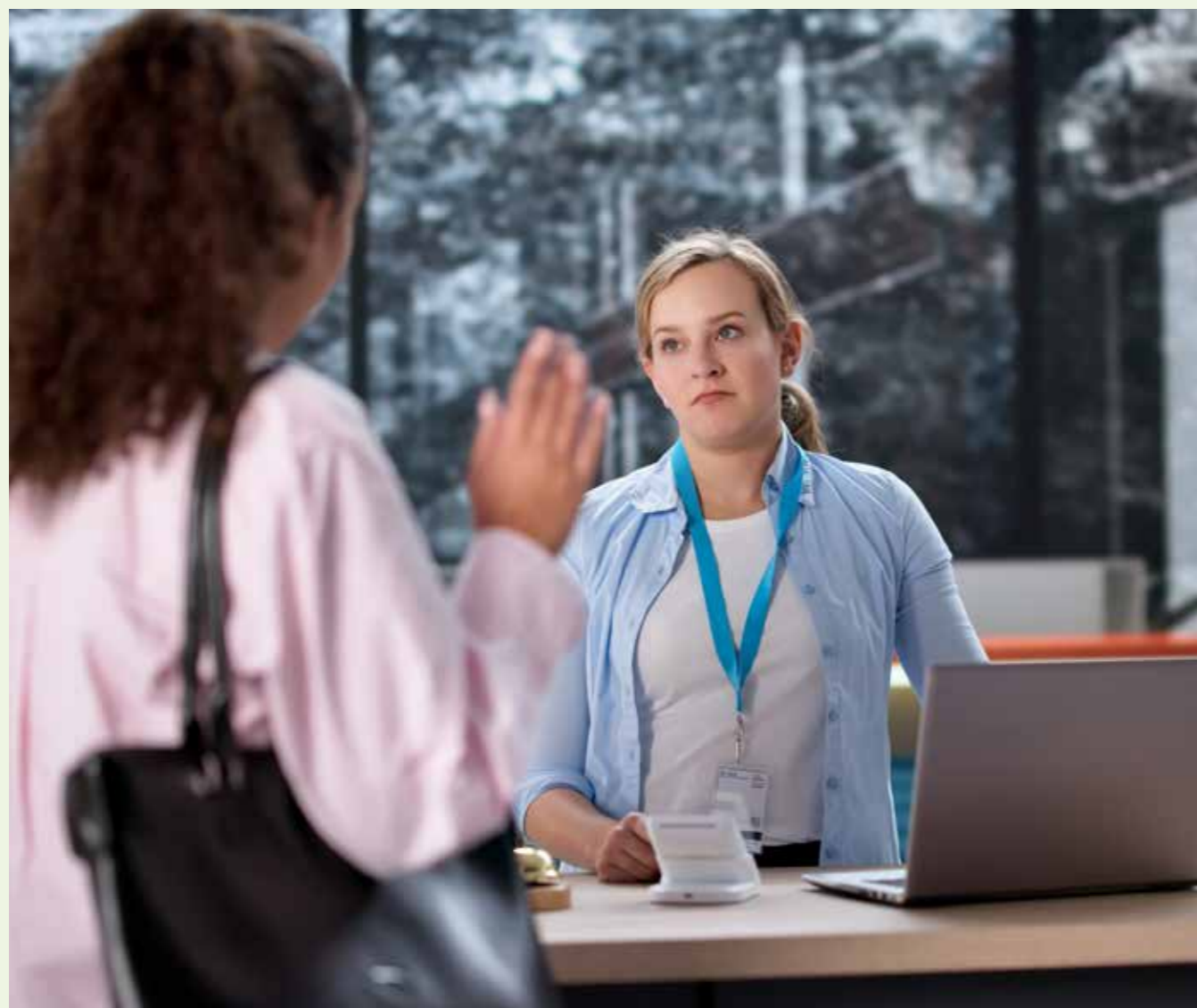
Interestingly, research in relation to customer service has found what has been termed the 'service recovery paradox.' Customers who have experienced a problem that has been resolved exceptionally well often become more loyal than those who never experienced a problem at all. Why? Because they have seen the business under pressure and how it responds when things go wrong.

Summary

Every complaint is an intersection with one path leading to defensiveness, frustration, and lost customers, and the other going toward accountability, strengthened relationships, and increased loyalty.

Those that respond quickly, listen carefully, take responsibility, apologise with sincerity, provide clear solutions, and follow through will last the course. They show customers that they and their concerns matter and so prove that the relationship is more important than a transaction.

Of course, mistakes are inevitable in business - perfection is just not possible. However, customers who see issues resolved fairly will become evangelisers instead of detractors.





Products

ATV / UTILITY VEHICLES

Ranger 500 arrives in Europe

Already available in North America, Polaris release into Europe



Polaris Off Road has expanded its European utility vehicle range with the introduction of the new Ranger 500, a compact side-by-side aimed at customers seeking a practical and affordable work machine.

Already launched in North America, the vehicle joins the company's existing Ranger line-up, offering a mid-size utility vehicle designed for small to medium-sized properties, livestock work and general land maintenance.

Powered by a ProStar 567cc engine tuned for low-end torque, the machine is paired with a Polaris CVT transmission and features a towing capacity of 680kg, alongside a tipping cargo bed capable of carrying up to 227kg. Polaris says the compact dimensions, at under 150cm wide, make the vehicle suitable for navigating narrow gateways, barns and confined working areas.

Standard specification includes a factory-fitted roof, LED headlights and a 1,134kg winch, while selectable VersaTrac Turf Mode is intended to reduce ground disturbance on delicate

surfaces. Auto-locking front drive engages four-wheel drive automatically when additional traction is required.

Polaris say they have also focused on ease of use and maintenance, with simplified controls, accessible service points and integrated storage solutions designed to appeal to both first-time and experienced UTV users. A two-year warranty is supplied as standard.

Chris Judson, vice president of Polaris Off Road Vehicles International, said the company had seen strong demand for a dependable and straightforward utility vehicle at a more accessible price point.

A range of accessories will also be available, including windscreens, rear panels, additional lighting and storage options, while a chassis-integrated plough mount plate can be fitted for landscaping and snow clearance applications.

The Ranger 500 will be available in Stealth Grey with Tractor T1b homologation.

COMMERCIAL

STIHL smartly connected

To simplify fleet management for professionals

STIHL has revised the Smart Connector 1, a digital solution designed to help professional users keep track of their tools, servicing schedules and daily usage across their fleet.

Suitable for petrol, electric and battery-powered machines, the Smart Connector 1.1 attaches directly to tools and records operating hours automatically. The new feature on the latest version of the Smart Connector 1.1

brings it in line with the Smart Connector 2.0, which can store the operating time that day, as well as previous days until the connector can communicate with the STIHL Connected App. No longer holding the total working time over a number of days, this removes the need for users to upload data daily. Data is transmitted via Bluetooth to the STIHL Connected app and online portal, giving businesses greater visibility of how their equipment is being used and when it

needs attention.

For contractors managing multiple machines across teams or sites, the manufacturer says the system provides a clear overview of total working time and daily operating history. With automatic prompts, this enables more proactive servicing and helps reduce the risk of unexpected downtime.

The Smart Connector 1 also supports location awareness, allowing users to quickly check which tools are nearby and identify any that may be missing. An integrated LED display can be activated remotely to help locate specific machines more easily.

Compact in design at just under 5cm in diameter, the unit is quick to mount and unobtrusive in day-to-day operation. It offers a battery life of approximately 12 months, with a replaceable battery to minimise disruption.

Through the STIHL Connected portal, users can arrange servicing with their nearest STIHL Approved Dealer and review maintenance requirements in advance.

AGRICULTURAL

Flagship Kuhn power harrow enters UK market



With four toolbar options

Kuhn Farm Machinery has launched a new folding HR 6030 RCS power harrow, with four seeding toolbar options, to match the 4m, 4.5m and 5m models already in the HR 1030 series.

The new flagship HR 6030 RCS 6m model is aimed at users requiring a versatile power harrow combination drill for a variety of soil types and conditions, while offering interchangeable drill

toolbars for sowing different crops. The folding models all feature a centre of gravity close to the tractor for improved weight balance and traction and are suited to tractors up to 350hp.

The company's HR 1030 RCS series is a modular concept allowing it to work alone or be fitted with cereal toolbars or precision Kosma CSM seeding unit. The new HR 6030 RCS has three cereal seeding options – a BTFR 6010 with

Suffolk coulters; the BTFR 6020 single discs; or the Seedflex 100 cereal bar on the BTFR 6030. Finally, an 8-row Kosma CSM precision unit, for maize and sugar beet, is also available. All seed bars fit onto the roller frame, which keeps the connection close to the tractor and reduces rear lift requirements. A 590mm Megapacker, or 550mm Steelliner packers, provide full width consolidation.

The main Duplex gearbox is equipped with an oil cooler to prevent overheating, while the Fast-Fit tines are DuraKuhn carbide coated as standard for increased longevity. Maintenance free gears and bearings in the rotors reduce daily requirements.

At the front, two seed tank options are offered. A single hopper TF 1512, with 1500 litres as standard, rising to 2000 litres with extensions, or the larger TF 2300 C, which is split (60/40) to provide both seed and fertiliser delivery from the 2360-litre hopper. Working depth, levelling bar and seeding depth are controlled from the cab via Isobus.

COMMERCIAL



Where we're wearing wearable

Brand-new Backpack Harness and PGX Power Bank from EGO

EGO is expanding its PRO X Series with the launch of a brand-new Backpack Harness and PGX Power Bank.

Designed to help professionals work for longer with less fatigue, the company says the new BHX2001 PRO X Backpack Harness combines high-capacity portable power with ergonomics, while the PGX2500PB PGX Power Bank provides super-fast, efficient charging both on the job site and overnight.

Engineered for all-day use, the backpack harness uses EGO's PeakPower technology to power their tools with two EGO ARC Lithium batteries simultaneously, benefiting

from extended runtime and eliminating downtime to swap out batteries.

When combined with the PGX Power Bank system, both batteries can be charged quickly on the job site, helping professionals stay productive without unnecessary downtime.

The harness, which boasts premium padding and an ergonomic design, distributes weight evenly with its horizontal battery layout, allowing for improved balance, enhanced comfort and reduced strain during long shifts. Meanwhile, a simple plug-and-go system ensures quick connection to any PRO X handheld tool, and for increased flexibility, the included ADB1000 adapter enables

compatibility with EGO's full product range.

Meanwhile the all-new PGX2500PB PGX Power Bank is a portable innovation, transforming energy from EGO's 40Ah high-capacity battery into a high-output, portable charging solution. 2500W of charging power is shared across the power bank's two ports, allowing users to charge their EGO ARC Lithium batteries and Lithium MAX Tabless batteries. The solution can charge two 8Ah Lithium MAXTM batteries in 25 minutes.

IoT-enabled via Bluetooth, the power bank allows users to monitor status, relay charging data, and control performance. At the same time, a wired data connection provides additional monitoring through the PGX1600-H 1600W Power Hub, which also enables overnight on-grid charging. For scalable power management, ideal for larger teams and inventories, the PGX sequential system allows for additional charging devices to be connected.

The PGX Power Bank also features an LED charging status indicator, integrated carry handle, stackable design for space-saving storage, and wall anchor points for secure transport and storage. It also features a physical anti-theft device.

COMMERCIAL

Pellenc have a Raison to be cheerful

Launch of new Easy pedestrian mower

Pellenc has announced the release of the Rasion 3 Easy, a professional-grade 24" (60 cm) self-propelled mower.

The company says new mower is engineered for high-frequency use, combining a 60cm cutting width with a frame weighing 28kgs.

The mower features a unique zero-turn radius system and front caster wheels that can be unlocked for 360° agility or locked for precision stability when working on slopes.

To handle diverse terrain and varying grass lengths, Pellenc has expanded the cutting height range to include new

85/95 mm settings. This allows for precise, selective mowing in demanding conditions without sacrificing the efficiency of the high-performance dual-blade system.

Key features include side and front bumpers to protect the caster wheels and chassis; a reinforced blade support and collection bin; and waterproof wheels for consistent traction and performance in damp conditions.

With a maximum sound power level of just 95 dB, the Rasion 3 allows professionals to work in noise-sensitive areas such as hospitals, schools, and residential zones without disturbing the

public or requiring hearing protection for the operator.

When paired with the ULiB 1500 battery, Pellenc say the mower is capable of maintaining up to 1.3 acres (5,400 m²) or providing up to five hours of continuous mowing on a single charge.



COMMERCIAL



A swappable battery first

AS-Motor's new AS 920 ESherpa 2WD

AS-Motor has begun series production of its new AS 920 ESherpa 2WD, describing it as the first production-ready battery-powered ride-on mower for tall grass applications to feature a swappable battery system.

The first machines are now leaving the production line and entering practical use with customers, as the company expands its professional electric mowing range.

Designed for tall grass and rough terrain mowing, the model uses a 56-volt interchangeable battery platform with a total capacity of 16kWh. AS-Motor says the electric drive and mowing system delivers cutting performance

comparable to, and in some cases exceeding, that of equivalent petrol-powered machines, with peak mower deck output rated at 13kW. The two-stage wheel drive system produces up to 600Nm of torque.

The machine shares the FusionCore battery system used by sister brand Ariens' Zenith E and Arrow E zero-turn mowers, allowing batteries to be used across multiple machines to improve utilisation and potentially reduce ownership costs.

Charging options include an integrated 3.3kW fast charger, with a full recharge taking less than five hours. A Type 2 charging socket enables charging via wallboxes, public EV charging points or standard 230V sockets when used with an adapter. An optional mobile charging station is also available for off-machine battery charging.

The manufacturer says the electric drivetrain reduces noise levels by up to 69% compared to combustion engine models, while lower vibration levels are intended to improve operator comfort. The company also highlights reduced servicing requirements, with the wheel and blade drive systems described as maintenance-free.

The AS 920 ESherpa 2WD is based on the existing AS 920 Sherpa 2WD platform and retains several features from the petrol model, including a mechanical differential lock, floating mower deck, pendulum front axle and steel tube frame construction.

AGRICULTURAL

Updates for the Xerion 12 range

Claas look to improve comfort, automation and operation

Claas has announced a series of updates for its Xerion 12 large tractor range, aimed at improving driver comfort, automation and operating efficiency for the 2026 season.

Among the key changes is the introduction of a new Autodroop engine management mode, joining the existing Eco and Power settings. The system automatically adjusts engine droop according to operating conditions, helping operators balance performance and fuel efficiency. Claas has also revised the vehicle drive controller for the CMATIC continuously variable transmission to improve responsiveness under rapidly changing loads, particularly during cultivation and drilling work.

The company has further developed the Terra Trac track system with a focus on durability and lower operating costs. A redesigned cast frame is intended to improve self-cleaning and reduce dirt build-up, removing the need for scrapers, while reinforced track roller components and bogie mountings are designed to extend service life.

Inside the cab, updates include additional storage compartments, integrated compressed air connections for cleaning, and a new luxury driver's seat with an integrated compressor. From model year 2026, the Xerion 12 will also feature a 6.75-inch touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and

Android Auto compatibility. The manufacturer says maintenance access has also been improved through the introduction of an electrically operated bonnet and revised access steps.



From the second half of 2026, the Xerion 12 will also be available with a new Vehicle Control Unit (VCU), developed in partnership with AgXeed, enabling driver-supervised autonomous operation. Using work orders created through Claas connect and the AgXeed TraXwise platform, the system can automate steering, headland turns and other field operations while the driver remains in the cab to monitor performance and intervene if required.

The manufacturer has also introduced Auto RefLine for the GPS Pilot Cemis 1200 steering system, allowing automatic switching between reference lines when working irregular field shapes, wedges and headlands.

DOMESTIC

Entry-level performance from Webb

Classic 39cm petrol lawnmower introduced

Webb has introduced the Webb Classic 39cm petrol lawnmower, that they describe as a dependable and affordable addition to its petrol mower line-up.

Designed for small to medium-sized gardens, this new model provides gardeners with a practical, easy-to-use petrol solution and, with an RRP of £169.99.

Powered by the 131cc Webb DV130 engine, the manufacturer says the new Classic 39cm delivers consistent cutting performance with engine speeds of up to 2800rpm.

With a compact 39cm (15") cutting width, the lightweight hand-push design ensures smooth handling, making routine lawn care straightforward and manageable.

Built with practicality in mind, the lawnmower features a lightweight polypropylene deck. Three adjustable cutting heights, ranging from 30mm to 65mm, allow users to tailor the finish to suit seasonal conditions and personal preference. It comes with a 35-litre grass collection bag.

Mark Moseley, sales and marketing director for Webb said, "The Webb Classic 39cm petrol lawnmower delivers exactly what many gardeners are looking for – straightforward, reliable petrol performance at a very competitive price. It's an ideal entry model that offers genuine value for money while maintaining the quality and durability customers expect from Webb."

It is backed by a three-year warranty and full UK-based customer support.



ATV / UTILITY VEHICLES



Liquid fertiliser system launched

From Quad-X aimed at livestock and grassland farmers

Quad-X has launched a new liquid fertiliser application system aimed at livestock and grassland farmers seeking more precise and lower-impact nutrient application methods.

The new ATV and UTV-mounted sprayer range was unveiled at the 2026 Balmoral Show and includes a flagship 700-litre commercial-capacity model available with 4m, 6m, 8m and 10m boom widths. Quad-X says the system is designed to offer an alternative to conventional granular fertiliser spreading, while maintaining the flexibility and low ground pressure advantages of ATV and UTV operation.

Developed in collaboration with users already working with liquid fertiliser systems, the sprayers are intended to support more accurate nutrient placement and improved efficiency, particularly on grassland where soil compaction and restricted access windows can be an issue for larger machinery.

The company says growing interest in regenerative farming practices, alongside rising fertiliser costs and tighter environmental requirements, is increasing demand for liquid fertiliser systems within the livestock sector.

The new sprayer range is built on a galvanised chassis and features a UV-stabilised tank, return agitation system and boom suspension to improve stability and application accuracy on uneven ground. Machines are fitted with Quad-X's SuperPump system, integrated pressure monitoring and specialist liquid fertiliser nozzles.

Additional features include break-back boom protection, multi-section shut-off control to reduce overlap on awkward field shapes and low surface-friction tyres intended to minimise ground disturbance. A 230-litre compact version with a 3.5m boom is also available for smaller farms and lower-acreage applications.

Optional extras include hose reel systems, self-fill systems, engine-driven pumps and alternative boom configurations, while the 700-litre Towed Pro Elite model can also be equipped with chemical spray booms for weed control work.

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Warranty woes (again!)

Returning to a subject of constant debate amongst the network, our mystery columnist The Sprocket considers why dealers feel left out in the cold by certain manufacturers / suppliers – and what can be done about the situation?



Not again?! I am afraid so. This is a subject that just isn't going to go away. It's a problem between manufacturers / suppliers and dealers since the wheel was invented. I thought I would chuck my four-pennith worth into the fray (*old English money for the benefit of the modern man and woman!*)

Much has been surveyed and written recently, including in *SD* - whilst a piece in the March/April edition of the *BAGMA Bulletin* makes for some interesting reading regarding the overall impact of warranty reimbursement.

The issues arising from warranty terms and conditions, and the subsequent reimbursement to dealers, is one of the most argued over issues in the industry. Bring it up with a dealer and generally you will find yourself in a frustrating and depressing conversation.

Let's be clear though, it is not the case that all manufacturers have bad warranty policies. It is the case, however, that some are just plain mean about their reimbursement to dealers and the demands they place when it comes to warranty repair of their products.

Reading the articles and talking to dealers, I don't think anyone expects that 100% of a dealer's costs when it comes to a warranty claim is ever going to be covered. Most dealers accept that a certain amount of expenditure involved in warranty work is going to be a cost to their business. When we are talking about a labour cost reimbursement being as much as 50% below the dealer's retail charge out rate mind you, the whole equation becomes ridiculous and unfair.

It doesn't just stop at labour rates though, as there is administration time to consider; mileage in many cases; workshop costs; training costs; and many other factors that are simply not covered by a manufacturer's reimbursement. Facing facts, without a dealer network most manufacturers and suppliers would not be able to sell their products in the UK - so why treat dealers so badly when it comes to warranty claims? I am sure that in some cases it is simply because the brand in question is strong enough so as not to be bothered

about how it impacts a dealership.

Keith Christian's article in *SD*'s Jan/Feb 2026 edition, covers a lot of detail about warranty and the legal status of dealers and manufacturers in the UK. It also covers information from prominent dealers about their issues, with one claiming that a certain brand costs them 10% of their sales value in warranty costs after they have been reimbursed by the manufacturer.

I am also not talking about just small dealers having a beef about warranty. Large multi-branch, multi-franchised dealers have the same issues. This being the case, why on earth are those manufacturers and suppliers who are in the firing line not listening? Well, it is a good question and perhaps the answers may be that they don't need to, or they cannot afford to. Perhaps the dealers need to adopt a similar attitude.

What I have learnt over the years, and more recently from various resources and talking to dealers, is that it doesn't matter how diligent a dealer is when it comes to warranty claims. Neither is it how fair the dealer is in terms of cost recovery. Many manufacturers and suppliers simply do not allow for full cost recovery. Clearly if warranty policies do change and the cost increases for the manufacturer or supplier it will be reflected in the price of the products being offered. Would this be a bad thing if the dealer can be better reimbursed? Probably not.

Warranty should be applied fairly to goods that are faulty or have design issues. It should not be used as a public relations exercise to pacify an irate customer. Either it broke because it was wrong in the first place or because it was misused or mis-fueled. If the manufacturer got it wrong, it seems only fair they should cover all the costs involved. The relationship between the dealer and the manufacturer or supplier should be such that it is a two-way street. It should be a fair exchange, not an ongoing battle with no winners and only losers.

With labour charge out rates varying considerably across the country, it is difficult to determine a standard

reimbursement rate for labour that would be fair to all. Maybe the industry could get together to determine a warranty reimbursement rate based on a discount structure that at the very least, gives a dealer cost recovery on labour and spare parts and ideally a small margin to work with. It may be naive of me to even think this could happen, but if the trade associations put their minds to it and their various councils got together, it is just possible that a slightly more level playing field could be achieved? Or, at the very least, a better understanding of what the two sides of the equation require to stop the constant rift that exists.

The dealer bears the brunt of consumer law in the UK, but unresolved issues can be passed along to the original supplier or manufacturer.

In the UK, consumer warranty law ensures that physical goods purchased must be as described, fit for purpose, and of satisfactory quality. Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, you have up to six years (five years in Scotland) to hold retailers accountable for faulty products, even if the manufacturer's short-term warranty has expired.

Dealers should not be left out in the cold or expected to cover the cost of warranty for products that are not fit for purpose or of satisfactory quality.

The Sprocket rides again!

On a brighter biker note I just wanted to share a biking adventure to the Lake District that I undertook recently with a bunch of guys of a similar age to me and on a variety of motorcycles - mine being a BMW R1200RT, a heavy beast of a bike!

We spent a day riding around the Lake District. An unusually dry day thankfully, we managed to do a number of the notorious passes that appear in many biker magazines.

With a knowledgeable frontman, we first tackled the Struggle out of Ambleside up to the Kirkstone Pass. I thought that was steep and difficult. We rode on to the Honister Pass, Barrowdale valley to Buttermere from the Slate Mine. Absolutely amazing and not so difficult. After a break we took the challenge of the Wrynose Pass which leads onto the infamous Hardknott Pass.

I thought the Wrynose Pass was difficult with some nasty tight uphill bends barley wider than a car and very steep but(!), when we got onto the Hardknott the fun began. A one in three gradient, narrow with no barriers and many right-angled uphill turns. The Beemer had the power to haul it and me up the turns, nearly 400kg in all. This required some difficult manoeuvring and clutch work - and more faith in the bike than the rider. We made it to the top and then had to traverse the other side which turned out to be even more terrifying as you are looking down a mountain whilst trying to make the tight turns!

I recommend it all for hardy riders but some it is not so good with a heavy bike. We all survived to ride another day with a few stories to tell. On the way home I was lucky enough to ride through the Yorkshire Dales and enjoy the barren beauty over the moors with a stop at the Ribbleshead Viaduct, a 24 arch railway bridge. An amazing piece of engineering and an incredible site just popping out of this incredible landscape. Worth a visit.

Ride safe and enjoy the summer.



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 2026

Groundswell 2026, Hertfordshire 1-2
www.groundswellag.com

TGA Summer Show, Grasslands Turf, Kent 2
www.turfgrass.co.uk

Kent County Show 3-5
www.kentshowground.co.uk

Hampton Court Palace Flower Show 8-12
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events

Norfolk Garden Show, Norfolk Showground 10-12
www.norfolkgardenshow.co.uk

Royal Isle of Wight County Show 11-12
www.iwcountyshow.co.uk

Great Yorkshire Show 14-17
www.greatyorkshireshow.co.uk

Royal Welsh Show 20-23
www.rwas.wales/royal-welsh

Driffield Show 22
www.driffieldshowground.co.uk

Border Union Show 24-25
www.borderunion.co.uk/border-union-show

The Game Fair, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire 24-26
www.thegamefair.org

Mid Devon Show 25
www.middevonshow.co.uk

New Forest & Hampshire County Show 28-30
www.newforestshow.co.uk

AUGUST 2026

Garstang Show 1
www.garstangshow.org

Anglesea Agricultural County Show 11-12
https://www.angleseyshow.org.uk/

Vale of Glamorgan Agricultural Show 12
www.valeofglamorganshow.co.uk/

Mid-Somerset Show 16
www.midsomersetshow.org.uk/

Edenbridge & Oxted Show 30-31
www.edenbridge-show.co.uk

SEPTEMBER 2026

Steinexpo, Germany 2-5
www.steinexpo.eu

Moreton-In-Marsh Show 5
www.moretonshow.co.uk

Autumn Fair, Birmingham NEC 6-9
www.autumnfair.com

Glee 2026 8-10
www.gleebirmingham.com

UK Dairy Day, The International Centre, Telford 16
www.ukdairyday.co.uk

GroundsFest 2026, Stoneleigh Park 16-17
https://groundsfest.com/

Tillage Live 18
https://tillage-live.com/

APF Exhibition 2026, Warwickshire 24-26
www.apfexhibition.co.uk/

OCTOBER 2026

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

NOVEMBER 2026

FTMTA Farm Machinery Show, C Kildare 10-12
https://ftmta.ie/

EIMA International, Bologna 10-14
www.eima.it/en

GMA Saltex 2026, Birmingham NEC 11-12
www.gmasaltex.co.uk/

Midlands Machinery Show 18
https://www.midlandsmachineryshow.com/

AgriScot 2026, The Royal Highland Centre 18
https://agriscot.co.uk

Royal Welsh Winter Fair 30-1/12
www.rwas.wales/winter-fair

DECEMBER 2026

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



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