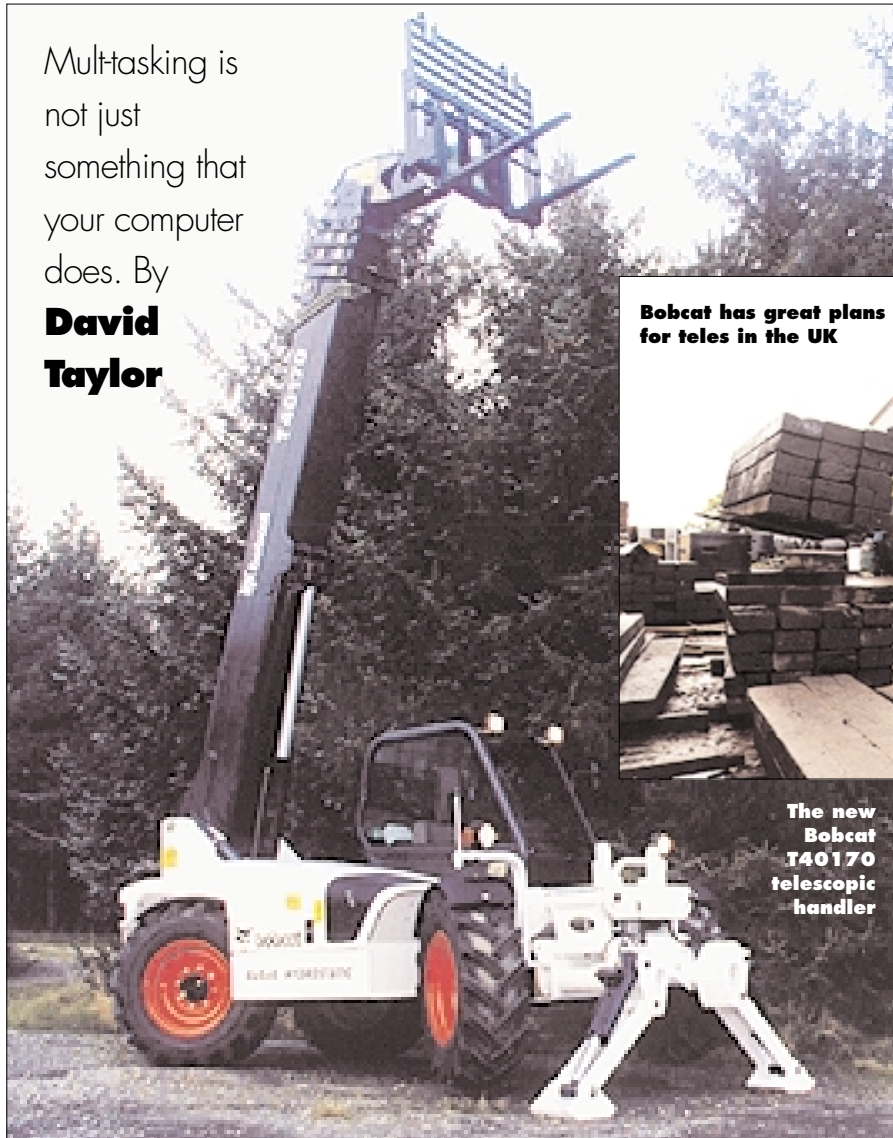


TELEHANDLERS

Telehandlers: give your business a lift

Multitasking is not just something that your computer does. By **David Taylor**



Bobcat has great plans for teles in the UK



The new Bobcat T40170 telescopic handler



A telehandler's lift and reach is equal to that of many small cranes

Multi-tasking is a buzzphrase widely used in industry these days. It describes a method of optimising your human resources but need not be confined to humans. In equipment terms, a Swiss Army knife could be said to epitomise multi-tasking; so too could the modern telescopic forklift, or telehandler.

The rise of the telehandler is a modern plant phenomenon. Developed from

the rough-terrain forklift truck (RTFL), the telehandler has become the jack-of-all-trades – and the master of most of them – on sites across the UK. The RTFL from which it developed is still a popular machine with some users. It is an efficient way of moving pallets around site and lifting them to a height but it is no good at lifting over obstacles. This is where the telehandler excels, having a long telescopic boom very similar to a small mobile crane.

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brushes, man-baskets, earth augers, waste skips and, of course, lifting forks. Unlike a telescopic crane, the telehandler can place loads inside a structure through doorways or other openings where a crane cannot reach. Some manufacturers even offer a small boom-mounted winch attachment enabling the machine to even lift like a crane.

Workhorse

Today, there are about a dozen different brands of telehandler available in the UK. The UK market leader is JCB, a firm best known for its development of that other jack-of-all trades, the backhoe loader. However, the telehandler has begun to eclipse even this workhorse – for the past five years, telehandlers have consistently out-sold backhoe loaders in the UK.

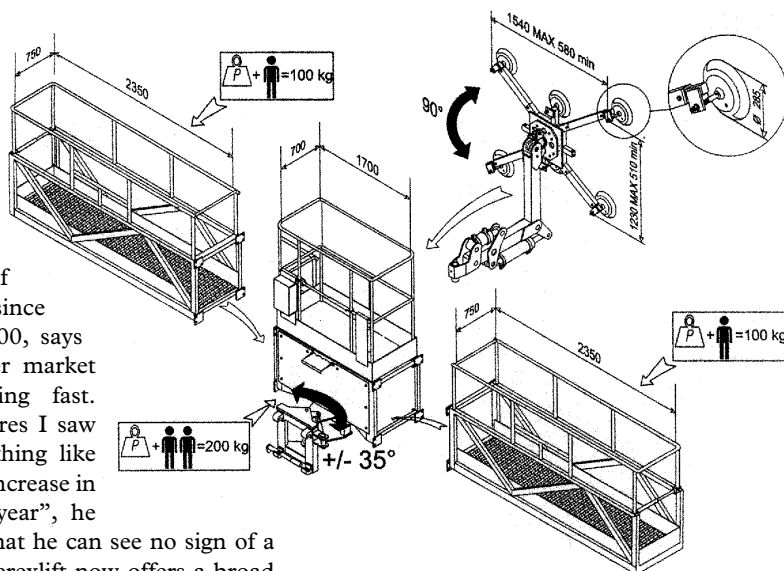
According to JCB spokesman Nigel Chell, “contractors are increasingly recognising the advantages of using telescopic handlers instead of cranes on site”. JCB, while conceding that not every telehandler is an automatic substitute for a crane, says that two of its Loadall telehandlers, the 532-120 and the 537-135, are “perfect for completing jobs sometimes done by cranes.”

These two machines, the largest in the JCB range, can lift to heights of 12 m and 13.5 m respectively. The 532-120 can carry up to 3.2 tonnes while the 537-135 has a capacity of 3.7 tonnes.

“In general, a telescopic handler should be used when mobility and compactness are paramount, when the job does not justify the cost of the extra payload, lift height and slewing features of a crane and when working inside a structure”, says Mr Chell.

One of the manufacturers to watch in the UK is undoubtedly Terex. Although still a fairly minor player on the UK telehandler market, Terexlift is one of the major world-wide forces in lifting equipment and has plans to expand in the European telehandler market. The company owns the Italian manufacturer Italmacchine and operates in the UK out of the old Matbro factory in Tetbury, Gloucestershire. Terex bought the Matbro business two years ago, following the collapse of its parent company Powerscreen.

Managing director Chris Melia, who has been at the helm of Terexlift since November 2000, says the telehandler market is still growing fast. “The last figures I saw showed something like a 10 per cent increase in volumes last year”, he says, adding that he can see no sign of a slow-down. Terexlift now offers a broad



Dedicated access attachments are increasingly popular

So why are telehandlers so popular? The simple answer is efficiency. Being so versatile, the telehandler can accomplish a vast range of tasks and so utilisation is usually very high. Most small telescopic cranes are lifting machines and that's all they are. Admittedly, all but the smallest have a higher lift height and capacity than any telehandler, but that's no disadvantage on, say, a house-building site where lifts are seldom more than a pallet or two of bricks and the height is unlikely to exceed 10 m. Add the fact that crane operators require a higher degree of training, and that most cranes are significantly more expensive than a telehandler, and it is clear why these machines are so successful.

While the development of the interchangeable end of boom attachment set the ball rolling for telehandlers, the devel-

range of machines with lift heights ranging from a 2.3 tonne, 6m lift model up to a 5 tonne machine lifting to a height of 22 m.

machine's abilities. The Terex range of slewing telehandlers (dubbed "Giro" by the manufacturer) are smaller, more compact and more manoeuvrable than any comparable crane, he claims.

Hire rates

The corollary to this is that hire rates are also lower than crane rates. "It gives you a machine that you can offer your customers at a lower cost. It won't replace a crane in all applications, but it will always find work", says Mr Melia. And he points out that the Giro machines, although very capable, are still at the exotic end of the market. "The core machines are still the fixed-boom models, and in fact we have very high hopes for our smallest machine, the 2306", he says.

Readers who want to judge the potential of this new machine should visit the Terex stand at this year's SED. "We'll be sharing the stand with Ferrec", adds Mr Melia, "so you'll be able to compare telehandlers with backhoe-loaders and decide for yourself which is the most versatile!"

Special attachments, like this one from Merlo demonstrate the telehandler's versatility

opment that now looks set to put the machine in real head-to-head competition with mobile cranes is the introduction of a slewing superstructure. At least three manufacturers now offer slewing (often called rotating) telehandlers; some have 360 deg slew, while others have unlimited slew just like a crane.

Chris Melia says that this adds hugely to the