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Spiders, spiders... everywhere

It is no secret that the aerial work platform industry is going through tough times just now, with most manufacturers of self-propelled units reporting a decline in sales of around 60 to 70 percent. Meanwhile many rental companies have seen a revenue decrease of around 30 percent due to lower utilisation and savage rate cutting. However there are a number of bright spots in the market where both manufacturers and rental companies continue to do well. One of these niches is the rapidly growing market for spider lifts, particularly tracked models.



Well, the original products in this sector had outriggers that when set up looked like spider's legs. The necessity that bred the invention was the need for a machine with a decent outrigger spread from a chassis that was narrow enough to pass through a single doorway. Today many lifts, particularly the larger ones, still retain this style of outrigger design, while many others have simple 'flop down' straight or bent outrigger legs. However, the spider lift moniker remains a good one to sum up the collection of narrow, self-propelled lifts, largely rubber track-mounted, that use outriggers for stability and levelling.

Two types of spider outrigger - the original in the foreground shows how the name was coined.



The spider lift's main benefit is that it is light, narrow and versatile; and can handle some of the worst outside terrain while - at least for the rubber-tracked models - be equally at home indoors on delicate flooring such as marble. If you add to this the fact that many spider lifts can pass through a single doorway, climb stairs and set-up on steep slopes, it's easy to understand their growing attraction.

Architects and developers take note

The larger model spider lifts are well suited to applications such as the cleaning and maintenance of high ceilings in public buildings such as cathedrals, mosques, museums and hotel or office atriums. At the higher end of the market there is an argument that a large spider lift is a practical and cost-effective alternative to built-in suspended or hydraulic maintenance platforms. The argument goes something like

- a) The building doesn't need to be reinforced or designed to accommodate the rails and tracks that built-in devices require.
- b) The architectural lines of the building need not be compromised.



A 42 metre Palazzani climbs the steps to Westminster Cathedral.

- c) A spider lift will usually cost significantly less.
- d) The lift can be used in other parts of the building.

It's easy to see why this can be such a persuasive argument, European Construction Design and Management regulations call for architects to consider safe means of access for any ongoing maintenance or cleaning tasks at the building's design stage. Working with a specialist spider lift manufacturer to specify a machine together with specific drawings of how to place and use it would qualify as meeting those regulations.



When it comes to smaller spider lifts the potential is entirely different and still largely untapped. There are a myriad of trades that even in the most developed European markets do not yet use powered access, for jobs such as external painting on houses or smaller commercial buildings.

Spider lifts can replace built-in systems.





spider lifts

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Then there's gutter, soffit and window installation, repair or replacement and, to a lesser extent, TV antennae/ satellite dish and security camera installation and maintenance.

These are often short jobs that are frequent and repetitive with ladders, trestles or small scaffolds currently the equipment of choice and normally carried around in the builder's van. If they are to change to powered access, the replacement needs to be equally portable. A trailer lift is certainly one solution as it can either be towed behind the contractor's van or collected from a local tool-hire shop as needed. However, once on site, they can be awkward to manoeuvre due to their length, and all but the smallest are too wide to pass through single doors or gates.

These same builders and contractors invariably own a twin-axle trailer that they tow behind their vans for transporting materials. They are also used to collect a tracked mini excavator when it's needed. The same builders would have used spades and shovels a decade ago but no longer consider this an option. The compact spider lift could well do the same for powered access?

Better availability is the key

Spider lifts can be towed to the job and once on site easily pass through doors or gates, set up almost anywhere, even on steps or slopes and have enough outreach to span obstacles such as flower beds etc...

However, in order for spider lifts to gain a wider acceptance they need to be more widely available. So far few if any of the major general rental companies have taken the product seriously, even though it meets their criteria for easy transport and compact storage. Price is clearly a factor as more producers enter the market and volumes rise spiders may become more affordable? Rental companies also need to consider how to reach a wider market. Builders that could use a lift every day will not want the cost of short-term rental, but may not be in a position to buy. In these cases contract rental might be an option? The problem with small builders is that they tend to be financially volatile and this may well be an obstacle. If a solution is found this could be the volume market of the future.

Who's who?

When it comes to spider lift manufacturers, the market leader in terms of unit volume is unquestionably Hinowa. Based near Verona, Italy, Hinowa produces almost three times the volume of most other manufacturers and is the only maker to have built and sold around 1,000 units in a single year. Last year it launched the Lithium powered 14:70 Goldlift battery and is increasingly working with

World Lift Industries, which distributes its products in the USA, India, Denmark and most of Asia.

At the top end of the market, in terms of size and price, Teupen leads, with models up to 50 metres, while Falck Schmidt currently builds the largest spider at 52 metres, but until now has focussed on the atrium market.

An interesting point is the total absence of any major self-propelled lift manufacturer. When and if this will change is an open question with no signs yet of any movement. The following chart covers all the companies that produce spider lifts on a regular basis.

Through the cloisters and into the nave

Panther Platform Rental was recently called on to find an efficient access solution for Salisbury Cathedral to clean, inspect and maintain its ceilings which are over 20 metres high. The challenge was to find a machine that was compact enough to pass through doorways and the cloisters and yet high enough to reach the ceilings. On top of this the equipment had to be gentle on the floors both in terms of overall weight and ground bearing pressures.

In the past scaffold or custom built towers have been used, but they require work areas to be closed off for days at a time and tend to be expensive. Panther specified an



Omme 2200 tracked spider lift. With an overall width of just 1.1 metres and a height of two metres, its non marking rubber tracks and relatively light weight were also gentle on the floors. The battery, diesel and AC mains tri-power pack, allowed the unit to work inside without fumes or noise - ideal for a place of worship.



And finally at the end of the working day the machine was quickly stowed and parked in a corner, thus not disrupting services.



The Omme 2200 passes through the first door....



And down through the



And through another doorway.



And through another doorway.

The principal Spider lift manufacturers

Company	Up to 15m	15-25m	Over 25m
Airo	No	Yes	No
Bluelift	Yes	yes	No
Cela	No	Yes	Yes
CTE	Yes	Yes	No
Dino Lift	No	Yes	No
Easy Lift	Yes	Yes	No
Falck Schmidt	No	Yes	Yes
Hinowa	Yes	Yes	No
Ihimer	Yes	Yes	No
Jekko	No	Yes	No
Leader	Yes	Yes	No
Leguan	Yes	No	No
Lion Lift	Yes	yes	No
Merlo	Yes	No	No
Multitel Pagliero	No	Yes	No
Nifty	Yes	Yes	No
Oil &Steel	Yes	Yes	No
Omme	No	Yes	Yes
Palazzani	No	Yes	Yes
Platform Basket	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socage	Yes	Yes	No
SUP Elefant	Yes	Yes	No
Teupen	Yes	Yes	Yes



New lightweight spider trailer

Bespoke trailer supplier Hazlewood and Teupen UK distributor Ranger Equipment have developed a new lightweight trailer for the 12.7 metre working height Leo 13GT tracked spiderlift.

Weighing in at 400kg, the trailer combines with the Leo 13GTs relatively low overall weight of 1400kg, plus 70kg for the on-board generator, to proved a combined trailer and lift weight of less than 1,900kg. This comes within the towing capacity of a wider range of vehicles, including small commercial vans and larger domestic cars, which would struggle with the two plus tonnes typically faced in transporting 12 and 13 metre spider lifts. An additional benefit is that by running a gross train weight below 3.5 tonnes with specific vehicles, it negates the need to fit a tachograph.

The trailer's overall dimensions have been kept as compact as possible

both for weight and manoeuvrability, being within the width of a typical large car. The unit is hot dip galvanised after manufacture for prolonged life and has twin axles with maintenance-free independent suspension, automatic reversing brakes and comes with stowable steel loading ramps.

Launched last autumn, the budget priced Leo 13GT is said to combine Teupen build quality with simple-to-use controls aimed at smaller rental companies and end-users. The specification includes non-marking tracks, low ground bearing pressures, narrow 780mm wide chassis, 6.10 metres of outreach with the maximum capacity of 200kg, plus completely automatic levelling operated from the platform control panel.





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Higher (50 metres) Access

Two years ago, Cranes & Access profiled a small up and coming Ramsbottom, UK-based access rental company, Higher Access. It now claims to have the largest spider fleet in the UK and has just taken delivery of the first 50 metre Teupen Leo 50GTX in the country. We return for an update.



In business, continual evolution is essential. At Higher Access, some things have changed drastically over the past two years, while others have remained the same. The fleet is now 100 percent spider platforms, and with 30 plus units it claims to be the leading specialist spider hirer in the UK. Director Lucy Ashburner however, is still running the day to day rental business, having just recruited a hire desk controller so that she can concentrate on growing the company.

The majority of the platforms above 23 metres are still Teupen and include the Leo 26T, a number of Leo 30Ts, one Leo 36T plus the new 50 metre, alongside the favourite Leo 23GTs. There are also 18 CTE traccess platforms, and 22 and 26 metre Ommes. The truck mounts, scissors and Pop Ups are long gone.

"We dabbled in other types of platforms but because of the poor returns and a possible conflict with other companies, and also the dilution of the specialist nature of our brand, we elected to concentrate on what we do best spiders," said sales manager, Paul Hyde. "We try to stay away from conventional equipment and

cross-hire as we find it difficult to maintain our service level."

Expansion has continued with larger premises - taking over similar sized offices, workshops and yard space next door - giving room for more equipment and in the longer-term, a training centre. Director Peter Ashburner has recently qualified as an IPAF instructor and the company firmly believe there is a need for a specialist spider training provider in the UK.

"We discussed the need for another depot in a different location but in the end decided to stick with a single depot. This is particularly advantageous when dealing with transport where the savings of a second depot buy an enormous amount of diesel," says Hyde. "We were in danger of not being able to satisfy demand due to transport cost, availability and delivery capacity. We have recently reviewed delivery charges in the region of a 20 percent reduction for long-haul deliveries; the reward has been a 30 percent uplift in work in the South of England. We have taken on another driver, acquired a 7.5 tonne beavertail and are looking for another 26 tonne beavertail to supplement our current fleet - long

term this will be a dedicated vehicle, with driver/operator, for the Leo 50GTX.

The company also gained IPAF Rental + certification last December - the first specialist spider company to do so. "We are building on the management systems already in place, which streamline the business, allowing us to run it profitably. smoothly and efficiently even as it grows over the coming years.

"We run inspHire software which has helped the business enormously, the reports it produces are superb but we could do more with the information. For example, when we buy a new machine we go on gut



instinct, which tends to be right, but it is nice to have the facts and figures so we know that we are making the right decision and are as profitable as possible," says Ashburner.

Higher Access is very clear about the products it buys and what it would like to see in terms of new products. "Our decision to opt for a multi-brand product offering has been proven right," says Hyde. "All the machines

differ and offer various features and benefits to suit almost any application."

spider lifts

The company is looking forward to Bauma and the new product releases that are rumoured. "In particular, a machine we understand is in development is a 23 metre CTE - if it's all that has been promised so far we will definitely be investing. We recognise that we have been strong below 30 metres, but to be a truly one stop shop we had to build the fleet above 30 metres, hence our investment in the Leo 36T and Leo 50 GTX. This has stimulated a lot of enquiries for 50 metre work, and surprisingly has also generated enquiries for other machines in the fleet."

"Our philosophy is still the same as two years ago - to supply good quality, well maintained equipment delivered and collected on time," says Hyde. "In support of this we have improved our systems and marketing, including strengthening the company brand with a new online and printed brochure and new website."

"When we were profiled by Cranes & Access two years ago, we made a number of statements of intent about our future," said Lucy Ashburner. "We are happy to say that we have achieved these objectives and remain focused on maintaining our position as the leading spider specialist in the UK."















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Watch out for Skako

Worldlift Industries has transformed itself over the past six months and is set to introduce a number of class-leading

new products - focusing on the largest spider lifts - while looking to expand into the more mainstream big spider lift market. As part of its transformation the company is set to change its name to Skako Lift. Cranes & Access visited the company's Odense headquarters and met new managing director Kenneth Loburg and sales and marketing director Brian Falck Schmidt.

Kenneth



Before you say anything, the Skako name was not dreamt up by the folks in Odense or by a highly paid corporate identity agency. It is the name of its owner Skako Industries, which is signalling its long term intentions in the access business and at the same time rebranding all of its group companies.

Worldlift was created in early 2005 when Denka Lift owner VS Holdings acquired fellow Danish manufacturer Falck Schmidt. While they were given a common name, the two companies maintained their separate brand identities, manufacturing facilities and overheads, with little effort to merge the businesses.

In 2006 VS Holding changed its name to Skako Industries, a public company quoted on the Copenhagen stock exchange. The group's main product line was and is concrete production equipment which it builds under the Skako brand in Denmark and the Couvrot brand in France. It also owns Comessa vibration which focuses on the mining industry. The rebranding of these companies will also be announced at Bauma.

Since the mid 1990's the group has considered exiting the access business. It attempted to sell Denka in the late 1990's and then after a number of good years considered it again in 2004 acquiring Falck Schmidt in order to put together a more marketable asset. After growing the two business it looked to sell it again a couple of years ago without success. Since then the



strategy and last year hired Kenneth Loberg as chief executive. A trained engineer, his recent background is general management in the window industry, with sojourns in the USA and Turkey.

Since joining the company last spring, Loburg has transformed the business completely with the aim to slash the company's manufacturing costs while adding substantially to its production capacity and flexibility. And at the same time improving the already enviable build quality. A tall order, but one that looks to have been achieved from a standing start last August.

80 percent complete, the company will drop the Worldlift name in favour of Skako, reflecting the change in strategy as the access business becomes a core product for the group.

A total culture change

Both Denka and Falck Schmidt were vertically integrated manufacturers, building much of the machine themselves, while the new Skako Lift is almost purely an assembler. This allows the company to focus on the core skills of design/ engineering, marketing, distribution and product support.



spider lifts

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Skako is not the first company to outsource fabrication. Many access manufacturers have done so for years, some locally and some from low cost countries such as China. Skako has however taken an approach rarely seen in the specialised equipment market. It has invested over €9 million in a process which began with the reworking of more than 4,000 component drawings/blueprints. This was particularly critical for the Denka machines which were built on an artisan basis which relied on a number of highly skilled and experienced employees at the company's unusual production facility in Holbaek with knowledge handed from father to son.

As part of this exercise the designs of the company's most popular models, which it will now focus on, were modularised with just eight separate modules for the Falcon range of spider lifts and four modules for the bulk of the Denka lift range.

Outsourcing search

The company then conducted a massive outsourcing search. The only companies that were approached were those with new plants that worked for major companies and did not have their own product lines. Each company approached was given over 600 questions to respond to within a rigidly fixed time frame. Any company that missed the deadline was automatically dropped from the selection process and only those that achieved satisfactory scores in all five specific areas were then considered. Eventually the company ended up with two subcontractors in China for the main modules, one in India for smaller steel parts and one in the Czech Republic for aluminium components.

Counterfeit/copy security

No subcontractor builds more than half the modules for a model and no modules that connect with each other, in order to protect the company's core asset - its designs/intellectual property - and prevent local copies. A module typically comprises the fabrication, paint and installation of associated components which might include pumps, valves and hoses, all of which are supplied to the contractor on a free-issue basis. The modules are all small enough to be easily containerised and even air freighted when necessary.

Subcontractor staff working on Skako product lines are all third-party certified, while external auditors have around the clock access for unannounced inspections. Skako now treats quality control on a strictly black or white basis, something that is harder to strictly adhere to when modules are built internally - only perfect modules are accepted and signed off. A number of Skako's own technical staff from its Danish HQ are also on site at all times, at least during the ramp up period. The whole approach has greatly simplified the final production process and made it much easier to add additional assembly plants in the future. Loburg sees the possibility of adding plants in the USA which currently represents 25 to 30 percent of the company's revenues and China/Far East as sales continue to grow in those regions.



Added expertise

"One of the benefits we did not anticipate was the expertise that some of these subcontractors bring to the table" says Loburg. "As well as working for us they work for global blue chip companies such as Toyota and are continually investing in new equipment. One of them has the ability to throw 130 highly trained production engineers at a problem over a weekend if necessary. There is no way we could bring that sort of power to bear on our own."

The benefit has been to cut the time a unit spends in production at the Odense plant by 90 percent - the Holbaek plant was closed last year with all operations transferring to the Falck Schmidt plant in Odense. Lead times have also been improved with eight weeks now being typical even though all products are only built to order. Constant contact with subcontractors means that this can be maintained even during periods of high demand.





An articulated Falcon - the world's largest Z-Boom?

Six months on from the start of the subcontract programme the company feels confident enough with its reduced production costs and increased capacity to start looking at new products in areas where it would have struggled to compete in the past. The first such unit will be a FS320Z - a 32 metre articulated spider lift - which the company claims is the world's largest Z-boomed spider lift. It features a chunky two arm overcentre riser, four section telescopic boom and 110 degree articulating jib. The result is a machine that weighs around 5,000kg and an outreach of 16 metres - possibly 18 metres thanks to its progressive overload cut out - at an up and over height of 11 metres.



FS320Z

Overall width is less than 1.2 metres with tracks extending to 1.5 metres for normal travel. Three platform options will be available with 200kg capacity, while maximum outreach will depend on the load in the basket - greater reach is possible for a single relatively slim person than for two hefty men and their tools.

"While the quality levels will be to



Brian Falck Schmidt.

Falck Schmidt/Denka normal standards, this unit will be priced very aggressively and will be competitive with offerings from other well known manufacturers," says Brian Falck Schmidt.

World's largest spider lift

The second new product is, at the time of going to press, the world's largest production spider lift, the Falcon FS520C. The largest spider lift ever built is a 55 metre Falck Schmidt built in 1995 for the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. In the 15 years since, it has had one repair call-out and clocked up more than 4,000 hours. The unit was recently given a refurbishment and is back at work.

The new FS520 will be based on the same design concept as the company's 42 metre Falcon model but with an eight section boom with slightly more overlap between sections. It includes the 42's dual track trunion-mounted undercarriage system and tri-power pack - AC Electric, DC battery and diesel.



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spider lifts

The overall dimensions will be only marginally larger to accommodate the extra height and reach. As with other models in the range it will be designed to handle soft and uneven ground as well as delicate indoor floors such as fine marble. It will handle steep slopes making it ideal for high reach utility work such as pylon/transmission line refurbishment, the gradeability and unusual track design also allow the Falcons to climb steep steps or stairs to reach otherwise inaccessible areas.

Lead customer

The lead customer for the 52 metre lift is Height for Hire/Easy UpLifts, the Irish-based international rental company which runs one of the largest big spider fleets in Europe, including five 42 metre Falcons. The company likes to be able to provide its customers with machines that are not widely available elsewhere and to solve challenging access problems. It also has a thriving re-rent business for its larger and more specialised models.

Spiders rather than built in access systems

A large number of the Falcon spider lifts are sold for work in large



atriums such as opera houses, large hotels and the like. The company says that while the big Falcons are not cheap, they cost considerably less than built-in access systems on large structures and do not detract from the architecture, while having the ability to work in other areas of the building.

Putting its money where its mouth is

As part of the company's new strategy it has doubled its warranty programme to two years and is promoting fixed price service contracts, both in Denmark and overseas. It is also confident enough to guarantee product satisfaction. The company says that it has taken this approach on a number of occasions where first time rental buyers have been concerned the the machine or concept might not



work with its customers. It has rarely if ever needed to take a machine back under such a quarantee. While Skako may be an

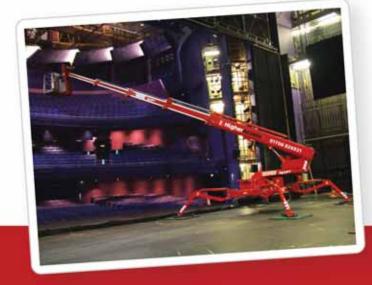
unusual name it is certainly enthusing the world's original spider lift manufacturer with a new found energy and optimism. Watch out for Skako.

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