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The specialist spider?

The spider type lift has been with us for more than 20 years and in that time its popularity has grown enormously particularly in Europe and for atrium work in North America. Like the spider crane, it is a true marvel of engineering, the product range is diverse and highly developed, is reliable and financially provides an excellent return on investment. But it is still relatively unknown by most end users. Are there plans afoot to change this

At the recent IPAF summit in Amsterdam, ex IPAF president Steve Shaughnessy outlined a proposal to 'grow' the access market through promotion – a suggestion first mooted two years ago by Facelift chairman Gordon Leicester - entitled 'Think Access' - and last year by AFI chairman David Shipman. Shaughnessy outlined the huge potential market still to be tapped and suggested that the 'whole industry' campaign might add three to four percent (£10 - 12 million) per year to the overall market size of around £350 million in the UK alone.

Of course this promotion would inevitably concentrate on boom and scissor lifts and more mainstream powered access with the focus on the potential savings from greater

efficiency, fewer accidents and lower insurance premiums etc...(see IPAF Summit page 35 for more details)

But where does this leave the spider type lift, as a niche product within the powered access sector? According to many spider specialists it is still relatively unknown by end users – both in terms of product and its capabilities.

High rate cheap solution

While the spider's popularity has grown rapidly in recent years, among both manufacturers and rental companies alike, market development it is still very much in its infancy. Unlike a scissor or boom lift which are used regularly for easily identified specific tasks, particularly in new build applications, the spider – particularly the larger 30 and 40 metre plus machines – does not have a specific 'raison d'être' apart perhaps



from high rise atrium cleaning and maintenance duties in the USA? Many in the market now think it needs to be promoted as a more cost-effective method of carrying out certain traditional tasks. An example of this is the food processor in Manchester (see applications) that has a spider lift on long-term hire to replace light bulbs. The job now takes minutes where previously it took up to two weeks, building a specific 12-15 metre high scaffold under each. And because of this the plant is now using the lift to carry out all of its high level maintenance work.

On the face of it, a daily or weekly rental rate for a spider type lift may look relatively expensive, but when it is compared to alternative traditional methods of completing the work it often proves to be fantastically cost effective.

According to the Cranes & Access 2010 Top 30 Rental Company survey Easi UpLifts has the largest rental fleet of spider type lifts in the UK and Ireland – of which over 20 units are larger models with working heights of 32 metres or more. The company has a

reputation for spotting a business opportunity early on and identified the spider lift market as a growth sector.

However, even it has realised that the spider type lift needs its own, dedicated form of marketing and it is launching a new way of promoting its larger spiders to end users. Easi UpLifts is not alone in this thinking other leading specialists, such as Higher Access, have been thinking along similar lines and coming to the same conclusions.

At a recent company sales and management conference in Dublin, Easi UpLifts managing director John Ball outlined a new strategy to promote big spider lifts – following its recent huge investment in the world's largest models.

The company is taking delivery of the new 52 metre Skako FS520C in September following the APEX show in Maastricht, as well as a couple of 32 metre FS320Z articulated models and another 42 metre in January. (And just to put the investment into perspective - a 52 metre Skako costs somewhere in the region of £300-400,000.)



The cost of alternative solutions can be very expensive compared to a spider lift

Because of difficult access Barrett Homes 'Fusion Development' in Wolverhampton had to crane-lift this Easy Lift R150 into position to carry out guttering repairs supplied and operated by Alpha Powered Access Operator Services, Telford

"£3-4,000 a week should not put people off the end result may cost substantially less than other methods."

"We have to allay customers' concerns and make them feel secure with the spider platform but specifically the big, 40 metre plus machines," say Ball. "So we have decided to set up a dedicated spider sales specialist in the UK whose sole role is to deal with end users as well as other hire companies for cross-hires. Our sales people will be fully conversant with the spiders' on-site capabilities and have knowledge of what the cost of alternative solutions would be. The weekly hire rates – possibly £3-4,000 for some machines - should not put people off because the end result may cost substantially less than other methods."

"The main fundamental is that when sales reps look at work, they should always be aware that the machine must be properly installed at the location. The larger machines should be supplied with an operator – not permanently, but just long enough possibly for the first week of a long hire - so that the customer is confident in operating the machine and knows what it can do."

"These large machines are slightly more complicated than the smaller spider lifts and most of the 'breakdown' calls we currently receive are due to operator error rather than a fault with the machine. If users think there is something wrong with the equipment they become frustrated with it. If they appreciate there is a bit more to operating and understanding the larger, more

complex machines they gain confidence which results in fewer problems and much greater satisfaction. A win win situation all round."

"Although there would be an additional cost for the operator, what must be emphasised is the extra cost of carrying out the contract in a more conventional manner. We have had instances where an area is so awkward to reach that the conventional cost of scaffolding is as high as £100,000 – compared to the £25,000 for the spider lift hire! So it is important that potential users are not intimidated by the weekly rental rate or by the physical appearance or structure of the machine."

This approach would obviously be aimed at longer rental contracts, so that the additional expense paying for an operator for a few days or week is small in proportion to the overall cost. Although it is possibly

single day hires, customers do not have a IPAF Category Static boom (1b) licence either, so providing an operator can be quite attractive to them."

There is also a benefit for the rental company. By using the delivery driver as the operator, the transport vehicle can remain on site, bringing the machine back at the end of the day rather than leaving the machine and going back again later to collect. It also gives the rental company full control over the job - how long the machine works and what the machine is being asked to do. So while there are financial benefits for both customer (more time using the machine to carry out the work) and rental company, having an experienced operator familiar with the machine can also be safer, while protecting the machine from the abuse that can arise from an unfamiliar user.

Architects must have a maintenance solution when designing a building



even more important for the shortest of jobs?

Operators supplied on one day contracts

The UK's largest specialist spider lift hire company – Higher Access – has adopted a similar approach. Since January it has been actively selling and promoting the idea that for almost all single day machine hires, an operator is mandatory, regardless of the size or complexity of the machine.

"For the end user, this has numerous benefits," says Paul Hyde of Higher Access. "Firstly they do not lose valuable contract time for an hour of machine familiarisation. As our specialist, trained operator is driving the machine they can just concentrate on getting on with the job done. Very often with ad-hoc

"The real issue we see is the differences in the products available,"

Perhaps it is the growing popularity of the spider type lift – albeit still quite small in the overall scheme of things – that has resulted in some rental companies and trainers questioning IPAF's Static Boom (1b) category which includes Self-propelled booms with outriggers, trailer lifts, push-around lifts and vehicle-mounted lifts as well as spiders and whether there should be a stand alone category given the issues involved in travelling with the ultra narrow models, deploying outriggers and levelling etc. Their argument is that it cannot be right to have been trained on a relatively small and easy to use say Teupen Leo 15GT and then a year later hire

Spider lifts can track large distances to get to the workplace



a different manufacturers' 40 metre platform, spend half an hour on familiarisation and then be left alone with it for the rest of the contract? And remember, it is not only the safety aspect that is being questioned, some of these larger spider lifts are quite complicated and very expensive items of equipment.

"The real issue we see is the differences in the products available," says Hyde. "You can track a Leo 25T up hill and down dale all day. Try doing that with a 17 metre narrow model without the outriggers being deployed slightly off the ground and it will tip over before you know it. By their very nature these narrow machines are top heavy and without exception every incident we have had has been when the machine is being tracked."

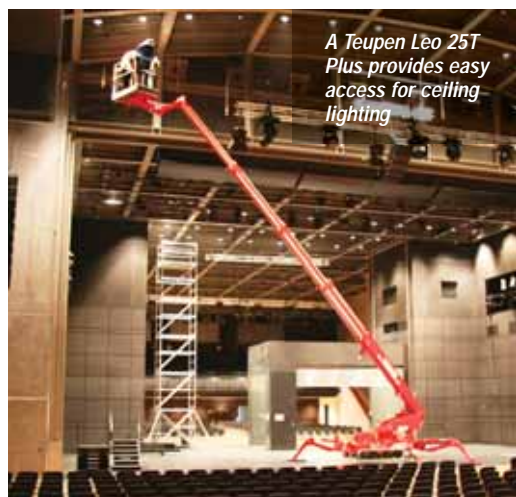
Both Hyde and Ball would like to see the introduction of a mandatory operator for the first day of a rental contract for certain complex machines such as the FS320Z and the Leo36T for example.

"We do not want to see the use of spiders become prohibitive due to cost by insisting that the first week should be operated, we just want to be able to work with the clients' operators for the first day in addition to familiarisation," said Hyde. "Hopefully this would be a dedicated spider user for the contractor and he would not be chopping and changing every time it was hired - unlike the way some self-propelled powered access equipment is used on site."

Promotion and the way forward

With leading rental companies realising that the larger spider type lifts, in particular, need a different approach and adopting these new ways of making it easier for occasional users to rent a large spider, it brings home how much more work is required in the market place to promote and educate users on the equipment that is available and what it can do. Perhaps Shaughnessy's idea of promoting powered access in general should be carried out specifically by the spider lift specialists? This sort of marketing campaign is being seriously discussed by the likes of Easi Uplifts at the moment.

"It is always good to look back and review what has happened with a new area of business," says Ball. "Perhaps we made the incorrect assumption early on that customers would be able to operate the larger equipment in the same way as booms and scissors? Certainly more help is needed for machines above 30 metres - particularly articulated machines - but the need is even greater for units over 40 metres. We should not put this sort of equipment in the same category as conventional self-drive access equipment, but treat them in the same way as big truck mounted platforms."



A Teupen Leo 25T Plus provides easy access for ceiling lighting



It is important that potential users are not intimidated by the weekly rental rate or the physical appearance of the machine



This Bluellift machine was able to quickly set up and carry out the task

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Market roundup

Over the past year or so there have been some interesting developments in the spider lift market. Most newsworthy is JLG's entrance into the sector after announcing the signing of a supply agreement with market leader Hinowa last October. The agreement - to promote and sell its products under the JLG brand name - is a major market development, as JLG is the first major manufacturer to offer spider type lifts. Certain European markets are excluded from the deal to protect existing exclusive distribution contracts, but this leaves JLG running alongside Hinowa in Europe, while having an exclusive distribution agreement for the rest of the world.

On the face of it, the deal makes sense for both parties. Hinowa is the world's largest spider lift manufacturer, having produced around 1,000 units a year in 2007 although numbers have fallen back to 800 in 2008 and 500 in 2009. With a capacity for up to 1,500 units a year at its Italian facility, there is plenty of room should JLG's global market coverage stimulate interest in the product. The agreement begins with four models from the 14 metre Goldlift 14:70 ILLs to the 23 metre Lightlift 23:12. And if the JLG product really starts to take off, Hinowa also has land available for further expansion.

The recent Conexpo show in Las Vegas was the first time the range was shown to the 'home' market and it will be interesting to see if they are accepted and purchased in significant numbers. A lack of volume is the primary reason why other major manufacturers have not yet dipped their toes into this market. Although spider type lifts are growing in popularity, volumes per model are still tiny compared to self-propelled lifts. JLG is clearly serious about the market and is investing a great deal of time and effort to ensure that these new products are sold and supported with the same level of passion as the products it builds itself.



Skako Lift manufactures the largest articulated spider lift - the FS320Z - which has a reach of 16 metres at an up and over height of 11 metres



JLG is the first major manufacturer to offer spider lifts

Another manufacturer that has transformed itself over the past 18 months is Skako Lift (ex Worldlift Industries) introducing a number of class leading new products including two of the world's largest spider lifts - the 52 metre Falcon FS520C and the 32 metre articulated FS320Z which uses a two-arm over-centre riser, four section telescopic aluminium boom and 110 degree articulating jib, giving a reach of 16 metres at an 'up and over' height of 11 metres. The new Skako name, adopted when the parent company decided to make it a core business, has not gone down particularly well in some parts of the world, the USA being a case in point. So by popular demand the US affiliate Skako Inc, (previously ReachMaster Inc) resurrected the ReachMaster brand name for the American market. Reachmaster was also the distributor for Hinowa. Following the 'surprise' JLG announcement, the company was forced to look for another product range from the beginning of this year and teamed up with Italian-based Bluelift which will be

marketed under the ReachMaster-Bluelift brand name. Skako Lift Europe will also represent Bluelift in Scandinavia and "other markets".

True Blue

All Bluelifts in North America will be rated with 440lbs (200kg) unrestricted platform capacity and will feature auto levelling outriggers, FMS (Function Memory System) that allows the operator to store lift movements, automatic slew centring and a new "Start 'n Stop" feature, where the power supply will automatically turn off if a function is not activated for a period and start up again automatically at the mere touch of the controller, thereby improving fuel economy and reducing CO2 emission and noise pollution.

Skako will initially market four models with working heights of 39, 46, 53 and 72ft (12, 14, 16 and 22 metres). It is also working on a new 18 metre/60ft unit to be followed by



Bluelift says its 22 metre working height, 11 metre outreach C22/11 is the most compact 22 metre spider lift on the market making it easy to transport by trailer.



Hinowa was the first manufacturer to introduce a lithium-ion battery powered platform at the end of 2009

a new 25 metre (82ft) model. All units are dual powered with 110v direct drive and either a Honda or Hatz engine.

The latest Bluelift is the 22 metre working height, 11 metre outreach C22/11 which weighs just three tonnes. The company claims it is the most compact 22 metre spider lift on the market, making it easy to transport by trailer, rather than a more costly truck. Standard features include radio remote control incorporating a diagnostic display, track width and height adjustment for better stability and ground clearance and three stabiliser auto-levelling set-up positions. The standard unit is powered by a Honda engine and electric motor, giving unlimited use of the platform both indoor and outdoor. A diesel engine option is also available.

The future is Lithium

Hinowa was the first manufacturer to introduce a lithium-ion battery powered platform at the end of 2009 with its 12.5 metre working height Goldlift 14.70. Whilst everyone acknowledges the technology is the way forward, few have yet followed its lead although

CTE has launched a lithium battery powered version of its popular 17 metre Traccess 170E spider lift. The battery is said to provide around five hours of continuous operation and takes eight hours to completely recharge. The majority of the machine is the same as the standard unit with a 17 metre working height, 7.5 metres outreach, 200kg platform capacity and outrigger base of 2.8 metres. The first units have already been delivered and a unit is likely to be on show at Vertikal Days.

Bluelift says that it is currently testing a Lithium powered prototype while still evaluating market demand for the technology, compared to the tried and tested 110v/combustion alternative. Hinowa now offers lithium ion power across its model range, recently delivering the first 23 metre 23.12lls to Italian rental company Edocar Noleggi which said its customers – particularly painters – wanted a quiet machine with zero emissions that can move freely without cables.

Italy is well established as the production centre for smaller spider type lifts with Hinowa, CTE, Oil &



The new Cela DT21



CTE has recently launched its lithium battery platform – the Traccess 170E



TRACCESS 230
 Working height 23 m
 Working outreach 12 m
 Capacity 200 kg

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Steel, Platform Basket, Socage, Cela, Bluelift, Palazzani, Multitel, Easy-Lift and SUP, all manufacturing. Larger spider platforms tend to be concentrated in Germany - Teupen - and Denmark - Omme and Skako Lift - although Palazzani is a notable exception.

Teupen has a reputation as being very well designed and easy to use, but which comes at a price. In



Socage launched its new SPJ315 at SAIE last year

recent years, the company has made great strides in redesigning and simplifying its smaller models, lowering its purchase costs and

speed of manufacturing. It has also just introduced a narrower, alternative to the 25 metre Leo 25T, the Leo 25T Plus for users looking for a more 'agile' machine.

The Plus combines a toughened boom structure based on the Leo 25T with the Leo 30T's narrower (1.58 metres compared to the original's 1.78 metre minimum tracking width) chassis with hydraulically adjustable (height and width) tracks, resulting in a compact unit with 18 metres of outreach (with 80kg platform capacity) compared with just 15.5 metres on the original Leo 25T. Extended track width is the same for both the 25T and the Plus at 1.98 metres. The Plus still offers 15 metres of outreach with 200kg and with a gross weight of 3,760kg it should fit on modern 7.5 tonne trucks. The original 25T is still available offering sub three tonnes weight and ground loadings less than 1.54 kN/sqm.

Increasing popularity?

With no market statistics available it is difficult to be sure of how each size really compares in terms of popularity. The main categories are up to 17 metres, 18 to 23 metres, 24 to 32 metres and above 32

metres. It would appear that the trend among mainstream access rental companies is to focus on 15 or 17 metre models on the basis that they can still be transported on a plant trailer, have similarly compact dimensions to smaller models and yet can cover all applications up to 17 metres. On top of that the cost of a 12 metre is not sufficiently lower for most entrants to justify stocking both. This is not dissimilar to what happened in the early days of the self-propelled market, when new players bought the bigger units to cover all eventualities. This is sure to change as the market becomes more sophisticated and manufacturers lower the cost and perhaps the overall weight of 12 metre models.

Large machines are capital intensive and at this stage of the market development, rarely have the same utilisation rates as scissors and booms, so rates are critical if they are to sustain a respectable yield, otherwise the whole process is fruitless. This is easily possible if the rate charged reflects the true costs of the traditional alternatives. One project that has done a lot to promote the awareness of the spider lift is the London Olympic site where many of the contractors are seeing them for the first time



The new Leo 25T Plus working in Pershore Abbey

The spider lift market grew very strongly up until early 2009, thanks to it being a new, growing sector with good rental rates and return on investment. However in some areas rental companies whose staff are not product orientated entered the market and only knowing how to sell on price and availability, spoilt the returns in the 15 to 17 metre sector. Add this to the drying up of credit lines since 2009 and it is not surprising that the market has suffered. This is nothing new though and the sector is already bouncing back.

Original and best

A food processing plant in Manchester has seen the light and is using a spider lift for general maintenance on its six storey building in place of traditional scaffolding. After an extended demonstration, the company went with a lithium battery powered CTE CS170E on long term hire from Manchester-based Higher Access. Weighing just over two tonnes allowed the lift to travel in the goods lift between floors and at 780mm wide by 3.5 metres long it easily navigates the obstructions within the Willy Wonka-type factory which produces 134 million kilos of cornflakes a year!



desired to keep the batteries topped up. The lift was originally brought in to change light bulbs, in place of erecting a 12 to 15 metre scaffold under each bulb which in some areas took up to two weeks to change all the bulbs. Having seen the platform's potential they have now identified a whole host of tasks from cleaning to working on air conditioning units and other jobs throughout the facility. The lifts have been specified with rotating platforms to help get into the nooks and crannies found in manufacturing facilities. A one man basket has also been supplied for the trickiest areas.

One big advantage of the battery powered version is the lack of trailing cables and a five hour battery life. The machine can be operated while 'plugged in' if



Social housing spider

Stoke-based specialist rental company AM Access has taken delivery of the first Leo 25T Plus in the UK, bringing its total Teupen investment to six machines in less than 12 months. Director Adam Gwynn says: "The phenomenal outreach of this machine is its big attraction, nothing else gets close. Yet it also has a very compact base for tight spaces."

These features have quickly proved themselves on the machine's first job, a with-operator hire for maintenance work on social housing.

"Getting the machine down the sides of properties with narrow gates and paths is far less of an issue and in many cases the outreach will get you there instead, he says. "The automatic outrigger levelling makes set up extremely quick and gives a very stable feel, even on slopes such as driveways to residential housing. Tracking speed with the new drive system is also much quicker. It all means that you can get on and off site much faster - a major benefit when you want to minimise the inconvenience for residents."

AM Access provides an operator with its new Leo 25T Plus for social housing maintenance.



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