

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

November/December 2024

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

2025
EVENT PLANNER
ENCLOSED

FANTASTIC GROWTH IN OUR DEALER NETWORK

Kress say the past two years have seen them grow their business together with their dealer partners



COLLABORATION OUT FRONT AND CENTRE

Kubota Gianni Ferrari developments

DELIVERING BUSINESS VALUE

Workshops confirmed for Conference

TRADE SHOWS

Will the discussion ever end?



A MAJOR INVESTMENT

Through building up its premises and the product ranges it offers, dealership has found a loyal customer base

Paxster eCompact Air

THE SILENT ALTERNATIVE UTILITY VEHICLE



PAXSTER

An electric, stylish alternative to traditional utility vehicles.

The Paxster eCompact Air is built in Norway to be rugged but with an eco-smart design. A silent drive yet snappy performance while smooth for everyday driving. Comfortable with easy access and masses of storage space.

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- eCompact
- eStretch
- eCompact Air
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THE FAUNAMASTER RANGE

BUILT FOR LIFE IN THE FIELD

Faunamaster



Faunamaster Spray 70

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Faunamaster FM130 ATV Flail Mower

A professional flail mower for all types of terrain. Remote control height adjustment, choice of impactors Honda V-Twin GX 690, 22hp, and the mower has a working width of 130cm.



Faunamaster Compact Disc Seeder

Designed for use with an ATV, UTV or compact tractor. Sows seeds of virtually any size to a depth of up to 80mm. Ideal for parks, gardens, sowing into existing grass fields, wildflower meadows, tilled soil, and paddocks.

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For more information about BOSS ORV brands call or email:
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www.bossorv.co.uk

Letter from the editor Steve Gibbs

steve@servicedealer.co.uk



Welcome to the November/December 2024 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

By the time you read this, we'll be deep into the autumn turfcare machinery show season – and our *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards will be upon us before you know it.

Taking shows first, though: as this mag drops onto your desk, we'll be just days away from the GMA's SALTEX show at the NEC. I feel like we've said this before, but this year is significant for the long-historied show. 2024's SALTEX is following on quickly from what was widely regarded as a hugely successful sophomore GroundsFest – successful both in terms of an increase in visitors and exhibitors, but, perhaps more importantly, it also seemingly succeeded in satisfying both those groups, too. You can read my thoughts on the show (and what caught my eye that is of interest to our dealer readers), starting on page 24.

Of course, what the second running of the show reignited is that age-old debate over the place of exhibitions in our sector – specifically, whether there are too many. It's a topic perennially discussed, but one that's hard to ignore. We are lucky this issue to have

industry expert Keith Christian give us his take on the whole situation. Keith has attended more than his fair share of shows and events over his career, both as an exhibitor and a visitor, so he's most certainly able to offer an informed opinion. See what he thinks, beginning on page 16.

Once we're on the other side of SALTEX, it will be time to truly begin getting excited about November's *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards. Our incredible organising team have been doing so much work behind the scenes all year, all to make the day valuable, on-point and relevant to our dealer delegates. We confirm this issue the subjects of the ever-popular workshop seminars, both of which will be looking at modern aspects of running a dealership: how to protect yourself from cybercriminals, and how AI can aid your business, will be discussed. It's all shaping up to be a superb day, and we can't wait to see you all there.

Finally, a huge thanks to Jo Balmer, who writes her final Diary entry this issue. Jo has kept us greatly informed this whole year about everything Balmers has gone through – and we truly appreciate all her efforts. Cheers Jo!

THE TEAM

Publisher: Duncan Murray-Clarke

Editor: Steve Gibbs

steve@servicedealer.co.uk

Agricultural Editor: Martin Rickatson

jmr.agriculture@gmail.com

SME Digest Editor: Adam Bernstein

adam@adambernstein.co.uk

Contributor: Laurence Gale

laurence.gale@btinternet.com

Design & layout: Iain Robinson

Produced by: The Ad Plain Ltd

Howbery Park, Benson Lane, Wallingford,

Oxfordshire, OX10 8BA, UK

Telephone: 01491 837 117

www.theadplain.com

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Advertising sales: Nikki Harrison

nikki@theadplain.com

Telephone: 01491 837 117



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INDUSTRY

AL-KO bought by Daye

100% acquired by Chinese manufacturer

It was recently announced that Chinese manufacturer Ningbo Daye Garden Machinery was taking over German manufacturer AL-KO Geräte for €20 million (\$22.1 million) in order to expand its global footprint.

According to a report on news site Yicai Global, Daye purchased a 100% stake in Kotz-based AL-KO Geräte, supplier of such brands as AL-KO, solo® by AL-KO, Masport and Morrison.

The report went on to say that the acquisition would provide Daye with

manufacturing bases and technology development centres in Europe.

Service Dealer contacted AL-KO UK, whose MD, Stewart Anderson, told us at the time: "Our dealers in the UK will notice very little change following this news. Over the coming months, we will sort out some details behind the scenes, but Daye is a quality manufacturer, and the AL-KO name is not going anywhere."

Stewart continued: "Following the news breaking, we were at

GroundsFest, meeting dealers and showing off the latest models - and I'll be honest, I think this is the best thing that could have happened to AL-KO for the brand's long-term future."

We also heard from Paul Butterly, MD of FGM Claymore – who distribute the Masport machines in the UK. He told us: "Masport is an important dealer brand in the UK, with a presence here since the '60s, and was one of the first producers of a rear roller rotary. I would like to think things will remain as they are."



DEALERS

Toro UK's pro dealers visit U.S. HQ

Strengthening partnerships

Toro UK Limited recently welcomed ten of its pro dealers to the Toro headquarters in Minneapolis for an exclusive event aimed at strengthening partnerships and showcasing the company's latest innovations.

During their visit, dealers explored Toro's test facilities, where they witnessed rigorous product testing and development. The group also toured the Toro factory in Windom, gaining firsthand insights into the manufacturing processes that ensure the company's products meet the highest standards of quality and performance.

"The opportunity to connect with our pro dealers and provide them with a behind-the-scenes look at our operations is invaluable," said Craig Hoare, UK sales and marketing manager at Toro UK Limited.

"We are committed to our dealers' success, and these interactions foster collaboration and innovation."

In addition to the informative sessions, the dealers enjoyed an outing to watch the Minnesota Twins take on the Milwaukee Brewers. Dealers witnessed Toro's longstanding partnership with the Minnesota Twins, seeing in action on the pitch a large range of their machinery. The visit culminated with a relaxing evening cruising on Lake Minnetonka, further enhancing relationships in a casual setting.

In a statement, Toro UK added that they are dedicated to empowering their dealers with knowledge and resources to better serve their customers. They said: "This event not only reinforced existing partnerships, but also showcased the commitment Toro has to its dealer network."



INDUSTRY

L-R: Annie Winn, Service Dealer social media and events manager, with technicians from Ben Burgess' Ellington depot - Honor Miles, Eleanor Miles, Iris Bagley and Zoe Parker

'Machinery Dealer Diversity' launched

Social media platform promoting the dealer sector

Machinery Dealer Diversity (MDD), a social media platform created by the team behind Service Dealer, has officially launched.

Headed up by Service Dealer owner Duncan Murray-Clarke and platform guru Deb Laird, of The Ad Plain, the social media content is run by Annie Winn.

Annie said of MDD: "Our mission is to encourage diversity within the machinery dealership network, whilst educating and creating connections for both industry professionals and the general public about the vast opportunities within this sector. We also aim to promote and encourage a more inclusive environment within the industry, too."

"Machinery Dealer Diversity will create fun, educational, and engaging content for the groundcare, turfcare, agricultural, and arboriculture sectors. In time, our content will highlight women in the industry, people with disabilities, individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and people of colour, whilst breaking down age-related barriers and

featuring voices from the LGBTQ+ community and more."

Duncan Murray-Clarke added: "I am so excited about the potential of MDD to highlight all the incredible work being carried out by a huge range of individuals right across our thriving dealer networks."

"I'd also like to encourage any manufacturer who'd like to support our work, to get in touch. We'd love to hear from you."

Dealers are also encouraged to support MDD's initiative and the campaign by following @machinerydealerdiversity on Instagram, Machinery Dealer Diversity on Facebook, and @MachineryDD on Twitter (X). Annie says: "Please message us if you and / or your company would like to feature on our page!"

Annie also passed on her special thanks to the platform's current support panel so far - Sophie Burgess and Kelly Burgess of Buxtons Ltd, Hannah Robinson of Brian Robinson Machinery Ltd, Joanne Balmer of Balmers GM Ltd, and Ben Burgess.

INDUSTRY

‘Landmark’ decision for industry apprenticeships

Enhanced funding endorsed by Government

The Land-based Engineering Training & Education Committee (LE-TEC) have announced that the Secretary of State for Education has officially approved revised funding levels for the standalone Level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships, in what they describe as a “significant development for the land-based engineering sector.” LE-TEC is an industry-appointed body sponsored by the AEA, BAGMA and IagrE.

In a statement, a spokesperson said: “This landmark decision underscores the commitment to fostering skilled professionals in a crucial industry.”

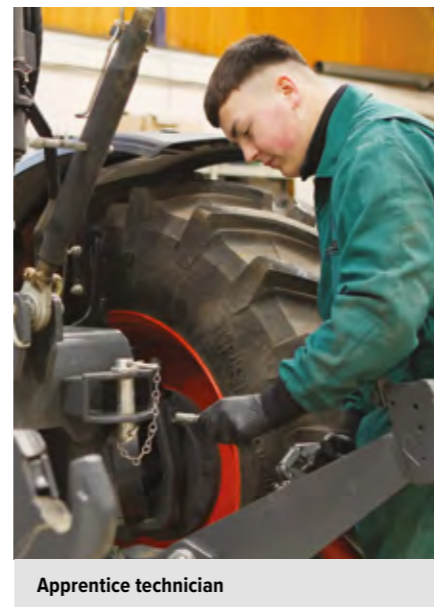
LE-TEC said that, following extensive negotiations and detailed submissions by their Apprenticeship Working Group – and following further scrutiny of the group’s comprehensive documentation and calculations – the Secretary of State for Education has “remarkably” revised the funding bands upwards. Funding levels are now set at £16,000 for Level 2 and £15,000 for Level 3. Previous levels recommended by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) were at £15,000 and £14,000, respectively.

The new apprenticeship standards, spearheaded by the Working Group,

have introduced a revised content and structure to the land-based engineering training programmes. Unlike the previous model which offered direct entry to either the Level 2 apprenticeship, or the Level 3 (which incorporated the Level 2), the revised standards offer a distinct pathway – a Level 2 apprenticeship, which is then followed by the Level 3, if required. This approach, say LE-TEC, not only enhances flexibility for employers, but also allows apprentices to advance according to their career aspirations by achieving a Level 2 in the first instance, and then moving onto the Level 3.

David Kirschner, independent consultant in the land-based engineering sector, praised the decision as a critical step forward. He said: “This increase in funding is not just a financial adjustment – it’s a recognition of the value and unique skills provided by the land-based engineering sector. It helps address the urgent need for skilled service technicians and engineers, ensuring the sustainability of apprenticeship programs vital to our industry’s future.”

The funding adjustment marks a 48% increase compared to the previous funding model, which was set at £21,000 for the Level 3 (incorporating the Level 2). LE-TEC say this enhancement is expected to



Apprentice technician

significantly bolster the industry’s ability to recruit, develop and retain talent, so urgently needed for the sector.

Also approved by IfATE is the funding of a progression pathway for students completing the new land-based engineering T-Level, who will be able to progress onto a fast-track apprenticeship should they wish to do so. The dovetailing of the qualifications means that training providers will assess a student’s individual skills gap for those who wish to progress on to the Level 3 apprenticeship straight from a T-Level. The training provider will put together a 12-month programme to cover the deficit skills and knowledge. This is, again, a huge achievement for the LE-TEC Working Group.

A LE-TEC spokesperson concluded: “The success of this initiative highlights the power of industry commitment and collaborative efforts in achieving meaningful outcomes. The revised funding structure promises to support a new generation of skilled professionals equipped to meet the evolving demands of the land-based engineering sector.

“A truly incredible achievement for the LE-TEC Working Group, who worked tirelessly on the rewriting of our qualifications, which remain distinct and unique from other equipment and machinery-based courses.”

INDUSTRY

Ben Burgess becomes new importer

Of Laski products in the UK

Ben Burgess has become the official importer of Laski products for the UK.

They say the partnership will bring a wide range of equipment to the UK, including Laski’s stump grinders – previously marketed as ‘Predator Power’ in the UK – trenchers and leaf vacuum truck loaders.

Ben Burgess said in a statement that they are committed to expanding Laski’s dealer network and service centres across the UK. Existing Predator dealers, they explained, will have access to a wider product portfolio, a larger parts and machinery inventory, and enhanced support from Ben Burgess including, as they put it, “improved warranty and financing packages, with zero- and low-interest financing options developed in collaboration with Arblease.”



Louis Phillippo, Ben Burgess’s group arboricultural specialist

The Laski product lineup will see new additions, including a 14HP, 360SW equivalent stump grinder and a wheeled 38HP option for easily accessible areas. This expansion complements the brand’s focus on narrow-access solutions, providing a range of stump grinders for arboricultural needs.

Louis Phillippo, group arboricultural specialist at Ben Burgess, explained: “The range and quality of the Laski products will be a winning combination, with narrow access at its heart, alongside performance and reliability. We look forward to offering a product we truly believe will become a valued asset to many arborists.”

The new range of stump grinders were seen at the recent APF exhibition.

DEALERS

Full circle moment

Yamaha returns to Gwalia Garage

Gwalia Garage, located in Tywyn, Gwynedd, has announced that it has rekindled its partnership with Yamaha.

The local vehicle and tyre repair business has welcomed the brand back into the fold, describing it as a full-circle moment for the company.

Owner Wyn Humphries expressed his delight at the opportunity to once again represent Yamaha, a brand his father sold over three decades ago. The dealership says the appointment comes as a natural progression after they invested significantly in their premises, creating a modern showroom and workshop to showcase the Yamaha range. Selling the utility, leisure and golf car ranges, the business believes there is plenty of opportunity to widen their



L-R: Wyn Humphries, owner of Gwalia Garage, and Carl Stuart, Yamaha area sales manager

customer base.

“It’s a dream come true to bring Yamaha back to Gwalia Garage,” said Wyn. “We have a loyal customer base and a strong reputation for service, which makes us the perfect partner for Yamaha. The area has huge potential for both utility and leisure vehicles, and we’re excited to offer our customers a wider range of products, with future potential to widen our customer base into golf courses.”

Carl Stuart, area sales manager at Yamaha Motor UK, added: “We’re thrilled to welcome Gwalia Garage back to the Yamaha family. Their commitment to customer service and their local knowledge make them an ideal partner for us. We’re confident that they will be a great success.”

DEALERS

Baroness extend Lister Wilder's territory

Describe move as a 'natural progression'

Baroness UK have announced the expansion of the territory area for existing dealer partners Lister Wilder.

Sales and support across the Baroness range is now offered to customers in the Dorset area, serviced by the Lister Wilder Salisbury depot, which opened in late-2023.

The manufacturer says the move marks a natural progression for the territory already covered by their longstanding dealer, adding the Dorset region to the counties already under Lister's remit, including Gloucester, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Kent and London.

Phill Hughes, sales and hire director for Lister Wilder, said: "We are delighted to have been appointed as Baroness dealers for Dorset following our move last year into the area with our new

Salisbury branch. Having now sold and supported Baroness machinery for over 10 years, we believe we understand just what the golf and fine turf sports industry needs when it comes to purchasing and supporting this type of machine."

Phill continued: "The Lister's company logo 'Sales with Service' highlights the importance that we deliver good local support. With this latest addition to our area coverage, we are looking forward to serving customers from the Kent coastline to the Bristol estuary, with our network of branches providing on-site support and backup."

Adam Butler, sales director at Baroness, added: "Expanding Lister Wilders' already substantial area is yet another move to show continued growth and customer support



Lister Wilder's Phill Hughes and Baroness' Adam Butler

throughout the UK. Yes, our machines are great, but we must have equally great service to back them up. Lister Wilder's track record in customer service is second to none, and we're very happy to be in partnership with a company that demands these high standards across the board. We also thank Highwood for their superb efforts, and all they've done for the brand in this area over the last few years."



COBRA

Why Not Become a Cobra Dealer in 2024?

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

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News in brief:

Read these stories, and more, in full at: www.servicedealer.co.uk

INDUSTRY



20 Years of engine-making

JCB's engine business marked its 20th birthday in September 2024 with a celebration to thank employees for their vital role in its continuing success.

PEOPLE



Stiga appoint

STIGA have announced that Mike Murray, who has spent the last couple of years as an ASM with Reesink Turfcare, has joined their team as a territory manager for Scotland.

DEALERS



Macgregor joins network

Inverness-based MacGregor Industrial Supplies is Bobcat's new authorised dealer for the Highlands and Islands, Aberdeenshire and Perthshire regions of Scotland.

Cordless Mowers



Petrol Mowers



Cylinder Mowers



Multi-Tools



Shredders





DEALERS

Graham Parker (sales director) and Angus Doe (managing director)

Ernest Doe successfully complete acquisition

Extension of territory

Ernest Doe & Sons Ltd has completed the successful acquisition of The Burdens Group Limited's south Lincolnshire branches, located in Sutterton and North Kyme.

This acquisition was facilitated through the appointed administrators at Begbies Traynor (Central) LLP, following The Burdens Group's entry into administration.

Ernest Doe & Sons Ltd, a family-owned business dating back to 1898, said in a statement that they are fully committed to extending their footprint into Lincolnshire. With existing branches across Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Sussex, Surrey and Kent, this expansion aligns with their commitment to delivering exceptional service and support to their growing customer base.

"We are thrilled to welcome the Sutterton and North Kyme branches into the Ernest Doe family," said managing director Angus Doe. "Our focus is on maintaining the strong customer

relationships cultivated by The Burdens Group, while introducing the high standards of quality and service that have defined Ernest Doe & Sons for over 125 years. We look forward to serving the local community and supporting our new customers with the expertise and dedication that our longstanding customers have come to rely on."

Angus continued: "Customers of the Sutterton and North Kyme branches will have the same points of contact, allowing a smooth transition. We will be working hard to invest in and improve the business, and look forward to furthering our understanding of customers' needs within the area."

Ernest Doe went on to explain that, for any financial matters concerning The Burdens Group prior to the acquisition date, please contact the administrators' office at sheffield.north@btguk.com. All outstanding debts or creditor claims will be managed directly by Begbies Traynor, who will provide the necessary guidance.

DEALERS

BossORV appoint Ark ATV

Adding to Corvus network

Somerset ATV dealer Ark ATV has joined the Corvus Off-Road Vehicle network.

The announcement was made by Boss ORV, the UK distributor, whose managing director, Phil Everett, has previously worked with Ark director Rob Blomfield-Richards. Phil said: "I am delighted to be reunited with him and his team, as I know how professional they are and what fantastic support they offer to their customers."

Ark ATV Ltd has been family-owned and operated since 1997, supplying farmers and other workers with ATVs from their base in the Minehead area. Boss ORV's national sales manager, Neil Everett, has also known Rob and the team for many years, and says he has seen them demonstrate extremely high customer service levels and a great understanding of the working ATV/UTV market. They will cover the area across Somerset and North Devon.

Neil said: "With their current lineup lacking a UTV, and us requiring coverage in such a strong area for UTV sales, it seemed almost natural for us to open up discussions regarding the Corvus franchise."

Ark will sell and support the Corvus Terrain ranges of diesel and electric UTVs.



L-R: Boss ORV national sales manager Neil Everett; Ark MD James Westwood; and Ark director Rod Blomfield-Richards



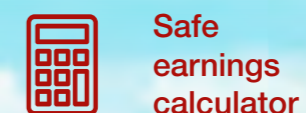
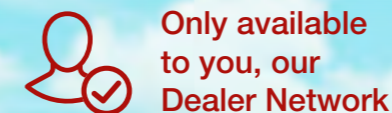
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PEOPLE

GreenMech appoint new sales director

Following Martin Lucas' retirement

GreenMech have announced the appointment of David Blackwood as their new sales director, following the retirement of Martin Lucas.

The company says David joins with a wealth of business acumen, gleaned from over 30 years of experience in the machinery industry. He will lead the sales operation across the UK, and throughout GreenMech's global network.

David started his career as a design engineer in the Massey Ferguson

tractor factory in Coventry. From here, he spent the next 15 years working for Massey Ferguson/AGCO in the Asia-Pacific region, looking after all aspects of the business, including product support, sales and marketing. He then took up a position with Kubota UK, managing the sales and marketing for their tractor and groundcare business throughout the UK, Ireland, Scandinavia and the Baltics. David went on to return to AGCO, this time to manage sales of FELLA hay tools for western Europe – and latterly all markets outside of Europe – for a further 10 years, before, most recently, becoming UK and export sales manager at Stocks Ag.

With over three decades of knowledge and experience dealing

with sales at home and overseas, GreenMech say David is well-placed to spearhead their sales team and dealer network around the UK, together with supporting distributors around the world in conjunction with colleagues from GreenMech France and GreenMech Germany.

Commenting on his appointment, David said: "Having started at the beginning of July, I feel I have already gained huge insight into the market, its challenges, but also, importantly, its opportunities."

He added: "Together with everyone at GreenMech, we wish to extend a massive thank you to Martin for all he has done and achieved with the company, and wish him the very best for a long and fulfilling retirement."

DEALERS

New Kramp store opened

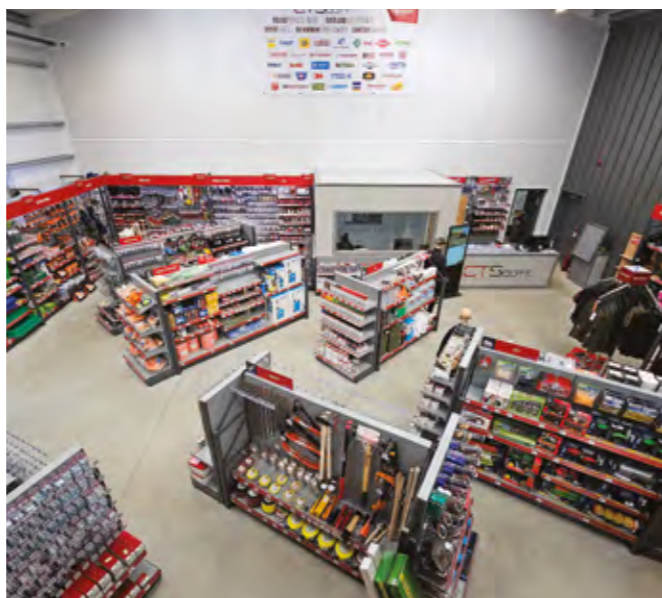
C T Scott expands into retail

C T Scott, who specialise in the sales and service of application technology and precision farming equipment to growers in Scotland, has expanded into retail by opening a Powered By Kramp retail store at its Insch depot in Aberdeenshire.

Craig Scott, managing director of C T Scott, says the decision to open a retail store was linked to their plans to take the next step in the growth of their machinery business.

"We had outgrown our office, needed a bigger workshop, and wanted to recruit someone to manage our parts department," says Craig. "The decision was made to build a completely new building alongside our workshop [at the Insch depot], giving us a separate parts department, retail shop, and new office space.

"We looked at several shop suppliers. We went with Kramp



because they are professional at it, have a team dedicated to doing retail shops, [they] research what sells, and have a team to do the installation. Nobody else could offer the variation or the team behind it," explains Craig.

Kramp retail consultant Gary Cartwright worked with C T Scott to set up the store, and was impressed with the site.

"Everything is done to a high specification, and the store looks incredible," says Gary.



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FIND OUT MORE





Delivering measurable business value

Workshop sessions confirmed for November's *Service Dealer* Conference

The organisers of November's *Service Dealer* Conference have now confirmed the subjects and speakers for the ever-popular workshop sessions. These seminars, involving smaller groups, allow for plenty of dealer interaction, questioning and feedback with the experts running the breakouts.

Alongside the previously announced keynote presentation from business leader Ellis Watson – and 'Customer Insight Sessions' featuring Jim Buttar from Twickenham, farmer Andrew Ward and Karl MacDermott of Lord's – the workshop sessions are:

AI in Action: from research to results

Neil Wilkins
Marketing consultant & senior tutor at Cambridge Marketing College



Neil Wilkins, marketing consultant and mentor, will be delivering a practical and engaging workshop

exploring AI applications, demonstrating the tools and techniques that deliver measurable business value.

Dispelling AI myths (both opportunities and dangers), Neil will be addressing common misconceptions about AI, emphasising its potential and limitations - while offering real-world examples of its uses and abuses.

Taking a closer look at AI in practice, and explaining how AI tools operate and can integrate into daily business activities, Neil will show delegates how AI can be applied to different job roles and tasks. From its use in research, through marketing, to prospecting and sales, Neil will be defining the benefits in the real world.

Delegates will receive a practical, hands-on demonstration, and leave with the concrete steps dealerships can take to start or further their AI journey.

How criminals are hacking your business

Ian Schofield
Police officer, Regional Cyber Crime
James Squire
Warwickshire cyber crime and fraud coordinator

Warwickshire Police Cyber Crime, in company with the Regional Cyber Crime Unit, will be leading an important workshop on the subject of cyber crime.

Organisers say the workshop promises to give delegates an insight into how cyber criminals use team members to gain sensitive information from your business. The session will explore techniques criminals might use, and will demonstrate – with case studies – how this could happen.

The team also promise to give practical advice on what to look for and how to recognise if you are being scammed – but also how to avoid it.



First look at the 2024 Conference running order

Welcome Duncan Murray-Clarke

Keynote Ellis Watson

Coffee break

Customer Insight Karl MacDermott
Head groundsman, Lord's

Breakout session 1

Cyber Crime: *How criminals are hacking your business*

AI in Action: *From research to results*

LUNCH, NETWORKING & SPONSOR SHOWCASE

Welcome back Duncan Murray-Clarke

Customer Insight Andrew Ward MBE, Farmer

Customer Insight Jim Buttar
Head of Grounds and Technical Operation, RFU Twickenham

Coffee break

Breakout session 2

Cyber Crime: *How criminals are hacking your business*

AI in Action: *From research to results*

Panel discussion Q&A

Conference close
Duncan Murray-Clarke

Charlie and Rob set to entertain again



Service Dealer are thrilled to announce that Charlie Baker will join us once again as our *Service Dealer* Awards compere.

His versatile talents as a stand-up comedian, actor, and highly acclaimed jazz singer have seen him earn a reputation as 'a superior take on the modern showman' (The Guardian) and he will certainly add that special sparkle to our evening's event.

Joining Charlie, and making a welcome return to the *Service Dealer* Awards stage, is award-winning comedian, Rob Rouse.

Winner of the prestigious So You Think You're Funny? award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1998, Rob Rouse has toured the world for the last 25 years.

Star of the BBC's *Upstart Crow*, *8 Out of 10 Cats*, *Spoons*, *The Friday Night Project*, Dave's *One Night Stand* amongst others, Rob is no stranger to bringing laughter to an audience – and, if last year's performance is anything to go by, we are sure he'll kick off the awards evening on a belly-laugh high!



Entries are in and judging is in full swing...



2024 Dealer of the Year competition

The categories that you, our *Service Dealer* readers have been entering in your drives this year are:



There are also special award categories this year:



In addition, of course: all those considered for entry will be put forward for the prestigious **2024 Overall Dealer of the Year Award**



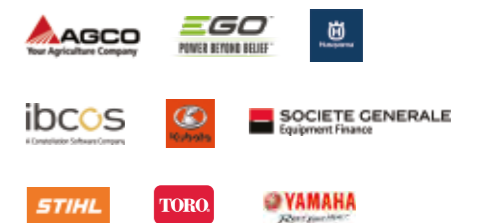
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Shows: will the discussion ever end?

KEITH CHRISTIAN has attended his fair share of industry shows over his long career, as both an exhibitor and a visitor. Here, he considers whether the current situation is sustainable.



The APF Show 2024 which took place at Ragley Hall

have the greatest sympathy for any company, large or small, trying to decide which industry shows they should exhibit at - and what their expectations may be from those that they choose.

To a lesser degree it can also be difficult for an individual to decide on where they should spend their valuable time, and from which show they would gain the greatest benefit from visiting.

I spent my career attending or exhibiting at all the regular UK shows, such as the IOG events, GLEE, BTME, Scots Turf, LAMMA, many of the European and American exhibitions, a host of county shows, and various open days and dealer trips. They all

have a value to someone, and, as long as that endures, there will no doubt continue to be a plethora of large and small shows and exhibitions in our industry.

The range of shows we have that are focused on the 'trade' exist because the organisers perceive a need for them and – being brutal – can see an opportunity to make money by holding them. BTME, LAMMA and the GMA (IOG) shows target users as well as dealers to provide a good mix, and to bring people together.

We now have GroundsFest thrown into the mix, too, which appears to target the same audience as the GMA show but a bit earlier in the year (nearer to the old IOG/Windsor slot in the calendar). This

now raises the issue of which one to go to and, crucially, which manufacturers or suppliers will favour which show – creating a huge dilemma for where they use their budgets for the best outcome.

No doubt those that support the GMA will stick with them at SALTEX and the NEC. This year's round of shows may then sort out some of the indecision for others. Covid changed a lot of working practices, and some of those changes will remain with us – but we are generally a social industry, and much can be achieved by being able to talk to each other face to face. The shows and open days that fill the calendar are a wonderful way of being able to connect with likeminded people.

Open days and dealer events

Earlier this year, I was able to report on two dealer events: Devon Garden Machinery, celebrating their 40th anniversary and the official opening of their new premises – which was a very personal event – and Ripon Farm Services' 20th anniversary of their annual customer event at the Great Yorkshire Showground, which was a huge undertaking.

Recently, I was invited to the Handy LIVE 2024 garden machinery event. This was a new concept for Handy's, who have been actively exhibiting at many of the UK shows, including GLEE and several press events.



Handy used their event to show off all their brands

This year, Handy's decided to focus on their retailers and dealer network, and invited them for two days of product reviews, live demonstrations and product training sessions delivered by Chelsea Flower Show gold medalist Adam Woolcott – and TV presenter Tommy Cross. Guests were also invited to try out products themselves in the grounds of Moulton Grange Country Estate in Northamptonshire.



Dealers attended a series of presentations at Handy Live

Handy LIVE 2024 showcased Handy's Webb, The Handy, Greenworks and AVA product ranges - including lawnmowers, line trimmers, hedge trimmers, pole saws, chainsaws, blowers and vacuums, tillers, trolleys, spreaders, log splitters, pressure washers, and more. Each product range was set up in its own area in the grounds, and groups were guided around the displays, product reviews and demonstrations. When you see the product range that Handy's have displayed in its entirety, it is an impressive sight, and a credit to the breadth and depth that the company has to offer and how they use their brand strengths.

The idea of bringing in 'specialists' to present the products and emphasise the

features and benefits in a working situation worked well. The venue also worked well, with guests able to walk around and keep on the move. A break during the day, with some air rifle target-shooting and axe-throwing – all under supervision, of course – was a welcome bit of fun. Refreshments were also available throughout the day, with lunch provided.

Guests were then able to discuss the various packages on offer from Handy's with staff, and there was a special room set up with product – called the 'Deals Room' – for exclusive, on-the-day offers.

Mark Moseley, Handy's sales and marketing director, officially opened Handy LIVE 2024 with a welcome speech which also reflected on some of the major changes in the UK garden machinery market.

"As the sales and marketing director for Handy for 10 years, I have seen some big changes in the UK market," he stated. "There is an ever-increasing number of new customers who want great cordless products, where there is a good depth of range, and the batteries are interchangeable, and the price is right. Our Greenworks range ticks all the boxes, whether you are talking to first-time buyers or to those customers who demand extra power for larger lawn types."

However, Mark was keen to point out: "There is still a high demand for petrol and electric products – primarily due to price versus petrol and confidence to tackle larger lawn types – and, therefore, the Webb brand compliments Greenworks by offering a full range of petrol, electric and cordless machinery. Webb is perfect for any retailer who wishes to either have a single brand covering all power options, or simply help build a credible machinery category alongside other branded product."

I was impressed with the commitment, organisation and enthusiasm shown by Handy and their staff for their open day. They have a lot of experience in exhibiting at various UK shows, and this change to an invitation-only event would suggest that that they are focused on their existing customer base. It takes a huge effort and a great deal of planning



Handy's Mark Moseley introduced dealers to marketing and POS, designed to support them by providing digital assets, as well as POS displays to enhance the customer experience



The APF show has areas for all different types of products

to organise an open day at a suitable venue. The logistics involved in moving equipment is a mammoth task. Focusing on their own brands, and specific franchises that complement their ranges, has turned Handy's from a local retailer into a significant provider to the specialist trade.

I have known some of the Handy staff for a long time, and it was refreshing to hear their positive comments about the open days and their views on shows within our industry, and their support for the dealer network. A mixture of all events seems to be the key to covering all the bases.

The current situation

Back to the current show scene: how will the industry react to the new GroundsFest event, which enjoyed some decent weather this year, and a very good turnout of both exhibitors and visitors? For me, it felt like a return to the good old days of the IOG show at Windsor Racecourse but with the added indoor element and an evening 'party'. For a show in its second year it was impressive so well done to the organisers, exhibitors and those who attended. You can read the editor's thoughts, starting on page 24 this issue.

By the time you receive this magazine, we will be just days away from SALTEX at the NEC. There is inevitably lots of

discussion about how the two shows will fare against each other and, going back to an age-old argument, how many shows do we need? If SALTEX and GroundsFest are designed to attract the same audiences such as the groundcare sector, landscapers and machinery dealers, I doubt we need both.

One has a long-term history, and I can claim to have exhibited at every IOG show at Windsor with three different companies. The heady days of Windsor – being packed with two-hour queues to get into the car parks – are long gone. Separating the throngs of tyre-kickers from the serious buyers is no longer a problem. An inside show at the NEC was a good call for most, despite a loss in atmosphere. However, the bigger question is: can two similar shows, held very close to each other, survive?

Talking to exhibitors at GroundsFest, they want to see existing customers and new ones – whilst those dealers I spoke to were happy to be able to chat to suppliers and each other. Some were looking for different ideas to help sustain and diversify their business, perhaps seeking new suppliers to alleviate the threat from changes in consumer buying patterns and how this is perceived by suppliers.

Recently, I was also able to attend the APF (Association of Professional Foresters) show at Ragley Hall in Warwickshire. This

is huge, and spread out over a large part of the Ragley grounds, with walkways, tracks and designated areas for different types of products. It covered all things forestry-related and more – from the smallest chainsaw to the largest forestry and chipping equipment. There were many companies from our industry exhibiting with an impressive array of equipment.

The APF is well-attended by visitors, and runs every two years for three days, including a Saturday. Its vast area means the crowds get swallowed up and spread out over miles of metalled tracks and woodland machinery walks. This show offers diversification, and there is much to be learned from what is essentially a different industry to what we are used to.

SALTEX will be upon us when this mag hits the streets, and there is still the BTME show to look forward to in Harrogate in January. This is, again, a different show with a different audience, and, whilst much has been said about BTME and the GMA getting together for a single show, one may be forgiven for thinking it would have to be at a different venue, which may forgo the attraction of Harrogate in January.

Ah, well! 40 years of talking about what is best for the industry and still no answers, with the questions remaining unanswered: where, when and with whom?

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A Major Investment

Andy Jones, MD of the Major R. Owen Ltd dealership in Penrhyndeudraeth, North Wales, says that, through building up their premises and the product ranges they offer, the business has found a loyal customer base. LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, reports.

Earlier this year, during a visit to Wales, I met the team from the Major Owen dealership showing off a range of Kubota products at a local show. Not one for missing an opportunity, I soon found myself talking to one of their sales demonstrators, Mark Wood.

We got chatting about the company and what they were doing, and what their future plans were. The conversation led to me exchanging contact details with Mark with the aim of visiting their premises in Penrhyndeudraeth.

So, after a few phone calls and catching up with their marketing person, Maddie Burnham, we soon were able to arrange a visit.

Mid-September saw me drive up from Newport, Shropshire – a journey of some 100 miles, through some beautiful countryside – to Penrhyndeudraeth.

I wanted to hear more about the company and how different business might be in the more rural parts of Wales.

On arrival, I was met by Joshua Owen Jones, the grandson of Major Raymond Owen, the third generation of the family to work in the business. Josh introduced me to his father, Andy, and his brother, Luke.

Andy's association with the business began in 1984. After dating Major's daughter for a few months, Andy offered to help Major to repair mowers in the workshop. They married in 1991 and had two sons, Josh and Luke, who now form part of the leadership team at the company.



Joshua, Luke and Andy Jones

What follows is my conversation with Andy:

Service Dealer: Tell me a bit about the history of the business.

Andy Jones: We were established in January 1977 by Major Raymond Owen, and we originally operated from his garden shed at his home in Penrhyndeudraeth. At this time, the concentration was primarily on two-stroke machinery, especially chainsaws and lawnmowers.

As he found demand for outdoor power products increasing, and petrol-powered equipment became more widely available, Major moved to his first retail premises in School Street, Penrhyndeudraeth. In 1984, he was on the move again, and took up a lease on the Old Market Hall, in the centre of the village.

I got involved in 1984, so it's actually my 40th anniversary this year. I met Major's youngest daughter when I was only 18. Then, after a few months, Major said to me he was looking for a mechanic, and I used to do mechanical bits and pieces. So, I started in September of 1984 in that role. There was only four of us back then.

As the volume of business increased, though, it soon became apparent we needed a purpose-built premises. In 1988, two acres of land was purchased at Park Road, Penrhyndeudraeth, and we erected a building of 5,000 square feet.

We moved into the new building in September 1990, and have steadily increased our space since then. Our current site now houses around 18,500 square feet of covered trading space, including our showroom, workshop, parts,



The dealership is located in Penrhyndeudraeth

Kubota machinery inside the showroom

warehousing and administration areas.

Major retired in December 1997, with his other son-in-law, David Burnham, appointed as managing director, supported by me, as sales director, and his daughter, Deborah Burnham, as administration director. David subsequently retired in April 2008, meaning I took on the MD role, supported by Deborah as finance director.

My son Joshua recently joined the company in the role of strategy and finance director. Josh is responsible for long-term strategic planning, with a current focus on digital transformation to enable better access to data and analytics for improved data-driven decision-making. Josh spent eight years working in corporate finance, buy-side mergers and acquisitions, and business strategy roles, before joining us earlier this year.

My other son, Luke, is aftersales director, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the workshop and the parts team. Luke has also taken an active role in the development of our two apprentices, giving them essential technical experience before they start their apprenticeships in November. Luke joined the company some 10 years ago, went to college for two years, and has worked his way up through the workshop up to his current position.

We all get on well, and I know that the company is in a good place and set up well for future years.

SD: What areas do you specialise in?

AJ: I would summarise our market areas as construction, agriculture, professional groundcare, domestic and garden machinery. We hold several key franchises, and supply grounds maintenance equipment and garden machinery to both the professional and homeowner sectors. Our franchises include Kubota, Hayter, Toro, Kubota Gianni Ferrari, STIHL, Husqvarna, Dennis and Honda. For many years, we have been actively developing a construction machinery side to the business, and similarly hold some key franchises, including Kubota excavators. Since 2014, we have been actively selling and servicing Hamm compaction equipment. More recently, we have been actively involved in developing the agricultural side of the business, and became Kubota agricultural dealers in late 2023.

Our operating area now extends throughout North and Mid-Wales.

We currently employ 26 people, including a team of 14 aftersales staff. 2024 saw us serve nearly 40 years as North Wales' main Kubota dealer, and nearly 30 years as a Toro dealer. At the start of 2024, we commenced our 47th year of trading.

Our customers include professional sports clubs, golf courses, councils, as well as domestic customers. We also sell a lot of Kubota products to caravan parks and holiday sites across the whole region. They tend to be good, regular customers of ours.

An essential aspect of our business model is the aftersales service we provide. We'll always support the area that we sell machines into, whether it be Aberystwyth or Holyhead or Flint. We'll always give backup. I believe that if you're prepared to sell a customer a machine, you should be prepared to look after it, as well.

Over the years we have invested a lot of money into our premises and stock – and we now have a great showroom for our customers to see the fine range of products we sell.

SD: Have you recently seen a surge in sales of battery-powered products?

AJ: Battery-powered products are becoming more popular, for sure. We have a wide range of cordless products for sale, having recently also taken on the Kress range, too. Battery technology is moving at a fast pace, with more and more manufacturers offering an ever-widening selection.

SD: How do you manage the storage and recycling of batteries?

AJ: We have dedicated facilities to store batteries in-house. We also offer recycling of batteries for our customers. This part of the business will only grow with the increasing number of these machines being brought to market.

SD: How about robotic mowers? Are they proving popular?

AJ: Yes, we have a range of Honda, Cub Cadet and Kress robotic mowers available. We are now able to offer both cable and GPS / RTK controlled types.

There is a natural scepticism with change and new technology, but, overall, there is ever-increasing interest in robotic mowers, both from professional and domestic customers. We are trying to educate our customer base on how the robots are becoming increasing intelligent and safe to use. We are starting to see some private estates, domestic homes and golf clubs showing some interest in them.

SD: How are you finding the recruitment of staff at the moment?

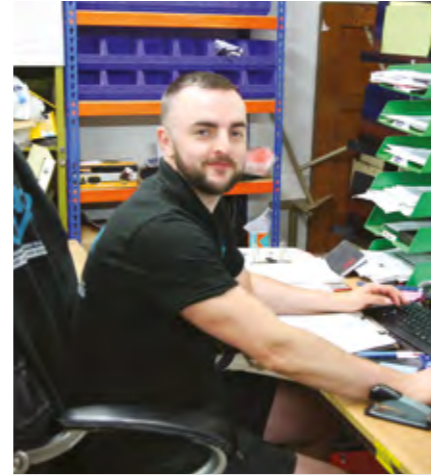
AJ: Recruiting staff is a mixed bag, and is dependent on the role. We have been



The dealership specialises in professional groundcare machinery, as well as domestic kit



Apprentice, Sion Ap Pedr, working on a Kubota tractor in workshop



Huw Williams, parts supervisor

fortunate that, when we find the right team member, they stay with us for many years.

Most of our staff have been with the company for many years. It is, however, becoming more difficult to find good mechanics and technically-trained people. Through our partnership with Kubota, though, we do have a fully-funded Kubota Agriculture Apprentice, Sion Ap Pedr, who started this year, along with Celt Thomas on Kubota Groundcare. Both are enrolled on the scheme at Llysfasi College.

As a family-run business, we are lucky to have family members and local friends that, over the years, have chosen to work for the company.

I do feel that the future looks bright, with both my sons choosing to join the company, taking up key roles. I feel the future of the business is in good hands.

SD: What is the busiest time of the year for you?

AJ: All year! We find each season brings its own business and workload. Gone are the days when we had seasonal trends, with mowers being brought in only during the winter months. Our workshops are in constant use all year round, and we have grown our parts business. We have a dedicated team, with Huw Williams parts supervisor looking after customers' needs for spares and parts.

SD: Do you find success with selling online?

AJ: We do sell a selection of products online. We are in the process of developing

and updating our website, which will offer our customers an easy-to-use online shop.

I feel it is now time to increase our focus and resources on developing this opportunity. Josh has worked closely with marketing teams in the past, who have had success in focusing their marketing on digital and website development.

Clearly online selling in the industry is becoming more popular, and we need to ensure we can meet the demands of our customers. However, we will not be trying to beat many larger online sellers on prices. We will sell at a cost that brings in a profit and keeps our business running.

Also, we are fully aware that people still like to come into the shop and try out and touch the products, asking many questions before buying.

If we do get people who have bought online from an outlet other than ours, and they want repairs or servicing, we are happy to carry out the work – but will prioritise our own customers first.

SD: Are you finding it's getting harder to sell products and services?

AJ: Generally, yes. It has always been a challenge to sell larger products to a customer, especially now prices have risen dramatically in recent years. A typical fairway mower can be in the in excess of £60,000, with decent professional pedestrian mowers now costing in the region of £6,000 and £15,000. Robotic mowers can range from £1,000 - £15,000. So, it is important that we give the customers the correct information and financial support to

secure a sale. Our existing customers have confidence that we are looking after them on each step of their journey – from point-of-sale to providing the best possible servicing, repairs and parts advice for their machine.

We also offer a wide range of finance packages to help customers buy with confidence. And there are a lot of grants and support from Lottery funding for sports clubs to acquire machinery. It is all about pointing the customer in the right direction.

SD: Where do you see the company's future?

AJ: We will continue to offer the best service we can for our customers, and keep aligned with the opportunities that befall us in terms of seeking new products to sell. We will look to embrace online selling and any new technologies that come around. Josh and Luke are highly focused on introducing new technologies and processes to continuously improve efficiencies in all areas of the business.

We've been here nearly 50 years. I want the business to be here for many more years, and, if we can give customers the best possible package that they're after – including machinery, service and parts – why would they want to go anywhere else?

We will retain our successful partnerships, and, where necessary, look to take on more as the everchanging market dictates.

SD: Thank you.



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Bigger and better

The second edition of the GroundsFest turfcare machinery show impressed in September, with more exhibitors, engaged visitors and a genuine buzz.

Service Dealer editor STEVE GIBBS reports from Stoneleigh.



held earlier in September this year than the damp first edition in 2023, the second edition of GroundsFest took place once again at Stoneleigh Park.

It must be said that GroundsFest's sophomore effort delivered in spades, being both bigger and better than 2023's edition.

As soon as visitors arrived, improvements could be felt. The car parking and entrance into the show was a much smoother operation, and once visitors walked into the showground, it was immediately clear that there had been a distinct step-up in the event's footprint and arrangement of stands.

Another improvement was in the exhibitor and visitor numbers. We were told there were 500 exhibitors, and in an official statement released by organisers post-event, they said

this year saw "8,014 visitors across two days - 4,738 on day one and 3,276 on day two." By those metrics, there's no doubt the event had grown since last year.

However, what is much harder to quantify is the feeling around the show – the idea that it was 'better.' With an intangible like that, I'm only able to make a judgement call based on the many conversations I held with stand-holders and visitors – and on the demeanours of everyone else I saw around me. And, by my estimation, there were a lot of happy people in attendance, satisfied punters and exhibitors alike.

If anything, what the feeling reminded me of was that first SALTEX back after Covid. My enduring memory of that was that it felt pretty special, with a genuine excitement pervading the halls of the NEC. Of course, a lot of

that feeling came from the joy of being able to interact with each-other again, but it was, nonetheless, a show that felt significant.

GroundsFest this September felt special as well, but in a different way. Thinking of how to define it, perhaps this year the vision of the organisers had clicked into place and aligned perfectly with the wants and needs of its exhibitors and visitors? That feels about right.

Of course, the success or otherwise of a trade show lives or dies on the quality and breadth of its exhibitors, and in the interest that the target audience has in the displays. At Stoneleigh, there was plenty to catch the eye of the many specialist dealers and professional end-users (possibly more on the landscaper side, rather than pro sports?) in attendance.

Seen at the show...

Some exhibitors of interest to *Service Dealer's* readers included:

Kress had a huge complex of a stand which GroundsFest organisers recognised with the 'Best Outdoor Stand' prize. It truly dominated the entrance to the show. They also chose to have a (not insignificant) stand inside, too. This was a serious commitment to the show and its visitors, allowing all those interested to get hands-on with their kit outside, and perhaps have a more in-depth, quieter sit-down discussion with representatives inside.



Tony Macer

I chatted with the company's sales director for the UK and Ireland, Tony Macer, who told me he was delighted with the show - and, indeed, with the growth that Kress has seen in the UK during these past few years. He said: "We are a dealer-only brand that is committed to the dealer network." He spoke of the great progress they are making placing their robotic mowers into the UK's golf courses, and how further expansion is ongoing across other professional sports.

Tony told me: "It is a really exciting time for us at Kress in partnership with our dealers. We have so much more new technology coming down the line – we can't wait to share it with our partners."

STIGA attended GroundsFest for the first time this year, and, rather than hold their traditional dealer meetings at the National Motorcycle Museum or on tour, they instead invited their

dealers to come visit them at the show. This will be much to the delight, I expect, of many other stand-holders, who will have noticed the definite increase in dealer numbers at the show this year.

Their large stand featured their articulated truck, complete with big screens and display space, an outside area for customers to view machines, and an indoor 'Dealer-Hub' for their partners to hold private conversations with staff members. On show, amongst other things, was the relaunched Mountfield range (which had benefited from dealer feedback), new robotics, and a new range of small, electric hand-tools.

STIGA MD Elizabeth Senior told me: "Dealers are our heart-blood - and we want to get across to them just how good electric kit can be for their businesses, with quality margins plus ongoing service and warranty work."



Elizabeth Senior

On **Cramer's** stand, I met new national sales manager John McGrady, who confirmed the brand is still looking for the right dealers in certain areas of the country. He said: "We're recruiting dealers, but we're being selective. We've appointed some well-known names, such as Lister Wilder, Hopkins and Vincents, but there are still some gaps in our map for our range of battery-powered machinery."

I also met European product

manager Brendon Harbour, who explained how dealers will begin to see the Cramer powerhead (battery, plus motor, plus chip technology) used on other manufacturers' machinery.



John McGrady

Jonathan Snowball, on **Husqvarna's** stand, said that they had enjoyed a great show, being inundated with visitors keen to learn about their professional range of machinery. Gaining a lot of interest, in particular, was the hybrid ride-on / remote control mower they had running in their demo area.

Jonathan said: "The remote control comes into its own for usage near water or on slopes, for example. It really is a unique machine, which has gained a lot of attention at the show."



Jonathan Snowball demonstrating on the Husqvarna stand

Peter Chaloner, of **Cobra**, told me that the show was great for them, and that it was fabulous to see so much footfall. He said: "We are all about our dealers, and creating differentials for them. That's what keeps customers returning to specialists - and that's what our Cobra and Billy Goat ranges offer."



Peter Chaloner

On **STIHL**'s impressive stand, customers were treated to many machinery demos throughout the show, including the new BGA 250 blower and the X-Flex harness. Ben Beaumont, training team manager, told me that the pro users they were talking to were interested in making the transition from petrol to battery-powered tools. He said that STIHL liked the setup of GroundsFest, as they were able to show interested users exactly how the machines felt and operated.



STIHL's demo plot

EGO's stand looked great, with its large arena allowing visitors to drive their Pro-X models around. Also gaining visitor attention was their lifestyle range, which included such items as an auger, misting fans, wet and dry vac and an

outdoor speaker - all powered by their own batteries, of course.



EGO's stand

On the **Toro** stand, Matthew Coleman, the firm's sales manager for professional landscape contractor and site works equipment, said the show was an opportunity for the company to present their latest innovations directly to their audience. He said: "The response was overwhelmingly positive, and it was fantastic to engage with so many professionals who are passionate about enhancing their work with the latest technology." Visitors to their stand were introduced to a range of products, including the ProLine H600 and the eProStripe.



Toro's display

Milwaukee took the opportunity to demonstrate new additions to its OPE range, including the dual-battery 50cm chainsaw and M18 Forge batteries which, they say, have been designed specifically for gardening, landscaping and horticulture professionals. Visitors to their stand were also able to talk with the company's jobsite solutions sales team.



Milwaukee's eye-catching stand

Sam Lewis, general manager of **AriensCo UK**, told me that professional end-users are without a doubt still interested in petrol-powered products for some of their needs. Catching their eye to this end was the brand-new Icon 42 zero-turn, which, since production, has returned to the US, undergone a complete refurbishment, and now includes a new Kawasaki engine.



The Icon 42



Paul Langford

An interesting new development for turf professionals was displayed by **Redexim**, with their launch of the Scarivator 2100. Described by Paul

Langford, director of commercial operations, as an "in-season" renovator for hybrid pitches, the machine was for "precision renovation, not brutal renovation" - meaning professionals could renovate surfaces mid-season and get them back into use, rather than waiting for major end-of-season works. He also confirmed to me that they only sell through a dealer network, saying: "We want to support the trade, which is the only way it should be done. We want our dealers to be able to demo our machines to customers locally."

BOSS ORV were showing the Corvus range of utility vehicles, as well as the Paxster and Faunamaster ranges. MD Phil Everett said of the exhibition: "After a great first day, it's clear that this event is becoming a must-attend show for the land management industry."



Corvus on the BossORV stand

Guy Overton, on the **MeanGreen** stand, meanwhile, told me that their new EVO-96 - the first wide-area electric mower to feature a 96" mulching rear discharge deck with electronic folding wings - had received many bookings for demos at the show, not least due to its weight.



Guy Overton

The complete package

As well as the machinery exhibits, there were plenty of other attractions to keep visitors interested, including live demos from the lads from Machinery Nation, as well as a music festival in the evening.

There was a whole programme of talks and interactive seminars across both days, too, including one which boasted an appearance from our very own Laurence Gale, the editor of our sister title *TurfPro*, and who dealers will know through the articles he contributes to this magazine.



Service Dealer and TurfPro's Laurence Gale speaking on a panel

Loz was speaking on a LANTRA-organised panel about the challenges that the professional turfcare sector is facing. The discussion covered ground that could be equally applicable to the dealer channel, with recruitment and retention of skilled staff at the top of the agenda. Laurence said: "It seems that the new generation either do not know about the opportunities available to them, or they are shy of getting their hands dirty." He went on to implore all trade associations and bodies with a vested interest in the sector to come together to speak with one voice to find a way of promoting the industry and solving this problem.

Overall, I believe the organisers of GroundsFest deserve a hearty 'well done.' To take what was a good concept from year one, and improve it to the levels experienced this year, is admirable. Of course, an outdoor show will always have one eye on



the weather. It helped that it wasn't a wash-out like day one last year - but it still wasn't perfect. I watched some people rescue their gazebo down off the top of someone else's due to the high winds, and the downpour late on day one's afternoon pretty much cleared the outside area. But to not hold a show for outdoor powered machinery outdoors, simply because the weather might be inclement, doesn't seem right.

It feels like GroundsFest has true momentum now. This was illustrated to me when I bumped into a senior figure from one manufacturer, who I'd spoken to there a year before. Last year, they were not exhibiting, but were on a recce to see if it felt right. This year, they had a stand that they were delighted with - and, crucially, they had no plans to return to SALTEX.

The GMA's show, which is coming up a few days after readers will have received this magazine, was mentioned to me a lot at Stoneleigh. Pretty much always in the context of: "How do they follow this?"

It's a legitimate question. Will visitor numbers hold up? Will there be this same buzz under the lights of the NEC? And, in the long term, does it maintain exhibitor support? Because three national turfcare machinery shows per year is undeniably a lot.

As always, though, we at *Service Dealer* are looking forward to SALTEX, and are keen to see how the organisers have evolved the offering this year. If you see us there, please do say hello - Stand H011.

So, whilst we anticipate the GMA's upcoming show, we say: good job, GroundsFest, and see you next year on September 9 and 10.

Building a new dealer business

Amid the turmoil of recent acquisitions, franchise changes and closures in the ag dealer sector, there are some strong shoots of recovery. MARTIN RICKATSON visits a new Norfolk business that has grown from a service operation into a franchised dealership.

Starting a new farm machinery dealership at a time when the markets for many machine types are contracting is a brave move, and news of new businesses launching is currently far exceeded by stories of companies selling up, merging or closing. But that's not to say they aren't out there.

West Norfolk is home to a prime example. At Stoke Ferry, near

Downham Market, Chris Coleman Agricultural Engineering, commonly known as CC Agri, is just three years old, yet has moved rapidly from a business based on service alone to a dealership with a full set of franchises. The service element, though, remains at its core, says Chris, who founded the company after some time spent as service manager for beet and slurry equipment firm Agrifac's UK operation.

"After deciding to strike out on my

own, initially I worked independently in general on-farm ag engineering, while also contract-working for Agrifac on Holmer harvesters," Chris explains.

"For the 2022-23 beet season Holmer then employed me directly to set off and oversee UK-sold beet harvesters, and at this point I officially founded CC Agri, and took on Karl Arndt as our salesman and a couple of engineers who had worked with me previously. We oversee a park

of around 60 fodder and sugar beet harvesters across the UK and Ireland.

"We needed a premises, and looked at various sites, until we came upon somewhere previously rented by Grimme UK as its sugar beet harvester centre, and which became available when they relocated this operation to their main UK depot. Being in west Norfolk, it was centrally placed in the key beet area, and most of our employees are based within half-an-hour. Being sited and staffed like this gives us an advantage against the super-dealer branches who have more service travel mileage and costlier charge-outs. From here, our service manager Andy runs the service team, so I can be out on the road on service work and keeping contact with customers, and my niece Cody manages the parts department, having done the same at Agrifac."

Growing franchise list

Having become the official UK agent for Holmer, CC Agri soon added Steketee beet hoes – now owned by Lemken – to its offering. It was a campaign by Zetor UK to fill gaps in its network, though, that led the firm down the road of developing a broader product offering for local farmers.

"There had been a prominent Zetor dealer – and, at one time an importer – based in the area during the 1980s, 90s and Noughties, before Zetor UK moved elsewhere and the dealership closed. But there remained a park of Zetors in the area, and, when the former Zetor UK MD came to see us, we could see the potential to take on the franchise to diversify and compete in a tractor sector that offered something different and had a history in the area.

"Selling and servicing tractors fits in well with our other work when things are quieter on the beet side, and the products offer something different from the mainstream, especially to livestock farms who like their size and economy, and the fact the tractors have the spec they need without unnecessary technology. Although the mainstream makers are now offering products made in lower-cost countries,



From left: Chris Coleman, Cody Coleman, Karl Arndt, Andy Cubley



Sharing spaces with the CC Agri offices, a small but well-stocked showroom is dominated mainly by Granit parts and sundries

and Zetor's price advantage has narrowed due to things like emissions requirements, the tractors are still very price-competitive spec for spec, and are especially strong in the 80-120hp sector. We are in a big arable area with strong demand for high-hp, high-tech tractors, but there is a niche here."

The firm has since broadened

its franchises further, adding Harry West's range of muck spreaders and trailers, Winton smallholder and equestrian equipment, and a full line of implements from Polish firm Pronar.

"It's a big company with an extensive line of well-priced, well-built products, and we have had significant success with implements including trailers,



CC Agri began as a Holmer service agent, then added sales, before bolting on Zetor and Deutz-Fahr agencies



INTRODUCING

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The Optimus range sets a new benchmark for professional users, designed and built to deliver best in class performance in every category.

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Robotic Lawn Mowers

Industry leading technology for homeowners and commercial applications

Cramer have a solution for any area, from compact lawns up to large public spaces and sports facilities. The AiConic series utilizes RTKVision technology, combining radar, camera and satellite positioning for the most advanced robotic mower system available. The RM series offers a lower cost solution for simpler installations up to 2700 m², where the robot mows autonomously within a boundary wire.



82V Range

Class leading power for landscapers or ambitious gardeners

The 82V platform was designed to the same high standards that professionals demand, with unrivalled performance, exceptional durability, quiet and emissions free operation. Perfect for landscapers and landowners, the range comprises everything you need to maintain your land from zero turns, tractors, brush cutters, earth augers and much more.



48V Range

The perfect balance for homeowners

A complete range of battery tools for maintaining all aspects of the garden. All 48V tools are designed to be easy and comfortable to use, while rivalling the performance of petrol equivalents. With the wide range of tools available and the freedom of cordless operation, you'll have everything you need to maintain a beautiful garden effortlessly.



mulchers and much more,” Karl says of Pronar.

With Zetor catering for the economy end of the tractor market, there was space for an additional franchise offering higher-spec machines, and with Deutz-Fahr dealers in the neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Cambs having closed in the past couple of years, Deutz-Fahr’s SDF UK parent business was keen to reassure the local customer base.

“We got talking with SDF UK management, and visited the main tractor plant in Germany,” explains Chris.

“It’s an impressive factory, the newest in Europe, and, with a number of loyal Deutz-Fahr customers locally, we decided to sign up, as the franchise offers us the ability to compete in the 200-350hp sector, as well as with higher-spec models of lesser power. Our engineers got straight into product training, and we quickly started getting calls for parts and service. Because our seven-strong service team, including me, are home-based in all directions, we are well-served to cover a wide area.”

Although it is early days for tractor sales, CC Agri had 15 Deutz-Fahr demos booked and enquiries for potential Zetor purchases by early October, says Karl.

“We’ve had a lot of tractor interest from current customers who use us for other machines, and are more assured by the support they will receive from a smaller dealership like ours. Recently, a customer I’ve known for years visited for another machine part. He used to be a loyal Deutz-Fahr customer, but, most recently, had bought another make from a larger dealer. He’s now opened an account and ordered some spares for his older tractors, and we hope to be talking to him about a new tractor in the new year.”

Telehandlers added

Most recently, the firm has added ATVs and telehandlers to its offering. CC Agri is now a CF Moto ATV/UTV dealer, while on October 1, just before our visit, CC Agri had been appointed by

People like personal service and at a reasonable price

Merlo for the area north of Cranworth Farm Services and Marst Agri, across to the former Collings Bros area and up into South Lincolnshire. The firm already looks after a number of Merlo machines nearby.

Managing all of this now involves a staff of 12, including admin, sales, service, parts and a full-time yard man. Two of the engineers were trained by Chris in his previous career, while his service manager is a former Claas UK instructor, and his senior engineer has been working on Holmer beet harvesters since the early-2000s.

“So we have a wealth of knowledge to draw on,” Chris suggests.

“Many customers don’t want to be forced to go to the bigger dealerships, and as a smaller, more reactive business, we pride ourselves on backup and service whenever it’s needed. In recent months, we’ve had many new people through the doors saying they’ve heard how we’ve done certain jobs for others, and that’s helping us pick up more service work.

“People like personal service, and at a reasonable price – we are not a massive setup, so our overheads are smaller and we don’t have to charge high-end £100/hr+ rates.”

But, with the industry struggling for engineers, Chris says he recognises

the need to find good staff and keep them happy.

“Recently, we took on an apprentice from a two-year college engineering course, so he has an understanding and is putting it into practice. He’s doing well and understands the hours and commitment necessary. But we need to add a couple more engineers to deal with the additional tractor and telehandler business, as well as some sales assistance for Karl. Currently, people are coming in to us, which is great, but we need to get out there and actively sell.”

Premises-wise, while the business initially took on half the yard area, it now rents it all. With the landlord’s support, a new four-bay, 20ft workshop extension is planned.

“Our growth funding has come from within the company, so our activities have to be profitable,” says Chris.

“At the same time, we can’t afford to carry big stocks of big equipment. Our suppliers, though, have been very fair with us in their support.”

Promotion of the business has been largely done through social media, a simple website, and attendance at small local shows.

“There are a number of these in Norfolk, and they’ve given us a good chance to show people what we do,” says Karl.

“We’ve been offered the use of a local airfield, and next year are considering an open day with all of our suppliers.”

Service commitment

With the business having been built on service, Chris believes that has to remain its focus, whichever way it continues to expand.

“Few engineers or dealerships are committed to the job like the beet ones, because of the longer September to March harvest and trickier winter conditions, and that’s why I’m pleased we have the beet experience among our service team.



The Deutz-Fahr and Zetor franchises complement each other by offering different specs and sizes of tractor, believes Chris

“There’s no point selling machines we can’t then support – that’s the quickest way to lose business. We are in a good position, with a decent number of service staff to match our workload, but, with our expansion, we will need more.

“I’d like to perhaps add a cultivation equipment franchise to match the larger Deutz-Fahr tractors, but beyond that, I’m really happy with the franchises we have. I’d rather not get into the additional complexities of the likes of sprayers. We do get manufacturers knocking on the door wanting us to take them on, but we are happy at the moment. Suppliers can start to drive your business if you’re not careful.

“We already have multiple strings to our bow, meaning we are never quiet, but thankfully, given the issues some dealers have in finding them, we are well-armed with good service staff.

“There are still family farms and independent contractors to serve, and they are a core customer for us. Keeping personal contact and service, and continuing it after the sale, is how we will continue to work.”



Most recently, the firm has added ATVs and telehandlers to its offering, becoming agents for CF Moto and for Merlo

Fantastic growth in our dealer network

So says Tony Macer, Kress sales director for the UK and Ireland, who tells *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS about how far the company and its dealer network have come in past two years, changing pro users' attitudes to battery products – and why they choose to support our Conference and Awards.



Tony Macer, Kress sales director for the UK and Ireland

Service Dealer: It has been exactly two years since *Service Dealer* featured Kress' owner, Don Gao, on the cover, launching the CyberSystem. How has business developed for you since then?

Tony Macer: Since the launch of the Kress Commercial CyberSystem – and the subsequent feature on the cover of *Service Dealer* – our business has experienced remarkable growth and transformation. We've seen a significant

increase in customer engagement in enquiries, and new client acquisition. The enhanced visibility from the magazine feature has helped to establish us as an industry leader in battery technology. This has led to multiple valuable partnerships and collaborations.

SD: Has the launch of the eight-minute charging system had the desired effect of changing professional users' attitudes to battery-powered equipment?

TM: Absolutely. The launch has had a profound impact on the professional users. Attitudes toward battery-powered equipment were hesitant, based on previous negative experiences with other battery equipment. Slow charging times, reliability, familiarity, plus not wanting to move from fossil fuel-based solutions. However, our simple fast-charging solution, commercial batteries and tools have effectively addressed all the hesitations and addressed all their concerns.

Users have reported newfound confidence in utilising our batteries and tools. Our system allowed them to work more efficiently, whilst reducing operational costs substantially. We are

seeing significant changes to attitudes on a regular basis. We believe the CyberSystem has proven to be a game changer in the industry, fostering a greater acceptance our battery system as a commercially viable solution for the first time in our industry.

SD: What have you learned about the UK professional end-user sector in these intervening years?

TM: In the intervening years, we've learnt that the UK and Ireland professional end-user sector values efficiency and reliability above all. Users are increasingly prioritising tools that enhance their productivity, reduce down-time and offer sustainable and healthier alternatives to their traditional tools. There's a growing demand for innovative solutions – particularly in battery technology, as professionals seek to minimise environmental impact without compromising on performance. Additionally, we've seen a trend towards greater collaborations and knowledge-sharing within the industry, highlighting the importance of our dealer-first approach among professionals.



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

TM: There are certainly a lot more options and wider ranges from the competitors in the outdoor power equipment sector. We have yet to see our unique CyberSystem battery technology matched. We believe our innovative features and solution set us apart, allowing us to maintain a strong competitive edge in the industry.

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

TM: We have ensured that our complete Kress Commercial Range of outdoor power equipment can, as a minimum, rival the best-selling fossil-fuelled alternatives on the market. This focus on quality and performance ensures that professionals can rely on our equipment for their demanding tasks, reinforcing our reputation as leaders in the industry. Our full 'five-year' warranty on tools, and the 'eight-year' warranty on the Kress CyberSystem, demonstrates our confidence in our products.

SD: How has your dealer network developed over the past couple of years?

TM: Kress have seen fantastic growth in our network of dealers over the last

couple of years, which continues to this day. Interest in both the CyberSystem and our amazing range of RTK robotic mowers has ensured we have rapidly gained awareness throughout the landscaping and commercial garden industry.

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

TM: Our dealer network has found that our unique approach entering this sector is refreshing and dealer-centric. The product range, technology, quality and durability are industry-leading. The Kress ethos is protecting the dealer's cash margin and removing concerns about any race to the bottom with online pricing. Dealers are engaging, as they know they are the only route to market for Kress OPE.

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

TM: Our dealers are our long-term partners. The expectation is to grow together and establish a profitable business together. We offer a unique stocking solution where dealers do not unnecessarily directly compete on anything other than service levels and support for our brand. This works well, ensuring that we get as close as possible to the win-win situation that all

businesses desire.

Feedback from dealers has been essential since our launch. We take on all views, and make changes where necessary. Our Kress dealers are intrinsic to our growth plans.

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

TM: Try Kress! We can offer a range of outdoor power equipment that can rival the best of the petrol-powered alternatives, and, at the same time, they can save money with no downtime waiting for a battery to charge, or the need to carry tens of batteries every day! Kress offer a risk-free option to trial our range of tools for a two-week period from any of our commercial dealers.

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?

TM: If I understand you correctly, electric vehicles don't adequately replace internal combustion engines? Within the car industry, I guess the potential arguments against this claim have dramatically changed in the last 24 months. Just the pure number of EVs on



our roads now and the fifth best-selling car of 2023 being an electric car from Tesla, illustrate this. The Kress CyberSystem is unique in the OPE sector, as it provides a battery system with the highest peak energy output of any equivalent commercial OPE battery. It can sustain super-ultra-rapid charging every time it needs to be charged – not the occasional charging recommendations of the EV industry. Plus, it is designed to be charged to 100% every time, then discharged completely at a high rate of energy release, and then charged again multiple times every day. There isn't an EV battery pack that could withstand that level of use, and certainly no other brands are offering anything close to the warranty that we are offering.

For example, our 5.5kw CyberTank costs just £1.70 – £2 a day – to charge, and this can keep a two-man crew running for a day. I challenge anyone to do the same with internal combustion.

SD: The lack of service work with battery tools is also something that some of our dealer readers have expressed concerns about. What do you say to them?

TM: Our battery tools have a complete service and diagnostic portal that can be charged for. Any tool with a moving part – for instance, a hedge-cutter, chainsaw, grass trimmer, lawnmower – all will need to be serviced regularly, just as they do with petrol equivalents. And the consumables are the same. Selling

a tool – and making great cash profit – shouldn't hinder a dealer's ability to offer a service package, too! Making money when you sell a tool, and then making money when you service equipment, remains the same.

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

TM: We have partnered with a battery recycling company, who can provide a battery recycling bin to any of our dealers, with a few different sizes and options available. There are clearly guidelines for storing and transporting batteries – especially high-voltage and high-Wh batteries – and a protocol for any damaged or faulty batteries. The EU and UK governments have a commitment to ensuring recycling and battery second life options are kept within each market to avoid unnecessary transportation costs.

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

TM: There are some clear advantages that battery-powered OPE tools have from an emissions, health benefits, noise, vibration and performance point of view. Clearly, there are some considerations that need to be in place in terms of handling batteries and protocol for charging, etcetera. However, this is no different to the potential hazards of handling and using petrol-powered

equipment. It is primarily that this element is less understood currently, so education needs to play a part in the changing of a culture.

More encouragingly ... the younger generations see the positive benefits. They have an attitude of: 'If this is to be my career, I want to protect my health and be environmentally-friendly at the same time'.

SD: I believe there have been some changes in roles at senior management level recently. Can you tell us about those?

TM: We have expanded our senior management team at both a local and global level to reflect the increasing and changing demands of quick growth.

SD: And dealers have mentioned some area sales manager changes. Can you tell us about those?

TM: Like any new brand entering a new sector – especially when we have dramatic technology advances – the team and new product development means we must continuously review, react and improve to stay on track. The goal is to replace petrol outdoor power equipment, all in the name of ensuring our industry is more in line with other major markets in reducing pollution levels and ultimately saving our planet.

SD: Are there more products to come from Kress to interest dealers?

TM: Kress' DNA is new product development. We have an extensive team of R&D engineers and product managers – both at our head office and around the world – that are continually developing new equipment for our ranges. 2025 will see further developments of the RTK range, commercial chainsaws, and the further extension of our hand tool range.

SD: Kress are once again principal sponsors of the Service Dealer Conference and Awards. Can you tell us about why you choose to do this?

TM: Becoming the principal sponsors of the Service Dealer Conference and Awards, as well as several other major UK events over the past few years, has played an essential part in getting the Kress brand out into the UK and Ireland markets. Kress is recognised in the industry as a major alternative to the established brands. This type of sponsorship helps to confirm our desire and commitment to become a dominant brand in the robotic mowing sector, and all OPE sectors.

SD: What do you think dealers get out of attending the Conference?

TM: The conference is an ideal opportunity for dealers and brands to mix and share both the good and the bad from their own experiences in a neutral environment. They get to see and hear what is new and what



Kress are exhibiting at autumn trade shows this year

is planned from the brands, as well as celebrating the achievements and successes that individual dealers and dealer staff have achieved over the last 12 months. Trade shows can provide some of this. However, a dedicated Conference can have a far greater impact.

SD: You have recently exhibited at GroundsFest, and are about to feature at SALTEX. What do you feel you achieve by having a presence at these events?

TM: Industry events are important to building credibility in an established market. It opens the doors to new conversations with dealers, contractors, national accounts and the press. A major benefit is we get to talk directly to the

important contacts necessary to expand our business.

SD: What do you see as the future for Kress in the UK?

TM: Kress are committed to becoming one of the major brands within the OPE sector. We believe that, with the combination of our industry-leading robotics and Kress Cyber Battery System, we have the DNA to establish ourselves and play a leading role in changing the OPE industry, transitioning a fossil-fuelled industry to one that can embrace the full potential of battery power and the clear benefits that it can offer the user and the environment.

SD: Thank you.

Breaking into the big league

While some key tractor brands no longer offer sub-50hp models, the compact specialists are increasingly moving up the power scale, but generally with simple-spec machines. Do such makers offer dealers a new approach for the tractor market? MARTIN RICKATSON reports on Kioti's latest launch.

Take a look around most new 100hp-plus tractors available today, and a stripped-back specification for those not seeking a CVT transmission, electronic spool valves or a touchscreen terminal is becoming harder to find.

The market for customers who don't need or want such bells and whistles is one that remains strong, but is arguably underserved. That, at least, is the belief of South Korean tractor maker Kioti, which is now offering models of up to 140hp with what it says are the features such buyers are seeking, but without the additional cost and complexity of the ones they aren't.

With the mainstream tractor market in the midst of tough times, Kioti's UK importer reckons dealers offering its products as a supplementary line to a bigger brand – as well as those who offer Kioti tractors alone – can benefit from this product focus. And, with the recent upheaval across both the manufacturer and dealer sectors, the firm says there are opportunities for those seeking additional

income streams, or even a different dedicated tractor franchise.

Kioti – known as the Daedong Corporation in South Korea – has been making tractors since 1968, and is reckoned to be South Korea's largest agricultural and compact tractor manufacturer. Its key markets until now have been the groundcare, golf, smallholder and equestrian sectors. Of its annual tractor output of 50,000, 10% goes to 27 importers across Europe. The firm began exporting tractors to the USA during the 1980s, and now sells in excess of 14,000 units per year there. Since then, it has gone on to develop markets across the wider world, and now has subsidiaries or importers in most countries.

While the German-based Kioti Europe subsidiary is responsible for many key continental markets, the independent Netherlands-based Pols Group covers such countries as Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland and France, backing them with a number of services, including full parts warehousing with overnight distribution. In addition, the firm owns Kioti UK, the Huntingdon-based



Kioti now offers tractors up to 140hp with what it says is a spec that doesn't include the cost and complexity of unnecessary features



Standard rear spec comprises a 4.4t rear linkage, two double-acting mechanical spools and 540/540E/1,000rpm PTO



Cab spec is kept simple, with mechanical spool valves, but there is an armrest with integrated hitch and throttle controls

business it set up to fill the vacuum created when RECO, the brand's initial UK importer in the early-Noughties, was dissolved.

Kioti also manufactures the K9 (formerly Mechcon) utility vehicle

and a zero-turn mower range, both offered by Kioti UK, plus some products not sold here, including skid-steer loaders and a golfcart line. The UK business, though, has been developed primarily around its compact and subcompact tractors in the 20-to-80hp power bracket. While RECO's initial offering encompassed only 35, 45 and 50hp models – before expanding down into the compact sector – Kioti's tractor introductions have, in recent years, crept up the power scale, and the company now competes firmly in the 100hp-plus tractor category, with the 101hp HX1001 and 117hp HX1201 launched last year. This summer, they were joined by the longer-wheelbase 130hp HX1302 and 140hp HX1402, powered by Kioti's own Stage 5 four-cylinder turbocharged and intercooled engine. Available on 38in rear wheels, these are the models the maker hopes will take it and its dealers into the mainstream ag market, particularly among livestock farms looking for something bigger to handle a baler or basic fieldwork, or specialist cropping enterprises, such as veg producers.

Spec to suit the sector

Despite coming in at lower list prices than many similarly-powered machines, the HX tractors are specified fairly comprehensively, with a four-range, eight-step powershift 40kph transmission, plus an electro-hydraulic shuttle. Implement coupling-wise, there is a 4.4t rear linkage, two double-acting mechanical spools, and 540/540E/1,000rpm PTO, while options include front linkage and PTO. For those requiring additional features, a premium specification package is in development, to include a load-sensing hydraulic pump, air-suspended seat, LCD instrumentation, an adjustable flow rate hydraulic system, front axle suspension and telematics-based fault-finding.

"We intend to maintain our emphasis on tractors that meet the needs of the groundcare and associated markets, but we now have the products to stretch our offering into the lower-end ag market," says Frans Pols, managing director of Kioti Europe.

"With the changes occurring across the agricultural tractor sector, we think this offers dealers an opportunity for greater sales scope, with a different type and specification of tractor, offering some features we have established on some of our smaller ranges, and others developed for these new HX models.

"We aren't working to the same specification or prices as comparable power models from the premium makes on the market, but are offering lighter-weight and manoeuvrable alternatives, with significant price advantages spec-for-spec. We include the features customers say they want – mechanical cab suspension is standard on the new HX models, for example, and the tractors are available with Quicke or Kioti loaders with integrated joystick."

The tractors are offered with Kioti's established warranty scheme, says Patrick Desmond, Kioti UK general manager.

"That's a five-year/3,000hr package, with the first two years covering all key machine aspects, and years three to five covering parts and labour for engine and transmission.

"We're aiming for 10-to-15 unit sales annually over the first two years. Full-spec list price for the HX1302 is £92,500, and, for the HX1402, it is £104,000, while a Kioti loader is £10,000."

RX range revised

Meanwhile, Kioti has also renewed the next range down in its line, the RX series, replacing the 73hp RX7330 with the RX8040. It offers the same power output from an in-house four-cylinder, 2.4-litre engine, with DPF but not DEF to manage emissions. Features Kioti believe will appeal to potential customers include a five-pillar cab with passenger seat, galvanised steps, and an air conditioning unit located beneath the seat, rather than on the cab roof, to minimise tractor height.

There's a five-range transmission with four synchronised speeds in each, changeable conventionally or via a declutch button on the gear lever, plus power shuttle and creep ratios down to 240m/hr and a dial to set clutch response. A front loader joystick is standard, and there are two or three double-acting spool valves. Linkage lift capacity is 2.8t, and there is a 540/540E/1,000rpm PTO package with an auto PTO cut-off. The same dealer diagnostic kit works across the Kioti range.

"Having made some really good recent appointments in areas like Suffolk, we now have a pretty comprehensive UK dealer coverage," says Patrick.

"But there are gaps still to fill, in Yorkshire, Lancashire and western Scotland. Here – and in areas such as mid-Lincs and Cambs, where we're looking to replace recently-closed dealers – we're keen to talk with those who share our customer support and service focus."

Collaboration is out front and centre

Kubota Gianni Ferrari – the result of a partnership between the Japanese manufacturer and the Italian grounds care machinery maker – have revealed the latest fruits of their alliance, launched back in 2022. *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS travelled to Reggiolo, northern Italy, to find out more.

In mid-September, I and other invited members of the trade press travelled to Reggiolo – near Bologna, Italy – to hear about the progression that has been made following Kubota's purchase of local grounds care machinery manufacturer Gianni Ferrari in 2022.

Before the trip, I had visions of elegant grass cutting machinery, gliding across immaculate lawns in the shadow of grand Italian palaces – which, to be fair, was the plan. However, the tail-end of Storm Boris put paid to all that. Heavy rain did not stop falling during my day-and-a-half-long visit to the area, meaning no demonstrations were

able to take place. Instead, we made the best of the (damp) situation with some static walkarounds, a series of presentations, and a factory tour – all of which delivered great insight into where this collaboration of East meets West is currently at. And, this year, that's out-front centre-collect mowers.

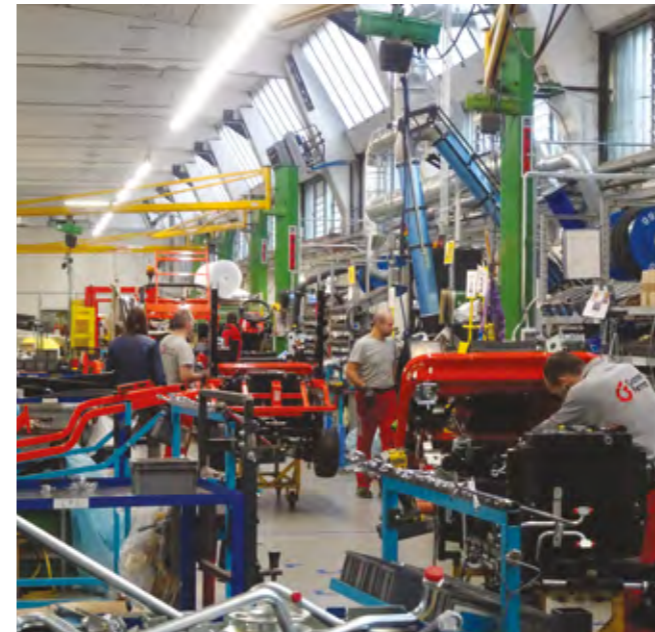
Before we got to the new machinery that UK dealers will be seeing, though, it was fascinating to hear where the company saw themselves, now we're a couple of years on from the acquisition. We had representatives of the corporation from the UK, Italy and Japan at hand to hear their take.

It was fascinating to learn from Kosuke

Ota (or Ota-san, as he was known), vice-president for sales and control, who said: "Kubota people think not just about making money, but how we can contribute to society." This philosophy sat well with people at the traditionally family-owned Gianni Ferrari.

Ota-san continued by explaining why Kubota wanted to purchase the Italian manufacturer in the first place. He said: "Our mission when we took over Gianni Ferrari was to discover how we could make it grow. Our ambition was to increase the range offered, and to increase profits – which is what we are doing now."

Henry Bredin, Kubota UK's general



Inside the Kubota Gianni Ferrari factory in Reggiolo, Italy



UK product manager Matt Wilson introducing the FC2-221

manager for sales, marketing and dealer development, continued by explaining what the Italian addition meant for Kubota's offering. He said: "Gianni Ferrari gives us additional products to enhance our portfolio. It also makes for an attractive proposition for our dealers, as it gives them an expanded lineup to present to differing customer groups. It keeps them interested in us."

Henry was also keen to emphasise the corporation's community ethos, highlighting all the local sports clubs and groups near their base in Thame, England, which they now sponsor. "We collaborate with our dealers in support of these clubs," Henry explained. "Reaching further than just business is our motto. We want to have a positive impact on local communities wherever Kubota is located around the world."

Asked whether the Gianni Ferrari purchase had meant a boost for Kubota's dealer network in the UK, Henry explained how Kubota already had a "mature distribution chain" in the UK and Ireland for grounds care. He confirmed that, essentially, that aspect of their dealer network was pretty much complete. It was in the agricultural sector where dealer network expansion was more likely to take place.

New mowers

It was then time to get into some of the new machines which have come about since the two companies were brought together. A current major focus is a range which they are grouping together under the banner of 'out-front centre-collect' mowers.

UK product manager Matt Wilson said that development has come far since 2022. He told us: "The Gianni Ferrari acquisition opened up the commercial grass cutting sector massively for us at Kubota. We had some gaps in the marketplace which we are now able to fill."

To this end, new this year are the FC2-221 and the FC3-221E ride-on machines. The primary objective of the FC2, said Matt, was to create a machine that brought simplicity to the existing range. He explained that design changes have led to a notable reduction in the number of wearing parts and maintenance needs, while the operating platform now features a more traditional and user-friendly layout.

Features include a 480-litre grass collector, whilst the raising, lowering and tipping functions of its high-lift feature are operated with a single lever.

The mower can come with either a rotary or a flail deck. The rotary deck features twin rotors with overlapping blades, while the flail deck offers

various cutting blade options to suit different conditions and applications. The latter option also comes with the patented 'Smart System' of blade removal, incorporating a magnetic pin for swift blade changes – a function that Matt was particularly enamoured with.

Matt was also keen to point out that, with these new machines – and the Gianni Ferrari range in general – the whole area of synthetic pitches had opened up for Kubota. "From our dealers' perspective," explained Matt, "we are giving them the ability to go out and sell into areas that we didn't previously have a foothold in."

Parks, golf clubs, sports fields and community all-weather pitches are all now all potential customers for these machines, Matt emphasised.

With the weather not playing ball for practical demonstrations, we made do with a walkaround and a fascinating tour of the factory, to see the machines coming through the production process.

An insightful trip overall, with the chance to see some new machines (not quite) in action – and UK dealers will be interested to hear of the promise of further machinery developments in the pipeline to look forward to.





BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

Workshops making up for any dip in sales

HOW HAS YOUR OVERALL BUSINESS BEEN COMPARED TO 2023?

UP ON LAST YEAR **42%**
 ABOUT THE SAME **38%**
 DOWN ON LAST YEAR **20%**

SALES WORKSHOP
 SERVICE PARTS
 STAFF %

Dealers say customers often looking to repair rather than buying new

The results of our Autumn 2024 dealer survey indicated that independent dealers are finding any dip in new machinery sales compensated for by a buoyant trend in service and repair work.

To the key question of how your overall business has been compared to 2023, slightly more respondents said it was up on last year (42%) than the close second-placed answer of about the same (38%). Only (20%) described it as being down on last year.

Wholegoods sales were described by a majority of respondents as being down on last year, which could be a concern, as this does come after 2023. Many dealers told us that machine sales had declined then, too.

However, like last year when we asked, it does appear that many dealers are making up for this seeming shortfall in business with their service department. 55% of respondents told us that footfall in their workshop had increased again this year. This very much ties into what we've been hearing from readers anecdotally – that the season can only be described as busy.

Elsewhere, we were told that parts sales have remained pretty much the same for most – and, indeed, that most had not experienced an increase in their staffing levels.

How have your machine sales (whole goods) performed this year against 2023?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR **50%** | UP ON LAST YEAR **40%** | ABOUT THE SAME **10%**

How has your service department or workshop performed this year compared with 2023?

UP ON LAST YEAR **55%** | ABOUT THE SAME **40%** | DOWN ON LAST YEAR **5%**

How have your parts and accessories sales performed this year compared with 2023?

ABOUT THE SAME **57%** | UP ON LAST YEAR **38%** | DOWN ON LAST YEAR **5%**

How have your staffing levels been this year compared to 2023?

STAYED THE SAME **70%** | UP ON LAST YEAR **20%** | DOWN ON LAST YEAR **10%**

“Your say”

Navigating the ups and downs of the season, we asked: what have you found has worked particularly well for you this year in keeping your dealership successful?

- Expanding our service department has allowed us to undertake more volume of servicing and repair work, which has seen us gain more customers due to the quicker turnaround repair time.
- We have found that people have been keen to have equipment repaired, rather than replaced. We believe this is due to the economic unrest following the general election. As a result of this, we took the decision to recruit another member of staff for our workshop, and, after some time, we found the right person, and he has had a positive impact on the business. In turn, this has led to an increase in spares sales. We have also invested in our business communications, with the implementation of online forms on our website for service bookings and spare parts enquiries. This has led to an increase in bookings, with many coming from new customers. We feel that 2024 started with the promise of being a great year, but it faltered a little, and has finished up being a good year.
- Working with the right supply partners is key to the efficient working of the business.
- Not accepting to service or repair any machines not purchased from our company, or any older machinery, or machinery poorly treated with complete lack of maintenance. It has helped our workshop to cull a number of customers, and helped the sales team sell some more new units.
- Nothing! It's been a year of stress, hassle and problems!
- Not taking in machines that are generally sold online or by DIY stores. Carefully assessing machines that require more work than 'just a service,' and estimating costs for customers. This can then result in new sales.
- Being on the Yorkshire Wolds, the wet spring did not affect us with water standing, so we got off to a great start, and it kept going.
- Less stock. Less borrowing.
- Loads of overtime!
- I can't think of anything. It's been a year to forget!

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Setting yourself apart from the Big Box stores



Sara Hey, president of business 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: HOW TO MAKE YOUR SPECIALIST DEALERSHIP STAND OUT FROM THE CHAINS!

With manufacturers jamming more and more dealers into a marketplace, your product lines are no longer a unique advantage. Big Box stores are now picking up lines of equipment that have in the past only been available at select dealerships. To set yourself apart from the business down the road, you can no longer rely on your brands. You must work to create a unique experience that your competitors can't easily duplicate.

Understand what makes you different and unique

People will pay more for what they perceive as different or unique. Why would a vase from the Ming Dynasty of China be more valuable than a vase from a local discount store? Because there are not many 4,000-year-old vases around – and the more unique an item is, the more value we as humans place on it.

What do you want customers to walk away from your parts counter saying? "Their prices are great, and they always have the part you need!" How about your service department? "Their prices are a little high, but if you want it done right, and on time, this is where you take your equipment."

Whether you like it or not, you are constantly creating a customer experience. You have to make sure it's the kind of experience that will drive your customers to talk to others about your business in a positive way.

Make sure you are developing your brand

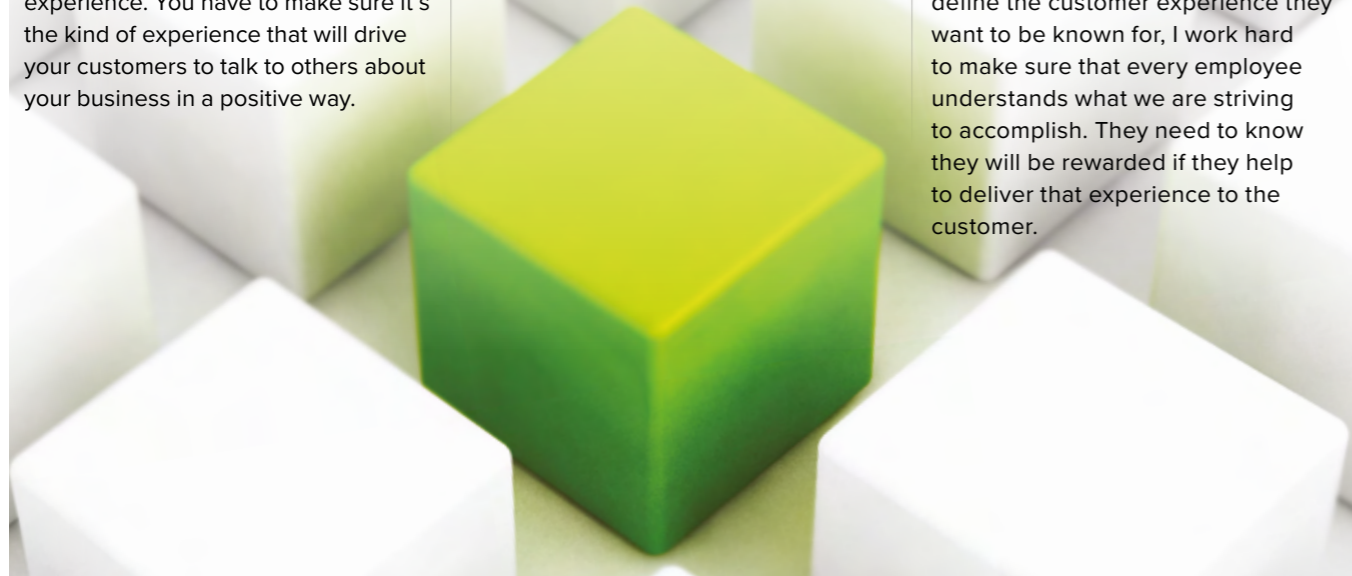
Your brand is intangible and has nothing at all to do with your location, the lines that you carry, or the building you are in. Instead, it refers to the reputation behind your company's name and logo. To build your brand, you have to be consistent in the image you create in your store, your advertising, and your web presence. I try to get all my dealers to create a 'sell line' that communicates what they are about in one sentence. That line is then used on signage in the store, on business cards, in advertisements and on the website.

Think of something simple. I encourage you to take some time and work on a sell line that tells customers what you are all about.

Reward your people for delivering the experience

Don't forget about the importance of customer service, and the impact your employees have on the customers' perception of your brand. Once a customer is ignored at the counter, or treated poorly on the phone or sales floor, you've lost not only that person, but everyone else that hears about the unfortunate experience. Remember that word-of-mouth can help, but it can also hurt. Get rid of employees who won't cooperate – even if they're related to you!

It's important to set goals for your people that focus on delivering the customer experience you are working to create. I do a lot of work in service and parts departments for dealerships, and, as I help them define the customer experience they want to be known for, I work hard to make sure that every employee understands what we are striving to accomplish. They need to know they will be rewarded if they help to deliver that experience to the customer.



Is there a better way?!



In her final diary entry, **Joanne Balmer** of Balmers GM, asks whether the process of winter stocking could be changed to improve matters – including cashflow – for dealers?

As this year draws to a close, and I pen my final diary entry, it's a good opportunity to sit back, catch our breaths and reflect on what I can only describe as a rather tumultuous year, with some really good areas of growth, some of which were quite stale, and all overshadowed by the loss of our Dad, David Balmer.

With 'Silly Season' now a distant memory, and the phones and emails becoming noticeably quieter, we're experiencing the inevitable arrival of manufacturer representatives through the door, all armed with order books in hand for their favourite time of the year – winter stocking. Sadly, we don't share the same sentiment, nor, probably, do many other dealers, either!

For as long as I can remember, we're expected to go through the same process each year - being asked to place huge stock orders with manufacturers based on what we've spent with them the previous year(s) - and that's it! So, I do find myself increasingly asking: is there a better way of doing this?

To give a recent example – and, of course, without naming any names, it's just been nonchalantly dropped into conversation that one manufacturer is expecting a 40% increase on what we ordered from them this time last year. I'm still picking my jaw up off the floor, by the way!

It is fair to say that we have had an exceptional year with said manufacturer, so a 40% increase in winter stocking may be feasible in their eyes, but from our perspective it may also cripple our cashflow next year - it's like we're being penalised for doing so well with them in 2024.

For us, as a multi-franchise dealer, we have multiple manufacturers expecting winter stock orders all at the same time. There must be more appealing options to incentivise dealers to commit to taking more stock - without the all the associated risks from the unknowns, such as a change of government, a potential slowdown in the

economy, potential changes to business taxation, and – let's not forget – the weather!

Could we look at quarterly or seasonal stock orders, rolling order programs, or, even better, forward order plans, where stock comes in early and is paid for at a later date via a payment plan? I won't hold my breath, but you never know?!

To summarise 2024: it's been a good year for our sales team, particularly with new whole-good sales. We saw a slower-than-usual start for our used commercial sales, but, thankfully, the season ended with demand for used machinery as strong as it has ever been.

On the domestic front, sales have increased again this year - something which I

personally take a keen interest in, as I've always been more involved with the garden machinery side of the business. This year, I was convinced that robotic mower sales would overtake ride-on mower sales, but, from running the numbers, this hasn't been the case – although it was rather close.

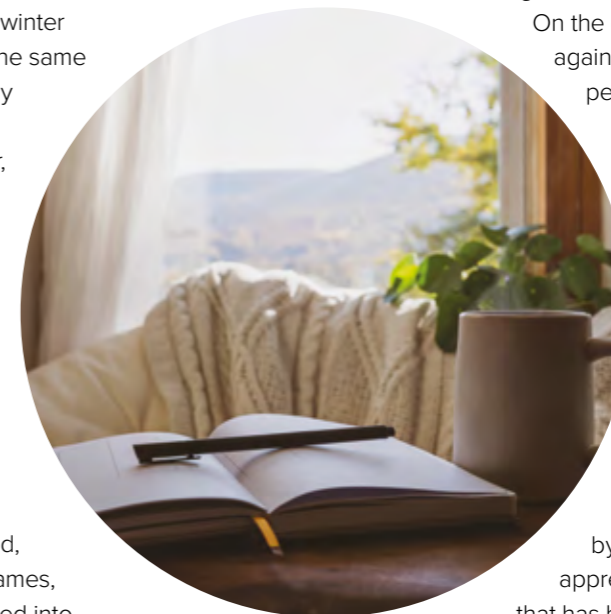
Aftermarket has once again been a challenge for us – specifically resources, by which I mean technicians. We appreciate it's an industry-wide issue that has been discussed time and time again,

but nevertheless, it's a huge challenge faced by dealerships up and down the country - and one of the reasons I'm pleased to be involved with Service Dealer's Machinery Dealer Diversity Group, to ultimately showcase our great industry in a bid to attract more people to come and work with us all!

Finally, I would like to thank everyone at *Service Dealer* for the opportunity to write this year's *Diary of a Season* – with a special thanks to editor Steve Gibbs for all the encouragement and patience afforded to me when times were tough!

As I pack my soapbox away, I'd like to wish all my fellow dealers a happy, healthy and successful 2025 season!

Jo B xx





PREMISES

Lease breakout

How can a tenant move on, and how can they get out of a lease? SME Digest editor, Adam Bernstein considers the options.

Unless a firm is flush with cash, taking on a premises lease and becoming a tenant is the only way to get up and running. In time, however, a tenant may find that their premises needs change.

They may be doing so well that they find that they have to move and take on a larger shop. On the other hand, the situation may not be so rosy – the only option to stay afloat is to downsize.

But how can a tenant move on? How can they get out of a lease?

Exercising a break clause

In law, a tenant does not have an automatic right to end a lease. Furthermore, 'break clauses' that lead to the legal termination of a lease are not regulated by statute. This means, very simply, that, beyond case law, they are solely governed by what is written within the lease.

The start point for any debate on the subject is the recognition that break clauses are complicated, and

tenants are strongly advised to seek legal advice if they are considering exercising one.

Bluntly put, a tenant must strictly comply with all relevant requirements in the break clause, and they would be well advised to protect their position by keeping evidence of their compliance.

This means keeping proof of how they posted or delivered the notice – if the lease is silent on the matter, the tenant should ask the landlord to acknowledge receipt.

Next, it's key that the tenant pays any outstanding monies due to the landlord, even if this is disputed. Payments can be made on a "without prejudice" basis and argued over later.

It's also important to ask the landlord for the precise steps needed to take to comply with any break conditions. This should include the landlord supplying a schedule of dilapidations – a list of repairs that need to be completed to reinstate the premises to a defined standard to formally end the lease.

Another option is to ask the landlord to accept the break notice upon payment of an agreed amount to deal with any outstanding breaches of covenant.

Timescales

As to when to exercise a break clause, that will always be: whenever the lease permits it.

Often, landlords require tenants to provide three or six months written notice of the intention to exercise a break. But then this must be validly served on the landlord.

It is important to note that break clauses are often conditional. This means that, without satisfying these conditions, the break clause exercise won't be valid.

The most common conditions are that the tenant must have paid all the rent (or all payments due under the lease), up to and including the break date. The tenant must have observed all their covenants; they must not be in material breach of repairing

covenants; and the tenant must hand the property back empty and with 'vacant possession.'

Observing the specified time limits is central to successfully exercising a break clause.

Break clauses can be fixed or rolling. A fixed break clause is usually exercised on a defined date during the lease term. Rolling break clauses are a type of break clause that is exercisable at any time during the term, with sufficient notice.

As to how to serve notice on the landlord, understanding what the lease demands is key. If a lease demands notice on pink paper, then pink paper must be used. While the tenant must be clear on their responsibilities in serving the notice, a landlord must act reasonably in accepting this.

Dilapidations

Dilapidations – the obligation to reinstate premises – can be very onerous on tenants, and can catch them out.

The end of the lease usually acts as a trigger that raises dilapidations issues precisely because tenants

have obligations under the lease to reinstate premises. And, even if there are no conditions on the right to break, a landlord can still pursue a dilapidation claim.

As to how tenants can protect themselves against aggressive landlords pursuing them for dilapidations, they should seek legal advice during lease negotiations (i.e. before taking on the lease), to ensure that repairing obligations are limited and not too onerous. Tenants should aim to incorporate a 'schedule of condition,' which details the state of the premises at the outset and what is necessary for reinstatement on return at the end of the lease.

But, if the lease is currently in force, then the best a tenant can do is regularly maintain the premises to minimise the expenditure at the end of the term.

Tenants should assess the premises before the end of the term, and obtain and compare quotes from different contractors to carry out any repairs. They need to make sure that the work is done in time, so as prevent the timely handover of the premises.

Tenants should also seek legal

advice upon receipt of a dilapidations claim, and consider instructing a surveyor to assess the landlord's dilapidations claim in line with the lease to make sure that it is fair.

Remember

It's important to keep in mind the fact that, once a break notice has been exercised, it cannot be withdrawn unilaterally – tenants should be certain that they want to get out of the lease.

With that said, the parties to the lease may agree to the break notice being withdrawn. However, as a matter of law, this will create a new lease with effect from the expiry of the break notice. This can have wide-ranging and unforeseen effects.

The importance of obtaining expert advice over the exercise of a break clause, or the conditions attached to it, cannot be stressed enough. Tenants are advised to talk to a solicitor before they exercise a break clause.

Find a surveyor at: www.ricsfirms.com/glossary/dilapidations

STAFFING

Employees and sickies

What should an employer do when a staff member is frequently absent, asks Greg Guilford, director of HR consultancy at WorkNest.

Sickness is a part of life, and employers will inevitably have to manage sickness absence at some time or another. You might have experienced a situation where an employee seems to be off sick frequently – how can such absences be dealt with?

Sickness absence policy

Creating a sickness absence policy is a fundamental first step in reducing absence rates and will serve to ensure that absences are managed in a fair, consistent and effective way. It will also establish what is expected of employees.

Importantly, setting out expectations allows genuinely

sick employees to know they will be supported during their absence. But it will also make malingerers aware of the risk of disciplinary action.

The sickness absence policy should set benchmarks – known as trigger points – for unacceptable levels of short and frequent sickness absence. These should be reasonable, and will help determine when short-term absence levels have become excessive.

It should also establish what actions will be taken once those triggers have been met.

Monitoring and recording each absence, and the reason for it, can prove useful in uncovering trends or patterns that can be tackled one way or another.

Conduct return to work interviews

Holding return to work interviews will allow you to probe the reasons behind absences and is an effective way to deter sickies.

Proactively following up on absences will signal to employees that their absences have been monitored and that disciplinary action may be taken if absences are found to be illegitimate.

Return to work interviews provide an opportunity to explore whether the absence was due to illness; find out whether the employee is fully recovered or whether this is part of an ongoing condition; and consider whether any reasonable adjustments can be made to their role to help improve their attendance.

However, it's also important to assess whether there are any signs of underlying medical conditions, whether the employee is suffering from a work-related illness, or whether they have a long-term health issue which may fall under the Equality Act 2010.



Consider whether formal action is required

In some cases, it may be necessary to take formal action. This would be warranted if the employee has reached the trigger points, and/or you discover that the employee's absence is not genuine.

It's important to be careful if making allegations against an employee without clear evidence. If you're too quick to jump to conclusions, the employee may have grounds to suggest that such allegations amount to a breach of trust and confidence. If they have been employed for more than two years, they could claim constructive dismissal.

Invite the employee to a meeting

Once you've decided that formal action is required, you should invite the employee to a meeting with their line manager to discuss their attendance. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative.

This is an opportunity for the employee to explain their absences. At the meeting, the line manager should review the sickness absence policy, the employee's attendance record, and – if appropriate – any medical evidence, which can be obtained from either the employee's doctor or an occupational health adviser.

Depending on this evidence and what the meeting has revealed, you may decide to issue a warning. You must clearly explain to the employee what level of attendance is expected, and set clear improvement targets and timescales in which to achieve them. You should also ensure that the employee understands what the consequences are for failing to improve their attendance levels.

It follows that seeking legal advice before taking action is highly recommended.

Revisit the situation

It's important to review the employee's attendance to see if there has been any improvement.

If the employee's attendance hasn't improved, a second meeting may be called. This should be carried out by a line manager, and the employee has the right to be accompanied.

The line manager may decide to either extend the review period, or issue a final warning requiring the employee to improve their attendance, and setting clear targets over a specified period.

Dismiss the employee

Of course, you may have reached the point where you consider that dismissal is the only avenue left. However, when considering dismissal for sickness absence, it's important to be mindful of the elements an employment tribunal could consider when determining if the decision was fair. Was there a fair reason to dismiss? Did you act reasonably in the circumstances? Did you follow a fair procedure?

Summary

According to a 2024 report in FT Adviser, sickness absence is estimated to cost businesses in the UK around £138bn per year. It's no wonder that employers are keen to take action to prevent employees taking too many sick days.



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Products

UTILITY VEHICLES

Spray and flail with Faunamaster

New accessories from Boss ORV



Boss Faunamaster sprayer 70

Boss Off-Road Vehicles has introduced two new accessories for use with ATVs and UTVs.

Complementing the Danish Faunamaster compact seed drills, the Sprayer 70 and FM 130 ATV flail mower are built for professional users.

The Faunamaster Spray 70 is designed for use on quads and UTVs, with a boom specially designed to resist damage by sliding off obstacles through a spring-loaded system. This, says the company, reduces the risk of damage to both the sprayer and its surroundings. The Spray 70 is equipped with precision spray nozzles from Lechler, Germany, for optimal performance.

The three-metre spray boom is height-adjustable, and folds for easy transportation. There is an efficient

mixing function built into the tank to ensure constant, uniform mixing of the spray liquid during use. Spray tank capacity is 70 litres, and there is a 10-litre clean water tank for hand washing.

The Spray 70 operates on a power supply of 12V/6 amp, and at a pressure of 120psi/8.3 BAR. The hose reel extends to ten metres with the spray lance. The sprayer comes complete, with only the major elements requiring assembly (which, the company says, takes about thirty minutes).

Also offered to professional users looking for an ATV flail mower for all types of terrain is the Faunamaster FM130. The mower is described as having an advanced adjustability system. The cutting height is adjusted directly from the ATV using remote

control, and the tailgate can also be opened for working on dense surfaces, allowing quick removal of grass clippings.

There is a choice of impactor, with either a hammer or a Y impactor. Hammer flails are versatile for all-round use, while Y flails are effective for grassy area and speedy mowing. Power for the Faunamaster FM130 comes in the form of a Honda V-Twin GX 690 (22hp), and the mower has a working width of 130cm.

5 SECOND INFO

- Adjustable 3-metre spray boom
- 70-litre spray tank
- FM130 features remote control adjustability
- Choice of Y or hammer impactor

COMMERCIAL



The most powerful Kombi-nation

New AP System KMA 200 R from STIHL

STIHL has launched the KMA 200 R, which it describes as its most powerful battery-powered KombiMotor to date, saying it offers greater power than the largest petrol KombiEngine.

The system is compatible with over ten attachments, including a brushcutter, pole pruner, sweeper brush, blower, edgers and hedge trimmers.

With a maximum power output of 1.5 kW, the KMA 200 R boasts 50% greater power compared to the KMA 135 R and 7% more power than the petrol KM 131, allowing power-intensive tasks to be completed at a faster rate.

The company says the optimised controls of the KMA 200 R allows users to cycle between three speed settings and best match the RPM to the task at hand, and to maximise battery working time. The maximum output of the KMA 200 R is 9,500 RPM, 1,000 RPM higher than the KMA 135 R, resulting in higher performance.

In addition, its adjustable loop handle can be moved along the shaft for greater comfort while working, and the harness attachment point can also be adjusted for perfect balance, too.

For brushcutting applications, the KMA 200 R must be used with the new FSS-KM attachment. The FSS-KM features a wider 45cm cutting diameter.

In addition, the new KombiMotor is compatible with the manufacturer's Smart Connector 2 A. The connector plugs directly into the control module of the machine to collect useful operating information. The STIHL Connected App can collect this information via Bluetooth and process it to create bespoke maintenance schedules, as part of a wider fleet management system.

FORESTRY

First in a new generation

Rear-handled chainsaw from EGO

EGO Power Plus has added a professional chainsaw to its range for forestry and garden professionals.

The company says the CSX5000 is the first in a new generation of rear-handle chainsaws designed for demanding work. With a 30m/s chain speed, EGO say it provides comparable performance to established petrol saws.

Chris Buck, product manager at EGO, said: "The most demanding ground saw applications require precision, power and good ergonomics. The CSX5000 delivers all three in a saw that matches or exceeds the performance of petrol saws."

Suitable for bar lengths of 40cm to 50cm, the saw has a 50cm full chisel chain for cutting, and metal bumper spikes for extra stability when cross-cutting. Intended for light forestry work, it copes with felling and cross-cutting tasks. An integrated felling line enhances safety by ensuring the user can see in which direction the tree or branches will fall.

Weight distribution is integral to the saw's performance and safety, so it features a centralised battery position to provide optimal tool balance. The company says the handle positions also ensure comfort when both cross-cutting and felling.

The saw also features a new display screen that enables the user to quickly check all the key parameters of the saw, such as oil level, battery capacity and set speed. The operator can use the LCD control panel to change the chain speed down to 25m or 20m per second, and to control the oil rate to ensure efficient cutting. In addition, there is a translucent oil tank for easy level viewing, and a flat filling position to minimise the risk of spills.





New range of XGT chainsaws

Rear-handled, brushless models from Makita

Makita has expanded its chainsaw collection with the launch of the UC022G, UC024G, UC025G and UC026G 40VMax XGT rear-handle brushless chainsaws.

All the new models are built on the company's 40VMax XGT platform to deliver what Makita describes as robust performance and extended runtimes, and each have been manufactured with the same body and motor design. The key differences between each model sits with the choice of chain bar lengths that are available - the UC022G at 350mm, the UC024G at 300mm, the UC025G at 350mm, and the UC026G at 400mm. Furthermore, the UC022G doesn't require any tools for chain tensioning, due to the easy operable handle for toolless adjustment, whilst the UC024G, UC025G and UC026G utilise captive bar nuts.

At the heart of the new chainsaws is a brushless motor that generates 1.6kW of maximum output power that is comparable to a 35cc two-stroke petrol chainsaw. The manufacturer says this speed allows the blade to cut through thick branches, with chain speeds up to 25.5m/s.

Improved trigger response rate provides acceleration, from 'Trigger ON' to full speed in under one second. Furthermore, should the chain lock due to load, the tool is able to restart immediately upon removing the blade from the load, without the need to retrigger, making it possible to resume cutting operations straight away.

Each saw has a highly visible felling line, as well as an onboard automatic oiler with an adjustable flow rate. The models are also equipped with an ergonomic soft grip that reduces vibration and fatigue from prolonged use. The saws' lightweight design further improves manoeuvrability and control, making them easier to handle in various cutting conditions, and safety features include a chain brake for added protection against kickback, as well as a protective hand guard.

AGRICULTURAL

Beacon of change

Synchronised amber warning system from Kramp



Kramp has launched a twin amber warning light system with wireless synchronisation, which will be available through their dealer network.

The company says the market for amber warning beacons on agricultural equipment has progressed considerably in the last few years, with the increase of oversized tractors and machinery dealing with a growing intensity of traffic.

Kramp say they have taken this one step further by developing this wirelessly synchronised multipattern beacon set for tractors, which, they say, will further enhance the safety of agricultural vehicles on the road.

"With a simple push of a button, the driver can select patterns like single synchronised flash or even double flash, all made possible by the wireless connection between the twin beacons," says Klaas Peter van de Pol, senior category manager for Kramp.

"This innovative beacon set, available at local Kramp dealers, is designed to bring more attention and awareness in traffic, ensuring safety on the road."

The new light system joins Kramp's existing range of LED work lights, beacons and light bars under the Kramp brand.

COMMERCIAL

Ariens reach the Zenith

Designed for daily professional use



Ariens say the Zenith is designed for daily professional use, and will be equipped with the new Ariens Envoy mowing deck from 2025.

The manufacturer say the deck is characterised by durability, a consistent cutting pattern and a robust blade

system, whilst an optimised air flow ensures the cutting pattern.

The machine also benefits from a fully suspended and adjustable seat, with high backrest and folding armrests, new ergonomic driving lever handles, and standard wheel fork suspension.

The zero-turn mower is powered by a Kawasaki FX730V engine with a displacement of 726cm³.

COMMERCIAL

Expanded garden and landscaping options

Bobcat add to range

Last year, Bobcat introduced the first models of their new mower line for the European market.

The company have recently announced new additions, meaning the lineup now includes a selection of four ride-on mowers, a stand-on mower and a walk-behind mower.

The zero-turn ride-on mowers, for example, now comprise the ZT2000, ZT3000, ZT3500 and ZT6000, powered by Kawasaki engines from 16-to-24 HP with hydrostatic transaxles. The ZT2000 can be equipped with 122cm and 132cm TufDeck Pro cutting systems, and has

a maximum mowing speed of 11 km/h. The ZT3000 can be equipped with 122cm, 132cm or 155cm TufDeck Pro cutting systems, and has a maximum mowing speed of 12.8 km/h.

The ZT3500 zero-turn ride-on mower (pictured) also has Hydro-Gear transaxles, and reaches a speed of up to 16 km/h. This mower features a mechanically-suspended seat. It is also equipped with a ROPS construction, two fuel tanks, and a TufDeck Pro mowing system.

The ZT6000 can be equipped with 132cm or 155cm AirFX cutting systems, and has a maximum mowing



Bobcat ZT3500 mower

speed of 19.3 km/h. The company says it provides an easy ride thanks to the 4400 drive system that minimises vibration and noise, giving the operator even more comfort and control.

5 SECOND INFO

- Powered by Kawasaki engines
- TufDeck Pro cutting systems from 122cm to 155cm
- Up to 19.3 km/h mowing speed
- 4400 drive system for more comfort and control

DOMESTIC



Electric ZTrak introduced to European markets

Fully-electric, zero-turn mower from John Deere

John Deere has introduced the Z370R Electric ZTrak mower to European markets.

This fully-electric, zero-turn mower has the ability to cover up to 8,000 square metres per charge, says the manufacturer. The mower features a sealed 3.56 kWh (maximum-capacity) battery that is fully protected against the elements, including water, dust, and debris (IP66 rating). With a large LCD screen and ergonomic controls, it also provides intuitive operation and enhanced usability.

Equipped with either a 107cm or 122cm Accel™ Deep Mower deck, it also features front and side rails, enhancing its endurance. It has a mowing speed of up to 11km/h, and optional attachments and accessories (including a material collection system, mulch kit, utility carts and a magnetic hitch pin) are available to customise the mower.

It is backed by a five-year warranty on battery life, or 200 hours of machine usage.

AGRICULTURAL

Five new Scorpions

From Claas

CLAAS has launched five new Scorpion telehandlers in the three- and four-tonne class.

The new models, with lift capacities from 3.3 to 4.2 tons, are the Scorpion 733, 1033, 638, 738 and 742.

Due to higher hydraulic pressure, the new telehandlers deliver up to 300 kg more lift capacity - 3.3 tons in the 1033 and 733 entry models, and 4.2 tons in the 742. At the same time, to ensure balance and stability, the wheelbase has been increased by 100mm, with corresponding modifications to the counterweight at the rear.

This machine class now benefits from Smart Loading functions, too, due to new hydraulic controls with electronic pilot control.

The cab in the 733 and 742 models have also had a complete makeover. There is now an external safety guard and a partially-glazed

access door, which swings open by a full 180 degrees and features a quarterlight to improve cab ventilation. New compartments and cargo nets provide ample storage space on the inside of the door. Furthermore, sound insulation in the door has been increased to reduce noise levels in the cab.

The redesigned steering column makes accessing the cab easier, and also creates more foot room for the operator. The height and angle of the steering wheel can be fully adjusted to perfectly accommodate the operator's needs. The display is now positioned above the steering wheel, making it easier to read.

To the right of the steering wheel is the repositioned and redesigned dashboard, with a 3.5-inch colour screen.

The joystick has been relocated to the right of the operator's seat to further enhance comfort. The joystick and other key controls – such as the controller for the speed ranges – now move with the operator's seat, allowing the right arm to remain comfortably on the armrest during load cycles. It is backed by a five-year warranty on battery life, or 200 hours of machine usage.



A season's reflection



Our mystery columnist, THE SPROCKET, looks back on the rants, discussions and controversies he covered within his *Service Dealer* articles this year.

Coming to the end of another season, I thought it may be useful to reflect on my columns from 2024, and give updates on some of the subjects I covered.

Some were meant to stimulate discussion, while others were more a case of providing information in a (hopefully) constructive and interesting way. Others were meant to court controversy, but, sadly, one must be ultra-careful with the printed word, even when firing from a mysterious hidey-hole! The Sprocket is a supporter of the UK's land-based engineering dealer network, and supports independent machinery dealers.

There are many good, well-intentioned suppliers in our industry, and, from a Sprocket point of view, I would not want to tar them all with the same brush. However, I do believe there are some less-than-supportive companies who are exploiting dealers and just using them as a means to an end.

The dealer network is important in the distribution chain, and the unique offering a dealer has should be supported by their suppliers with fair terms of engagement. Markets will change, as will products and consumer demand. Buying patterns will vary according to trends. Within this, there will always be a need for a dealer network. So, as an industry, it is essential that dealers are supported and allowed to make a living, and not undermined by their suppliers.

Multi-channel distribution is the way of the retail world, and direct selling on the

internet or 'click and collect' is overtaking personal retailing. High streets are becoming decimated by closures of independent and large brand retailers, and footfalls are falling alarmingly. Yet, in all of this – and through the ravages of Covid – the dealer network stood strong, open and willing to support its customers in any way they could. They deserve the support of their suppliers.

But let's go back through my articles from this year see what can be reflected upon. Starting with ...

2024
JANUARY
FEBRUARY

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

This covered some of the fallout from Covid, considering changed working practices and the declining state of high street retail.

Working practices changed, and many of these changes are still with us today – for example, people working from home, hybrid working, and increased online purchasing with more click and collect. Thankfully, the dealer network was able to weather the storm of Covid and – dare I say – come out of it stronger than ever.

A brief chat with Andrew Goodacre, CEO of Bira, highlighted the difficult times high street retailers were having, and, in particular, the independent businesses. Andrew said: "Indies have the skill and determination to succeed." This is true of our dealer network. The high street continues to change, and many national brands have fallen by the wayside,

leaving empty shops and sad-looking town centres.

It does, however, appear that the LBE dealer network is still strong and adaptable. Whilst we have lost a few more companies than we would like, most suppliers still rely on a dealer network.

January and February also highlighted the recruitment issues for our industry, and the need to work together to gain the interest of newcomers and youngsters alike. This was a recurring theme throughout the year. Some progress has been made, and a recent announcement from LE-TEC (the Landbased Engineering Training and Education Committee) about changes to LBE apprenticeships will help with better training and better funding.

2024
MARCH
APRIL

WARRANTY WOES

Another one of those never-ending sagas that may never resolve itself to everyone's satisfaction.

Admittedly, this one was a bit of a rant about how unfair it can be for dealers to be paid so much less than their labour charge-out rates to repair product for a manufacturer or supplier that they may not have even sold in the first place. Get online with *Service Dealer* and have a read if you are a dealer that is fed up with being out of pocket over warranty.

With good or qualified technicians becoming a rarity, and the cost of training increasing all the time, the cost of employing a qualified technician within a

dealership is high, to say the least. Why on earth should a dealer get 30% to 40% less than their charge-out rate for repairing a product that the manufacturer has agreed was faulty? Worse still, there may not have been any profit for the dealer for that product, because they never sold it in the first place.

Why on earth would a dealer do a job and lose money on it when they probably have a queue of retail customers to sort out at the normal charge-out rate? It is not fair, and those suppliers who are culpable should step up and do something about it.

Sounds like another rant, but not one I can add an update to at this time.

2024
MAY
JUNE

WHERE HAVE ALL THE PEOPLE GONE?

Retired, mostly, or gone to cleaner, easier jobs for more money! Part of the recurring theme throughout the year was recruitment and retention.

This edition had two full pages about the issue, and, if you are recruiting, look it up in case there is some help there for you.

There is no magic solution. Whilst there are initiatives within the industry, it still needs a massive joint effort to raise awareness of what goes on, what careers are available, and the diversity that exists. We have an aging population of technicians in dealerships, and we risk a total loss of talent and experience unless we start hooking up newcomers with experienced mentors who can pass on certain skills and practices. Don't wait until this lack of recruitment bites you in the bum! It will hurt if you do.

2024
JULY
AUGUST

WHERE DOES IT ALL COME FROM?

This covered the issues dealers face with stocking and the supply chain, looking at the aftereffects of Covid on the supply chain and how manufacturers were coping.

Apart from the obvious issues faced in the aftermath of the pandemic, we even had a container ship stuck in the Suez Canal, which disrupted global trade for months! If one container ship can do that

to global distribution, it does highlight the delicate nature of the supply chain and the 'just-in-time' policies manufacturers have.

This piece covered the pitfalls of winter stocking – or 'pre-season ordering' – and the risks taken by dealers to satisfy their suppliers' demands. It was not all doom and gloom. I am sure most dealers manage their way through this situation, but it is a risky business committing to high stock levels months before the season breaks – especially with buying trends changing, the Internet and, in some cases, changes in distribution policies.

Understanding how the supply chain works for your business, and having a close relationship with your suppliers, will help with improving supply issues. I expect much of this has settled down for pre-season ordering for 2025, but has the demand from suppliers for pre-season orders adapted to the needs of the dealer?

I enjoyed writing this article, as it is an involved subject, and piecing together the supply chain issues is an interesting exercise. The *Service Dealer* designers provided a great graphic to go with the piece, which helped sum it all up.

2024
SEPTEMBER
OCTOBER

ANXIETY AND DISAPPOINTMENT

This was probably the most difficult of my pieces to write. Not because the subject matter was hard to put to paper, but because of the possible ramifications of speaking one's mind on a sensitive subject.

Essentially, this piece was about a dealer's position when a supplier decides to change their policies and go to market in a different way, bypassing the existing dealer network. This was prompted, of course, by STIHL GB announcing their hook-up with Screwfix. I wanted to cover some of the historical issues actions like this have created, and how several well-known brands have gone down the mass-distribution route through the sheds – more recently, using the internet and direct selling. Conflict can occur when the dealer is expected to pick up the pieces and cover warranty on products they have not sold – and, in some cases, will lose money by doing warranty repairs.

Understandably, few dealers want to put their head above the parapet and publicly challenge what one of their long-term suppliers is doing. Their only real response is to look at their business and make sure that they are not beholden to any one brand or supplier, ensuring that they diversify their product range so that any significant change can be overcome quickly. There are plenty of alternatives out there, and, as a specialist dealer, one would hope your customer base will trust you to steer them in the right direction for the correct product covered by aftersales service.

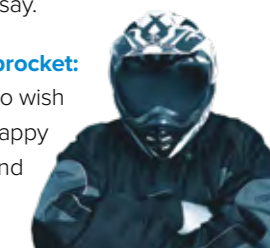
Change is inevitable, and suppliers want to use their brand recognition to sell more product and be competitive. Multichannel distribution has always been a way to stay on top. With smaller, less complicated battery products taking the market by storm, it may be that suppliers in this product area do not feel that they need to channel product solely through the dealer network. That's fine, as long as they don't expect the dealer to carry on dealing with them in the traditional manner. After all, it should be a two-way street.

To summarise, it has been an interesting year with all its ups and downs, and, whilst some issues will come and go, we seem to be stuck with the annual debate about the future of shows, the very real issues about recruitment, and where our future technicians will come from. The old argument about having a fair warranty system probably goes back to the invention of the wheel, and the anxiety and disappointment constantly faced by the dealer network in an ever-changing supply chain.

If you have any comments to make about any of these subjects, our editor will be very pleased to hear from you at steve@servicedealer.co.uk and he will assure you that your anonymity will be totally respected, and that your comments will be reported accurately to reflect what you have to say.

From the Sprocket:

I would like to wish you a very happy Christmas, and an excellent 2025.



What's on?

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

NOVEMBER 2024

EIMA International, Bologna 6-10
www.eima.it/en

AgriScot 2024, The Royal Highland Centre 13
www.agriscot.co.uk

Midlands Machinery Show 20-21
www.midlandsmachineryshow.com

Royal Welsh Winter Fair 25-26
www.rwas.wales/winter-fair

CropTec 2024, East of England Showground 27-28
www.croptecshow.com

Service Dealer Conference & Awards, Stratford-Upon-Avon 28
www.servicedealer.co.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 21-6/04
www.idealhomeshow.co.uk

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

APRIL 2025

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

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

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

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

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



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