

MOBILE CRANES

A family affair



Q: How did Fairview's life begin?

A: My brother Jeff and I started up in crane hire in 1988 having previously run a transport company together. We knew nothing about cranes and to diversify was a gamble, but times in the transport business were hard and we already had a yard, fitters and workshop. In fact, unbeknown to us at the time, it was a great time to start up a crane hire business. Local companies were actually glad that we appeared on the scene because business was booming and they could use us rather than turn customers away.

Q: Fairview supplied only truck mounted cranes until last summer, when it invested in a LTM1035 35 tonne all terrain Liebherr. You have recently taken delivery of a LTM1055 55 tonne AT. What influenced the change in direction?

A: Simply the fact that customers were demanding all terrain cranes. We had to develop the business and keep our clients. All hire companies were getting AT cranes, so we had to keep up with the competition. All terrain's are easier to use in the confined working spaces common in the city – they are smaller and more versatile. Demanding an AT was also something of a matter of 'keeping up with the Jones's' for many customers!

Q: How's the industry faring?

A: The last two years have been busy, but I think many people would say that 2002 is a worry. Whilst there's plenty of good work out there, a recession seems imminent, even though it could be partly to do with talk about one rather than anything else.



In the first of a series of snapshot 'small business' interviews, Rosie Gordon talks to John Harris of Fairview Crane Hire Limited.

In the latter part of 2001 some small companies in our customer base went out of business. Also, I started getting calls from debt collecting companies asking if we had any bad debtors, which I took as a negative sign! It was a reminder of the early 90's recession. I'm not sure that anyone has really taken full advantage of the good times we have had up until now.

Q: How do you think Fairview will get on?

A: If the promised government investment in the country's infrastructure comes about then of course we will feel some benefit. Otherwise we just have to keep a step ahead and keep the right focus. One of our most positive areas is actually in our staff base. We have had to get more people in due to regulations and now have a very well qualified staff of slingers, banksmen, appointed persons, traffic management and technical staff. They are sought after – for example, we can go to do a site inspection at short notice and tell customers exactly what they need for the job.

I see us as a service provider, so we have to get that service right. A lot of our ongoing, repeat business is down to getting it right. Hire rates were almost become secondary if you can offer a customer excellent manpower and professionalism.



Q: Any plans for future growth?

A: I think the company is likely to stay more or less this size, so that the two of us can continue to run it. However, we do have a large customer base which is growing. It's hard to plan too far ahead in this business, as we are not taking bookings so much as being able to supply as and when. We can only predict the future according to what we have done in the past. We spent consistently on crane rehire to satisfy customer demand last year, which shows you that there is room for some growth or investment in our own fleet. As long as people keep seeing our leaflets and, most importantly, our cranes at work around London, new business should keep coming in.

Q: Will you phase out truck mounts and focus on all terrain now?

A: At the moment we've got a range of 20 – 50 tonne Kato truck mounts on the road as well as these two all terrains. We plan to keep some truck mounts going. The hire returns are better on the all terrains, but with the maintenance and fuel costs it all evens out.

Q: Why did you choose Liebherr?

A: We travelled a fair bit to see several manufacturers' factories before we made our decision, but we are convinced that Liebherr was the right choice. The whole concept was good – the machine, the lifting duties and the company itself. We may well invest with Liebherr again in the future.

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