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A well trained operator leads to a well maintained crane

A trained operator = lower maintenance costs

Everyone understands the need to maintain commercial vehicles, in order to keep them roadworthy and reliable so that they continue to earn revenue. However, this understanding does not always extend to auxiliary equipment, such as a loader crane.

As with any piece of mechanical handling equipment, loader cranes and attachments need to be maintained to keep them in good working order and to guard against failure in service, not to mention assure that they remain safe.

Many lorry loader owners make the mistake of assuming that the crane is serviced when the vehicle is put through its six weekly inspection, but this is often not the case and even if the crane is covered, can it always be said that the person carrying out the job is qualified to do so?

Even if the answer to the above question is yes, going six weeks without addressing the issue of maintenance is far from satisfactory. The routine maintenance required on a loader crane and its attachments will vary according to the manufacturer and the application in which it will be used, but for example, a typical lubrication regime includes:

- Column bearings should be lubricated on a weekly basis.
- Attachments should be lubricated on a weekly basis.
- All other greasing points should be lubricated every two to four weeks depending on the application and frequency of use.

Owners whose vehicles are equipped with automatic chassis lubrication systems may consider that this is not an issue. However unless the system is properly specified for the loader and the grease required, then extending the truck's autolube system to the crane is not a desirable option. Loader crane manufacturers have, however, assisted the implementation of lubrication routines by installing Central Greasing Points. This is a cluster of grease fittings, situated in an accessible position and therefore making it much easier to grease the appropriate parts of the crane.

As part of an effective maintenance regime, it is crucial that the operator of the equipment is aware of his/her responsibilities. In fact, one of the biggest assets that a lorry loader owner can have, when it comes to maintaining the equipment in good order, is a well-trained operator. For this reason ALLMI dedicates two training modules to Pre-Operational Checks and Operator Maintenance as part of its course.

Operators need to be informed of their legal duties and what to do if a fault is found. They need to be told what to look for with regard to the in-cab equipment, stabiliser legs, hydraulic oil, the loader crane and any attachments. They also need to be aware of the level of maintenance activity that is expected of them and the importance of their participation in keeping the equipment in good order. They may also need to be shown how to carry out basic maintenance work.

When it comes to a more technical inspection, again the intervals will vary according to application. As a guide, these can be expected to be:

- Hook attachment – twice a year
- Brick grab attachment – three times a year
- Clamshell bucket attachment – four times a year

Advances in technology now mean that manufacturers can help owners of lorry loaders to be more specific about this. Some Lorry loader safety systems can be programmed to warn of impending service intervals, although this is a development which owners have been slow to take up. This could prove costly as the money spent on a well structured

maintenance regime will amount to only a fraction of that spent when things start to go wrong.

The cost comparison for routine preventive maintenance against breakdown repair is heavily weighted in favour of maintenance:

- If a pin is not greased then, when a ram needs to be re-sealed, it may take an additional three to four hours to remove the seized pin before the job can be completed.
- The cost of replacing a hydraulic hose as part of a routine service is normally one fifth of the cost of replacing the hose as a result of a breakdown. This comparison doesn't even take into account the downtime of the equipment.
- Simple greasing of lift cylinder pins and bushes costs only 30p per week. Compare this to a typical cost of £250 to replace these items.

For those who have cranes under warranty, do not make the assumption that maintenance is something that you don't need to worry about. Most manufacturer warranties stipulate that the equipment must be properly maintained otherwise the warranty will be invalid. Even if problems can be rectified under the warranty, poor maintenance can cause problems for the future life of the crane, long after the warranty has expired.

So the message is simple; preventative maintenance is far cheaper than corrective maintenance. The latter will only lead to higher running costs and downtime of the equipment, and usually an unhappy customer!



A lorry loader in for crane maintenance, was recently found to have a whole outrigger missing