

# Core strengths

**Hewden - the UK's largest hirer - is in a process of redefining its core strengths. Mark Darwin talks to director Brian Sherlock about cranes, computers, access, tool hire, telehandlers and..... football.**



Brian Sherlock

**As a lifelong Liverpool FC supporter (mainly armchair) I used to dream of going to the big cup finals. For Liverpool during the late 1970's and 1980's there were many, including four European Cups but unfortunately I did not get to go to any.**

One final I remember well was the 1981 final at the Parc de Princes, Paris when Alan Kennedy rifled home a late winner. To have been at the game would have been amazing but Brian Sherlock was not only there, he was commentating for Radio City (Liverpool's local radio station) with Clive Tinsley. Respect. Although a Liverpool supporter himself, he used to commentate regularly at Tranmere on Friday with the wind howling in from the Irish Sea down the Mersey!

This was just the first indication that Sherlock is a man of many talents and varied experience. His time as a football commentator

preceded 10 years with Marks and Spencer going through the training and stores programme which gives him a very 'customer aware' slant, too often missing in senior management.

A spell in IT and infrastructure project management has also proved invaluable, particularly with the introduction of Hewden's massive new £14 million 'Project Horizon' computer system which went 'live' on July 1st.

Sherlock joined Hewden Hire Centres as managing director in 2002, staying for two years before being appointed operations director for Hewden Stuart and then managing director in 2005.

Hewden hit the news last year announcing that it was selling its larger cranes and concentrating on machines up to 100 tonne capacity. However, just nine cranes were



*£11 million may be put into the access fleet - which currently has 2670 machines.*



*This is now Hewden's biggest crane - a 100 tonne Demag*

sold, including a 300 tonner, from its fleet of 220. It currently has 229 units, the majority from Demag, with lifting capacities up to 100 tonnes. This year it has been in the news again after selling its tool hire business to Speedy Hire for £115 million. Both moves are part of a strategy aimed at returning to the company's core businesses and mainstream hire sector.

Selling the tool hire business relieved Hewden of 188 purely tool hire depots. It still has 102 locations, putting a location within an hour of 96 percent of its customers. Of the total, there are 30 core locations and 12 crane depots.

The new M3 computer system is now up and running and will streamline the rental side of the business as well as reduce costs and increase efficiency throughout the company.

This new IT system is just a small part of £60 million overall investment planned on new equipment, with £6.1 million earmarked for 16 Demag cranes (mainly 30, 50, 80 and 100 tonners) to be delivered in 2008. It has also put £7-11 million aside for additions to its 2,670 unit aerial lift fleet. Hewden has 120 telescopic booms in the 80 to 135ft range, which, it claims, is the largest 'big boom' fleet in the UK.

Its fleet of 2,600 telehandlers is without question the largest and this will be enhanced with a £10-12 million investment in new, JLG-built, B-Series Cat units as they come available in February 2008.

In all the company has 7,000 Caterpillar machines in its fleet and as a division of Finning, the UK Cat distributor, will use Cat products wherever possible. Its Skyjack, Genie and JLG lifts all have Perkins engines for example.

When not available, Hewden generally tries to keep its fleet to one or two main suppliers. For the last four years Demag has been its preferred choice for cranes followed by Liebherr; Genie and JLG for access and Cat and JCB for telehandlers.

"We try and keep the fleet as clean as we can with just two to three

suppliers for the larger equipment," says Sherlock. "But we are always open to buying a product that does a specific job - but it must be versatile enough for the rental market."



*Already the UK's largest fleet of telehandlers, Hewden plans to spend up to £12 million when the new JLG-built machines are available next February.*

Hewden and Sherlock are always looking at new products. He was intrigued by the new Merlo high speed platform at Bauma. However roto telehandlers are not on the cards ('not available from JLG-Cat') nor are smaller truck mounted platforms ('the core machines can do the job'). Sherlock has been surprised with the continued growth of the access market over the last three years and seems positive about specialist machines such as spider lifts.

So Hewden's reorganisation appears complete. It has its internal systems sorted and it has returned to core products. But has the sleeping giant woken?

## Brian Sherlock - essential or favourite.....

**Gadget:** Blackberry - a love hate relationship - doesn't like it but has to have it

**Car:** Likes BMWs but not the cost of four run-flat tyres

**Book:** Good to Great (Jim Collins) How to deal with people, systems and processes

**Film:** Trains, Planes and Automobiles - or any comedy/relaxing

**Music:** A varied mix of Radio 1 or Radio 2 plus a sprinkling of Radio 4