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# Keep on truckin'

The truck and van mounted sector in the UK and Ireland which has grown considerably over the last few years is now experiencing mixed fortunes. Mark Darwin takes a look at the main factors and developments affecting each sector.

The growth in open chassis platforms - particularly the 3.5 tonne GVW machines - continues apace helped by driving licence restrictions and the increasing refinement of up and over units with sigma-style risers. The market for larger truck mounted units is still developing but UK end-user demand lags behind the pace of manufacturers' development programmes, with machines now topping 100 metre platform heights. However, it is not all sweetness and light. The van market is suffering this year -

a combination of several factors. Major users such as BT are cutting back on purchases and work, and there is a sizable amount (20 percent of the total new sales) of second hand units from collapsed companies flooding the market. Put these together with the impact of the ever increasing height, reach and drivability of platforms mounted on 3.5 tonne GVW chassis and the van market is having a tough time. According to one major manufacturer, 'it has not been this bad over the last 16 years'.

Feedback from manufacturers on the UK/Irish van market suggests that this year could be down by as much as 25 percent. Versalift, run-away sector leaders with over 50 percent of the market is seeing a marked change in the proportion of van/truck units it builds. In previous years 88 percent of the company's production was taken up with van mounted platforms. This year the figure has dropped to 66 percent. Versalift is fortunate in that it can offer insulated platforms - one area of increasing activity. A recent order included 12 Versalift VOE36MHI insulated units mounted on Unimog U400's for Scottish Power and eight chassis mounts for Scottish & Southern Energy.

## LV protection

Versalift says it introduced its full low voltage protection as a result of listening to customers' concerns as to what would happen if the boom touched a live cable instead of just the bucket.

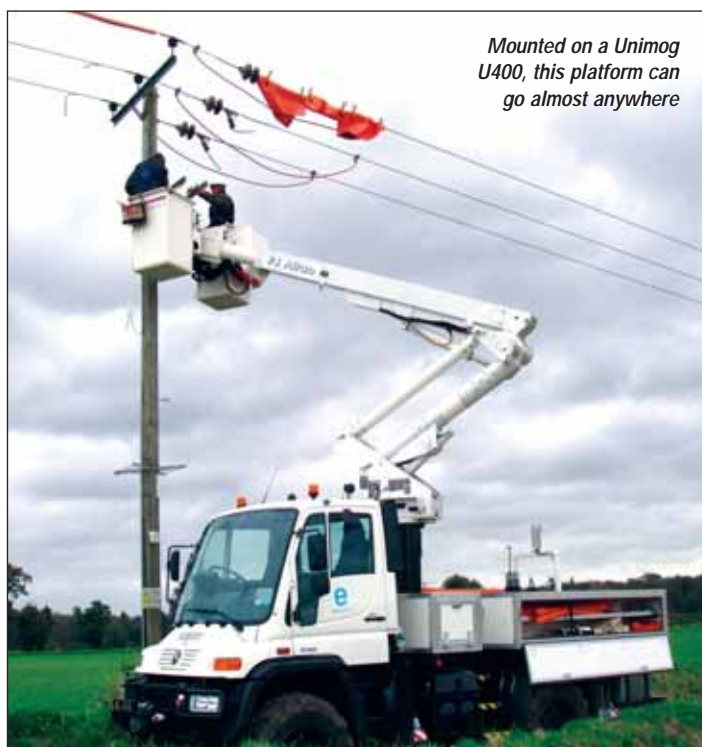
"The LV insulation kit offers up to 3kv operational insulation of the whole platform for working near live electrical equipment such as low voltage power lines and faulty street lamps," says Versalift's commercial manager Steve Kellet. "The full insulation of the boom is critical as it ensures the safety of

both ground and aerial personnel. The bucket is insulated from the boom, the lanyard connection is insulated from the boom, the boom is insulated from the vehicle and the controls are insulated from the platform." According to Kellet, many companies rely purely on the insulation properties of the bucket. He maintains that this is not good practice as it exposes the ground staff or passers by to risk. "We dielectrically test the machine between the boom and bucket, boom to lanyard anchor, boom to turret and the bucket itself," he said. "Testing between two points on the bucket means nothing other than the bucket is insulated if it touches a live contact, and even then, only when it is in a good state of repair."

Versalift's increase in the proportion of truck mounted platforms, reflects the growth in the 3.5 tonne GVW market. The ET32NFXS mounted on a Ford Ranger 4x4 pick up was launched earlier this year and offers an alternative off-road capability to Land Rover based units.



A 90 metre Bronto Skylift S 90 HLA owned by the Finnish contractor Jalo & Jalo was recently used for painting the masts of the full-rigger Suomen Joutsen which was built in France as a freighter in 1902. UK Bronto dealer Blue Line Access says it has interest in a similar sized unit.



Mounted on a Unimog U400, this platform can go almost anywhere

Its 10.5 metre working height is a fair way short of the latest 20 metre plus working heights available on most 3.5 tonne chassis vans, such as the Nissan Cabstar and Ford Transit.

Although CTE offers a closed van mounted platform, it is not for sale in the UK. "The CTE van platform has many good features such as no central column and automatic jacking but offers no cargo payload on 3.5 tonne units, while the larger 4.5 and five tonne vans take you into a very competitive market," said CTE UK's Brian King. "There are developments on the way from CTE in this sector but these will probably not be unveiled until next spring."

There is no question though that the 3.5 tonne chassis sector is currently where most of the action is taking place and CTE says it is taking a good slice of this business. According to King its Z20 offers the right combination of specification and price that attracts customers - particularly rental companies, which take 85-90 percent of its sales. But it is its recent sales to Nationwide - 26 Z20s and Z14s - that it thinks is a sign that the 3.5 tonne market is set for big growth. "Users are realising how easy and convenient it is to use a platform on a 3.5 tonne chassis," said King. "We first brought these units in about four years ago when driving licence restrictions were not as important. Now more and more younger drivers only have the standard licence and companies are unwilling to pay for the additional training to drive larger trucks. This has fuelled the demand for the 3.5 tonne machine." Advances in design means that platform heights are now similar to platforms mounted on 7.5 tonne chassis. Therefore the actual cost has decreased significantly when using the smaller

machines. With a saving of around £10,000 in the cost of the chassis alone, the 3.5 tonners are taking sales from the larger units and offering a similar performance on a sizeable amount of contracts."

### Sigma boom

"Our big seller is the Z20 which features the sigma boom giving good up and over reach," said King. "The sigma arrangement also simplifies operation when working on the face of a building or column so that you don't have to be an expert to use it. The Z20's other big feature is zero tailswing which means increased versatility, and the ability to operate with only one lane closure rather than two."

King believes that the growth in 3.5 tonners will continue for a while yet. In Italy - a country that is similar in population and development to the UK - there are about 5000, 3.5 tonne chassis platforms for hire. In the UK King estimates the number at about 500. Italy on the other hand has only about a quarter of the number of self propelled platforms compared to the UK.

"I can see a big shift between the self propelled and 3.5 tonne sector driven by convenience and reduced costs," said King.

Allan Access - currently in the process of moving to larger premises to cope with the increased demand for its products, particularly the 3.5 tonne GVW units - also identifies a change in the market from vans to open chassis units. The company also offers insulated booms through its Altec distributorship and has recently supplied leading arborist company Fountain Forestry with a fleet of specialist insulated booms mounted on Unimogs. "The additional platform height of the open chassis now outweighs the storage capability of the van," said Phil Allan. "For



Skylift has specified CTE Z20's for its self drive fleet.

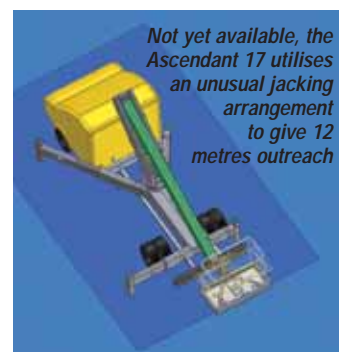
example in tree work, an arborist may be able to carry out 40 percent of his work with a 12.5 metre platform, where as an 18-20 metre platform may allow him to complete 60 percent or more of his work. I think the maximum sensible height for a 3.5 tonner is about 22 metres and this is now impacting on the 7.5 tonne market. With more and more operators passing their driving test after 1997, the demand for 3.5 tonne GVW weight machines is naturally increasing." With the 20 metre plus working height, the 3.5 tonne GVW self drive machine is ideal as it offers users an easy to operate unit with enough height and with the new sigma-style booms, up and over reach without the hassle of say towing a trailer platform behind a car or 4x4.

### Transit chassis

Allan Access recently introduced what it claims is the first 20 metre platform mounted on a Ford Transit 350 chassis, the unit was delivered to industrial maintenance company WB Services. The machine - fitted with a fully hydraulic Apache DA20 unit - has an outreach of nine metres with 200kg in the basket. This outreach is improved to 10 metres with a reduced basket capacity.

Another company set to enter the smaller truck mounted arena is British manufacturer Ascendant Access. Based in the North East, Ascendant initially launched a 7.5 tonne truck mount, but sees the potential of the smaller 3.5 tonne market. The driving force behind the company is Steve Dean, previously with Aerial Access and Andy Northwood of Bronto dealer Blue Line Access. "With Bronto focussed on larger truck mounted platforms, we felt that there was a

growing market for machines based on 7.5 tonne GVW and below," said Northwood. "We aim to produce simple, reliable and of course safe machines primarily for rental customers." Its first machine on a 7.5 tonne chassis offered a working height of 22 metres, a working outreach of 17 metres and an enhanced lift capacity of 280kg. One of its key features was its variable jacking facility, offering the choice of outrigger spreads of 4.1 metres and 3.2 metres on one side only, or a 2.2 metre narrow option providing the ability to work in confined spaces. The unit obviously offered something different and one of its first orders was for 10 units to Facelift Access. With this model



Not yet available, the Ascendant 17 utilises an unusual jacking arrangement to give 12 metres outreach

now well established, the company is turning its attention to the growing 3.5 tonne GVW sector. "We have noticed the trend towards self-drive machines over the past 18 months to two years so we have looked long and hard at the competition - the Italians in particular - and what they offer," said Northwood. "We can't compete on price so we decided we had to offer something different." In an effort to offer more lift capacity as well as a 17 metre lift height and about 12 metres of outreach, Ascendant has gone for an unusual outrigger design. The prototype is still a few weeks away, however



Mounted on a Transit 350 chassis, Allan Access claims a first with a 20 metre platform

early details suggest the unit has been designed around a Ford Transit chassis with vertical outrigger jacks on the drivers side and an extended jacking system on the nearside (passenger side) of the vehicle. According to Northwood, this gives a much greater outreach than conventional systems. The design and specifications have obviously impressed Facelift which has placed an initial order for 15 units. Possibly the highest platform on a 3.5 tonne chassis is Teupen's Euro B25T. Mounted on a Mercedes Sprinter chassis, this straight telescopic unit has a working

height of 24.4 metres and outreach of 8.90 metres with 200kg in the basket, with an outrigger spread of just under three metres. Distributed in the UK and Ireland by Ranger Equipment, Teupen says it achieves its additional height through high-quality, lightweight steel.

Although more widely known for its larger truck mounted platforms, Ruthmann Steiger has recently launched the straight telescopic boomed TB180 - an 18 metre working height platform on the Mercedes 3.5 tonne chassis. The unit has a maximum outreach of up to 12.8 metre depending on the cage load and position. Maximum capacity is 200kg and the vehicle has an overall height of under three metres. A major platform manufacturer - the third biggest in the world - but not associated with truck platforms has also entered the small truck mounted platform market. The Haulotte family of three model heights is built around the HTB 180. With an 18 metre working height the unit is not yet available in the UK, - Haulotte preferring to establish a position in mainland Europe first. The Nissan Cabstar 3.5 tonne chassis is currently being used, however by the time it



Ruthmann's tilting superstructure frame claims to reduce tailswing and also allows additional levelling



Teupen's Euro B25T is a straight telescopic unit with a working height of 24.4 metres

does appear in the UK, it may well be on a different chassis. Maximum platform capacity is 200kg and maximum outreach 10.5 metres. Turret rotation is 380 degrees. With H type stabilisers at the rear and wider A frames at the front, the unit has a maximum working width of three metres. By using telescopic booms these three new 3.5 tonners offer good working height and straight outreach, but cannot compete with the sigma-style units' performance when it comes to up and over reach.

#### Scissor lift

A variation on the 3.5 tonne theme is offered by Platform Sales and

Hire which has launched a new vehicle mounted scissor lift. Called the Flying Carpet V25, the lift can be mounted on most 3.5 tonne chassis cabs including the Mercedes Sprinter, Ford Transit and Mitsubishi. Offering a working height of just under 10 metres, it is supplied complete with roll out deck extension. The first unit has been sold for aircraft service and inspection work and has been designed to give access to both wide and narrow bodied jets. Truck mounted scissor lifts are not new to the UK - UpRight or rather John Rusling - built a similar unit in the late 1980's but it was never produced in volume. A company growing rapidly in the UK truck



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*Mounted on a Mercedes chassis, the Flying Carpet V25 has a working height just short of 10 metres*

mounted rental sector is Dartford-based company Orion Access Services it now offers a fleet of about 50 platforms with truck mounts up to 46 metres. It also sees a surge in business in the 3.5 tonne sector - and cites tree surgeons as the main users for this type of equipment. "We have a mixed fleet of 50 platforms from 46 metre Wumag truck to 12 metre scissor," said Orion's Paul Chalk. "We have invested in the smaller end of the truck market because of an increase in demand." The company took delivery of six new E198PX platforms from Skyking earlier in the year. Mounted on the popular Nissan Cabstars, the two stage sigma type riser with top mounted telescopic boom provides 20 metres working height. Outreach is up to 8.5 metres even at lower heights combined with up and over reach, zero tailswing and 360 degree rotation. "Our biggest purchase decision is backup and support," said Chalk. "All machines have some problems, so it is how the supplier sorts it out that matters."

*The Mitsubishi 4x4 chassis offers off-road capability*



"Our biggest self-drive machine is a 30 metre Wumag on a 7.5 tonne chassis," explained Chalk, "however it is not the maximum height that is important, customers are more interested in outreach." Hire rates in the London area have improved dramatically - by as much as 30 per cent - bouncing back after one particular company offering cut-throat rates ceased to trade. "Although rates have generally improved we still struggle with very competitive rates for TV work," said Chalk. "When we start to expand the fleet again we will be looking at a slightly bigger machine - say 52 metres - but it must have good outreach."

### Different philosophies

Developments in the larger truck mounted machines have been interesting in the past few years, with companies following different philosophies. Bison Palfinger thanks to its unique counter-rotating superstructure design manages to keep the overall length of its machines to the minimum, while still traveling with its basket over the rear of the truck and maintaining a tight operational tailswing. Its largest unit configured this way is the 61 metre TKA61KS introduced late last year. Ruthmann has recently introduced a different method of stowing the boom's pivot point over the top of the truck cab, and keeping tailswing down. Its T270S and T300 feature a tilting superstructure frame. Not only

does this, like the Bison, use all of the trucks length for the base boom, but Ruthmann claims that it also allows a degree of extra leveling allowing it to work on five degree slopes.

Companies such as Bronto, increasingly prefer stow the main boom over the front of the truck, with the jib folding alongside, so that the basket sits in the centre of the truck bed for transport. The company says that not only does it eliminate superstructure design complexities, but it allows the use of longer jibs, which can provide good up and over capability.

The Bison hi tech concept is clearly very much appreciated in its home market and increasingly in other

says that its customers main criteria is outreach followed by narrow jacking widths. "The van mounted sector is very quiet at the moment primarily because there are too many players in the market," said Graeme Hill, EPL's operations director. "This may change as we head towards winter and street lighting works pickup. One sector that has been busy hiring vans is the forestry, tree and landscapers. Other popular areas are the 3.5 tonne machines and 22-30 metre platforms." It would appear the changes in legislation is resulting in the forestry sector becoming more and more of an influence.

The larger truck mounted platform market in the UK is dominated by



*Oil&Steel's latest Eagle truck mounted platforms seen at Intermat - the S2618 on an Iveco Eurocargo chassis and a MAN based S4230*

European markets. In the UK however a number of operators prefer a simpler approach in the belief that the more complicated a design, the more there is to go wrong.

One of the few hirers with a fleet including booms, scissors, truck and van mounted platforms - EPL -

the Finish and German manufacturers Bronto, Wumag and Ruthmann. Market-leader Bronto's current popular range is its XDT heavy lift platforms from 37 metres to 70 metres. According to Andy Northwood, the unit's main feature is its 700kg basket capacity. Many of the larger rental companies - such as Facelift and Nationwide - have purchased Bronto machines - particularly in the 46 metres to 52 metres size range.



*Neat over-cab storage courtesy of Bison's new counter rotating boom design*



*Bison's counter rotating superstructure keeps the overall length of the machine to a minimum*



*This Sorage platform uses a Mercedes Sprinter chassis*

## Wind farms

"The trend through Europe is to increase the working height of the equipment", said Northwood. "This is primarily a result of the growth in wind farms. If the government presses ahead with more wind farms in the UK then we will see bigger and bigger platforms." Bronto has already sold three of its new 101 metre platforms in mainland Europe. In the UK Northwood has interest in a 90 metre unit and two 70 metre units - all for specific uses. Ruthmann - probably third in UK sales behind Bronto and Wumag - introduced two machines at last month's Platformer Days in Germany - the T300 and the T450. The smaller unit utilises a 7.5 tonne MAN

chassis, the larger an 18 tonne unit. The T300 has a 30 metre working height, four section telescopic boom which features the new Russel jib design that stores over the cab. Its 1.85 x 1.0 metre basket has a maximum outreach of 19.7 metres. The T450 features the same jib and basket but has a 45



*Manlift Hire in Ireland has a sizeable truck mounted fleet including this Isoli PNT 205*

metre working height and 40 metre outreach. Skyking distributes both Wumag and GSR platforms in the UK and recently added Belgium's SkyHigh range of self propelled, vehicle and trailer mounted lifts. SkyHigh produces pick-up and 4x4 mounted lifts. GSR - the Italian truck mount producer has added to its extensive range of products with the recent launch of the 27.7 metre platform height 290PX. Mounted on a 7.5 tonne Iveco chassis cab the unit uses a sigma style 'Pantel Extra' riser giving the unit more than 11 metres up and over reach and more than 15 metres of unrestricted outreach.

Extending front outriggers are marginally wider than the truck's wing mirrors, whereas the rear vertical stabilisers are within the truck width. GSR claims that the new 290PX outperforms similarly configured products from its Italian competitors. GSR's other recent addition - the 228TJ is a straight telescopic boom plus jib - is also



*Recently launched, GSR claims its E290PX outperforms the competition*

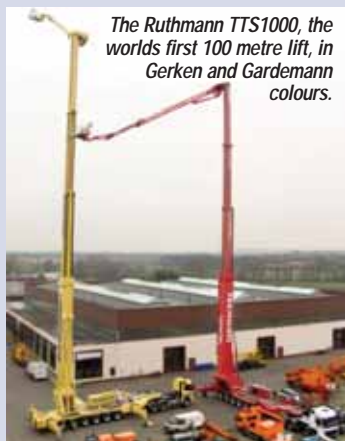
mounted on a 7.5 tonne chassis. Its 280kg of lift capacity and more than 17 metre outreach is proving popular with UK customers. Overall, it is exciting times for the van and truck mounted platform industry. The market is changing significantly with the growth of the 3.5 tonne models but also developments in the van sector and larger truck mounted platforms over the next year or so will continue to offer better solutions and further help to evolve this buoyant sector of the industry.

## Up up and over 100 metres

The first 100 metre boom lift, the Ruthmann TTS1000 was introduced at Bauma 2001, leaping well ahead of its competitors in terms of the tallest lift. At the time many considered that there was little point to such a large machine, which could be labelled as the worlds largest trailer lift rather than the largest truck mount, as it is mounted on a special six axle articulated trailer pulled by a three axle tractor unit. With a GVW of around 80 tonnes it was no lightweight. Few could understand where such a platform might be used and it could be argued that the Ruthmann was ahead of its time.

However the arrival of wind farms with ever higher turbine heights is changing all that and fast. Bronto announced late last year that it was introducing a 101 metre platform, taking the 'largest' title away from its

competitor by a whisker. The new 101 does not attempt to match the Ruthmann spec for spec in terms of lift performance and features almost 12 metres less outreach at 28 metres, but then it only weighs 62 tonnes, with 17 metres overall length. It certainly looks as though the compact nature of the Bronto is a more marketable



*The Ruthmann TTS1000, the worlds first 100 metre lift, in Gerken and Gardemann colours.*

package than the Ruthmann with the first three units already sold. Even before Bronto has shipped the first new machine to Belgian rental company Maes for fire fighting duties, its other major competitor, Wumag, has announced a 100 metre truck mount, due to surface in around nine months time, although we should see more of it at Bauma in April. The Wumag, while being the last big platform from the three, might turn out to be the biggest seller if it can turn its ideas into iron without too many compromises. The new lift will weigh less than 60 tonnes and be mounted on a five axle 10x8x8 2.5 metre wide All-Terrain type crane carrier. The company has already booked three orders from German companies for windmill work. With compact dimensions, eight wheel drive, eight wheel steer and great ground clearance it looks a very attractive proposition.



*The first of the new Bronto 101's was shipped to Belgium where Maes will rent it out for fire fighting duties*



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