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Access movers

In the first of a new series on transporting cranes, aerial work platforms, telehandlers, lifting equipment and heavy oversized exceptional loads trailer industry veteran Mark Carrington takes a look at the increasing range of specialist trailers and truck bodies for transporting aerial lifts.

The aerial work platform market has grown rapidly over the past 10 years or so as more and more companies and market sectors realise they are essential items when working at height for reasons of safety and efficiency. This growth has attracted the interest of transport equipment manufacturers, many of which are now focusing on this sector. Both trailer and body manufacturers are paying increasingly close attention to the needs of companies operating in the sector, leading to an ongoing evolution of products as they adapt to customer requirements.

The market is challenging in comparison to most other types of equipment in that the spread of machines stocked by hirers ranges from the very smallest push rounds to some of the largest scissors and booms that can be moved in a single load. Add to that the huge diversity in terms of width, ground clearance and stability when stowed - and the fact that the sector is still developing new products with differing specifications to anything that has

gone before - and one begins to understand how versatile transport equipment needs to be.

Added to this is the growing pressure of health & safety issues and it's easy to see how this has become a battleground for body and trailer manufacturers keen to stay close to their user customers and meet their demands. 15 years ago discussions within transport fleets would rarely justify any cost additions on the basis of safety grounds. Today the huge focus on protecting staff and the legal threat of not doing so has meant that operators and internal health & safety policies have a key seat at the table when determining vehicle specifications.

Versatile designs

Most equipment carrying vehicles have traditionally been designed to accommodate a wide variety of tracked and wheeled machines, resulting in some limitations on payload mainly due to the robust nature of the basic body construction. One of the first UK manufacturers to recognise the opportunity in the sector was



Where the full deck length is required for loading, fold forward ramps are an option



Upward Powered Access' DAF CF 8x2 fitted with Sterling GP access specification beavertail plant body



Sterling GP builds around 200 bodies per year, many for the access market

Andover Trailers which continues to be a prominent player across the general plant hire sector. Its beavertail bodies have a loyal market following due to their robust construction, wide variety of options and versatility to specification. Andover pioneered fold forward ramps for applications where the full flat deck is required for loads such as site cabins. This design still allows a fairly shallow loading angle when the ramps are deployed but may not accommodate those platforms with the lowest ground clearance.

A key issue in the access business is versatility. The increasing popularity of micro scissor lifts such as the Pop Up, with their low ground clearance and high centre of gravity, not only require low ramp angles and 'hump heights' (peak angles) which can also handle the heavier machines, but they also require a multiplicity of shackling positions to deal with that variety which can add significantly to vehicle weight and cost.

Sterling GP has rapidly increased its prominence in the access market

in recent years and is now one of the major players in the UK for beavertail bodies. Manufacturing around 200 bodies a year, the company's products are well represented in many access hire fleets. Sterling GP has focussed on the needs of the customer with a range of well-developed options making the choice of product specification much easier for the buyer. This includes a high level of galvanised components for durability, while basic construction is geared to ramps with a low loading height of around eight degrees whilst also utilising a double crank beavertail meaning low ground clearance machines do not bottom out when loading. The company has also pioneered the use of composite open grid decking on truck bodies which assists grip, while saving weight. While most of the options that operators might need are available, don't be surprised if the price of a fully equipped beavertail body comes surprisingly close to that of a semi-trailer, particularly when equipped with outriggered walkways which are becoming increasingly popular.

Another well-established player in the UK beavertail market is Shawtrack. Whilst building a range of bodies up to 32 tonnes GVW, the company has carved out a niche in the manufacture of bodies in the 7.5 to 18 tonne GVW range thanks to their lightweight construction. Another player is PPS which has won sizeable orders over the years for beavertails, thanks to solid relationships with the larger general rental companies such as A Plant and Speedy Hire. PPS has also developed a hydraulic pull-out access step and walkway system which has been adopted by a number of major fleets. Montracon has also made noises in this part of the market but has been more successful in the semi-trailer sector. The standard workhorse for the access industry was traditionally a 26 tonne, three axle truck chassis, developed to cope with the large number of Genie Z-45 boom lifts in service. The target was a truck that could carry two Z-45s as at one time they made up a significant proportion of daily traffic. As truck chassis have gained weight due to emission regulations and aerial lifts have also become heavier, that objective is now more difficult to achieve. The weight of the truck body is the balancing factor - reducing it too much risks compromising its strength and durability, and as a result there is a move towards more four axle 32 tonne chassis. The additional six tonnes of gross weight gives around five tonnes of additional payload and provides a cost effective solution for many fleets.

Three axles or four?

But is a four axle truck a better option? 'Try before you buy' can be an expedient way to find out.

Trucks with beavertail bodies are increasingly available to rent. In the UK Leeds Commercial operates one of the larger beavertail fleets, but others are entering the market. King Trailers has not held a significant share of the truck beavertail market, but recently made a decision to expand its Safety Vehicle Hire and Lease rental fleet with the introduction of step frame trailers and plant bodies. It introduced a number of four axle DAF plant trucks into the fleet last year with more beavertails due in the new year. It has some way to go to catch up with Leeds which offers beavertails from six branches across the UK, having increased its presence significantly when it acquired the Shawhire fleet in 2013.

For those operators not wishing to take a leap of faith immediately but not wanting to 'waste money on rental', most hire companies will offer some form of rental purchase option providing the vehicle you specify is standard enough to slot back into their rental fleet or be easily disposed. But expect to pay a rental premium if you specify non-standard options as that cost may be difficult to recover.

Most aerial lift fleet operators are happy to develop their transport fleets within the 44 tonne limit leaving their bigger equipment to be moved by specialist contractors. A combination of beavertail plant bodies supplemented by step-frame three axle trailers covers most platforms.

A growing move to trailers

An increasing number of UK access rental companies have invested in tractors and semi-trailers, but in the UK equipment trailers have traditionally been built to operate under STGO (Special Types General Order) rules above 44 tonnes. While axle weights in STGO Category 1



Outrigged walkways are becoming more popular



SVHL has recently introduced a number of four axle beavertails into its hire fleet



Faymonville's specialist lifting deck trailer for access equipment



A number of operators are finding four axle trucks more cost effective

are the same as for 44 tonne C&U (Construction and Use) rules, the requirement to frequently or constantly accommodate 30 tonne payloads requires a heavier trailer for construction. The core trailer fleet of many UK access companies comprises trailers from King, Andover and Nooteboom.

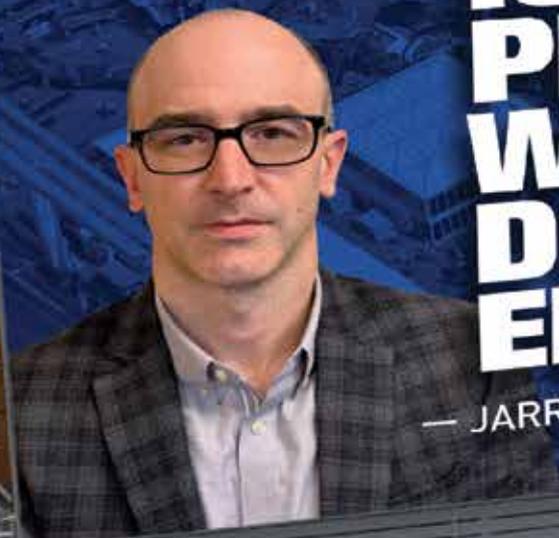
For the traditional manufacturers of abnormal load semi-trailers, the access market is now so important that more of them are moving into that space. Montracon - which has traditionally been more of a 'distribution' trailer manufacturer - has gained a significant foothold in the step frame trailer sector, competing with Nooteboom, King, Andover and Faymonville which is promoting its Polish-built Max Trailer range. And of course, there are new entrants into the trailer market, the most notable of which is Sterling which launched its new plant trailer at Vertical Days last year and benefits from a substantial access company customer base for its plant

bodies.

As the sector has grown and competition increased, more manufacturers have focussed on the specific needs of access hire customers that operate at 44 tonnes combination weight within C&U, introducing customer orientated features, options and weight savings. King was one of the early companies to recognise the needs of the access industry redesigning its GTS44 model in cooperation with Nationwide Platforms, changing its neck profile, deck and beavertail to suit the widest range of platforms in the Nationwide fleet while developing a range of options to meet driver demands. But others were quick to follow suit and today a wide choice of suppliers includes Nooteboom, Faymonville and Broshuis and more recently Turkish suppliers including Kassbohrer. The market has also encouraged the introduction of lifting decks, open grill floors, side walkways and other access related features.



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The new Sterling semi-trailer has borrowed many good features from its competition in an aesthetically pleasing design

As already mentioned, Sterling GP has launched a new access industry trailer with early models delivered to Lifterz which has already committed to further units for delivery this year. The Sterling trailer features a fully galvanised mesh deck for maximum traction and its 3.2 metre double flip ramps have a gap between them of just 50mm, allowing large and small platforms to be loaded safely without any adjustment. The overall trailer specification includes multiple shackles, a deck profile which is

remarkably similar to King's GTS 44 with low hump angles and a shallow ramp angle so small scissors can be easily loaded onto the top deck. As is now common place in major fleets, fall arrest straps and removable poles are fitted along the entire length of the deck.

Weight distribution

With bigger booms a further complication is weight distribution. The general trend towards lower axle weights and increased enforcement means that some of



Two of the 16 new Max trailers for Gardemann

the larger JLG and Genie boom lifts present a transport problem and in order to prevent axle overloads some operators are using extending trailers - not so much to deal with the length of the load but to spread the load between axles. However it is not uncommon to see a large JLG Ultra boom loaded on a trailer 'the wrong way round' simply because it is under the maximum weight and fits, however to a trained eye it is clear that in this configuration the weight distribution overloads individual trailer axles.

In Germany Gardemann - which runs more than 3,500 platforms from 30 outlets - has made a

substantial investment in Max trailers taking delivery of 16 three axle semi-trailers. With high levels of galvanised components the trailers are fitted with open grating flooring and multiple lashing points as well as the usual winch and chain stowage options. Max Trailers is also making inroads in other markets, including the UK.

Of course a trailer requires a tractor unit. Issues such as driver health & safety, the safety of pedestrians and other road users are having a dramatic effect on vehicle specifications, with many larger rental companies pushing their specifications up market.

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Some of the new Scania tractors going into service at Nationwide

In the UK Nationwide Platforms - until recently a heavily DAF orientated fleet - announced the purchase of a number of P450 Scania tractor units. Whilst all operators are striving for efficiency and fuel savings, Nationwide - now part of Loxam - has ordered the units with three star City Safe windows to give a better view of other road users and pedestrians, along with proximity sensors, side scanners, audible left turn warnings, auto braking if the vehicle senses a hazard and a factory fitted satellite

navigation system with overhead height warnings. The specification is topped off with a multiple camera system from Brigade which allows live viewing and playback. For those operators regularly involved in urban deliveries this trend to improve the safety of other road users is almost certain to continue and Nationwide is just one example of a company trying hard to future proof its fleet. The aerial work platform rental market is still a high growth industry and there is no doubt

that its continuing development will provide further opportunities for truck and truck equipment manufacturers.

Mark Carrington

Mark Carrington began his 45 year career in the truck equipment and trailer business in marketing for York Trailers. In 2008 he acquired full ownership of the King Vehicle Engineering Group which he sold in June 2016. He was also responsible for bringing Wumag (now Palfinger Platforms) into the UK market during his tenure at King. More recently he has been providing advice through his consultancy company Hickmire and is non executive director for truck bodybuilder Kurt Hobbs Coachworks. In the next instalment he will cover transport in the crane market.



One of three Advanced Access Platforms' 7.5 tonne beavertail Mitsubishi Fuso Canter Euro 6 delivery trucks with fibretack decking

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