

Readers Letters



The following letter was received from Cathal McNally of Forsyth of Denny regarding a serious incident in the company's yard during the first week of March, which was caught on the CCTV cameras.

Dear Leigh,

I would like to highlight a serious incident that occurred in our own yard earlier this week, the attached video refers to it and although the quality is poor, it serves to demonstrate how close we came to losing one of our work colleagues as a result.

I appreciate it is uncommon for crane owners to publish their negative news or anything they deem may have a negative effect on their business. All of us publish the positives - stories of new machinery added to the fleet, stories of new depots opened, stories of self-praise, 'Another Happy Customer', team this and team that. However, do ANY of us learn anything from this type of news?

The reason we are publishing this, is in the hope that someone, somewhere might learn from it. I believe all crane companies should publish their incidents and near misses and not attempt to cover them up - there is no shame in admitting your failings - if these type of occurrences can be eliminated or a life can be saved, it can only be a positive thing for the whole industry. Of course, some will 'scoff' but shouldn't, because this type of occurrence is out there waiting on us all.

Briefly describing the incident, one of our operators (with over 30 years crane and lifting experience), needed to add oil to the engine of a Liebherr LTM1040. To do this, the ballast normally carried on the deck during road travel needs to be 'lifted' or mounted on the rear of the superstructure, thus allowing the engine covers to be removed to allow access to the engine.

The operator decided to carry out this procedure 'Free On Wheels' despite full Liebherr Training & Crane Mobilisation RA/MS for fully rigged duties being in place. We can see from earlier footage that the superstructure was rotated to 180 degrees over the rear with the boom angle quite low. Once over the rear, the boom was raised to a higher angle, the ballast was lifted, and the crane was slewed, resulting in an overturn backwards.

In our family, we have always said, that 'Nothing is a problem if money can fix it'. There is considerable damage to the crane itself and indeed, the crane (60t) that it collided with. However, it was only when we viewed the footage of the incident that we realised how serious it was - one of our colleagues who was innocently washing the 60t - just passed the stricken crane as it overturned. We estimate if he had paused alongside the 60t he was washing about five seconds earlier, he would surely have been pinned underneath the overturning crane OR, had he been on the other side of the 60t, he could have been injured as it was pushed forward or struck by the swinging hook block.

Following full investigation, we held a safety stand-down this evening in our yard and got all staff involved, showing them this video and discussing what it would have been like to recover the crane had someone been pinned under it - it was and IS clear to be seen how close we came to losing a work colleague and I can assure you - it was a very sobering moment for us all.

It is very difficult to be innovative or change the crane industry in the UK but if we can ALL learn from each other's mistakes we can make a difference and help make the crane industry a safer one."



Reporting Wish List

Dear Sir,

I have a 'Wish List' for accident incident reports, perhaps other business leaders involved with work at height use the reports you publish to teach preach and reach new levels of workplace safety. I visit the Vertikal.net almost every day and learn so much from details photos and reader comments about industrial accidents. I wish you could and would take this activity up several steps to follow through on investigative reports, recovery plans and methodology used to correct the wrong actions.

I realise you can't fix stupid, so I wouldn't expect follow through on 'Death Wish' stupid moves. A line must be drawn somewhere. My safety meetings, for a crew of two, three or four guys, have your accident reports threaded into the good moves I expect and insist our guys use.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sherm Anderson

We totally recognise the need and the potential benefits of a full follow up to add to the learning potential that accidents/incidents and 'Near Misses' can provide. This is something we already do when possible, and we do go back and add to the original report. Sadly all too often the contractors' attitude openly prevents such potential benefits reach a wider audience. The typical reaction in the event of an incident is a total refusal to speak with us, and in the case we have the information the usual response is "who sent you" followed by attempts to prevent us publishing anything while a heavy handed attempt to unearth the 'whistle blower' is made. If only managers would take a more enlightened approach as in the case of Cathal McNally above the lifting world would be a safer place. We will step up our efforts to follow up on incidents, and in the meantime hope that this current crisis might just change company attitudes to such things. But at the same time, it requires safety authorities to change from a blame attitude to one more similar to that used in the aviation industry.

Norman Taylor 1928 - 2020

Dear Sir,

Norman Taylor, the long served and loyal servant of the crane and excavator company Priestman of Hull, died on the 2nd January at the grand old age of 91. He had sadly suffered from severe dementia for some years and spent his final years in a nursing home. I first met him in 1970, when I joined Priestman as Export Manager, and we were very much thrown together because he was Overseas Service Engineer, who had been expected to spend most of his time travelling, despite the fact that he was a married man with a family. European trips were at least six to eight weeks' long, and overseas journeys three months. His longest trip was no less than nine months, followed shortly afterwards by another three. When the company was setting up its Canadian subsidiary in 1958/9, his wife met him at the airport on his return with their two sons, one of them burst into tears at the sight of this complete stranger.

Apart from long absences away he was often contacted by customers home over the weekends, often entailing hours on the phone sorting problems. I believe that Norman joined Priestman as an apprentice, but he certainly had no equal in the company for technical product knowledge, he was very down to earth and had a sound practical knowledge, meaning he did not always agree with the opinions of the designers. I found him invaluable as a colleague and, as we often travelled together, we became firm friends. Various bosses were imposed on him during the period up to the takeover by the Steel Group in 1970, and then he had to report to the Coles hierarchy in Sunderland, until de Vigier of Acrow re-established the company independently of Coles in 1972, and Norman finally got the job he richly deserved as General Manager Parts & Service. He led a team of highly skilled men and was very respected by every one of them because he had worked his way up from the bottom. He had a wonderful sense of humour and got himself into trouble with the traffic police more than once.

He recounted how he could not resist, whilst in Canada, driving the powerful Pontiac Ranch Wagon, hired for his use, at maximum speed on a motorway where the limit was 60mph, and, on presentation of his UK licence to the copper who pulled him over, was asked what kind of a Mickey Mouse document did he think it was, and was fined heavily on the spot. During the Miners' Strike in 1982, he was stopped twice on the same day by the same policeman and was so cross the second time that when asked his name, replied "Bloody Arthur Scargill", not exactly a diplomatic reply to a police officer at the time!

After the final collapse of Priestmans in 1968, Norman continued using his technical skills in assisting one of his sons in designing and building light aircraft. He was very upset at the death of his long-suffering beloved wife, Pat, in March 2007, and is survived by his three sons, Noel, Martyn and Robin. He was, in every way, an exceptional man, and also a very modest one, who never flaunted his talents, and established excellent relationships with customers and colleagues alike.

Dick Lloyd

Sadly we learnt that since he sent this letter, Dick Lloyd has suffered a fall and is in hospital.

**Antonio Agosta 1937-2020**

Antonio Agosta, the founder and managing director of Italian scaffold tower and ladder manufacturer Svelt, passed away earlier this month, he was 82. Agosta, was born and grew up in Palermo, Sicily, trained as an engineer and settled in Bergamo more than 55 years ago, where he founded Svelt in 1964, offering a low cost modular steel scaffold tower that could be easily folded, erected or dismantled. He started out selling 'door to door', attempting to catch potential customers/tradesmen during their lunch breaks in order to demonstrate the benefits of his products.

He said that he chose the Svelt name for his company to emphasise speed and ease with which the products could be assembled and disassembled. The company steadily increased its product range over the years even spending some time as a powered access distributor, and in recent times with his two sons, Davide and Eros, on board the company has grown internationally with subsidiaries in France, Romania, Spain and Belgium.

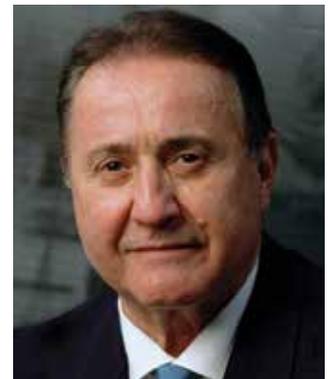
In later life he became something of a writer publishing a range of items, including a children's book 'The Adventures of Toni the scarecrow' and a collection of poems.

Antonio Agosta lived life to the full, had a very strong and loving family, and enjoyed his tennis. Sadly he was one of the many inhabitants of Bergamo that have succumbed to the Covid-19 virus. He had a warm and generous heart and will be greatly missed by all those who were fortunately to have known or met him.

**Alessandro Fagioli 1938-2020**

Alessandro Fagioli, president of Italian heavy lift and transport Fagioli passed away on March 22nd, he was 81. In 1950 Fagioli's family moved from Traversetolo near Parma to Montecchio north of Rome, where his father purchased a Dodge truck and started his own transport business. In those early days he carried anything from lumber to livestock and food. Then in 1955 he began transporting canned goods for a local company and the business took off. By 1960 the Fagioli company owned six trucks and was purchasing two new ones every year. A significant step change occurred in the early 1960s with the purchase of the company's first articulated/semi-trailers. One of the first 'heavy transport' jobs for the company involved moving a boiler and was executed by Alessandro Fagioli, this was followed by winning a prestigious contract to move an historical bronze bell in 1965, which brought publicity and a boost to the company's reputation. Continuous investment in the latest equipment increased the company's heavy transport activity, initially in central Italy and then further north, with the opening of offices in Milan and Turin. 'Technology moves the world' became Alessandro Fagioli's motto, as he understood the importance of advanced engineering solutions to move increasingly heavy modules. Recent examples include the transport, lifting and installation of offshore platform sections weighing 44,000 tonnes in Canada, and a key role in the salvage of the Concordia wreck. He was also involved in the installation of 12,000 tonne caissons and barriers for the MO.SE project in Venice.

He is succeeded by his son Giovanni Fagioli.



Horst Felbermayr 1945-2020

Horst Felbermayr Snr, owner of Austrian crane, access and heavy transport company Felbermayr, passed away on Friday 13th March, following a serious illness. He was just 75.

The company that bears his name, was established by his father, Franz Felbermayr in 1942, with a single delivery truck for short haul transport.



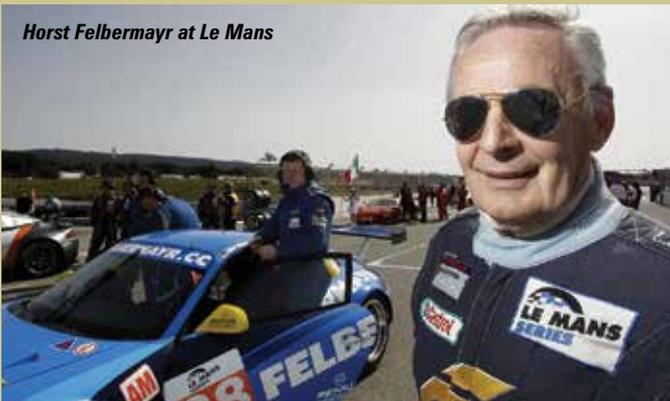
Horst, and his wife Gisela, took over the company in 1967 when it ran a fleet of four delivery vehicles and one excavator. However, over three years he expanded the business into civil engineering, container rental and sewer and gas line construction, opening a branch in Grieskirchen in 1972 through the acquisition of the companies Hintenaus and Scholze.

During the mid 1970s the company purchased more construction equipment along with specialist trucks and trailers to move it. This in turn led to the creation of a special heavy transport division. In 1989 it entered the crane rental market after purchasing a specialist road/rail mounted crane and in 1993 acquired Vienna based crane company Wanko, along with heavy transport company Schwertrans Enns. In 1996 Linz based mobile crane rental company Kern was added and in 1998 Vienna based powered access rental company Wallner.

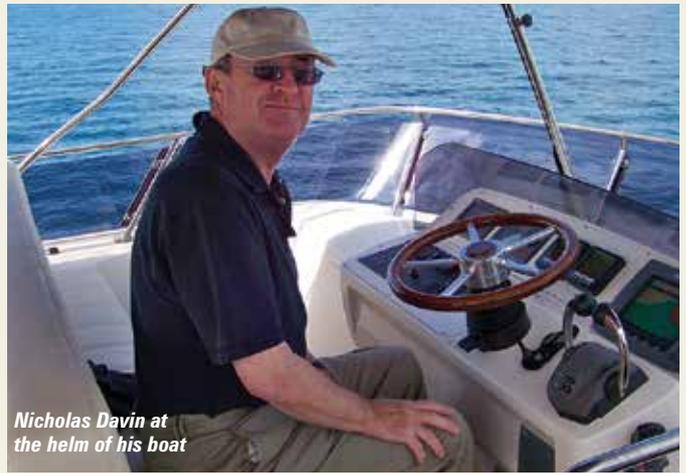
At the start of 2000 Felbermayr began to expand outside of Austria, adding ZRE in Poland in 2004. That same year saw the addition of Scheffold in Wörgl and AKS Autokran und Schwertransport. And then in 2005 the company acquired the Austrian division of aerial work platform company Lavendon - Zoom Austria. Since then it has gone on to build a truly international business, covering heaving lifting, transport and marine logistics, with more than 2,700 employees across 67 locations in 19 countries.

In addition to his crane and platform business Horst Snr was an accomplished and well known racing driver competing at Le Mans on six occasions collaborating with the Proton Competition squad, as a driver and car owner under the Felbermayr Proton banner. He last raced in 2011 when he suffered a heavy accident at Le Mans. He also raced in the FIA GT Championship, alongside his son in the family owned Porsches.

In 2015 Horst and his wife handed the day to day management and control of the business to the next generation in the form of Horst Felbermayr Junior and wife Andrea. He remained on the supervisory board however until the very end of his days.



Horst Felbermayr at Le Mans



Nicholas Davin at the helm of his boat

Nicholas George Davin 1945 - 2020

One of the founding fathers of the Irish powered access rental business, and a past president of IPAF, Nicholas Davin passed away on the 11th of March, he celebrated his 75th birthday at the start of the month.

In 1972 Nicholas and his brother David took over their father's business Flood Motors which ran a Ford dealership and plant hire business. With car sales waning they focused their efforts on developing the rental business. Nicholas identified access equipment as an emerging opportunity and in 1980 established Aerial Platform Hire with his other brother Andrew. The following year they set up a sales company and was appointed as the first JLG distributor in Ireland. The company, still a JLG distributor, is the manufacturer's longest serving dealer.

A number of major projects helped the business grow, including providing aerial work platforms for Aughinish Alumina, and the Harland & Wolff shipyards, while in more recent years the company has worked with companies like Facebook and Intel. The company expanded to service the whole of Ireland from locations in Kildare and Cork, with a good number of his team from the early years remaining with the company some with more than 30 years' service.

He was passionate about the powered access industry and in 2001 was appointed as president of IPAF (the International Powered Access Federation) becoming a board member. He loved industry 'get togethers' and was well known for being a straight talker and someone that spoke up about issues in the sector. He was relentless in pushing for solutions to customer issues and lamented the less personal moves as the industry became more digital.

Davin loved his home county of Donegal and walking on the beach with wife Liza he became a certified boat captain and loved to talk of his explorations along the Irish coastline and to Scotland and its distilleries. In recent years the couple cruised the Slovenian and Croatian coastlines, particularly the islands south of Zadar - start him off on his boat travels and you were in for a long and interesting session. He was always happiest selling machines, or on his boat, with his family around him.

He will be missed.



Aerial Platforms supplied many booms to Harland & Wolff in the 1980s

John George Thomas Barton 1967 - 2020

John Barton, founder and co-owner of UK rental company Quick Reach, passed away suddenly on the 29th February, he was just 52.

John Barton and his brother David had worked for the Platform Company and then Nationwide Platforms, before establishing Quick Reach at the start of 2015. This time last year the two brothers were celebrating new funding and a new depot. Quick Reach operates from Manchester, Wolverhampton, London, Doncaster and Wishaw in Scotland with a fleet of around 1,000 units ranging from small scissor lifts to telehandlers.

A statement from brother David said: "It is with great sorrow and heartbreak to say that my brother, John, unexpectedly passed away on Saturday 29th February. He was not only the co-founder of Quick Reach but also my older brother, soulmate and best friend. We are all understandably devastated. Please hold your loved ones tight and send your prayers to his wonderful wife and children. Although we are still open, I hope you understand that we are facing an enormous loss to the company and family during this difficult time. Quick Reach will continue in the memory of the legendary John Barton."



John Barton with brother David

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP BUSINESSES STRONG

In these difficult times it is more important than ever to communicate with your customers, suppliers, remote workers and others and maintain confidence in your company and brand as well as highlighting plans and strategies.

This may appear challenging when the natural instinct is to 'hunker down' cut everything back and just get through the crisis, often sacrificing long built up reputations. But there are alternatives.

By working together in a constructive manner and understanding each other's concerns and challenges, companies and the industry as a whole can stay strong and in a far better position to bounce back when all this has passed, as it most certainly will.

The Vertikal Press will be here all through the crisis, continually reporting on the industry we love and breathe, continuing to publish the magazines and providing a daily news service via the Vertikal.net web portal. We are also open to all manner of ideas and ways in which we can help support you - our readers and customers.

In times of crisis, creativity, openness and maintaining your presence in the market wins the day. This is when a company's true colours, depth and quality shine through - and the weak are exposed. So, keep in touch. Keep sending your news and continue to work closely with suppliers and partners as well as your customers - they are all important.

We will work with you to make sure you can maintain your profile. If you need help in any area - from finding ways to continue your advertising programmes, to assistance with editorial/news items - we are here to help.

The Vertikal Team, Leigh, Nicole, Keng, Pam, Clare, Mark, Rüdiger, Lee, Alex, Ed, Poppy and our fantastic contractors - Brett, Roland and Anja.