

The James gang

Two years ago Phillip James was appointed managing director of Haulotte UK - which includes rental company UK Platforms - from outside of the access industry. Since then he has set about improving various aspects of the business particularly service and backup. Mark Darwin finds out more.

It is difficult for a newly appointed managing director to have an instant effect on a company, rapidly changing the way it operates or fixing a perceived problem. Yet within a year or so of taking over Haulotte UK, James had not only changed the attitude within the company but had customers and users seeing the positive changes first hand.

In his time at Haulotte UK, the company has forged a good reputation for service and parts backup, something that was previously holding back its products with some of the major rental companies. Today with new products and a service-friendly attitude, it is in a strong position.

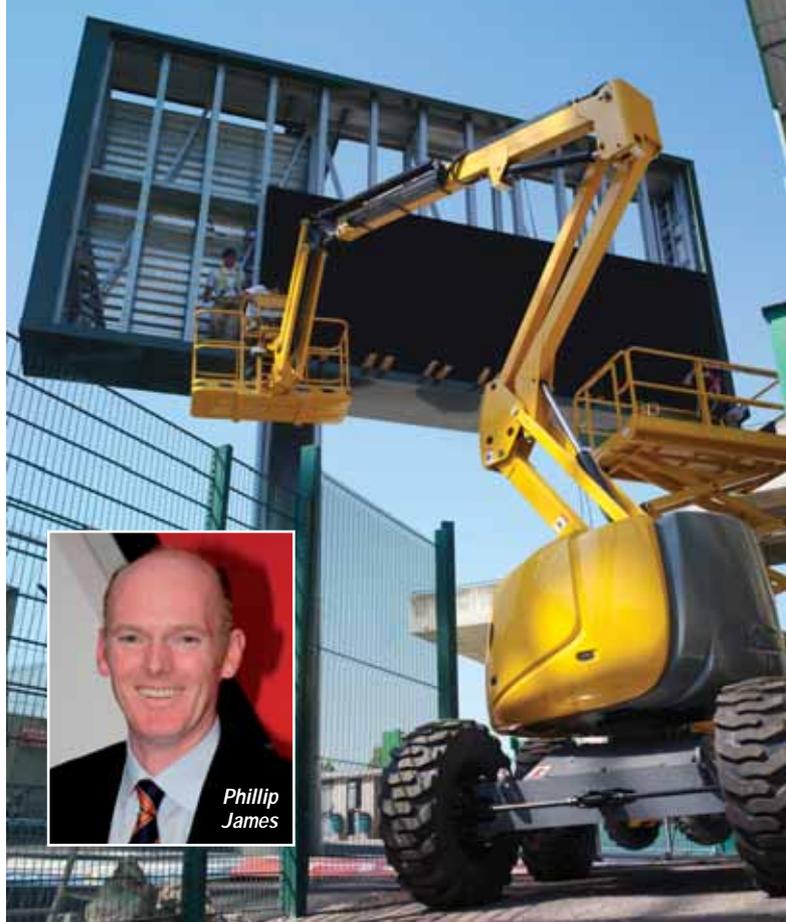
Perhaps the fact that James was not an industry insider helped? He has a solid and varied CV having performed a variety of senior roles, spending a good amount of time in each. He was born in Stratford upon Avon and started his career with Redditch-based air compressor

company Hydrovane where he spent six years, working on marketing and design development. The next five years as marketing manager with Unipart (part of the Austin Rover Group) developing new products and a distribution network in the UK. It was during his time product marketing and developing dealerships that he moved to Oxford, where he lives today.

Paint and bodyshops

While at Unipart, he became involved in the launch of a range of automotive paint products, a product that facilitated a move to Dutch-based multi-national Akzo Nobel, the world's largest paint coatings company. As a marketing manager based in Didcot, Oxfordshire, he was involved with selling its products into bodyshops and developing dealer/distribution networks. Successfully rising through the ranks, the opportunity then arose to run the French subsidiary which he did for the next five years, moving to and living in Paris.

"The business in France was selling to major car companies such as Peugeot, Citroen and Renault and focussed on after-sales service as well as advising customers. A three year stint running the Canadian part of the group then followed, living in Canada (where his fluent French came in very handy). He then returned to the UK as managing director. In all James was with Akzo for 16 years and although he had done a variety of jobs in different countries, he could not see himself 'in paint' for the rest of his career and



wanted to gain more experience in a different market.

"Although totally different products, there are a lot of similarities between Akzo Nobel and Haulotte," says James. When he first joined Haulotte UK he initially reported to Pierrick Lourdain, who had spent the previous three years stabilising the business following a disastrous period for the UK company's reputation, which has taken years to repair. It was during Lourdain's tenure that UK Platforms was brought into the fold.

A step up

James now reports directly to chief operating officer Alexander Saubot after his role was expanded to include regional manager of Northern Europe which covers the Benelux countries, Germany, Poland, Russia and Scandinavia as well as the Haulotte factories in Arges, Romania and Reims, France which produce electric and diesel scissors and vertical mast machines.

"This additional appointment meant a very heavy workload and I was travelling a large proportion of the time, but I have now appointed excellent local general managers in Russia, Poland and France which help me enormously," he says.

Covering a large area of Northern Europe gives James a good view on how the current economic

situation has impacted differently in various countries. Comparing two regions Germany and the UK, there are major differences.

He says sales in Germany are currently doing OK - although well down from its peak. The UK, has been worse than this, with significant sales to the major rental companies scarce. Consolidation in the UK rental market, including Lavendon's takeover of the Platform Company and subsequent order cancellations has hit many equipment suppliers hard, including Haulotte.



"This is the problem of having a few, large companies in the market," says James. "I would prefer a much wider customer base such as in Germany which remains a highly fragmented market and has been less severe."

One bright spot is the increasing demand for sophisticated electric machines - such as the Star 10 mast boom - particularly in shopping centres, supermarkets and with facility management companies where increased health and safety awareness is making an impact.



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Reduced sales

"When I first joined Haulotte, there were orders in the 200-500 unit range. Now we are looking at 5-10 machine deals which means that we have to realign our salesmen to current figures. There has been a poor start to this year, a combination of the way the Christmas holidays fell and then the snow. But we have seen an improvement in March with some money released as budgets are being spent before the April year end."



"This lack of significant new equipment sales means fleets are ageing, so machines need more maintenance and repair which all helps our service and parts business. This is also helped by the numbers of second hand machines being moved around Europe. However, our 'raison d'etre' is to sell machines so while these other areas help, it is not a solution to the current downturn."

He says that he has also seen a move towards larger equipment being used in infrastructure projects such as power stations. Europe is now looking for 31-42 metre used machines and it is difficult satisfying the demand.

So are there signs of a recovery? "It is too early to say," he says. "There may be a few access casualties yet, but I hope not, it would not be good for the industry."

Sales and service operations

Since James came aboard Haulotte has invested heavily in its sales and service operations, and this has included following the same blueprint right across Europe - even in Russia and Poland - which according to James, now offer



the same standard of support as can be found in the UK or elsewhere.

"This has been a good move for Haulotte, particularly in the current climate, even in difficult times, we are geared up and still able to support the customer. In today's market I think we have achieved what I set out to do but you cannot remain stationary and have to continue to develop."

In the UK there are now 25 staff with mobile engineers around the country - so machines are sorted on site with very few taken back to head office. All new machines receive a full PDI at the head office in Telford.

UK Platforms

James' other main interest is the hire company UK Platforms where, he says, utilisation is currently running at just over 50 percent - which he thinks is not untypical. "There is an excess of machines in the market which means getting a return on capital is difficult and budgets are tight for everyone."

"Many of our 2000/2001 machines have been sold to Eastern Europe as demand there has been quite high, but wherever the machines end up, customers still expect full support."

Bil-Jax

Following the Bil-Jax acquisition by Haulotte last year, Bil-Jax dealer Promax continues to distribute the

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range to end users and smaller rental companies, while Haulotte sells the products to larger rental companies as well as providing the parts and service in the same way as it does for Haulotte machines.

"The Bil-Jax machines are very good and complement the Haulotte range," says James, "It is good competition for Niftylift which we currently have in the rental fleet. The recently introduced alloy tower on the other hand, will be dealt with totally separately - we are not scaffolding people."

Telehandlers

Haulotte's other main equipment line is its telehandlers which according to James are performing

well but 'selling in hundreds rather than thousands'. He adds that the current slow-down gives Haulotte time to establish the brand, while expanding the range. Expect to see more new telehandler products over the next couple of years.

Personal downtime

So in between running the two businesses in the UK and looking after most of Northern Europe, what does James do to relax?

"My main passion is golf - I have a handicap of five. I also like watching sport and I am a keen skier - as are my three children - so it is a fantastic family holiday.

I am not a gadget person and would rather talk directly to people on the phone than email - hence I do have a huge mobile phone bill. I am not a huge music lover but the latest band I am listening to is The Killers. I still love living in Oxford and visiting the pubs and restaurants and its convenient for Heathrow airport.

Favourites:

Essential Gadget - *mobile phone*

Current Music - *The Killers*

Hobby - *Golf*

Latest Book - *The Reader by Bernhard Schlink*



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