Christian-Jacques Vernazza

1948-2013

As we went to press we received the shocking and sad news that Christian-Jacques Vernazza, owner of French crane and access company Mediaco and president of ESTA, passed away on March 18th after struggling with ill health over the past couple of years. He celebrated his 65th birthday on March 13th.

In spite of his health issues, he continued to work as normal, including his duties at ESTA - the European crane and heavy transport association - which he helped found and the success of which was one of his great passions, along with his home city of Marseille and most importantly of all his family - wife Joëlle and children Alexandre, Anabelle and Rodolphe. In November the Marseille Club de l'Économie presented him with the Manager of the year award for his achievements which included a great deal more than the impressive job he did at Mediaco. A charming, friendly and charismatic man who loved what he did, he will be greatly missed.

Christian Vernazza

Publisher Leigh Sparrow has known Vernazza off and on for more than 30 years and has added his personal recollections of a friend.

I recall first meeting Christian Vernazza in Marseille in 1982, as a young district manager working for Grove Manufacturing. He was, compared to most French crane owners at the time, a young and dynamic businessman with an enthusiasm and love for life that was infectious.

As a total novice 'just off the boat' and in my first field job, I found he was amazingly accessible, would always make time for you, was friendly, charming and while a little frustrating to tie down on a deal as he moved ever closer to Liebherr, he never exactly said no, as if he did not want to disappoint. I recall one incident where not long in my new job, with a poor command of the French language and a dealer that had gone bust, I was suddenly confronted with a number of angry French crane owners reacting to a ministry of transport bulletin that would have effectively forced their big American-built Grove truck cranes off the road, and in those days there were a lot of them.

Christian, showing some of the skills that would later serve him well in his role as president of ESTA, joined a meeting of crane owners and managers that we held to discuss the situation. He helped calm everyone down and keep the meeting focussed. He also helped me in discussions/correspondence with the ministry which eventually resulted in a classic political compromise - the details of which completely escape me - but that kept everyone reasonably happy.

A few years later we appointed a division of Mediaco as a Grove Manlift dealer leading to a different relationship which was a little more successful - business wise - than trying to sell him cranes. I then didn't see him for at least 12 years, until the 2004 Bauma having taken over the Vertikal press a few months earlier. I spotted him on a stand and without hesitation he stopped his discussion and said Ahhh my friend Leigh (always pronounced slightly wrong as he tried to incorporate the G no matter how many times I corrected him) just as if we had met the week before.

He was almost always the same, consistently polite and friendly at least from my perspective, down to earth, oddly naïve at times, but always a very canny businessman. He took over the transport and freight forwarding business from his father Jean-Jacques Vernazza who had founded it in 1942, and then added cranes. His first purchase when he founded the lifting business in 1973 was a Grove TM800 which may well be why he always had a bit of a soft spot for Grove. He built the business into a world class international company with a strong reputation for quality.

Although my contact with him over the past 20 years or so has been sporadic at best, it is hard to believe that he will not be at Bauma this year or that I will not bump into him at some of the most unexpected places, as has been the case over the past few years. The crane industry has lost another great character and a great human being.

Adieu Christian

(L-R) Alexandre Vernazza, Nicolas Mayet and Jacques-Christian Vernazza at the official opening of Haulotte Middle East, Dubai November 2007

Vernazza and Mediaco favoured Liebherr from the 1980s on

Looking serious at a Snug meeting 2004

Accepting the 'key' for the first Palfinger WT1000 103 metre truck mount in France - Intermat 2009