

Hank Suttorp, international sales manager for Hek says that capital being made available in Europe for infrastructure development is good news for the mast climber sector

Up she rises

According to Andrew Reid, managing director of Mastclimbers UK, the mast climbing work platform (MCWP) is still in its infancy, but as awareness increases in the UK, he believes less people will turn to scaffolding. *C&A reports*

"IN TERMS of MCWPs, other European countries are ten years ahead of the UK," says Reid. "Up until a few years ago, the equipment was only available in the UK as a plant hire tool and as people didn't really know what the equipment was about, they weren't prepared to sacrifice traditional scaffolding. We are hoping to raise awareness of MCWPs by providing a total access solution for the customer".

Admittedly, Reid states that there are areas where scaffolding would arguably be the more economic option. "For instance, it is a matter of debate whether MCWPs should be used for access under two storeys," he says. "Anything above this, however, and it all boils down to efficiency".

Paul Brunt, managing director of Haki notes that there is room for both MCWPs and modular scaffold systems and that Haki actually manufactures both products. "However, the UK scaffolding market is much more demanding compared with continental countries," he says. "For example, there is the need to fill in gaps between the building façade and the platform. Also, traditional thinking is to have all areas covered by scaffolding with every level decked 'just in case'. This is easier than planning the work more carefully to use a MCWP".

According to Hank Suttorp, international sales manager of MCWP manufacturer Hek: "There will always be competition between MCWPs and scaffolding, but things start to get interesting as projects get bigger and materials get heavier".

"There are five 'golden rules' that we use to justify the use of MCWPs over other forms of

access. If two or more apply to any project then we believe that MCWPs offer the most viable solution.

"Firstly, the shorter the rental period, the more economical it becomes to use MCWPs, because the time it takes to erect them is considerably less than scaffolding systems. Secondly, it is significantly easier to handle heavy materials such as granite, glass and bricks et cetera. Materials can be unloaded directly from a lorry onto the platform and transported, with personnel, directly to the desired position on any floor of the building with minimal damage to the materials. With scaffolding, a goods hoist is often required at an extra cost, which will only deliver materials to a point on the line of the mast. On average, customers can achieve a 30 per cent increase in productivity when talking of material logistics on site. This is where the real savings are made.

"Thirdly, there are considerable savings on the volumes of equipment needed. Scaffolding has to be considerably reinforced every 30 metres because of the sheer weight of the system. Even up to just 3 metres, a MCWP requires just four bolts per mast compared with the uprights, braces, planks, vertical and tubes, grips and clamps needed for a scaffolding structure. Between 50 and 100 metres, a platform doesn't really change, while the anchor forces remain very minimal.

"The working environment itself is much more accessible and comfortable to work with, not to mention aesthetically appreciated when using MCWPs. People working inside a building ► 36

MAST CLIMBERS



Hek has been involved in a full integration process with hoist manufacturer Alimak, since Intervec's acquisition of Hek in 2002

during renovation don't want to be staring at endless tubes, fittings and planks all day".

Jan Paul Mutsaerts, regional director Europe/Middle East at Hek, also notes that: "Access projects are constantly losing money and often customers don't know where money is being lost. If we can tell our customers that there is money to be made and where the hidden money can be found, the extra money will be often pay for the platform."

"There is an enormous amount of scaffolding around the world and labour is becoming more expensive," says Mutsaerts. "And, when you consider that every mistake on site costs around £500, costs need to be monitored very carefully. We need to be sharper in convincing people of MCWPs and the savings that can be generated".

Hek operates in the UK, along with Alimak, through Intervec UK, and has built up a significant rental client base through the likes of A-Plant, Sovergein, Mastclimbers UK, and its biggest customer globally, SGB, which currently operates approximately 240 free-standing mast climber units.

"Companies like A-Plant were initially reluctant to invest in mast climbers," says Hank Suttorp. "They didn't like the product at first because they are a one-stop rental shop and the fact that you needed personnel to erect the equipment was bit of a put off for them. We then introduced the MSHF free-standing mobile platform which could also be seen as a very big scissor lift. The single mast unit can be raised free-standing to a height of 20 metres with a 2.3 tonne lifting capacity. Of course it all depends on the application. For instance, a scissor would be used for shorter projects in terms of the rental period and height, and the more lightweight disciplines, but with the MSHF, there are no height limitations, payloads are greater and the deck is much longer".


Hek will be pushing hard this year to raise the awareness of MCWPs to its customers and the market in general. "Perhaps our most significant product is not the equipment itself, but our 'Total Support Service', says Jan Paul Mutsaerts. "This is of prime importance to Hek and we will be looking to expand it through an extensive dealer network with qualified experts on hand to convince, train and teach people about mast-climbers.

"The first sale or rental is usually very difficult, but we find that when the customer uses the equipment they rarely want to use anything else. We have to make expertise and service easily accessible to the customer. We want people to know that we are not just selling hardware. Sure

the equipment is useful but it isn't everything. Our aim is to sell a complete access solution and take away the headache from the user. This is firstly achieved through sales to rental companies and followed up with an extensive dealer network where components and application knowledge is easily obtainable. There are currently 12,000 Hek units worldwide and in rental, customers want the equipment when it suits them, so we need to be up and running at all times, where ever the location".

Both Mutsaerts and Suttorp are quietly confident about the future of mastclimbers and say that the current 5 per cent share taken up by dynamic access, of which mastclimbers counts for 1 per cent, could easily increase to up to 25 per cent if awareness is increased.

"We are not interested in undermining other access sectors as each piece of equipment serves its own purpose," says Suttorp. "We even sell MCWPs to scaffold companies themselves for erection and dismantling their own systems.

"It's all about finding the most productive and efficient solution to a problem. We can only explain what our equipment can do and it's then down to the customer to make up his/her own mind". 

Show stoppers

Haki and Geda will be out in force at this year's SED exhibition and have already promised a very impressive display which will include live, active demonstrations of its various products.

Keith Hancock, technical sales engineer for Haki Machines said: "We are building a 5 metre wide by 16 foot high bridge, constructed from Haki's new Aluminium Beam, from our main stand to our demo area, where visitors will be able to view our display from above. We will be demonstrating Haki System Scaffolding, New Temporary Roof System and the new Aluminium Beam. Geda Hoists will be operating a running demonstration area where it will be transporting and moving materials using transport platforms. We are also hoping to have two different mast climbers, one from both Haki and Geda".

Haki Ltd of Tamworth is the official UK and Ireland distributor for Geda-Dechentreiter of Bavaria, one of Europe's foremost manufacturers of hoists and related products.

The aesthetics of mast climbers is just one factor contributing to their growing popularity among users

