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The fleet of a 1,000 cranes



Graham Bellman, Travis Perkins
group transport manager

High profile companies such as Travis Perkins are under constant pressure to comply with every rule and regulation. Mark Darwin speaks with Graham Bellman on the pressures and challenges facing one of the UK's largest lorry crane operators, where compliance is often just the starting point.

Travis Perkins - TP - just keeps on expanding. One of the 'big three' building suppliers in the UK (along with Jewson and Wolseley UK), TP has recently opened its 1000th branch – a significant milestone for the company.

Over the past five years the company has almost doubled its number of depots through acquisitions and brownfield development of new businesses.

The size of the business is impressive - more than 15,000 employees and a fleet of 2000 vehicles, 2500 forklifts and 1400 cars. TP also runs more than 1000 lorry mounted cranes – a significant proportion (85 percent) being Atlas units.

"Over the last 10 years, Atlas has effectively been our sole

lorry loader supplier," said group transport manager Graham Bellman. "Due to the various company acquisitions, we have had many different marques. If in good working order, the machines are added to the fleet and evaluated over a period of time."

Bellman has purchased some Palfinger units for certain projects, but has also 'acquired' Fassi, Hiab and Bonfiglioli units. "It is hard to beat the overall Atlas package", he says.

As transport manager, Bellman has many years experience with lorry loaders and has a simplistic view of what he requires from a crane.

"Lorry loaders are operated by truck drivers – so keep it simple and don't complicate things,"

he said. "Basically our only stipulation is that the crane should not be able to slew over the cab roof. Maintenance of the unit and support from the manufacturer or supplier is also very important."

Having such a high profile within the industry, TP cannot afford not to comply with every rule and regulation. "If a local builder's merchant has a problem with a delivery or a minor accident, it is probably not even reported and quickly forgotten. However if it involves Travis Perkins, then, as a publicly quoted company, it is much bigger news."

over a trial period, we found that by operating the crane remotely it eradicated the falls. It also made the operator's job much easier and gave a far better image to customers."

TP was the first major company to specify radio remote controls as standard on all new lorry loaders and now has more than 200 units in operation.

"We have very few problems with the equipment and the operators find it much easier to unload," said Bellman. "With 1050 lorry loaders in the current fleet, if there is a problem, we see it very quickly."

"We have more training videos than Blockbuster!"

Always complying and often far exceeding what is required has resulted in TP leading the way in certain safety related areas. And it is currently looking to try and introduce more 'logical thinking and cost saving' in the near future.

"One of the major health and safety problems we have had over the years with the lever operated lorry loaders was that the driver occasionally fell off the back of the vehicle," said Bellman. "After testing more than 100 radio remote units

"Obviously training drivers to operate the cranes is very important," he said. "We have more training videos than Blockbuster! All employees are trained to a high level and the driver/crane operators have to sign to say they have watched and read all the relevant training information. We also outsource training to Eldon Training Services – the first ALLMI accredited training provider - to ensure that everyone is fully up to speed with operating the equipment and complying with all the latest legislation."

LOLER and PUWER regulations mean that forklifts and cranes have to be regularly inspected.



One of the older, lever operated Atlas 3008 units superseded by the 3500/A11 and now the 92.2/A11

New from Hitachi Sumitomo

The New SCX400T, 40 Tonne Telescopic Crawler Crane

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TP equipment has a total of five major inspections per year and this includes three maintenance inspections.

"We have five, fully qualified engineers in the transport department, one of which is a specialist in lorry cranes and truck bodies," said Bellman. "Any cranes the company acquires are fully inspected and tested to evaluate whether they are worth adding to the fleet."

in London has been sorted with the introduction of the Atlas rapid response motorbike that can be with a customer anywhere in the capital within 35 minutes."

This backup appeals to Bellman, but he also likes the ruggedness and reliability of the Atlas equipment helped, he says, by not being over complicated.

"Of the other makes of equipment in the fleet, we have had faults,



Radio remote controls improve safety, ease of operation and image

Support is key

According to Bellman, maintenance is the key with lorry loaders and, he says, probably the reason why he prefers Atlas loaders. Atlas claims to have 37 directly employed engineers in the UK, including four in Scotland, giving, it says, unrivalled support.

All equipment will have a problem at some time or other and from the customer's point of view, it is how quickly the supplier can send an engineer and how quickly parts can be sourced and fitted says Atlas.

"Atlas builds its own cranes and so has the knowledge and expertise to identify the problem, source the parts and have the unit back in operation as soon as possible," said Lee Maynard, general sales manager UK for Terex Atlas lorry cranes. "Even responding to problems

Service in central London is just 35 minutes away using the Rapid Response motorbike



often electronic or there is not good enough backup," said Bellman.

"Atlas currently has the best combination of performance, reliability and backup."

Current TP policy is to buy its lorry loaders and trucks (predominantly DAF) outright and run them over eight years. All new units have their PDI (pre delivery inspection) carried out by Atlas with the weight test carried out by the fitting specialist.



Every effort is made to reduce the risk of an accident

Its 'bread and butter' unit is the Atlas 92.2/A11 fitted either to an 18 tonne GVW or 26 tonne with short body. This model superseded the 3500/A11 and depending on the specification has a maximum load capacity of 910 kg at a reach of 9.1 metres.

Other units supplied include the 45.2/A1 fitted to a 7.5 tonne, the 85.2/A1 on a 15 tonner, the 105.2/A11 on an 18 tonner timber specification truck, the 120.2/A2 fitted to a 26 tonne long body and the 125.2/A2 on a 32 tonne GVW. With the exception of the small 45.2, all are fitted with radio remote and Kinshofer brick grabs.



Specialising in heavy building products, Keyline joined the Travis Perkins group in 1999

One of Bellman's problems is the huge range and variety of products - in all shapes, sizes and weights - supplied by TP. This means that the cranes have to be specified to cover the 'heaviest weight' carried by the truck.

With material supply now a global business, packaging is generally standardised - the result of positive communication between equipment and materials suppliers.

Packaging of materials has changed enormously over the years. TP now no longer supplies loose aggregate - everything is delivered in bulk bags holding a minimum of 850kg (not 1 tonne!). Liaison between the materials and equipment manufacturers ensures that packs are of a manageable size and weight. However, there are occasionally a few problems.

"About six years ago we noticed that some of our Atlas 3008 units were starting to struggle when unloading packs of plasterboard," said Bellman. "Unknown to us, the manufacturer had made the packs bigger by adding a few extra sheets per pack. As a result we upped the capacity of the loaders, switching from the eight tonne metre 3008 to the 9 tonne metre 3500".

Standardisation is important as suppliers from different countries enter the global market. More recently, bricks from a supplier in the Czech Republic were manufactured in imperial sizes resulting in a physically larger pack size that could not be lifted safely.

Remote control is a big plus

So is Bellman happy with his fleet of lorry loaders? Well yes and no. "Remote control is a big plus and the addition of steps at the back of the vehicles also helps reduce accidents on lever cranes," he said. "Manufacturers have gone for the small round pads under the jack

legs which in many situations are inadequate. We need large square pads for increased stability and reduced damage to drives etc."

TP is an active member of ALLMI and has joined the user group where it is in regular contact with other crane users in an effort to improve safety and efficiency.

A change is needed

"There is one area that applies to all major, national material suppliers that should be changed and will make a big difference to speed of delivery and the overall cost," said Bellman. "As a high profile, major materials supplier in the UK, we cannot afford not to comply with every piece of legislation. It is therefore annoying when vehicles are refused entry onto sites if they do not have every single certificate to show, every time they enter".

"Why not use a recognised body such as ALLMI to carry out inspections on the larger, national suppliers to ensure they have the relevant certification, and issue a compliance disc that can be displayed in the cab window saving time and therefore money, when entering sites. There has to be some trust but TP and the other major suppliers cannot afford not to comply."



TP no longer delivers in bulk, just 850kg minimum weight bags

Available on the XS111
Hiab's Automatic Duty Control -
ADC - aims to improve payloads
and efficiency



Hiab wrings 10% more capacity from its cranes

Hiab's Automatic Duty Control - ADC - aims to improve payloads and efficiency for brick and block suppliers as well as builders and roofing merchants.

Available on its most popular models - the XS111, 122 and 144 models - ADC offers the customer the option of choosing a lighter, slimmer crane with the same capacity as a larger machine.

The system works by recognising that brick and block 'grab' applications differ from more arduous tool applications such as digging, eliminating the need to press down and therefore creating less stress on the boom.

Hiab says that 10 years' experience with on-board computers has highlighted that in less arduous applications the crane boom is under utilized and can cope with an additional 10 percent lift capacity. ADC also enables the on-board computer to recognise if the operator is making any mistakes which might cause additional stresses to the boom system during operation.

More new models from Fassi

Fassi has added a five tonne/metre crane to its light duty range. Suited to 7.5 GVW vehicles the F50A.21 weighs 605kg and has an out reach of 4.9 metres with a 960kg lift capacity. Available with up to four extensions the unit has a reach of nine metres. Options include radio remote and winch.



Suited to 7.5 GVW vehicles the F50A.21 weighs 605kg and has a maximum radius of 4.9 metres and a 960kg lift.

Fassi says that the F50A is extremely competitively priced and includes its new hydraulic

overload protection system - HO - as standard equipment. Fassi has also further extended the Evolution series, that it launched at SAIE last year, to its 24 - 45 tonne/metre range of loader cranes. All Evolution cranes feature radio remote control as standard along with the Fassi ADC (Automatic Dynamic Control) system which controls the crane speed relative to the load and claims Fassi, eliminates undesirable load bouncing. As with other Evolution models, the cranes are lighter than the outgoing models and in the case of the F290A/310AXP lifting capacity has been increased by 10 percent.



The Evolution visual display on the standard remote controller.

New rock drill quadruples speed

The Rockmaster earth drill quietly slipped onto the market when four units were specifically designed and sold to British Telecom. Drilling using loader cranes can be a particularly tedious and time consuming process. The 'Rockmaster' however, claims to offer much higher output and reliability for concrete, tarmac or rocky conditions. Using a hydraulically driven percussion gearbox between the auger drive unit and special Rock Ripper auger, the penetration in concrete is increased from 220mm per hour with a standard unit to 800mm per hour on a standard BT Pole Erection Unit.



The Rockmaster auger with percussion gearbox quadruples drilling speeds

Rockmaster says that tests have verified that the system imposes no extra loading on the crane structure. Surprisingly, it has been shown that loads are normally lower with the percussion system engaged. For loader cranes, no additional hydraulic services are required. When activated, the percussion action works in the forward (drilling) rotation only and automatically switches the auger drive unit to low speed for maximum torque.

Body builder uses ultra high yield steel

Crane and body fitters Spenborough Engineering is keeping up with the advanced materials being used by loader crane manufacturers, by using ultra high yield crane steel on a new range of lightweight bodies. In addition to the lighter weight, critical on van chassis, Spenborough says the new steels offer increased longevity without compromising lift capacity.

A recent contract for a local authority involved an Iveco 65C15 chassi fitted with a Palfinger PC1300A crane which has a maximum capacity of 1130kg at one metre radius. For increased stability, the vehicle was fitted with hydraulic stabilisers within the body width. Guarding around the crane base has been fitted for additional safety.



Spenborough Engineering is now using the stronger and lighter ultra high yield steel in its new range of bodies

Pesci goes back to basics

Pesci has also introduced a 13 tonne/metre, all hydraulic (no electronics) 'old technology' crane in response to customer requests. Geoff Hindle, managing director of Manchester-based distributor Crane Sales says that on cranes of up to 32 tonne/metres, customers would rather have a simple unit, without complications such as sophisticated electronics.

However, Pesci has also launched the SE435 with its new CSS safety monitoring system. The system, which will be fitted in all new

models, including the SE405, SE765 and the SE815, monitors the extent the crane is out of level and automatically de-rates the lift capacity.



Pesci has introduced new all hydraulics models and a new CSS safety monitoring system.

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