

2024  
EVENT PLANNER  
ENCLOSED

# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

November/December 2023

- News
- Industry
- Dealers
- Training
- Shows
- Reviews
- SME Digest

## IT'S AN ALL-YEAR-ROUND BUSINESS

Gone are the days of just servicing in the winter and selling at the start of the season, say dealers Morris Bufton & Co.

### SERVICE DEALER CONFERENCE '23

Taking Care of Business  
on the agenda

### NEW IMPLEMENTS INTRODUCED ACROSS THE BOARD

Kuhn show off new range to dealers

### MARKET REFLECTIONS

A lookback at a career in ag  
and groundcare



### STIHL TALK REVENUE

At the newly-opened Brand World  
facility, the board confirms a  
downturn following the highs  
of the Covid-years

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Letter from the editor  
**Steve Gibbs**

[steve@servicedealer.co.uk](mailto:steve@servicedealer.co.uk)



**W**elcome to the November/December 2023 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

There are a couple more significant industry events to look forward to in November, following what has already been a busy autumn for our dealer readers.

Firstly, all the team at Service Dealer are tremendously excited about the Conference and Awards at the end of the month. It's the first event in the new venue, and it may sound like a cliché, but it really does promise to be bigger and better than ever before. With the theme of Taking Care of Business to be addressed by a variety of expert speakers, the organising team have lined up a day packed full of top-notch content, curated to offer specialist dealers plenty to take away and put into practice at their own dealership.

Elsewhere, the GMA have their SALTEX show at the NEC at the start of the month – which, following the launch of GroundsFest in September, feels like it's had its stakes raised somewhat. The new show, despite a drenching on day

one, has generated plenty of positive comment amongst those who attended and exhibited. The question now is: what happens next?

In the short term, will we see any tangible difference at SALTEX? Will numbers be down due to punters thinking: 'I've only just visited a show like this?' And will attendees and stand-holders miss the lack of outdoor space?

More significantly in the longer term, with GroundsFest already announcing a date for next year, what impact will this disrupter have on the national industry show scene? Have they tossed a hand-grenade into the sector that will fundamentally shake up the year's calendar of events?

I, personally, cannot envisage a scenario where either of the established trade associations ever give up running their own, independent shows. The value to themselves as industry organisations, and not private enterprises, just seems too great.

But who knows?! We can but watch this space.

THE TEAM

**Publisher:** Duncan Murray-Clarke

**Editor:** Steve Gibbs

[steve@servicedealer.co.uk](mailto:steve@servicedealer.co.uk)

**Agricultural Editor:** Martin Rickatson

[jmr.agriculture@gmail.com](mailto:jmr.agriculture@gmail.com)

**SME Digest Editor:** Adam Bernstein

[adam@adambernstein.co.uk](mailto:adam@adambernstein.co.uk)

**Contributor:** Laurence Gale

[laurence.gale@btinternet.com](mailto:laurence.gale@btinternet.com)

**Design & layout:**

Iain Robinson

**Produced by:** The Ad Plain Ltd

Howbery Park, Benson Lane,

Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8BA, UK

Telephone: 01491 837 117

[www.theadplain.com](http://www.theadplain.com)

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**Advertising sales:**

**Nikki Harrison**

[nikki@theadplain.com](mailto:nikki@theadplain.com)

Telephone: 01491 837 117



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Prime Minister Rishi Sunak with apprentices at Writtle University College

# Ernest Doe apprentices meet the Prime Minister

## Visit to Writtle University College

**A recent trip to Writtle University College saw Prime Minister Rishi Sunak meet some of dealer Ernest Doe's agricultural engineering students.**

The PM visited the college on September 21 to discuss food and the farming sector. He joined the university's engineering apprentices for a lesson on tractor maintenance, before talking to students studying agriculture and animal science degrees.

The apprentices in land-based service engineering spoke to Mr Sunak about their workshop, while demonstrating their understanding of agricultural machinery.

Hayley Hill, marketing manager at Ernest Doe told *Service Dealer*: "We currently have 21 apprentices split across two years, learning both in our workshops at a number of our branches and at Writtle University College – and PR of this kind is a good reminder that we do have some keen and engaged people coming up through the ranks.

"We were delighted that the PM got to meet a number of our apprentices and see, first-hand, the investment in our young people and the commitment they are showing to learning and developing their skills and forging a rewarding career path."

The students the Prime Minister met are part of a partnership launched last year between Writtle, CNH Industrial and Ernest Doe, which seeks to address the skills gap for specialist engineers within the agriculture sector.



# Kärcher finds new UK distribution

## Partners with Kramp

**Kramp and Kärcher have announced an exclusive distribution partnership to supply the UK agricultural market.**

Under this partnership, the two companies say they will combine their "industry knowledge, resources, and technological advancements" to provide cleaning equipment tailored specifically for agricultural applications. It is part of a broader European collaboration, which has seen similar deals rolled out in Denmark and France.

"We are excited to be able to stock the Kärcher range," says Craig Marsh, assortment manager for Kramp UK. "They are the most recognised brand for industrial pressure washers and vacuum cleaners. The Kärcher team can offer excellent technical product support and on-site training for new customers. Combining this with Kramp's reach, with its dealer network and ability to deliver next-day delivery, is a compelling offer for farmers.

"Our customers have already enquired about when they can place their first orders," added Craig.

## INDUSTRY

# Service Dealer publisher becomes B Corp certified

## Recognition for TAP



L-R: TAP company directors Liz Tomkinson, Emma Craigie and Duncan Murray-Clarke



**The Ad Plain (TAP), who publish *Service Dealer*, have recently become B Corp certified in recognition of their commitment to people and the environment.**

As well as publishing this magazine, TAP predominantly works in digital communications for a broad range of clients within the environmental science and agriculture industries, including many of the world's largest seed and crop protection companies. It is one of just 1,300 businesses in the UK to be verified as meeting B Corp's high standards of social and environmental responsibility.

The announcement comes following a rigorous two-year process. Duncan Murray-Clarke, *Service Dealer* owner and group managing director of TAP, which has offices in UK and in Spain, said, "We are beyond thrilled to become a B Corp certified business. It has been a long and detailed process, but it reflects all that we believe in.

"It has reaffirmed for us that responsibility and profitability are not oil and water, and long-term success is built on genuine values and purpose. There can be a tendency towards greenwashing in the current business and political climate, and we wanted to demonstrate, transparently, our genuine commitment to the people who make our business work, to the planet and the wider community. TAP is a growing business, and I'm so proud of our team for getting us to this point; I look forward to seeing how we can continue to strengthen as a business, a supplier and as part of the global network."

B Corp is an international movement to change the global economy and encourage for-profit businesses to be a force for good. B Lab, which administers the certification, takes a holistic review of the business' social

and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.

The greatest reward has been furthering the conversation around environmental science, agriculture and producing food sustainably for a growing world population, says Duncan, who established TAP in 2002:

"We specialise in communication at the highest levels with some of the world's top food production and environmental science businesses. We are very privileged through our work to be speaking daily to growers, agronomists, leading agricultural companies and other industry experts. There's a challenge to produce food sustainably for the growing world population."

As well as demonstrating its B Corp values through policy and governance, TAP sponsors employees to volunteer, including at board level, with a charity of their choice, which has included Reading for Dyslexia, UK farming charity, the Addington Fund, and the company is sponsoring children through school in developing countries.

## People at the core

With agriculture and environmental science working as hard as many industries to meet environmental goals, TAP puts significant emphasis on supporting clients throughout the supply chain to communicate their sustainability work and stimulate change.

"We have always had people and purpose at our core," explains company director Emma Craigie. "The B Corp lens has given us a structure and guiding principles for all that we do, including how we support our clients to communicate their sustainability and make change. Reassuringly, as we went through the verification process it was clear we were already doing so much in our business through choice, and it doesn't stop here: we will keep evolving and continue to drive our business and support others in the industry to take steps to effect positive change."

To complete the process, TAP invested in a full business audit, changed the legal structure of the business and rewrote staff and external contracts to commit to the B Corp values.

Duncan concluded: "It's clear that business needs to lead the way, and I'd urge more businesses in our sector to consider committing to a sustainability scheme, and potentially start the B Corp process. It doesn't matter that it takes time, it does matter that you start the journey."



# Simplicity & Snapper tractors to be discontinued in U.S

Briggs & Stratton tell *Service Dealer* no change for UK and Europe

**A recent report from U.S trade journal *Rural Lifestyle Dealer*, said that Briggs & Stratton have stated that effective immediately, it will no longer offer Simplicity and Snapper tractors in North America.**

An internal U.S dealer memo seen by the publication stated that the manufacturer will cease production “due to the considerable year-over-year market decline for the tractor segment.”

As well as the tractors, the memo also said the company will no longer produce their remaining four series of Simplicity and Snapper zero-turns for the US.

The memo went on to explain: “This decision was not taken lightly, and it reflects an evolving market dynamic as consumer preferences and needs change.”

The manufacturer also explained to its U.S dealers that their Ferris brand had seen “rapid growth in the market,” and that they intend to expand on its success. They also say they are “actively exploring opportunities to license the Snapper brand.”

## UK and Europe

*Service Dealer* reached out FGM Claymore, the Simplicity and Snapper importer for the UK, to see whether this decision in the US would have any impact on our readership

of UK dealers. Managing director Paul Butterly told us: “Importantly, this decision by B&S will have no impact on the market in Europe. B&S will continue to produce and develop products for both Snapper and Simplicity brands for Europe.

“We are very excited about the introduction on their new battery-powered zero-turn, which we will receive in season 2024.”

*Service Dealer* also contacted Briggs & Stratton’s European branch, which issued us the following statement:

“Recently, Briggs & Stratton announced to cease Snapper and Simplicity tractor production at their North American manufacturing facility, due to a considerable year-over-year market decline for this segment. Subsequently, the decision was made to also discontinue the production of Snapper and Simplicity zero-turn mowers for North America.

“Strategically, both Snapper and Simplicity remain very important and popular brands for the European and MEA markets. Therefore, these brands will remain active in these regions.

“Our current Snapper and Simplicity tractor and zero-turn lineup will continue to be manufactured at our North American facility, and remain available for the European and MEA markets. In spring 2024, both Snapper and Simplicity will launch two new rear-collecting tractor lines for Europe and MEA. The new tractors will be manufactured in Europe.”

## DEALERS

# Lister Wilder awarded Kverneland franchise

At their Kent branch



Lister Wilder's Ashford depot

**Lister Wilder are now offering the full range of Kverneland products from their Ashford branch.**

The franchise will sit alongside its parent company Kubota as well as Merlo, Yamaha and Bomford.

With the latest addition, Lister Wilder say they have achieved their goal to complete their agricultural product offering from the Ashford depot.

The company are no stranger to the product range, as it previously held the franchise in its Western branches before the restructuring to become full-line Kubota dealers in 2020. The dealership also sells the Kubota implements range manufactured by Kverneland, which it will continue to do

across all branches.

“This is a positive appointment for our growth within the agriculture sector in Kent, and completes our portfolio of quality agricultural machinery, working with leading manufacturers within the county,” said Phill Hughes, sales director. “Our team are well-prepared to hit the ground running with the new appointment, with product training, stock of machines and parts availability.

“We are looking forward to being able to offer our customers the complete solution to their agricultural machinery needs in the Kent area.”

## DEALERS

# B&B Machinery acquires new premises

Ahead of opening new depot

**B&B Machinery has announced the successful acquisition of a new premises in Swineshead, Lincolnshire.**

The dealership describes this strategic move as a “significant step forward for the company” and say it is a “testament to its commitment to providing top-notch services and support to its valued customers.”

The newly acquired premises, strategically located in Swineshead, will serve as B&B Machinery’s main depot, centrally located to cover the Lincolnshire territory. This expansion initiative comes in response to what B&B say is a growing demand for high-quality machinery solutions in the Lincolnshire area.



Artist's impression of the new depot

The depot is expected to officially open its doors in 2024, and will be well-equipped to support Manitou products.

“We are incredibly excited about this new chapter for B&B Machinery,” said James Bowring, director of the B&B Group of companies. “The acquisition of our new premises in Swineshead, and the upcoming launch of our depot in 2024, reflects our dedication to better serve our clients and partners, particularly in the Lincolnshire area.

“We recognise the importance of efficient and reliable machinery solutions, and this expansion allows us to be even closer to our customers while ensuring they have access to the exceptional support they’ve come to expect from us.”

PEOPLE

# Technicians for 2023 crowned

LE-TEC competition winners presented with prizes

## First Place

**Callum Adams**

*From Gordons*

winning a STIHL 100 Plus Control Pressure Washer



## Second Place

**Shannon Howe**

*From Hamblys*

winning a Makita UK Job Site Radio MR003GZ



## Third Place

**Paul Thomson**

*From Agricar Ltd*

winning a Makita UK 221 Piece Tool Kit E-10883



**The Land-based Engineering - Training and Education Committee (LE-TEC Ltd) have announced the winners of their 'Technicians for 2023' competition.**

The organisers say the awards are designed to find and celebrate the UK's best technicians in the land-based engineering sector. To take part, entrants submitted a short video explaining a little bit about themselves, who they were, how long they have been a land-based technician, and why they enjoy their day-to-day job.

As an industry collaboration, the LE-TEC Ltd judging panel consisted of representatives from the Institution of Agricultural Engineers (IAgrE), British Agricultural and Garden Machinery Association (BAGMA) and the Agricultural Engineers Association (AEA), alongside industry independents. Aiming to highlight the skills and passion for the sector, the judges said they were extremely impressed by the honesty shown in the entries received.

Charlie Nicklin, CEO of IAgrE, said: "After some tough decisions on choosing our top three from the numerous entries, it's great to announce and celebrate these fantastic

young people progressing their careers as technicians in our industry."

Nick Darking, BAGMA general manager, added: "It's amazing to see such young and inspiring examples of technicians in our industry, all of whom demonstrate a great confidence and commitment to rewarding futures in the sector."

Upon hearing of his win, Callum commented: "Getting recognition for the hard work we put into this industry is a great feeling. I'm excited to be able to share my story and showcase land-based engineering to a wider audience, and that next generation of talent."

Gareth Ford, from the We Are Land-Based Engineering campaign, of which these three winners will all feature in the coming months, said: "Unearthing more incredible talent in our industry is what this competition does best. I'm excited to meet with all three of the winners, and let them tell their story in a little more detail. Together, they can help to attract new talent to our industry."

LE-TEC say the competition will return for its fifth year in 2024.



# COBRA

## Why Not Become a Cobra Dealer in 2023?

With over 170 products in the Cobra range including the largest range of lawnmowers in the UK, Cobra is fast becoming a market leading brand in garden machinery. Contact us today to join the growing number of Cobra Dealers across the U.K. For information on becoming a Cobra Dealer contact Andy Marvin: 07771 581 296 or call: 0115 986 6646 today.

- Increase your business and bottom line profits.
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- No unreasonable Cobra stocking commitment.



### Cordless Mowers



### Petrol Mowers



### Cylinder Mowers



### Multi-Tools



### Shredders



INDUSTRY

# Familiar face appointed by GreenMech

Direct sales manager role

A familiar face in the groundcare and arboricultural industries has joined GreenMech as their new direct sales manager.

Bringing with him over 30 years of industry experience, Neal Hussey will be working with customers and aftermarket dealers across large swathes of the Midlands, while his East-Anglian roots will also see him supporting dealer TNS in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Neal boasts a well-rounded sales and technical background, starting his career in the groundcare industry as an apprentice technician in 1982. He progressed to service manager, before moving into sales roles from the turn of the millennium, working for Ben Burgess & Co for 19 years and playing an instrumental role in building and establishing their dedicated arb department. After a short period working for Fuelwood selling a range of arb and forestry products, his most recent sales position was at Tallis Amos Group (TAG).

He joined woodchipper manufacturers GreenMech in August 2023 as their new direct sales manager, offering dedicated support to customers in Bedfordshire,



Neal Hussey

Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands and Worcestershire. Neal will also be working with established dealer Thurlow Nunn Standen (TNS) across East Anglia.

GreenMech sales director Martin Lucas said of Neal: "His strong foundation of knowledge and industry experience will no doubt help him succeed in this new role within the company."

Neal added: "I look forward to familiarising myself with the range and customers old and new over the coming months."

# Corvus name Readman as latest dealer

Kicked off at Great Yorkshire Show



Boss MD Phil Everett (left) with Michael Readman (right)

Readman Mowers have been appointed the latest Corvus Off-Road Vehicles dealer.

The announcement was made by Phil Everett, MD of Boss ORV – the Corvus UK distributor – just prior to the Great Yorkshire Show. Formerly Michael Readman Lawnmower Services, Readman Mowers has been supplying residents of the north with lawnmowers, tractors and garden equipment for over ten years. They offer a broad selection across a wide variety of brands, which are backed by a complete servicing and repair service.

"We were delighted to announce Readman Mowers as our latest new dealers for Yorkshire," said Phil. "The timing was perfect, since they were able to spend the first week as a Corvus UTV dealer at the Great Yorkshire Show."

Readman Mowers said they are pleased to become Corvus dealers, and, as a small team, they can offer the best quality of service and personal customer experience.



XGT is a system with its own tools, batteries, and chargers. A combination of innovative tool design and higher output batteries provide a genuine solution for high demand industrial users.

### Optimum power supply and charging system

The XGT range of tools and batteries come with a built-in program, providing digital communication between the battery and tool. Allowing not only for the battery to talk with tool but also the tool to talk to the battery. A battery technology and motor that work together for optimum performance.



### Digital communication

Tool ↔ Battery ↔ Battery Charger



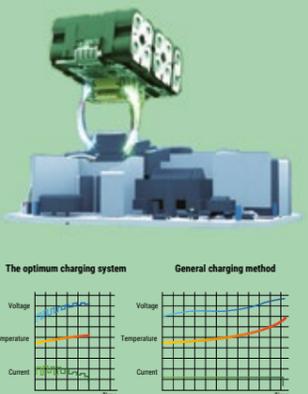
### Rapid Charging System

The charger will cool down the battery before charging if the battery temperature is high. Built-in fan circulates air through the battery before charging and during to cool the battery for a faster charge time.

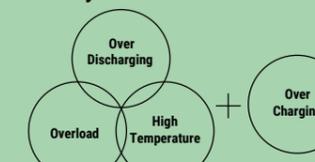


### Digital communication

The Makita Rapid Optimum Charger communicates with the battery's built-in chip throughout the charging process to optimise battery life by actively controlling current, voltage and temperature.



### Battery Protection Function



This communication technology allows the tool and battery to monitor conditions and exchange data in real time to protect against Overload, Over-Discharge and Overheating.

**Anytime Charge**  
No Memory Effect  
No Discharging Required

**Shock Absorbing**  
Heavy Duty Pack





# A holistic approach to taking care of the business

Promised at November's *Service Dealer* Conference



Daryl Fielding

Organisers of this year's *Service Dealer* Conference have promised to present a holistic approach to the theme of 'Taking Care of Business.' *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "With our lineup of expert speakers, and with more breakout workshops than ever before, we will offer our dealer delegates practical, helpful advice for caring for all aspects of their business. "As we all know, it's the people who are at the beating heart of every thriving dealership. Our programme will look at how we can place our valued colleagues at the centre of all we do – and, crucially, support them in those roles. "The conference always prides itself on offering something for all dealers, of all sizes and all machinery categories – and this year is no

different. The varied workshops we have planned will also allow greater opportunity for discussion and shared learning."

As announced last issue, the keynote speaker will be **branding expert Daryl Fielding**. She will consider how branding can be so much more than simply a logo – and can define a dealership's identity and unique voice.

Alongside Daryl, organisers have confirmed that the Conference will also cover:

## Customer experience



Adrian Swinscoe

Running an interactive presentation will be customer experience expert **Adrian Swinscoe**. Adrian is a best-selling author, *Forbes* contributor, speaker, investor and advisor. At our conference, he will explore what makes the customer's journey.

Adrian is widely-experienced in his field, and has been growing and helping develop customer-focused large and small businesses for over 25 years. His clients have included brands such as Sky, NowTV, Apple,

ING, KFC, Philips, Cancer Research UK, TalkTalk, Kramp, Intercontinental Hotel Group, Olympus, HarperCollins, the UK Government's Crown Commercial Service, Microsoft, Nespresso, Pearson and Costa Coffee as well as numerous tech vendors and many smaller and medium-sized businesses.

Adrian says: "I'm a huge fan of organisations that do great things for their customers and their employees, and I'm a helper to many wanting to achieve their own level of greatness.

"I'm also a lover of simplicity and advocate of the human touch, with a bit of really useful technology thrown in."

## Sustainability



Sophie Brooks

**Sophie Brooks**, founder and consultant at Certified B Corp consultancy Fit for Purpose and B Leader, will be delivering our second workshop, which will look at sustainable strategies for business growth.

Assisting Sophie in delivering the seminar will be her colleague, **Camilla Barnes**, founder of B Corp consultancy, Better Business, Better World. Camila is a communications



Camilla Barnes

and impact specialist, with 12 years of expertise in international sustainable development and business innovation. Both are passionate believers in the power of business to drive positive social and environmental change.

At this year's conference, Sophie and Camilla's workshop will help dealers celebrate what they are doing well, and look at how creating a successful, purposeful business can be instrumental in helping achieve a fitter, stronger, more profitable dealership.

## Mentally healthier workplaces

**Abigail Kimber**, a client development consultant at Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England, will be delivering a workshop to help break the stigma on mental health.

With the financial impact cited as costing upwards of £33 billion per year, she is keen to point out that poor mental health can have a huge impact on a business.

Abigail works with organisations of all sizes in a wide range of industries, including agriculture, construction and

manufacturing. She supports businesses to identify and understand their employees' mental health needs, and create long-lasting solutions.

Focusing on assisting businesses to build and enhance their wellbeing approaches to create mentally healthier working environments, Abigail helps people to develop the skills to look after their own and others' wellbeing.

"I am dedicated to normalising attitudes and behaviours around mental health in all areas of society," says Abigail.



Abigail Kimber

Taking place on November 30, 2023, at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon, the theme for this year's event is 'Taking Care of Business.' For all the latest information, keep an eye on the *Service Dealer Weekly Update*, published every Friday at midday – (subscribe for free at: [www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk)) and visit [www.servicedealer.co.uk/2023-theme](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk/2023-theme)



## First look at the 2023 Conference running order

**Welcome**  
by Duncan Murray-Clarke

**Keynote**  
Daryl Fielding - Branding

**Coffee break**

**Workshop 1**  
Customer experience  
Mental health and the workplace  
Sustainability and your business

**LUNCH, NETWORKING & SPONSOR SHOWCASE**

**Afternoon Welcome**

**Workshop 2**  
Customer experience  
Mental health and the workplace  
Sustainability and your business

**Coffee break**

**Workshop 3**  
Customer experience  
Mental health and the workplace  
Sustainability and your business

**Panel discussion**

**Conference close**  
by Duncan Murray-Clarke

*Please be aware details might be liable to last-minute alterations.*

## Our 2023 Sponsors

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2023 *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards\*. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.

PRINCIPAL:



GOLD:



SILVER:



NETWORKING:



*\* Details of sponsors are correct at time of going to print.*

# Rob Rouse set to entertain at Awards

Returning to host our Service Dealer Awards once again is our friend **Charlie Baker**, comedian, actor, singer, and all-round good egg.

Charlie will, however, be abdicating his stand-up duties this year, and will be introducing renowned comic **Rob Rouse** to entertain our gala dinner guests.

You will know Rob from BBC's *Upstart Crow*, *8 Out of 10 Cats*, *Spoons*, *The Friday Night Project* and *Dave's One Night Stand*. Since winning the prestigious So You Think You're Funny? award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1998, Rob has toured the world for the last 25 years.

Rob told us: "As he types this, that shocking realisation shudders through him and makes him (me, it's me writing this) wince. Fortunately, a quarter of a century in 'the biz' hasn't made him (me) in the slightest bit sensible and he's (I am) absolutely delighted to be coming to the *Service Dealer Awards*."



## 2023's Dealer of the Year awards

Entries are in, and judging is in full swing

The categories that you, our dealer readers, have been entering in your droves this year are:



There are also special award categories this year:



### Overall Dealer of the Year award

In addition, of course: all those considered for entry will be put forward for this prestigious award.

## CHANGING THE WAY YOU POWER YOUR BUSINESS

Toro® is leading the way with the launch of a powerful new range of battery powered equipment, contributing towards a more sustainable business efficiency for professionals.

Calling on 100 years of expertise and engineering excellence, Toro's new range combines our proven mowing equipment with pioneering battery technology to deliver like-for-like performance with our petrol or diesel equivalent. Easy to maintain and cost-effective to run, they can also lower the total cost of ownership and contribute to greater business efficiency.

Scan and calculate your operational ROI (return on investment) and see why going electric may just be your best decision yet!

So join us today in leading the charge towards a more sustainable future.



**TORO.** [toro.com/leadthecharge](https://toro.com/leadthecharge)

# STIHL announce a revenue downturn



A recent international press conference, held at the newly-opened Brand World facility in Waiblingen, Germany, saw the STIHL board confirm a downturn in revenues following the highs of the Covid years. Also announced was an addition to their in-house manufacturing portfolio and an increased commitment to battery-powered products, writes *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS



Michael Traub, chairman of the STIHL executive board

**S**TIHL held an international press conference at their headquarters in Waiblingen, Germany in mid-September, where they announced a downturn in revenue.

I attended the event, which saw trade press from around the world gather to hear Michael Traub, chairman of the STIHL executive board, say that the past eight months have “proven challenging” for the STIHL Group.

He confirmed that the company had generated revenue of 3.84 billion euros in the period from January to August 2023, which is a decline of 1.5% year-

on-year. He also announced that the company’s workforce had decreased by 0.5% to 20,311 employees worldwide as of August 31.

Michael Traub told the assembled press: “After several years of strong growth, our markets find themselves in a period of temporary consolidation in 2023.” His explanation of this downturn was that it was a consequence of consumers not spending as much on their homes and gardens as they were during the Covid years. He said: “Since the lifting of measures to contain the coronavirus, consumers have resumed spending more on tourism, cultural activities, and eating out.”



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Brand World contains exhibits charting the history of the company's products

He also cited the high energy costs hitting both themselves and their customers as another factor affecting revenue levels, explaining: "Weaker economic development, inflation, and the cost of energy have also led to subdued consumer spending in general. Alongside this restraint among consumers around the world, authorised dealers' high stock levels have also had an impact on sales performance at STIHL."

He went on to say though that the company is looking to the future with confidence and how he saw future growth for the company firmly based in the battery-powered equipment segment. An intention of an 80-20 split in favour of battery over petrol machinery was cited as being the aim by 2035.

"We have ambitious growth plans, and continue to invest a great deal in our business," he explained, "especially in batteries - the technology of the future - and in our global manufacturing and sales network."

"What's positive is that our battery strategy is paying off, and that our customers around the world remain very interested in battery-operated STIHL products. Sales of battery-operated chainsaws and other battery-operated power tools have increased year on year, and we have also achieved growth with our iMOW robotic mower."

However, despite this increase in battery popularity, an overall decline in sales worldwide, across all drive types,

has, indeed, been the recent trend.

Upon my return from Waiblingen, I heard from STIHL dealer Pete McArthur from Strathbogie Forest & Garden, who had a view on the revenue downturn announcement. Pete said: "It's an interesting take, this idea that the downturn is due to consumer spending. At our dealership, we have seen an increase in spend from the consumer looking for quality product."

"Is it not possible that the order backlogs would have contributed to the surge in stock within dealerships, therefore with less top-up orders required?" Pete continued, "In my view, this is going to be running the financials of many manufacturers who let the backorder scenario escalate out of control. However, I believe that next year results will be more accurate, as most dealers should be on a more level footing by then."

Pete also thought that another reason for the downturn could possibly be the manufacturer focusing on the lower end of the market, which Pete said "is obviously very volatile every year."

### Developments ahead

Michael Traub did stress at the press conference, though, that, as STIHL is a family-owned company, they believe they are resilient to market fluctuations, and are optimistic for further growth in the medium to long term – "particularly in the battery segment." As such, he

confirmed what the board described as "significant investments in the global STIHL Group". The investments included:

- Expanding and renewing their product range for private consumers and in the professional segment.
- Developing charging solutions for battery-operated products, particularly in the professional arborist sector.
- Expanding global sales channels, with the addition of e-commerce solutions, and growing the global network of specialist dealers.
- Developing special products for emerging markets to make better use of market potential there.

Alongside these, a first for the company, which they seemed particularly excited about, was the announcement that they are to build their own EC (electronically-commutated) motor plant for professional battery-operated products in Waiblingen. This will be the first time the company has manufactured their own EC motors in-house, which, they said, will ensure that the motors are a better match for their products as a whole. The facility will initially focus on producing these components solely for professional tools, and is set to start in 2025. The total investment was said to amount to roughly 17 million euros.

Michael Traub explained: "We are now manufacturing the beating heart of any battery-operated tool: the EC motor. This marks a major strategic step in our transformation, and allows us to increase the depth of our added value in the expanding battery market, strengthen our supply chain resilience, and broaden our expertise. Last, but by no means least, the decision to set up the new facility in Waiblingen represents a strong commitment to our founding company in Germany, and will enable us to safeguard jobs there in the long term."

The company's facilities in Waiblingen currently make the petrol-powered professional tools and battery packs, as well as components such as guide bars and plastic parts. They said



New professional battery-powered brushcutter demo

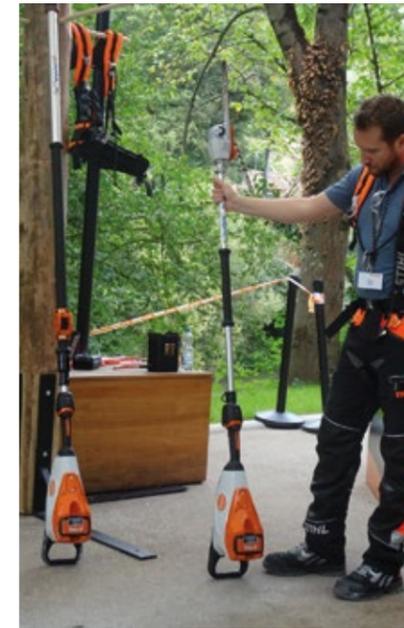
they will also begin manufacturing professional battery-operated tools at the site in 2024.

### Effects on dealers

This upturn in battery product will, of course, lead to increased numbers of spent batteries that require recycling. As we have discussed in Service Dealer already this year, that is a situation that dealers on the front line are finding a distinct lack of clarity around. This was put to the board at the press conference, who stated that it was "not economically viable" currently for themselves to recycle and reuse their own batteries – and that consumers should continue to return old batteries to the dealer network. Quite how dealers are expected to cope with increased numbers of units was not explained.

Also along these lines – of a dealer network increasingly trading in battery-powered machinery – the board were asked to address how dealers could cope financially with decreased service work as a consequence of fewer petrol machines in the system.

The answer was essentially that dealers will need to find other revenue sources to manage any workshop downturn. The board said they were



Battery pole pruners for the professional market were also demonstrated

working with their network to help them exploit new streams, and to attune to new consumer demands. This included ideas such as concentrating on increased accessory and protective equipment sales. They also spoke of some European dealers who are moving into monthly leasing contracts on equipment, such as robotic mowers, as new means of generating cash flow.

### Brand World and new products

As mentioned, this press conference was held in the confines of the company's new Brand World facility, located as part of their Waiblingen production complex.

A three-storey exhibition space measuring just over 1,500 square meters, the modern, interactive facility highlights both the company's history and the development of its products. Enhancing its educational credentials, it also focuses on the power and importance of forests around the globe. It's an impressive facility that will be both open to public and used to bring groups of STIHL's dealers and guests together.

Visitors can navigate their way around the exhibits via a clever smartphone app which recognises where they are

within the exhibition and link audio to what they are watching in real time.

The facility that apparently cost more than 100 million euros to build, making it by far the most expensive construction project in the company's history, incorporates many large windows that make the most of its location directly on the banks of the Rems River, with views of its natural surroundings.

And it was within these grassed areas that the press event rounded off, with demonstration previews of new machinery that dealers will see in their stores in the coming year.

### These included for the professional market the:

**FSA 200** the company's most powerful battery-operated brushcutter, featuring an ergonomically-designed bike handle and an anti-vibration system.

**HTA 150** battery-operated pole pruner, featuring a hollow shaft and a powerful EC motor for precision cuts.

**HTA 160** to enable professional tree maintenance specialists to remove high-up branches from ground level.

**KMA 120 R** battery-operated KombiEngine that can be fitted to a host of KombiTools using the quick-release coupling.

### Whilst for the domestic market, the company previewed the:

**HSA 30** and **HSA 40** battery-operated, entry-level hedge trimmers for small gardens

**FSA 30** battery-operated trimmer for the areas of smaller gardens that are difficult to reach with a lawnmower.

**FSA 80** battery-operated clearing saw, which comes standard with a grass cutting blade and can be fitted with other cutting tools.

**Series 2** and **Series 4** battery-operated lawnmowers revamped range, with a catcher kit or mulcher, side or rear discharge, and cutting widths of 41, 46, or 51 cm.

**KMA 80 R** battery-operated KombiEngine, offering twelve KombiTools, such as cutter, pole pruner, and long-reach hedge trimmer.

# It's an all-year-round business

Steve Bufton – of Morris Bufton & Co in Ludlow – says long gone are the days where it was just servicing in the winter and selling at the start of the season. He speaks to Service Dealer's LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, about robots, batteries and the importance of retaining margin

A recent visit to Ludlow allowed me to visit a long-established garden machinery dealer, Morris Bufton & Co. Ltd. Set up in 1954, they are a family business now into third-generation ownership, with the company celebrating its 70 years of trading next year.

I met up with Steve and Dan Bufton, both of whom currently hold the position of managing director of the company. These guys are sons of the late John Bufton, who died in 2018, and the grandsons of Sydney Bufton, who started the business. John began working for the company in 1959, at the age of 13, and carried on until his death aged 71.

It was John who put the company on the map and grew the business substantially between the '60s and the '90s, bringing on-board many of the notable products they now sell – with both STIHL and Ifor Williams Trailers being two of their longest-serving suppliers.

The company has held a long



Steve and Dan Bufton, managing directors of Morris Bufton & Co

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association with STIHL, in fact, partnering with them through both the reigns of Peter Baker and Robin Lennie. To this day, they have one of the largest displays of STIHL equipment I have ever seen.

Today, the company sells a vast range of equipment, including the likes of Honda, EP Barrus, Stiga, Echo, Ariens, AS Motor, ATCO, Browns, Cub Cadet, Emak, Hayter and Draper Tools.

Their current 4.5-acre site provides plenty of room to store large volumes

of stock, secured both indoors and outdoors. Steve was keen for me to see some vintage machinery they had collected over the years. Tucked away in one corner of the yard was some old International tractors and implements which would surely be of interest to some collector. Also, I was shown one of the first Barrus collection ride-on mowers the dealership was selling in the 1970s, plus a couple of rare, still-in-their-boxes Australian Victor lawnmowers from the '80s.

Steve Bufton told me he followed his father into the business, again starting at an early age. Helping out during weekends and holidays, as soon as he left school he joined the business full time, working in the repair shop mending mowers. His brother Dan had a career in America for a number of years before he joined the company some ten years ago – now mainly looking after the trailer and farm implement sales.

And now, the latest, fourth-generation family member to join is Max, Steve's son, who is currently repairing trailers.

As for staff, the company employ ten, with four working in sales, four in the workshop, and two in the administration side of the business.

With the business being in the centre of town, it gets a lot of drop-in customers, and, because they have been trading so long, they have a core base of loyal, local customers. Steve told me they generally operate to a 50-mile radius, and are happy to deliver and carry out demonstrations of machinery within that boundary. As for their customer base, it is roughly a 50-50 split between professional and domestic end-users.

In the early days, I'm told, most of the business's trade was conducted with local farmers, buying tractors, implements and trailers. However, since the late-1980s, the dealership has been driven more towards selling garden maintenance products. As such, they now stock a vast range of mowing equipment both in handheld, ride-on or trailed and towed equipment. They also recently took on Kioti Tractors, which, they say, are proving popular with customers.

Speaking of customers, they still sell a fair amount of machinery to the farming community, as well as to contractors, local authorities, parish councils, and schools. However, sales to domestic customers have gone through the roof, especially now they have an online sales counter.

I sat down with Steve Bufton to conduct a Q&A about the business.

**Service Dealer:** How has business been for you these past couple of post-pandemic years?

**Steve Bufton:** Like most dealers, during the lockdowns, it became a very busy time for us. It was during this period that we made a decision to sell more products online. In one week during Covid, in fact, we sold over 130 Mountfield mowers via eBay! Post-Covid, though, we have noticed a trend that customers are now keener to see the machinery first-hand, and try it out in-person before making a purchase. This is one of the reasons why we now have such a wide range of products on show in the store.

**SD:** How have you found the stocking situation recently?

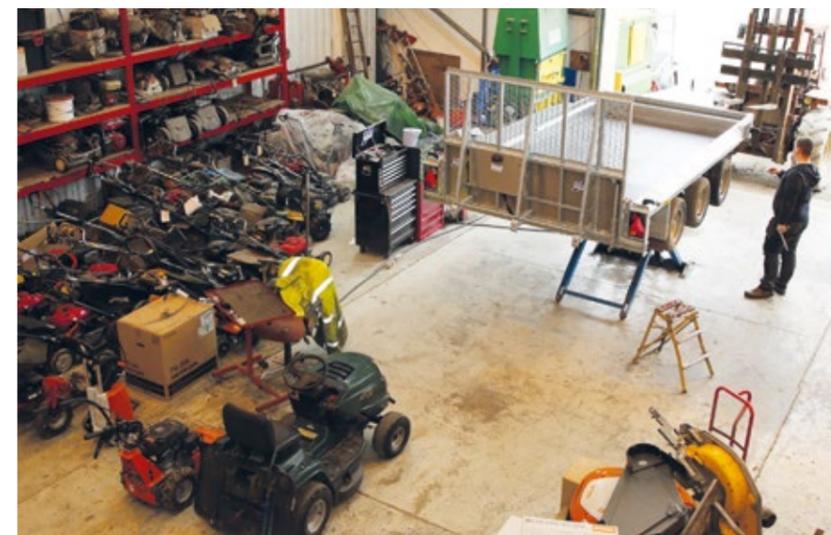
**SB:** Like most dealers, we had issues with certain manufacturers, but, when we did, we found it was a case of getting by and being honest with your customers, explaining the issues behind any delays. We are now virtually back on track, though, and are able to supply all parts efficiently and quickly.

**SD:** Do you sell robotic mowers?

**SB:** Yes, we sell both Honda and STIHL brands. More and more customers are buying into robotic mowing. Our sales have grown substantially since Covid. We offer cable installation and are looking to enter the GPS-guided robotic mower market next year.

**SD:** Have you also seen a substantial rise in battery-powered equipment sales?

**SB:** We have, indeed, seen a strong growth in sales of battery-powered products. This has mainly been driven by the fact more brands are now producing better ranges, with the technology having come on in leaps and bounds, offering more power and faster charging times. This, in turn, also keeps the prices competitive.



The busy workshop



Inside the Ludlow showroom



Ifor Williams Trailers are also one of their longest-serving suppliers



Vintage International tractors



Morris Bufton's are coming up to their 70th anniversary next year

**SD:** On the subject of batteries, are you facing issues with storing and recycling your batteries?

**SB:** Like most machinery dealers, we have been left with little or no decisive information by the manufacturers on how we should be storing and handling both new and old batteries. We are all now storing many different battery types, and there are several questions that we feel need to be answered. We'd like to know, for example:

- How many batteries can be stored at any one time?
- What should we be storing them in?
- Should we be keeping new batteries charged up?



Buften's have a long association with STIHL

This issue is not going away anytime soon, with the problem only likely to get worse with the increasing sales of battery-powered products.

We need clearer guidelines from both the manufacturers and the governing bodies, namely the H&S executive. The current guidelines are not specific enough for the sheer number of batteries we will be dealing with in the coming years.

**SD:** What are your thoughts regarding online selling?

**SB:** We do sell a range of products online; however, we believe that we need to offer our customers the complete experience of physical and online sales. We have all seen what happened to F.R. Jones, who concentrated heavily on online discounting. At the end of the day, there needs to be sensible profit margin retained when selling products online. With many of the top machinery brands now selling their own products direct to the end-user, it's important that there is clarity of what we, the dealers, can expect to receive for any aftersales repairs and servicing.

**SD:** Have seasonal trends changed for customers buying and having machinery serviced?

**SB:** Long gone are the days when we only tended to service and repair mowers in the winter months and sell mowers at the start of the growing season. It's now an all-year-round business, with grass needing cutting for longer than ever before.

**SD:** With the government changing the ban date till 2035 for sales of new petrol and diesel engines, will that have an impact on our industry?

**SB:** It will perhaps give us some additional breathing space, allowing manufactures some leeway to sell any remaining diesel and petrol products. What is interesting is waiting on the results of the hydrogen engine developments, and how those may fit into the power-source equation in the coming years.

**SD:** With nearly seventy years of trading behind you, what does the future look like for you?

**SB:** Well, it took a long time for us to get planning permission to develop this site – some 20 years, in fact! However, now we're here, it's undoubtedly a great spot, with plenty of potential to improve the site in the years to come. So who knows what the future will bring?

**SD:** Thank you.



The company employs 10 staff across sales, workshop and administration



# A Breakthrough for battery powered professional outdoor power equipment

**In a world that's constantly evolving, so too are our demands for outdoor power equipment.**

Over recent years battery powered OPE has increased in popularity. However, there still remain concerns around robustness and performance when comparing battery power to more traditional petrol powered equipment. These concerns have been well and truly answered with the launch of EGO's groundbreaking range of battery-powered professional outdoor power equipment and charging solutions. With a focus on incredible performance, flexible fast charging, and seamless connectivity through IoT and fleet management, EGO are revolutionising the way professionals tackle outdoor tasks.

**The toughest tools for the toughest tasks.**

EGO's new Pro X tools have been developed for demanding professional use in the toughest of environments. Special design features such as carbon fibre components, steel drive shafts, robust gear boxes and cast aluminium mower decks, ensure strength, stability, and durability in extreme conditions. Plus, with EGO's industry-leading battery power and performance, each tool exceeds their petrol-powered equivalent.

New product introductions for 2024 include the new **Pro X Mower, Pro X Chainsaw, Pro X Line Trimmers/Brush Cutters, Pro X Backpack Blower** and long and short reach **Pro X Hedge Trimmers**, all designed for comfortable, tough, all-day working.

**All-day battery power for professionals.**

At the centre of the new extended EGO Pro X range is the new PGX Power hub which provides flexible charging solutions to meet the individual needs of the user. Whether it's charging at the depot, into a vehicle, or even in the middle of a forest, EGO have the solution. Capable of charging up to 70 batteries, the EGO PGX Power Hub ensures run time anxiety is a thing of the past, taking all-day professional working to the next level.



**Stay Connected.**

With the new EGO Connect app and wireless/bluetooth connectivity, it's easy to remotely manage large fleets of tools, including control of tool charging, tool usage over time, tool maintenance periods and firmware upgrades.

**EGO launch their PRO X range in 2024. If you would like to find out more about this new range and are interested in becoming an EGO stockist then email [egosales@hentonandchattell.co.uk](mailto:egosales@hentonandchattell.co.uk)**

# Reflections on changes in the marketplace

... or: the inane ramblings of the aged! Industry stalwart and current sales specialist at Campey Turf Care Systems, IAN 'POGGY' POGSON, looks back at his long and varied career in the ag and grounds care sectors



Ian 'Poggy' Pogson

**B**eing closer to the end of my career than the beginning, I can look back and assess the changes that have occurred in the two markets that I have been involved in, namely agriculture and grounds care. I feel both are incestuous in that people rarely leave for pastures new or migrate from one to the other.

Having been brought up in a rural environment in North Nottinghamshire, it was a choice of working on a farm or going 'down the pit.' The latter didn't have much attraction for me – I wanted to drive a tractor. Being a member of the Young Farmers Club, and getting a job with an agricultural cooperative in the contracting department, I eventually got to drive one. This led me to becoming a salesman on the road in my Ford Popular three-speed box, with no heater or radio. Oh boy, I felt I'd made it! I was given a box of leaflets and a



Motspur Park show in the early days



'Poggy' in his younger days

list of names and addresses, a pat on the back and an "off you go." The ag market in those days, where the average size farm was about 200 acres – and mainly family farms at that – was relatively buoyant. Like a lot of people, I thought it would be easy. Well, I guess in my naivety it was, but it depends on where you set your targets and ambitions. I set mine high. I may get there one day. You never know.

After several sales courses, I learned the art of the 'salesman.' Features, advantages, and benefits – or FABs. Ask questions, listen, assess, present, make eye contact, ask for the order. Lots of deals were done around the kitchen table on a handshake, or in the pub on an evening at Young Farmers, NFU dos, and the like.

My first venture nationally was an eye-opener, in that I now had to visit the dealer network, as well as accompanying dealer salesman, doing sales presentations, shows, and managing my time and persuading all and sundry that our franchise should be put first and foremost.

We went through the plough-less farming bit without too much of a hiccup, and, with big financial institutions getting interested in buying up land as an investment, farms became bigger and so did tractors and equipment. I was often referred to in those days by a lot of my client base as the "most expensive man on the planet." This is where I noticed the first big change in buying trends. The big estates had always had farm managers, but now some of the larger units had them and budgets and quotes came into it. The major manufacturers expressed interest

in these, as well, and wanted input into what went on, tying up a deal for 50 tractors at a time on some big units.

Today, a lot of people say: "Ah, you had it easy in those days." But it all depends on where you set your targets. We didn't do 'quotes' or demos, we 'sold' the product – FABs ...

Roadshows, demo days, county shows, national shows, international show – long hours were spent following up leads from these events. No mobile phones, remember – it was done from home on the phone, from hotels, even letters (remember them?!).

## From ag to grounds care

This was also around the time of my change from ag to grounds care, and the influx of Japanese compact tractors. I can look back and see the changes from small local dealers to major and multi-depot companies – a lot of them driven by the major manufacturers' desire to be 'top dog.'

This drove a lot of the smaller British manufacturers out of business, and we began to import a lot more product. We lost two major shows, the Royal Smithfield and Royal Shows. I didn't take notice at the time, as it evolved, but it was with the benefit of hindsight that I realised the traditional family farm, whilst still there, was subsumed in the marketplace by the large units – not always to the benefit of the small local dealers.

The same can be said of the dealer network. Major manufacturers wanted bigger shares of the market and encouraged the larger multi-depot outlets, which still goes on today. Make

your own mind up if you think that's a good thing. The smaller family-type dealers had to turn to eastern European tractors which brought in some rather strange and very basic product. They did fill a need at the time and kept a lot of these ag dealers in business – which is not a bad thing.

On introduction to the grounds care market, and sports turf in particular, I saw that the machinery sector was dominated by a certain British manufacturer who had a foot in both ag and grounds care - the Blue and the Green. Having this franchise was a licence to print money in those days, as all the local authorities ran extensive fleets and renewed them on a regular basis. To succeed with the 'mini tractors,' we had to work on the end user and develop a range of product to suit them. Each local authority had several different departments, like Highways, Parks and Gardens, Education, Sports and Leisure, etc.. Each had its own budget and manager, more importantly, its own 'order book' - access to which was paramount.

So, to IOG days. Initially the brainchild of a major dealer in Worcester Park, then, as it grew to Motspur Park, when it became the IOG show, then to Windsor and SALTEX. Those halcyon days when everyone and their grandma would turn out to see what was what. Most of the staff from all local authorities would turn up, each with their own budget and the all-important order book. Anything

new was scrutinised to the nth degree, changes recommended, tyres kicked, opinions expressed, and so on.

It was around this time that the first event happened, that, in my mind, saw a fundamental change in the industry.

The Conservative government of the day, in its wisdom, wanted to open up the local authority market to all and sundry – to make it more efficient, we were told.

It's a matter of your own opinion if this worked out successfully or not, but what is for sure is it changed the way the market worked. Gone was the buying power of the individuals and separate departments. Contractors saw an opportunity here, and such was their buying power they went directly to the manufacturers rather than the dealer. What the manufacturers did was dependant on their relationship with the dealer network – however, it happened, and we had to get on with it.

Health and Safety also affected the way the market worked, in that we had to satisfy the inspectors who, it seemed at the time, just wanted to close the whole show down. Whatever you were doing, operator training became paramount, and hours were spent installing 'safe practises' to reluctant operatives – all of which was needed, if not heeded.

### Further changes to the commercial sector

In my mind, the next biggest change to the professional turf care sector was the growth of colour TV and televised sport – football, in particular. After the World Cup in 1966, which was principally watched in black and white, we just assumed the playing surface was green. Usually, only the FA cup was televised, anyway, so the surface was incidental.

If memory serves, it was when Murdoch and Sky got involved that the turnaround really occurred in earnest. After one particularly important match was played at Villa Park, I think (the pitch was so wet and so heavily sanded that it looked like a beach), the diktat came down to the FA from the TV people: 'Do something, or we ain't coming back!' Clubs, the FA, and all and sundry had to buckle down. The groundsman then became a much more important figure.

The equipment available at the time was minimal. Other than mowers, we had a spiker for aeration, spreading sand was done by hand, and that was about it. The budget for the playing surfaces was minimal. One groundsman told me that the club owner wouldn't give him the £1,600 for a spiker, he had to use a fork. However, forward-thinking turf professionals used

their initiative and sweat of the brow. Machinery people, agronomists and plant breeders stepped up – and look where we are now. Our surfaces are the envy of the world.

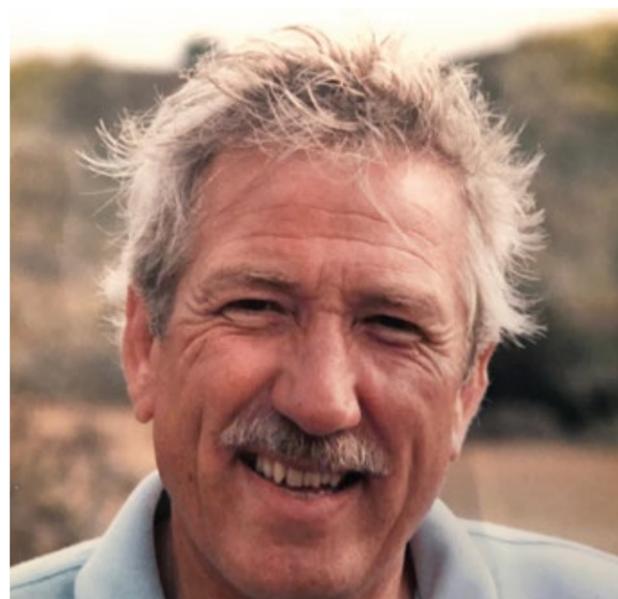
We export grounds staff and greenkeepers to all corners of the world. Whether the influence of the foreign managers and players had a part is subjective, but the emphasis of ball speed, running speed, a less physical side of the game – as opposed the traditional British hoick-it-up-field-and-chase-it, helped toward improving the standard of playing surface.

I clearly remember walking out onto the hallowed turf of Wembley in the early days. It was like walking on a mattress, with the thatch buildup tremendous. No wonder players were always getting cramp. But there was little equipment available, and little incentive or inclination to rip it to bits, decompact, aerate and reseed - a common and essential practice these days.

Another giant leap forward is the hybrid surfaces. New maintenance practises have been developed, along with machinery and cultivars to make these an almost must-have for anyone in the world who have aspirations in major sport.



Getting the deal done!



'Poggy'

## Milwaukee Partners with Winchester Garden Machinery



Industry leading tool manufacturer Milwaukee has partnered with award-winning retailers Winchester Garden Machinery to open a new and exclusive Heavy Duty Centre dedicated to a range of Milwaukee garden and outdoor tools.

The Winchester showroom will be a one stop shop showcasing a wide range of Milwaukee products across several categories including outdoor powered equipment (OPE), power tools, storage, and PPE as well as hand tools and accessories. The new Heavy Duty Centre is Milwaukee's first in the garden machinery/OPE industry. It is a prestigious appointment as there are only a small handful of these centres exist across the UK.

"Winchester Garden Machinery and Milwaukee share the same ambition of being at the forefront of the transition to battery outdoor power equipment," says Nick Mills, Key Account Manager at Milwaukee.

"This combined with their enthusiasm for the Milwaukee brand made them a very natural choice to become the first Milwaukee Heavy Duty Centre in our industry."

For over 50 years, Winchester Garden Machinery has been one of the largest retailers of garden machinery,

professional grounds care and arboriculture equipment in the UK. Jason Nettle, Dealership Director at Winchester Garden Machinery, is delighted to be partnering with Milwaukee: "As the industry continues through its significant change from petrol to battery, it made sense to partner with Milwaukee. Their large market share within the lithium-ion sector and success in the power tool market gave us the foresight that there is a big opportunity for WGM as we join up with Milwaukee in Outdoor Power Equipment."

"We are very excited at the prospect of accessing customers we have yet to reach with Milwaukee's customer base. Their strong brand name is a perfect addition to our carefully selected

portfolio. We are thrilled to partner with Milwaukee in their journey into the garden machinery industry."

"We know Jason and team offer a top-quality service to their customers and are highly proactive which is important to us," says Rhys Adams, National Sales Manager at Milwaukee. "Winchester Garden Machinery gives Milwaukee access to a large professional customer base, many of whom will already be on our battery platform and can now use them as their one-stop

Milwaukee shop. Similarly, Milwaukee is equipped with a huge following that will drive new business through the showroom doors and website."

Talks regarding the partnership initially began back in January 2023, but it was attending Milwaukee's conferences earlier in the year that sealed the deal.

"I had the luxury of attending two of Milwaukee's conferences before we made our decision, giving us a firm understanding of Milwaukee's ambitions and capabilities in the OPE market," continues Jason. "Their investment is meaningful, and we believe they have a leading knowledge in battery technology, which is where we are heading."



Jason Nettle, Dealership Director at Winchester Garden Machinery, and Rhys Adams, National Sales Manager at Milwaukee, in front of the new Heavy Duty Centre.

"The final piece was Nick Mills joining the OPE team from the Power Tool side," concludes Rhys. "Nick brought with him a wealth of experience in what makes a highly successful Milwaukee dealership and has directed the initial stages of our partnership with WGM. I think this has really instilled confidence in Jason and his team that Milwaukee don't just want to sell product in. We work closely with the dealer on all levels with a tried and tested blueprint for success."

For more information on Milwaukee tools, visit: <https://uk.milwaukeetool.eu/>.

## MARKET REFLECTIONS

We now have a range of equipment to renovate all types of surfaces. We have new cultivars, grow lights with different colours to stimulate the plant, carbon tents, under-pitch heating, blowers, and stadiums that take into consideration sunlight. If I'd have told you this years ago, you'd never have believed me.

### Looking ahead

We've come a long way in a short time, and it'll continue.

With the growth of social media, another big plus is having the access to everyone in the world from the comfort of your pocket. It can be annoying and destructive, but- used in a positive way, what a great sales aid. During the recent lockdowns and subsequent passage of time, it has been a revelation, and kept many companies afloat, moved machinery in our case, and kept everyone in touch with developments and techniques one way or another.

One of the downsides is the growth of the 'Google greenkeeper/

groundsman.' Now every supermarket shelf-stacker and forecourt attendant can be the 'best!' How many times over the past few years have we heard the story of clubs or greens committees overruling sound greenkeeping practices because someone has done a Level 1 online?!

So, let's take the positives, dispense

with the negatives, and go forward with confidence, and in the knowledge that, whatever the shortcomings of our country, in one thing we do lead the world – our industry!

Furthermore, when folks go on about the good old days, let me tell you – these are the good old days.

Make the best of them.



'Poggy' in demonstration mode



SALTEX in the mid-2000s

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Kuhn chose its pre-Agritechnica press event in early-July to launch more than a dozen new products across its arable and livestock machinery ranges. Most were tractor-powered, but there were some autonomous developments, too. MARTIN RICKATSON was there for *Service Dealer*

**W**ith more than 60,000 machine variations from 1,500 base models marketed across the globe, Kuhn has arguably one of the most extensive lineups of any global farm implement manufacturer, spanning many of the equipment types required by both crop and stock farmers. But, while it has traditionally focused on tractor-powered equipment, the business is now dipping a toe into self-propelled and even autonomous machine development.

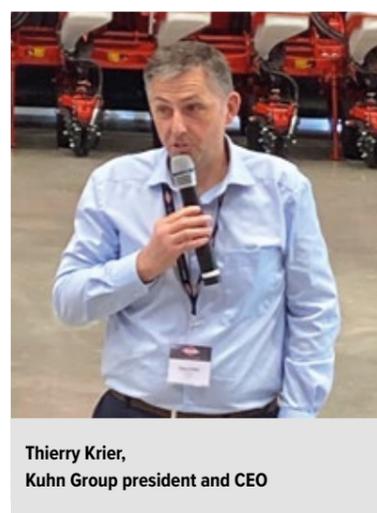
Welcoming 70 European agricultural journalists to its headquarters at Saverne, in the Alsace region of France, Thierry Krier, Kuhn Group's president and CEO, said that, with half the manufacturer's output sold in Europe, the market was clearly the most significant for the maker globally.

"That's not to say we are not proud of our progress elsewhere in the world," he noted. "In South America, for example, Kuhn is now the largest non-Brazilian manufacturer of farm equipment in the country. Globally, we had net sales of €1.5bn in 2022, up almost €300m, or 23% on the previous year."

Mr Krier noted that, with the world population expected to reach 9.7bn by 2050, global food production would need to increase by 50%.

"However, in that period, while there is expected to be a 120m ha increase in arable land brought into production in developing countries, in developed countries the area is anticipated to fall by 70m ha, and the overall area will rise by just 3%. Some 90% of the growth required in agricultural production must come from yield increases. Then, of course, there are the challenges of a farmer population that is getting older and fewer, climate change, and social and political pressures for change, such as reduced pesticide and fertiliser use."

In terms of equipment trends, Mr Krier talked of an unsurprising trend towards fewer but larger machines.



Thierry Krier, Kuhn Group president and CEO

"The extra-large implement category – our widest cultivators, drills and other equipment, for example – now represents one-third of Kuhn's global business, and we are working on the basis this trend will continue to the point where that proportion is 40% by 2025.

"We are also fully involved in the move to autonomous vehicle development where it has value in reducing farmers' workloads and raising productivity. Our released Aura autonomous feeder was our largest R&D project in history, but the Karl autonomous field robot on which we are currently working will overtake that. The machine will make its global debut at Agritechnica in November."



12.5m CTF-targeted Optimer L 12500

### 12.5m CTF-targeted Optimer L 12500

Among the clearest illustrations of this trend was the introduction of a new version of the Optimer L cultivator designed to match the needs of farms using controlled traffic farming (CTF) systems. A development of the established 12m version, the new 12.5m 12500 Optimer L has been introduced to cater for the needs of farmers using controlled traffic (CTF) systems who are looking to incorporate trash and create stale seedbeds. The machine is a development of the existing 12m 12000 Optimer L, created by incorporating two additional 510mm discs on each side. The implement is designed to work at 30-100mm, with potential work rates of 20ha/hr at the sort of 15km/hr forward speed that should be obtainable behind a 450-500hp tractor. Kuhn is working on an XL version of the 12500 with 620mm discs, designed to work down to 15cm. Just one spool valve is required to fold/unfold the wings.

### HR power harrow

There were other drivers of Kuhn developments beyond size and capacity, chiefly the need to do more when faced with a dearth of labour. Among these, for those needing to work down ploughed ground, there are new 4.0/4.5/5.0m HR folding power harrows designed to work solo or as part of a combination. Suited to tractors up to 3-350hp, they feature hydraulic working-depth and levelling-bar settings that allow on-the-move changes according to soil type and the desired result.



HR power harrow



Megant tine drill

### Megant tine drill

Demand for simple mounted tine coulters, especially as a get-out-of-jail tool in a wet season, remains strong, says Kuhn, which has extended its Megant range with the new 602 R model. It features a 6m working width and 1,800-litre hopper capable of swallowing two 600kg bags of seed. Suited to tractors of 150hp+, the drill's tines are staggered across four rows and set 40cm apart.

### Front tank pairs with different rear drills

New BTFR models with a working width of 4m, 4.5m and 5m complete the range of Kuhn pneumatic and folding drill combinations equipped with SeedFlex 1000 seeding units, and are available with 12.5cm or 15cm row spacings. The SeedFlex units are fitted to the power harrow's roller frame to limit overhang and to bring the centre of gravity closer to the tractor, while also aiding ground-following in work.



New BTFR front tank/rear drill combination

**Sitera box drill**

For those still seeking a simple box-type drill, Kuhn's latest Sitera models are available with Suffolk, single-disc or double-disc coulters. Further choices include landwheel or electric drive, and ISObus or VT30 terminal control.



Sitera box drill

**SP sprayer now in Kuhn livery**

Models with front-mounted booms represent 30% of the annual self-propelled sprayer market in France, which totals 300-350 units, and this has prompted Kuhn, which fully purchased fellow French sprayer maker Artec in 2018, to now offer models from its range, including this 5/6,000-litre/28-50m F40 Evo, to French farmers in Kuhn livery. There are, however, no current plans to bring the machines to the UK.

**Lexis 3800 trailed sprayer**

With a new grey livery replacing the previous white, the Lexis trailed sprayer range of 2,400- and 3,000-litre nominal capacities has been joined by a third model, the 3,800-litre 3800, with a full capacity of 4,000 litres and boom options from 18-28m. A steering drawbar is optional, and there is a choice of Manuset or Diluset controls. Boom Assist options comprise Slant, Pro and Extreme, with proportional control smoothing system response. Other boom developments for Lexis and Metris trailed sprayers include a new LEH boom, blending steel and aluminium sections. Kuhn is also gradually introducing the option of its iSpray technology, which uses camera sensors to detect specific colour areas – such as green weed patches – to allow spot spraying.



New front-boomed SP sprayer range

**New Rauch-sourced Axis boom spreader**

With fertilisers becoming more expensive, the merits of being able to place them more precisely – especially if they are of lower quality – is stimulating interest in boom spreaders, says Kuhn. Manufactured by Germany's Rauch, the latest 3,200-litre Aero 32.1 comes with boom sizes of 27m, 28m or 30m, all with 24 outlets in independently-controllable groups of six. Boom height can be maintained by an ultrasonic sensor option, while other extras include a fine metering roller for applying fine seeds or slug pellets. Other innovations included a new field border spreading system for Axis disc spreaders and a new 9,400-litre Axent 90.1 to top Kuhn's trailed spreader range, with a new PTO-driven hydraulic power pack which drives the conveyor delivery belt.



New Rauch-sourced Axis boom spreader

**Twelve-rotor, 13m mounted rake**

On the grassland front, innovations included a twelve-rotor mounted tedder with an impressive 13m working width. Kuhn suggests this offers farmers and contractors needing more output in hard-to-access fields a new option. The GF 13003 is reckoned to be the market's widest mounted tedder, and joins Kuhn's 13m trailed version launched last year. By placing the weight of the tedder over the rear of the tractor, the design helps prevent implement slippage on hillsides. The machine folds to a transport width/height of 2.99m/2.67m. Drive is via a single gearbox, and there are two hydraulic services. Cost is likely to be around 8% more than the trailed equivalent.



GF 13003 twelve-rotor/13m mounted tedder



Lexis 3800 trailed sprayer with 4,000 litre capacity



Further news included this new development for wide rakes to ensure all crop is moved

**Variable-chamber baler range revised**

Kuhn's latest variable-chamber VB round balers comprise six models in three series. The simplest Strong models, the VB3255 and VB3285, make bales from 0.8m-1.65m and 0.8m-1.85m, with feed options from straight-through from the pick-up to Optifeed integral rotor or Opticut fourteen-knife chopper. The VB3260 and VB3290 Pro models make bales up to 1.6m/1.85m, and can be ordered with 23- or 14-knife chopping units or Optifeed rotors. Greater crop pre-compression boosts output by 10%. At the helm of the

line, the VB7160/7190 Ultimate balers make bales of up to 1.65m/1.85m and offer the same intake options as the Pro range. There are also new VBP3260/3290 baler-wrapper models, with larger crop roller and improved wrap-roll installation, plus 15% faster chamber-to-table transfer. VB3200 series combination balers also feature Progressive Density Plus, offering a 10% greater density benefit in drier crops over comparable solo models, courtesy of an additional hydraulic valve that exerts greater pressure.



# SALTEX '23 has a point to prove

Coming just over a month after a new kid on the professional turfcare show block made its debut, the GMA's long-established show will be looking to make a stand, writes *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS

**S**ALTEX '23 takes place once again in its regular home of the past few years, the Birmingham NEC on November 1 and 2.

Circumstances for the GMA's show feel slightly different this year, however, coming as it does just over a month after the debut of GroundsFest at Stoneleigh Park at the end of September. Organisers must be slightly concerned what, if any, impact this newcomer to the UK turfcare show scene will have, in terms of both the number of visitors through the doors this November plus the new show's ability to turn the heads of exhibitors for future editions. Already for this year, for example,

STIHL chose the debut option rather than a return to Birmingham.

These are matters somewhat out of the GMA's hands, though, I suppose. All they can do is put on their best show possible, and hope that appeals to industry members across the board.

**Service Dealer** will be in attendance at the NEC again this year, along with our sister title for professional end-users, **TurfPro**. Readers can find us on **STAND H010**, so if you are planning a day or two away from the dealership, please do make sure to come over and say hi. We always enjoy any opportunity to speak to our valued dealer readers.

Publicly, of course, SALTEX are bullish about their prospects for this

year, saying they are on track to have their biggest exhibition yet thanks to industry support.

Sarah Cunningham, director of commercial and events at the Grounds Management Association, said: "Exhibitors are the heart of any show, and SALTEX has always attracted a good mix of new and returning, young and established, small and big companies.

"The reason for that is, they know the visitors will come. And, yes, the quantity will be there as it always is, over 8,000 visitors last year, but the quality is, too. Research has proved that the decision-makers attend."

The GMA are also keen to point out that good numbers of overseas

exhibitors are also signed up for this year's show, reflecting the standing it has on the international stage.

There are many familiar brands returning, too - companies such as **Reesink UK**, for example, who booked one of the largest stand spaces for 2023 following their success at the 2022 show.

**Husqvarna** will also be back, with Jonathan Snowball, head of professional sales, marketing and services, saying: "Husqvarna is very pleased to once again be exhibiting at SALTEX, an event we look forward to each year to connect with our customers and meet new people looking for new technologies to support their business. This year we will be showcasing our robotic solutions for sports turf and facilities. We also have new battery machinery with sophisticated charging solutions."

As ever, a trip to the show for those who can spare some time away from the business, following what will have been a busy period of manufacturer dealer days and events, is always worthwhile. Ample inspiration for those already in, or those looking to diversify into, professional turfcare machinery, will be on-show.

Also, as a new addition this year - perhaps as a direct reaction to GroundsFest, who attempted to emphasise the social element of their show with the addition of live music - SALTEX are adding 'The Clubhouse,' which they describe as a "relaxed, licensed, social space" on the show floor. The GMA say the area will feature "a bar, relaxed seating options, and a private area called the Trophy Room, which can be booked for pre-arranged meetups." Whether elements such as these succeed in attracting visitors, we shall see.

**SALTEX '23 will take place over two days, on November 1 and November 2 at the Birmingham NEC. Doors open at 9am both days and close at 5pm on Wednesday and 4pm on Thursday.**

**For more information, visit [www.saltex.org.uk](http://www.saltex.org.uk)**

## Machinery on show

A brief look at some of the new machinery options that will be on display at November's SALTEX



**EGO Power+** will be offering an exclusive viewing of its new-look PRO-X range.

Set to launch in 2024, the new PRO-X range features battery and charging technologies which, the company says, have been specifically designed to meet the demands of professional users as well as local authorities.

Vince Brauns, group product director at EGO, said: "We have been able to evolve our battery and charging innovations to the point where users can work all day, every day, making our new PRO-X range the reliable and performance-driven fleet of tools that professional users need."

On the stand, visitors will also be in with a chance of winning a selection of EGO prizes.

**STAND C150**



**Cramer** will be launching two new Optimus Z zero-turn battery-powered mowers specifically designed for professionals.

The company says the ride-on model boasts a mowing speed of 25.6km/hr and a battery that allows for a full day's operation, whereas the stand-on model has been designed for use in narrow, awkward spaces.

The ride-on has individual rear-wheel hub motors which integrate transmission for fast drive as well as park brake. The stand-on measures 92cm in width to enable it to be driven through smaller gates and around tighter obstacles.

Cramer will also be exhibiting a selection of its existing cordless professional outdoor power equipment tools.

**STAND H090**



**Kubota UK's** stand will provide the European launch platform for their new electric machine - with the exact details of the new unit being kept under wraps until its appearance.

The company's bigger stand will also feature two out-front centre-collect mowers from their FC Series. The additional floorspace also means that larger products from the range will be showcased - including tractors up to 110hp which find applications for users across the groundcare sector.

Also highlighting their RTV range, the Kubota team will be joined by Baroness - whose range of mowers and implements complement their offering.

**STAND C070**



**ATT** will be showcasing the latest advancements across their Infinitic and TMSystem ranges.

The company say there are refinements in line-ups and new features incorporated into both the hardware and software of their pedestrian mower collection. For example, the motor technology in the Infinitic has now been developed and enhanced to offer greater efficiency, torque and smoothness - with one of the most evident advantages of the new upgrade being the noticeably quieter operation.

A multi-connector has also now been eliminated from the motor design, further improving reliability.

**STAND H070**

# Tillage makers reveal 2024 wares to dealers



Ahead of November's Agritechnica, many farm machinery makers have held preview events to reveal what they will be launching at the show for 2024. MARTIN RICKATSON rounds up some of the developments from three key European makers



## TineCare V 12200 Master

Pöttinger's new TineCare V 12200 Master is one of the first fruits of its purchase of fellow Austrian firm CFS. With a 12.2m working width. It has a 330mm inter-gang spacing, with tines spaced at 30mm. Tine pressure can be varied hydraulically, from 0.5-5kg to match soil type and weed density.



## Flexcare weeders

On 6/8/12m Flexcare inter-row hoes, the working width of the hoe elements, coulter position and longer hoe settings can all be adjusted without tools. Optional section control raises and lowers the hoe elements using GPS.



## Updated Vitasem mechanical drills

Recognising that there remains a small but important market for conventional drills, Pöttinger has updated its 2.5-4.0m Vitasem mechanical range, available with Suffolk, single-disc or double disc coulters. Seed hopper volumes on all models have been increased by up to 25%, and capacity now ranges from 530 to 1,700 litres, a 25% jump, while maximum coulter pressure is up from 50kg to 60kg.



## Facelifted Lion power harrows

The latest 2.5-4.0m Lion power harrows feature 3.3 rotors per metre of working width, adjustable to four rotors/m where finer work is required. Options include tungsten coated Durastar tines for abrasive soils. The sideboards do not now have to be folded upwards for road transport, as they fit within the permitted transport width and make full use of the maximum working width.



## Servo 3000 plough

Replacing the Servo 35, the 3-5 furrow Servo 3000 plough suits tractors up to 200hp. Available with various point-to-point spacings and underbeam clearances, it comes in Standard, N (with Nova hydraulic reset), P (with Plus furrow width adjustment) and PN (with both features) versions. A new Servomatic control centre, with four-joint linkage, simplifies plough setting, and a curved cast yoke means the front furrow width can be set to cover tractor inside track widths of 1,000 to 1,500mm.



## New control system for Terrasem

The Profiline 'comfort control system' now oversees all hydraulic functions on Terrasem drills. The machines are supplied with oil by the tractor's load-sensing connection, and all movements are controlled electro-hydraulically via a valve block. The drill is fingertip-operated, or works automatically by the task controller using section control and variable rate control, with fan speed and coulter pressure also controlled automatically.



VÄDERSTAD

### New control for Tempo V/F/L

Väderstad's Tempo F, Tempo V and Tempo L precision drills now all feature new WSX electronic management, with automated singulation to ensure precise singling in the metering unit without requiring manual setting, says the company. Sensors in each row unit continuously monitor singulation, making automatic adjustments as necessary. The upgrade is expected to be especially welcomed by those drilling, or who need to change between multiple crops.



VÄDERSTAD

### Liquid fertiliser kit for Tempo

Tempo L 8-24 precision drill models are now available with a liquid fertiliser kit. While the primary demand is expected to be from eastern Europe, where cold springs can hamper plant getaway, Väderstad believes there may be demand in other markets where farmers are seeking fast early development. The kit incorporates a 2,000-litre tank, and, on 75cm-spaced rows, rates from 30-200 l/ha can be applied at up to 15km/hr without changing nozzles.



VÄDERSTAD

### Seed Hawk updated for Europe

There is now a new 6-9m Seed Hawk 600-900C drill range designed for European conditions, with features including new front discs for trash/cover crop processing, and knife coulters made for soils commonly found here, with a dual knife system where the second knife covers the fertiliser with soil, before the seed is placed, to prevent seed scorch. Up to three hoppers can be specified for seed, fertiliser and cover crop application.



VÄDERSTAD

### Variable depth cultivation

A new variable-depth cultivation option for TopDown and Opus cultivators uses E-Control technology in conjunction with prescription maps based on factors such as soil sampling or type maps, with claimed benefits for fuel use, steel wear, time, soil structure, moisture, carbon retention and workrates. Using E-Control, individual working depth or intensity of the discs, tines, levelling elements and packer can be set and altered before and during work, with four presets available.



VÄDERSTAD

### New inter-row weeders

Väderstad's entry into the inter-row weed control equipment market comes with the trailed 16-48 row Extract L and the 8-36 row mounted Extract V. An 85cm maximum ground clearance allows the implements to work later in the season, and a section lift function is guided by GPS coverage mapping to raise individual row units to 75cm above ground, on headlands or in short work. 3D camera guidance monitors three plant rows, to cultivate as close as 3.0cm to the plants in each row.



AMAZONE

### New frame for weeders

Retaining the Schmotzer brand following its purchase of the company, Amazone now offers a new shift frame for its hoes. The VR2 linear shift frame has a travel range of 300mm in each direction, which, Amazone claims, ensures accuracy, particularly on non-straight headlands and fields with slopes where the tractor can drift. A compact design sites the centre of gravity closer to the tractor, minimising lifting power and front ballast requirements. A variety of tines are available, as is a camera with multi-row detection system for up to five rows.



AMAZONE

### Teres plough range extended

Following their launch last year with fully-variable furrow width adjustment, Amazone's Teres four/five/six-furrow fully-mounted ploughs can now be had in stepped adjustable versions with manual furrow width adjustment. The new models are targeted at customers not wanting to adjust furrow width in the field. The furrow width can be adjusted to 35/40/45/50cm for each plough body in the new Teres stepped ploughs. The Teres 300 and 300 S feature manual furrow width adjustment as standard, with optional hydraulic front furrow adjustment, allowing the front furrow to be adjusted from the cab and adapted to suit varying soils and when working on slopes. The parallelogram arrangement in the settings centre means that the pull point does not have to be readjusted when the front furrow is adjusted (it being automatically adjusted via the parallelogram).



AMAZONE

### AutoTill system automates setting and monitoring

Shown in conjunction with an AgXeed robot – although suited for work with conventional tractors – Amazone's AutoTill system enables an ISOBUS tractor/cultivator combination to set itself automatically according to entered data, such as working depth and forward speed, and then monitor work independently (even warning the operator of any issues such as blockages, which may be easily missed when working wide implements at high speeds).



AMAZONE

### New 4.0m folding Cenio

There is now a 4m folding model of the Cenio three-row mulch cultivator, complementing the 3.0/3.5/4.0m rigid versions. Suited to use at depths from 5-30cm, it can be fitted with 320mm duckfoot shares, or 360mm C-Mix wing shares for full-surface cutting in stubbles, 100mm or 80mm C-Mix shares for primary tillage, or 40mm C-Mix shares for deep loosening to 30cm. Fine-serrated, 410mm concave discs can follow if specified, with a choice of seven packer types at the rear.

# Questions to self-evaluate your service department

**Sara Hey**, vice president of operations and development at Bob Clements International, Inc, the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers U.S. dealers with *Service Dealer's* UK readership every issue



**THIS ISSUE: EVALUATION TECHNIQUES TO MAKE SURE YOUR WORKSHOP IS RUNNING TO MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY**

If you are having trouble answering “yes” to many of these questions, you may need to invest time to get your service department processes in place.

### Do you maintain an accurate accounting of all your technicians' time?

We buy time by the hour, track it by the tenth hour, and sell it by the half-hour or hour. Making sure your technicians are always clocked onto a work order is critical to the success of your service department.

### Do you file warranty claims, at least, on a weekly basis?

Tens of thousands of dollars are lost by dealerships in the States every year because warranty claims are not filed or not filed correctly to maximise the dollars available. If you are struggling with getting warranty claims either filed on time, or making sure the maximum available is claimed, you might want to consider having a warranty processing company take care of this for you.

### Do you understand what your warranty recovery rate is by vendor?

If you look at every one of your manufacturers, you should be running a report that shows you what your warranty recovery rate is. For example, if you do warranty work for ABC manufacturer and ask for £1,000, but they only give you £800, then you know that your warranty recovery rate for that vendor is only 80%. Low warranty recovery rates may mean you need to move your posted labour rate up enough to offset the loss.

### Do you have a written process for equipment entering and leaving your service department?

From the moment you either have a piece of equipment brought into your dealership or you pick it up, you communicate with the service department what is going on, either verbally or through a written procedure, they can look at. It is also best practice to communicate with the customer within 24 hours on what you are seeing, and some basic information. Your focus should be following through from beginning to end, from drop off to pick up, including communications on what complex repair may be taking place.

### Does your compensation help drive both quality and speed of the equipment repair?

If you have great technicians, all they want to do is sit there all day long and turn wrenches, because that's how they maximise the money they make. Technician compensation should be tied into productivity. If a technician produces ten hours of billable work in an eight-hour day, they should receive their base hourly pay plus incentive or bonus for the extra two billable hours of work. Why would anyone work hard to turn more work out of a shop when they get nothing extra for the effort? Make sure your compensation program drives both the quality and speed of equipment repair.

### Do you require your technicians to attend manufacturer training?

Manufacturer training is critical. If we want to get high performance in our shops, we've got to have technicians who are factory-trained technicians. They've got to be passionate and want to go to that training. Are you making sure that you're sending all your techs there? Or are you sending the service manager to all of them, so they can maintain the certification for the dealership, and the technicians are just hoping the service manager in some way can communicate all of the training knowledge back to them? Don't do that. You've got young technicians – get them out there to training. That's how they're going to get better. That's how they're going to get faster.

### Do you avoid pulling techs off their work orders to do non-billable tasks?

You can't pull your technicians off a job to go out and unload a truck, to sweep the floor, or to empty the oil. Your technicians should be turning a wrench all day long. They're not going to sweep the floor. They're not going to go out and get their own equipment. They're not going to clean their equipment. All they're going to do all day long is turn a wrench. That's how they're going to make their money, and that's how they're going to make money for the dealership.

# Weather still dominates a dealer's year

**Jason Nettle** of Winchester Garden Machinery, in his final diary entry, considers that perennial aspect of the industry, winter stocking and warranty rates



**W**ell, I sit here writing my final diary entry for the year – and what another strange year this has just been.

With a slow start, a small flurry in May, and an August which could only be described as a March, what a mixed-up year we have all seen. I can only speak from what I am seeing and hearing, but nothing is normal anymore.

One thing is for sure, and August proved it: no matter how much planning you put in place and the marketing campaigns you look to run throughout the year, the biggest deciding factor for all of our businesses is the WEATHER.

This has and always will be the case. As garden machinery specialists, we can adapt and change quickly at the coalface of the industry listening to the customer demands and trends. I can only hope that manufacturers are looking at ways to

adapt, help and assist the dealer network with this ever-changing landscape of the industry.

### Winter stocking

It still amazes me that we, as stocking dealers, are expected to place winter stock orders in the coming months, not knowing what the 2024 year will bring weatherwise - especially when coupled with the financial forecast, ever-changing interest rates, and the looming general election.

I know in any business there must be some form of commitment, but this at times does feel heavily weighted on the shoulders of the dealers. I would love to see manufacturers working towards a closer joint relationship, with shared responsibility, and a movement towards inventory stock throughout the year. I firmly believe that this could also help from a manufacturing and planning perspective.

Also, looking back over our warranty rates we have received from manufacturers for the year, we are experiencing a range from £25/hour up to £60/hour, with various fixed-rate times set per job. I personally think we run an efficient and well-organised setup when it comes to the workshop and warranty processes, but we are still losing as a company when it comes to warranty work. I'm not looking to use this as a finger-pointing exercise, but I do hope manufacturers can look at this going forward. I have reached out privately to the various manufacturers, and I look forward to working with them in the coming months.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank *Service Dealer* for giving me the opportunity to write this year's *Diary of a Season*. I hope everyone has a prosperous and successful 2024 season.





# BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by Garden Trader

## Workshops taking up any slack

**T**he results of our Autumn 2023 dealer survey indicated that, whilst perhaps machinery sales might have taken a slight knock this year – possibly due the increased cost of living – other areas of the dealership’s business have taken up the slack, in particular the workshop.

To the crucial question of ‘how has your overall business compared to 2022?’, a majority of respondents said it was about the same (41%), with the next most popular response saying it was actually up on last year (35%).

Interestingly, when it came to machinery wholegoods sales, a slight majority of respondents indicated that these have dipped for them this year (41%) – although 35% (not far behind that) said they had, in fact, increased.

Where any shortfall in sales appears to have been made up for our dealer readers who answered our survey, though, was in the workshop. An impressive 82% of dealers who responded said that their workshop levels had been up on 2022. This very much ties in with what we’ve heard anecdotally these past few months: that dealerships are rushed off their feet with full service departments.

Elsewhere, parts sales also saw an increase for most (38%) – whilst staffing levels, in the main, seemed to stay consistent with 2022.

Dealers say service departments keeping business buoyant

How has your overall business compared to 2022?

ABOUT THE SAME  
**41%**  
UP ON LAST YEAR  
**35%**  
DOWN ON LAST YEAR  
**24%**

SALES WORKSHOP  
SERVICE PARTS  
STAFF %

How has your service department or workshop performed this year compared with 2022?

UP ON LAST YEAR	ABOUT THE SAME	DOWN ON LAST YEAR
<b>82%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>6%</b>

How have your machine sales (whole goods) performed this year against 2022?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR	UP ON LAST YEAR	ABOUT THE SAME
<b>41%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>24%</b>

How have your parts and accessories sales performed this year compared with 2022?

UP ON LAST YEAR	DOWN ON LAST YEAR	ABOUT THE SAME
<b>38%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>25%</b>

How have your staffing levels been this year compared to 2022?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR	UP ON LAST YEAR	STAYED THE SAME
<b>18%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>71%</b>

## “Your say”

We asked: with all the obstacles that dealers have faced this past year, how have you kept your dealership successful?

- The client has been key in keeping us successful - they have been opting for repairs rather than new machines in the middle market. The premium market (except tractors) has been very buoyant - mainly the older generation having more disposable income.
- We increased wages and introduced bonus retention schemes, and a shared working time initiative. We have also reduced working hours. On top of this, we have instigated training investment across all levels. We also initiated supplier review and assessment processes to analyse and dig into performance, engagement, improvement opportunity and alternatives.
- We focused on providing a good aftersales service, and maintaining our reputation for this – not overloading with stock. Customers have been waiting for stock to come in, ordering prior to delivery. This has been great for cash flow, maintaining a steady balance.
- Good staff and good products.
- Supply issues and price rises have been a problem this year. The season has been steady, and lasted longer this year. We have had more repair work than last year.
- By hard work and watching costs. Also, by trying to be more efficient, and being more proactive with customers. We learned after Covid that electronic contact can be worked to an advantage.
- The grass has grown; therefore, we’ve been busy. Simple as.
- We have been a dealer for 57 years, but the current state of supply and internet discounting is killing the business. Margin is king. Just look at F.R. Jones who ruined the garden machinery pricing ethos.
- Having long-serving managers in each department.
- Worked harder and smarter!

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# SME DIGEST

Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

*Edited by Adam Bernstein*



## DATA RULES

At the start of March, the government announced the reintroduction of the Data Protection and Digital Information (No. 2) Bill. First mooted in July 2022, the original bill was withdrawn “to allow ministers to consider the legislation further,” writes Adam Bernstein, editor of SME Digest

**Despite the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act being not even five years old, the government says that it wants to capitalise on post-Brexit freedoms to make changes to the current data protection regime. The government’s view, according to the new bill’s explanatory notes, is that some elements of the UK GDPR and DPA create barriers, uncertainty and unnecessary burdens for businesses and consumers.**

The new bill is the culmination of a reform programme which began with a public consultation back in autumn 2021. This new version is the result of that process. It doesn’t create wholesale change – rather, it is seeking to amend the current laws.

And, for many, the delay from last year was welcomed – especially by the European Commission, since, as Euractive.com commented, “London’s planned reform of its data protection regime has attracted considerable

attention in Brussels, given its potential implications for the EU-UK data adequacy agreement reached in 2019, which facilitates ongoing data transfers between the two.”

In response, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport has said that the UK had been in “constant contact” with the European Commission in creating the new bill.

### What the government is proposing

In overview, there are a number of changes. Subject Access Requests – where individuals seek their information – will be able to be refused or charged for if vexatious; there will be new legitimate interests for processing data; there are to be new rules on data security; a ‘senior responsible person,’ who is part of an organisation’s senior management, will have to be appointed; record keeping requirements are to be diluted except for ‘high-risk’ activities;

the role of artificial intelligence in data processing will be clarified; and the penalties for breaching rules on electronic marketing are to be radically increased.

The bill also proposes the establishment of a ‘digital verification services trust framework,’ where providers of digital verification services are accredited and listed on a DVS register. ‘Verification services’ means services provided at an individual’s request, and involve ascertaining or verifying a fact about the individual from information provided by another source, and confirming to another person that the fact about the individual has been ascertained or verified from the information provided.

If implemented effectively, the framework could make it easier for employers to use digital verification services providers when verifying employees/future employees. The devil will be in the detail, however, and the

government will need to consult with the ICO and possibly others when setting up the framework.

Notably, as alluded to earlier, the bill increases the level of fines for nuisance calls and texts to up to 4 per cent of global turnover or £17.5 million, whichever is greater. Presently, the maximum fine is £500,000. How effective these much higher penalties will be as a deterrent depends on how stringent the level of enforcement is in practice.

### Confidence in the new bill

There is confidence in the revised bill, in that it has been co-designed to create more integrity and transparency. Of course, the fact that elements of bureaucratic red tape have been removed or watered down is going to be good for business; they’ll have new-found clarity about when they can process personal data without needing consent without weighing up their own interests against an individual’s rights.

But lawyers such as Jeanette

Burgess, head of regulatory and compliance at Walker Morris, are warning that the bill doesn’t radically change the data protection regime as “organisations still need to make sure that they only process personal data where they have a lawful basis to do so and that data protection principles are complied with.”

Beyond that she says that cost could be a problem for companies with operations in the EU, as they will still need to comply with the EU GDPR. Here, Burgess says that: “They [the companies] may find it cheaper to continue to follow the current regime in the interests of consistency, to the extent that is possible under the new bill.”

The ‘weaponisation of data’ by employees is a frequent frustration for HR managers. James Potts, legal services director at Peninsula, a business services organisation notes that the bill “will assist HR managers in shielding their businesses from vexatious data subject requests, and

will also give the ICO the power to reject complaints relating to such requests.” But, while vexatious or excessive requests can be quickly dealt with, proof of the fact will be needed.

Overall, the bill is bound to please organisations, especially those that are small, because ministers have specifically sought to cut down on the amount of compliance paperwork they need to complete; unless their processing activities could pose high risks to individuals’ rights and freedoms, they won’t need to keep processing records.

### In summary

**Ultimately, those already compliant with the UK GDPR will not need to make any significant changes, as the main principles and obligations of the current data protection regime will remain. However, it’s hoped that the burdens on organisations are eased, but the results will take time to become apparent. More detail will filter out on the Bill at gov.uk**

## EMPLOYEE DISPUTES

# Taking away trouble



As any employer who has been involved in an employment dispute will know, those that end up before an employment tribunal can be costly, time-consuming and distracting to resolve. And this is a key reason why more are looking to mediation to resolve disputes with employees, writes Adam Bernstein, editor of SME Digest

**Firms that prefer to have their day in front of a judge can expect to pay for the privilege. Solicitors can charge from £3,500 plus VAT and disbursements to handle an unlawful deduction of wages or breach of contract claim, more for an unfair dismissal claim, and even greater amounts to defend a discrimination claim. On top of that is management time and any awards made in favour of the claimant.**

But regrettably, some firms do end up before an employment tribunal. As searches on the government’s employment tribunal decisions website illustrate, there are numerous cases with references to, for example, groundcare, lawn, and landscape.

### The point of mediation

In describing the process, Mali Smith, a legal director and mediator at Wright Hassall, says that it is voluntary, confidential and uses an independent third party to try to reach an agreed resolution.

As Smith outlines, mediators themselves are independent, professionally-trained individuals, many of whom are lawyers. She says that “mediators do not offer any opinions on the dispute; they are there purely to facilitate a solution and help parties reach an agreement that works for all.” In her view, this is a far more constructive approach than adversarial court proceedings which seek to find for one side only.

And the benefits of mediation for employers are substantial.

Firstly, costs are, generally, considerably lower than pursuing a tribunal claim. A day’s mediation can work out at a fraction of the cost of defending a tribunal claim.

Next, the process can be considerably faster – there is no tribunal backlog to negotiate and, depending on the matter being mediated, a dispute can be resolved within a short timeframe. And because mediation is a collaborative process, an experienced mediator can often get to the nub of problem very quickly and agree a more flexible remedy.

Thirdly, and simply, mediation is confidential; the result is not made public.

Lastly, mediation can save a considerable amount of management time. According a CIPD survey, employers spend, on average, six days dealing with an individual disciplinary case, and five days with a grievance.

### The proceedings

With the benefits laid out, Smith is keen to emphasise that a mediator will not advise the parties within the mediation. As she says: “Mediators are impartial,

and both parties are encouraged to speak openly; the mediator will only disclose information to the other side if agreed.” She adds that the mediator “will also stress the importance of both parties taking legal advice to complement the mediation that takes place, which is why most are accompanied by their legal advisers.” In essence, all need to understand the legal consequences of any agreement they make.

As to how the process works, parties are invited to provide a short summary of their case for the other side and for the mediator. They agree a suitable venue, which must have at least three rooms, and the mediator will circulate a

their representatives. If the parties are comfortable with each other, the mediator would ask each of them in turn to explain what they think led to the mediation. After that, groups will break into individual sessions, where the mediator will ask if there is anything else they want to disclose that did not come up in the opening session. Fundamentally, Smith says that “the mediator will try to focus parties minds on the best way forward while trying to preserve relationships.”

### Preparation is key

No-one in their right mind would walk into a courtroom unprepared, and mediation is no different. So Smith’s advice here is clear: “Parties should start their preparation with a position statement and evidence that outlines their case, and which offers a solution that looks into the future.”

From her standpoint, the aim is to reach a resolution so that a compromise is inevitable. However, she knows from experience that not all mediation leads to a settlement or resolution, but at least

“the parties at the end of the mediation should know, sometimes for the first time, each other’s position and how far they are willing to go in finding a settlement.” She continues: “Sometimes, after mediation, parties will meet and sign a settlement agreement between themselves. Mediation can lead to ‘out-of-the-box’ solutions being discussed at mediation that lead to a resolution.”

### In summary

**In short, mediation should be, and is being, actively encouraged as a way of resolving employment disputes. It is cost-effective, and can produce a better outcome if both parties fully commit to the process.**

**“No-one in their right mind would walk into a courtroom unprepared”**

mediation agreement, setting out the terms of the mediation, including that of confidentiality. Each party will retire to their respective rooms, and the mediator will move between them, questioning their cases and drawing out the salient facts.

### A matter of openness

Because the mediator must remain neutral, any questions they ask will reflect the fact that they are impartial and independent. This means, as Smith explains, “that questions will be open, and will not allow the mediator to offer a solution – any solution must come from the parties themselves, with assistance of the mediator.”

In fact, she says that the technique used by many mediators is to invite parties to attend an open session where they introduce themselves and



# Products



#### 5 SECOND INFO

- Electric power steering
- 10-year belt warranty
- Free Datatool tracking device
- Towing capacity of 600 kilos
- Diff lock for greater stability

## Yamaha announce 2024 lineup

### Range of modifications and additions

**Yamaha has announced a range of modifications and additions to its ATV and Side-by-Side models with new colours, features, accessories and technology.**

The company says the Kodiak 450 and 700 ATVs both offer the option of electric power steering (EPS) and diff lock for greater stability on uneven ground. Special Edition (SE) specification models will offer alternative paint colours, and all models will be supplied with a 10-year belt warranty and Datatool tracking devices free of charge.

The range features the manufacturer’s On-Command 2WD/4WD drive system with optional diff lock, which will help riders on uneven and hilly ground, especially in wet conditions. The switchable drive system is operated using a switch on the handlebars to enable operators to move between two- and four-wheel drive as ground conditions change. This, says Yamaha, coupled with their Ultramatic CVT automatic transmission and independent long-travel

adjustable suspension, makes both the Kodiak and Grizzly models easier to control and more comfortable on difficult terrain.

A WARN winch is also standard on all the new ATVs. Both Kodiak and Grizzly models have a towing capacity of 600 kilos. The 421cc Kodiak has a rear rack load capacity of 120kg, whilst the 686cc Kodiak and Grizzly models can carry 140kg. All the ATVs in the range can also be supplied with tracks for snow, and to assist travel on challenging surfaces.

The three-seat Viking EPS Side-by-Side vehicle features a cargo bed box and an accessory mounting bar to make mounting implements easier to manage. The 686cc Viking has double wishbone suspension and a tipping cargo bed that can carry a 272kg maximum load. Like the ATVs, it also features electric power steering (EPS) and switchable two-wheel drive, four-wheel drive, and diff lock.

COMMERCIAL / DOMESTIC

# EGO aim to blow users away

Backpack Blower with PeakPower uses two batteries



A new EGO cordless backpack blower, which, the manufacturer says, features improved power, performance and productivity, is now available for both domestic and professional use.

The company is introducing the LBP8000E Backpack Blower. Featuring their PeakPower technology, and a more powerful motor, EGO says it offers extra runtime and better performance.

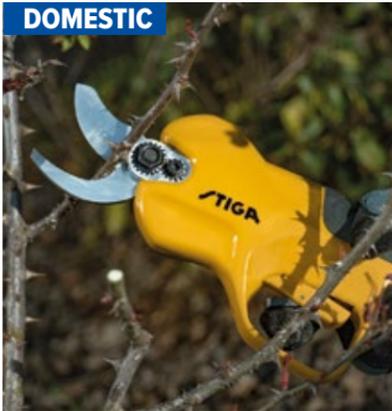
Vince Brauns, group product manager at EGO, said: "Our PeakPower system fully harnesses the potential of using two EGO batteries at once, making it possible to provide extra runtime and power."

"Designed with an improved user interface, control system and newer, more powerful motor, the LBP8000E represents a step change in comfortable, efficient working."

PeakPower, explains EGO, combines the power of two batteries for maximum output, and up to two and a half hours of runtime. The new motor enhances air speed, and delivers air volume of 1360m<sup>3</sup>/h. Upgraded PCBA cooling further improves durability, while the integrated tool stand helps keep the harness and batteries clean and dry.

The LBP8000E is part of EGO's Professional range, designed for larger gardens and for everyday use by contractors. For domestic use, it has a five-year warranty on the tool, and three years on the batteries, while professional users benefit from a two-year warranty on both the tool and the batteries.

For the user, battery slots on either side of the backpack ensure that the tool is centrally-balanced on their back, while an improved harness provides greater comfort. Other features include tool-free handle adjustment and an ergonomic handle with variable speed trigger and trigger lock. An LCD display ensures the operator has quick access to real-time battery and tool status.



# A battery first from STIGA

The SC 100e pruner

STIGA has announced its first-ever battery-powered pruner, the SC 100e.

The company says the ergonomic design makes this battery pruner both functional and comfortable to use, allowing gardeners to work efficiently and quickly. Described by themselves as solid, well-balanced and equipped with a non-slip handle, this latest generation pruner offers high safety security due to a button with an easy lock-off system and standby/lock-off software.

With an option to select from three blade-opening settings, this allows the cutting and trimming of branches up to 3cm in diameter. Its high-quality carbon steel blades are sharp, and capable of making a clean and precise cut.

Powered by the manufacturer's ePower 20V 2 Ah battery, they say up to over 2,000 cuts on a single charge are possible.

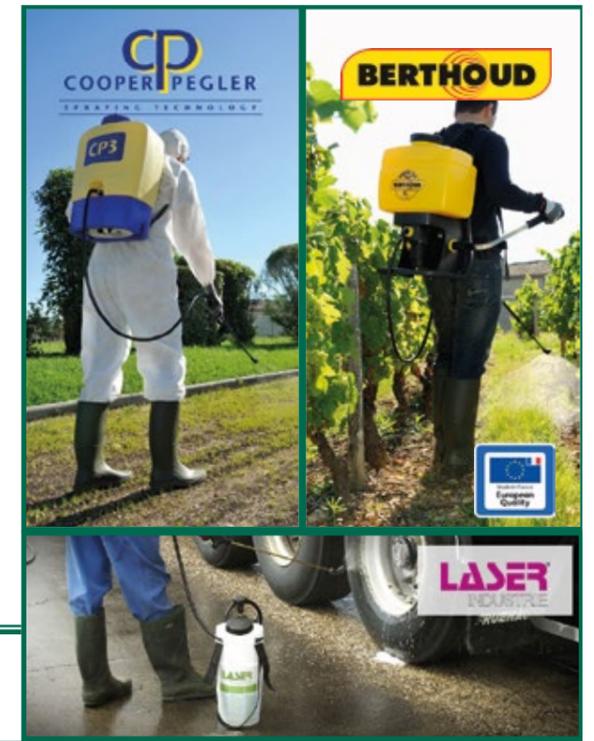
The ePower 20V batteries can also be shared among a series of lightweight and easy-to-use tools. With the 20V system, the "intelligent" battery recognizes the product in which it is used and sets the appropriate working parameters autonomously. It adapts by optimising the operating range for each product, thus maximising battery life.



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AGRICULTURAL

5 SECOND INFO

- Three-tonne lift capacity
- 6m lift height
- 550Nm of torque
- 20 inch and 24 inch tyre options
- Regenerative hydraulics



# Super-compact Loadall from JCB

Features three-tonne lift capacity

**A new three-tonne lift capacity compact telescopic handler has been launched by JCB for the 6m lift height sector, with a specification that, they say, offers significant performance and productivity advantages.**

The Loadall 530-60 AGRI Super is sized to match the needs of livestock farms, with narrow aisles and passages, and caters for the needs of pig and poultry units, in particular by combining high levels of power and traction with compact dimensions for productive performance, especially when working inside buildings with restricted height.

Power is provided by a 4.8-litre

Stage V emissions-compliant JCB DieselMAX engine, with peak outputs of 97kW (130hp) and 550Nm of torque, which is combined with a new two-speed hydrostatic transmission.

This combination delivers a 25% increase in dynamic tractive effort over its predecessor, 527-58 AGRI Plus.

JCB's VariSpeed control, meanwhile, provides separate engine revs and ground speed adjustment when using hydraulically-driven attachments like a bucket feeder or sweeper.

An overall height of 2m on the 20in tyre option ensures sufficient clearance to work beneath poultry

house feeders and drinkers lifted clear for the cleaning-out operation.

To suit outdoor working on muddy and uneven surfaces, the new Loadall 530-60 AGRI Super is also available on 24in tyres for maximum ground clearance and traction; on these tyres, overall width is just 2.1m, and even less on the 20in tyres at 2m.

Yet within those tight dimensions, the new Loadall has a JCB Smart Hydraulics package, featuring regenerative hydraulics for fast but controlled boom lowering, Smooth Ride System boom suspension, boom-end hydraulic cylinder damping, and bucket shake with minimal control input.

DOMESTIC

# Cobra extend their reach

New model following customer demand

**Following customer demand, Cobra has introduced a new model to its 24-volt range of battery-powered equipment.**

The cordless range, which currently consists of a GT3024V Grass Trimmer, CS1024V Chainsaw, and H5024V Hedgetrimmer with a range of 50cm, has been expanded with the introduction of the new HT50LRH24V Long Reach Hedgetrimmer (RRP £134.99).

The new model is designed to tackle awkward jobs, with the ability to change from a standard 50cm cutting length to the longreach option. The extension pole clicks into the main body of the tool, before attaching the standard hedgetrimmer blade, granting an additional metre to help reach taller hedges. To further aid this, it also has an articulating head that moves through 90 degrees, with a dual handle switch, and is light and easy to use, weighing 3.34kg.



It has a double-sided reciprocating precision-cutting blade, with a tooth spacing of 20mm, along two-speed modes (eco and turbo).

Peter Chaloner, managing director of Cobra, said: "We are continuously looking for ways to expand the 24V range, creating more commercial opportunities for dealers and providing gardeners with useful, compact tools that stand the test of time. Our standard 50cm hedgetrimmer has proven to be very popular with buyers, but we noticed that many gardeners required a model with a longer reach - so we knew we wanted to create a product to fill that gap in the market. The demand for cordless tools continues to grow, as people seek convenient, hassle-free options."

Faunamaster

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DOMESTIC

# First battery ride-on from Yard Force

ProRider E559 launched

Yard Force has released a new battery-powered ride-on mower, the ProRider E559, targeted at both consumers and professionals.

Driven by a fast-charging single 56V 50Ah lithium-ion long-life battery, the company says it will deliver 2800WHS of power to achieve 90 minutes of runtime on a single charge. Yard Force boast that battery has been tried and tested, and will provide performance for more than 4,000 charging cycles.

Featuring a twin-blade deck, with a 96cm cutting width, makes it suitable for lawns up to 8000m<sup>2</sup>, or around two acres, and the anti-scalp wheels fitted

to the cutting deck ensure the mower can adjust to changing terrains. The blades have been specially designed to mulch the clippings when the side discharge flap is closed. There are 12 easily adjusted cutting heights, ranging from 34mm to 114mm, and a reverse mowing feature to cover all areas of the lawn. An optional twin-bag, 220-litre grass collector is available.

It features an adjustable seat, fixed-speed cruise control and a one-kick parking function allows the user to lock the mower into place with one kick, and release with another.



The steering wheel has a 40cm turning radius for easy steering, and the cutting deck can be cleaned due to a helpful cleaning connector.

The Advanced Control Panel has been designed to be user-friendly, with easy-to-operate buttons for blade engagement, cruise control, operating the mower's LED light and the reverse mowing function. The bright LED display panel shows battery charge levels, mileage and parking status. There is also a built-in cup holder and a USB charging point.

COMMERCIAL

# Providing professionals' portable power

STIHL launch new PS 3000



STIHL has launched its first portable 230V power supply, that, they say, provides professional users with a quiet, low-maintenance and emission-free alternative to petrol-powered generators.

Weighing 19.8kg, and boasting a 3.6kW power output, the new PS 3000 offers a high power-to-weight ratio, and is one of the most powerful portable power supply units in its weight class.

The PS 3000 can be used in a wide variety of applications, from corded drills, site lighting, STIHL tools – such as power washers and vacuums – as well as recharging STIHL batteries while out in the field. The high 2.1kWh energy content also ensures long working

times for minimal disruption.

The new portable power supply produces a pure sine wave, meaning it generates the same electrical current produced by the grid, ensuring no difference in performance and that no electrical noise is generated. In addition, a boost mode function temporarily increases the power output by up to 250% for tools with high initial starting currents.

Designed to operate in tough conditions, the unit features a sturdy frame for high protection levels, multiple handles for carrying comfort, is protected from dust, and can be used in wet weather conditions.

# Show debate to rumble on



Our anonymous columnist, THE SPROCKET, enjoys a (wet) day out at a new show, considers how the recruitment situation isn't getting any easier, and looks back at a certain engine maker's fluctuations

**A**t the time of writing this column, SALTEX has not happened, the summer is coming to a close, and the autumn season will be upon us by the time this mag you're holding hits the streets. It also means that the latest show in the equipment calendar, GroundsFest, has been and gone, and the views of many will have been expressed verbally or in writing.

Not one to disappoint, I will add the Sprocket's voice to whatever maybe out there. I did attend, but not on the bike – as the weather was absolutely atrocious – and my heart went out to the organisers and the brave exhibitors who supported the show. As a visitor, and one who has been in and heard most of the debates about the show scene, I have to say it was a great effort, and only dampened by the weather and not the spirit of the event. I very much enjoyed my day there, with a very large umbrella, and was pleasantly surprised at the number and diversity of the exhibitors.

No doubt the debate will rumble on about some peoples' preference for one show. SALTEX (GMA) and BTME (BIGGA) have kicked this around with industry stalwarts for years. Covid nearly helped to bring it all together, despite the show dates being changed for some, but now GroundsFest has snuck into the old IOG SALTEX month, and SAGE has taken a punt for July and is in its third year. One has to assume there is a demand for all this, as none of the organisers would be putting together these shows unless they can make money out of it.

The heady days of crowded avenues at SALTEX, Windsor Racecourse, and a very full Harrogate for the BTME show are long gone. The outdoor show concept is suspect because of the weather, but maybe the hybrid, inside-outside style of GroundsFest at the NAEC, the old Royal Show Ground at Stoneleigh, could be what suits the

visitors – and maybe the exhibitors – in terms of cost and convenience.

For the GroundsFest organisers, my only criticism would be that the food on offer in the main café area was appalling. £8.50 for a cold pork bap, with a sliver of pork and spoonful of apple sauce, is just not on for any biker! Otherwise, guys: well done, a great effort, and congratulations on your first show.

The big ag boys now have a few shows coming up, with the Midland Machinery Show and LAMMA, and no doubt a round of dealer get-togethers for 2024 product launches. Let's hope that we see some of the big brands back at these shows in their own right.

## Staffing problems persist

My wanderings around GroundsFest helped me catch up with a few dealers and suppliers, and some dealer visits recently have highlighted even more the very difficult situation in getting staff. Not just technicians, but administrators, accountancy staff, warehouse staff, etcetera. What a crazy situation to be in, and we are not alone as an industry. It seems you will have to fight to get people for some of the more mundane positions, as well as the more qualified areas.

There does not seem to be a magic solution. Locally, you can do all the normal stuff for recruitment around your own area. You can use social media, or, so I am told, post vacancies on your own websites, talk to your local colleges and schools, and rattle the word-of-mouth channels. The problem is that you must compete with all those other businesses that want the same people, and our industry is not renowned for paying that well. Something has to change. Pay more, offer benefits, provide flexible working, look for people returning from long-term parenting to the workplace.

I asked a supplier at GroundsFest about employing a young person. He said he would be happy to if he could find one who would get out of bed early enough. What a testament to the youth of today – but I am sure there are those out there that would give their all once they understand what working is about. Couple this with the statistics about sick leave, showing that the UK has the highest level of sick days being taken ever. So, can we blame Covid for cultural and workplace changes that are causing people to re-evaluate their life/work balance, and should we be more aware of the changing nature of those we may want to employ and accommodate them?

I had to go back to my local dealer with my mower, which they had serviced not long ago. It is being used by my son-in-law, but, after filling it up with fuel, it would not start. I had a look at it, no luck, went back with some tools, and messed about for a while – but still no joy. Took it back to the dealer a few days later, who wheeled it into the workshop, looked at it, pulled the cord, and away it went. What a fantastic service, and incredibly gifted mechanic! Boy, did I feel an idiot or what? Cost me five litres of special fuel, as I had to have an excuse for my son-in-law and told him off for using E10 fuel because of the bio content. I really did need a get-out!

## Production changes

The recent announcement that Briggs and Stratton will cease production of Simplicity and Snapper lawn tractors and their Zero-Turn models for the North American market came as a surprise after so many years of providing these up-market products under both brands. More of a surprise is that they will continue the product lines for Europe and the MEA (Middle East and Africa) regions, which suggest that the volumes in these areas are better than in North America.

Looking back many years, when American manufacturers were looking at the European markets and having to make

their USA product lines comply with CE regulations at considerable expense and inconvenience, it now seems the whole market has turned on its axis, and Briggs are looking to Europe and the MEA to keep their manufacturing plants alive. One has to acknowledge the success of Ferris, but it is in a different marketplace to the Simplicity and Snapper brands.

Briggs have seen so many changes in their operation since they got into the wholesales market by buying Simplicity, Snapper and a few other big brands that they seem to have lost sight of their core engine business – as was the controversy at the time of their 'breakout' into the wholesales market. What was the largest manufacturer in the world of small-power engines doing buying into a market that saw them compete directly with their very own engine customers?

They have bounced around with major brands, opened and closed factories over the years, and jumped in and out of various product lines, eventually selling the whole business as a result of a Chapter 11 intervention.

Let us hope that they stick to providing product for Europe and the MEA, for the sake of the importers and dealers who handle these brands, and that continuing in Europe is not just a warm-down to further changes. One for the history books and the icons of industry past and present to debate.

There seems to be lots on in November for the industry, and, in particular, the garden machinery dealers, with SALTEX early in the month, and then the Service Dealer Conference later in the month – and in the middle of all of that we have the Motor Bike Show at the NEC. Always nice to have a look around, but some of the big brand bikes are now so expensive it is hard to get too excited – although brands like Royal Enfield have some great practical machines to offer at sensible money. I hope some of you bikers out there get to go to the show. It's indoors in the warm and dry at the NEC, and with carpet in the aisles, just like SALTEX!



# What's on?

Status of the events correct at the time of going to press, but we advise confirming with organisers' websites and social media channels

## NOVEMBER 2023

<b>GMA SALTEX 2023, Birmingham NEC</b> www.gmasaltex.co.uk	<b>1-2</b>
<b>Midlands Machinery Show</b> www.midlandsmachineryshow.com	<b>8-9</b>
<b>AgriTechnica 2023, Hanover</b> www.agritechnica.com	<b>12-18</b>
<b>AgriScot 2023, The Royal Highland Centre</b> www.agriscot.co.uk	<b>22</b>
<b>Royal Welsh Winter Fair</b> www.rwas.wales/winter-fair	<b>27-28</b>
<b>CropTec 2023, East of England Showground</b> www.croptecshow.com	<b>29-30</b>
<b>Service Dealer Conference &amp; Awards</b> www.servicedealer.co.uk	<b>30</b>

## JANUARY 2024

<b>Oxford Farming Conference</b> www.ofc.org.uk	<b>3-5</b>
<b>LAMMA 2024, Birmingham NEC</b> www.lammashow.com	<b>17-18</b>
<b>BTME 2024, Harrogate International Centre</b> www.btme.org.uk	<b>23-25</b>
<b>Golf Industry Show, Phoenix, AZ</b> www.gcsaaconference.com	<b>29-1/02</b>

## FEBRUARY 2024

<b>Spring Fair 2024, Birmingham NEC</b> www.springfair.com	<b>4-7</b>
<b>Doe Show 2024, Ulting</b> www.ernestdoe.com	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Dairy-Tech, Stoneleigh Park</b> www.dairy-tech.uk	<b>7</b>
<b>Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS), York Auction Centre</b> www.yams.uk.com	<b>7</b>
<b>World Ag Expo, Tulare, California</b> www.worldagexpo.com	<b>13-15</b>
<b>Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry</b> www.executivehireshow.co.uk	<b>14-15</b>

## MARCH 2024

<b>Low Carbon Agriculture 2024, NAEC Stoneleigh</b> www.lowcarbonagricultureshow.co.uk	<b>6-7</b>
<b>Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London</b> www.idealhomeshow.co.uk	<b>22-7/03</b>

## APRIL 2024

<b>AEA Conference 2024, One Great George Street, London</b> www.aea.uk.com	<b>9</b>
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