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30 years and going strong

This year at least two UK rental companies are celebrating 30 years in business, this month we cover the smaller of the two, NMT, the family company based in the village of Marston Moreteyne between Bedford and Milton Keynes. The business is run by the three Ambridge brothers, Tim, Mark and Nick. Their father had been in the equipment and contracting business thus sparking the brothers interest in construction equipment.

In 1975 Tim and Mark started renting out pumps and excavators. Tim in particular became very involved with the equipment, rebuilding, repairing and modifying it. A year later it was their father who pushed them towards cranes when he spotted a 25 tonne Coles Ranger for sale. The brothers purchased the crane and renovated it ready for hire and so started the main business they run today.

The arrival of the first crane did not stop other activities. The company had moved into breakdown and recovery work, and when they needed a larger machine Tim's fascination with equipment led them to build their own wreckers and even patent a sliding counterweight design for heavy recovery trucks. That part of the business has continued to grow and now operates as TFL, based at a different location.

By 1989 the crane fleet had grown to four cranes, the largest being an 80 tonner. Within a year the fleet had more than doubled to nine units. In those days most of the cranes came from Coles which had

supplied the company's first new crane, a 45 tonne truck mount.

In recent years the company has been a good customer of Terex Demag and its largest crane is a 350 tonne Demag AC350. NMT also purchased the first 20 tonne Locatelli city crane in the UK and operates a six axle Spierings, mobile self erecting tower crane, with a second unit due in January.



All contract lifts are now simulated and plotted on the company's CAD system.

The three brothers have taken a conservative view towards growth, preferring to pay cash for any purchases under £200,000 and keeping overall debt levels down. The latest such purchases include their first self erecting tower crane from Comedil.



Tim, Mark and Nick Ambridge



NMT workshops with one of its Liebherrs

In the 1980's the brothers added self propelled lifts to the fleet, thinking that they would be a good complimentary fit with the cranes. Like many other crane companies, they soon discovered that it is a different business at the rental end and pulled back from it. NMT still runs a few units though, including two Grove Manlift MZ80s and an UpRight SL14.

A good portion of the company's work is contract lifting. To help cover this work more professionally, all contract lifts are now planned and plotted with its CAD system. Nick, who mans the hire desk, showed how easily the system plots every aspect of a lift, which helps with the risk assessments and lift plans.

The company says it follows the CPA rules on when a crane hire is appropriate and when it should be a contract lift. The brothers complain when a potential customer



The company still gives charity rides from time to time

is refused a crane hire. They know he simply hangs up the phone and calls someone else who will do it. In spite of this careful approach, NMT is unusual in that it has continued to provide cranes for activities such as giving rides to people, usually for charity, and more recently participated in the UK's first Base Jumping exhibition.

A few years ago the company was stopped from lifting people in a purpose built cage at SED, something that still rankles.

In spite of that brush with the show's organisers and IPAF, it continues to provide rides from time to time, on the basis that if a full and detailed risk assessment has been done it is perfectly safe.

The latest such event that the company participated in was the UK's first ever Base Jumping exhibition at the Bedford River Festival in July. Oxford Stunt Factory, an extreme sports club that works with many prestigious filmmakers, carried out the jumps, which involved leaping from a basket, suspended over 100 metres up, from the jib of the company's largest crane. The jumper deploys his parachute as soon as he is clear of the basket, landing safely at the foot of the crane. The team of 25 parachutists carried out over 200 jumps during the day all of them without incident.

The company is now looking at continuing its steady expansion and is currently going through the Investors In People programme, which is formalising the way the brothers work with their staff, encouraging them to keep everyone informed on how the business is doing and involving them in the decision making process.

With an increasing level of work in the nation's capital they are also weighing up the pro's and cons of opening at least a satellite depot in North London to offset the cost of fuel, tyres and wear and tear on the cranes, not to mention avoiding the increasing traffic on the M1.

NMT used its big Demag for the first ever base jumping exhibition at the recent Bedford River Festival

