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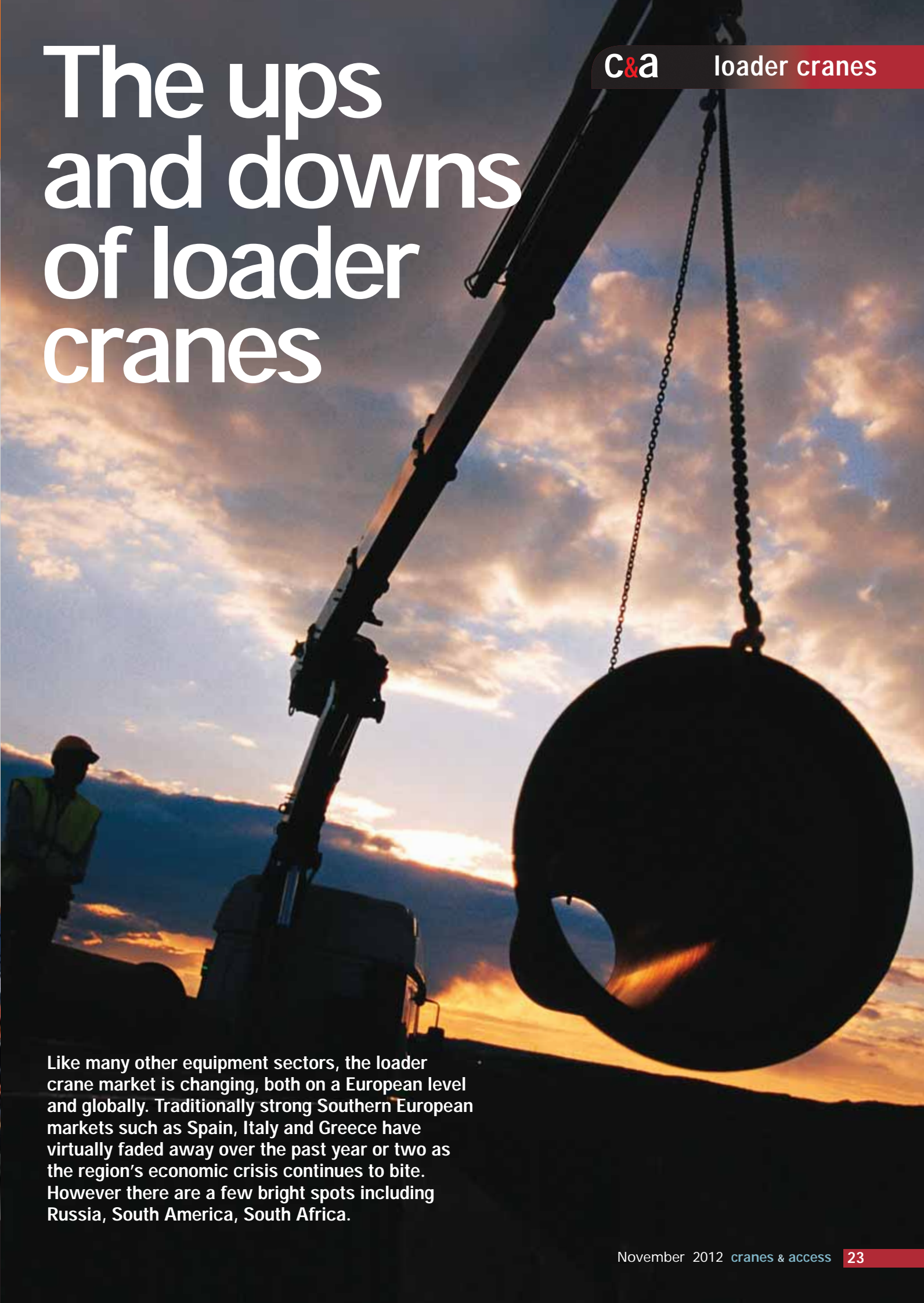
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The ups and downs of loader cranes

C&a

loader cranes

A silhouette of a loader crane is shown against a dramatic sunset sky with scattered clouds. The crane's boom extends from the bottom left towards the top right. A large, dark, circular object is suspended from the end of the boom by a chain. In the lower-left foreground, the silhouette of a worker wearing a hard hat and a high-visibility vest is visible, looking towards the crane. The overall scene is backlit by the warm, golden light of the setting sun.

Like many other equipment sectors, the loader crane market is changing, both on a European level and globally. Traditionally strong Southern European markets such as Spain, Italy and Greece have virtually faded away over the past year or two as the region's economic crisis continues to bite. However there are a few bright spots including Russia, South America, South Africa.

Northern Europe, including the UK is also relatively buoyant, driven by buyers recognising the need to place orders and secure trucks with Euro 5 engines before manufacturers switch production to Euro 6 ahead of the January 2014 deadline. This activity is expected to continue into the New Year resulting in considerable increases in truck lead times, especially right hand drive models.

In spite of the emergence and growth of Chinese crane manufacturers, its loader cranes are really only seen in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. Compared to European manufacturers, the Chinese product is exceptionally basic, designed for a less sophisticated and demanding end-users. This can change quickly though, you only have to look at the way Chinese manufacturers have come to dominate the global concrete pump market by swallowing up the major European producers. Chinese mobile and crawler cranes are also beginning to make progress in both Europe and the Americas. While nothing along these lines has yet

been seen in the loader crane sector it does show what the Chinese manufacturers can achieve when they focus on a particular market.

There are some small signs that something may be starting to happen in the loader crane market. In February this year market leader Palfinger entered into a Chinese based joint venture for loader cranes and truck mounted platforms with Sany Heavy Equipment. Sany Palfinger SPV Equipment Co will produce and sell Palfinger products in China for the Chinese market and develop the existing Sany loader crane products. At the same time the two companies established a Salzburg, Austria based joint venture - Palfinger Sany International Mobile Cranes Sales GmbH - to distribute Sany mobile cranes in Europe and the CIS countries.

According to Palfinger chief executive Herbert Ortner the joint venture agreements are the most important event for the company in more than a decade. For the last two years or so Palfinger has concentrated on reducing its reliance on Europe aiming to achieve equal revenues from the



Both Sany chairman Liang Wengen (L) and Palfinger chief executive Herbert Ortner are expecting very positive results from their joint ventures

Americas, Europe and Russia and Asia. Since 2010 it has invested in the USA, Russia, Brazil and Holland and in 2011 was actively looking for a Chinese partner. In September, six months after the initial contracts were signed the Sany Palfinger joint venture started production with Palfinger hoping that the new venture will gain a 30 percent share of the growing Chinese market for loader cranes.

Initial production will include 10 redesigned and simplified Palfinger crane models, mainly from the light and medium ranges from six to 50 tonne/metres. The capacity of the new plant near Sany's existing Changsha facility is 10,000 cranes a year, but there are plans to increase this to around 30,000 (the current worldwide market level) over the next five years, as well as establishing a national network of loader crane dealers. China built 1.23 million trucks last year, almost half the worldwide total. Non-Chinese truck manufacturers currently only represent two percent of this market. Based on these statistics Palfinger believes that China will quickly become its largest market. In 2010 roughly 7,000 articulated and telescopic loader cranes were produced in the country. This figure is expected to rise to 30,000 units by 2017 - representing roughly half of a rapidly expanding global market.

"Our aim is to be number one in the Chinese market," says Ortner. "Sany is market leader in mobile and crawler cranes and construction equipment so there is no reason to think that we will not also be market leader for loader cranes and truck mounted platforms."

Perhaps more worrying from a Western European and American viewpoint is Sany chairman Liang Wengen's comment: "For Sany, this close cooperation with Palfinger is a major step towards tapping the global market. We will use Palfinger's dense, international sales and service network to promote the globalisation of Sany. We are looking forward to our cooperation with a partner that is a technology and market leader and whose customer proximity and comprehensive services are highly appreciated by its customers. We are fully convinced that these two joint ventures will swiftly achieve success thereby making a significant contribution to the rapid and sustained growth of Sany."

And while Palfinger will undoubtedly benefit from this venture, there are many who think Sany will benefit the most. Most other European loader crane manufacturers are happy to avoid China primarily because of its reputation for taking technology by copying. "Chinese costs are also rising fast and who is going to buy products without backup," says Italian loader crane chief executive Giovanni Fassi.

Italy is still the spiritual home of the loader crane with a plethora of manufacturers still producing a wide range of cranes - despite the country's dire economy. The recent SAIE show in Bologna once again had a surprising number of loader crane exhibits. As well as the market leading manufacturers such as Palfinger, Cargotec/Hiab and Fassi, there was a strong contingent of other Italian companies including Cormach, Airone, RF Engineering, Powerlift and its Stern range, Next



A 40 tonne metre XCMG loader crane shown at last year's Conexpo show in Las Vegas, USA

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Hydraulics, KLM, Effer and PM. The top of the line European loader crane is one of the most sophisticated pieces of equipment made today, from the special steels used in the structure to the boom forming techniques to create the profiles with a single weld, to advanced electronics, controls and safety systems. They are used every single day to deliver an amazing range of products year after year and downtime cannot be tolerated. It is an exceptionally brave or foolhardy fleet manager that risks switching to an unknown crane supplier just to save a little on the purchase cost. So any successful move into the market will have to come via acquisition - just like in the concrete pump sector.

Fassi SmartApp

Fassi has recently unveiled its SmartApp system claimed to be the first smartphone controller in the lifting sector. A fully working system will be on show at Bauma next year, but will only available for Android phones and not the Apple iPhone. The integrated system combines data reading and collection in real time and can also carry out remote diagnostics on the crane operation. The system is part of the Fassi Human Machine Interface (HMI) philosophy and a result of the company's involvement with Milan's Polytechnic Institute.

Among the SmartApp's most interesting features is the ability to use remote diagnostics and 'black box' capability. The company claims that it is so much more than a mere smartphone app because it "allows the user to set parameters for remote control levers, conduct rapid analysis and interpretation of crane-use statistics, consult the Fassi Geo Locator to reach Fassi support centres quickly and enable crane interface for immediate data readings in comparison to what is already possible through the remote control".

Fassi SmartApp.



A line-up of Cormach loader cranes at this year's SAIE show

Atlas expanding

Last year's loader cranes feature highlighted Atlas with an interview with its colourful owner Fil Filipov. Since then Atlas UK has made several strategic moves including a distribution tie up with Italian loader crane manufacturer Effer and Austrian-based log loader specialist Penz.

The new distribution agreement was announced last month at Effer's headquarters in Minerbio, Italy. The deal means that Effer cranes will be sold, serviced and supported by Atlas in the UK in a move specifically designed to complement the existing Atlas line up. By offering Effer cranes with a capacity of up to 300 tonne metres, Atlas will be in a position to meet the demands of the larger crane market. The largest crane currently available from Atlas is the 62 tonne metre 620.3. It also benefits Effer which gains Atlas' unmatched national sales and support structure with more than 30 field service engineers.

"This new partnership with Effer represents a natural and logical move for Atlas," said Atlas UK managing director Jim Smith. "By complementing and extending the existing Atlas crane range - which is chiefly focused on the construction market - and the brick and block sector in particular, it allows us to broaden our product offering with hook cranes capable of handling the largest and heaviest applications."

Effer's top of the range loader crane - the 1855 - is the largest legally approved truck mounted knuckle boom crane, with a vertical reach of 49 metres and a capacity of up to 40 tonnes at 2.7 metres. It can be mounted on a standard commercial chassis of 32 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

More military work

Atlas still supplies specialist loader cranes to the military - more than 2,300 units since 1968 - for a variety of applications. In addition to its on-going contract with the US Army, the company has also been awarded a contract to supply model 390.1 cranes to WFEL of Stockport for tactical military bridging units destined for the Swiss Army. Production of the first prototype for the purpose-designed 6000M 18 recovery crane for the new FRES (Future Rapid Effects System) vehicle is also now nearing completion.

The Atlas UK facility in Bradford has undergone a major makeover and now includes a new assembly area and three extra test beds to cater for additional demand. It incorporates a 'drop in' repair service which requires no advance bookings or appointments. Drivers can simply turn up, drop off their vehicles, agree a lead-time and, whenever practicable, wait for the work to be completed. And in another development Atlas has also tied up with Austrian timber and recycling crane company Penz Crane working with the company on supplying and supporting its Z crane folding truck-mounted timber cranes.

New concept crane

Two years ago we reported on a new concept loader crane from Italian company RF Engineering that was shown at SAIE. Its original idea for a slimline crane installed on 3.5 GVW trucks is now 10 years old.



Jim Smith, managing director of Atlas Cranes UK with a Penz 11L 980 logging crane at the APF show following the tie-up between the two companies. The crane has a 1,125kg capacity at 9 metres

However the first production model in the range was seen at this year's Bolonga show specifically designed for installation on the Iveco Daily chassis.

The 2.5 tonne metre capacity RF333 is available in three versions (A1, B1 and C1R) and being just 220mm wide can be mounted behind the cab of the Iveco Daily tipper truck whilst keeping the standard wheel-base and maximum length of the tipper body. This is the first model in a series of cranes that the company says offers reduced (25 percent less) weight, quicker installation time and reduced (25-30 percent) costs. Crane operation is via a Hetronic remote control unit.

The owner of the company Romano Ferrari has been involved in small cranes since the early 1970's, running a small manufacturing facility from a small town in the

Reggiana planes of the Po Valley, Italy. After a few years the brothers started designing, producing and marketing small loader cranes. By the mid 1980's the company had grown to 70 employees and was exporting 60 percent of its production to 30 countries worldwide.

RF Engineering was founded in the 1990's principally to design cranes for small trucks from one to six tonne metres. Today the company sells a range called Serie 2000 RF all over Europe. The range has 35 models with either straight or articulated booms with capacities from 0.8 to six tonne metres for trucks from 1.5 to 7.5 tonnes.



At just 220mm wide the RF333 can be mounted behind the cab of the Iveco Daily tipper

KLM rides again

Another Italian company making a welcome return to the market at the Saie show was KLM. After financial problems forced it to cease trading, spider lift manufacturer Bluelift purchased the company's crane designs and rights thinking it would

benefit from supplying replacement parts and support. However demand for the small capacity loader cranes meant that it has redesigned some of the models, upgraded them to the latest

standards and reinstated production and now manufacturers, sells and supports the products.

What the future holds?

What the future holds for the loader crane remains to be seen. The dire economic situation in Europe and the collapse of traditional markets is causing problems for the Italian manufacturers in particular. At the moment the Chinese expansion into Europe and North America is a long way off. However joint ventures with companies such as Palfinger mean that Sany may soon be able to produce sophisticated equipment that would have a market outside China. What is certain is that the global market will grow, and possibly even double in size over the next five years which has got to be good news for all concerned.



KLM made a welcome return to the market at the SAIE show

Atlas wins Hanson order

Atlas has recently won one of the biggest loader crane orders in the UK. Leading construction material supplier Hanson Building Products has ordered 90 Atlas 125.2 A11 cranes - fitted with radio remote controls - for phased delivery starting in January 2013.

Part of a complete fleet replacement programme, the Atlas cranes will be fitted to new Volvo FM trucks and eventually deployed at nine Hanson depots across the UK. They will be used to handle approximately 44,000 loads a year, with each crane lifting around 50 tonnes of bricks and blocks a day - between 50 and 60 lifts depending on product.

All 90 cranes will be supplied with a

double, high-level operator's platform with walkway around the back. The platform incorporates 'safe zones' so that the operator can only use the crane in a particular zone - depending on where he is standing on the platform. It also includes a custom-built access ladder that stows away above the drawbar.

The sub-frame and platform have been designed to minimise the weight and maximise the payload, and the 125.2 enjoys the benefit of a fully proportional leg deployment system.

"Having evaluated the market, we chose the Atlas 125.2 for a number of reasons," said Dale Clarke, Hanson's national transport



manager. "It met the specification in full, incorporated the safety features we needed, and was backed by Atlas's extensive nationwide after-sales network."

"Hanson Building Products has a strong safety culture, so not only were we impressed by the crane's own-inbuilt safety features and

those added at our request to match our specific method of working, but by Atlas's overall approach to safety. For example, by the way in which it has developed a special access platform to protect its engineers when working at height on crane maintenance."

Range topper

The challenge for Fassi and its F1950 project was to develop a high-performance machine which could be mounted on a 32 tonne truck. To achieve this Fassi had to refine the design calculation method exploiting the strengths of ultra high-strength steels. With a weight increase of only eight percent compared with the F1500RA, it has produced a crane with performance increases of up to 34 percent. The combination Man-Fassi F1950RA.2.28 has a 45 metre horizontal reach and a load moment up to 138 tonne metres with a weight of 15 tonnes. Maximum lift capacity is 40 tonnes.



New HMF aimed at hauliers

Danish loader crane manufacturer HMF launched its 30 tonne metre 3220-K at the recent IAA show in Hanover, aiming it at haulier applications.

Designed with longer reach while being light weight, it allows operators to retain higher truck payloads. The crane is also more compact than previous models requiring less space on the truck giving users more application possibilities. The 3220-K can reach 16.8 metres with six hydraulic extensions and 21.3 metres with eight extensions.

The space requirements of the crane have been reduced to 1,034 mm meaning a shorter wheelbase between the first and second axles. The new crane is also equipped with the HMF EVS stability safety system which actively monitors vehicle stability.



The new HMF 3220-K

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Penny crane

Water companies in Hungary are benefiting from using Penny Hydraulics compact cranes to safely and economically handle pumps and other equipment in access shafts. Local handling specialist Modul Stor supplied the products including portable davit cranes on the wells and compact SwingLift cranes on its commercial vehicles.

Modul Stor carried out market research on the the country's hundred or so water companies to assess their current handling provisions. Many of the companies did not have appropriate equipment for handling items weighing up to 200kg in access shafts and manholes.

Some pumping stations were equipped with fixed gantry crane pillars with manual chains blocks or electric hoists. Many of these had been fabricated in-house or from manufacturers who were unable to supply proper documentation. While these considerations were less important when the equipment was installed, the water companies were keen to ensure EU compliance. In reality the older equipment was not very effective because the weight of a chain block made it difficult to lift and attach to the pillars which could be up to two metres high. It was also expensive to install gantries at each site for the relatively rare occasions that access to pumps was required. Other sites had basic davit-type cranes which although designed to be portable were impractical and too heavy weighing in at 50kg.

The Penny Hydraulics davit crane is lightweight and compact originally developed for the utility sector. With a 500kg maximum lift capacity it was ideal for handling pumps and other items. An electric winch mounted on the boom allows loads to be lowered up to nine metres below ground level, with power

supplied from any vehicle using jump leads or a standard electric service/cigarette lighter socket. A wander lead allows remote control and the device can also be used with standard block and tackle if preferred or when power is unavailable.

Weighing 47kg with winch the davit is mounted into a simple socket adjacent to the manhole or access shaft and can be dismantled for easy transport. The largest sub-assembly weighs just 24kg which means all components can be carried within the existing manual handling regulations.

The water companies install sockets supplied by Modul Stor in all the locations where they intend to use the cranes, allowing a small number of cranes to cover multiple sites and provide the companies with a more economical solution. More than 25 of the cranes have been supplied over the past two years many to relatively small operations so one or two cranes and 30 or 40 sockets provide the capability to cover an entire area. Some water companies looked to rent in regular loader cranes to handle the pumps however it proved uneconomical because of the high rental rates for such rigs and the cranes were much larger than required to handle the pumps.

To solve the problem, Modul Stor offered Penny Hydraulics' Swing Lift models and some water companies have since fitted the 1,200kg capacity SwingLift FV1200 to their vehicles. The crane is



The SwingLift FV1200



The 500kg capacity Penny Hydraulics davit crane

supplied with a winch to handle items below ground level and its light weight and compact dimensions mean it can be installed

on the regular 3.5 tonne vehicles operated by the water companies - not always possible with larger cranes.



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