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On the cover:

A collection of Wolff luffing cranes at dusk on a contract in Munich, Germany.



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Spider lifts 17

Track mounted spider lifts have grown steadily in popularity in recent years and look set to become a major product sector particularly internal and external maintenance, repairs to domestic housing and small commercial buildings, forestry and utility work. Mark Darwin looks at the market and the latest product developments.



Tower cranes 26

Tower cranes have unfortunately been the centre of attention for all the wrong reasons over the past couple of years. We take look at why tower crane safety is still a major issue as well as well as looking at the latest products and developments.

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Last year the HSE told utility companies that the days of climbing poles and towers were numbered given the arrival of powered access solutions that can reach even the most remote locations. We look at various forms of equipment available for isolated locations along with some routine tasks that have been converted from climbing to powered access.



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c&a
comment

Leadership needed on rates

The vast majority of cranes, aerial lifts and telehandlers are rented rather than purchased - by far the most efficient way for users to source this specialist equipment. The problem is that as most rentals are short term with no contracted duration it leads to wild fluctuations in rates and availability that benefits no one over the long term.

Whatever the equipment, the rental cost as a percentage of a typical project is usually minimal. So any saving in the rental rate, assuming of course that you are not being totally 'gouged', is completely insignificant when compared to the risk and disruption that changing equipment supplier can cause. Far more costly are the extra delivery/collection and familiarisation costs along with inevitable errors, not to mention the repeated off-hiring of equipment when it is not needed for a few days. The few pounds saved on the lifting equipment, quickly pales into insignificance compared to the cost of keeping skilled tradesmen hanging around when there are not enough lifts, or when the re-delivery of an off-hired machine is late.

American contractors know this well and tend to agree a deal for all the access equipment and most of the cranes for the duration of the job, with rent paid monthly rather than weekly. Almost any study of two similar projects built on different sides of the Atlantic, highlights the significantly higher efficiency of our North American cousins. All too often the largest single factor is the better use of access equipment in the USA.

When times get tougher, more pressure is applied to rental companies, too many of which capitulate based on the anecdotal information that someone else has undercut them. Try that line with an airline or a car hirer, who while varying their 'walk-in' rates according to demand and competition, maintain a strong discipline tied into a specific yield strategy.

In the UK, a small number of companies in both the crane and powered access markets control a substantial portion of the total fleet. Given that lack of finance is limits rapid expansion by upstarts, if those largest companies set an example and led the market rather than followed, rates are likely to retain some stability which if continued over the longer term will be better for hirer and user alike - not to mention the manufacturer.

Mark Darwin

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you may have, to the editor, stating if
we may publish them or not.*

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