

# SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

January/February 2025

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

## DRIVING SUCCESS!

Invaluable advice for evolving the business – and the celebration of incredible dealerships – at the *Service Dealer Conference and Awards*

### A NECESSARY INDUSTRY EVOLUTION

Q&A with Milwaukee

### BATTERY REVOLUTION

Changing the industry landscape

### SALTEX AND EIMA

UK and European show reports

### TAKING THE PLUNGE

From a mobile groundcare mechanic business to a full-blown professional machinery dealership





Letter from the editor  
**Steve Gibbs**

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

**W**elcome to the January/February 2025 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine. I trust all our readers had a relaxing Christmas and New Year break – and are now raring to go for the upcoming season? This issue, we look back to look forward at what may be heading into your showrooms this year, with show news from around the world. There are reports on trade events in Italy and the UK, alongside word of our ‘Digital Special Report,’ offering in-depth video analysis of the U.S. Equip show – all covered by our team of roving reporters.

We also look back to what I suspect many will agree was *Service Dealer’s* best ever conference. We celebrate all our dealer winners, and relive the presentations that our dealer delegates enjoyed throughout that late November day in Stratford-upon-Avon.

A highlight for myself and others was business expert Ellis Watson, who delivered the keynote. In his wide-ranging, entertaining talk, with the concept of change at the forefront, he argued that our dealer delegates shouldn’t be altering their commitment to exceptional, one-to-one customer service.

Ellis claimed that making customers

feel they are cared for is essential to a dealer’s continued success. He went on to argue that passion cannot be delegated or outsourced – it must come from a company’s leadership walking the walk themselves. It was powerful, inspiring stuff.

Dealers have always known that their attentive customer interactions are one of their superpowers - but in this age of increased digitalisation, of AI creeping further and further into retail, and with our human exchanges at risk of becoming ever more remote, I think it was fantastic to have this reconfirmed by such an experienced businessman as Ellis (and, indeed, one who is an outsider to our sector).

You can read a full report on Ellis’ and all our other speakers’ fascinating and timely presentations, beginning on page 20 this issue.

Elsewhere in the mag, we welcome our new diarist of the season, Les Gammie from Gammies Groundcare. We thank Les for his commitment to keeping us informed throughout this year of developments at his Forfar dealership. It will be fantastic for us to once again gain a dealer’s perspective on the industry from north of the border.

**THE TEAM**

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More Information  
**HARRIER PRO TOUR**  
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DEALERS

# MKM Agri close business for good

After 40 years of trading Dealers MKM Agriculture Ltd, of Marston Moreteyne, Bedfordshire, announced at the end of November 2024 that they were to close their business for good at the end of December.

This move came after the company closed their second branch in Bury St Edmunds at the end of August last year. Owner Anthony Deacon said in a statement: "We have been through a great deal of adversity and challenging economic and government pressure on SMEs, and globally-effected changes. We always made it through, but this has taken its toll over the years. Testament to our staff, we recovered from the devastating fire in 2021 and dealing with a global pandemic. Years of growth and brand expansion has seen us grow to a leader in the ATV and UTV industry.



MKM owner, Anthony Deacon

"We are pursuing all options open to us, but our focus is now on supporting our staff and delivering our last few machines to our loyal customers. We will be working with our suppliers and manufacturers to advise of the nearest service centre for any of the machines we have supplied. Any work currently with us will be completed and returned upon completion, but no more new work will be taken on.

"To be clear, we are solvent as a business, and all supplier obligations will be met in full. Our relationships with customers and suppliers are strong, and we would like to thank you all for supporting our brand since 1986."

INDUSTRY

# Baroness acquires Shibaura

Agreement reached for turf care machinery business

**Kyoeisha Co., Ltd. (Baroness) has reached an agreement with IHI Corporation to acquire Shibaura - the turf care machinery business of IHI Agri-Tech Corporation.**

Kyoeisha say they have been looking to enhance production capacity and expand sales and customer service to meet future domestic and international demand. They say the acquisition of IHI Agri-Tech Corporation's turf care machinery business aligns perfectly with these goals.

An established manufacturer of turf care equipment, IHI Agri-Tech Corporation boasts state-of-the-art facilities, a skilled workforce and a reputation for high-quality products both in Japan and overseas. The Shibaura brand features a range of walk-behind mowers, three-gang and five-gang reel and rotary ride-on mowers, front mowers and other ride-on implements - such as top dressers and bunker rakes - for maintenance tasks on the golf course.

Recognising the strategic fit and potential for growth, Kyoeisha engaged in extensive discussions with IHI Corporation. It was formally announced on November 25, 2024, that Kyoeisha had reached an agreement for its acquisition of the Shibaura brand and portfolio.

More details have been promised in due course.

DEALERS



# Etesia add to dealer network

New chapter for Fisco Farm & Garden Machinery

**Etesia UK has announced that Fisco Farm & Garden Machinery, a long-standing family business based in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, has officially become its latest dealer.**

The partnership marks a new chapter for Fisco, enabling the company to expand its commercial product offerings while reinforcing the manufacturer's presence in the region.

Fisco Farm & Garden Machinery has been a family-run business in Wakefield for over 60 years. Founded by Clifford Broadhead as Farmers Ironmongery Supply Co, it later expanded to meet the changing needs of the agricultural industry. Today, Fisco continues to evolve, now offering brands to enhance its product range for both domestic and commercial clients.

Ryan Powala-Higgins, manager of Fisco Farm & Garden Machinery, explained that becoming an Etesia dealer is a strategic move to grow the company's commercial opportunities. "We are a single branch, and for a long time we were predominantly in the domestic market," said Ryan. "But over the past few years, we've started to take on more commercial products to boost sales in that area. We felt like we were missing out, and that's why we decided to take on Etesia."

Looking ahead, Ryan expressed enthusiasm about the future of the partnership, saying: "We're very excited about what's to come."



DEALERS



GGM's Andy Melville and T H White Machinery Import's Stuart Winwood

# T H White Machinery imports team-up with GGM

New dealership partnership for Ferris

partnership, we will leverage GGM Group's local expertise to provide customers with greater access to Ferris' high-performance mowers. The collaboration of a leading manufacture and leading dealership is the perfect fit, enabling GGM to offer a complimentary range to their existing product line up, backed up with the first-class aftersales support for which GGM is already renowned."

Bill Johnston, director of T H White Machinery Imports, explained: "We are excited to join forces with GGM Group as we expand our services across North West England. This collaboration not only enhances our ability to meet the needs of our clients, but also creates a partnership with GGM Group to work

together to provide comprehensive solutions for the sector."

Andy Melville, commercial director of GGM Group, added: "Partnering with the Ferris brand is a fantastic step for us, and the range complements our existing offering brilliantly, making this an ideal collaboration.

"We're proud of our reputation throughout the industry for exceptional customer service, aftersales backup and support, and our team look forward to enhancing our range with premium Ferris products and delivering exceptional service to our customers across the North West and Yorkshire territory. Together, we'll ensure they have the best tools for every job, backed by reliable support."

**T H White Machinery Imports has announced a new dealership partnership with the GGM Group, expanding its groundcare product range and support services across the North of England.**

This collaboration, they say, will bring Ferris mowers closer to customers in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Staffordshire and the Wirral.

In a statement, T H White Machinery Imports said: "Through this



L-R: Owen Buttle, national sales manager, Merlo UK; Tom Jobling, machinery director; Ian Gate, machinery consultant, and Dale Shaw, dealer principal, Carr's Billington; Shaun Groom, general manager, and Euan Thomson, regional sales manager, Merlo UK

# Carr's Billington join Merlo network

Described as a 'significant addition' to dealership's range

**Beginning in December, Carr's Billington, headquartered in Carlisle, have taken on the Merlo brand in Cumbria and the North East, covering depots in Carlisle, Hexham and Morpeth. The two companies say this marks the beginning of an exciting and strategic partnership between two trusted names in the agriculture industry.**

Owen Buttle, national sales manager at Merlo UK, said: "Carr's Billington is a trusted supplier of leading agricultural brands, and this partnership represents Merlo's continued commitment to strengthening its dealer network and providing agriculture customers across the north of England with strong and comprehensive coverage. We are delighted to welcome Carr's Billington

to the Merlo dealer network."

He continued: "As well as sales and installations, Carr's Billington offers exceptional service and repairs, as well as stocking a wide range of fast-moving parts. This level of support ensures customers receive the best experience with their Merlo products."

Tom Jobling, machinery director at Carr's Billington, added: "Following a thorough evaluation of suppliers and key brands, we are excited to add the Merlo product range to fill a gap and strengthen our portfolio. The Merlo agreement is a significant addition to our range, and presents exciting opportunities for our customers. We look forward to expanding our offering, and forging a successful partnership with Merlo."



## ATV range finds UK and Ireland distribution

Aodes brand established for 30-plus years

**Boss ORV has announced their appointment as UK and Ireland distributors for Aodes Off-Road Vehicles.**

Established over 30 years ago, and headquartered in Shandong, China, Aodes is a multinational brand, sold in more than 100 countries. The company opened an R&D and distribution centre in California, USA, in 2012. In 2021, they introduced the Pathcross ATV Series, featuring V-Twin engines in 525cc, 650cc, and 1,000cc displacements. The appointment of Boss was finalised at the EICMA exhibition in Milan.

"We are very excited to have a new ATV/Quad in our product portfolio," said Boss ORV managing director Phil Everett. "The wait has been worth it, as we have finally found a really high-quality and price-competitive product to suit our challenging market. This range will fit perfectly with our current products. We will announce more details over the coming weeks."

The Pathcross ATV will be on show for the first time on the Boss ORV stand at the LAMMA agricultural show this month.



## One-day format from this year

For the Midlands Machinery Show

**The Midlands Machinery Show will adopt a new one-day format from this year, the Newark and Nottinghamshire Agricultural Society (NNAS) has announced.**

After a decade as a two-day event at the Newark Showground each November, the NNAS say they have consulted exhibitors and examined feedback from showgoers to ensure it continues to deliver what attendees want.

Events and development manager Elizabeth Halsall said: "The agricultural industry has changed significantly over the years, and it's important that we remain in-tune with what people want from a well-established regional show.

"We recognise that visitors have less time to be away from their businesses, and that exhibitors want to make show attendance as efficient as possible. This new one-day format will help in both these regards."

Gavin Pell, managing director at

dealership Chandlers Farm Equipment, agrees. He says: "The show has enjoyed huge success in its original format, which was set out 10 years ago. We have to acknowledge that the industry has changed, and it's right for the agricultural society to review how the event runs.

"We feel a one-day show will be really positive, meaning it is more cost-effective for us to attend, visitor footfall will be concentrated to one day, and there will be less time away from the farm for those who want to attend."

The show organising committee says it is excited about the potential of bringing two days' footfall into a single day. "We believe this positive move will further enhance what is already a hugely valued and well-supported regional show," Elizabeth said.

The NNAS have announced that the 2025 Midlands Machinery Show will take place on November 19 at Newark Showground.

# News in brief:

Read these stories, and more, in full at: [www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk)



## Kuhn strengthen regional support

Kuhn Farm Machinery has announced that they have strengthened their UK regional teams, appointing Will Cruse (pictured) as an area sales manager covering the East of England, and Martin Little as bedding and feeding specialist for Northern England and Scotland.



## Foley acquire Salsco

The Foley Company in the U.S. have announced the acquisition of Salsco, Inc., a manufacturer of turf maintenance equipment, including petrol and electric greens rollers, leaf vacuums, wood and brush chippers, chipper shredder vacuums, and many more.



# Check out the Equip Digital Special Report

Live on *Service Dealer's* website

*Service Dealer* and *TurfPro's* exclusive Digital Special Report, packed full of video coverage of October's Equip show that took place in Louisville, Kentucky, is now live on *Service Dealer's* website.

The event is the world's largest outdoor power machinery industry exhibition, which the owner of our titles, Duncan Murray-Clarke, attended with the magazine's Diarist of the Season for 2024, dealer Jo Balmer (of Balmers GM), alongside our video expert, David Comiskey.

The team gathered and produced tons of content *Around The Show*. Much of this follows Jo as a first-time UK dealer visitor to this incredible expo. Her experience of the OPEI's event illustrates just what a trip to Louisville could offer to other UK dealers. The scale of the show is genuinely something to behold. There's so much to see, interact with and enjoy – it's a lot to take in. With Jo's help, we hope the Report offers a flavour of what other UK dealers could expect should they decide to make a trip in subsequent years.

The Digital Special Report also includes an 'In-Depth' section, featuring an interview with Kris Kriser, president and CEO of OPEI, the show's organisers. Plus, we serialised a five-part roundtable discussion between Duncan, Jo and Bob Clements (of Bob Clements Inc), alongside our American columnist Sara Hey. This included a comparison of the U.S. and UK markets, discussion of dealer stocking commitments, product evolution and routes to market, the rate of industry change, Equip show developments, and battery recycling.

You can also watch Duncan and Jo round up their views on this event, and hear why they believe a visit is well worth a UK dealer's time.

Next issue of this magazine will feature an article by Jo, sharing her experiences from her first visit to the show.



Michael Robson

# Polaris name new district sales manager

Overseeing 26 dealerships

**Polaris UK has announced the appointment of Michael Robson as its new district sales manager for southern England.**

Michael will be overseeing 26 Polaris Off-Road dealers across the south of the UK, from Lincolnshire to Cornwall. He says he will be supporting them by optimising stock levels, upholding brand standards, and driving growth across the dealer network.

"I'm thrilled to join the four-wheel off-roading world with Polaris, and to help grow an exceptional dealer network," said Michael. "Polaris' products are unparalleled, and I'm eager to drive more customers into our showrooms with fresh, innovative ideas."

Michael's career began with 23 years in the British military, where he specialised in logistics and later trained as a motorcycle technician. This experience laid the foundation for his post-military career in aftersales and customer support within the automotive sector. After his military service, he worked at a KTM dealership in a technical and aftersales capacity for five years, before joining Piaggio in 2014 as a field-based manager for southern England. In 2017, he advanced to operations manager for UK operations and sales, solidifying his operational expertise and commitment to quality.



# COBRA

## Why Not Become a Cobra Dealer in 2025?

With over 170 products in the Cobra range including the new for 2025 Premium lawn tractor range powered by V-Twin Loncin engines, 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.

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DEALERS



# Pro dealership expands portfolio

Takes on Toro professional range

Effective from this month, T H White Groundcare has been awarded the franchise to sell Toro grounds equipment from Reesink UK, the brand's UK distributor.

The partnership will see the dealership offer ten models from Toro's range of cylinder, rotary, and flail commercial grounds equipment (excluding golf) to customers across Hampshire, Dorset, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and the

borough of Birmingham. Complementing sales, the company will provide backup on Golf products sold through Reesink's direct sales team within these areas.

Alastair Rowell, managing director at Reesink UK, said: "This partnership is an excellent addition to our UK dealer network. T H White Groundcare brings great expertise, a proactive approach, and a strong commitment to service excellence. We are delighted to work with such a focused team of

groundcare specialists."

T H White's divisional director, Adrian Lovegrove, added: "This collaboration allows us to further enhance our offering, ensuring we can provide the right machine for every bespoke application. Our excellent staff and carefully selected partners are the cornerstone of our success, and this partnership strengthens our ability to meet the needs of our clients."

PEOPLE



Tim Walters

# Massey Ferguson appoint brand manager

For the UK and Ireland

Massey Ferguson has announced that Tim Walters has been appointed as the new brand manager at Massey Ferguson for the UK & Ireland.

Tim joined the company in 2014 as sales support specialist for FUSE. Following this, he has worked as area sales manager and harvesting national sales manager, following a stint as manager of sales support and product marketing for the UK and Ireland, leading a team of four sales support specialists. Officially starting his new role on December 1, 2024, Tim will head up the UK and Ireland sales and marketing team.

Tim said: "I'm delighted to have the opportunity to lead the UK and Ireland teams into 2025 and beyond. I've been part of the MF brand for a decade, and appreciate how valued we are by many farming businesses. My experience across different roles in the business will be vitally important as we continue to showcase our excellent range of machinery to the UK industry.

"As we start a new year, the MF team looks forward to working closely with every dealer to ensure a good start and continuing success into 2025," Tim concluded.

DEALERS

# Yamaha confirm new dealer partner

DGM Ltd expand their portfolio

DGM Ltd has expanded its offerings by partnering with Yamaha.

The dealership says this strategic alliance will enable them to provide customers with a wider range of high-quality outdoor equipment, including Yamaha's ATVs and golf cars.

"We're thrilled to partner with Yamaha," said Steve and Charlotte Dommett, owners of DGM Ltd. "This exciting collaboration will not only attract new customers to our business, but also offer our existing client base a wider range of high-quality products. We're particularly excited about the potential of Yamaha's golf cars and utility vehicles, especially within our existing golf course customer base."

Carl Stuart, area sales manager at Yamaha UK, added:



Steve Dommett, director/owner of DGM Ltd, and Carl Stuart, area sales manager at Yamaha

"We're delighted to welcome DGM Ltd to the Yamaha family. Their strong reputation and commitment to customer service make them the perfect partner for us. We're confident that they will be a great success in the region."

# News in brief: [www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk)

INDUSTRY



## Ego publish whitepaper

Battery-powered outdoor power equipment specialist EGO Power Plus say they have launched a new whitepaper to "educate heavy commercial outdoor power equipment users about the benefits of switching to battery power." Read it at [tinyurl.com/32kxm4my](http://tinyurl.com/32kxm4my)

INDUSTRY



## Kubota celebrate dealers & distributors

Kubota marked a significant milestone of 50 years in Europe by hosting an exclusive event (with the theme: 'It's All About People') at PortAventura in Spain recently, where they welcomed over 900 attendees, including dealers, distributors, partners, international media and employees.

INDUSTRY



## Change of colour scheme

As part of its brand strategy, the Amazone Group has announced a change to the design of its groundcare and hoeing divisions to a green and orange colour combination. All product lines will now match their long-established agricultural machinery colour scheme.



# Students start Ofsted highly rated training

As part of Claas' apprenticeship scheme

At the end of October, Claas UK welcomed this year's new apprentice intake of 30 students to the Claas Academy at Saxham for their apprentice induction and the start of their first training block.

Their arrival coincided with the publication of the first full inspection by Ofsted of the programme, which they highly rate for the training that the new apprentices are set to receive over the next four years of their course.

Claas is the only UK machinery manufacturer registered as an apprenticeship training provider which delivers a specific in-house apprenticeship under one roof. 2024's cohort was made up of students from 15 of their dealerships throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Over the next four years, they will study for a Level 3 Apprenticeship Standard in Land-Based Service Engineering Technician. Based in their purpose-built facilities – which include specialist fabrication, engine workshops

and classrooms – their training will be delivered by dedicated Claas trainers, alongside specialist product trainers from the main Academy.

In its first full inspection by Ofsted, the Claas Academy and its team of apprentice trainers and coordinators have been recognised for the commendable progress and development of their in-house apprenticeship programme.

In their inaugural report on the training that students receive, the manufacturer achieved an overall rating of 'Good' from Ofsted inspectors, confirming: "Apprentices develop the high-level technical skills they need to service and repair machinery such as tractors and combines. They learn from trainers with extensive land-based engineering experience, using the latest industry-standard facilities."

In terms of the structure of the course, the report again recognised this as 'Good,' and rated the behaviour and attitude of students as 'Outstanding'.



Comedian Charlie Baker and TAP's Emma Craigie make the draw for the raffle at the Service Dealer Awards, which raised funds for MND

## £3,500 raised for MND

By guests at the Service Dealer Awards

The organisers of November's Service Dealer Awards are proud to announce that the evening's guests raised a grand total of £3,500 for the Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association.

Luke Robson, regional fundraiser, said: "The generosity and efforts of the Service Dealer team, guests, sponsors and industry will make a real difference, and we are truly grateful for your commitment to fighting this devastating disease."

Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke added: "Well done and thank you to everyone who donated on the night to raise such vital funds for the charity."

If you would like to know more about the MND Association or want to give a donation, you can find all the info you need at [www.mndassociation.org](http://www.mndassociation.org)



Full coverage of the Awards and the preceding Conference can be found in this issue, beginning on page 14.

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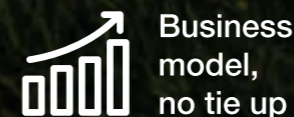
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# Driving success!

The winners of 2024's *Service Dealer Awards* were announced and presented at a celebratory gala dinner, held after the day's conference.

**O**n November 28, 2024, following the *Service Dealer Conference*, the winners of the 2024 *Service Dealer Awards* were revealed during a lively and celebratory ceremony at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon, marking the event's second outing at the venue.

The evening kicked off with an energetic set by standup Rob Rouse, alongside comedian and actor Charlie Baker returning to host the awards. Organised for the 20th year by the team behind *Service Dealer* magazine,

the ceremony shone a spotlight on exceptional achievements in sales, service, advice and support across the garden machinery, professional turf care machinery, farm machinery, ATV and forestry equipment dealer sectors.

An expert panel of judges carefully evaluated nominations submitted by dealer principals, dealership staff, manufacturers and loyal customers. Open to dealerships of all sizes - whether single-location operations or multi-branch enterprises - the entries were reviewed with great care and a commitment to fairness, reflecting the awards' dedication to excellence.

Steve Gibbs, editor of *Service Dealer* magazine, said: "Every year, *Service Dealer* takes great pride in honouring the finest examples of specialist, local dealer expertise. Our award-winning businesses and individuals embody a commitment to consistently surpassing customer expectations in their daily work.

"At a time when the consumer experience often feels impersonal, our 'Dealer of the Year' recipients demonstrate the importance of personalised, friendly and highly-skilled one-on-one service - a cornerstone of excellence that deserves celebration."

The winners were:



Josh Owen-Jones and Luke Owen-Jones are presented with the award by Stephen Irvine, head of sales UK at sponsors Husqvarna, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## GARDEN MACHINERY DEALER OF THE YEAR

**Winner:** Major Owen Ltd

Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd

**Finalists:** Ron Smith & Co, Gammies Groundcare and Celtic Mowers Ltd

**Sponsored by:** Husqvarna

**Presenting award:** Stephen Irvine, head of sales UK

**The judges said:** "Major Owen Ltd has consistently demonstrated exceptional commitment to the sector, providing unparalleled service and a customer-centric approach. They have achieved a high customer satisfaction rating this year, with the parts department winning an award from Toro.

"On top of this, they have actively participated in local community initiatives, such as sponsoring their local Football Club. They have invested in staff training and development, upgraded their software system to further develop customer relations, and are committed to the promotion of sustainable products."

## PROFESSIONAL TURFCARE DEALER OF THE YEAR



Jack Fielding and Andy Wolley are presented with the award by Craig Hoare, sales and marketing manager UK at sponsors Toro UK, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker



Dan Coates, Phil Bush and Jeremy Turney are presented with the award by Adam Giles - global business development manager, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## FARM MACHINERY DEALER OF THE YEAR

**Winner:** Turney Group - Bicester

Middleton Stoney, Bicester

**Finalists:** Border Plant Sales Ltd

**Sponsored by:** Ibcos

**Presenting award:** Adam Giles, global business development manager

**The judges said:** "Having also won the New Holland Q1 'Customer Service Champion' award this year, Turney have established a highly regarded apprenticeship program, as well as being renowned for best-in-class workshop operations, community involvement, team morale, and strong industry and supplier relations.

"Earlier this year, they built upon their annual Grain Clinic, holding their first Agricultural Open Day, inviting along many of their suppliers and customers. A hugely successful day - they intend to build upon it next year."

**Winner:** GGM Group Colne, Lancashire

**Finalists:** Middlewich Machinery, Gammies Groundcare and Major Owen Ltd

**Sponsored by:** Toro UK Ltd

**Presenting award:** Craig Hoare, sales and marketing manager UK

**The judges said:** "GGM Group is well-respected by its supplier partners, and highly regarded amongst its customer base. This year has seen continued recruitment, turnover growth and increased profitability.

"GGM pride themselves in building and developing a team capable of sustaining and developing the business through time - recruiting engineers, apprentices and training managers for the business of tomorrow. They give careful consideration to their sustainability strategy, whilst giving back to their local community, including through fundraising for the North West Air Ambulance."





Richard Thomas, Amy Nocetti and Jason Nettle are presented with their award by James Dalke, head of agriculture at sponsors Societe Generale Equipment Finance, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## FORESTRY EQUIPMENT DEALER OF THE YEAR

**Winner:** Forest and Arb

Winchester, Hampshire

*Finalists:* GGM Group

*Sponsored by:* Societe Generale Equipment Finance

*Presenting award:* James Dalke, head of agriculture

**The judges said:** "Forest and Arb are always striving to improve, and are committed to delivering exceptional value and support to their customers."

With a strong presence in the industry, this year they took significant stands at both the Arb Show and the APF event. Constantly innovating and evolving, they recently introduced new first aid kits and portable defibrillators for forestry professionals. Their comprehensive support to customers includes next-day service and support for major brands."



Stephen Lowe is presented with the award by Carl Stuart, area sales manager, power products, South at sponsors Yamaha, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## ATV/QUAD DEALER OF THE YEAR

**Winner:** Border Plant Sales Ltd

Sandbach, Cheshire

*Finalists:* Gammies Groundcare

*Sponsored by:* Yamaha

*Presenting award:* Carl Stuart, area sales manager, power products – South

**The judges said:** With a reputation built on trust and reliability, Border Plant Sales consistently deliver top-tier quads/ATVs to customers, facilitated by their own in-house experts, who love the products as much as their clients.

"The dedicated team provides an outstanding service, ensuring all quads are processed swiftly with warranty and road registration, alleviating all the stress from the customer. The service team goes above and beyond. Their focus on long-term customer relationships has earned them a loyal base who trust in their professionalism and expertise, offering a complete package from initial purchase to aftercare."



Amy Phythian is presented with the award by David Mortimer, regional sales manager, UK & Ireland, at sponsors EGO, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## STAR OF THE DEALERSHIP

**Winner:** Amy Phythian group warranty manager at Crawfords Group, Chelmsford, Essex

*Finalists:* Phil Portman - Pallisers of Hereford Limited

Nathan Nash - Devon Garden Machinery

*Sponsored by:* EGO

*Presenting award:* David Mortimer, regional sales manager, UK & Ireland

**The judges said:** "Amy Phythian, group warranty manager, has been instrumental in supporting all depots and aftersales teams across the Crawfords Group, working tirelessly to maintain efficiency and high standards."

Her close collaboration with suppliers ensures exceptional accuracy and efficiency in the dealership's warranty claims process, achieving a remarkable acceptance rate. This commitment underpins their farmer-first approach, ensuring a seamless and positive experience for customers. Amy has also taken significant steps to train Crawfords' technicians, equipping them with a comprehensive understanding of warranty requirements and submission processes."



Jake Trueman is presented with his award by Simon Chadbone, business development manager, parts at sponsors Kubota, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

## NEW TECHNICIAN OF THE YEAR

**Winner:** Jake Trueman Sam Turner & Sons, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

*Finalists:* Tom Wood - Crawfords Group

Joe Sweetmore - B&B Tractors

*Sponsored by:* Kubota

*Presenting award:* Simon Chadbone, business development manager, parts

**The judges said:** "Starting out as a Saturday employee, Jake Trueman has quickly progressed into a key player in Sam Turner & Sons' workshop, specialising in robotic mowers."

"When Jake first joined the dealership at 15, he was a shy and quiet young boy, but, over the years, he has grown into a confident, self-assured young man. His determination and eagerness to learn have been key to his development, tackling each new task with a level of focus and maturity beyond his years. His self-confidence has flourished, becoming a highly-respected and integral part of the team, with great prospects ahead of him."

## BEST NEW INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR



Tim Rogers – channel manager Omni/EBP from sponsors STIHL – collected the award on behalf of Gammies, with *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker

**Winner:** Gammies Groundcare

for their diversification into pro arborist equipment

*Finalists:* Mower Magic

*Sponsored by:* STIHL GB

*Presenting award:* Tim Rogers, channel manager Omni/EBP

**The judges said:** "Gammies have always sold a variety of forestry equipment, but, this past year, their store manager, Stan, noticed an influx of professional customers who were asking about ancillary equipment used by arborists. It made sense to Stan that the professionals who were in the store purchasing machinery should also be able to shop for professional tree-climbing equipment, rather than resort to online stores."

"The dealership's subsequent expansion and diversification into these products, taking on brands new to themselves, has been successful and appreciated by Gammies' customer base. The development is ongoing, as staff undertake brand training, increasing their knowledge of the equipment and how their professional customers utilise the tools."





Luke Owen-Jones is presented with his award by Jason Webb, manager, national aftersales commercial, UK & Ireland at sponsors AGCO, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and comedian Charlie Baker



Luke Owen-Jones and Josh Owen-Jones are presented with the award by Jim Kirkwood, director of product management at sponsors Kress, with Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke, and comedian Charlie Baker

## LEADERSHIP AWARD 2024

### Winner: Luke Owen-Jones

Major Owen Ltd, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd

Finalists: **Jeremy Turney** - Turney Group

Sponsored by: **AGCO**

Presenting award: **Jason Webb**, manager, national aftersales commercial, UK & Ireland

**The judges said:** "The staff at Major Owen Ltd nominated Luke Owen-Jones for the Leadership Award, recognising his exceptional dedication to the company and for fostering a positive, supportive and growth-oriented environment."

"He has consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership far beyond his years through his strong values, leading by example, and setting the standard for the team. Over the last year Luke has guided two new apprentices through their learning journeys, his patient mentorship helping them build confidence and technical expertise for their future successes. His leadership style has not only inspired his team, but has also fostered a culture of inclusivity and teamwork across the business."

## OVERALL DEALER OF THE YEAR

### Winner: Major Owen Ltd

Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd

Sponsored by: **Kress**

Presenting award: **Jim Kirkwood**, director of product management

**The judges said:** "As well as winning our 'Garden Machinery Dealer of the Year' and 'Leadership' awards, Major Owen have claimed 2024's 'Overall Dealer of the Year' prize. Achieving an increase in sales over the previous year in both domestic and commercial machinery – as a small team of 25 – Major Owen Ltd take great pride in their standard of work. Keen to also bring on the next generation, they have taken on apprentices in both ag and groundcare."

"With their steadfast commitment to excellence, innovative strategies, and deep community connections, Major Owen Ltd truly exemplify the attributes of a local dealer, serving the domestic, commercial, agricultural, forestry and construction markets."



# Helping dealerships thrive and evolve

From the dealer needs of farmers and turf professionals, to expert advice on cyber crime and how businesses can benefit from artificial intelligence, there was plenty of variety to the topics of November's *Service Dealer* Conference. MARTIN RICKATSON provides a precis.

**A**fter a steady but not spectacular year for turf, domestic grass and outdoor power equipment dealers – and a rocky one for the farm machinery sector – it would have perhaps been no surprise if the mood at the 2024 *Service Dealer* Conference had been a little subdued. Yet, while the dealer trade is undoubtedly facing some challenging times, it was clear from the outset, as the delegates gathered, that determination far outweighed any despondency, and that they had come along

once again to take home advice, inspiration and knowledge from speakers both inside and outside of their business spheres.

Opening the day's proceedings, *Service Dealer* owner Duncan Murray-Clarke thanked the day's sponsors: Kress, AGCO, EGO, Husqvarna, Ibcos, Kubota, Societe Generale Equipment Finance, STIHL, Toro, Yamaha, Milwaukee, Garden Trader and TAP. He went on to acknowledge the challenges faced by the dealer trade during 2024, with reasonable sales in the groundcare sector countered by the downturn in farmer investment and issues with

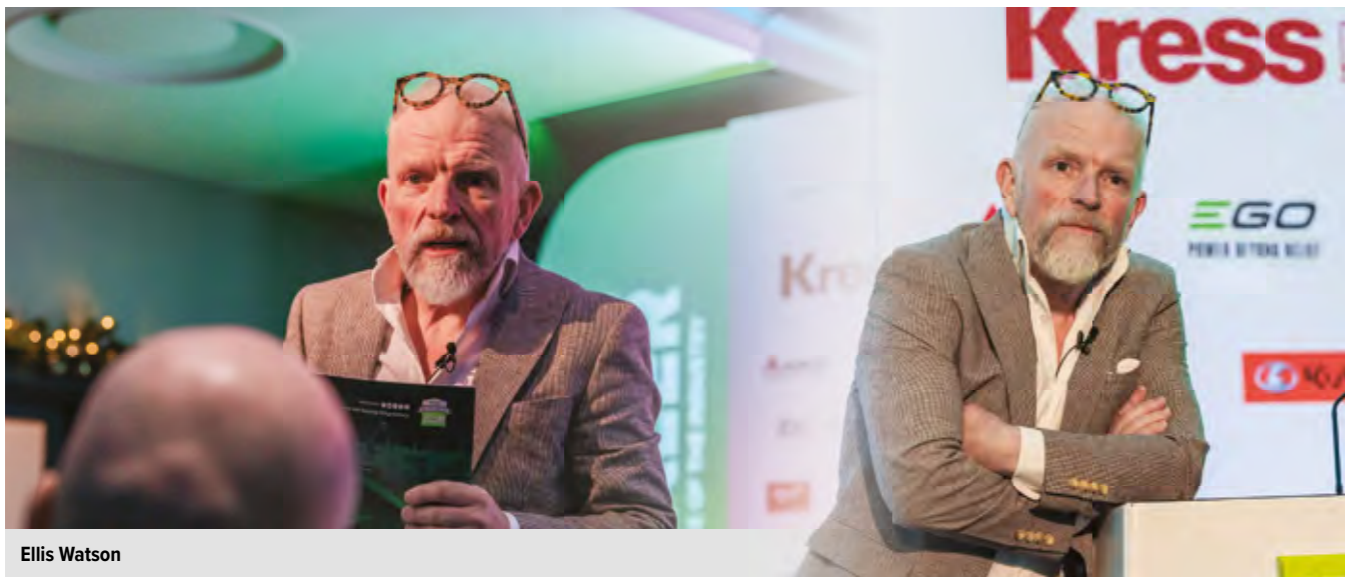
stocking, plus the trend towards battery-powered domestic/garden equipment with a reduced aftercare requirement, and dealers seeing the move of some major outdoor power franchises into large distribution chains.

"There's no doubt tomorrow's dealerships may have a different role to play in how they support customers," he acknowledged.

"With the nature of equipment changing, from autonomous tractors to robotic mowers, the nature of dealerships is changing too. I hope today's speakers will help delegates to positively tackle the challenges this brings."



Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke who hosted the day and led a Q&A panel discussion



Ellis Watson

**Ellis Watson**

As usual, the conference then opened with a keynote speaker drawn from outside the sector to provide a different viewpoint on commonplace business issues, regardless of company type or size. Having held senior management roles in sectors as diverse as TV and publishing (under such bosses as Rupert Murdoch and Simon Cowell), as well as bus companies and even the Scottish government, Ellis Watson paced the stage and, without notes, engaged the audience for an hour, drawing parallels that showed the research he had clearly put into his audience.

"I've been part of businesses that have been through huge financial or technological changes, and, to play my part, I've used the self-confidence I've developed from learning from my mistakes far more than any actual ability," he said.

"As an adopted child, I was lucky to have the same opportunities as my adopted family siblings, but I started work at 16 without passing any exams. I managed to secure an office job, and learned of the joy of going to work and realising how you can make a bit of a difference in whatever you do.

"It soon taught me the value of being curious and bold, and to try doing things you perhaps don't think you can do, realising that your barriers were probably of your own making.

"When I moved to take a job at Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, no matter who they were, everyone

started by learning the basics of the company – working in the postroom, for example. It's essential to behave the way you would want your staff to, and set an example throughout."

Ellis recalled how, as he worked his way up through the company, the business had had to adapt to huge changes, ranging from the technological shift to electronic printing to the largely consumer-driven pull of a move away from print to digital media.

"Big changes always cause big challenges, and bad implementation of well-meaning policy can cause huge problems. It requires patience to work out what should be changed and what shouldn't. Knowing what you're doing and what you have done is an advantage, but sometimes you need someone who knows neither of those things and can bring an outside view.

"As an example, when I was asked to speak here, I decided to do some investigation. I know very little about, for instance, garden machinery. It became apparent that the old, established model is that manufacturers sell to you to sell to customers, and then you support any further needs they have. But I also gathered that this is beginning to shift, with makers starting to sell direct.

"The need to find different ways to do things to adapt to that change is apparent, especially taken alongside what appears to be the second most significant change you're facing: difficulties finding and retaining the right staff.

"As part of my preparation, I walked into five domestic grasscare dealers to learn more about their businesses. I wanted to know the key issues that made the difference between a great year and a tough year.

"I learnt some interesting things, but the exercise underlined my opinion that your competitors will not solely be the reason you have a good or bad year. As well as the state of the economy, the key ingredients include not only your customers themselves, but also their willingness to adopt the technology you offer, especially as it changes.

"Whatever the machine, and whoever the customer, it's important to educate them to understand the value of that technology – and that's especially true among older buyers. Most know what matters most is value and not price."

He also urged delegates to ask themselves what attitude their dealerships need to make them thrive.

"In business, the biggest advantage – and disadvantage – is history and experience. Those things help to know what works, but fresh thinking helps work out what could work in the future. The more established they are, the more risk-averse business owners and managers can tend to become. Keep developing and discovering – get out of your own skin and challenge your own mode. Small changes to approach can make a big difference."

With the 'digital revolution' offering huge benefits but tending to reduce interactions, making customers feel



Karl McDermott

they are cared about will help retain them, suggested Ellis.

"It's about passion, something that needs to be shown by all employees in a business. Ensure no-one is hiding behind a desk or screen – make people feel you're pleased to see them and work with them. They need to see you care and value what they do."

He also urged further collaboration, using such opportunities as conferences and other gatherings to learn from (and compare approaches to challenges with) others in the sector, as it's likely some will have faced common issues.

"Conversely, though, also ask those closest to your issues – your own employee teams – how they think you can be better as a business, and empower them to come up with answers to challenges and make the necessary changes. Everything should be open to question, from your processes to your product offering to your service levels. Challenge the way you do things, think differently, and open your eyes to change. And, as an employer or employee, try to retain the learning, improving, developing, inquisitive nature of a child. Being an older father, it's something that resonates with me deeply."

**Karl McDermott**  
Lord's head groundsman

Being head groundsman at Lord's cricket ground, Karl McDermott reckons

to have 18,000 bosses among the Lord's and Middlesex County Cricket Club members. With 60 days of play during a six-month season translating into cricket taking place every three days across England and Middlesex games, and for both men's and women's teams, that places some significant demands on him and his team, and he acknowledged the help of his turfcare machinery dealers in managing these.

"I started groundsmanship 35 years ago at my local cricket club in Ireland, before moving in 2008 to Worcestershire County Cricket Club, followed by Hampshire as deputy head groundsman, later taking up the head role," explained Karl.

"Having latterly moved to Lord's as head groundsman, I'm lucky to have a good budget, but it's spent very carefully – largely with RT Machinery, my local dealership.

"They had been working with my predecessor, and it made sense to maintain the relationship. With a dealership at a previous job, I was feeling like a smaller fish as business practices changed. I have a very good relationship with RT, from which I get a family feel.

"My primary dealership needs are knowledge, personality, good machinery, approachability, availability and good aftercare. A good relationship with a sales contact over the long term is obviously also a plus – as is, of course, the ability to pick up the phone!"

"As a customer, I rely on my dealer's help, experience and knowledge, and to keep me up to speed on new technology that can help my job.

"We're not averse to adopting new tech that can make our work better, and we need our dealers to come forward and show us what new developments can do for us. Dealers are part of our business wheel, and an important part of what we're trying to achieve. I'm a customer, but I value my dealer as a partner."

**Andrew Ward MBE, Lincs farmer**

Well-known as a Cereals event host and farming video maker via his *WardysWaffle* YouTube channel, Lincs arable farmer Andrew Ward was also at hand to speak about what he looks for in a dealership.

"I've made some significant business changes over recent years, in machines and systems, and have



Andrew Ward MBE



Andrew Ward MBE with Service Dealer owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke



Jim Buttar

ensured I've included my staff in the decision processes, including examining operating costs. I think it's important dealers do the same when aiming to sell a new machine.

"There are significant differences between the operating costs of different key machine types. For example, when we ran a big four-tracked articulated tractor, almost half of the operating costs were fuel. On a combine, depreciation is the biggest cost. On a self-propelled sprayer, though, the hours worked means the biggest operating cost is the labour involved. If you can present figures to a potential customer to help them make a purchase decision, and/or study their current figures with them, it will help determine the best machine for the farm's needs.

"We've effected some major economies of operation through recent changes in our system, but not only by buying new equipment. Although we have recently invested significant money in a new tracked tractor to head our fleet, our main cultivator and drill are both well into their second decade – they are looked after, and their depreciation is very low.

"Also, learn as much as possible about the customer's cropping, fields and soils to help them find the best machines for what they want to achieve. Tour their fields with them, if possible. Farming is undergoing some of the biggest changes in decades, so what they may

have done previously may not be what they will do in the years to come."

Andrew acknowledged the need for two-way understanding between dealers and customers.

"While it's essential to know what your customers want from you, we do understand your challenges, particularly those of finding and financing good labour.

"Our nearest John Deere depot is relatively new, but they have worked hard to build a relationship with me, and I appreciate that, particularly with the support of dedicated technology specialists as well as sales, service and parts."

**Jim Buttar**

Twickenham head groundsman

People, materials and machinery are the three key inputs that determine the quality of elite sports surfaces, suggested Jim Buttar, head groundsman at Twickenham. He points out that the last of those requires significant dealer support.

"Our current pitch was constructed in 2012, with a planned ten-year lifespan. The fact that's being extended means our machinery has to play its part in keeping it up to scratch," said Jim, who is particularly data-driven in his decision-making.

"We also value our staff's decision-making input when it comes to things like machinery. They make

the daily decisions, and my role is more strategic."

"Bringing new product developments to key customers for trial as soon as possible – on the basis of providing solutions to known challenges – is a valued dealer attribute," said Jim.

"We've many more options today on inputs from seed and fertilisers to machinery, and manufacturers and dealers do ask us to trial developments. Send a message and photo, saying: 'Look what we have – would you like to try it?' Maintaining good customer contact like that is invaluable.

"We do our own R&D, including on machines, and provide suppliers with honest feedback. Any input has to do what it promises. Some exceed expectations, while others may need compromises, negotiations and price adjustments before we consider investing.

"We build dealer relationships on trust and a can-do attitude. Response is everything, and a phone call that says: 'Don't worry, we can fix it, and/or back you up until it's fixed,' means a lot."

Jim has moved to leasing most machinery, which, among other advantages, eliminates depreciation costs, and each fleet replacement deal is put to tender.

"The most recent took 18 months, so dealers need to bear this timespan in mind. Stadium sport involves long-term planning, and we're already working on 2028-29."

# Breakout sessions

## Cyber crime How criminals are hacking your business

With an estimated 7.6m annual UK attacks, increasing use by cybercriminals of artificial intelligence is making fake emails and websites harder to detect, warned two representatives of the Warwickshire Police Cyber Crime Unit in a presentation. Such scams as invoice redirection are increasingly commonplace.

Delegates were urged to ensure they have a clean, backed-up, segregated version of a company's IT system made as often as possible, for restoration should a malware attack be prompted by – for example – an infected email being accidentally opened.

Hackers are getting cleverer at researching companies and addressing individuals directly, as well as imitating a genuine contact in correspondence. Such 'spearfishing' means they investigate what you or your employees are really interested in, to make it more likely an email/attachment will be opened and engaged with.

The speakers warned that reading every email carefully, and looking for authenticity clues before taking any action, is crucial. Often hackers will try to target the person rather than the system and exploit interpersonal relationships, and employees should be told to always adhere to procedures without exception. The National Cyber Security Centre Cyber Action Plan (at [ncsc.gov.uk](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk)) offers tips from password advice to infection procedures.

Passwords should never be replicated, and should be strong, using – for example – three random words and special characters, with passwords saved to a password manager if encrypted. Two-factor authentication is a free security feature that asks for a second piece of security info – usually a code via text – to check user authenticity when logging in, and should be used when available, as it can protect even if a password is compromised. Warnings were given never to share authentication codes, and to update devices whenever genuinely prompted, as cybercriminals exploit software weaknesses.

Meanwhile, some 3.1m fake business domains – which may lead people to websites spelled or sounding similar to yours – are taken down annually by the NCSC. Owning the major variation domains of a registered Internet domain name (.co.uk, .com., etcetera, and key variations on the name itself) can help guard against this.

**More government or police advice, including online courses, is available at [www.ncsc.gov.uk](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk). Suspicious emails can be forwarded to [report@phishing.co.uk](mailto:report@phishing.co.uk) and suspicious texts forwarded to 7736, whereupon they are investigated by the authorities.**



Neil Wilkins

## AI in action From research to results

Neil Wilkins, marketing consultant and senior tutor at Cambridge Marketing College, sought to help delegates navigate the rapidly-evolving world of artificial intelligence, with the audience urged to harness it for good rather than fear it.

"There are, naturally, concerns over AI around jobs, ethics, legal issues, implementation challenges, the speed of change, data bias and privacy, and financial impact," he acknowledged.

"But AI offers significant potential to aid business personalisation, automation, efficiencies and forecasting.

"It can automate repetitive, low-value business activities, releasing time for other value-added tasks. It can also help with confident evidence-based decision-making, spotting trends and impacts that humans cannot.

"From stock analysis, analytics and scheduling, to copywriting and design,

there are tools that can be harnessed to aid all areas of a dealership.

"Tools like ChatGPT are designed to know everything about everything, but you need to feed them to guide their responses to your particular requests and make those responses relevant. ChatGPT, in particular, is like an over-caffeinated intern – it's keen to help, but cannot do anything without prompts/instructions. We've been asking questions of search engines like Google for decades. This tech, though, provides feedback – it works like a conversation with another party, and tries to understand what you want from it. The more time you spend with it, the better it learns you, and the better the output."

When feeding information to AI software, he suggested using the acronym PROMPTS:

**Persona:** be clear on the audience for the output

**Research:** tell it sources of information, types of research required

**Outputs:** define the ultimate goal

**Models:** share examples of similar outputs and background models

**Preferences:** converse with the tool to develop better and then best versions of the outputs

**Tone:** make clear the style, tone of voice, brand guidelines, etc., of your business

**Start:** begin by asking the AI: 'How can I brief you best?'

"In addition to ChatGPT – with which users can talk to gain a response, as well as type – AI tools that could help your businesses include Grok, which is the AI embedded in Twitter/X and can produce mock images, Perplexity, which can research trends, and Make, which can automate repetitive sales admin processes. There is an AI fact sheet and module coming soon on the *Service Dealer* toolkit – register for free at: [www.servicedealer.co.uk/dealer-toolkits](https://www.servicedealer.co.uk/dealer-toolkits)

"AI isn't a distant tech, but a present, practical, hybrid asset that's not about eliminating human connection, but building upon it to develop greater loyalty."

# Taking the plunge

Peter Hough took the leap from being a mobile groundcare mechanic business into a full-blown professional machinery dealership. LAURENCE GALE MSc, MBPR, visited Middlewich Machinery to discover the dealership's journey.

In early November, I was asked to be a member of the judging panel for 2024's Dealer of the Year Awards. Whilst reading through the many applications, I came across one which caught my attention, from Middlewich Machinery.



Owner Peter Hough

Set up by Peter Hough 15 years ago as a mobile groundcare mechanic business. Since then, with Peter's drive, determination and love for the industry, he has grown the business into a successful sales, service and parts dealership, recently acquiring a neighbouring dealer and employing a small number of staff.

Part of Middlewich's Awards entry reads: "Peter has bucked the industry trend by being one of the youngest dealership owners in the North, and, due to his passion and business acumen, has managed to create relationships with residential customers, small 'one-man band' contractors and large-scale national accounts. The machinery, service backup and parts availability that Middlewich Machinery offer has built up a very loyal and satisfied customer base, with a huge amount of repeat business."

Well, after reading that, I thought I must go and visit this dealership and find out more about their remarkable achievements. So, I soon found myself driving up to Middlewich to meet Peter and his staff to gain an insight into the company's drive and ambitions.

The dealership is situated on the family's farm, just off the main

A530 Holmes Chapel Road on the outskirts of Middlewich. Peter's father and grandfather ran a dairy herd, but have now stopped, with most of the land now rented out to other farmers. However, Peter has taken the opportunity to make use of the old dairy buildings and turn them into much-needed office, showroom, storage and workshop spaces.

I spoke to Peter about running a successful dealership that has built up a loyal customer base within the Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales area.

**Service Dealer:** How did you get into this industry?

**Peter Hough:** I was brought up on the farm and got involved in repairing and using ag machinery, taking the opportunity to attend a three-year land-based technology course at Reaseheath College in 2005. This gave me plenty of in-depth knowledge of the subject, which formed a solid backdrop to becoming an experienced technician.

In 2008, I completed my course, and got a job as a mechanic at the High Legh Golf Course in Knutsford, thoroughly enjoying the experience. It wasn't long before I found myself applying for another job, and was

due to start the following spring, but my mind was also thinking about starting my own business. After some feedback from several friends, I took the plunge and decided to set up my own mower repair and servicing company, investing in a van and going round many of the local golf courses, offering my services.

**SD:** What did you do to promote yourself in the early days?

**PH:** I advertised my services in the local press, and sent letters to many golf courses. Soon I was inundated in enquires, and begun building up a reliable customer base. Word got around about my reputation for looking after my customers. I also began taking on ag repairs at local farms. It was not long before I was getting asked to provide other services and machinery products.

**SD:** When did you move into your current premises?

**PH:** In 2010 as I needed somewhere to store and repair machinery. We soon adapted some of the farm's old dairy cowsheds and outbuildings, and, in 2012, I decided to invest in a Hunter Grinder to be able to undertake grinding work for golf clubs.

**SD:** Who are some of your prominent customers now?

**PH:** We enjoy a strong presence in golf, landscaping, local authorities, schools, contractors and ag. We do have a few domestic customers, but we tend to focus on professional businesses.

**SD:** When did you start selling new machinery?

**PH:** In 2018, I started selling tractors with the Kioti brand. I then took on my first employee, Brendon Cole, who still works for me at the same time as being a part-time fireman. Subsequently, the business has acquired more brands including Toro, Hayter, Echo, Wessex, Weibang, Cramer, Team Sprayers and Mantis.

To help cope with all this additional



Middlewich Machinery, as pictured on a snowy day in November 2024

workload, we now employ more staff, including mechanics, admin and an apprentice. Gemma Latham is our parts manager, who oversees the parts, spares and booking side of the business. We recently acquired a paperless system that records all transactions and monitors progress of work.

We have also moved all spares and parts into a new phase of our development, utilising another cowshed, along with making use of the large, covered areas for storing all machinery for repair.

**SD:** Have seasonal working patterns changed?

**PH:** Yes, we have seen vast changes in when we can do servicing and repairs. Gone are the days when traditionally mowers and machines would come in for a winter overhaul. We now work closely with our customers, and find a suitable period of the year to carry out works.

We have a large workshop area, and have a team of three or four full-timers working on repairs and servicing. We have a lot of ride-on and pedestrian machinery booked in for repairs, keeping Karl, Jason, Tony and our apprentice Jake busy.



Gemma Latham, parts manager



Apprentice Jake in the workshop



In the showroom



Cramer display

**SD: Are you seeing an upsurge in robotic mower sales?**

**PH:** Yes, we have noticed an increase in the sales of robotic mowers over the last 12 to 18 months. I am also starting to see many golf courses, asking about them in terms of becoming a labour-saving device, allowing the redeployment of staff to undertake other duties, freeing them from the laborious regimes of mowing of rough, fairway and practice areas. With many 18-hole golf courses running on only four or five staff, the opportunity of investing in robotic technologies is becoming more viable.

We currently sell Cramer robotic mowers, and I am seriously looking at taking on some other makes to offer a wider range of autonomous mowers.

**SD: Are you finding it hard to recruit new staff?**

**PH:** Yes, it is not always easy, particularly finding trained mechanics. Ag and amenity mechanics require a unique blend of mechanical, hydraulic, electrical and electronic diagnostic skills, specific to modern machinery. The specialisation makes the talent pool smaller.

Fewer young people are entering

vocational training programs for agricultural mechanics due to limited awareness or availability of specialised courses. Also, we are seeing an aging workforce with many experienced mechanics retiring, and not enough younger workers to replace them.

The agricultural and amenity maintenance sectors are often perceived as less glamorous compared to careers in automotive or tech industries - plus the physically demanding nature of the job and the rural locations where many mechanics work can discourage potential candidates, despite advancements in technology making the work less labour-intensive.

And, to top it all, many machinery dealerships often find it difficult to pay the going rate for fully trained mechanic technicians.

For me, it should not necessarily be about paying a high wage. We need to create a good working environment that offers many other benefits and incentives, such as good working conditions, flexible hours, and providing resources that improve efficiencies and work-life balance.

**SD: Finally, how do you see your business developing in the next few years?**

**PH:** Well, following from your last question on recruitment, we are now looking at employing some additional staff. We will be looking for a couple of mechanics, a sales manager, and another apprentice to join the company. Hopefully this will free me up to spend more time developing the business and looking at new marketing strategies. We also need to embrace additional brands, and look to bringing in a new range of products. There is a growing market in robot technologies, along with the opportunity to develop arboriculture services - plus, we need increase our online sales potential.

With so many new cordless products, we are seeing a vast number of batteries flooding the market. Once spent, they will need to be recycled. I see a need for regional recycling centres for these items to be properly stored and dealt with. We currently have no real guidance from manufacturers on the correct procedure for this. Who knows – perhaps there might be an opportunity in the future for me to provide such a service?

**SD: Thank you.**



# TOUGH TOOLS FOR TOUGH ALL-DAY TASKS

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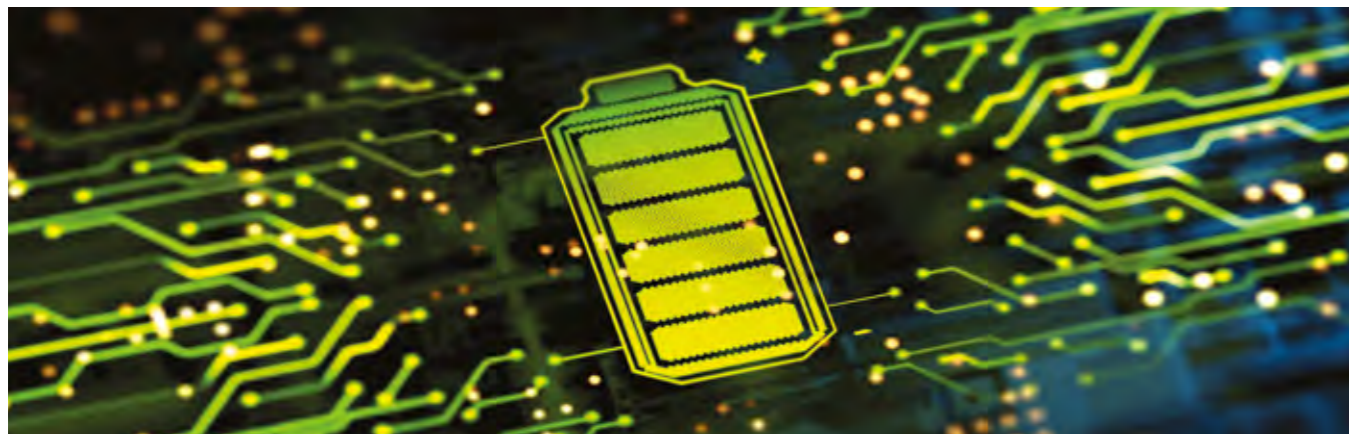


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# A battery revolution

Battery technology and application is changing the machinery offering of the land-based engineering sector, inevitably raising new issues, says KEITH CHRISTIAN. How much involvement will the UK dealer network have in dealing with the factors that arise?



**B**attery technology is central to many industries and users, including consumer electronics, electric vehicles (EVs), renewable energy storage, and more. Significantly, battery technology and application is changing the machinery offering of the land-based engineering sector, from small handheld products through to groundcare equipment and the larger machinery areas. But is the increasing use of lithium-ion batteries going to be the environmental disaster of the future?

On the consumer side of the market, handheld and walk-behind products are enabling suppliers to bypass the dealer network and sell direct or through mass merchants. This effects the technical support service offered by a dealer, and the profitability of a dealer (who can still be expected to provide support for a product not sold by themselves). The problem that occurs is with the end-of-life issues for batteries, and the inevitable

environmental issues of battery production and lack of current recycling. How will these issues be dealt with in the long term, and how much involvement will the UK's dealer network have in this process?

## Lead acid batteries (LABs)

Essentially, we are talking about two different types of battery technology. One is the traditional and ever-present lead acid battery that has stood the test of time over the last 160 years, and has, indeed, been used on lawnmowers for over 60 years. Lead acid batteries have powered just about everything since they first became available, and are still widely used today, as they can be more durable than alternatives.

The good news with lead acid batteries is that, according to the Battery Council International (BCI), 99% of LABs are recycled and 100% of a LAB can be reused. The BCI claim that LABs are the most environmentally sustainable, safe and trusted battery technology available for energy storage across

a wide range of applications.

As with all products, there is a downside, and that is the environmental issues that can be caused by the toxic lead used in the batteries if they are not produced and disposed of carefully. The extraction of the material required to produce a battery also causes environmental damage. The long history of LABs does mean most of the issues that are effecting modern battery technology have been overcome with established processes for end-of-life disposal and recycling.

## Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs)

Lithium-ion batteries can be recharged, as opposed to single-use lithium batteries, which cannot be recharged. LIBs tend to be lighter, and deliver more power and are quicker to charge than a LAB. Current technology does not generally allow for fast charging, which can degrade a battery more quickly and can have overheating and safety issues. The life expectancy of a LIB can be as limited as two to three years, depending on the number of charging cycles - although this is increasing as technology improves. This, of course, means there are higher rates of replacement required, and more issues with the volume of disposal, especially with the much larger EV battery packs.



The lighter, more powerful LIBs make them ideal for small handheld tools and lighter weight applications in bigger machines. This will also be the case for the larger batteries used in electric vehicles. Costs tend to be high because of the difficulties in mining the materials needed to produce the batteries, and the environmental issues caused by the mining processes. Mining and processing lithium, cobalt, nickel, and other essential materials is environmentally damaging, and often associated with ethical concerns (e.g. child labour in cobalt mining). This limits scalability, and increases the environmental footprint of battery production.

Alternatives – such as sodium-ion and magnesium-ion batteries – as well as increased recycling efforts, aim to reduce reliance on scarce materials in the future. Unfortunately, recycling facilities are not keeping up with the volume of LIBs being disposed of. The lack of efficient, scalable recycling processes for lithium-ion batteries results in environmental waste and loss of valuable



**“When an industrial Li-ion battery reaches the end of its useful life, if not reused, it must be recycled under UK Waste Battery Regulations. Disposal by incineration or landfill is prohibited under the regulations, therefore it is important to use services that can provide reporting on the process. Contained within Li-ion batteries are scarce and valuable recyclable materials such as cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese, which can be recycled and even reused in new Li-ion batteries.”**

Veolia Li-ion Battery Recycling Services

material, and an accumulation of e-waste and missed opportunities to recover critical limited resources.

Advancements in recycling technologies and circular economy initiatives are critical to the future lifetime management of LIBs and their environmental impact in the longer term.

The statement above is from Veolia Li-ion Battery Recycling Services in the UK, who recycle electric vehicle batteries. There are other companies that can or will be able to recycle LIBs in the future, but, right now, the ability to recycle is not able to keep up with the manufacture and end-of-life issues of LIB's both small and large.

There is a lot of information available online in relation to the recycling of batteries and the legislation that requires this to be done. Dealers and consumers should be aware of the risks of fire or explosion from faulty batteries (mainly LIBs), and how to deal with a potential fire. The battery cells can burn at different rates and create a prolonged fire issue that



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is not easy to contain. Store old or faulty batteries away from any combustible material, and preferably well away from any workspaces. It may be worth checking with your insurance company as to what they recommend for these issues, to ensure you are adequately covered by your provider.

The LIB technology will change as progress is made, but one must ask questions about how environmentally friendly LIBs are. The production of LIBs can be damaging to the environment, due to mining and manufacturing processes, which use large quantities of water. LIBs are reported as being less harmful than lead acid batteries, and easier to recycle, but this is maybe a debatable point, as views vary on the percentage of material that can be recycled for lead versus LIBs.

Whilst we may be thinking of smaller batteries in handheld and walk-behind products, we must also consider the much larger LIBs used in electric vehicles, and their effect on the environment in both production and in recycling, disposal or re-purposing. The emissions created in producing an electric vehicle are higher than those created producing a car with an internal combustion engine. That is shocking, and even worse when you consider that an electric car will only break even with a petrol car in eight years in terms of overall emissions – but the emissions created throughout the use of the electric vehicle will be less.

The big issue for larger batteries comes at the end of life of the EV's battery packs. Reports currently suggest that only between 5% and 9% of LIBs are recycled whereas 99% of lead acid batteries are fully recycled. Part of the problem is that LIBs are complicated to recycle, and the costs of recovering the usable elements from them is higher than the cost of mining the raw materials.

Materials for LIBs are harmful to the environment (due to the mining of the materials that are required to produce LIBs), and the production processes use large amounts of water, which can cause pollution problems. Recycling is currently limited, causing waste pollution and ongoing issues if disposed of in landfill. LIBs are considered e-waste, and have

been declared one of the world's most pressing issues for environmental and human health by the United Nations when they are not disposed of correctly.

Lead acid batteries can also be harmful to the environment, and a problem if not disposed of correctly – but the very high numbers of LABs that are recycled (up to 99%), and the 100% recycling processes, help to even out some of the downside issues.

### An overall cleaner environmental solution?

The benefits of LIBs are clear: lighter weight (giving more power); reasonable life spans; and less emissions during use. They are also helpful to the environment, in that they can store energy from renewable resources, such as wind and solar, for later use.

Battery technology comes at a high price for now, but progress is being made with alternatives, such as sodium-ion batteries (and with recycling processes and plants). Having had a bee in my bonnet about the revolution in the use of LIBs in recent times – and even after researching for this article – I am still not sure if they present us with an overall cleaner environmental solution to our need for energy, or if the old-fashioned combustion engine and its environmental issues are the lesser of two evils. Clearly, batteries generally have an important role in our future energy use, but we need to manage their life cycles better, and work towards less damaging technology and lower use of scarce mineral resources.

It is likely that the lithium-ion batteries may be our future nemesis, and end up as one of the world's all-time pollution problems, along with plastic waste.

For the land-based engineering dealer network, one has to ask you to be fully aware of what you are dealing with. Be responsible for the storage and disposal of your waste batteries, make sure you keep up with the legislation relating to batteries, and do all you can to repurpose batteries and educate others on the more serious nature of the useful – but harmful – LIBs that are out there.



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# A necessary industry evolution

Rhys Adams, national sales manager OPE at Milwaukee Tool, tells *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS, about the company's journey, the challenges and opportunities within the UK sector, and the promising advancements in battery-powered outdoor equipment.



**Service Dealer: What prompted Milwaukee Tool to enter the outdoor power equipment market in 2017?**

**Rhys Adams:** We wanted to use our expertise to create innovative solutions that would improve the productivity and durability of tools used by professional greenkeepers, landscapers and gardeners. By expanding into the OPE market, we've been able to deliver advanced, trade-specific solutions while upholding our commitment to providing high-quality, specialised tools for professionals. This strategic expansion ensures our end users benefit from increased efficiency, reliability and performance from their outdoor power equipment.

**SD: What did the company feel they were bringing to the sector?**

**RA:** Milwaukee Tool has long been a leader in providing heavy-duty, cordless

battery solutions to meet the needs of the market. Since joining the sector, we have brought a new level of leadership in cordless innovation by introducing a range of cutting-edge technologies that set us apart from our competitors, such as our REDLINK PLUS intelligence, POWERSTATE brushless motors, and our M18 Forge battery technology.

Our commitment to understanding end-users' needs goes beyond theory - we work closely with end users to test and refine our tools by developing a hands-on approach that allows us to adapt and innovate continuously, ensuring our products not only meet, but anticipate, our users' evolving demands. By getting feedback, we can continue to develop our products while setting new standards in the industry.

**SD: What have you learned about the UK sector in these intervening years?**

**RA:** Over the years, we have learned that the UK sector is incredibly dynamic, and rapidly evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of end users, which has shaped the market demands for continuous innovation and adaptability.

We've noticed a significant shift towards sustainability and eco-friendly solutions, pushing us to innovate even further. This approach confirms our commitment to staying ahead of trends and ensuring our products meet the highest quality and functionality standards.

**SD: Would you say that the battery-powered outdoor equipment market is becoming more competitive?**

**RA:** We've noticed a trend where many brands are enhancing their battery technology to deliver superior performance and longer-lasting power. Even traditional petrol-powered manufacturers are shifting their focus to battery power, recognising them as a viable and more sustainable alternative to petrol power.

This shift is driven by market

opportunities, and the growing emphasis on reducing carbon emissions is motivating change in the industry. Through this, we've been supporting the industry through innovation by adapting and improving our product offerings continuously while providing products end users truly need.

**SD: What do you do to differentiate your tools in the minds of professional end-users?**

**RA:** Our tools offer forward and backwards battery compatibility, which protects our users' investments in the Milwaukee Tool ecosystem.

We also prioritise ergonomic design and user comfort, ensuring that our tools perform exceptionally and are easy and comfortable to use. This investment is evident in our ongoing product development and support initiatives, ensuring our tools are always at the cutting edge of technology.

**SD: How many dealers do you have for your products, and are you looking for more?**

**RA:** Creating a strong dealer network is crucial to ensuring our customers receive exceptional support and seamless access to our products. Over the years, we've grown a substantial network of national and independent dealers across the UK. Nevertheless, we are still committed to expanding our dealer base to better meet the growing demands of our users.

**SD: What feedback have you received from your dealers who have taken on the brand so far?**

**RA:** The feedback from our dealers has been overwhelmingly positive - they appreciate our robust support, which helps them better serve their customers. Similarly, there has been a significant demand for our products from end-users, highlighting the strong market presence and reputation Milwaukee Tool's brand has in the sector. Our dealers have also noted the reliability and durability of our tools, which has helped them build trust with their customers.

**SD: What do you expect from your Milwaukee Tool dealers, and what can they expect back in return from yourselves?**

**RA:** We would like our dealers to commit to the Milwaukee Tool brand by embracing our products and values. Currently, our job site solutions (JSS) teams provide training and hands-on demonstrations for dealer staff and customers, while also providing technical support to ensure our dealers are well-equipped to promote and sell our products, working together to create demand and drive sales - ensuring mutual growth and success.

**SD: Some dealers tell us they are uneasy with the transition from petrol to battery-powered tools. What would you say to them?**

**RA:** We understand the concerns surrounding the transition from petrol to battery-powered tools. However, this



is a necessary evolution in the industry, driven by environmental considerations and technological advancements. Battery-powered tools offer numerous benefits, including lower emissions, reduced noise and smaller operating costs over time. We are committed to supporting our dealers through this transition, providing the resources and education they need to make the shift to battery-power smoothly and confidently.

**SD:** A dealer reader recently wrote to us, saying: “Electric propulsion does not adequately replace internal combustion, yet there seems to be some blind faith that the technology will miraculously get better.” How do you respond to that?

**RA:** Milwaukee Tool is a pioneer in cordless technology, and launched lithium-ion batteries in the UK back in 2008. Since then, battery technology has advanced remarkably, with our latest offering, M18 Forge batteries – which are a testament to these innovations – offering superior performance and longevity. We have consistently invested in research and development to push the boundaries of what battery technology can achieve.

We believe in continuous improvement, and are confident that ongoing research and development will further enhance battery propulsion capabilities, surpassing internal combustion engines.

**SD:** How are you helping dealers with the disposal of used, end-of-life batteries?

**RA:** Environmental sustainability is a core value of ours, and we work in line with the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations that were established in 2014. We have implemented a comprehensive recycling take-back service to ensure that used batteries are disposed of correctly, preventing harmful chemicals and metals from contaminating the environment.

We also collaborate with certified recycling partners to ensure that all materials are processed responsibly.

The recycling partners can help recover valuable materials – such as

lithium, cobalt, manganese and nickel – by recycling power tool batteries with us. This not only reduces the environmental impact of mining, but also supports the production of more sustainable batteries and tools.

**SD:** Are there more products to come from Milwaukee Tool to interest dealers?

**RA:** Absolutely! We’re excited to announce a robust lineup of new products on the horizon. This year alone, we’ve already launched 30 new products, with plans to introduce around 50 more throughout 2025.

**SD:** Do you see legislation playing an increasingly important role in the growth of battery-powered tools?

**RA:** Legislation is becoming a significant driver in the growth of battery-powered tools. There are already examples in the UK and globally, where communities have banned the use of petrol tools in favour of more environmentally-friendly alternatives. Government incentives and subsidies for adopting this technology also encourage more businesses and consumers to switch to battery-powered tools. This trend is expected to continue and intensify, further propelling the adoption of battery-powered tools.

**SD:** And finally, what do you see as the future for Milwaukee in the UK?

**RA:** Milwaukee’s future in the UK is very promising. We plan to expand our product range substantially, enabling us to offer even more solutions to our customers. Additionally, we plan to strengthen our partnerships with dealers across the UK, enhance our market presence, and continue providing the industry with new product ranges.

Our long-term vision includes becoming the go-to brand for professionals seeking reliable and high-performance tools, while contributing to a more sustainable future through our innovative products.

**SD:** Thank you.



# Italian show offers antidotes to ag challenges

Exhibitors at November’s EIMA International farm equipment show – held in the Italian city of Bologna – acknowledged the challenges currently facing ag machinery makers and dealers, but countered them with a raft of innovative new products. MARTIN RICKATSON toured the halls.

**W**ith lots of big international names from the farm machinery sector based in Italy (think CNH, SDF, ARGO, Merlo, Maschio and many more), in addition to multiple component makers, the performance of the country’s manufacturing base – and of its home customer market – are good barometers of the health of European and world ag equipment business.

It was heartening, therefore, to see crowded halls, plenty of innovation, and lots of new product introductions at November’s EIMA International farm machinery show in Bologna, even if the trade itself - as with that of most countries - is enduring some tough times currently. Italian farmers, like their counterparts elsewhere, are reining in their spending amid support cutbacks, policy uncertainty, higher farm input costs, rising interest rates and large rises in machinery prices.

Manufacturers, importers and dealers have seen growth of large

inventories and higher stocking pressures, a problem traceable back to Covid-caused component supply issues. Currently, Italian dealers, as well as domestic manufacturers, have excess inventory and a dearth of customers.

Italy is Europe’s third-largest tractor market, and FederUnacoma, the Italian agricultural machinery manufacturers’ federation and EIMA organiser, calculates registrations fell by 15.6% in the first three-quarters of 2024, while combine numbers fell by 31.9%. In a tale that will be familiar to UK dealers, delayed confirmation of revised investment support schemes has not helped with the downturn, which, it is suggested, may last for at least another year.

Despite this picture, though, November’s biennial EIMA International farm machinery show saw almost 347,000 visitors through the doors over the event’s five days. And there was plenty new from the 1,750 exhibitors across the 17 halls, covering 13 hectares of the BolognaFiere exhibition centre.

## Tractor news

Aside from a new tractor suspension system for its Quadtrac tractors, the biggest news from **Case IH** was the European debut of its new flagship dingle-rotor Axial-Flow combines.

The 775hp AF10 and 635hp AF9 feature a new design, with engines mounted lengthways to simplify power transmission efficiency, reducing required harvesting engine speed from 2,100rpm to 1,900rpm, benefiting fuel economy. AF10 grain tank capacity is 20,000 litres, with a 210 l/sec



Case IH AF10 combine

unloading rate, while comparable AF9 figures are 16,000 litres and 159 l/sec. Draper headers up to 15.2m (50ft) are available for the AF9, while units up to 18.6m (61ft) are available for the AF10. Wider elevators match the increased crop intake. The AF9/AF10 retain the single-rotor Axial-Flow design, but, at 3.67m, the 762mm-diameter AFXL unit is said to be the sector's longest, with claimed benefits for crop flow, fuel efficiency and straw quality, while total threshing and separation area is up to 5.1m<sup>2</sup>.



Kubota M7004 tractors

**Kubota** marked ten years of full-scale farm tractor manufacturing of the M7 series at its French factory by launching revised M7004 130-175hp models. They feature a 6.1-litre, four-cylinder Kubota engine, with either a powershift or KVT (Kubota Variable Transmission), the latter now featuring updated pre-set droop settings, boosting fuel efficiency and allowing transmission sensitivity to be customised.

The cooling pack has been repositioned for enhanced access, as have the fuel and DEF tanks, and a new automatic assisted parking brake is integrated within the tractor shuttle, while the K-Monitor touchscreen benefits from a new quad-core processor, which, Kubota says, offers more functionality and faster processing.

A new 360-degree vision system from **McCormick** earned the ARGO brand an EIMA Innovation medal. The feed from four cameras is accumulated by a central processing unit equipped with specially-designed

software. Functions include a radar view to identify the distance from obstacles, a 360° view around the tractor, and a projection of the tractor trajectory. The feed from each camera can also be viewed with zoom, and, at the front and rear, the view can be used to aid implement hitching and monitoring during work.



The new McCormick 360-deg vision system



First appearance for tractor giant TAFE

Indian tractor giant **TAFE** made its EIMA debut, and says it is looking to continue its push into Europe. With more than 80 global markets already served, the firm now offers a range of 18-100hp models in hydrostatic and mechanical, cabbed and open-station formats. It plans to exhibit at LAMMA 2025 under a newly-formed importer, TAFE Tractors UK/ROI Ltd, which has already signed five new dealers and is seeking more.



New Holland FR forager

**New Holland** showed its refreshed T5 tractors, new midi excavators from CNH's acquisition of Sampierana, and a revised FR Forage Cruiser 476-911hp self-propelled forage harvester range, incorporating as an overload warning sensor. It uses a spout-mounted radar sensor that monitors the crop flow leaving the machine, and detects any change in its rate in relation to the forage harvester's forward speed. Should crop ejection speed start to slow below 35kph, a warning is issued to encourage forward speed to be reduced. If the speed falls below 6kph, feed roll operation stops immediately.

### Handler developments

**Merlo** also won a medal scheme 'mention' with its TFe43.7, which brings the advantages of a zero-emissions handler to a full farm-scale size machine. Previewed a year ago at Agritechnica, and now entering production, the machine is capable of lifting 4.3t to 7.0m. Run time is reckoned to be eight hours in 'average' operations, and charge time is three-and-a-half hours. Top travel speed is 33km/hr. A further model with greater battery capacity for a longer runtime was unveiled at the show.

Other telehandler news included Italian maker **Dieci's** EIMA Innovation Award win for its Fast Attach implement attachment system. Designed for automation and speed changing and connection of buckets, grabs and forks, it is claimed to be the only

one of its type which connects all mechanical, hydraulic and electrical couplings. It is based on a hook-type headstock, with a faceplate that connects the implement mechanically and plugs in a single hydraulic service. This can be optionally extended to include a second hydraulic supply, a double-acting feed, and electrical and digital connections.



Dieci's fast attach implement system



Smart Weighing system from Manitou

**Manitou's** Smart Weighing System earned the French firm an Innovation Award. Fully integral and wirelessly connected, its rapid tare function means no calibration is required, regardless of the attachment fitted. The system is configured from the operator touchscreen, and users can define the type of weighing required, including basic, cumulative, target and ration functions. Weighing data can be recorded in manual or automatic mode, and data is transferred to, and accessible from, a myManitou app. Accuracy is reckoned to be within +/- 2%.

A new entrant into the ag sector is Italian manufacturer **Magni** founded by a former Manitou employee in 2013. Since then, Magni has focused on construction-type rotary telehandlers. It previewed three models out of a seven-strong farming-focused line (the THA 3.6, THA 4.8, and THA 5.10), with the first number equating to the lift capacity in tonnes and the second to the



Magni's new ag telehandler



Maschio Gaspardo Jumbo X

### Cultivation innovation

**Maschio Gaspardo** reckons it has introduced the world's widest power harrow with its 10m Jumbo X, formed of a reinforced frame consisting of three main sections arranged around a telescopic and folding design for road transport, aided by a patented four-wheel transport system. ISOBUS-based control includes the ability to automatically manage headland sequences, including outer wing lifting.

**Alpego** showed a power harrow prototype powered by a 700 V DC electrical supply. Each of the five

electric motors drives an input gear, and from here, as with a conventional power harrow, the rotors are connected to each-other by a series of gears. In this way, each electric motor is electronically controlled to provide the power and torque required by each rotor, with potential for automatic real-time adaptation to changing soil conditions, and consequent fuel and wearing metal savings.



Power harrow prototype from Alpego

# A positive SALTEX

The GMA's show at the NEC at the end of October seemed to satisfy exhibitors with the delivery of quality end-users to the aisles, despite the second day feeling a tad on the quiet side. *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS reports.

**S**ALTEX took place at the Birmingham NEC back in October, with perhaps something to prove.

2024's show followed on quickly from a successful GroundsFest - so comparisons were inevitably going to be drawn, especially when there was such a crossover of brands exhibiting and visitors in attendance.

I think what the GMA pride themselves on (especially in the years since their show moved inside the halls of the NEC) is that they attract quality punters. Unlike in the old days - when huge teams of turf professionals could be found roaming Windsor racecourse, kicking tyres and collecting free gifts - SALTEX nowadays say they attract top-level decisionmakers. They boast that those in charge of the purse strings can be found perusing the stands.

Geoff Webb, CEO of the GMA, confirmed as much to me when I spoke to him on the first day of the show. He said he trusts the quality of their database and their attendees. Also, he was pleased with the attendance on that first day, which, after a slow-ish start, definitely felt busy by 10am through to 3pm-ish. Day two was undeniably quieter. However, there were certainly enough visitors having serious conversations on stands to make the day worthwhile. In a post-show press release, the GMA said that, in total, they

saw 7,300 visitors across the two days.

Geoff also told me how proud he is that their event is dedicated to promoting the turfcare industry in the best light possible, and, crucially, in taking the show's revenue and reinvesting it back into the sector. I don't think anyone can deny this is an important and worthy endeavour, and one which, I suspect, plays a large part in the thinking of all exhibitors.

Speaking to stand holders, I got the impression that they also agreed with Geoff that this notion of quality visitors remains the case. And it needed to, because there is, of course, increased competition these days on the turfcare machinery show scene.

For those that did choose to exhibit, and, indeed, those that did choose to pay it a visit, I came away with the impression that a valuable time had been had. There was a real sense of the unknown, I think, before the show kicked off, but, from what I gather, exhibitors were, on the whole, pleasantly surprised with what they experienced.

Certainly, each day - before the inevitable post-lunch migration home (or to Wetherspoons) - there was a genuine buzz about the place that business was being discussed and leads being gathered. The footprint of the whole show felt smaller, perhaps, than in years gone by, but, with the excellent displays put on by all, it had the vibe of a prestigious, high-end business event.

## Battery and robotics to the fore

Once again, in terms of the products on display, battery power and robotics were very much at the forefront. One could pretty much play 'hunt the petrol product' around the aisle - which, as we discovered at Equip during the same month, isn't the same in the U.S. (see our *Digital Special Report* online now and our write-up next issue).

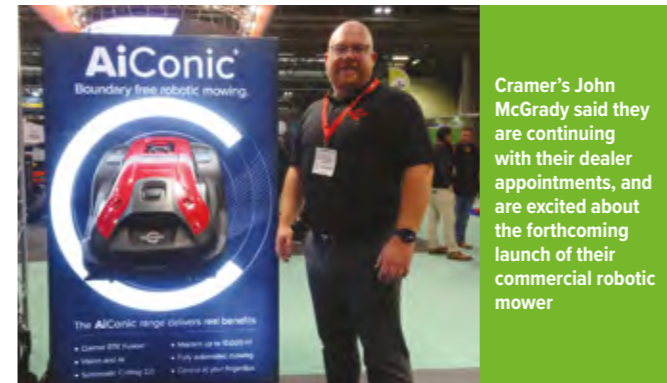
I spoke to many of the exhibiting suppliers, whose products our dealer readers will stock in their stores - and I'd say they seemed happy with the show. A refrain I heard repeatedly was that perhaps GroundsFest is more of a landscapers' show, and SALTEX is geared for the turf professionals (of multiple disciplines). So they were making some different leads.

I think, overall, a 'well done' is due to the GMA for putting on a show that delivered once again. The pressure will have been on behind the scenes, but I think the Association can be applauded for rising to the occasion.

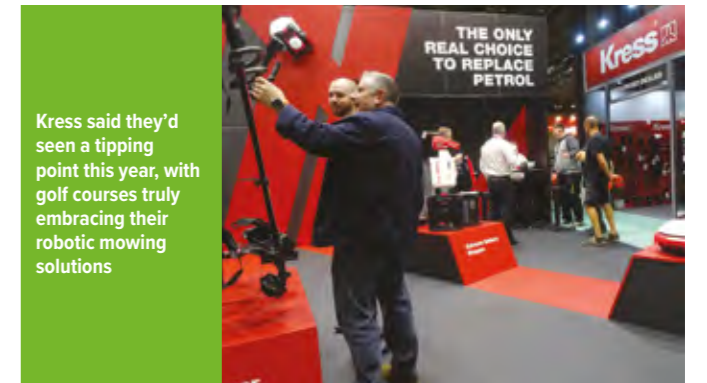
Whether the industry's calendar can continue forever, with two shows aimed at similar audiences (featuring a wide crossover of the same exhibitors) in consecutive months, we shall see. Whilst the current setup remains, though, *Service Dealer* will enjoy meeting up with friends and colleagues, and reporting back to our valued dealer readers on what we find.



The aisles filled up for the peak hours each day



Cramer's John McGrady said they are continuing with their dealer appointments, and are excited about the forthcoming launch of their commercial robotic mower



Kress said they'd seen a tipping point this year, with golf courses truly embracing their robotic mowing solutions



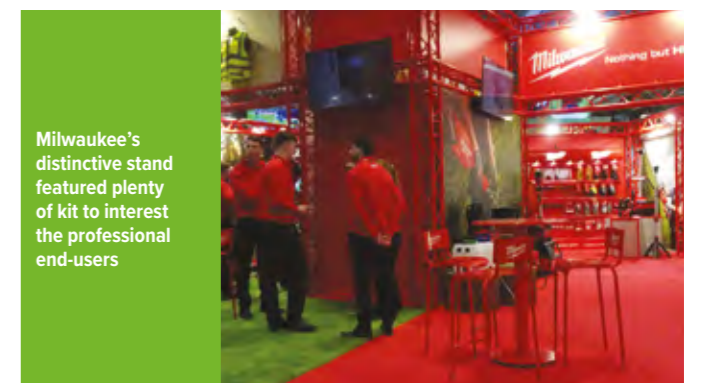
EGO's eye-catching stand drew the crowds



Kubota's David Hart said the key industry trend is not so much about power sources, but rather automation



On the Hayter branded stand, Toro UK's Craig Hoare said they'd experienced massive interest in their battery-powered rear roller Harriers



Milwaukee's distinctive stand featured plenty of kit to interest the professional end-users



Husqvarna's Jonathan Snowball (right) told *Service Dealer* editor Steve Gibbs they'd had a pleasing mix of top-level sporting establishments and landscapers on their stand to check out their robotic solutions and handheld battery tools



STIHL were allowing visitors to try out some of their battery-powered range in the Demo Zone



# BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

## Warranty claims still causing dealers frustrations

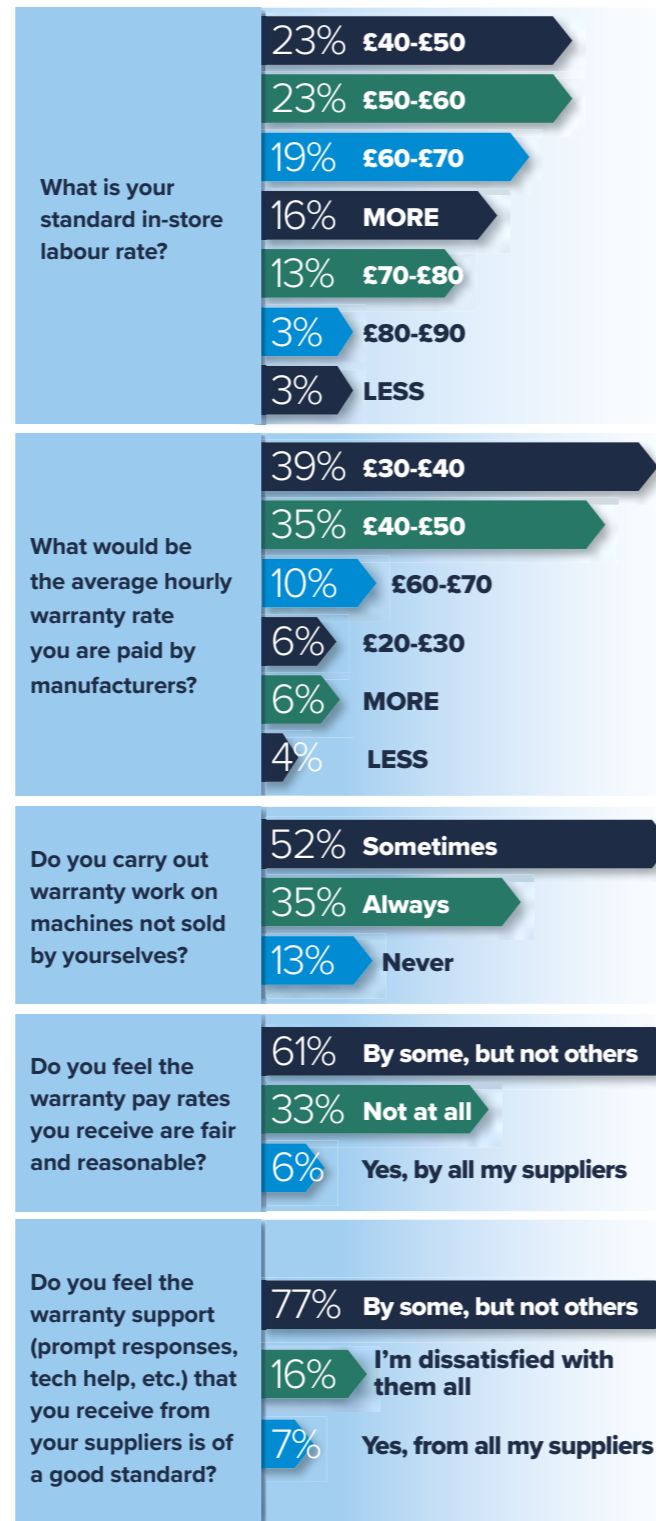
Dealers cite payments, support and time expectations as causing difficulties

**T**he results of our end-of-2023 warranty claims survey, conducted with our dealer readers, unfortunately reveal ongoing frustration with the systems implemented by manufacturers.

Dealers were asked: "Do you feel the warranty pay rates you receive are fair and reasonable?" Only 6% of respondents agreed this was the case with all their suppliers. The majority (61%) felt it was true for some suppliers but not others.

Equally concerning was their response on whether dealers felt the warranty support provided by suppliers met a good standard. A significant 77% indicated that this was the case with only some suppliers, highlighting significant inconsistencies across suppliers.

Feedback from dealers included numerous comments indicating that, while there have been some improvements compared to last year's survey, many believe that certain suppliers still have a long way to go to fully meet their expectations.



## Your say...

What is your take on the warranty situation this year?  
Are there any changes you'd like to see the manufacturers make?

- Some companies are making warranty claims procedures on the garden machinery side very difficult. I suspect it is to make it less likely for dealers to lodge a claim. Some examples being: paper forms to be filled out and posted (not accepting emailed copies or having an online system); dealers' purchase invoice numbers to be quoted; claims going missing; excessive processing times; and incorrect payments (e.g. refunding 'promo' price for a machine, then expecting the dealer to order a replacement which is billed at in-season price, with the dealer expected to eat the loss).
- Agricultural machinery manufacturers significantly impact their dealers when they fail to provide adequate warranty reimbursement and process payments promptly. Dealers are not performing warranty work for their own benefit, but to address issues arising from manufacturing defects or design flaws which are frequently beyond their control. This work demands skilled labour, time and resources, which are a direct cost to the dealer. When reimbursement rates are insufficient, or payments are delayed, it strains the dealer's cashflow and profitability, undermining their ability to invest in staff, training, or customer service improvements. Such practices not only erode trust, but also risk damaging the dealer-manufacturer relationship, ultimately affecting customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the competitive agricultural machinery market.
- Warranty is a huge cost to the business. Not only are the rates greatly reduced compared to our standard charge out rate, it reduces available hours to charge out at the higher rate for routine service work and repairs. We have to employ specific people to handle the warranty data entry and reconciliation, and, as machines become more sophisticated, they become inherently more unreliable, creating a higher level of warranty claims. Factory-trained service support personnel are becoming fewer and fewer. Manufacturers need to build in more reliability, and pay back in line with our standard hourly rate.
- We should be paid a fair hourly rate, we should be credited quickly, and they should take into account all the time taken for doing claims, paperwork and putting up with all the hassle and abuse from some customers. An absolute minimum of £50 per hour should apply now.
- Manufacturers' allowed times are unrealistic. They seem to be based on a 'perfect world' scenario (everything comes apart easily, as new). There is no allowance for diagnostic times from any manufacturer we do warranty work for, and the warranty times seem to assume that the dealers are repairing the same faults on the same machines daily in order to achieve such a well-practiced speed. In reality, not all faults are immediately obvious, and they can take some time to diagnose.

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# Pumped, prepared and ready to rock!



**Sara Hey**, vice president of operations and development at Bob Clements International – 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, Sara considers what to focus on, to get your sales team ready to hit the ground running for the next busy season.

**T**here's nothing better than a sales team that's pumped, prepared, and ready to rock when the busy season hits. Think of this time as the preseason training camp for your dealership - what you do now will pay off big when your customers are ready to buy. Here are three must-do steps to prepare your sales team to bring in those sales!

## The Golden List

(Your next customers are right under your nose!)

**Let's start with a little secret:** you already have the customer list you need. Yep, it's true! The magic group to target? Anyone who has paid off their unit, has a unit that's out of warranty, or maybe has started looking a little longingly at the Jones' shiny new toy next door. When these things align, we call it the lifecycle - that sweet spot where customers are ready to upgrade.

Help your sales team understand this lifecycle concept and get them laser-focused on these customers. They're primed and ready, just waiting for the nudge. And since you already have their info, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. It's all about working smart!

## Invest in Training (Because winging it isn't a strategy)

**Let's be real:** your team needs ongoing training to keep that sales funnel full, close deals, and handle objections like pros.

By helping your salespeople brush up on their skills, you're setting them up to convert those "maybes" into "heck yes!" Plus, your investment now will keep the sales momentum strong when things get busy.

## Embrace the CRM (Yep, it's time!)

I know, I know... CRM! It's the tool everyone loves to hate, but here's the thing: if you want to create an amazing customer experience, and keep tabs on what's really happening with sales, it's a non-negotiable. A CRM will help your team manage relationships, track their pipeline, and – let's be honest – keep things from slipping through the cracks. Now, here's how to make sure your team actually uses it:

### ● WEEKLY CHECK-INS:

Review their notes, follow-ups, and progress. This keeps everyone accountable and reminds them it's not just a "data dump" tool - it's a part of their job.

### ● CELEBRATE WINS LOGGED IN THE CRM:

When a sale closes and all the CRM info is up-to-date, shout it out! Recognise the behaviour you want to see.

### ● TIE IT TO PERFORMANCE:

Include CRM usage in their performance review. When it is tied to their growth, they are more likely to keep it up-to-date.

So, start working on these three strategies now, and, when busy season arrives, you'll have a sharp, skilled, and organised sales team ready to bring in those deals! With the right list, the right training, and a CRM to stay on top of things, you'll be ready to make this forthcoming season your best yet.



# Planning and preparation



In his first Diary entry, **Les Gammie** – of Forfar-based Gammies Groundcare – tells us of the work that goes into setting up the dealership for the coming season.

**S**o, at the time of writing this – my first 'Diary of a Season' entry for *Service Dealer* – at the start of December, it is definitely a busy part of the year for me.

Recently, I have been occupied with winter stocking, ensuring we have the right machines – and enough of them – for next year. At the same time, we're dealing with our various manufacturers, who are looking to offload their abundant stock into the dealers' hands. Using our forecasting - as well as the latest crystal ball for 2025 and beyond - we have almost managed to juggle our way through this important task.

Involved in this is our budgeting for next year, deciding where our spend will go, and ensuring that the return is worthwhile. One aspect brought up by the various emails from show

secretaries at this time of year is what events we will be attending in 2025. Shows and events are a large, increasing cost to the company, but also a continuous opportunity to increase awareness of ourselves. However, a large majority of them are not local for us, meaning it is a cost versus reward decision that we must weigh up. With the increasing costs across the board, from stock to labour, this is a challenge we have to account for within our budget planning for 2025 to ensure the depot is operating both efficiently and profitably.

All this planning and preparation is being done while we are still operating, with our sales team busy with a high demand for winter maintenance equipment. Meanwhile, our parts, servicing and marketing departments are encouraging and fulfilling winter repairs and servicing.

At this time of year, some staff require encouragement to take their holidays before year end. This means that, although we have additional tasks to handle as the year wraps up, we are often operating with fewer staff.

As well as within the depot, this is the time of year where manufacturers like to review their (and our!) performance for the year, and prepare goals and targets for next year. This has meant we have had various dealer conferences to attend across the country. This takes time away from the depot itself, but is equally important to provide us with the vital information we need to prepare for the year ahead. When I am back at the depot, it is full steam ahead, stock checking across all departments so that we are ready for the best present of them all – a stock audit on New Years Eve!



Based in Forfar, in the heart of Angus, Gammies specialise in groundcare equipment, and stock an extensive range of agricultural, horticultural and landscaping machinery. Their customers include local authorities, amenity contractors, golf clubs, farmers and members of the public. Established in 1968, the company today employs 25 people, priding themselves on providing excellent advice, first-class equipment, top-quality aftersales support and the highest possible standards of customer service



## RETIREMENT



# Succession and selling up

No small privately-held business will stay static forever – a change in ownership is inevitable. But what are the considerations for owners looking to the future? How can they plan ahead, and what are the core issues to apply thought to, asks *SME Digest* editor, ADAM BERNSTEIN?

## It's all about the why

According to Freya Summers, corporate partner at Wright Hassall LLP, those looking to move their business on need to think about why they're looking for change. As she says: "Understanding the motivations for sale - retirement, derisking or seeking additional funding for growth - will determine how to approach the project."

From then on, as soon as discussion around the sale starts to take shape, Summers believes that engaging experienced advisors early in the process "allows plenty of time to assess an exit strategy, and affords time for a thorough review of the business." This should identify potential areas that may affect the valuation, type of purchaser or funder for the transaction.

## But who?

There are multiple routes to an exit – and Summers lists them.

The first she highlights is a trade or competitor purchaser. This, she says, is the most traditional method of sale. She says: "The business is marketed, and

ultimately sold to a trade purchaser. They may be a competitor, an expanding company, or an overseas operation looking for a UK enterprise."

Next is a sale to private equity. This is a sale made to a private equity group that acquires the shares in the company. Of this, Summers says: "Typically, private equity groups will buy mature proven businesses with demonstrable growth strategies."

Then there's the management buyout - the acquisition of a company by its existing management team, often supported by either private equity finance or by traditional institutional debt finance.

Another option that Summers points to is an Employee Ownership Trust. Akin to a management buyout, it differs in that "an Employee Ownership Trust transfers the shares in the company to a trust established for the benefit of all employees of the company."

It's also possible to pass a company onto the next generation. However, Summers says that this requires meaningful thought and planning, including whether the company or

business is set up for this, the children are actively working in the business, and whether there are any third-party shareholders who may be affected.

## How best to move the business on?

Changing ownership of a business is, in essence, about moving value to a new owner. Summers highlights that there are two mutually exclusive ways to do this – a share sale or an asset sale – with buyers and sellers take opposing stances. "They are," she says, "very distinct transactions, which result in different liabilities and tax positions – which often have an impact on price."

In a share sale, a buyer is purchasing the entire entity, which includes all assets, liabilities and obligations, a 'warts and all' approach. But in an asset sale, the buyer 'cherry-picks' only the assets they want.

Summers explains: "In a share sale, there would usually be far more detailed due diligence, along with more detailed and lengthy assurances, or 'warranties,' provided by the exiting seller."

Generally speaking, a seller is likely

to prefer a share sale, while a buyer may prefer an asset purchase.

## The need for good advice

Since selling a business is often the result of a lifetime of work it's important that sellers surround themselves with the right team of advisors. In Summers' view, it's best to "appoint advisors that understand your marketplace, the type of business you have, and who have experience in similar successful exits."

It's possible, however, that the process starts after an approach from a buyer. In relation to this, Summers warns to not overlook the need for specialist corporate finance sales advice. She said: "The process may go straight to the legal advisors, but this can prove troublesome if the commercials of the transaction have not been finalised." She explains that could leave much of the commercial negotiations – price, for example - to the seller, which can be difficult to manage. In her opinion, corporate finance advisors help the process through to completion, and deal with sticking points.

## Maintaining confidentiality

Of course, confidentiality is critical – particularly in the early stages of the transaction, when one or more bidders may be interested in making an offer. This is especially true when such a bidder is a competitor. This is the reason Summers says that it is standard practice to put in place a nondisclosure agreement (NDA), which provides "stringent undertakings from potential purchasers that any information they acquire will be utilised solely for the purpose of analysing the transaction."

Confidentiality also allows for reassuring conversations about the future of the business to occur when the time is right to introduce the new owners. However, it needs to be recognised that a purchaser may want access to some employees or key customers. This can be difficult to manage, and so may require additional NDAs.

## Establishing value

Lastly, when it comes to what a business is worth, Summers states:

"Understanding what the market may consider a reasonable price may influence the type of transaction undertaken." She points out that, often in sales or investments, an 'enterprise value' or 'price-to-earnings ratio' are used. This takes the profits of a business and seeks to determine an appropriate multiplier of that figure to land on a price. For example, using a price-to-earnings ratio of five for a business that makes £50,000 in post-tax profits would mean that the business would be valued at £250,000.

But determining what the appropriate multiplier is is often tricky. Certain sectors, such as tech startups, have higher multiples due to the level of rapid growth expected. Similarly, trendy sectors can carry higher multiples – in 2023, there were good multiples for ecommerce and professional services sectors.

And to this, Summers adds: "Proven annual profits can also realise a higher multiple, as investors will give higher multiples to those business in which they can see scalability." In such 'buy and build' arrangements, Summers explains that private equity investors pay higher multiples for those businesses they believe can be grown quickly and then sold again. Ultimately, Summers thinks that a combination of thought, early planning and good advice will make for a good sale.

## Take good advice

And then there's the matter of tax law, which is another quagmire ready to swallow up all who go near it. There are issues over what happens if the business is run as a sole tradership or a partnership. And then there's the matter of the business premises. And on top of that are issues relating to capital gains tax and distributions – but that, as they say, is an entirely different story.

## In summary

Succession planning – or, rather, how to move the business on to another owner – is a tediously complex subject. There's no DIY option here, or, at least, none if the seller wants it.

## TAXATION

# Trying to lower business rates

Business rates as a method of paying for local services on non-domestic property have a surprisingly long and storied history that goes back to the Vagabonds Act of 1572. But, history aside, the fact remains that business rates are as unpopular as they are expensive – and ratepayers naturally want to seek to find ways of reducing them, says *SME Digest* editor ADAM BERNSTEIN.

## A great dislike

As for why they are so disliked, Alex Izett, a partner at Daniel Watney, says that not only are they a tax on occupation, but: "They're often the third-highest outgoing for most businesses after salaries and rent."

Worse, he explains: "Business rates are calculated based on the hypothetical rental value of the property at a specific date in time, also known as the property's Rateable Value."

Alan Morrish, a chartered surveyor at Ameliorate Consultancy Ltd, isn't that enamoured with business rates, either.

He comments: "The rate used to calculate bills is far too high at circa 55p in the pound. In 1990, the rate in the pound was circa 30p. Property values have increased substantially since 1990 - meaning rates have turned



into another stealth tax.”

The last rating revaluation in England and Wales came into effect from April 1, 2023, and should reflect a property’s rental value as of April 1, 2021 (the valuation date). These values will be in effect until the next revaluation, which is due to take place with effect from April 1, 2026.



### Dealing with high rates

Now, while properties are assessed by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) – part of HMRC – Izett says that ratepayers can challenge the accuracy and fairness of their assessment by registering themselves on the ‘Check Challenge Appeal’ government gateway.

As he says, there can be several reasons for bills that are higher than they should be, and they all revolve around incorrect data held by the VOA.

This is why he says to use the Check Challenge Appeal process to examine, at the check stage (and, if necessary, dispute) factual matters, such as floor area, specification, age and so on – “all of which may have an impact on the value of the assessment.”

Morrish details the process further. He explains: “The first stage is about factual matters, such as HMRC thinking that premises measure 1000 sqm but actually is 100 sqm.”

“The next stage,” he says, “is about matters of opinion.” By this, he means premises are assessed at £100 per sqm, but should really be £50 per sqm. In this instance, he says that the onus is on the ratepayer to prove their case with evidence and detailed reasoning.

At the Challenge stage, ratepayers will need to disclose the passing rent and other comparable rental evidence to support a requested reduction to the value of an assessment.

If the parties cannot agree, the ratepayer can appeal to an independent tribunal of laypeople.

Morrish emphasises that it’s important to be mindful. He says: “Properties are assessed from the desk by the VOA, so there are likely to be errors given the bulk valuation exercise.” He adds that the rateable value is the estimated rental value of a property based on values as of April 1, 2021. If physical changes are made to a property, then these will be reflected in its assessment - but only if the VOA becomes aware of them.

But if the VOA refuses to grant a reduction at the Challenge stage, a ratepayer may proceed to the Appeal stage, whereby, as Izett outlines, “both ratepayer and Valuation Officer present their respective cases to a panel of lay members to decide the correct value of the assessment.”

Another route is to see if there are any reliefs and exemptions that can be applied for – under the retail, leisure and hospitality relief scheme, for example, where qualifying businesses can apply for a 75% relief up to a cash cap limit of £110,000 per business (2024/5). The October 2024 budget changed this to a 40% relief on a liability of up to £110,000 per business in 2025-26.

Beyond that, Morrish advises looking at small business relief, which can zero a bill, but “only if the rateable value is below £12,000 and the business occupies a single property.” Izett develops the point, noting that the relief is then tapered between £12,000 and £15,000. Regardless, by definition, this won’t be of use to anything other than a very small firm.

One final option is that, if a property is empty or being redeveloped, there are

exemptions – but these have to be applied for.

Overall, though, Morrish says: “Local authorities offer very little in the way of discretionary relief these days.”

### Be careful

As might be expected with anything procedural, there are catches, chief of which is that the process could lead to a rate rise – something referenced by Morrish, who warns: “Never put your head above unless you are sure.”

Further, there is always the risk of fraud where money is involved. Consequently, Izett says that he would “advise seeking advice from a rating practitioner who is a member of one of the professional bodies - IRRV, RICS and RSA - before challenging an assessment or contacting the local authority for relief.”

Further, he highly recommends “doing your homework before agreeing instructions, as, unfortunately, there are a number of rogue agents out there.”

Of course, using a third party carries cost – a rating agency will usually charge a percentage of any actual saving achieved over the period of liability or rating list period, whichever is shorter.

### Looking ahead

As for the future, there’s a change coming that ratepayers need to be aware of - a ‘Duty to Notify,’ which, Izett says, has already been legislated for.

The duty, according to Izett, will “effectively require ratepayers to provide the VOA with detailed property information via an annual return, and to notify them of any property changes made within 60 days of the change.” This new duty, backed by fines and criminal sanction, is expected to be implemented in 2026.

### Wrap up

Business rates – for the moment, at least – aren’t going anywhere. Firms should, therefore, take time to examine their position, compare data with like premises, and consider an appeal. But they should only do so on the basis of good advice.



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Our knowledgeable staff and technical experts can provide you with valuable guidance and support. Whether it’s product information, technical advice, or after-sales support, Cyril Johnston & Co. Ltd. ensures that dealers have access to the expertise they need.

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# Products

DOMESTIC

## Inverter invention innovates

EGO launches the Nexus Escape

**EGO Power Plus has added a new model to its three-strong range of power inverters.**

The company says the Nexus Escape provides power where and when it is needed, with this latest model boasting improvements to the pure sine wave inverter, making it compatible with sensitive electronic devices. This model also features a 240V AC outlet, two USB ports, one USB-A port, and one 100W USB-C PD port for direct connection to a range of portable devices.

Compatible with any EGO ARC Lithium battery, the Nexus Escape provides flexible power on the go for charging mobile phones, laptops and cameras. It can also provide off-grid power for lights and music devices.

Andrew Frohock, product manager at EGO, said: "Providing 20% more output than the previous model, the PAD1800E is even more useful while still retaining the



qualities that users love – easy to carry, great functionality, and full battery compatibility with the rest of the EGO range."

The unit features an adjustable light for use after dark or in low light conditions, and can provide sufficient power to pump up airbeds, charge phones, and power a TV. When used with an adapter, it can also power multiple three-pin plug devices at once up to a combined 180W power.

COMMERCIAL



## STIHL's first dedicated vacuum

In their AP System

the operator full control to match the power output to the task at hand. The reinforced suction tube can be used to loosen stubborn leaves, ensuring nothing is left behind.

The wide positioning of the rubberised handles ensures comfortable handling and manoeuvrability. Balance has also been achieved due to the central location of the battery between the handles.

Featuring an adjustable shoulder strap, the 55l collection bag sits at the operator's side without impairing movement. The robust metal buckle

openings are able to withstand tough working conditions, while the large opening leads to quick and complete emptying with minimal effort. Ventilation openings can be used to deliver constant suction power, regardless of the fill level or the degree of dust and dirt in the bag.

Transport and storage have also been factored into the design, with tool-free removal of the catcher bag and suction tube.

With the recommended AP 300 S battery, the SHA 140 has a working time of up to 60 minutes.

**Designed for professional landscapers and grounds maintenance teams, the SHA 140 vacuum shredder is the most powerful in the STIHL lineup, offering 15% improved suction power compared to the petrol SH 86.**

The variable speed trigger provides

COMMERCIAL



## ESherpa found in the high grass

AS-Motor's electrically powered ride-on mower

**AS-Motor's new battery-powered AS 920 EShepna 2WD high grass ride-on mower is equipped with four 56V lithium-ion rechargeable batteries with a total capacity of 16 kWh.**

The company says the electric drive and blade drive is efficient, and ensures a professional mowing performance that even slightly exceeds that of a combustion engine. The electric drive provides blade power, and guarantees the mowing pattern. The two possible driving speeds of 0 to 7 km/h and 0 to 11 km/h enable area outputs of up to 6,300 m<sup>2</sup>, or up to 9,900 m<sup>2</sup> per hour.

The exchangeable batteries of the unit are compatible with the professional Zenith E and Arrow E zero-turn mowers from sister brand Ariens.

With the exchangeable battery system, the company says users can mow for many hours without interruption, as full power is achieved with just two batteries. Empty batteries can be replaced in just a few seconds.

With the integrated 3.3 kW quick charger, the charging time for a full charge of 16 kWh is just under five hours. The Type 2 charging socket

enables charging at a Wallbox (optionally available), at public charging points, or with an adapter at a conventional 230V socket. The optional mobile charging station allows additional batteries to be charged outside the machine.

The integrated LED interface on the steering column allows the driver to keep an eye on the charge status and capacity of each battery. Faults are diagnosed automatically. Energy is recovered during braking, and the batteries are recharged (recuperation).

The company says the combustion engine model AS 920 Sherpa 2WD served as the basis for the EShepna. Many components can also be found in the new battery-powered version: the mechanical differential lock, the double blade bearing, and the overload protection of the AS Sherpa cross blade system. The all-round tubular steel frame, the tyres and the oscillating front axle ensure agile handling and a turning circle of 0.65m. The surfing mower deck compensates for unevenness, and the track widening of the rear axle ensures increased tipping stability.

DOMESTIC

## 2-in-1 from Webb

Cordless Grass and Shrub Shears

**Now available from Webb are the 2-in-1 Cordless Grass and Shrub Shears.**

A multipurpose and lightweight gardening tool with grass and shrub blade, they are powered by 7.2V lithium-ion battery technology.

Designed for carrying out light maintenance jobs in the garden, the new shears deliver 1,200 rpm, and have a cutting width of 90mm for grass and 170mm for shrubs.

For more challenging or hard-to-reach hedges, the Webb cordless 2-in-1 Grass and Shrub Shears with telescopic pole handles offer an extended reach of up to 90cm.

Designed for optimal performance with a super-fast battery recharge, Webb say their cordless garden machinery range provides an eco-friendly and cost-efficient alternative to traditional petrol and corded options.



COMMERCIAL

# Poles apart

New pruner now available from Makita



Makita say their new cordless 40VMax XGT UN001G Brushless Pole Hedge Trimmer provides a lightweight and powerful option for cutting thick branches.

They say its performance capability comes from its 40V Max XGT lithium-ion battery and thick-shear 600mm blade.

Featuring a sharper three-facet obliquely ground blade (double-sided rough cut type), the UN001G provides up to 4,000 cutting strokes per minute. With its three-speed design, the trimmer offers a maximum cutting diameter of 20mm. The angle of the head can be adjusted in six steps, between 45o upward and 70o downwards. A new lock-off lever mechanism has been added as an additional safety feature, and the machine also features an automatic power-off function to prevent accidental start-up if left unused for a period of time.

The tool weighs 4.7 - 5.9kg, which, Makita says, means cutting thick branches overhead is made easier and more convenient. The inclusion of a grease nipple, and the fact that oil can be supplied with a grease gun without removing the bolt on the oil supply port, makes maintenance simple. Finally, when not in use, it can be folded down for transport and storage.

AGRICULTURAL

# Drilling versatility increased

Dual front tank from Kuhn



Kuhn Farm Machinery has added a dual seed and fertiliser front tank to its existing range, which, they say, offers growers greater flexibility for establishment using different toolbars, and the option to apply nutrition in the same pass.

The new pressurised TF 2300C features a 2,360-litre tank, with a 60/40 split for seed and fertiliser. It features the manufacturer's OptiSeed metering unit, with interchangeable cassettes and a pressurised hopper, allowing distribution rates up to 500kg/ha at 15kph. The two hoppers are individually dosed, and can be mixed into the same delivery tube or kept separate, depending on the machine and crop. Agitators are standard to help fertiliser flow, and the cassettes are simple to change via a handle locking mechanism, with an external calibration button to simplify the process.

Users can choose a carrying frame or optional front packer, featuring four 822mm diameter tyres to reduce the weight carried on the front linkage and improve consolidation. Machine control is via ISOBUS terminals VTI 60, CCI 800 or 1200, or using the tractor's compatible display. The hopper features automatic switching at the start and end of runs via GPS, variable rate application based on prescription maps, and data transfer using agrirouter.

LAWNMOWERS | HEDGE TRIMMERS | LINE TRIMMERS | BRUSHCUTTERS | BLOWERS & VACUUMS

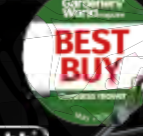
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- An ever-evolving range - covering Manual, Petrol, Electric and Battery
- UK Aftercare Team for Spare Parts and Warranty services
- All Webb products come with a 3-year Warranty (2 years for battery & charger).



WEV20X2LM43B4X 40V (20V x2) 43cm Cordless Rotary Lawnmower

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AGRICULTURAL

# MF 5M to make UK debut

At this month's  
LAMMA



The latest Massey Ferguson 5M tractor will be shown in the UK for the first time, as the brand returns to LAMMA for the second year in a row.

The manufacturer says the new MF 5M series has six models, from 95hp to 145hp. It builds on the MF 5700 M series in the efficient small tractor sector, aimed at livestock, arable and vegetable producers.

They say key highlights of the new range include the 40kph Dyna-4 transmission, a 24% larger fuel tank than the 5700 M range, a 4.65m turning radius, and the all-in-one SCR emissions system. Greater functionality is possible with a brake-to-neutral function and a choice of loaders (with the Visio Roof), while MF's technology

services are available on the new models.

Lindsay Haddon, MF's advertising and sales promotion manager for the UK, Ireland and the Middle East, says LAMMA provides the perfect place to introduce the latest MF tractor to the UK.

He states: "We are delighted to be back at LAMMA in 2025 to showcase our range and present several products to the UK market for the first time. The show is the ideal platform to do this, with the undercover venue and high footfall making it attractive to exhibitors and visitors alike. Our MF 5M model has appeal across a wide demographic of buyers, and features the new MF family styling along with improved functionality."

COMMERCIAL

# Sports turf health enhanced

Electric Sarel Roller launched by  
Campey at SALTEX

Campey Turf Care Systems launched an Electric Sarel Roller at the recent SALTEX, a tool for aeration of sports turf, tailored especially for bowling greens and cricket squares.

The unit is a 60cm-wide aerating roller designed to improve soil health and optimise grass growth on areas up to 3,000m<sup>2</sup>. Using 70 sharp, durable spikes, the roller penetrates the soil 223 times per square meter, increasing air circulation and water absorption. This essential process reduces soil compaction – which is often a concern on heavily-used sports grounds – and promotes deeper, healthier root growth for strong and resilient turf.



The roller is powered by a high-capacity battery, allowing for long, continuous operation with zero emissions. The roller's design also includes a transport roller, which securely shields the spikes while moving the unit, preventing damage and extending its operational life.

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# Change is inevitable



In the first column of 2025, our mystery columnist, THE SPROCKET, considers whether dealers are facing a perfect storm of change - squeezed between supplier and customer demands.

## A new year— and perhaps new challenges for the dealer network?

Having listened to several dealers and orators of various persuasions, it will be no surprise to anyone that change is inevitable and a constant throughout our business and personal lives. The way to deal with change is to anticipate as much as possible, and adapt as quickly as possible. At least, that is what I think ... I think?!

The quote “*Change is the only constant in life*” is often attributed to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who lived around 500 BCE. Even back then, it would not have been such a revelation to anyone listening – but how prepared are we for the inevitability of change?

**“I’m always willing to accept change, just as long as it isn’t change for the sake of change. If that change will result in a better way of doing things, then I’m all for it.”**

*James Van Fleet*

Just for fun I have cheated a little with some of the following as a result of all the furore surrounding Artificial Intelligence. I asked the question of ChatGPT about ‘change’ in the hope that some nuggets of wisdom would jump out and help with this article. It told me:

This quote expresses the idea that change is an inevitable and ongoing aspect of existence. While other things in life may appear stable, change is always occurring, whether we are aware of it or not.

### Key Ideas:

**Impermanence:** Nothing in life remains the same forever. Circumstances, people, and experiences are subject to change, whether through external events or internal growth.

**Adaptation:** Since change is unavoidable, it encourages people to adapt, embrace uncertainty, and be flexible in the face of new challenges.

**Flow and Cycles:** Heraclitus saw the world as a dynamic interplay of opposites — day and night, birth and death, light and darkness — and this constant tension between opposing forces drives change.

**Modern Interpretations:** In modern times, the quote is often used to reflect the speed of technological advancements, social change, or personal growth. It serves as a reminder to be resilient and embrace the inevitable transformations that come with time.

**Technology and Society:** In today’s world, rapid technological advancements and shifts in societal norms highlight the constant nature of change. Whether it’s in the workplace, in culture, or in politics, change is a constant factor.

**In summary,** “Change is the only constant in life” reminds us that we must be open to transformation and flexible in our responses to it, since change is a natural and unavoidable part of existence.

Thanks, ChatGPT! All good for an introduction, but why bring it up? Obviously, in your businesses, change is constant, from the demands of your customers to the vagaries and initiatives of your suppliers and service providers. You are a ‘piggy in the middle,’ no offence intended. As a dealer, you must adapt to both sides of the equation and run your business in the middle.

I have rattled on in Sprocket articles about *Warranty Woes*, *Supply Chains*, *Anxiety & Disappointment* and *Where Have All The People Gone?* It would seem the only constant in these issues is that warranty arguments are the same today as they were 100 years ago. The change with the other areas will be obvious when studied, but why on Earth is the issue of warranty still a constant when it could so easily be

resolved by those who flaunt the principles of it?

Are dealers now facing a near-perfect storm of inevitable change, where they are being squeezed by supplier policies on one side and changing customer demands on the other – alongside the recent raft of tax changes (which will challenge many of the UK’s traditional dealerships)?

Earlier last year, a discussion within the pages of *SD* asked if the closure of dealerships was becoming a trend. This was challenged as being more of a hiccup rather than an ongoing issue, but 2024 saw more closures – and in some cases takeovers – in a year that calls into question the viability of a dealership regardless of if it is ag or garden machinery/groundcare.

The ag dealerships operate under a different criteria to garden machinery dealers, and are probably far more influenced by their suppliers (and maybe better supported, as they are often single-franchised for main brand lines). Garden machinery dealers tend to be multi-franchised with main brand lines, but not so dependent on one or two suppliers. Whatever way it is looked at, there is a need for a dealer network to support machinery that is sold and will require aftersales support, provided by knowledgeable and skilled people.

## Dealers require supplier support

Privately-owned business and family-run businesses are more vulnerable to change, but can also adapt more quickly than a large corporation. However, their unique makeup does mean that they need more support and understanding from their suppliers and service providers. They also require a higher degree of loyalty and a better understanding of their business needs from their suppliers.

It would be very difficult for a garden machinery dealer to operate on a single-franchise basis and be sustainable. I do not want to tar all suppliers with the same brush, as there

are many good ones out there that are fully supportive of dealers, and who understand the needs of the dealer network. But those that skimp on warranty reimbursement, want large preseason orders and multiple distribution channels need to support dealers better, and understand what a dealer has to have in place to provide the platform to sell a supplier’s product.

The current trend with some suppliers of multi-channel distribution or retailing does affect a dealer’s profitability and maybe their longer-term future. The tidal wave of battery-powered products makes it easier for suppliers to go to multi-channel retailing and inevitably bypass a dealer, as aftersales service becomes less of a requirement and brand exposure can be greater for the supplier.

We have seen the demise of the high street, due mainly to the internet and direct selling. The high street independents have suffered, as well as the big-name high street brands. Technology has changed marketing, and buying patterns have changed with it. Face-to-face selling is becoming a thing of the past, and the relationship between retailers and suppliers is becoming more distant. This leads to a lack of understanding between retailers and suppliers, and, inevitably, a lack of loyalty.

Dealers build long-term relationships with their customers, and rely on their

own reputations to get new business. They offer a unique service by being able to offer advice on products, sell a variety of products and services, and give that very special aftersales service. They are the face of many brands in the sector, and ambassadors for many well-known manufacturers. They absolutely need the support of their suppliers, and much more can be done by suppliers to support them.

An issue that has been raging for a number of years is staff recruitment. I hear that dealers recruiting younger staff are having to adjust to the modern way of dealing with Generation Z (under-30s), who have been brought up in the digital age and have a different work ethic to older employees, with different lifestyle and work expectations. An area for change, and one that can be disruptive to our aging industry – but also an issue that needs to be understood and embraced.

With staff recruitment issues (and, in particular, a shortage of technicians), our industry needs to embrace this change both as suppliers and dealers, and help each-other to recruit for the future as an industry.

Like all businesses, dealers are facing ever-increasing costs in service provision, such as utilities, energy, transport, staff costs and computer and software support costs. The recent budget has not helped, either. There is not a bottomless pit of money to support these cost increases, and suppliers and service providers need to be more aware of the margins and profit retention of the dealers as well as their own costs.

So, to those suppliers and service providers that are looking after their dealers and supporting them: keep up the good work. To the dealers: remember, it is a two-way street that needs to be nurtured. To those suppliers that are lacking in their understanding and support for their dealer network: take your blinkers off and pull your fingers out to help – before you don’t have a dealer network to work with.



# 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.

## JANUARY 2025

- Oxford Farming Conference** 8-10  
www.ofc.org.uk
- LAMMA 2025, Birmingham NEC** 15-16  
www.lammashow.com
- BTME 2025, Harrogate International Centre** 21-23  
www.btme.org.uk

## FEBRUARY 2025

- Spring Fair 2025, Birmingham NEC** 2-5  
www.springfair.com
- Golf Industry Show, San Diego, CA** 3-6  
www.gcsaaconference.com
- Doe Show 2025, Ulting** 4-6  
www.ernestdoe.com

- Dairy-Tech, Stoneleigh Park** 5  
www.dairy-tech.uk

- Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS), York Auction Centre** 5  
www.yams.uk.com

- World Ag Expo, Tulare, California** 11-13  
www.worldagexpo.com

- Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry** 12-13  
www.executivehireshow.co.uk

## MARCH 2025

- The Scots Turf Show, Hamilton Park Racecourse** 5  
www.scotsturfshow.com

- Low Carbon Agriculture 2025, NAEC Stoneleigh** 5-6  
www.lowcarbonagricultureshow.co.uk

- Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London** 21-6/03  
www.idealhomeshow.co.uk

## APRIL 2025

- AEA Conference 2025** 1  
One Great George Street, London  
www.aea.uk.com

- Harrogate Spring Flower Show** 24-27  
www.flowershow.org.uk

- Newark Garden Show, Newark Showground** 25-27  
www.idealhomeshow.co.uk

- East Anglian Game & Country Fair** 26-27  
Euston Estate, Thetford  
www.ukgamefair.co.uk

- The Commercial Vehicle Show** 29-1/05  
Birmingham NEC  
www.cvshow.com

## MAY 2025

- North Somerset Show** 5  
www.nsas.org.uk

- Nottinghamshire County Show** 10  
www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com

- Balmoral Show, Belfast** 14-17  
www.balmoralshow.co.uk

- Hadleigh Show** 17  
www.hadleighshow.co.uk

- Smallholding & Countryside Festival, Royal Welsh Showground** 17-18  
rwas.wales/smallholding-and-countryside-festival

- Chelsea Flower Show** 20-24  
www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show

- Shropshire County Agricultural Show, West Midlands Showground** 24  
www.shropshirecountyshow.com

**2025**

TAP is the content and communications agency specialising in groundcare machinery and agriculture. As proud publishers of *Service Dealer* for over 9 years; we launched, and have nurtured, the *Service Dealer* Conference from the start.

Our expertise in this sector has helped evolve the dealer support content of related websites in the form of toolkits and special reports; as well as the dealer website Garden Trader.

We have been privileged to get to know and become friends with the servicing dealer community and machinery manufacturers; and understand how difficult and vulnerable it can be at times – especially when product technology is moving so quickly. It's a pleasure to witness just how close the dealer network can become and also to see its resilience.

We feel blessed to be working with you all and simply want to wish you success, happiness and good health in 2025. Because if the servicing dealer community is successful, the whole industry does well.

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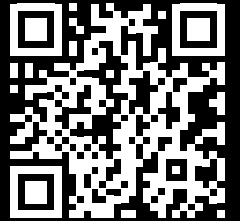
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