Readers Letters

The Editor

Dear Mark Darwin,

In respect of the three pictures on page 50 of the October 2011 – volume 13 issue 7 of Cranes & Access, I note that all chassis frames are well clear of the ground surface i.e. wheels.

We were always led to believe that the main chassis bulk of the crane should just remain in contact with the ground and the suspension locked. In the days of manual screw type outrigger jacks operated by hand, they were only just lowered until the outrigger beams came into contact with the boxes and not to raise the crane chassis so that you can drive a bus under it.

The use of these mats does not exclude the basic rule of soft or unstable ground material. Putting the total weight of the crane onto just four points would require load charts for each outrigger leg.

Also having the crane chassis so high, if a mat were to fail the crane has that extra distance to fall before ground contact. Ouch!

The only use I can see of being so high off the ground would be to have a higher tip/block height –if things are this tight do they also remove the anti-two block cut off switch?

To see these photos I wonder why there are accidents.

Yours

Fred Pole,

Darlington

Ex Grove Coles demonstrator.

As far as we have always understood it modern cranes and platforms require the crane to be lifted completely clear of the ground in order to ensure that the entire weight of the crane acts as counterweight. If even a little weight is left resting on the ground through the wheels it shifts the crane stability point. We do agree though that jacking a crane or work platform up unnecessarily high adds to the risk, not only should one of the jacks give way, but also due to the fact that long legs equals less stability/rigidity. Jack clear but not to the max.

We would be pleased to hear any other views on this subject.

Ed

Dale Farm eviction

Dear Leigh,

In response to the comments on the dale farm footage I would like to make it clear that at no time was the machine overloaded. Not only does the Bronto have a highly accurate cage load sensor which would prevent this from happening there are also only five people in the cage. I am personally what I would call "larger than average" 6ft5 and 18stone =114kg 5 x 114 = 560KG The Bronto's cage capacity is 600kg so there would have been spare capacity for their helmets etc.

For the machine to have been overloaded then they would have all had to been approximately my size or bigger which looking at the average policeman nowadays would be almost impossible!!

Regarding the use of safety harnesses I understand that all the officers were wearing them and attached when the cage left the ground, the machine was also being used close up and my operator had a clear view and was also being directed by a policeman from the cage.

Regards **Gordon Leicester**

MD Facelift

The following letter and response was triggered by a BBC video on Vertikal.net that showed a Bronto Skylift platform owned and operated by Facelift, being used by the Police to assist with the eviction of protestors at the illegal Dale Farm encampment.

Dear Leigh,

Having watched the video on your website the use of a lorry mounted platform used to evict protestors from the Dale End Farm site, I would be interested to see whether you and your readers are concerned to have watched what I would describe as a total lack of adherence to the Working At Height Regulations.

The lorry mount appears to have at least a minimum of five police officers in the basket. Working on the basis of each person being 180kg, that works out to a total workload of at least 900kg (in reality I suspect that this is well over 1,000kg) the maximum capacity if this machines is either a Bronto 46DXT or a Bronto 56XDT which at its optimum outreach has a capacity of 600kg, to make matters worse you can clearly hear and see that they are intending to use the machine to pull demonstrators off the structure and therefore increase further the already overloaded work platform.

In addition to exceeding the platform capacity it is obvious that not all of those within the platform are wearing a harness or if they are whether they are attached.

The machine appears also to be operated from the ground, which brings into question whether given the proximity of the scaffold structure and the potential to cause a catastrophic accident by failing to see clearly (red material used over the front of cage) whether this is a safe system of work to employ.

I would be very interested to see a copy of the method and risk assessment for this operation.

I suspect that the opportunity to get some free publicity (questionable whether helping evict children from their homes is good business) overtook common sense here.

The company website devotes a significant part to its health and training credentials so it is surprising that they should feel that this flagrant disregard for people's safety should be broadcast for all to see.

A concerned powered access employee.

Letter sent in to our offices by post with no indication of sender.

We were concerned to see what appeared to be several examples of poor Practice in the eviction, the platform appeared to be overloaded with five fully equipped riot police in the platform (See letter from Gordon Leicester on this subject). Much worse still was the way the suspended crane platform was being used in this effort.

We were however encouraged that most of the police, if not all had harnesses on and generally appeared to be using them. For the evictions perhaps a large scissor lift with long roll-out deck would have been handier? More like a siege engine of old.

One thing that is highlighted is that the police ought to look at how they might use such equipment in the future. It is interesting to note that at one time every police force in the UK and Ireland received a copy of Cranes & Access magazine – given that they frequently need to source cranes and platforms for emergencies, not to mention work on their own premises etc… Yet in recent years as staff have changed, several of them have said that they no longer require such information – perhaps they should re think?

Ed

Hi Leigh

Just to let you know Allan Access Platform Services Ltd one in a long line of Allan Access companies has had a company winding up order placed on it at the High Court of Justice in Birmingham on the 10 October 2011 some 16 months after making its final worker's redundant in May 2010 without any pay.

One of its former directors and one director from its former incarnations having removed themselves as far from the company as possible declared themself personally bankrupt in the Northampton court in Feb 2011(check individual insolvency register).

This just left a Mr Herbert Jones as the director (company house records) who took over two weeks before they laid the last workers off.

As you have pointed out in Cranes & Access the laws of insolvency in this country do need tightening up with a bit of forward planning it's far too easy for people to walk away. Anyone who knows about Allan Access Platform services will know who was responsible for the day to day running of the company maybe not in the eyes of the law but we all know who was running it at the end.

Having taken the company to an Employment Tribunal in April 2011 and won our case we then had to wind the company up to receive all the money owned to us at some cost to ourselves. This is the way the law works, it has taken from mid-June 2010 to October 2011 to get a result.

We are now in the process of applying to the government to get our money.

Regards

Former worker

PS

Leigh You may wish to print this you or may not it's up to you

C&A

Dear Mark,
Crawler Cranes and the Golden Age of Cranes

I was most interested to read both articles in your October edition. As export Director of Priestman from 1970 to 1984 (the year that Acrow Group, owners of both Coles and Priestman, went into Receivership), I knew Ken Gibson (MD of Neagron Plant) well. He was a frequent visitor to the Hull Works and a loyal Priestman customer. The sad fact is that Priestman failed to do what their overseas agents and distributors unanimously advised them to do at the first Dealer Convention which I held in Hull in 1973, which was to build larger crawler cranes.

This strong recommendation from the market-place was superseded by the decision of the Chairman of Acrow, Bill de Vigier, to force Priestman into investing their innovative design capacity and financial resources into building Offshore Cranes to take advantage of the North Sea Oil Bonanza. The Sealion, the result of this development, was a superb crane technically, but a financial disaster for the company. Every crane was special, the oil companies were very demanding customers, insisting on all kinds of modifications within a contract price, and Priestman lost money on every crane produced.

They did eventually use this expertise to produce an 80 tonne all hydraulic crawler crane, the Lion 80, but this was not until the early 1980s, and it never developed into a production machine.

Yours Sincerely

Dick Lloyd

(Author of 40 years a salesman)

Kingsbridge Devon

Nothing new under the sun

Regarding a new Modular Wind Turbine Maintenance Platform – Page 6 Cranes & Access August September 2011 – I note with great interest this 'new system'.

It is possibly new to wind turbines and to the Spider division of Safeworks, but we have been using Rig Platforms on chimneys since the early 1970 period.

The Rig consisted of a wire rope around the top of the chimney, with Tirfor ropes hung down from the same. Frames, Tirfors and lightweight walkways formed the working deck. Yes the system was much simpler (See photos) than the one on your pages.

As always the most difficult part of the job was getting to the top of a structure which has no access – unlike the wind turbine towers. As in the case shown in the photos from 1976 of the Drakelow 'B' power station at Burton Upon Trent, ladders had to be erected up the brick structure to a height of 450ft (136 metres), before the deck could be installed. From this deck 96 heavy steel bands were winched up and fixed into place on the chimney.

As steeplejacks we have been erecting more modern electrical powered machines like this in various configurations. So the device show is not a new system but simply a different application.

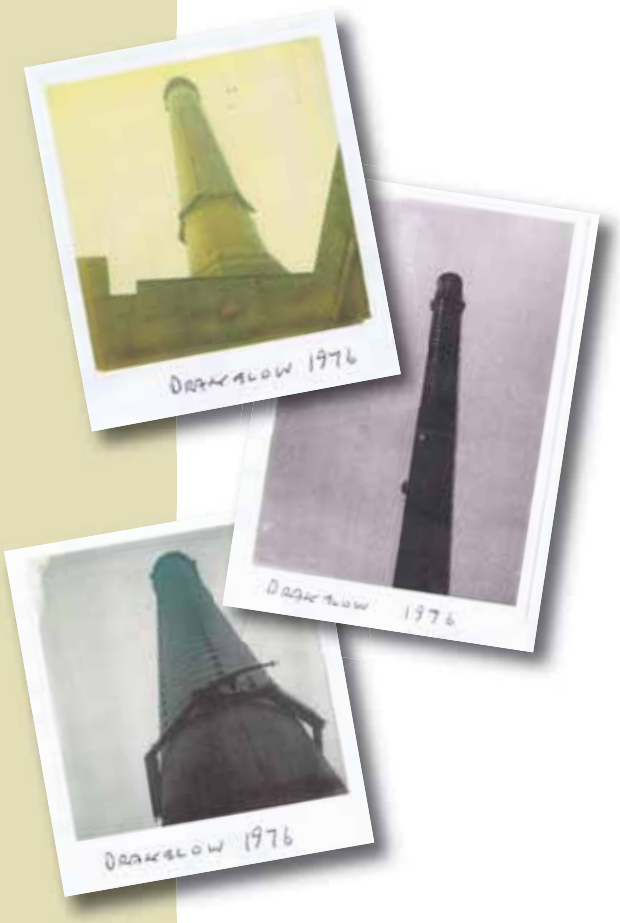
Clients looking to overcome access problems should contact steeplejack companies who are part of the trade group A.T.L.A.S who have fully trained operatives to carry our all aspects of any high level works required.

Regards

JD Avey

Senior contracts manager

H&A Height Services



Dear Sir,

I am the Senior H&S Specialist for Vestas Northern Europe(NEU) and chair the Vestas NEU Subcontractor Workshop. The workshop is attended by leading Sub contractors involved in the construction, erection, maintenance of Wind turbines and farms (not only for Vestas) in the industry. One question that is repeatedly being raised during the workshop by our crane operators/providers is that the cranes used for construction are still not being supplied by the manufacturers with appropriate safe climbing and working at height provisions! Lack of fall arrest/restraint, anchor points etc…, solutions for which are readily available. What is Crane & Access/Vertikal's view on this, are manufacturers placing enough emphasis on the serious working at height safety issue?

Paul Robbins

Vestas Wind Technology

Publisher Leigh Sparrow responded to Mr Robbins with his rather long winded views on the subject the following letter opposite is his response:

Spiders on my mind

Dear Sir,

My ex-demo Multitel 225 SMX has finally arrived, hand delivered by Melvyn Else. I felt like a kid at Christmas and also rather nervous as it had just sunk in that I had spent over £80,000 in two days, machine, land rover and trailer, up graded training for four of us and the list goes on.

I justified it to myself by these facts, 80k wouldn't pay my mortgage off, a new Overfinch Range Rover will plummet like Nick Clegg's popularity and I wasn't getting much for it in the NatWest savings account.

So the process started. Now I'm not the quickest decision maker, you can ask Melvyn Else at Multitel about that, as it took over a year for me to part with the money and I had an informative 40 minute chat with Paul Hyde from Higher Access, but I must say it's been a fantastic move.

Based in the North East, we are a small specialist cleaning / maintenance company specialising in drain jetting & CCTV surveys, industrial cleaning and now anything to do with high level maintenance, gutter cleaning & repairs, inspections, window cleaning etc…

The dilemma was that I needed a machine that would cover the jobs our previous CTE Z20 carried out, towable with a vehicle that could be utilised within other areas of our business and we needed company that would look after us. The spider was the ideal piece of machinery, could be used internally due to its dual power, narrow accessibility, light weight and the fact that it can be used on various terrains.

Although we have only had the machine one month we've managed to get over ten thousand pounds worth of work and half of it is work we would otherwise have had to pass over if we didn't have a spider lift. Now that's good business in today's financial climate.

I've attached a couple of pictures of our new machine in action.

Many thanks

Paul Rider

Rider Industrial Services

Yugoslavia 25th October 2011

Gentlemen,

Looking through the October edition of C&A, I noticed that your house ad on page 79 - "Did you know" - mentions that you distribute the magazine to Yugoslavia. Given that the country finally disappeared with the break-apart of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, that does seem like a bit of Balkan-style double-counting .

Yours pedantically,

Simon Walker
Principal, I.E.T.S Ltd
Charlbury England

We checked this out and in fact the reason it is there is that we have several readers still claiming this as their address – or rather they have not updated it yet. Most of the Yugoslav addresses are in fact in Serbia, while one is in Montenegro. Other readers from the region use just Serbia or Montenegro. The data used to compile that advert was simply taken from the mailing data used for the October 2010 issue.

Ed

Dear Paul,

There is no single answer to this, as it varies enormously depending not just on the manufacturer, but also on the size of crane. Most companies are doing an excellent job in equipping their larger new cranes with all of the equipment required, such as guardrails and anchor points while attempting to eliminate some jobs that require working at height.

The problem comes on smaller cranes where weight and dimensions are more critical, prices are also lower and fewer companies are buying new models. The situation is made worse by the fact that the UK market for smaller cranes is very sluggish and the rest of Europe is not enforcing the work at height rules anywhere near as aggressively.

Add to this the fact that meeting the new emission and noise regulations has soaked up enormous amounts of engineering hours at a time when manufacturers were cutting back and you can see the dilemma. It is a fact that most crane manufacturers are reacting more to pressure when selling a crane than joyfully embracing the challenges that the work at height rules present.

Lest crane hirers over-egg this issue you need to know that:

1. Manufacturers have and will supply big cranes with full protection – although they are less keen to provide modifications for older cranes given their engineering limitations and a preference for buyers to sell their older models to markets that do not require or even want such equipment.

2. Smaller cranes are increasingly available with full remote controls such as Liebherr's Bluetooth system which allows many jobs to be done from the ground and standing in a safe place, the big challenges involve such things as the installation of counterweights on some cranes, where operators need to be up on deck and it is hard to install a fixed guardrail system. Fold up protection is available but not a realistic solution. Hook block reeving can usually be done now from the ground, although all companies do provide a ladder to reach the boom nose with a stowage place on board. Access to the hoists can generally be avoided on site with a little pre-planning, so that leaves access to the cab which is not really a significant risk.

3. There is another example of working at height which is the most risky and most challenging, and one that is prevalent on wind farm applications – that of rigging extra jibs or boom support systems. On larger jib or boom sections some companies have now installed walkways and anchor points or other forms of protection, I am not sure though that an anchor point alone really improves things much, as a fall is less about hitting the ground and more about hitting the structure, so a fall with or without a harness can be serious. Manufacturers have also supported a new product from Standfast – its TRAM system does provide a moving harness point for walking along the top of booms and jibs, which when combined with a walkway really works and some UK crane hire companies have already adopted it.

So Paul… I realise that the above is a long winded way of not giving a very straight answer to your question "Are manufacturers placing enough emphasis on the serious working at height safety issue?"

If I had to answer in a word or two it would most likely be – 'probably not' The attitude with some manufacturers is more one of being seen to be providing a solution for a problem that they do not see as the most important and which most safety authorities around the world are not pushing.

If the wind industry as a whole were to stand up and say " This has to be treated more seriously on small as well as larger cranes" the industry would perhaps devote more engineering time to move the technology that it has introduced on larger newer cranes to all of its models.

Crane hirers also need to look at their older cranes and either install their own solutions or replace the cranes. However as a final word I would say that with the wind industry pushing hire rates down by as much as 25 percent over the past two to three years something has to change if this is to happen.

Paul this is a very good point and I would very much like to run your letter in Cranes & Access so that we might get some more input from other crane users. Please let me know if you can agree to this.. if not it will of course remain confidential.

Many thanks and

Best Regards,

Leigh Sparrow