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A FAMILY AFFAIR

TreeSmiths is a first generation tree care company in south east England, established in 2012 by brothers Ben, Sam & Charlie Smith. Growth has been steady since then and is now owned and managed by five siblings. The company recently took delivery of a 23 metre CMC 23i insulated spider lift - the first in Europe and one of only two in the world. Mark Darwin went to find out more.

TreeSmiths operates from a base near Ashington, West Sussex covering an area from Lewes in East Sussex, north to London and west to Winchester. The tree operations are run by the three brothers, all of them trained arborists, together with sisters Dionne - finance - and Rebecca - HR and training. The company employs a total of 33 staff, so is a sizeable business, and one of the larger Arb operations in the area.

The company carries out both domestic and utility work, however the vast majority - about 90 percent - is for two major electricity supply companies in the region. The company is also a Utility Arb and Arb approved contractor and has recently obtained its ISO 9001, 14001 & 45001. "Before forming their own company Ben and Sam worked for a local domestic tree surgeon

then moved to a tree company in Surrey working with utilities," says youngest brother Charlie.

QUALITY EQUIPMENT

The brothers are firm believers in having the right equipment for the job and have assembled an impressive array of powered access equipment, including eight insulated Versalifts on Unimog chassis. It also has two 13.5 metre Socage platforms on Hi-Lux pick ups, and an older 4x4 Priestman lift for which replacement parts are now a challenge. Arb equipment includes an assortment of Först tracked and towed chippers, a JCB Fastrac and multiple Toyota Hi-Lux pickup trucks. It also has a grapple saw mounted on a 14 tonne excavator. Until recently TreeSmiths used a 23 metre Teupen Leo 23GT telescopic spider lift but sold it when the insulated CMC i23 arrived.

"We have always tried to be self-sufficient in



(L-R) Charlie, Ben and Sam Smith



One of eight 14.8 metre insulated Versalift VST240i mounted on a Unimog chassis



The new CMC i23

all areas of the business and that includes our equipment - if we need something we tend to buy it," says Charlie. "Most of our work involves power line clearance - from 32kV down to low voltage overheads hence the addition of the CMC i23 spider lift."

Although the brothers liked the Teupen's telescopic boom, it had an aluminium platform rather than a fibreglass basket which they prefer when working near power lines.

"Unfortunately, Teupen was not able to supply a fibreglass basket, so we started looking for an insulated spider lift. We saw the CMC machine advertised in an issue of Cranes & Access which we read regularly. We had not seen any other insulated spider lifts on the market and after chatting with CMC placed an order. For the work we do, the machine is priceless, both for us and our clients. A lot of the line work requires network shutdowns however with the i23 we can carry out the work live which means savings all round."

TreeSmiths uses the 13.5 metre Socages for jobs not requiring the Unimog's ability, for example dealing with a tree on a domestic driveway for which the 4x4 pickups are ideal leaving the Unimogs free for the High Voltage work.

"In the South East there is a lot of Ash dieback disease so it is not always safe to climb the affected trees and our standard Unimog mounted access platforms only go about 15.5 metres. This means we were having to put in frequent shut down requests whereas with the new CMC and its additional reach and insulated boom, we don't have to do this."

CMC i23 INSULATED

The new CMC i23 was ordered mid last year and delivered in April. At the launch early last year CMC said the machine was to be the first in a new line of 'i' series insulated spider lifts, although no other models have yet been announced.

The lift is insulated to 46kV using insulated fibre boom inserts in each boom section as well as a high insulation fibreglass material for the one person platform/basket and special non-conductive oil in the hydraulic system.

The net effect is a machine that will protect those working in the vicinity of power lines, both in the basket and working below. The i23 has a working height of 22.8 metres, a maximum outreach of 10 metres at an up & over height of 12 metres with the 180kg unrestricted/maximum platform capacity. The basket is tight at 600mm square but features a full 180 degrees of platform rotation. Although the spec says the unit has 400 degrees of slew - 200 degrees either side of centre - TreeSmiths commented that it is limited on one side and says 360 degree continuous slew would be very useful.

Overall weight is 3,930kg which according to TreeSmiths is one of its downsides in that the three tonne Teupen could be towed behind a 4x4. Now it has to use a low loader behind its JCB Fastrac to move it around.

TreeSmiths' i23 is diesel powered but also has AC mains power. However other options include a 300Ah lithium battery, hybrid power and the remote diagnostics which TreeSmiths did specify. Given its 23 metre working height the machine is reasonably compact - overall stowed length is 7.2

metres, under two metres high, with an overall width of 890mm with tracks in or 1.4 metres when extended for extra stability. The outrigger spread is two stage variable from 2.88 to 4.96 metres wide with up to 32 degrees of levelling and a free jacking height of more than a metre, which is ideal for self-loading without ramps.

"We love the machine as it does everything we want," says Sam. "There were a few teething problems, but this involved a change we wanted relocating the remote control unit to a docking station on the side of the machine. The backup support from CMC UK was brilliant, best we have had, and it is now all sorted."

WOULD YOU BUY ANOTHER CMC?

"Yes definitely, a 30 metre insulated with telescopic upper and lower booms would be ideal if available. Our i23 is very well protected with all the cables and pipes hidden so that dropping a branch or log will not damage it. CMC has thought about everything on the machine including a see-through fuel tank for keeping an eye on the levels, however it is difficult access the filler cap when the boom is stowed. Turning the tank around



Positioning the CMC i23

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TC22

New **TeleCrawler**
TC22S - TC22N



- 22m working height
- Up to 12,4m working outreach
- Automatic straight flush telescopic boom extension control
- "Go home" and "Go back" functions
- Available engines: Diesel, Lithium-ion and Bi-energy

New **DSE** basket with dual side entry and mesh floor

might be an easy fix? Tracking in the wet is easier than the Teupen, and if the terrain is really bad then we generally put boards down to protect the surface."

70% FASTER

"The contract we are on today isn't really what this machine is about, but we were just using it to see how it performs. It is definitely quicker than climbing and is doing work that our other platforms cannot reach. I would say it is about 70 percent quicker, even if you have to relocate three or four times when working on a typical tree," says Sam. "On the previous tree, an oak, we had about 10 different set ups because some of the branches were over a road. But it is still much quicker than climbing."

"The working at height hierarchy is to use powered access where possible and then climb," adds Charlie. "All our guys would choose to use a platform rather than climb. Before platforms, trimming a tree would have meant climbing just for a few branches. On the power line work we are mainly concerned with a vegetation to conductor clearance, which involves a great deal of side pruning. Using MEWPS to achieve side prune clearances, is far more productive than using climbers. Being 70 percent faster makes a huge difference when taken over a year. I would say that nine out of 10 jobs are faster with a work platform."

ANY THOUGHTS?

"The narrow basket is very tight for one person, particularly with tools," says Sam. "To make it easier we bought a saw sheath which keeps



A saw sheath for the chain saw keeps the small basket tidy



TreeSmiths has assembled an impressive array of quality equipment

it tidy and accessible without having to reach down. Also, although the machine has a capacity of 180kg we would rather have a double basket - not that you can work side by side, but it provides more space in the bucket for things like a set of rods, a saw, perhaps a rigging kit - all the gear weighs about 50kg. The emergency lowering on the CMC is also easy and straightforward."

"We like to pioneer new techniques and practices etc such as these headset comms which are brilliant so we can keep in constant contact with each other while working improving safety. We could do with a 28 to 30 metre spider lift, but in terms of physical size they are often so big that access can be an issue."

THE ARB SECTOR?

"It is a good industry to be in at the moment," says Ben. "The domestic side is flourishing, and we would like to do more of it. Training is onerous but necessary - every three years we have to renew our qualification and certifications but this is good for maintaining standards and competency."

"It is a good time to be in the sector but there is constant pressure on increasing costs - wages, equipment even little things like putting the Unimogs through an MOT has gone up £15 and hour - it all adds up. ■

INSULATED SPIDER LIFTS

While the number of spider lift manufacturers continues to grow, very few offer insulated machines. One of the first was Italian manufacturer Platform Basket which launched the 17 metre PB18.90.46kV with 46kV insulation in 2012, having initially developed it in partnership with its US dealer Tracked Lifts. Demand in North America for a larger machine resulted in the 22 metre Spider 22.10.46kV in 2018, with more than 100 units delivered to arborists so far. In 2015 Bluelift unveiled a version of its 22 metre SA22 model with a fully certified insulated 1,000 volt basket/bucket.

BIG OMME

Three years ago, Danish manufacturer Ommelift started shipping a new 26.5 metre insulated model - the 2650 iRX-46kV - rated to Category C level insulation. The boom is insulated with Waco fibre glass sections and is ANSI A92.2 compliant. The 2650 iRX has an outreach of 12.2 metres with the 136kg unrestricted platform capacity, at an up & over height of 13 metres. Features include a hydraulic supply for saw hook up and 180 degrees of platform rotation. Overall stowed length is 10.24 metres while the machine weighs 6,075kg. The diesel/battery hybrid power pack with engine generated re-charge is standard, as are radio remote controls.



The Ommelift 2650 iRX-46kV

GOMAN GO

Around the same time Chinese manufacturer Goman launched the X18D - an 18 metre 10kV insulated spider lift. With long riser, topped by a three section telescopic boom made of hot dip galvanised steel sections, topped by a fibreglass articulating jib and a fibreglass two man platform. The machine offers 200kg platform capacity and up to 7.2 metres of outreach. The overall length is just under six metres with the basket in place, which



Chinese manufacturer Goman has launched a new 18 metre 10kV insulated spider lift



Platform Basket PB18.90.46kV

given the insulated connections, is not easily removed. Overall weight is 2,380kg.

Finally Italian truck mounted lift manufacturer Comet finalised its new range of Leopard spider lifts last year, which includes a 25 metre lift insulated to 46kV which should be available later this year. Provisional information suggests an unrestricted platform capacity of 250kg with 11.5 metres outreach.



The Bluelift HA22 with insulated bucket platform

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