

Spoilt for choice

The number of mobile cranes available for rent in the UK and Ireland on a daily basis is estimated between 2,700 and 3,300. The majority of these are All Terrains, a dramatic change from the mid 1980's when most would have been truck mounts up to 45 tonnes.

The past two or three years has seen a dramatic growth in the range of alternative products offering lifting solutions in this sector. Spider cranes, telehandlers, small self erecting tower cranes, large loader cranes, trailer cranes, small city cranes, two axle All Terrain cranes and commercially mounted truck cranes can all do the job. And now making a comeback, is the traditional truck mounted mobile crane.

The increasing variety of product offerings has been driven by two factors. Firstly users are more knowledgeable about the different products available and are seeking out rental companies that will provide them with a specific lifting solution that improves their productivity. Secondly, rental rates at the bottom end of the market have become so competitive that crane rental companies are raising the bottom end of their All-Terrain crane ranges with many now starting at 40 or 50 tonnes or more. A side effect of this is that manufacturers have reduced the number of smaller All-Terrains products they offer.

There is, however, still a demand for a taxi crane hire service of 25 tonnes and below. Worldwide, the traditional 25 tonne truck mounted

crane is still by far and away the most popular in terms of units produced. This is driven by the sheer numbers built by crane manufacturers in China, mostly for the domestic market although an increasing number are being shipped to other regions such as the Middle East and South America.

Many UK and Irish crane hire veterans lament the day that Kato and Tadano stopped selling their truck mounted cranes in Europe. As if this was not enough, they then also stopped importing the small City cranes that were showing signs of replacing them! The Japanese truck crane is remembered fondly for its exceptional reliability and low running costs. This combination at least gave rental companies a fighting chance to make some sort of profit from the ridiculously low rates that the industry allows to continue.

The shift to All Terrains was driven by the notion of offering something more to the customer - a more compact and manoeuvrable machine that could squeeze into tight areas, all wheel drive in case there was no proper access road and even a pick and carry capability. Unfortunately, users were unwilling to pay anything but 'bottom dollar'



Terex Demag surprised many when it unveiled three and four axle truck cranes from its PPM plant in France

and the free market has done its work and the number of mobile cranes in the 20 to 35 tonne bracket is dwindling as rapidly as the average age of the fleet is growing. Some crane hire managers are now looking at this market with fresh eyes, many of them going back to basics and looking at traditional truck cranes. And as if on cue there are a number of new products coming onto the market. Terex Demag surprised many at Intermat 18 months ago when it unveiled three and four axle truck cranes from its PPM plant in France. With 40 and 60 tonnes they are not aimed at the smaller end of the market, but the same principles apply. Interestingly Terex is not offering these models as lower cost alternatives to its All Terrains. It claims that this is due to the fact that they have an extra axle, while the engine, transmission, boom and superstructure are all pretty much the same.

The first company to buy the Terex TC40 and TC60 in the UK is Nottingham-based McGovern Crane Hire. The first unit will be delivered in the New Year.

"People think they need four wheel drive and all wheel steer cranes, but for most jobs, the crane has to get close to a wagon so is generally easily accessible with a truck crane. A truck crane is also easier to maintain, better for the driver and has cheaper running costs," said Tommy McGovern.

"Tyres in particular are much cheaper costing between £250-300 each rather than £1,200 to £1,300 each for an All Terrain tyre."

This argument is even more applicable for the truck cranes introduced by Liebherr, Ormig and

Tadano Faun, which actually use a commercial truck, so that all replacement parts, from windscreens to the transmission are widely available and priced accordingly. They are also designed specifically for the high mileages that UK crane hirers typically rack up.

Interestingly McGovern has ordered two 35 tonne All Terrain cranes as well citing that there are times when an All Terrain is the crane for the job. With its shorter chassis and all wheel drive there are some sites that just don't suit the truck crane.

It is interesting to compare the machines Terex has on offer in this lifting capacity sector. The TC40 and TC60 truck cranes use the same boom as the equivalent sized AC35 and AC55 and therefore have very similar lifting performance and similar overall lengths and carrier lengths. Main differences are the engine power - the truck cranes have about 35 kW more output - which translates into a higher (10-15 km per hour) road speed. Gradability of the All Terrains is much better - at least 55 percent compared to 42 percent.

Truck cranes produced in China (XCMG and Zoomlion) and the USA (Link Belt) that look set to be available in the UK tend to have an longer chassis but overall offer reasonably similar lifting and road performance.

Tadano Faun's HK40 is just one of several other manufacturers offering product in this sector.



This set-up offers a good alternative solution for roof trusses



Zoomlion cranes are now available in the UK from Crowland Cranes.

Surprisingly, the pricing for the Terex TC and AC cranes is very similar - and even more surprisingly - the truck crane, if anything, being slightly more.

The main advantage of cranes from China and USA (particularly as the dollar is so weak) will be a competitive price. NRC has recently been appointed Link Belt dealer for the UK so should be able to provide a good spares and service backup. While Crowland Cranes is investing in supporting the Zoomlion truck cranes it has started importing.

A rapidly growing alternative is the larger loader crane mounted locally to a standard truck. This is a far less costly solution and with high capacities, long booms and some unique reach capabilities they offer an interesting alternative for many jobs such as placing roof trusses. In addition, with their radio remote

controls, the operator can also double up in the dual role of slinger/signalman and being right with the load -cutting out communication errors and improve safety at the same time. When not in use, the truck can revert back to earning a living pulling the flatbed trailers.

Trailer cranes such as Bocker and Klaas take this one stage further offering a cross between the loader crane and a self erecting tower crane giving a semi mobile, longer term solution for a single site.

Another possibility might be the large boom trucks from manufacturers

such as Manitex in the USA which are looking at the European market for their top of the range cranes which offer long straight booms, strong lifting capacities and a fully enclosed operators cab. Given the dollar exchange rage they should be competitively priced and given their design it is possible - unlike articulated loader cranes - that they could be licensed as a mobile crane, with all the benefits that this offers.

Our 2008 crane rental survey shows that hire rates are generally higher than they were a year ago. However they are still a long way short of covering the cost of the investment in a smaller capacity All Terrain crane. Lower running costs for the truck crane help the hirer but



With NRC recently being appointed dealer, the Link Belt cranes should be much more popular in the UK.

until the purchase cost is significantly less than an All Terrain, the only winners appear to be the alternative lifting solutions. Perhaps when the Chinese and American truck cranes are readily available this will change. Until then the lower end of the market looks set to be increasingly dominated by lower cost, alternative solutions.

Model	Max lift	Main boom	Boom ext	Max tip ht	o/a length	Carrier length	Engine kW	Speed kph	drive	grad%
Terex TC40	40@2.7	30m	8-15m	45.4m	10.6m	8.7m	240	90	6x4x2	42
Terex AC35	35@3.0	30m	8-15m	45.4m	10.69m	8.46m	205	75	4x4x4	58
Terex AC55	55@2.6	40m	8-15m	55m	11.63m	9.32m	260	80	6x6x6	55
Terex TC60	60@2.5	40m	8-15m	55m	11.2m	9.82m	294	90	8x4x4	42
Zoomlion QY30V-1	32t@3m	40m	8m	50m	12.9m	10.8m	206	78	6x4	30
Zoomlion QY 50V	55t@3m	42m	9.5-16m	60m	13.3m	11.6m	235	75	8x4	32
XCMG QY35K	35@3.0	33m	15m	48.7m	12.5m	9.9m	206	72	8x4	30
XCMG QY50K	50@3.0	40m	15m	55.1m	13.1m	11.5m	206	66	8x4	28
LinkBelt HTC 8640SL	36.2@	33.5m	8.7-15.5m	49m	13.27m	11.27m	272	97	8x4	
Link Belt HTC 8660 Series II	45.4@	33.5m	8.7-15.5m	49m	13.27m	11.27m	272	97	8x4	

Note: Chart compares new the Terex European truck cranes with the All Terrains it has evolved from and places them alongside some of the other carrier type truck cranes that are either headed for Europe or likely to be headed for Europe.

Michael Hunt 1942 - 2007

Michael Hunt died on the 15th October, just before his 65th birthday, after many years of suffering the effects of MS which ultimately left him bed ridden for two and a half years.



Mike Hunt

Inactivity was never a part of Michael's agenda and he suffered this long period of forced inactivity with tremendous courage and good humour, greatly helped by the loving care he received from his wife Carol and his children Kirstie and Jonathan and his step-children Ben and Sam. I first met Michael in the summer of 1973 when, as managing director of EPL, I spent two days at the 400th

Anniversary of Bristol, where the BBC had bravely decided to use our Moonshot 150ft platform to televise one of the first international "It's a Knockout" competitions to coincide with the city's celebrations.

After a long day's rehearsal, as the camera crew were about to be brought down, a main hydraulic pipe on the machine burst, shedding some 30 gallons of an almost unobtainable hydraulic fluid beneath the machine. Supplies were only available in London and as televising was due to commence at 7.30am the following day, a volunteer was sought to drive overnight to London to collect the essential fluid.

Hunt, then employed by John Laing as Bristol depot accountant, volunteered for the task. We all assembled at 5am the next day and thanks to his selfless overnight drive, we made the 7.30am deadline.

That was typical of Michael's enthusiasm and dedication but I did not meet him again until 10 years later, in 1983, he attended the first meeting of the International Powered Access Federation.

Soon after the Bristol incident, Michael was moved to John Laing's Elstree depot as central stores manager and later became involved in a major Laing contract to build a pvc manufacturing complex in Poland.

In the early 1980's, EPL and John Laing's plant and transport organisation were amalgamated and Michael joined that organisation, becoming northern operations director of EPL which managed all the group's plant.

He subsequently became managing director and his enthusiastic support of the amalgamation of the International Work Platform Association, of which EPL were a founder member, with the International Federation of Hydraulic Platform Manufacturers, led EPL to becoming a founder member of the International Powered Access Federation.

As an IPAF council member he enthusiastically supported its activities, being elected president for a two-year term of office in 1994. Under his leadership, the Federation moved forward through a critical period which saw it building the foundations which played a large part in assuring its growth into what it is today.

Although the support Michael gave to the Federation never wavered - nor was it without humour - one could, at times, forget that he was also holding down an important job within the Laing organisation through the difficult times of change which were affecting the construction industry. It was a great sadness, to all who worked with him, when his deteriorating health necessitated early retirement and his absence from IPAF Council Meetings.

When time and health allowed, Michael enjoyed a round of golf and as his debilitating illness took hold, he found a delight in film making with his video camera which gave him an outside interest in his enforced retirement. Throughout his illness, he became ever more dependent on his family which was always there, including when he died peacefully at home.

Michael will be missed by all who knew him and enjoyed the privilege of sharing his enthusiasm and humour and they will wish to extend their sympathy to his wife Carol and his family for their very sad loss.