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Van innovations

The UK/Ireland small truck and van mounted lift market is one of the hottest sectors in the vehicle mounted market, and as associate editor, Ian Boughton discovered, there is no shortage of new ideas from manufacturers in the sector as they fight for customers attention.

The UK and Ireland van-mounted lift market is estimated at just over 800 fitted-vehicle sales a year. Of that Versalift has a market share approaching 50 percent, with second-placed player, Gardner Denver selling around 200 units, and third place SkyKing a hundred or so. Meanwhile the 3.5 tonne van chassis mount is also growing fast, taking the combined van and small truck mount market to over a thousand units.

"The UK is certainly the biggest market for closed van-mounted platforms, and the market here is trending ever higher, on ever-smaller vehicles," confirms Richard Tindale, UK sales manager at Gardner Denver.

Gardner Denver has come up with two new ideas that apply to several of its models. One is a personnel bucket in a new material, and the other is a new stabiliser design.

"Buckets have generally been made from fibreglass," remarks Tindale. "Fibreglass can be painted and

repaired. However, it cracks easily, and a 'potentially dangerous crack' at your six-monthly inspection could put you off the road and cost a great deal. There have been cases of cages falling off, at height, through untreated cracks. "We thought there had to be a better way to make a cage, and our engineering guys decided on a centrifugally-moulded polyethylene. It's quite like ABS – it's stiff and resilient, but it will bend before it breaks.

"Now, if you say to someone 'I'm going to put you in a cage that bends', they might worry but it doesn't really bend. It simply flexes slightly under impact".

How tough is it?

"Well it will break if crashed into at high speeds, as one customer has already shown, but in practical situations it will take almost anything you throw at it, you can take a sledgehammer to it and see, it simply flexes and absorbs the impact".

The polyethylene bucket is retro-fittable to older lifts, at a



*Richard Tindale
knocks seven bells
out of a bucket.*

price not dissimilar to a fibreglass cage, but Gardner Denver says that it has a far longer safe working life.

Keep out of the van

Gardner Denver is also proud of its new stabiliser design, the main advantage of which is to free up space inside a van.

"Usable space within the van is key," says Tindale. "For some people, the van is their complete kitted-out workshop, and so they need all the space we can give them. The big thing that users always want to know is after the lift has been installed, what space is left?"



The new under-chassis stabiliser.

"At one time, I think we were worse than anyone else in taking up space within the vehicle. Our outriggers and stabilisers used to come diagonally through the sides of the van, which is still a very common design."

The new design mounts them under the floor and uses a two-stage outrigger, mounted under the vehicle. It extends outwards, and then downwards. "It was a Gardner Denver 'eureka moment'!" says Tindale.

Walk in and don't mind your head

At Versalift, commercial manager Steve Kellett makes the point that while trade innovations may not make the television news, they are

extremely important to those doing the work. With most van mounts sporting fibreglass platforms, differentiation is quite subtle. Kellett says "We've introduced the walk-in bucket, and while you may think that's not going to change the world, it makes a lot of sense for those who are getting in and out of these things 30 times a day, and having to duck under the guardrail. To them, yes, it's revolutionary!"

The walk-in bucket comes from the group's sister company in Denmark. "Why did nobody do this before?" asks Kellett. "Part of the reason is strength. The one-piece moulding, with a continuous top rail, gives a normal bucket much of its strength. Our new design gains its strength from the bracing underneath.

Look no feet

Versalift has also devised a lightweight mounting which allows a lift to be installed without the need for jacks or stabilisers. This is ideal for particular applications where only one man is working, and going from job to job at speed.

The basic difference is in a lighter platform and a one-man, 120 kg capacity bucket. The company maintains that with a lighter platform, the stability of the vehicle is maintained, even with a six-metre outreach.

Specials and insulated

When manufacturers are being so imaginative, says Versalift, it should encourage users to be more open with their requests.

"Our adaptability is something a customer can use," says Kellett. "It's our job to cope with any problem the customer throws at us. Our success has been built on a willingness to adapt to local needs."

A completed shipment of 11 metre lifts on Piaggio Porter chassis



An example he gives is a contractor working on power lines, Versalift can provide a wealth of advice and guidance on platform insulation.

"The old method of working on power lines relied on 'outage', which was switching off a whole town so the engineers could get to work. Now, because of the competition between power companies, there is an increase in work on live wires. Some customers have started buying all insulated platforms even when live line work is not the norm. The Irish electricity board took the decision that all of its equipment would be insulated after a man was killed when he slewed the wrong way while repairing a street light and hit a power line.



An insulated platform mounted to a Bremach chassis.

The Blackpool Illuminations involve a vast amount of comparatively low-voltage work but they too demand full insulation."

In this, Versalift incorporate the expertise of its American sister

company and supplier Time Inc. In the USA, engineers have been working 'live' for thirty years or more, and the lessons learned have helped Versalift become the dominant supplier to the UK/Ireland insulated access market.

The principle of insulation essentially concerns eliminating metal components in critical areas.

Fibreglass components are safer, but heavier, and require more care and maintenance", says Kellett.

"Fully insulated platforms use a boom-wrap cover when stowed, or the boom will get dirty when driving to the job and dirt gives a fantastic path for electricity!"

Versalift says that it has many good ideas in the pipeline.

"The access market is still an immature industry and a few back-street cowboys still make a living. We have ambitions and, compared to where we can take it, the access sector is still in the dark ages."

Self drive 20 metres

At Skyking Skylift, managing director Mark Carrington says that its recent innovations bring convenience of operation to the small-vehicle sector.

"Many will tell you that the 3.5 tonne sector is the main battleground, thanks to the increasing number of driving license holders who are restricted to 3.5 tonne vehicles. Skylift was a late starter in this market sector but we've done very well from a late start" he says.

"Every maker looks to offer a 20 metre lift on a 3.5 tonne truck. The major rental companies are very keen to have kit in this market, and it is a well known fact that it is difficult

to get a 20 metre 3.5-tonner right. Our late entry has been our gain, in that we came in with a product which we have got right."

The newest Skylift product in this sector is the E198PX.

"We designed this to be a self-drive downtown access vehicle which operates within its outrigger width. The E198PX is suitable for 3.5 tonne trucks with a typical 2.90 metre wheelbase such as Nissan



The first new SkyKing E198PX sold to Easi UpLifts

Cabstars. It offers a working height of 20 metres and 360° rotation, and features a 'Z' configuration boom with 8.5 metre outreach, providing good 'up and over' capability.

All Hydraulic controls

One of its differentiations is that the control system is hydraulic.

"Simple reason," says Carrington. "Although there are benefits to electrical systems, there are also problems. Electrical switches have lots of attendant problems, not the least of which is corrosion. Hydraulics are the cheapest to maintain, without question, and are usually easier to train people on, in that the controls are similar from model to model.

"There is a partial question of how far you can reach, machines are often bought for outreach more than they are for height, and as hydraulic hoses are heavier than electrical cables, an electrical system probably gives you marginally more outreach.

"But for a long-lasting, easy-maintenance, you want hydraulics. although there is a breakpoint at around 30metres, at which electronics take over" he continued.

Change is in the air

The E198PX is deliberately planned to be relevant to smaller-company users. "The market is moving downstream," explains Carrington. "Window-cleaners and tree-trimmers, who used to be occasional hirers at best, have now been pushed into the powered-access sector.

Those who were regular hirers are now becoming more regular hirers, and some have now realised that they can convert to leasing or even becoming purchasers of kit on their own account.

This, Carrington advises, is something the access industry should watch carefully. The vast number of different jobs now being served by smaller contractors will give the manufacturers their clues to the products which will be demanded in the future.

"We have to keep our eyes and ears open," confirms Carrington. "We are seeing changes in sectors such as outside-broadcast, in which there is a new generation of OB cameras coming in, driven by the demands of Sky. I'm told that the trend for TV companies to move to high-resolution digital cameras means that those who do contract work for TV companies are going to have to change their equipment.

"We have to know about this. So, our sales people are actively encouraged to ask questions of customers about why they do things the way they do, and this is something that the industry must understand. If a customer in Guildford comes up with a new demand for a platform, don't forget about it. Be prepared for your customers in Leeds to start asking for the same thing!"



Steve Kellett of Versalift demonstrates the walk in basket.

Nationwide supplied 35 metre Brontos to carry out blade inspections.



Wind power checks

The number of "wind farms" in UK and Ireland is increasing rapidly, creating a good deal of work for crane and access rental companies, not only in erecting the windmills (wind generators) but also in maintaining, repairing and inspecting them. Nationwide Access recently supplied a 34 metre Bronto Skylift to CeltPower for blade inspections on the P&L wind farm in Llandiniam, mid Wales.

The farm is home to 103 windmills each powering 300Kw turbines and

standing 30 metres high. Total output of the farm is up to 30.9MW of energy, enough to meet the power needs of 19,500 homes. P&L used Nationwide Access's lifts to check the condition of the 12.5 metre long blades.

All P&L's maintenance work is carried out by Sinclair Knight Merz and Andrew Williams is the wind farm supervisor. "These machines are central to our inspection work as they give us a safe platform from which to inspect the turbines," he explained. "We couldn't do our job without them."

Blackfriars Bridge gets a Facelift

A specialist Moog truck mounted underbridge lift, owned by Facelift, recently helped complete a contract on London's famous Blackfriars Bridge.

The Moog 230X was working for painting contractor CLC on behalf of the City of London Authority who hired the machine for three months.

The machine is self-propelled with 1000kg cage capacity and an underbridge reach of 23 metres, allowing six painters to work on a bridge repaint at the same time.



EPL had two truck mounts in place within 30 minutes of being called out, after a hurricane struck Birmingham.

Hurricane repairs

When a freak tornado with winds of up to 136 miles an hour struck Birmingham last month, causing significant structural damage, two EPL truck mounts, a 45 metre Wumag WT450 and a 35 metre Wumag WT355, were on the scene within 30 minutes to help secure buildings against further damage.

Painters ready for height

Fletcher Cleaning of Worcester has taken delivery of a 17 metre SkyKing 179TJV telescopic 7.5 tonne van mount to assist it with building cleaning contracts.

The 179TJV features a three section telescopic main boom with two metre articulating jib, giving a 17 metre working height with outreach cutting out at 8.5 metres, with 200kgs lift capacity and 30 degree slew.

The chassis chosen by Fletcher is a Mercedes 815 Atego with a Bespoke four metre long GRP box body from Mercedes dealer Mudie Bond.

Simon Fletcher a director of Fletcher cleaning said "We always hired access in the past but have

now decided that it would be more cost effective to operate our own equipment"

The Box van has side and rear mounted doors, a translucent roof, hand washing facilities and an opening to cope with ladder stowage.

"We decided on a box body, as we undertake a great deal of highway work, so it is ideal for storing equipment while providing shelter for employees" continued Fletcher.

The platform is fitted with electrical outlets for tools and has an integral 10mm water feed for pressure washing. Two spotlights are fitted to the cage to allow work in poor light.

Fletcher Cleaning say that its purchase of its own platform will give a 12 month payback



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In the Ascendant

New British truck mount producer Ascendant has sold 10 new 22 metre booms to Facelift Access Hire, after purchasing an evaluation unit earlier this year.

Due for delivery in October, the new lifts offer a working height of 22 metres, an enhanced lift capacity of 280kgs and a working outreach of 17metres, far greater than the average.

A key feature of the model, which was launched just over a year ago at Access Daze, is its variable jacking facility, offering a choice of outrigger spreads of 4.1 metres, 3.2 metres on one side only or a 2.2 metres narrow option, providing the ability to work in confined spaces.

Gordon Leicester, Managing Director of Facelift said 'We are extremely pleased with the evaluation machine's performance so far, and have now made the decision to expand our self drive fleet with the Ascendant.



Ascendant is bringing truck mount production back to the UK.



Barin, delivers underbridge lifts to China.

Barin the Italian underbridge lift producer has delivered a model "ABC 170/LT" truck mounted underbridge inspection unit to Chongqing Cheng Tou Road and Bridge Administration Co Ltd in China.

The unit is mounted on a MAN TGA 36 350 6X2 truck.

The lift offers a horizontal reach under the bridge of 17 metres, with up to 90 degrees of rotation either side of centre (180 degrees). The unit can reach over bridge railings as high as 2.1 metres, and span pedestrian walkways

of up to 3.2 metres. This particular unit has an additional three metre segment that can be added to the vertical tower to allow the platform to be located over 12 metres below the bridge deck, while still maintaining its 17 metres of reach.

The 170 only requires an overall width of 2.5 metres on the bridge, thus occupying only one lane, leaving the others free for traffic. The unit went into service at the end of May on the Chongqing Cheng Tou project.

Wumag launch new 22m

At the recent Platformer Days in Germany, Wumag arrived on day two with a new 22 metre truck mounted lift mounted to a 3.5 tonne chassis. The WTB220, offers 22 metres working height and 14 metres of outreach on a

2.14 metre wide, 3.55 metre wheelbase chassis.

In spite of its height and outreach the WTB220 still includes features such as a 160 degree platform rotation.

Versalift has won a new three year contract to supply ESB of Ireland with 75 insulated van mounted lifts. The company has also won an order from Irish telecoms company Eircom, for the supply of 30 EuroTel 36NF units mounted on Ford Transit vans.



The Barin ABC 170/LT underbridge unit working in China, can span a 3.2m wide walkway and offers 17m of reach under the bridge at up to 12m below the carriageway.