

Manitou is best known for its telescopic handlers

MANIACCESS

Access Ability

November was an important landmark for Manitou and the access industry, as the French company started to manufacture its own scissor lifts. **Rosie Gordon** reports from Candé in France

Manitou's air of confidence, competence and general, all-round assurance is palpable. Flying in the face of the confidence bashing that most of the industry is undergoing, the family-run business has set its sights on the world, and seems unlikely to get sidetracked. It now boasts nine factories, each of which has a different specialisation. Candé's is now the scissor models in the 'Maniaccess' range of 31 self propelled access platforms.

Manitou's decision to build its own scissor lifts stems from 2000, when it signed a partnership agreement with US based Mayville Engineering Company Inc. (MEC). Under that agreement Manitou was able to offer MEC scissor lifts under the Manitou name everywhere outside North America. MEC, in return, sold Manitou boom lifts in its livery throughout North America.

In January 2001, MEC surprised many in the industry when it decided to withdraw from the access industry and focus on its core business of industrial subcontracting – this was despite the fact that in 1999 about 40 per cent of MEC's \$128million (£85 million) turnover was from the construction of scissor lifts. Manitou recovered from the shock of losing its major deal only two months down the line by taking advantage of an element of the contract enabling it to take over the MEC scissor lift patents.

Having acquired the patents, drawings and models of scissors from MEC, Manitou set itself ambitious targets for developing its access business. It aims to cater for 10 per cent of Europe's demand by 2003, with complete 'world domination' by 2005.

"Although 10 per cent in each European market will be difficult, especially in the UK, the figure has already been achieved in some countries and is a minimum target", says Marcel Claude Braud, Manitou's managing director.

This year Manitou has already more than doubled sales of access equipment, and is expecting to exceed that in 2002. The

World domination by 2005? Inside CIMM



Manitou network boasts 500 dealers for 100 countries, through which it hopes to identify and develop further markets.

Manitou is represented by 47 dealers in the UK and five in the Republic of Ireland. Nick Egan, UK product manager, is confident of success in Britain, "We're in the business for keeps. Maniaccess is looking at

Marcel Claude Braud shows off the Maniaccess range



an exciting few years in the UK, with some major companies already signing up to buy machines. The current climate in the UK presents us with an opportunity to shine."

Many of Manitou's existing dealers are, of course, more familiar with fork lifts or telescopic handlers than AWP's. Braud acknowledges this but believes it could bring long term advantages as they will have access to potential customers outside companies already familiar with powered access. Manitou is nonetheless investing heavily in training, which it sees as preferable to staff replacement.

The Candé CIMM factory (Compagnie Industrielle de Matériels de Manutention) expanded in May to 6,100 square metres. The impressive plant now houses five instead of three assembly lines, a 20 metre testing tower, an area for prospective buyers to inspect equipment and a training zone for dealers. A second production site in Laille specialises in the produc-

Manitou displays scissor lifts at Candé



tion of Manitou's existing range of self-propelled booms.

The success, or otherwise, of Manitou's ambitious plans will of course depend upon worldwide demand for AWP's over the next year or two. However, with €6million (£3.7million) invested in the new production facilities for the Maniaccess range, the decisive push that Manitou is giving its newest venture displays a stamp of confidence – this is no "toe-in-the-water" but a direct challenge to the biggest players in the industry. ■