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Making smaller lifts easier

In the March All Terrain feature we covered the idea that truck mounted aluminium cranes (as well as other equipment including spider and loader cranes) that were viable alternatives to a small All Terrain crane for some applications, particularly when lifting a small load to a considerable height or radius. We highlighted the Böcker AK 44/4000 truck mounted aluminium crane and compared it against 40 tonne ATs from Terex, Grove and Tadano Faun to demonstrate the point.

Böcker trailer cranes have been available for many years but in a number of markets they failed for whatever reason to capture end user imagination and therefore sales. Its truck mounted versions - despite a slow start in some countries - are gaining favour in several European countries, particularly the UK where the crane rental fraternity have discovered their benefits.

Over the past few months an unusually high number have been added to UK crane rental fleets including the manufacturer's biggest single crane sale in its history - an order for eight AK 44/4000s from Ainscough Crane Hire. This made it the ideal time to visit the company in Werne, Germany to find out more.

Böcker launched its first crane 25 years ago but has been producing equipment since Albert Böcker - a master blacksmith - founded it in 1958. Early products were fabricated for local farmers but an enquiry from a roofing contractor

resulted in the first trailer mounted construction hoist for roofing tiles. The product was right from the start and sales reached 5,000 by the early 1970s.

Expansion continued with its first sales in the United States in 1970 and by 1974 the furniture lift was born. However it was another 15 years before the first aluminium truck crane arrived in 1989 - developed to comply with the 7.5 tonne vehicle weight limit that could be driven on a car licence.

"The first crane had a 25 metre maximum lift height and maximum capacity of 650kg, now we can achieve a 35 metre reach on a 7.5 tonne truck and lift up to three tonnes, which shows the development over the years," says sales and marketing director Michael Sendermann. "In the UK we initially concentrated on the trailer cranes but sales were slow. However we have been very surprised with the recent level of interest in our truck mounted cranes



The aluminium truck crane with 250kg capacity basket

which have quickly made the UK our best export market, although Germany is still the biggest market for 7.5 tonne truck cranes."

Albert Böcker handed over the management of the business to his son Robert in 1990, and passed away seven years later. Shortly after our visit we heard the sad news that Robert had died unexpectedly following a heart attack, he was only 60. At his 60th birthday party last December, he announced that the company would remain in family hands for the foreseeable future and that his son Alexander would take over from him at the start of 2016 when he was planning to retire. Alexander had completed his academic studies and was working for car manufacturer VW, however

the succession plans have naturally been brought forward and he has now taken over the running of the company.

Wide product range

The company has a wide range of products in six divisions, which include truck and trailer cranes, inclined construction and furniture lifts, rack and pinion lifts, mast climbers and hoists, mini cranes and grabs for lifting bricks and masonry blocks etc., ALP personnel and material lifts and a rental company that operates mainly in Germany. The addition of the lifts and hoists was a result of acquiring hoist manufacturer Steinweg - another Werne-based company - in 2005. Over the following five years the company and employees were



One of the trailer mounted furniture/industrial lifts



A couple of the masonry and brick mini cranes



An aluminium trailer crane

fully integrated into the group. Today all products are produced in-house at its 70,000 square metre facility in Werne and sold under the Böcker brand name. The business generates revenues of around €60 million, employs 400 more than half of which are involved in equipment production, including 37 apprentices, while 50 are employed in the service and support division. Current production capacity is about 2,600 units a year, including more than 1,000 ladder lifts, 160 truck mounted cranes, 450 trailer mounted cranes and 120 rack and pinion hoists.

The company is still expanding its overseas coverage and has recently opened a sales office in Istanbul, Turkey and acquired its Paris, France distributor TOM Leverage. Economic problems in Eurozone countries such as Italy, Portugal and Spain etc... have reduced the level of exports to around 35 percent of the total, but it now has 56 dealers in 36 countries selling the whole range of products. Service is also a priority with the department opening at six in the morning and not closing until after eight at night, so that qualified technicians are on hand to help.

Truck advantages

Mounted on a 15.5 tonne two axle chassis, the Böcker AK 44/4000 - the largest aluminium crane in the company's range with a maximum tip height of 44 metres and a maximum capacity of 4,000kg - is naturally significantly lighter than a two axle All Terrain crane, resulting in lower fuel consumption and generally less wear and tear on the less expensive drive train components. While it is obvious that the Böcker has nowhere near the maximum lifting capacity of an All Terrain crane, it does compare well as the radius increases - more

than 22 metres - offering enough capacity/reach for the types of jobs that these smaller crane are often used for, such as installing roof trusses or chimney stacks.

The Böcker also has a fully variable outrigger control system which is not yet available on most small All Terrain cranes, and which is a definite plus on challenging and narrow construction sites. The position of each outrigger is monitored by the PLC controls and the lifting envelope is automatically calculated depending on the footprint. The Böcker also has the very useful option of a two person - 250kg capacity - work platform which is either rigid or is available with 60 degrees of platform rotation. This gives crane operators the option of converting the crane into a platform with over 40 metres of working height, adding to the machine's versatility and ideal on some small contracts.

The largest single order in Böcker's history was recently confirmed by Ainscough Crane Hire in the UK, comprises eight AK 44/4000s. While this model is normally mounted on a 15.5 tonne chassis, Ainscough has opted for the new MAN 18 tonne chassis giving a greater payload on the deck, adding to the crane's versatility.

Furniture and industrial lifts

Another product line that looks set for future growth is the Böcker industrial and furniture lift range. The lightweight industrial Toplift sells more than 1,000 units a year. Costing between €3,500 and €5,000 the unit has a 25 metre lift, 250kg capacity, and uses three different drive units for lift speeds of up to 40 metres per minute. Its latest model is the compact trailer mounted Simply. Weighing 750kg it



Böcker has a range of mastclimbers and hoists courtesy of the Steinweg acquisition



The crane can be operated by remote control



The aluminium boom under construction



Sales and marketing director Michael Sendermann with some of the ALP personnel lifts



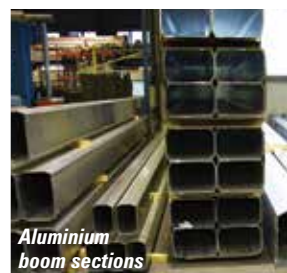
A Superlift 200 hoist in the display area in head office



The first industrial lift produced more than 50 years ago



Producing the aluminium boom section



Aluminium boom sections



The Böcker aluminium truck mounted crane is changing crane rental companies' attitudes towards lifting small capacities

can be towed behind a passenger car and needs a set up space of just 2.0 x 2.3 metres. Maximum capacity is 250kg and lift height up to 20.6 metres.

Although popular in France (where more than 2,000 have been sold), Italy and Portugal, truck mounted furniture lifts are a rare sight in Germany or the UK. However attitudes may be changing, just like they have with the truck mounted aluminium crane. London-based City Lifting has recently purchased an Agilo HL34-1.8 furniture hoist mounted on a Nissan Cabstar chassis which has a capacity of 400kg and a maximum lift height of 34 metres.

Weighing just 3,500kg it is the ideal machine for lifting furniture and heavy awkward loads such as large fridge freezers into some of the older buildings in London which have no

lifts or means of getting modern furnishings into high rise buildings. The largest truck mounted furniture lift (mounted on an 8.5 tonne GVW chassis) has a maximum lift height of almost 55 metres and able to lift 400kg.

Try before you buy

Böcker is still very much a family company and is always keen for customers to try its equipment and compare it against the competition before they buy. In order to make this possible on a regular basis it operates a rental fleet of more than 300 machines.

"It is very important that customers can use the equipment and get an idea of the quality and product features of the equipment," says Sendermann. "The quality, design and backup are all very important when buying new equipment and this is what Böcker focuses on."

Scaffolding with integrity

The NASC Code of Practice product audit applies to new product at point of entry to the UK. NASC supplier members are audited on system scaffold, tube, fittings, timber board and aluminium beam products. From 2015 the audit will incorporate unit transoms and high tensile 3.2mm tube

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