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Hender's Hewden

Following Finning International's recent £7 million investment in Hewden Crane Hire, and a further significant investment in Hewden Powered Access planned for early 2005, C&A met up with Hewden general manager – Crane Hire and Powered Access, Martin Hender, to talk about life at one of the UK's largest rental operations.

Cranes & Access: Mr Hender, you were appointed as general manager of Hewden's Crane Hire business back in mid-2003 from a non-lifting background. How has your time at the company been to date? And what are your first impressions of the lifting industry?

Martin Hender: Great! I have really enjoyed it so far. I joined Hewden at a very exciting time and have

been supported 100 percent by a great team ever since. The UK crane hire market is very competitive, which also means that it is very progressive in terms of the equipment available from today's producers. This link between market demand and the available technology is central to Hewden's purchasing strategy and we prize ourselves in investing in new equipment to keep up with



market demand. Our customers, who are often sub-contractors carrying out work for a main contractor, do not want to be supplied with old, unreliable equipment, so providing them with the latest technology means that they can keep their side of the bargain in terms of completing contracts safely, efficiently, on time and within budget.

C&A: Finning, the Caterpillar (CAT) distributor and owner of the Hewden group, recently invested nearly £7 million in new craneage for Hewden Crane Hire. Can we assume then that Finning is fully committed to the specialised crane hire market unlike most other general rental companies?

MH: Yes! Since acquiring Hewden in 2001, Finning has invested around £27 million in new cranes. That's an average of about 23 new cranes per year. Hewden Crane Hire currently operates

around 250 cranes with an average fleet age of 6 years, while another 50 cranes are operated elsewhere within the Hewden Group. So yes, Finning is hugely committed to its Crane Hire business.

Hewden Powered Access has more or less experienced the same level of investment. During the same four-year period, Finning has purchased just under 1,000 new machines at a cost of around £6.3 million per year. In total, it has invested £52 million in cranes and access, and £85 million across the whole of Hewden this year alone.

C&A: Cramo, a very strong brand name, in Scandinavia and The Netherlands and MVS in Germany have both re-branded themselves a CAT Rental Stores. Are there any plans at all to do the same with Hewden?

MH: Hewden is a strong UK brand and customer research shows that it is associated with safety, quality and accessibility. This said, the CAT brand is obviously very complimentary. And, being able to offer a complete plant line with brands ranging from CAT to Terex-Demag obviously presents a fantastic proposition. We would only re-brand if we were fully satisfied that customers wouldn't be confused into thinking that we were not able to supply non-cat brands. Hewden's focus is on providing the 'best of breed manufacturers' products' and promoting awareness that this is the case regarding products ranging from cranes to access platforms to saws.

C&A: Now that you are general manager, Crane Hire and Powered Access, are there any plans to share facilities and service coverage, or even backroom functions, such as accounts?

MH: It's all about improving customer services and working toward what we call the 'One Hewden'. We are currently reviewing back service facilities and working towards the concept of a single Hewden entity. We want to make life easier for our customers and decision-makers who don't want to have to deal with three or four Hewden managers to hire out three or four different types of equipment. We recently launched Customer Connect, a new national number that directs customers to their nearest Hewden depot relevant to their product requirements.

We are also seeing an increasingly greater co-operation between Hewden management from all sides of the business. Although the Hewden businesses will continue



Since acquiring Hewden in 2001, Finning has invested around £27 million in new cranes for Hewden Crane Hire.

According to Hewden general manager – Crane Hire and Powered Access, Martin Hender “for those [crane hire companies] that continue to operate on a regular basis, the future looks rosy.”



to be run separately, one of my aims will be to engage all staff, from crane drivers to sales people, in working towards the ‘One Hewden’ concept.

C&A: *Hewden Hire Centres and Hewden Powered Access both offer access solutions. Are there any plans to bring the two businesses together?*

MH: Hewden Hire Centres do operate certain access solutions, but they are part of wider range of products. The question is not really one of product separation though. It’s more to do with product alignment and suitability and offering the right tools for the job. So, here there is no competition between the two operations.

C&A: *Hewden, unlike Lavendon, SGB or Ashtead have seemingly shielded away from international expansion in the past. With Hewden now part of Finning, is this a policy set in stone or at least one with restrictions where Finning also has a CAT presence?*

MH: With the UK plant hire market currently worth about £3 billion a year, there is more than enough work to do here. So no, no plans for international expansion.

C&A: *Was the sale of Hewdens’ Irish business (North) to the Irish CAT dealer last year part of such a restriction?*

MH: The Irish sale was made purely for commercial reasons. Hewden management received an attractive offer and sold it. Simple as that!

C&A: *Unit for unit, it seems that Hewden Powered Access has*

been subject to less expansion than Hewden Crane Hire and it may even slip a few places in the 2005 C&A UK Top 20 listing. Is this intentional, or does the crane business currently justify more investment?

MH: This has not been the case. The level of investment has been mirrored by both the crane and access operations. In terms of the 2005 Top 20, having the most number of machines is not really the issue here. It’s about having the right number of machines in utilisation, delivering sensible returns for Hewden as well as offering the best possible solution for the customer.

Hewden Powered Access currently operates at a utilisation rate of 85 percent, while Crane Hire operates at over 80 percent. We don’t buy cranes only to then work out where to use them. We approach our customers, then invest in what the market requires. Across all operations, investment is very ‘customercentric’. We are continually investing in both Crane Hire and Powered Access equally, reflecting our customers’ demands in safety, quality and accessibility.

C&A: *October’s near £7 million investment by Hewden saw the company turn to Terex for the purchase of 25 new Demag all terrain cranes and 180 access platforms from sister company Genie UK. Why Terex?*

MH: This was pure coincidence. The purchase was up for grabs among the various producers, but it was Demag that came back with

the best overall deal in terms of the product and after sales service. Genie also offered a very good product from a very good range.

The sale is open every time we look to invest in new equipment and we will buy whichever products best suit the customers at the time. When we look to further invest in new access equipment next year, for example, the sale will be wide open again to all producers.

C&A: *Would it be safe to say that Hewden Crane Hire is the core business operation of the Hewden group?*

MH: No, it is not the core business. Each operation is an important core part of the complete Hewden customer offer.

C&A: *It has been said that a key strategy of Hewden is to promote contract lifting as opposed simple crane hire. What is the reasoning behind this?*

MH: Lifts are becoming increasingly complex. Hewden promotes contract lifting because it believes that it is the way forward. Some people say that with the potential liability surrounding complex lifts these days, the future availability of straightforward Construction Plant-hire Association (CPA) crane hire lifts will be severely limited as more people opt for contract lifting. Hewden does offer straightforward crane hire under CPA conditions, but progressively we are seeing revenues from contract lifting increase. Customers simply do not want the complexities of straightforward crane hire lifts resting on their shoulders.

C&A: *How do you think the UK crane hire market will pan out in 2005?*

MH: It certainly has a lot of potential, but I think we will see consolidation next year. It’s a very fragmented market place at present and I think that the progressive move towards health and safety and contract lifting may cause many of the smaller crane hire firms to rethink their position.

What it certain is that the market simply cannot sustain the large number of crane operators currently in operation in the UK, but for those that continue to operate on a regular basis, I think the future looks rosy.

For Hewden itself, I would not rule out acquisition, but it is not an issue at the forefront of our business development plans at the moment. Organic growth will be the main focus in the coming months.

C&A: *And the powered access sector?*

MH: As with crane hire, I think that there is still room for rate growth, but it’s not all about rates. Rates are just one element in Hewden’s basket and we are seeing more and more evidence that customers are not settling for the cheapest options anymore.

Customers need to be sure that quality and safety are also integral parts of the overall package.



In just four years, Finning has purchased just under 1,000 new machines for Hewden Powered access at a cost of around £6.3 million per year.

C&A: *What are Hewden’s own plans for its crane hire and powered access businesses over the next 12 months?*

MH: We will be continuing to improve customer service and promote awareness amongst our customers of the full range of the Hewden offer, while working toward the ‘one-stop’ Hewden solution. And, of course there will be further investment in new cranes and access equipment.

C&A: *Finally Mr Hender, C&A would like to end this interview with our regular ‘What is your favourite?’ questions.*

‘What is your favourite..?’

- C&A:** *Film?*
- HF:** The Godfather (trilogy)
- C&A:** *Song?*
- HF:** Stairway to Heaven
- C&A:** *Gadget?*
- HF:** Portable DVD Player
- C&A:** *Hobby?*
- MH:** Travelling