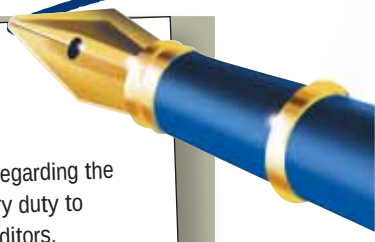
Readers Letters



Thursday 23rd February 2011. Sent by E-mail to editor@vertikal.net

Dear Sir,

Re your comment and news article in the February issue of Cranes & Access.

Firstly I would congratulate you and your staff for publishing these two articles. You have clearly hit the nail on the head regarding the current practices of administrators who clearly put generating huge incomes for themselves over and above their statutory duty to clearly demonstrate that they have actively sought to obtain best market value for the benefit of the failed company's creditors.

As your news article, clearly and properly states this company, as all others in the construction industry, has suffered from the long term downturn in work load.

Therefore it is clearly apparent that this failure was not the result of a sudden and unforeseen catastrophic event but was due to the failure of its directors to take corrective action throughout the current recession. Instead the directors seemed quite happy to continue to trade at an increasing financial loss in the knowledge that they could subsequently appoint "Administrators" to strip off the debt and sell back the assets to the same directors whose failures had brought about the insolvency in the first place.

Please can you, on behalf of those responsible companies and the creditors of this company, ask BDO to explain why this company continued to trade for so long after it was insolvent and why the creditors are being "shafted" by its failure to properly advertise the asset sale or demonstrate that it has obtained best value in the realisation of the assets.

Also can you ask BDO what actions they are taking against the directors for continuing to trade for so long after it was clear that the company was insolvent and unable to meet its liabilities and debts.

It is very interesting to read that the directors and the holding company had no difficulty in acquiring the assets from the administrators but were totally unable to provide the financial support to stop the administration in the first place!

Yours sincerely, **P J Chapman, J A CHAPMAN**

Please edit and publish as you require.

We have as is our usual practice not edited this letter as we believe it reflects the very strong feelings of many of our readers based on emails and telephone calls received.

Dear Leigh,

I have read your online editorial and the vote regarding the reporting of near miss type accidents or near hits as I prefer to call them. I am general against the idea of making it compulsory to report them, as I just cannot see how it would work without increasing site paperwork even more. The attitude on a lot of sites I work on is all about the paperwork, the real safety effort often seems to be forgotten. I do think it would be a good idea if we could all share this information openly, but can't see it happening. The good guys will follow the rules while the bad ones will just find ways around it. I have seen myself how my employer, who is not a cowboy by any stretch, tries to clamp down on any information getting out when a major incident happens. I was on site last year when a crane went over, not near enough to see it, but certainly to hear it and thankfully no one was hurt.

Shortly afterwards most of us were cleared off site with no word about what had happened. We found out fast enough of course – not from any official sources I might say, but when we were allowed back on site security was stepped up to stop any of us from taking photos of the scene and we were warned not to speak about it at all with the suggestion that 'if we talked we'd walk'.

There was a strong effort to keep this one under wraps and yet I now know that this accident was caused by a string of occurrences and a number of quite small mistakes. It would be helpful to other crane owners or operators if they had this information, as it might just stop something similar happening to someone else. Just imagine if another crane went over now in similar circumstances and a man was killed!? Word is that there is a fight going on over who is responsible for and that this might be causing some of the touchy behaviour? Anyone with a brain knows that it's not right.

There ought to be an open investigation into this 'incident' but no one who was involved or who saw what happened first hand is prepared to risk speaking out. The whole atmosphere surrounding it is just plain negative and will not help make our sites or jobs safer places to work.

That's what I wanted to say … do keep doing what you do, you are on the right track and who knows someone might be listening?

This correspondent only agreed to let us publish the letter/email if we kept any hint of his identity confidential and edited out some parts of it in order to avoid any risk of him being identified by his employers. This we hope we have managed to do.

Dear Sir

I read with great interest your article 'To MOT or not to MOT' in the latest issue of Cranes and access, and am still at a loss to understand how anyone in the western world could, with their hand on heart, stand up and argue against some form of legal enforcement of proper roadworthiness tests for cranes. A run away crane is likely to cause far more damage than a car or a commercial vehicle as one of your pictures shows.

The argument that if you let this go through as it is the thin end of wedge and that other nasty things will follow, just does not stand up, nor does the defence that maybe there won't be any testing stations available. I imagine that this was a case put forward when cars and trucks were first required to be tested and that must have been a much bigger problem to face than to have a few rolling roads that can take cranes installed. Provide the need and the market will provide a solution.

I don't come into contact with the CPA any more as I now live and work in Saudi Arabia. But it seems to me that instead of taking the initiative and leading the industry forward, it prefers to block any changes at least when it comes to the road (axle weights, red diesel and now MOTs). Maybe if the industry had higher standards enforced legally it would put a stop to some of the fringe players that chop away at the bottom of the hire rates?

Even if Heavy Goods licences and tachographs were required and such things - this would surely raise the entry barrier against those people you referred to who go off and buy a cheap 20 year old crane and then undercut everyone? It might also be good for the crane manufacturers by forcing the export or scrapping of old junk heaps?

I know I would not have to live with any changes and that it is easy to be critical from a distance, but maybe I have a clearer view from here, than those who are closer to the situation?

I would like to see more of this sort of article in the magazine.

All the best,

Peter Francis

PS: Do I get a free subscription for writing? Or is there another even better 'gift' for contributors?

We have indeed provided Mr Francis with a year's free subscription, so he won't need to print out or read C&A on line anymore. We also think he has a point and that we should offer a small gift for those who do bother to contribute… suggestions appreciated. Ed

Hi Mark,

Just a note of support for your Comment in this months magazine which I'm happy to have published.

Whilst seemingly it looks very fair for the staff of the 'Company in administration', by saving the jobs of the workforce employed, it does endanger jobs elsewhere amongst its competitors.

Having usually operated at 'uneconomic market rates' prior to going into administration they are now free, with lower operating costs, to further undermine competitors hire rates.

Ultimately this cannot benefit customers or crane operatives, much less other crane companies!

Perhaps the fees of insolvency practitioners also need to be in the public domain for the practice of the 'Phoenix' to receive the attention it deserves.

Regards

John Chappell
Managing Director
Crane & Heavy Lift Division
Specialist Hire Group Ltd

Dear Leigh,

I am prompted to write to you as the result of a readers' response to a picture you published of one of our smaller platforms set up on a concrete base without the use of soft ground plates. The reader who complained mistakenly assumed that it was on Tarmac.

Let me begin by saying that I am a strong advocate for the use of soft ground plates on truck mounted platforms of all sizes but let us not become myopic about using them. We do not want to send out the wrong message. The message is NOT that using soft ground plates is always the answer. Sometimes it is not sufficient.

We are one of the few companies in the UK who supply all of our boom platforms (even the smallest) with composite soft ground plates as standard. We tell people to always use them, but also tell them that it is more important to carefully assess every work situation because sometimes the soft ground plates alone are not enough. The message is every work situation must be judged on its merits.

Some I suspect would like to make the use of these plates on truck mounted platforms mandatory. I enclose a picture of an example where such an approach would be somewhat illogical. In this case it was a 767 that had just rolled over the piece of concrete before our machine was set up. It could have been a 747 or Airbus 380 the result on the ground would have been the same.

The message is judge every work situation on its merits and always air on the side of caution. But do not expect people to automatically use soft ground plates where they have done a proper assessment and decided they are not necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Melvyn Else
Access Industries Group Ltd

Readers Letters

Dear Leigh,

I am writing to you to let you know about a very positive experience I had on Friday, so unexpected that I thought it worth sharing.

We had just started a operator training course for boom lifts, and whilst running through the pre-use checks on our own boom, a Niftylift HR10, the tilt alarm started going off and we were not on a slope! I looked at the obvious possible problems but there was nothing wrong with the machine except that the alarm would not stop going off unless I removed the Anderson plugs, thus isolating the batteries completely. I was utterly stumped and also had no alternative boom lift for the training course.

There was clearly nothing else for it so I called the manufacturer. I will be honest, I expected the usual pillar to post experience where nobody helps and you are left exactly where you started.

What I actually got was a real human being, in the same country as me, that listened to what I was saying, asked intelligent questions and offered useful advice. Wow! I was genuinely taken aback, this was a completely new experience for me. No arguing, no blaming, just attempts to find solutions. The problem was diagnosed as a PCB (Printed circuit board) fault and my heart sank. Clearly it was way beyond my abilities to repair a PCB, but again Niftylift exceeded all of my expectations and said they could get their technician over to me immediately as he was not far away. Once again I was amazed, my problem was being solved for me and all I had to do was wait. Within a short time the technician arrived and replaced the PCB getting us back up and running within 20 minutes of arrival and we completed the training course.

All in all we lost just over an hour and a half from break down to back up and running. I do not think that there is any other manufacturer that could or would have achieved this and I thank Niftylift for quite unbelievable service. My advice to anyone thinking of purchasing a boom lift, GET A NIFTYLIFT! its that simple.

Yours Sincerely,

Paul Roddis

Training and Development Manager, On The Job Training,

Newent, Gloucestershire.

Lars Petter Godenhielm 1940-2011

Lars-Petter ('Lasse') Godenhielm, owner of Dino-Lift and ex-president of IPAF, passed away after losing the battle against a serious illness, on Tuesday February 8th, he was 70.

He took part in the business activities of Dinolift until the very end, although he stepped down from operational day to day management in mid-January, handing over to his younger daughter Karin.

In the early 1990s Godenhielm was appointed managing director of Finnish truck mounted lift manufacturer Bronto Skylift, launching his career in the powered access industry. He later acquired the Loimaa-based manufacturer of Dino trailer-mounted work platforms and began what he was later to describe as the happiest period in his entire career, being an entrepreneur in an expanding business. From a relatively early time he recognised the importance of an industry working together and served as a director of the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF) for many years becoming president in 1999. During his two year period he put a great deal of effort into making the federation a more international association.

Lars-Petter was a gentleman, quiet yet strong, always reliable, always consistent. He cared passionately about the access industry and when he felt people were disabusing it he could get very angry in his quiet polite way. He was a stickler for things being right, for fair play and strongly against waste and excess. As a long time IPAF council and board member he could never let some seemingly excessive expenditure be approved without at least a question or comment- no matter how small it was – The principle of it was as important to him as the potential waste or extravagance. Yet in his private life he loved fast cars and boats and enjoyed life to the maximum.

A quiet man he had a wicked sense of humour, when he found something funny - which was quite often - his eyes would light up and you would see an amazing smile or if something was really funny hear his unique deep Finnish laugh. He leaves behind a wife, two daughters and their families as well as many friends around the world. He will be very sadly missed.

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