

Diverse for its size

For its size Kettering-based County Lifting is one of the most diverse lifting companies in the UK. Established 20 years ago, the company has diversified from a traditional industrial moving and lifting provider serving once sizeable local-based businesses, such as British Timken and British Steel into a full service lifting and heavy haulage company with national and even international coverage. Cranes & Access takes a closer look at a company that operates both in the industrial lifting/moving sector, crane and access hire.

County Lifting was founded by Steve Drury in 1991 after 16 years of working for his father's crane hire company, the similarly named County Crane Hire. Drury branched out and started his own business supply lifting equipment and engineers within the industrial market.

"I had grown up with cranes and it was in my blood, and I formed County Lifting which initially dealt with anything but cranes," he says. "Now my son Daniel is a major part and the future of the business."

It was only when his father sold his business in 1997 that Steve bought his first mobile crane – a Grove

A combination of equipment working at Silverstone race circuit



Prior to its first mobile in 1997 the company ran a Coles AP415 as part of the machinery moving business



Steve Drury (l) with son Daniel

TMS635B truck mount. He remembers it was a 'bit of a Frankenstein' assembled from the last components of the Sunderland factory but it did allow the company to enter the sector with new equipment in a cost-effective manner. Up to this point Drury had only run an Iron Fairy as part of his machinery moving business.

"We made a conscious decision to buy new equipment from the start in spite of the higher up front cost, we have maintained this philosophy ever since. I think we now have - for our size - the most modern and diverse range of equipment in the industry."

The fleet includes five mobile cranes from 20 to 130 tonnes, two Versa-Lift 25/35 fork trucks, lorry loader cranes up to 100 tonne/ metres and access equipment including a Niftylift SD170, Niftylift HR12, Hinowa spider lift and an

eight metre scissor which are used in the company's work and rented out at other times. On the wish list is the new Liebherr LTC1045-3.1 City All Terrain and possibly another spider crane.

Impressive Crevo

The mobile crane fleet includes a relatively new 20 tonne Tadano Crevo city crane. "We originally bought a Crevo in 2000, at 7ft (2.1m) wide it can go almost anywhere," says Drury. "Prior to that point we were using a Grove-Coles AP415. The Crevo was great because it could work both inside and out. Unfortunately it is no longer available in the UK but its newer replacement was purchased through a source in Ireland in 2009 – a cancelled order destined for Australia – it features a Cummins Tier 4 engine which should meet current EU emission regulations. The Irish supplier also had a 25



The negative boom angle helps when operating through a window



One of its earlier platforms - a Niftylift trailer

tonne Kato but it was too wide and too tall for our needs."

The rest of the crane fleet includes three Tadano Fauns - an ATF 40G (purchased last year) a 2007 ATF 65G and a ATF 45 bought in 2006 which is the oldest crane in the fleet. The most recent purchase is its Liebherr LTM1130 - 5.1 which has just been delivered and was seen on the Liebherr stand at Vertikal Days as well as at Liebherr GB's 50th Celebrations at its head office in Biggleswade.

"In the time we have had cranes the whole profile of the work has

about 10 years. But we never cut our ties with industry and are now developing that side of the business."

25 tonne truck cranes

While Drury believes that there are better alternatives to the 25/30 tonne truck cranes in the UK he is interested in seeing the reaction to the new 35 tonne Zoomlion truck crane that was launched at Vertikal Days. "Today's ATs have moved on so much, but it will be interesting to see what other crane rental companies make of the Zoomlion. Modern sites really need a more



An older picture showing a steam engine lift



The Fassi F600XP erecting garage signage

changed with many large local industrial manufacturers - such as British Timken which relocated to Eastern Europe - closing down, downsizing or moving. We therefore had to look for new customers and with construction booming at the time we picked up a lot of work such as the positioning of roof trusses, which was good for

compact and manoeuvrable machine. The truck crane is just too unwieldy."

County Lifting is not solely dependent on crane hire, its strength lies in providing engineering solutions and it continually invests in new technology to bring its customers the latest equipment. A case in

point are the American-built Versa-Lift fork trucks. "The Versalift's can pick and carry loads up to 15 tonnes sometimes completing a job that would have taken days with skates in just a few hours. It is all about having the very best equipment that we can do the job. There are bigger companies but I think we have the best pool of equipment for our size."

A major part of the company's lifting capabilities are the lorry loader cranes from the 100 tonne metre Copma mounted on an extending trailer to 60 tonne/metre and 42 tonne/metre Fassis. "The Fassi product is excellent and we will replace the Copma with a larger Fassi which features a very useful negative boom angle which is so important to us placing loads through small openings such as windows."

During the interview, a call came through from a customer that had dropped 40 tonnes of steel because

of a broken axle on a trailer. "We will come up with a solution," he says. "The trailer is stuck so the steel has to be removed before moving the trailer. We are here to help and assist with customers' problems as and when they arise. We are engineers first and foremost and will continue to engineer solutions to problems. Over the years we have stuck to what we do best and played to our strengths."

"Versa-Lifts outperform pick and carry cranes"

The mainstay of our industrial moving side of the business are the Versa-Lift machines. "We should have purchased them 10 years ago and kept a smaller crane fleet. We had an Iron Fairy but the Versa-Lifts outperform traditional pick and carry cranes and can effectively unload a truck load of equipment and then carry and place it in its final destination. We also have one that has the expensive remote control option - controlling the driving,



Rescuing an overturned forklift



The first mobile - a Grove TMF635B



Lifting equipment such as this Riggers Tri Lifter is hired when needed



steering and lifting operations - but as yet we have not had a suitable application."

County Lifting hires in the larger capacity Versa-Lift 40/60 and 'monster' 60/80 when needed as well as Riggers Tri Lifters and jacking systems.

"The Versa-Lift is a very agricultural-built piece of equipment. Its origins apparently stem from taking a seven tonne Hyster forklift (which was the staple machine for industrial lifting) cutting it in half and extending the ballast

County Lifting operates the crane hire and machinery moving business under the one banner, even though they are two separate but indivisible companies. It also has a fabrication department which can manufacture most items including overhead lifting systems and purpose-built scissor grabs giving customers the full package. Geographically it used to limit itself to a 50 mile radius around Kettering but now has an international transport license and has customers with facilities throughout Europe



The 20 tonne Tadano Crevo has been a big hit with County Lifting

which gave it a greater capacity. The machine can work in 2.4 metres of headroom and can be fitted with either forks or hydraulic jib attachment. And being five feet (1.5m) wide can go into places an Iron Fairy or conventional crane cannot reach."

"However one of the most exciting concepts in cranes at the moment is the new Liebherr LTM1045-3.1 City," he says. "It is a truly remarkable crane crossing over from AT to City crane. It suits our needs perfectly being able to work inside or out, has a very short base boom section and good road speed."

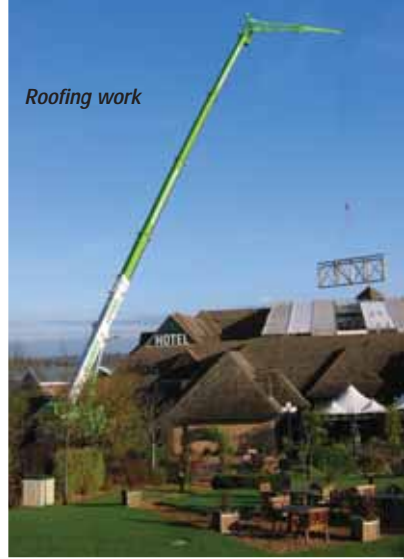
including Belgium, Holland, France and Germany as well as the UK and Ireland. It operates from two adjacent properties in Kettering which gives enough warehouse (27,000 sq ft) and yard space (35,000 sq ft) for its needs and can store equipment for customers whilst in transit between moves.

And the future?

"We are going to have to look at spider cranes and we will also look at some more tracked stair climbers. We currently have two stair robots which can carry one tonne up stairs. I would like to add a new 110 tonne/metre plus lorry



Recovering a toppled crane



Roofing work



loader on a bespoke trailer, the 45 tonne Liebherr city crane and a Versa-Lift 40/60. The 130 tonne Liebherr has just been delivered and depending on how it performs may take us even bigger. Even so, it has the capability of lifting one tonne to 68 metres or 60 tonnes at six to seven metres."

Despite the sector it operates in, County Lifting has no traditional pick & carry cranes. "Perhaps if we did petro-chemical work a Valla or equivalent would be useful, but the Versa-Lift is perfect for carrying most of our loads which are between five and seven tonnes and together with a big fleet of skates (up to 80 tonnes) we can deal with most situations."

Drury's son, Daniel is now assuming a greater role in the business -

developing and marketing the company to a wider audience - after finishing University. Despite being in his mid 20's, he has been around the industry all his life.

"I am the company's biggest strength and its biggest weakness because everything is in my head," says Steve Drury. "We started as a husband and wife team and it has grown from there. I am still very passionate about what I do but the industry and technology are changing rapidly. For most of my 30 year working lift I was doing 17 hour days, seven days a week. This has recently been reduced to a five day week in an effort to reach a healthy balance. But I am not going to retire in the near future - I plan to be around for a long time yet."



Machinery is loaded using the Fassi F420XP