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# c&a comment



## Where's the innovation?

In this issue we carry our first preview of the massive Bauma exhibition and review Februarys ARA show. Looking at what the aerial lift manufacturers had on display in Atlanta and what manufacturers are telling us they will launch at Bauma, one wonders what happened to real innovation?

Most equipment manufacturers agree that new products are the life blood of a growing business, the same applies to the health of an industry. It looks as though the major aerial lift producers are running out of steam when it comes to new ideas or are they simply resting on their laurels in a fat and happy market?

Don't get me wrong, this 'impression' does not come from any in-depth analysis, more a gut feeling after discussing Bauma plans with most manufacturers in January and then walking around what used to be the hottest new product show in the aerial lift business in February. A slower pace of development might of course be related to the fact that the powered access market is reaching a level of maturity, where it is harder to make a true breakthrough?

In terms of innovation the crane industry is currently setting a shining example, there is no argument about its maturity, some claim that it is even approaching its dotage. Yet some 10 to 15 years ago the industry was in the doldrums, new models on offer were hardly any different to 10 year old products in its customers fleets... leaving no pressure to trade up... so many simply refurbished. Then the industry came alive and over the past six to 10 years has been a hotbed of new product development. Modern cranes have longer booms, faster set up times, easier transportation and new concepts, or at least new angles on earlier concepts have sprung up.

A few years back the aerial lift industry needed to take a breath, it needed to slow down a bit and improve the quality and reliability of its products while reducing manufacturing costs. That task has all but been completed now and what the industry needs, using jargon, is to be 'stretching the envelope', moving things along, even 'thinking out of the box'.

New products that bring true user benefits forces or encourages rental companies to turn their fleets over faster. It differentiates the better companies from the 'rent-a-wreck' suppliers and enhances rental rates. Perhaps as importantly it produces a steady stream of good used machines for developing markets where powered access is in its infancy and where the cost of labour will not justify new.

The industry would do well to step up development while it can afford to make the odd mistake or two or it might face the double whammy of a lack of interest in a falling market.

Leigh W Sparrow

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