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on the cover:

Leigh Sparrow test drives a Hiab-Unimog crane over a punishing off road course. See polished knuckles for the full story.



Last months cover:

The answer to our challenge to identify the machine on the front cover of the October issue, you all failed except, Menno Koel of Holland lift, of course, Allan Russon of Russon Access, (we think Menno told him) and Mark van Oosten of Omega lift. So what was it? It was a **Holland Lift Q-135DL24-TR scissor lift**.

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Tel: +44 (0)8707 740436 Fax: +44 (0)1295 768223
E-mail: info@vertikal.net

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We publish our annual review of UK and Ireland rental rates, this years results vary widely between crane and access hirers. We have also added Telescopic handlers for the first time.

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The Vertikal Press

PO box 6998 Brackley NN13 5WY, UK
Tel: +44(0)8707 740436 Fax: +44(0)1295 768223
email: info@vertikal.net
web: www.vertikal.net

In Germany:

Vertikal Verlag

Sundgaualle 15, D-79114,
Freiburg, Germany
Tel: 0761 8978660 Fax: 0761 8866814
email: info.vertikal@t-online.de
web: www.vertikal.net

Germany, Scandinavia, Austria and Switzerland

Karlheinz Kopp, Vertikal Verlag,
Sundgaualle 15, D-79114, Freiburg, Germany
Tel: +49 (0)761 89786615
Fax: +49 (0)761 8866814
email: khk@vertikal.net

Italy

Fabio Potestà, Mediapoint,
Corte Lambroschini,
Corso Buenos Aires 8, V Piano-Interno 7,
I-16129 Genova, Italy
Tel: 010 570 4948 Fax: 010 553 0088
email: mediapointsr.it

The Netherlands

Hans Aarse

39 Seringenstraat, 3295 RN,
S-Gravendeel, The Netherlands
Tel: +31-78 673 4007 Mobile: +31-6 10 901037
email: jfwaarse@planet.nl

UK and all other areas

Mike Posener

PO box 6998 Brackley NN13 5WY, UK
Tel: +44(0)8707 740436
email: mp@vertikal.net

France

Hamilton Pearman, GMT,
32 rue de la 8 mai 1945
F-94510 La Queue en Brie
Tel: 01 4593 0858 Fax: 01 4593 0899
email: hpearman@wanadoo.fr

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Editor:

Leigh Sparrow

Sub/Associate Editors:

Ian Boughton
Rüdiger Kopf
Jürgen Hildebrandt

Sales & customer support:

Mike Posener
Karlheinz Kopp

Production:

Nicole Engesser

Publisher:

Leigh Sparrow

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Press

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MEMBERS OF



Letters, emails, faxes and
phone calls are welcome and
should be sent to:

The Editor,
cranes & access,
PO Box 6998, Brackley
NN13 5WY, UK

Tel: +44(0)8707 740436
Fax: +44(0)1295 768223
email: editor@vertikal.net

C & a comment



When will we ever learn?

From my very earliest days I have been aware of the heated and often emotional subject of rental rates. Even before I started school the subject was a hot one in our house as frustration was expressed over

those who simply undercut on rates rather than offer a first class fairly priced service. Few things caused more joy than the return of a customer that had gone elsewhere to save a few pounds on the hire rate. The usual reason for a "return to the fold" was poor service which ended up costing way more than the few pounds on the hire price.

In those days meetings were held to try and prevent such undercutting, a practice well beyond the pale these days. The worst expressions were reserved for those who after agreeing not to cut rates, returned to doing so at the first sign of difficulty. Usually a day or two later!

Here we are, I won't tell you how many years later and the same moaning and finger pointing is still with us. And don't think that such antics are a peculiarly British thing, my experiences elsewhere, including Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and other markets are very similar. However in the USA, Holland and Sweden, while rate discounting does go on, especially on large contracts, there appears to be some rationale to it.

In the UK a simple word from a prospective client that the same piece of equipment cost less down the road, all too often results in acceptance, capitulation and a lower rate. You don't find such eagerness to throw away profits when hiring a car, or buying airline seats or hotel rooms.

Surely the time is right for the crane and access hire industries to sharpen up in this area and build some logic and consistency into discounting policies, there is nothing wrong with offering lower prices during quieter periods, as long as they are higher during busier periods. It is called Yield management: we do it in the publishing world, which by the way can be as bad or even worse than the equipment hire business. Companies need to focus more on the quality of service for which a fair and economical price is charged and make sure that potential customers know what they are getting for their money.

Customers are getting more sophisticated and do understand the importance of a good quality service, and well maintained, good quality equipment. They understand that buying on rate alone is a risky business that can easily blow up in their face. Salesmen should be banned from calling on sites simply to offer a lower rate if the contractor switches supplier halfway through a job. The time to sell is when the customer is looking for equipment not after he has already hired it!

This month we publish our annual hire rate survey, and all in all it shows an industry in pretty good shape, in spite of concerns among many crane hirers. However the good times are tenuous and while rates are OK, there is not much "fat" in them, they either need to go higher to reflect increased costs or sales practices need to be sharpened to make sure that rates do not collapse when a slower patch comes along.

I am not holding my breath.

Leigh W. Sparrow

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