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K26 > 12 m



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More twists than a TV soap opera

The van mounted aerial lift market is not known for being the most dynamic, and is relatively stable in terms of product development, although order intake can soar and dive depending whether a big utility is refreshing its fleet or not. However, since our last review of the sector - admittedly more than two years ago - there have been a fair few changes, with almost as many twists as a television soap opera. We take a look at the latest developments which includes a sizeable new manufacturer.

The enclosed panel van platform is most popular in the UK, France and some Scandinavian countries and you would think that van sales have been relatively stagnant over the past 10 years compared to say 3.5 tonne truck mounts. However, if we look at the top UK rental companies supplying this type equipment there are some surprising results.

10 years ago, our Top 30 rental survey revealed there were over 100 more van mounts in rental fleets than truck mounted platforms - 884 compared to 781. Last year's survey showed that the national van mounted fleet had increased by almost 300 units over the decade to almost 1,100 whereas truck mounted lifts had decreased to 612! So in the UK, van mounted lifts make up 64 percent of the vehicle mounted aerial lift rental fleet.

Of course, these figures only cover the machines in the major access rental fleets and do not count end-user sales which are actually more substantial for van mounts. One of the reasons of this apparent disparity is a huge switch in the market from leasing companies providing van mounted lifts to the big utilities - such as British Telecom - to larger access rental companies providing them on long-term rentals which can be ended at any time so are truly 'off balance sheet'. As with leased platforms

the vans are branded and painted in customer colours and ordered to the specific customers detailed specification. As with any rental, the hire company provides the servicing and annual inspections etc.. as well as supplying a replacement platform while it is off the road.

But why use a van rather than a truck mounted lift? The main reason is that the van mount provides a method of working at height - admittedly with lower working heights than a truck mount on a similar weight - up to around 17 metres, while also providing secure storage that can double as a mobile store, workshop or lockup. The 3.5 tonne truck mounted lifts above 20 metres have no spare payload capacity to carry tools or equipment.

The van mounted lift was originally created for street lighting contractors and telephone engineers to meet their specific requirement to carry equipment safely and then gain access to lights or overhead wires. More recently other trades have adopted the van mounted lift, including close circuit camera installers and maintenance contractors along with urban tree care companies. Street lighting generally requires heights of up to 11 metres for town centre and amenity lighting and 12.5 to 17 metres for lights along major roads and motorways, while security camera work typically requires working



Another van mounted manufacturer is Easy Lift with its 15 metre EV150 now available on a Ford chassis

heights of 12 to 13 metres and five to six metres outreach.

A change in market dynamics

For many years Versalift has held a dominant share of the European van mounted aerial lift market, comprehensively seeing off numerous attacks from competitors tempted by the blue chip end-user market and lack of a major competitor. But its combination of quality, design, performance, reputation and professionalism always kept the interlopers at bay.

However, the European van mounted lift market entered a new phase which started in the summer of 2015 when an existing but bit-part player in the UK called Aldercote agreed a sales and assembly partnership with sales, parts and service company IAPS to provide a sales, marketing and product development boost. At the time it looked as though this might transform Aldercote into a more



Aldercote's only 3.5 tonne van is the 14 metre VZ140



The 16 metre/11.1 metre outreach VZ160 is mounted on a 5.2 tonne van

credible mainstream contender but this has since turned out not to be the case. However, it does have a new four model range with three using a 5.2 tonne van including the 18 metre/11 metre outreach VZX180, the 16 metre/11.1 metre outreach VZ160 and the 14.3 metre/9.2 metre outreach VZ145P. Its only 3.5 tonne van is the 14 metre VZ140 which has 400kg of spare payload after allowing for fuel and two occupants as well as a

maximum outreach of nine metres with 120kg platform capacity.

Hot on its heels in December 2015, Time Versalift's dealer/partner in France - another of the major van mounted markets - announced out the blue that it was forming a new company - Klubb - to build its own van mounted platforms with the clear aim on dislodging Versalift as market leader.

Then a year or so ago another small UK van and truck mounted manufacturer Ascendant - emerged from several years of financial and ownership problems - appointing Skyking as its sole UK distributor. Skyking had recently been acquired by the Martin group and is well versed in van and truck mounted platform market, having been distributor for GSR van mounted and 3.5 tonne truck mounts for many years. It also represents Palfinger truck mounts.

Just prior to this Skyking and GSR had ended their relationship, with GSR moving to a wholly owned operation in the UK. This left Skyking without a van mounted product to sell. Around about the same time Klubb appointed



The Time Versalift SAS facility in France

Kettering-based CPL (Cumberland Platforms Ltd) as its UK distributor, a good match as it was looking for a van mounted product to augment its success with platforms mounted on 4x4 chassis.

Back in France Versalift responded to the loss of its French dealer/partner by forming a wholly owned distribution company, Time Versalift SAS, appointing two managers who previously worked for French aerial lift manufacturer Comilev which went into administration early in 2016. It opened a new production and service facility in Morlaàs, Southern France to cover the whole of France with its main facility in Angers in the North West of the country. The aim was to ensure that the substantial Versalift fleet in France was properly serviced and of course secure future business by retaining the customers in what was a 500 to 600 unit a year market.

Comilev's intangible assets on the other hand were eventually

acquired by Klubb early in 2017 and included its brands, know-how and intellectual property, complete with drawings, including its new Xtenso utility/network product range headed by the innovative 21 metre Xtenso 3. Klubb has used the acquisition to step up its plans to develop a wider truck mounted product line.

In the Klubb

When it announced that it was parting from Time Versalift, Klubb had a new 20,000 square metre production facility ready in Ferrières-en-Brie and revealed plans of its range of van lifts under the Klubb brand. It said that it had set its sights on export with the ambition to eventually become European market leader.

Time France dates back to 1980 when the company JF Degrémont became the Time/Versalift distributor. When Jean Francois Degrémont retired in 2000 Time Versalift acquired the company and



The Ascendant 12.5



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Klubb has a five model van range including all electric and hybrid van mounts such as the K32 Hybrids above

changed the name to Time France to reflect its principle business of mounting, selling and supporting its aerial lifts in France.

The company then recruited ex-JF Degrémont employee Julien Bourrellis to manage the business. He had previously left the business to manage a software company start-up. In 2002 Bourrellis organised a Management Buy Out from Time International and took over the business. He now runs numerous companies under the Gelev Group umbrella.

Under his ownership and management Time France grew rapidly from mounting and selling around 30 units a year in 2002 to a claimed 500 units at its peak and included products such as van, Land-Rover and truck mounted Versalift platforms and as well as Isoli truck mounted lifts and its own specials.

At the launch of Klubb the company was already building three models - the 11.8 metre K26, designed for a short wheelbase or cutaway chassis van with an outreach of 6.8 metres, the K32 a 3.5 tonne, 12.5 metre one person platform without stabilisers and the 9.2 metre K21



Klubb has just launched its K26 on a Mercedes X Class pick-up

mounted on a 2.8 tonne Renault Traffic. All three have a similar two section telescopic boom with variable length fixed jibs. Two further models, the 13.8 metre K38P with an articulating jib and a 15 metre model were also on the drawing board.

Bourrellis claims that the company now has a capacity to build at least 1,000 Klubb van mounted platforms a year, aimed at contractors, local authorities and utilities. The company now has a five model van mounted range that runs from nine to 15 metres - the K21/K21N cut out, the all-new 10 metre K20 electric (see below), the 12 metre K26, the 13 metre K32, 14 metre K38p and the 15 metre K42p. Last month it launched the K26 on a Mercedes X Class pick-up with an 11.1 metre working height and 5.2 metre outreach. The company also makes truck mounts up to the 25.5 metre Xtenso 5.

A variation on the van mount is its 18.5 metre Xtenso 3 mounted on a 14 tonne chassis with an enclosed 'workshop' area. Klubb says that it is already producing 1,000 machines a year at its Ferrieres-en-Brie facility and plans to add a further 700 units a year from its new 7,000 square metre truck mounted facility opened last summer in Croissy-Beaubourg, to the east of Paris.

All electric Klubb

At the end of last year Klubb announced plans to launch a new 10 metre all electric van mounted lift. The new K20 platform will be mounted on a cutaway Nissan eNV200 van. The platform features a three section telescopic boom and fixed jib, with up to five metres of outreach without stabilisers. The one man composite platform has a maximum capacity of 120kg. The Nissan eNV200 currently has a range of just over 100 miles between charges but is due to get a new 40kWh battery pack which will boost this to 175 miles.



The new 10 metre all-electric K20 platform mounted on a cutaway Nissan eNV200 van



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Versalift still the market leader

In spite of all the comings and goings Versalift remains the dominant manufacturer in the market. This was reinforced at Bauma 2016 when the company formally handed over its 20,000th van mounted lift to Stuttgart-based international traffic management group, Swarco. Overall the manufacturer has delivered more than 100,000 aerial lifts worldwide. To put that figure into perspective, at a similar time GSR, a significant player at one time, delivered its 800th van mounted platform - a 17

metre GSR E170TJV mounted on a five tonne E6 Mercedes MB516 - to its German distributor Rothlehner. Klubb would take another 20 years to reach the same population.

Last month Time Versalift appointed Kim Bach Jensen as chief executive to replace Per Torp who will remain with the company as director of sales and strategic planning and to assist with the longer-term succession plans. Torp began his association with Time when he founded the Danish company in 1985 and then formed a strategic partnership with the American platform producer. In 2001 he sold the business to Time, and since then has been the global export division, responsible for the sale of Versalift vehicle mounted platforms across all markets outside of North and South America. He was also involved with last year's



Versalift E6 van mounted platforms



Versalift unveiled its 20,000th van mount delivered to Swarco the international traffic management group at Bauma

management buy out from previous owner O'Flaherty Holdings.

In the UK, Versalift has upgraded its range of Eurotel ETL and ETM van mounted platforms. Branded 'E6' - to coincide with the launch of Euro 6 vehicles - the new platforms are manufactured from higher strength steel and are said to provide significant improvements in terms of vehicle payload and the platform's working envelope, assisted by the introduction of Load Moment Control system. The most significant developments are the relocation of the hydraulic valves to within the load area, an improved working envelope, a payload increase of more than 50 percent and the addition of a 120 degree articulated jib.

Other van manufacturers

Other manufacturers include France Elevateur which began producing van mounted platforms in 1984 and currently has a very wide range of 15 van mounted lifts, from nine to 17 metres and 2,800kg to 4,500kg Gross Vehicle Weights, including hybrid and an all electric 091Fe mounted on a Nissan eNV200 with cut away van, that it launched in 2016. The rear cut out with the basket in the back of the vehicle, means that the original size of the eNV200 is hardly altered.

Spanish truck and van manufacturer Movex is also thought to be in the process of developing a new line of electric platforms which should be available later this year.

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France Elevateur has a very wide range of 15 van mounted lifts, from nine to 17 metres

Its latest model is the 14 metre TLF14 designed for 3.5 tonne vans, particularly the Renault Master. It has a platform capacity of 200kg for an outreach of 6.5 metres or

7.7 metres with 120kg, while still offering spare payload for cargo. It features a two-section telescopic boom and long jib with around 120 degrees of articulation. The

unit uses twin centre mounted stabilisers and offers 420 degrees of slew.

Italian truck and trailer mounted lift manufacturer Comet is also

expanding its exports, with the appointment of a new UK distributor - Comet UK. Although it has just one van mounted lift - the 14 metre/eight metre outreach 14/2/8 Jib mounted on a 5.2 tonne chassis - it does have two other 'van like' products offering 12 metre and 14 metre working heights using the company's X-range platform mounted across the chassis behind the drivers cab with a large enclosed storage compartment to the rear.



The 14 metre Movex TLF14



The Comet 12 metre X van

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