

# TELEHANDLERS

JCB's first telehandler, the Loadall 520

## One size fits all?

Many companies are turning to telescopic handlers as a solution to both light lifting and heavy duty access requirements.

**Rosie Gordon** asks, are these 'jacks of all trades' the ultimate accessory for every fleet?



Manitou's 1850 in John Thorburn's livery

**T**he IPAF Health and Safety Forum provided a valuable source of information for anyone wondering about doubling up their telehandler as a work platform. We all know the implications of using machines such as forklifts without a proper man cage attached – the accident statistics arising from this type of behaviour are still alarmingly high in agriculture and construction.

### Look before you leap

IPAF speakers included the director of product safety for Ominiquip Textron, Dave Merrifield and Ian Fraser from the French Ministry of Employment.

In the UK we can still use forklifts and other 'non MEWPS' to lift people, so long as there is no other 'reasonable means' and a proper man cage is fitted. But as Fraser explained, even in France, where the use of forklifts and other 'non-MEWP' equipment is strictly prohibited for personnel lifting, telehandlers can be used. This is because they can come with an integral basket – one that is especially designed and conforms to the need for the platform to be controlled from within the basket, as specified in regulation EN280 for MEWPS.

The rub is this: Although telehandlers provide a safe lift when they are stationary, it is too tempting to move the handler with the operator elevated, rather than bring down the basket and reposition. Dave Merrifield is approaching ANSI in the US to address this problem. His view is that it is all too common practice that operators try to use the telehandler as a MEWP – which it is not. It

could be that, until these machines have a mechanism by which the main body of the machine automatically stabilises and immobilises before the manbasket can be lifted, that their operators will continue to pose a health and safety risk. Merrifield pointed out that most of the accidents involving telehandlers took place just after the machine had been moving. Often, rough terrain conditions meant that only 3 points would be touching the ground and, with the boom extended, the machine would easily tip over.

But there are plenty of pros for telehandlers. They are almost always on site before a MEWP needs to be ordered, and can negotiate rough terrain to most areas. They are an obvious solution to many access problems. They are legally used for access all over the world, and safe – so long as your operators understand the correct use of them when fitted with the basket attachment. They can be a cheaper option; again, they are generally on site anyway. They could provide a great solution, so long as you are vigilant. So what's out there for buyers?

### What sells, where

In 1977, JCB launched its '520' to the UK. Since then the company's distinctive logo has been synonymous with these versatile machines.

"The size of the world market for telehandlers is now almost 33,000", says Nigel Chell, marketing manager at JCB. "In the UK JCB is number one with a 45% market share. In Europe, JCB is number two with a 25% share."

The UK's favourite JCB is the 532-120 Loadall, with 12 metres of lift height

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◀ and a 3.2 tonne payload. House builders find that this has the right capacity and reach and the added advantage over smaller machines of stabilisers. It costs around £42,000.

According to Chell, anyone in charge of a crane rental fleet should think seriously about purchasing a telehandler. "Telescopic handlers and cranes and access share a similar customer base: Users engaged in above-the-ground activities, rather than ground works or the extraction industries. Also, concerning cranes, there is a good fit between the jobs that a telehandler can do and those requiring a crane, with the crane handling the heavier loads and bigger lifts."

Manitou celebrates 30 years in the British and Irish markets this year. Marketing directors Benoit Paquet and Edward Ugolini advise "We now have a high lift capacity that is starting to touch on crane activity. When you can get in close to your target, your machinery can be much lighter – this is where telehandlers excel."

"The market has developed fast since 1994, when we first introduced our rotating telescopic handlers.", says Paul Bidwell of Manitou Site Lift. "We now have six models in the MRT range. Northern Europe shows a particularly healthy market for us, with a high percentage of sales in the Netherlands. The MRT range offers the best selling Maniscopic handler, a rough terrain crane and an access platform in one."

Another manufacturer upbeat about increasing sales is Merlo. "Merlo sells 4000 telehandlers every year – which shows a 20 per cent increase each year over the last eight", says Peter Grant, marketing consultant. "Merlo is the third largest manufacturer in Europe, with about 15 percent of the market."

Merlo developed the first slewing telehandler (the 'Roto') in 1990, followed by

Manitou, then Dieci, a small Italian maker. In the Merlo range now are eight slewing models, eight 'Turbo Farmers' and 16 conventional models. In the construction sector, the 25.13EVS is the best seller, which is probably going to set you back £75,000. The biggest Roto is the 40.21, at about £105,000. For continuous rotation and a basket, look at a bigger budget.



Grant believes that the European 'pecking order' is shifting, describing the German market as 'plummeting'. The UK is now the third best market for

Merlo after France and Italy. However, there is an interesting split in demand for different machines from each area. "Although general telehandlers are getting to be a big seller in the UK, Roto's have not taken off at all – we have only sold about 15", explains Grant. "They have taken off in Germany, Belgium and France. One theory is that these countries are 'leaders of fashion' more than the UK. They are not scared to steer away from traditional solutions. Also there are more owner operations and small sub contractors in these countries to create higher demand."

And telehandlers versus cranes? "They are not designed the same way and cannot perform on lifting jobs, even though they have a great versatility", explains Grant. "One of the problems is that telehandlers are only now getting the same safety features that are prerequisite in cranes."

Michele Peacock of Caterpillar believes that the addition of a telescopic handler to a crane or access fleet should be considered, but definitely as a support, not a replacement. "It's the ideal piece of support equipment for owners of traditional

crane fleets, and the versatility of telehandlers allows owners of access fleets to carry out more jobs on site such as pallet work and site clearance duties."

US-born Caterpillar is one of the UK's top exporters, with over 80% of its production sold outside the country and a brand recognisable all over the globe. It began manufacturing in 1950 and now employs 11,000. It has made telescopic handlers at its Leicester facility since 1995 and has now developed a five model range. The most popular in the UK is the TH63, with a maximum lift height of 12.5 metres, forward reach of 8.1 metres and operating weight of 9,140 kg. At the end of the year we will see a



new range of Cat telehandlers, comprising ten machines (two are compact).

## Watch out for..

Conexpo crowds saw JLG provide the most exciting innovation away from cranes, with its Model TF6-42A Transformer. Unfortunately, says Wayne Lawson, the general manager for UK and developing markets, here in Europe we will probably have to wait until mid 2003 before we see it – probably at Hannover Messe.

Specially for Europe was the launch of the 4013 range of 10 telehandlers to lift 3.2 tonnes at 7 metres, to 4 tonnes at 13 metres. "They have an advanced electronic control system, whereby all the governing systems in the vehicle, from engine to hydraulics, are controlled electronically", explains Lawson. The first model is due to ship out from the Maasmechelem factory in Belgium in April this year.

"A lot of aerial work platform rental companies see synergies with telehandlers, so expect to see JLG with a significant market presence fairly early on", says Lawson. "There is lots of overlap with our existing access customers and our sales operation in the UK has excellent coverage."

Liebherr exhibited a prototype tele-



**Merlo's Roto 30.13 EV is yet to become big in the UK**

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scopic handler two years ago. Since then the company has gone back to the drawing board to redesign the machine in response to customer reaction. It seems likely that a new machine may be launched at Bauma in 2004.



**JLG's US launch of the 'Transformer'**

Coming soon from Terex is the new range of Atlas Terex telescopic handlers. These are being built in Italy but will be available in the UK shortly.

Late last year, Volvo acquired the rights to Upright's range of telescopic handlers. However, the UK is unlikely to see any of the products until late summer 2003. Volvo is presently redeveloping the range.

Finally, New Holland Construction launched its range of telehandlers at Intermat 2000 and is just expanding the range, to launch at the end of this month. The new machines are the LM1340, LM1440 and LM1740, with 13, 14 and 17 metres of reach respectively. All offer a super-comfortable cab, low effort joystick, 2-wheel, 4-wheel and crab steering modes and an 88kw engine.

## The easy option?

Like every type of construction or agricultural machine, regulations are awaited with baited breath from those involved with the use, development or sales of telehandlers. For example, Peter Grant cites a recent bug bear for most of the construction industry. "The whole body vibration issue could cause huge problems, especially with agricultural machines, or others with good road speeds", he says. "Until standardised factory testing is brought in the whole thing is a bit of a farce. We need a common method of working out vibration levels so that manufacturers can do tests during machine production."

It could also be the case that, far from seeking an all-in-one solution, rental fleet owners prefer to have specific machinery for specific jobs, and stick with traditional solutions that they know offer safe and effective results.

But, as JCB's Ben Brookes believes "They could provide in one machine a forklift, loader and crane. Also, they are considerably less expensive, require less maintenance and can be rented out without an operator. Also, telehandlers are useful when used in conjunction with a crane, getting materials over rough terrain to it easily for the lift." ■



**Cat's most popular model, the TH63**