

VEHICLE MOUNTED ACCESS

Transformers

The Versalift VLR130T, mounted on a Landrover Defender

The gloss is wearing off for many who decided to invest in self propelled booms, as rental rates plummet. If you're thinking of getting into vehicle mounted platforms, now could be a good time. **Rosie Gordon** talks to the experts.

scopic booms (see box story). PJ Allan is the company's UK dealer, with Phil Allan at the helm. "The 3.5 tonne sector is interesting" he explains "because UK companies seem to be very nervous about investing in it. In Britain it is not yet seen as a major market, even though in Europe 3.5 tonne vehicles present a huge rental sector."



Pagliari's 220ALU/AF

However, generally, business for PJ Allan is good. "We have been selling more van mounted platforms to big contracts lately. Utility or 4x4 vehicles serve power line maintenance, tree cutting and so on perfectly. There has been a boom on the larger 4x4 truck mounts, to do work on mobile phone masts. I am not sure that that is really going to be a sustained growth sector though."

Allan believes that Pagliero, which is one of Southern Europe's major players, will soon be able to compete with the likes of Bronto in the UK. The most popular models he has sold so far into this country have been 18-22 metre booms on 3.5 tonne vehicles. The boom range goes up to 72 metres.

"The vehicle mounted hire sector is getting very hot", says Richard Tindale of Versalift. "For the growing CCTV business, van mounts are perfect. They have a secure storage area and are quick to set up. Security people don't tend to like hanging around in surveillance areas! Lots of these companies started out using trailer mounts, but you have to get a van as well to carry the gear and it takes more time to set up. Companies are now either buying van mounts or putting pressure on the hire companies."

The major business for vehicle mounted platforms is, and traditionally has been, street lighting contracts. "Big civil engineering companies are winning contracts at the moment to maintain entire highways - from street furniture to lighting - for regions, which means they have to set up long contracts and special divisions", says Tindale. "For instance, we sold five or six units to hire companies who immediately had orders for them from WS Atkins, which is setting up a division to do all the street lighting for the whole of Northamptonshire."

Versalift specialises in vehicles under 7.5 tonnes, and employees four engineers full time to fit whatever platform the cus-



Dudley Metropolitan Council's new Versalift ETN38NF platforms, with 110 degree flyboom

tomers requests. Tindale believes that the 3.5 tonne market is the most important at the moment. "Even new drivers can take out a Landrover or Ford Transit mounted unit. We can put a 13 metre boom on one of those, and a 21 metre boom on a Mercedes Sprinter. The 3.5 tonne sector is big on the continent and soon will be here."

UK to follow Europe's lead?

As if to back up this claim, Multitel Pagliero recently opened the doors of its factory near Turin to launch its NJ range of 3.5 tonne vehicles fitted with tele-



Kiwi Stephen Andrews recently emailed some alternative solutions to vehicle mounted access he had spotted in a street in Auckland. Here, a scaffold tower is balanced on the back of a truck.

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PJ Allan has also been associated with Niftylift for about two years, having deliveries of Nifty booms in kits to be fitted to vehicles in the PJ Allan Market Harborough factory. The association has enjoyed a growth in the vehicle mounted industry and between them, PJ Allan and Niftylift have developed several new products. One of these is the V140, a 14 metre, van mounted platform.

"There may be a few changes in the hire sector", says Allan. "Fayken is one of the largest rental companies in Europe, owned by Iveco. It has 36,000 vehicles. It is just entering the powered access market, supplying Colas, which has just been awarded the street lighting contract for the whole of Kent. This is Fayken's entry to the UK – in France they are as big as PTP."

One of the most prominent access



The Niftylift V125 has plenty of storage space and a useable payload of 500 kilograms

hire companies is undoubtedly Facelift, based in East Sussex. Managing director Gordon Leicester says that the work Facelift's platforms are hired for is much more varied than street lighting and the odd mobile phone mast "We do a massive variety of work – anything from providing platforms for the camera work at the Grand Prix to supplying the MOD" – but apparently the latter's platform requirements are strictly QT.

Facelift had an excellent SED and its huge stand showed off a variety of products, including a new Moog – see box. Its range of vehicle mounted platforms is about 120 strong and, if Leicester is correct about the mobile phone and construction industries picking up, there should be no lack of demand.

One man who does not back the arguments for 3.5 tonne vans is Jim Longstaff of Skyking, the UK's leading supplier of vehicle mounted platforms. "The advantages of going towards 3.5 tonne vehicles are yet to be proven. For a start, those who get the new licence will be in their early twenties and many self drive hire companies will not be keen on supplying them. Then again, the 3.5 tonne vans are likely to be operated at their full capacity all the time and will probably wear out more quickly. Thirdly, there is the obvious limitation of a lower specification platform."

To illustrate his point, Longstaff points out that major hire companies – such as Facelift, PTP, Nationwide and EPL – are not really entering into the 3.5 tonne market. "Give it another four or five years, though, before it really becomes an issue", he says.

Success stories

Skyking has had phenomenal success with its truck mounted aerial platforms.



Skyking 149T improves access for Humber Bridge Board

With top clients such as Nationwide, Loxam, Brogan, MHS and Facelift, the rental sector is definitely its bread and butter, and probably jam, but it is planning to increase its penetration in the end user market. "We are in a slightly more protected position compared to most of the access industry, which jumped on the self propelled band wagon and now finds a vastly over saturated market and very low hire rates. There are less cowboys in van mounts, the units are a bit more specialist and, if anything, under-subscribed."

Skyking predicts that it will sell 120 units this year, from an 11.5 metre boom on a van, to 28 metres on a truck. The RA range was launched about 18 months ago and includes the very popular RA125, a 12.5 metre platform which is generally mounted on a 4.2 or 5.2 tonne Iveco van.

At ASI Access International, UK sales manager Tim Hood says that the end user is the major concentration. "Cleaning, maintenance and forestry are our major client sectors. We do talk to utility etc, but our products are aimed at ►

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German manufacturer Ruthmann has just celebrated its 100th birthday

◀ longevity and so they make sense as an investment for end users. Rental companies are more interested in getting bulk for their money.”

ASI is the UK dealer for Ruthmann, which will launch a 22 metre boom on a 3.5 tonne truck in October. This will predominantly be aimed at Germany but, following plenty of interest at the SED stand, there is likely to be a tour of the UK, or a factory visit to Germany arranged. “We are pushing the TK310 to the UK market at the moment, explains Hood. “It has a 31 metre boom on a 7.5 tonne truck. The 25 metre version was at SED and got lots of interest. In fact, one visitor who had been driving van mounts for 15 years said he thought it was superb – and he had never even heard of Ruthmann before.” Ruthmann uses steel for its booms, not aluminium. Most component parts are made ‘in-house’.

Ruthmann has struggled to get into the UK market and ASI has only represented its products here for 12 months.

If you are looking for something a little larger, it might be worth calling Blueline Access, the UK’s sole distributor of Bronto Skylift products. Andy Northwood set up the company in 1986, having already worked with Bronto for some time.

“Our range is 34 metres and above. We don’t get involved with the bottom end, or mass market – this is more specialist equipment.” Last year, Bronto launched its MDT 2000 series of medium duty telescopic platforms. The most popular so far is the S50MDT, with a 50 metre working height, on a 26 tonne chassis. “It’s the most popular because it’s versatile”, says Northwood. “This can quickly get in and out of a city site, unlike a self propelled boom which is very heavy and difficult to transport. Bigger truck mounts are attracting excellent regular contracts where machines are required for several days at a time. You will find that many large rental companies will never have been busier with their truck mounts – but because the self propelled units are bringing down profits, investment is being reined in a bit.



Ruthmann’s TK310 was a hit with end users at SED

A competitive market

So far, so good. But there are a few nasties lurking around in the vehicle mounted sector. With some manufacturers offering customers finance deals and service contracts, hire companies are starting to see them as competition – and this could ultimately lead to more squeezing in the hire rates contest.

One company that offers service contracts but refuses to offer any form of finance or lease deal is Priestman. “How customers buy our equipment is up to them”, says Richard Breedon, sales manager. “We are not going to start treading on the toes of hire companies – their business is very important to us and we do not want to be seen as competition.”

The bulk of the Priestman machines (there are 30 in the range; best selling is the DA12.5 on an Iveco van) go to councils for street lighting contracts. “We cannot give the height for telecommunications work, as we specialise in booms of 16 metres and under”, explains Breedon. “However, CCTV installation is probably the major growth area for vehicle mounts now. As yet, there are very few big players out there, and lots of small independents. The industry is in its infancy and many companies cannot yet afford to buy a unit outright. They will go for second hand or hiring at the moment, but it will pick up”

One of the major showcases at SED (and at the earlier Commercial Vehicle Show in Birmingham) was the Priestman’s TVM13.5 and TVM11.5 telescopic booms on Landrovers. This ▶

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◀ is a brand new combination and generated a lot of interest at SED. So far two have been sold.

With every truck mount dealer or manufacturer claiming that the biggest business comes from councils for street lighting contracts, this must be a fiercely competitive industry. Or is it? "We just ignore the competition", discloses Breeden. "Take Versalift for example – they have machines for different applications. The customer will decide what is needed and choose the best for them. As far as the argument for 3.5 or 4.5 tonne vehicles goes, well, people need the storage capacity of the 4 – 4.5 tonne vans.

"I don't think the new licence is going to upset our business too much. Some companies will sell on the 3.5 tonne point because they can offer a 12.5 metre on a 3.5 tonne vehicle. We don't, but to our advantage is the fact that we are the largest UK manufacturer of this type of equipment – most other companies import. That's a big boost for us, and having Landrover is another string to our bow." ■

Underbridge units

Underbridge units receive a much slower trade. Demand is limited, obviously, to very niche work and just a handful of companies will regularly use them. Indeed, Phil Allan at PJ Allan does not think that Pagliero will attempt to market its underbridge units in the UK, "as the market is only big enough for a few". There was, however, a recent stir, when Facelift displayed its new Moog at SED.



According to Facelift's Gordon Leicester, "Bridge engineers have been waiting for a new, better model to come out. Ours is the latest and biggest Moog you can buy. At SED we had lots of interest and some bookings for the machine."

The new Moog weighs in at 32,000 kg, has an outreach of 23 metres, downreach of 9.5 metres, as well as basket rotation of 180 degrees. The platform is 22 metres x 1.7 metres, with a 110 volt power source on board. It can work a four-lane dual carriage way in one pass. The Moog is thought to have cost Facelift around £350,000, and the daily rental rate will be approximately £1000.

Moog is the company which first developed underbridge units. Facelift also has a couple from Simon, but these do not compare in size. The Simon UB40 stows away at 2.5 metres width and 3.5 metres height. The outreach is 6.1 metres, downreach 8.2 metres and platform size is 1.7 metres x 1.2 metres.