

The Dutch are coming

Earlier this year, Vertikal.Net was the first to report that Russon Access had been appointed UK and Ireland distributor for The Netherlands-based heavy-duty scissor lift producer, Holland Lift. With the first units now arriving in the UK, Cranes & Access visited Holland Lift's HQ and manufacturing facility at Hoorn, The Netherlands.

Holland Lift rightly claims to be the "original" heavy-duty scissor lift producer. Martin Haak and Gerrit de Gier founded the company in 1984 in response to requests from Dutch customers for more reliable, more rigid scissor lifts with greater longevity than were available at the time.

The new company quickly acquired a strong following for its products in The Netherlands and Germany where, in order to get a machine considered to be of maximum quality, customers were happy to pay prices that were often double that of the US imports.

Holland Lift never expanded out of The Benelux and Germany due to the firm's inability to keep up with

demand in what it considered to be its "home markets". Disaster struck, though, in the early 1990s when it was discovered that the company's scissor arm pivot pins had been supplied for many years below specification, causing excessive and premature wear. The potential cost of replacing the pins and bushes put the company into administration, only to be rescued in 1993 by MBB, at the time a division of Daimler Benz.

Second bite

Having effectively established a new company, the new owners did not handle the retrofit programme as many customers had hoped. It also became clear that the new parent was experiencing difficulties



Holland Lift sales and marketing director. Menno Koel.

of its own, which put Holland Lift back on the block. Terex then acquired the company in 1998. For many, this was akin to Skoda buying Rolls Royce. At the time, the Terex Philosophy was very much, "make it simple, no frills, pile it high and sell it cheap". Terex could not have bought a company with a more different philosophy if it had tried. Needless to say the marriage was not a happy one and the high volume efforts of Terex did not work well for the Holland Lift brand.

The strategy also included extending the company's market coverage, initially within Europe, but ultimately over a wider area. The closure by Grove of the Liftflux plant and the earlier demise of German Standard Lift provided an unexpected bonus, leaving Holland Lift almost alone as a builder of ultra heavy-duty scissor lifts.

The products

Holland Lift excels at producing units with platform heights over



Holland Lift takes no chances and supplies Scissor Arm Pivot Pins with dual lubrication tracks (right). The pins also sit inside substantial bushes which in turn sit inside heavy duty collars (left).



At its main Hoorn facility in The Netherlands, Holland Lift produces units with platform heights over 20 metres, the tallest being over 30, as well as big narrow aisle scissors and big high-capacity models.

The final chapter of the story so far was the surprise purchase in January 2002 by Stoneham Equipment, owned by entrepreneur Roger Tracy. Having acquired the business, Mr Tracy placed the responsibility for turning Holland Lift around with a management team headed by Pieter Boogert and Menno Koel. Their strategy was to go back to Holland Lift's roots of building high quality specialist scissor lifts with a long life expectancy.

20 metres, the tallest being over 30 metres, and big narrow aisle scissor lifts such as 1.2 metre wide models reaching up to over 18.5 metres. They also excel at big high-capacity models and special units, such as crawler mounted scissors and special application units. An example of this is the 7.2-metre long dual-deck designed for the UK market. Holland Lift's facility is very different from a normal scissor lift factory.

Re-engineering

One area that highlights a slice of Holland Lift's history is the aforementioned scissor pivot pins. It is clear that the engineers have made sure that they never have another pivot pin issue, even if a unit is used for

50 years in a sandstorm! "Over-engineered" does not come close to describing it. The pins now have dual lubrication tracks spiralling down their length, many with dual grease fittings. The pins sit inside bushings that have tiny lubrication indentations, and as if that isn't enough, the substantial bushes sit inside massive collars, which fit into the scissor arms. One thing is for certain. If a problem did arise, it would not

affect the machine's structure and replacing the component would be easy.

Further attention to detail includes built-in drip trays under wheel motors, sparing the floor in case of a leak, steel spirals on hoses that move, such as those feeding the wheel motors, and high-quality electrical components.

Holland lift certainly builds products to last. And to help it offers a full rebuild service. During our visit a number of 14 year-old units were on the receiving end of a full strip-down rebuild. Given the massive structures of the machines, it is easy to see how by replacing some of the running gear and repainting, a unit would be given a lengthy, new lease of life.

Products of this calibre have not in the past appealed to the UK's shorter-term investment mentality. However, within a short space of

time Russon Access has built up a substantial order book with Holland Lift. So the future looks bright, but it is not orange!

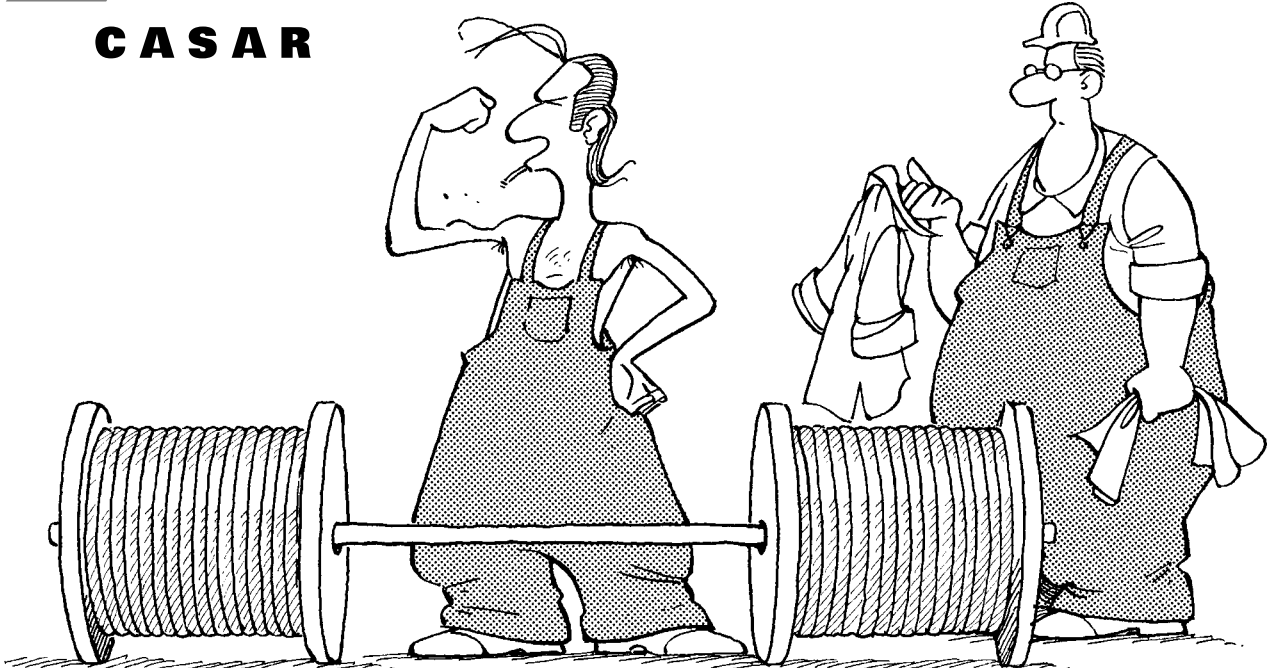
Built-in drip trays under the wheel motors prevent oil covering the floor in case of a leak.

Everything is calmer with no production line, as such. Most of the larger orders are customised to accommodate the various rental companies' most detailed wishes. Most machines are also pre-painted in customer colours. During C&A's visit, units were being built in everything from black, to cream and orange - where have we seen that combination before?



High-end units such as the Holland Lift product have in the past failed to grab the attention of the shorter-term investment mentality of UK market, but increasing orders placed with its new UK dealer Russon Access points towards a changing climate.

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