

Making tracks

Since rubber tracks were perfected the crawler chassis has not only become popular on compact equipment, such as mini excavators, but the number of aerial lifts now available on both rubber and steel tracks has also ballooned. **C&A** looks at the larger crawler-mounted aerial lifts.

The main boom categories adopting the crawler chassis are light trailer lifts, such as the Octopussy model from Oil and Steel, or the very large specialist machines

such as Falck Schmidt, Teupen and Omme. All of these units feature narrow crawler chassis with outriggers and are only self-propelled in the stowed position.



Aichi booms are being used on Holland's motorways to install sound suppression a number of the units have special 4x1m platforms.

There is, however, a surprising range of heavy-duty, full width aerial lifts that are fully self-propelled, including telescopic booms and scissor lifts. The crawler units are mostly popular in regions where ground conditions are at their worst. Thus, the largest market in Europe for such machines is The Netherlands, where glass house construction on reclaimed polder land is big business.

The ground of UK and Ireland job sites tends to have a firmer base so that high-wheeled machines with high flotation tyres manage perfectly well. However, a number of contractors have found that crawler mounted booms are well suited for some applications where ground conditions are particularly bad, or a low ground bearing pressure is required. Some users also appreciate the rock solid base that a heavy crawler chassis provides.

Booms

Most crawler-mounted booms are straight telescopics rather than articulated, the straight boom being more suited to rugged applications, while providing more outreach for a given height. Japanese producer,

Aichi, now 100 percent owned by Toyota, claims market leadership in the crawler-mounted sector. It has been selling its machines in Europe for over 15 years with working heights from 14 to 23 metres. The units sell at a substantial premium to regular-wheeled booms, partly due to the fact that Japanese lifts cost more and also because of the extra cost of the crawler chassis itself.

Users that have purchased or used Aichi crawler booms usually become fans. Not only are they well suited to applications such as steel erection, but they also handle



Tadano's Super Deck - a scissor lift sized platform on a stick! It offers a lift capacity of up to 800 kilograms and up to eight metres of outreach.



Mega scissor lift: The two-tonne capacity HTN with a dual extension 12- by 5-metre deck and side scissor stack rotation.



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just about any ground conditions with ease and have a reputation for rock solid reliability. Aichi claims a total machine population in Europe of almost 3,000 units, many of which are crawler mounted.

The only "major" US/European producer to offer a crawler mounted boom is JLG with its 600SC and SCJ units. But, while a fine machine with a strong specification and sleek appearance, it does

scissors are popular, but turning to big diesel models, Aichi produces the RV range with working heights of 11 and 13.5 metres. Having sold over 50 units, mainly in The Netherlands, the company has now stopped importing them into the EU.

This leaves the highly specialised crawler mounted scissor lift market open to a handful of Dutch producers. The most mainstream



Hitachi boom lifts are rarely distributed in Europe outside of The Netherlands.

not appear to have done as well as was expected.

For a totally different crawler mounted boom, Tadano offers the Super Deck - a scissor lift sized platform on a stick! With a lift capacity of up to 800 kilograms and up to eight metres of outreach, it offers some unique potential. But with only 14.5-metres working height and a very high 'sticker price', it is a very niche product.

Scissors

Crawler mounted scissors is a very mixed category. In Japan, for instance, small rubber tracked mini

is Holland Lift, which is now represented in the UK and Ireland by Russon Access. While producing a number of standard units, the company will customise them to fit a particular application. Rather than use outriggers, Holland Lift's scissors are trunion-mounted so that the entire stack can be levelled from the platform on sloping ground for faster set up times and greater stability.

The demand in The Netherlands and North Germany for crawlers is such that a number of other producers have sprung up in

recent years. One such firm, Omega lift is looking to enter the UK market with its range of diesel crawler scissors with working heights from 10 to 18 metres. The company has even incorporated dual deck extensions, an option particularly appreciated on diesel scissors in the UK.

The scissor stacks can also be levelled and the units are typically supplied with radio remote controls. Counter rotating tracks allow the lifts to literally rotate with their footprint, while with low ground bearing pressure and plenty of power, it would be very hard to get them stuck.

Right at the top end of the market is a true beast of a product. HTN builds special crawler mounted scissor lifts for special applications, including 12 metre long by 5 metre wide working platforms with lift capacities of up to two tonnes. Not only can these big machines level themselves on sloping ground, but the scissor stack is mounted on a slew bearing allowing it to rotate. Most of the units built so far have been to put to work on the construction of glass houses on reclaimed land where the soft fine sandy soil literally has no base to it and where wheeled-lifts simply get bogged down.

Demand

It seems that planning permission for vast glasshouses on virgin reclaimed land is easily given. The structures are erected and then a few years later it becomes possible to apply for industrial or residential use for these now "brownfield" sites. The glass houses are demolished and new ones are built on new sites and so the development process keeps demand high for crawler mounted units.

These vast scissor lifts would also be suited to other applications, and



The largest market in Europe for heavy-duty, full width aerial lifts is The Netherlands, where glass house construction on reclaimed polder land is big business.

have been quoted for jobs, such as bricklaying and special façade work. In a way, these large units offer a cross between a mast climber and a big scissor lift. Ideal for shorter term projects perhaps.



Japanese producer, Aichi, claims market leadership in the crawler-mounted sector.