

Elementary my dear Watson

Piling specialist Watson & Hillhouse will soon be a common name in the crane sector following its appointment in May as exclusive UK agents for the full range of Sany cranes and drill rigs from China. The company has obviously been busy as it has already sold two cranes. In a Cranes & Access exclusive, Mark Darwin visited the company at its Ipswich headquarters as it was due to deliver its first machine.

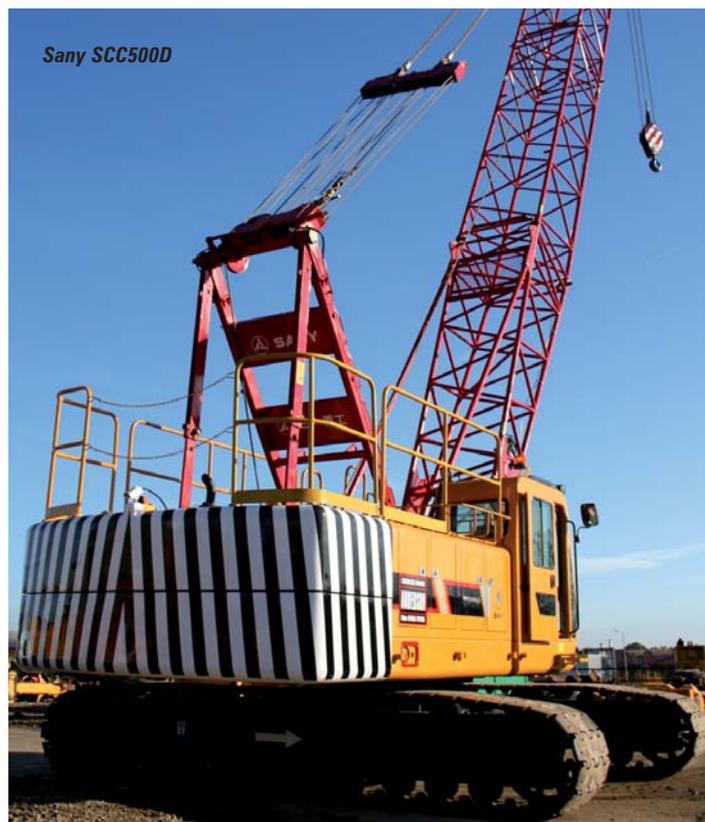
Given Watson & Hillhouse's background of 35 years in the piling industry - it is an obvious question to query its commitment to selling the Sany range of crawler cranes in the UK. But managing director Phil Bell immediately makes his intentions clear.

"Everything we hire out goes on the end of a crane," he said. "We saw an opportunity and we have a good level of in-house engineering support and sales expertise. The time is

right and there is a good demand for the product. We are fully committed to selling these cranes right across the UK."

With two sales in the first few months, the company has been quick out of the blocks, and is already in serious discussions with other potential purchases.

"Most enquiries to date have been for the 50 and 80 tonne cranes, and these will make up the vast majority of our sales," said Bell. "But there



Sany SCC500D



l-r Paul Lee, Zhao Wei and Phil Bell

have also been a few enquiries for 100 tonne cranes.

Sany's current range of crawler cranes spans from 50 to 400 tonnes although it is launching a 900 tonner in January 2008 and there are rumours of an even bigger crane in the pipeline. All of its models from 50 to 250 tonnes have already been CE marked and are available for sale in the UK. The larger machines are currently undergoing approval.

The first crane to be delivered - a 50 tonne SCC500D - was ordered by York-based Anderson Crane Hire. The relatively short delivery times meant that having ordered the crane in June it was at Watson and Hillhouse's head office in Ipswich being readied for delivery early in November. A second unit has been purchased by BSG Civil engineering of Maghera County, Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

The Anderson crane was ready for delivery in the UK five months after placing the order. It is lead times like this, combined with a competitive price that is obviously the initial attraction. Reliability remains to be seen, but the cranes use Cummins engines with either Rexroth or Kawasaki hydraulic systems.

"We are very serious about this new venture," said Bell. "We first started talking with Sany in August 2006 and we have been to China numerous times visiting its facilities in Shanghai and Beijing. Having studied the market we believe we have the best quality Chinese crane. Sany has only been building cranes for about seven years, and only exporting them for the last two or three. But although they do not have a history or tradition of crane building, it has allowed them to start from scratch with a totally new design which includes modern technology and construction methods."

"Chinese manufacturers are still learning, but Sany is more than happy to listen to our thoughts and suggestions," said Bell. "In fact we currently have Mr Zhao Wei, one of

Sany's design engineers staying and working with us on minor improvements to the crane for the UK market."

The SCC500D has extendable tracks giving a working width of 4.40 metres reducing to a 3.30 metre transport width. The main boom has a maximum length of 52 metres with a maximum lift capacity of 55 tonnes at 3.7 metres radius. The unit can lift 0.7 tonnes out to 34 metres radius on the full boom. The maximum fly jib length is 15.25 metres and when used with a 43 metre main boom, will take 3.2 tonnes to a height of about 57 metres.

"The crane certainly looks well-built, has a strong boom and is smooth



Both cranes are fitted with the optional Kruger load indicator systems

and easy to operate," said Paul Lee, operations director and in day to day charge of the crane side of the business. "All major components are easy to get at making maintenance easy and the unit is fitted with every feature one would expect on a European or American- built crane of this size."

Watson & Hillhouse will carry its own parts inventory and combined with its in-house service engineers, will provide a full machine back-up in the UK and Northern Ireland.

Sany has also set up a parts centre in Belgium and is scheduled to build an assembly plant and new European headquarters facility in Germany within the next 12 to 18 months. This is likely to provide additional reassurance for users in Europe, of which, I am sure that there will be many in the next few years.