

Editor **Rosie Gordon** speaks some of the UK's leading manufacturers about the year past and their predictions for 2002.



Lavendon. Working out of the factory in Market Harborough, over the last seven years King has managed to double its output. Much of the work has been a result of the growth in the access business – the huge demand for self propelled booms and scissor lifts has created a need for beavertail truck bodies and stepframe semi-trailers to transport them.

King's Skyking division has become the UK's largest supplier of truck mounted aerial platforms. In partnership with GSR, who provide part assembled platform kits, Skyking completes and assembles them. An 18metre Skyking platform will be launched in the new year.

King is looking forward to continued high demand in 2002. its workforce will expand by 20 to 135 by next summer, and the painting facilities will be replaced and upgraded to cope better with the 300 trailers and 100 truck mounted aerial platforms currently being produced each year.

"Usually, when the national press starts flagging up the possibility of a recession, the capital equipment business is either well into it or on the way out, but against that, margins are getting tighter than ever as more people come into the market. We're keen to keep working hard to stay ahead. In 2002 we will find out if the press is right", says Carrington.

Surviving slow demand

Ian Baker, sales manager of Hastings-based **Wylie Systems** reports that, since last July, sales have been concentrated in three local areas – Scotland and mid and southern England. "The UK market for our safety indicators has been exceptionally strong all year – except for September, which could well have been affected by the US terrorist situation."

Wylie has no plans to expand in the UK, but will be keeping up to date. The company has experienced poor demand for its crane operating systems as there are few original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) left. "British companies are losing out on trade due to the influx of machines from overseas already fitted with foreign-made indicators. Up to 90 per cent of Wylie's business is now in retro-fit, leaving only the OEMs to supply new." However, Baker believes that the future holds plenty of work. "When foreign indicators need servicing in four to five years time, Wylie should be able to provide new ones for less than the service price."

More short term projections for

After a bleak year 2000, British manufacturers have enjoyed a surprisingly good 2001. With talk of a depression in Europe and a US market at rock bottom, somehow the UK has consolidated and business is buoyant, if not booming. The disadvantage, of course, is that where there is a healthy market, in this climate it will be flooded.

So what does 2002 hold in store? No matter what business you are in, these are nerve-wracking times. Ever since September 11, it has been impossible to predict next year's events or economy. The press have been gloomily presaging a recession, whilst the government has pledged to stop our economy from slowing down by pumping money into the country's infrastructure.

When *Cranes and Access* heard from some of the UK's leading lifting industry manufacturers, their anxiety about the coming year was apparent – but the general mood was upbeat.

The right focus

Langley Holdings will celebrate the first anniversary of several acquisitions in December, including **R-B Cranes**. The company has been manufacturing excavators and cranes since 1874, churning out 40,000 machines since then from its old Lincoln plant. Ruston's, as it was originally known, became Ruston-Bucyrus in 1930 when its excavating interests were allied to those of the

Bucyrus Erie Company of Wisconsin. The company has been known simply as R-B and wholly British-owned since 1986. For a year it has been based at Retford, Nottinghamshire.

Marketing manager Christa Baxter believes that the UK market is 'very steady', i.e. uneventful, but R-B has plenty of projected new business under negotiation. It will be concentrating on worldwide promotion of its dockside, multi-purpose and bulk handling cranes, all of which are made in the UK at Langley's own factories. R-B are launching a prototype 135 tonne hydraulic crane in November, from the Langley Gateshead assembly and testing facility.

Baxter is particularly confident in the growth and success of R-B. Marketing efforts are concentrated on establishing a good relationship with past customers since the Langley take-over last year. All the staff at R-B have been kept on, including the worldwide agents, and they will be pushing the quality of the machinery to customers internationally.

Mark Carrington, managing director of **King Trailers**, stresses the importance of a resourceful approach to business for the year to come. "Improvements in the rail infrastructure and roads, law changes in the demolition market and the legal requirements to use access platforms are all areas where King has spotted opportunities."

King Trailers is one of the UK's foremost manufacturers in its field, producing trailers for massive companies such as

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Wylie's advancement are predictably based in the export business. With the US, Canada and Middle East effectively eliminated as developable markets for the time being, Wylie will pursue other international markets through 'trade missions', using 35 agents worldwide and defend its successful offshore business.

Bridon has been making wire ropes since 1924, originally under the name British Ropes. Marketing co-ordinator Angela Maltby acknowledges that recent conditions for Britain's lifting industry manufacturers are exceptionally tough. "Competition from overseas due to the strength of the pound is impacting a situ-

Cattron in use on London's Underground



Cattron's TC 100 Quadro remote controls



SEV's AL17 Compact in the city

ation that is forcing many manufacturers to close business or change focus. With buyer demand decreasing, I see little hope of the market turning around in 2002."

However, Bridon is performing well under the circumstances; demand is buoyant for the high performance products that can offer benefits to buyers when compared to their existing supply. Maltby believes that, so long as Bridon and any other British manufacturer can stay ahead of the game in innovation and remain flexible to cope with market forces, they will survive. For their part, the company has just announced the

success of their 26 strand crane rope, which has been developed specifically for mobile cranes, to replace the more usual 6 or 8 strand ropes. The 'Endurance 50DB' offers the highest breaking force of all rotation resistant ropes available.

Tim Ward, UK Sales Manager at **Niftylift** also cites the strength of the pound as a factor that has becalmed export trade, although UK sales have increased. Niftylift has sold around 2000 units this year – eight years ago it shipped only 200.

At the Milton Keynes factory, ten designers work on keeping Niftylift's products up to date. Using 3D modelling software, the engineers are able to produce and test models in a short time span, allowing more scope for development and improvement of existing designs.

The company continues to invest in international markets – in the US it opened up a USA office in Baltimore, which this year expanded and moved to Chicago. In Newcastle, Australia, another premises opened 18 months ago. Ward says, "We are just starting to see the fruits of our labour there. We also took on an international salesman recently to concentrate on the Far East and Eastern Europe, so we are constantly on the look out for new markets."

On the future for UK businesses, Ward takes a positive view; "I think if we can hold our nerve the future is bright for UK manufacturers. I should imagine there will be some belt tightening next year, but this will only make us stronger in the long run."

Diversification is key

Gordon Adie, managing director at **Konecrane UK**, predicts that standard crane sales will fall in 2002, but hopes that specialist and modernisation contracts should hold up well. The company has picked up after a poor 2000 and Adie cites "diversification and the ability to create technical advantage" as the main reason.

Konecranes started out as JH Carruthers, a Glasgow pump manufacturer. In 1948 it branched out into crane design, which became its focus in the mid 1960s. Kone of Finland bought JH Carruthers outright in 1989 and the present trading name was established in 1996.

Konecranes has operated out of West Kilbride since 1959. Although in the past it has exported 40 per cent of their units, now 90 per cent are sold within the UK. During 2002 and 2003 the company will invest in its new plant, which will focus on new production methods and heavier lifting capacity. During 2000 it launched a new range – CTX single and double girder cranes for 3.2 tonnes capacity. This was extended to 10, then 20 tonnes this year.

Cattron-Theimeg (UK) Ltd claims an excellent 2001, with record sales. As is often the case, the construction industry can benefit from other industry's disasters and Cattron has been busy with demand from the rail industry as they fight to improve safety and efficiency on the nation's rail network. Providing infra-red and radio control for track switches, shunting locomotives, overhead cranes and ballast car doors is their main market now.

MADE IN BRITAIN



Skyking on a street lighting contract

◀ David Stagg, sales manager at Cattron, predicts a tough year for UK manufacturers, “although generally I don’t think

we will have it as bad as the USA or mainland Europe”.

For future development of markets, Cattron is forced to look abroad as tower cranes in the UK and Ireland are not commonly using remote control. No expansion or reduction is planned for the Surrey-based company as, with its present structure, it is able to cope with extra demand by sub-contracting. It is determined to keep its staff on to offer a continuing quality of service to customers.

SEV, a manufacturer of electric vehicles since 1907, acquired Aerial Access in 1999, which has been one of the UK’s major manufacturers of access equipment for more than 20 years.

Brian King, the SEV sales and marketing manager, reported that most access manufacturers have found the last year hard, particularly the latter half. “Problems are best illustrated by the ailing North American companies, but Europe is lagging behind as well. SEV has had a tough year, but business is reasonable.”

Growth is certainly happening; last year SEV acquired Euro Access and earlier in 2001 made a £1m deal with US based Biljax, to whom it is shipping 100 machines. This amounts to a very significant order for SEV, but a fairly minor, low-risk one for Biljax. King has found his US partners anxious but upbeat since September 11, and is confident that there is still room for SEV to expand into America.

About 50-60 per cent of what SEV produces is still sold to the UK. However, other markets developing are Germany and Belgium, where a AL16T mounted on a Renault Mascot has just been sold to the local authority – hopefully the first of many.

New products launched this year are the AL16T, AL17 and AL18. Although they have not been seen at shows yet, SEV is 90 per cent certain that it will be going to Hanover next year, following its successful Bauma. The machines will be displayed there.

Back from the Brink

One of the UK’s most famous crane builders is struggling



**Konecranes -
hoping for the
technical
advantage**

back from the brink and hopes to be back to full health next year. **NCK Crawler Cranes Ltd**, part of the SPW Group, is now based in Stoke-on-Trent and has closed its Ipswich factory. Les Derbyshire, sales director, told *Cranes & Access* that the company is building machines to order and is just completing a 65 tonne capacity HPC 65 mobile harbour crane for Ronayne Shipping in Cork. This will be delivered early next year. Other cranes in the NCK range include an 80 tonne harbour crane, the HPC80, and three hydraulic lift cranes: the 50 tonne Nova HC50, the 65 tonne HC65 and the newest model, the 90 tonne Astra 90. Three of the Astra 90 are now owned by Weldex.

Looking to the future Derbyshire says the focus is on "stabilising the company" but stresses that "we brought the company here (Stoke-on-Trent) because we want NCK to continue".

Keeping a few steps ahead in innovation and quality looks set to be key to British prosperity in 2002, along with investigation of new markets all over the world. The major players are likely to keep their cards close their chests, set for a year of very creative strategy. At this rate, the UK could even emerge in 2003 with a stronger hold on the international lifting industry than ever before. ■

Facts and figures

The Department of Trade and Industry recently released statistics for new construction orders in the United Kingdom.

It found that infrastructure orders between May and August this year had risen by 5 per cent more than those in the period three months before. However, they were 4 per cent down on the same period in 2000. In the year to August 2001 orders were 11 per cent up on the previous year.

Meanwhile, in the USA...

The Construction Industry Manufacturers Association (CIMA) released a dispiriting report, showing the likelihood of continued decline for the construction industry. The survey was taken before September 11, so in fact the estimates for US, Canadian and worldwide year-end business are likely to go lower.

For the lifting industry, year-end sales are predicted to fall by 22.9 per cent in America, 20.3 per cent in Canada and 8.7 per cent in worldwide markets. Next year it is thought that America will suffer a 5.7 per cent drop in business, whilst Canada will experience a 6.4 per cent decline. Other worldwide purchases are likely to drop by 8.2 per cent.