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# Back to normal?

The small truck and van mounted lift market is in a constant state of flux. In recent years developments have been driven by the increasing number of European drivers limited to 3.5 tonne vehicles, resulting in several manufacturers 'pushing the envelope' and developing 26 metre articulated and 27 metre straight boom platforms.

A year or two ago the more unusual CTE 20.13 MP offered a different take on the traditional truck mount, while the Cela DT21 and 24 built on Multitel's MX design. Neither have really captured the imagination of buyers and have only taken a relatively small slice of the 3.5 tonne market.

Recent platform launches have tended to be more on the 'conservative' side, offering the operator a stable and secure 20-22 metres working height machine with the performance well within the capability of the chassis.

There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, the latest engines

that comply with the increasingly strict emission regulations are now larger and heavier, increasing the gross weight of the chassis and making it increasingly difficult for the manufacturers to add longer, heavier booms for increased working heights while keeping within the weight boundary. Secondly with machines becoming more and more popular and 3.5 tonne platforms being driven more by 'Joe Public', rental companies want simple to drive and operate machines that feel stable and inspire confidence during use. For most tasks being carried out by these platforms, 20-22 metres is more than enough height and reach.

## Not enough platform capacity?

Here might be a good time to mention platform capacity. Manufacturers typically followed the EN280 standards allowing 80kg per person plus 40kg for tools - resulting in a standard 200kg maximum capacity. Perhaps some operators in their birthday suit may beat the 80kg, however with the average weight of people in most western countries on the increase I would suggest that most reasonably well-built male operators - also wearing protective clothes, boots, harness, jacket and hard hat etc - would probably be closer to 100-120kg making even a 230kg basket capacity really just a two man and no tools affair.

It is good to see that some of the latest crop of platforms have increased platform capacities up to the 250 to 300kg range and these tend to be the less extreme working heights - ie 18-22 metres. An example of this is the latest 3.5 tonne CTE Zed21JH truck mounted lift unveiled at Intermat in April. One of the first units has been delivered to Bishop's Stortford-based Rapid Platforms in the UK. The 21 metre platform offers up to 10 metres of outreach but more interestingly has a 300kg unrestricted platform capacity.

A few months later at Vertikal Days, CTE launched its second generation 20 metre Zed20C. While more evolutionary than revolutionary, the Zed20C adopts many of the new ideas introduced by the Zed21JH including the 300kg platform capacity and the single action out and down H-type outrigger system. The use of Domex high strength

1200 steel in the lift structure - combined with a new boom design - helps improve platform rigidity, especially at full extension according to the company.

The 3.5 tonne truck mounted sector is dominated by Italian manufacturers including CTE, Multitel, Oil & Steel, CMC, Isoli and GSR with the UK's Ascendant also doing well. There is also no shortage of Italian manufacturers on the fringes such as Ram, Hinowa, Cela, Co.Me.t and Sogage, while German manufacturers include Palfinger and Ruthmann.

But why are the Italians so dominant in this area? Well one possible reason is that it was until the single market began to apply in the early 1990s Italy was not permitted to drive a self-propelled lift once the platform was raised. Towing trailers was also severely restricted so trailer lifts or delivering small



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scissors behind a 4x4 were also non-starters. In Germany driving at height was limited to eight metres and a highly fragmented rental market may also have had an influence on small German truck mounted production.

### The smaller the better

Another current trend is towards the 'environmentally friendly' truck or van mount which includes electric or bi-energy power and if working in town and city centres, a smaller chassis. At Vertical Days Affordable Access unveiled a tiny 2.1 tonne Piaggio Porter Maxxis with a Co.Me.t 13.5 metre dual riser, articulated Eurosky boom. With about six metres of outreach and 200kg platform capacity it is ideal for inner city work and space restricted sites.

Measuring just 2.15 metres wide with the outriggers deployed, the platform has 360 degree continuous slew, 220 volts outlet in the rotating basket and the option of using an auxiliary engine to operate the platform rather than the truck's engine. Socage which pioneered this sector, also offers a machine on the Piaggio as well as one that is totally electric. This size of truck mount is certain to gain in popularity in the coming years.

The major advantage of electric truck and van mounts is that they can work without noise pollution, carrying out maintenance and repair work outside normal working hours or in sensitive areas without a problem.

### 4x4 growth

Another growth area is cross country lifts on 4x4 chassis. The perennial Land Rover-based platforms are still relatively popular in spite of the problems of mounting a boom on a 50 year old vehicle design. True the Land Rover is very good at off-roading but it has a

cramped driving position and in platform mode, usually a very high centre of gravity making negotiating roundabouts very interesting.

Several manufacturers are looking towards other small 4x4 chassis such as the Ford Ranger/F150, and if additional carrying capacity is required then larger chassis up to six tonnes such as the Iveco Daily available from 3.5 to 5.5 tonnes. With utility companies obliged to stop climbing towers and poles, this is another area set to grow.

Which ever way you look at it - development is good for the sector. There is still a growing demand for truck mounted lifts on chassis less than 3.5 tonnes because of the restricted driving licences. All that is needed is for more rental companies to expand their product offerings so that we all can benefit from the more unusual and versatile platforms.



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# Affordable Access?

With so many truck mounted manufacturers it is becoming rarer to find something unusual and different. However Italian manufacturer Co.Me.t is spreading its wings and looking for new markets outside of Southern Europe. With several novel machines that warrant a closer look Mark Darwin visited its new UK and Ireland dealer Affordable Access and spoke to directors Tony Thornton and Phil Orwin to find out more.

Romsey, Hampshire-based Affordable Access specialises in tracked and 4x4 equipment. Its founder Tony Thornton started out as a tree surgeon in 1986 but now uses his skills working primarily for utility companies using a variety of truck and track mounted platforms.

In the early days constant reinvestment in equipment meant the company quickly built up its fleet - all being used in its day to day work. However it was not until it purchased a 26 metre truck mounted platform from Facelift in 2004 that the rental side of the business took off with local arborists.

the UK's major utilities companies Thornton had ideas of machines that would be useful but were not readily available on the market. One of the first 'specials' was an Italian Bimec 4x4 truck fitted with a 20 metre CTE platform. Users thought the concept was great but didn't like driving the 'agricultural' truck and the unit was eventually sold. After that followed other 4x4 truck mounted platforms and tracked spider lifts.

Affordable Access Hire also includes tracked wood chippers, tracked dumpers, Polaris 6x6 AT vehicles, telehandlers and ground mats as well as a few electric and 4x4 scissor lifts - mostly equipment



Phil Orwin (L) and Tony Thornton

"In the early days of hiring out the equipment it was often quicker for me to operate the platform rather than training others in how to use it," says Thornton. "Operated hire is something we still do today but not as much."

As the company grew it split into two divisions - platform rental and tree work. Working alongside one of

that gets to areas not accessible by normal vehicles. Its access fleet includes Niftylift SD170s, SUP spider lifts (S15s and S24s), an Omme 30 and a CTE Traccess 17. Truck mounts include several new Co.Me.t 22 metre platforms, a 12 metre X4 and 14 metre Piaggio Porter as well as a 26 metre CTE Z26 on a 7.5 tonne chassis.



The compact 14 metre Piaggio Porter



Affordable Access had a very successful Vertical Days securing many orders for the Co.Me.t truck mounted platforms

"Run of the mill equipment you can find in any yard. Almost everything we have is tracked or 4x4 so we try and stick to the more specialist equipment," says Thornton. "In all we have more than 30 specialist ehicles and many go out for months at a time."

On the 4x4 side of the business it has 14 metre SUP UV145 Land Rover-based units, while Co.Me.t is currently mounting a 14 metre platform on Ford Ranger chassis. One of Affordable's most popular items of equipment is the 15 metre SUP S15 spider lift.

"We have had these machines for two years and never had a problem. They are so simple and easy to operate that they are one of the best spiders I have seen for a very long time," adds Orwin. "It has the simplest emergency control system, the only one able to change baskets easily - take out one pin and easily change from fibreglass to metal in less than a minute and by yourself - and is priced very competitively given that it is a full two-man capacity with full non restrictive working envelope, 12 volt emergency descent and an articulated jib."

Affordable Access has been the

UK dealer for SUP Elefant since September 2010 and believes that the product could be market leader. "From a hire desk point of view the only phone call we receive is when it is ready to be off hired after completing the job. Other spiders are too complicated," says Orwin.

Affordable Access sold its first S15 spider lift to family run Evans Building and Plant Hire, of Bridport, Dorset last year following demonstrations from other manufacturers' products. The new unit is both diesel and AC powered and includes a 110 volt power supply, air and water feeds to the platform, a cable type remote control box and a quick change basket allowing a GRP platform to replace the standard cage.

"It is almost a year since we delivered this machine and the only problems is a broken stop button and a broken cap on the 110 volt outlet, apart from this it has performed faultlessly," says Orwin.

Affordable Access attended Vertical Days for the first time this year - primarily with its Co.Me.t van mounted platforms - and the feed-back was very encouraging. The Co.Me.t truck mounts are totally different to the usual van



The SUP S15 spider lift is a simple easy to use machine

mounted products," says Thornton. "The X4 has a 12 metre working height dual riser articulated boom mounted 'lorry loader style' across the chassis behind the cab. The design means that there is a clear pick-up body to carry tools or other materials. With two outriggers either side of the boom, outreach to the rear is about 4.5 metres with 150kg capacity."

truck mount is ideal for inner city work and space restricted sites. Measuring just 4,800mm long and 2154mm wide with the outriggers deployed, the platform has 360 degree continuous slew, 220 volts outlet in the rotating basket and the option of using an auxiliary engine to operate the platform rather than the truck's engine. All Co.Me.t platforms have low pressure



The SUP S15 has one of the simplest emergency control systems

Another innovative platform is the new 14 metre Eurosky 14 which uses the Co.Me.t dual riser articulated telescopic boom mounted on the diminutive Piaggio Porter Maxxi chassis. With a working height of around 13.5 metres and just less than six metres of outreach with 200kg, the 2,100kg

hydraulic controls – no complicated electronics – which are simple to use and reliable. "We are also working with Co.Me.t to mount the 14 metre boom on a Ford Ranger chassis," says Thornton. "The unit will be the only double pantograph boom on a 4x4 and the design ensures that the

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overall height of the platform is just higher than the Ranger's cab."

This design has obviously created a lot of interest as Affordable says that it currently has more than 80 units using the 14 metre boom on order for UK clients. Vertikal Days also added enquiries for up to 210 Co.Me.t truck mounts from just three customers. The main interest (120 units) is for the 14 metre boom but mounted on various chassis with a good proportion on the Piaggio Porter and the X4.

"We currently have two X4s on 5.2 tonne chassis with chip bodies mounted behind the platform being built for arborists working for utility companies clearing trees around low voltage cables or tree trimming

expansion is the arrival of the second generation in management which is focussing on introducing more models to the range and on utility companies all over the world. This is excellent news for dealers such as Affordable Access in that the company is eager and willing to listen and implement new ideas.

Co.Me.t was founded in 1960 and is based in San Giovanni near Bologna, Northern Italy where its 20,000 square metre facility includes the whole manufacturing process from design to the end product. In keeping with its utility company focus it also specialises in insulated booms. Its range of platforms includes working heights from 12 to 18 metres mounted on

Although many replacement parts for these machines can be sourced locally, Co.Me.t is sending a consignment of spares which will be housed in a new building/workshop unit located adjacent to the Affordable Access main head office.

"All parts are priced at cost plus a few percent for handling and delivery etc," says Orwin, "We both think it is outrageous the mark-up some companies add to spares that are readily available through other sources."

At the moment Affordable has 21 staff – four for rental and the rest in the arborist division. The company is currently advertising for engineers and hire desk personnel to expand the rental business – but still keeping to the 4x4 or tracked philosophy.

The morning of the interview both Thornton and Orwin – had for the second consecutive night – been working through the night a major utilities company helping repair damaged live electricity cables due to the very high summer temperatures - approaching 30 degrees centigrade – which meant the cables expand and sag by several metres, igniting nearby trees which then burn through the cable.

"Through the arb' side of the business - Thornton Associate Tree Services - we initially clear a route into the job where the live cable has broken so the electrical engineers can gain access and make the repair," said Thornton. "About 80 percent of the company work is for electrical contractors or the utilities companies.

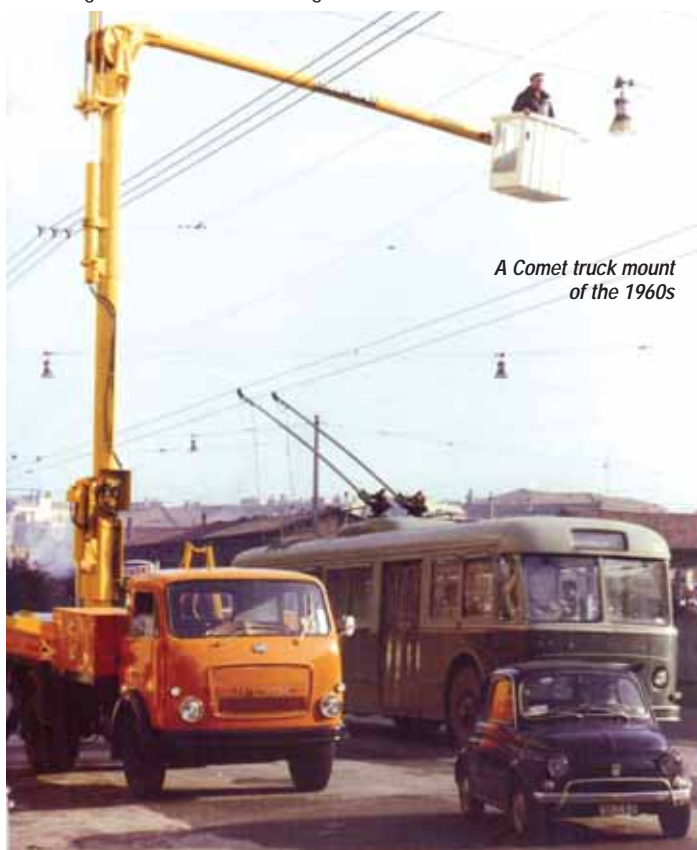
We also use specialist equipment including the only Fellabuncher in the UK which can fell 600mm diameter, 24 metre tall trees as it drives, cutting, holding and then placing and stacking the trees. When there is a problem with a line, the power is turned off and the Fellabuncher goes in clears an area of trees quickly and safely without any climbing required. Trees in the live 'red' zone can be processed so much quicker than using older methods and cost savings are sizeable."



Piaggio Porter

## Future plans?

"We will be adding to our 4x4 truck mounts with a 38 metre platform in the early part of next year," says Thornton. "Hopefully the 19 metre lightweight SUP spider will be available and this will be added to with a 30 plus metre spider and have 10, 22 metre platforms on Iveco chassis on order. We are looking to have a mixed self drive fleet starting at 12 metres. The Piaggio Porter chassis ticks all the boxes because it can be petrol, diesel, biofuel or electric. It is competitively priced – a 14 metre on the Piaggio is less than £40,000 – weighs just 2,100kg and can be hired out as a self drive for around £200 a day. Because of its size and weight it can be used in shopping precincts and on paved areas, and can be driven in multi-storey car parks without a headroom problem."



A Comet truck mount of the 1960s

in urban areas," says Thornton. "The advantage is that just one vehicle can be used to carry out the work and take away the chips. With either a 5.2 tonne or 6.5 tonne chassis it allows a good size chip body to be installed."

Another string to the Affordable Access bow is its UK and Ireland dealership for the Big Astor pedestrian protection tunnels. The easy to erect system provides overhead protection to pedestrians while work continues above – ideal when carrying out property maintenance or keeping gangs dry when carrying out electricity cable repairs.

Another force behind Co.Me.T's

3.5 tonne chassis with in-board stabilisers making them suitable for narrow streets and inner city work. Its articulated telescopic platforms with dual risers and articulated jibs have working heights from 14 to 28 metres, while heavy duty versions (insulated if required) go from 31 to 44 metres working height.

Co.Me.t also produces tractor mounted platforms from 18 to 23 metres and tracked platforms from 12 to 17 metres. All models can be fitted with hydraulic outlets for high performance tools up to 700 bar. It is also thought that Co.Me.t is currently working on a 22 metre, road towable spider lift although this is still in its early stages.



The X4 has a 12 metre working height platform mounted 'lorry loader style' across the chassis

# Ever changing market

There are more than 40 manufacturers of truck mounted platforms fighting over a very fragmented global market. One of the market leaders is Palfinger which recently celebrated its 80th anniversary. Mark Darwin caught up with Stefan Kulawik at its recent dealer meeting in Austria to discuss the market and discover its plans over the coming months.

"The truck mounted platform market is constantly changing," says Kulawik, "20 years ago demand was mainly for platforms mounted on a 7.5 tonne chassis with heights of 20, 25 and eventually 30 metres. However, over the past 10 years the self-drive market has been growing and with it the 3.5 tonne chassis with platforms heights increasing from 10 metres to now typically 21 to 22 metres."

Palfinger introduced the record-breaking 25.6 metre working height P260 in 2009 and although it has been surpassed by Ruthmann's 27 metre T270, the unit has sold nearly 300 units. The updated larger cage capacity P260B was launched at this year's Intermat, where it booked orders for 50 machines.

"Our philosophy is to offer the best combination of outreach, working height and platform capacity on each chassis and for us the most important factor in the self-drive 3.5 tonne and 7.5 tonne chassis sector is that the customer using the platform must feel very stable. We may have slightly lower maximum working heights than some competitors but customers come back to our products because they feel safe and comfortable when using our range of platforms."

"Rental rates are generally decided by the platform's working height and so the 21/22 metre platform is the most popular sector. Just five percent of all rental is in the 24 and 26 metre range although the rental



Stefan Kulawik

rates for these machines are significantly higher."

The company says that it is busy at the moment with its 3.5 tonne P210BK which has a 21 metre working height, good outreach and 185 degree articulated jib. Kulawik says the unit offers the same performance as an older 22 metre on a 7.5 tonne truck. Another 'best seller' is the 30 metre working height P300KS with its counter slew design that results in a very compact overall length. Outreach is 20.5 metres and platform capacity 350kg.

"We do not need a 28 metre on a 3.5 chassis just to beat the competition," says Kulawik. "Figures show that we are not losing sales because we have a slightly lower platform. The customer feed-back is good and so we are following our strategy. For example the feed-back on our 103 metre machine is very positive and customers feel very safe when in the basket. This is very important particularly when many are not regular users using the platform perhaps once every month or two." Palfinger's sales of 3.5 tonne platforms outside of Germany - in places like the UK are low, probably as a result of their relatively high prices compared to the dominant Italian manufactured platforms?

"The first time I dealt with the UK market was in 1997 when quality and performance was required - very similar to the German market," says



Palfinger P260B



P180



P220B

Kulawik. "The UK liked premium products but this has changed over the past 12 years. The big rental companies have given up this quality philosophy. With a cost difference of perhaps 40 percent between the top quality brands and the mass market platforms the rental companies opt for the cheaper products as their return on revenue is better. And if the rental rate is based on the cheaper Italian products then it is very difficult for us to compete in the market."

This however is not the case throughout all of Europe. In Germany, Austria, Switzerland and some of the Nordic countries the higher priced German machines sell well, while Italy dominates the rest with a mixed markets in between.

"If we want to enter this market we would have to compromise the performance or quality. If customers then have a bad experience they would be reluctant to purchase larger machines such as the 100, 70 and 45 metre platforms. All platforms have to fit in with our brand image of quality and performance."

"There are other 'German' manufacturers which produce cheaper rental machines with a reduced number of features however this is not a route that Palfinger would want to go down. It was tried at Wumag several years ago but customers still wanted to increase the specification so the exercise was pointless".



## truck & van mounts **C&a**

"European markets - Russia, Central Europe and Eastern Europe - are very different but there is an evolution in each as it becomes more sophisticated, going from any type and quality of platform to second hand machines then new then a quality products. Poland a couple of years ago was a second hand market but now it is looking for quality products. This process has been slowed by the global economic crisis but is starting to gather momentum again."

With Palfinger group revenues over €800 million last year, the platform division made up just over 11 percent of the total at €90 million. This year revenues should be slightly more but not the 20 percent annual growth achieved over the past few years. The Sany joint venture opens up a lot of new possibilities for Palfinger but the main focus at the moment is on the loader cranes. However it is looking at other products in its range which may be of interest for the Chinese market such as platforms.

"Unlike the loader cranes which are mounted onto Chinese trucks in



P300KS



P210BK

China, Palfinger will supply fully built platforms ready to sell and we are currently looking at the right product mix." says Kulawick. "In the past, 30 and 35 metre platforms have been sold for aircraft maintenance at Beijing Airport for example but you only have to look at the amount of platforms needed for wind power in Europe to see a similar potential in China. It is going to be very interesting."

Palfinger is currently strengthening its sales and service team in Europe and its distributor network which has grown to 37 dealers around the world.

"Last year in Russia we sold 12 platforms from 27 to 100 metres which was a good start. In North

America the first 100 metre platform was delivered earlier this year and the second is scheduled for October. The next market we are looking at is South America including Argentina, Chile and Brazil."

No major new products will be launched in the foreseeable future. However the success of the P210BK will see the addition of two other models in this range by the end of the year. At Bauma it is hoping to show a new platform (probably 90 plus metres) on a five axle commercial chassis filling in the gap between its largest four axle truck at 70 metres and the 85 metre and 103 metre platforms.

"We have no intentions at the

moment to build anything larger than the existing 103 metre platform, making more investment in standard equipment rather than niche or super high products," he adds. "In the 90s the UK took the first 72 metre platform. However I think the UK has been overtaken by the Spanish, French and Scandinavian markets. It is trying to catch up and still has a good potential for purchasing more big machines. We have a close dialogue with our dealer Skyking and we have the best back-up which is important. We are not after winning crazy deals, we are after forming long-term relationships and offering excellent service, spare parts and backup."



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# Strategic partners

C&a truck & van mounts

Italian truck mounted platform manufacturer GSR has for decades exported the vast majority of its production. Kran & Bühne editor Rüdiger Kopf visited the company to find out more.

Looking purely at the numbers GSR may well get the gold medal for export performance with about 80 percent of production going overseas. Unlike many other Italian companies it is far less dependent on the performance of the domestic market. However, in order for its platforms to appeal to customers in various markets the challenge has always been creating and producing a model range that is both standard and yet also easily adaptable to local preferences. This it has achieved through its strategic local partners.

The Rimini-based company was formed in 1976 when Gentili Oleodinamica purchased ladder manufacturer Scalificio Riminiese, however it was not until the early 1980s that GSR produced its first powered platforms and not long after that it looked to overseas markets for expansion. Today 60 people work for the company, including 10 in product development, producing 600 units a year with €14 million of revenue. This is planned to grow to €20 million by 2016.

"We have evolved over the years as has our ability to cater for the various different markets and chassis

requirements," explains company owner Vincenzo Gentili. "The British prefer to use Ford, then Iveco and Vauxhall, Germans like the Mercedes Sprinter and Nissan. In Italy it is usually Nissan and Iveco chassis that are specified, however, individual laws of each country also have to be catered for."

"To succeed we have strategic partners in each country and build long-term partnerships which are very important to us. King Highway Products for example has been our partner for the UK and Ireland for many years has recently secured deals for 130 units, which will be delivered over the next 18 months."

Included in the deal is an order from Irish telecoms group eircom for 95 van mounted lifts, following a successful trial and initial 34 platform order last year. eircom evaluated King's hybrid electric design with the initial order and has included this feature on all 95 vans in the latest contract. The new SkyKing 125RA lifts will be mounted on Fiat Ducato four tonne vans and will be used for the installation and maintenance of the telecoms network across Ireland. The 125RAs feature a number of key



Some of the first Skyking 125RA units for eircom



Stefan Weber, sales manager (L) and Piero Palmieri, product manager

modifications to suit eircom's operations including reinforced plastic walk-in baskets.

The new hybrid conversion - also offered as a retrofit conversion for existing machines - is available on all of the company's new van mounts and allows operators to arrive at a job, switch off the engine and operate the platform on battery power. A simple foot pedal switches the power source so that the platform can be operated using the normal controls in the basket. The system offers a number of major benefits. As well as the obvious reduction in noise and emissions, the fuel savings can also be significant. It will also provide the opportunity to carry out emergency repairs in residential areas overnight with significantly less disturbance.

Power comes from two batteries with sufficient capacity to handle at least a full 20 cycles of the platform. When the vehicle is travelling or engine running, a split charger directs any charge not required for the vehicles batteries to the platform's electrical power pack, charging the batteries up during transit. An independent 13 amp charger is also fitted, allowing them to be charged when the vehicle is not in use. The charging system is automatic and only operates when a top up is required. Installation kits are initially available for Iveco, Mercedes, Ford and Fiat vans.

"Our core business remains truck mounted platforms with heights of between 10 and 32 metres," says Gentili. "Nevertheless, the development continues particularly to accommodate the Euro 5 engines because the chassis weigh even more."

Six years ago production capacity at the factory was expanded and the build process designed to improve quality whilst reducing problems. Each employee in his section is solely responsible for that particular stage of production. For about a year, the company has painted the lifts with a powder coating system which improves the impact and scratch resistance of components. The suppliers must also meet the stringent quality standards and are checked regularly resulting in a documentation trail so as to easily identify any problems that might arise.

Prototypes are initially evaluated through a series of test cycles in extreme situations. "Through active participation in national and European regulations such as EN280, we are involved in future issues such as component fatigue and this has already resulted in further development," says Gentili. "I believe the company - despite the economic crisis - is in good shape. However prices have fallen, primarily due to globalisation and I cannot see this improving even when the market recovers fully."



The assembly facility



A 240PX during the testing phase