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The changing face of lower level work at height



Dingli has made a major impact in the small scissor lift market

Working at heights of up to five metres is by far and away the biggest cause of life changing injuries and fatalities resulting from falls at height. It is also a major cause of minor strains and muscle pulls, as tradesmen move or climb ladders and steps. And yet not only are low level work platforms safer, but they are also more efficient and therefore cost effective! We take a look at the market and some of the latest new products.

Normally this time of year plant maintenance and operations managers across Europe are busy planning work, including factory layout or machinery moves to be carried out during the vacation shut down period. With many plants having closed for several weeks this spring, one wonders if there is as much need for shutdown work this year? Companies may though be looking to change their production lines and reorganise plant layouts in order to adapt to the 'new normal' and be ready for the pickup that most are hoping for later in the year.

When carrying out such work, the importance of safely and efficiently when working at height is more critical than ever. With the ghost of Covid-19 still lurking, the last thing anyone wants is a visit to the Accident & Emergency wing of the local hospital, no matter what their injuries. So this is no time to take risks with the improper use of a ladder or pallets for fork lifts etc...

No excuses

Thankfully there has never been more choice and small platforms have never been as widely available or as inexpensive. So there is no excuse not to plan work properly and to organise the best equipment for the job. Not only is it infinitely safer, but it will save time, result in better workmanship and with fewer people on the job, might help ensure social distancing.

A market in its infancy

Rules covering the temporary work at height have been changing steadily over the past 15 years, with an increased focus on the way work is carried out at lower levels. In Europe this was kick started by the implementation in 2005 of the European Council Directive 2001/45/EC minimum safety and



Pop Ups at the Hire Show 2006

health requirements for the use of equipment for work at height. This brought in a key change for most countries in that work at height rules now applied at any height, rather than the usual four to five metres (platform heights of 2-3m). The UK was the fastest to embrace the new regulations as small companies spotted a profit opportunity offering work at height audits, advice and to sell equipment, suggesting that ladders were now banned. The 'ladders are now banned' myth spread rapidly,

and many contractors took it very seriously, prompting the Health & Safety Executive to setting up a 'Myth Buster' service to counter the rumours. While ladders are not at all dangerous when used properly, the fuss did launch a new low level powered access industry that the UK arguably still leads. Scaffold manufacturer NSG was first to market with its 3.63 metre working height Pop-Up push around scissor lift, unveiled at the Hire Show in January 2006. Pre orders for the Chinese built platform were



substantial, and it found a ready market as an alternative to ladders and steps. Priced between £2,400 and £3,000 it was also reasonably priced and with a rental rate back then of almost £100 a week a decent investment.

While not covered by the EU's rules the USA had seen new company Custom Equipment ship its first product in 2004 - the 10ft HB-1030 - with a five metre working. It is still in use with the original customer. However, while aimed at a similar market the Custom Hy-Brid scissor

lift was self-propelled, had a higher platform and weighed just over 500kg compared to the Pop-Up's 270kg. It was also more expensive but light enough to work on suspended floors, a key and rapidly growing requirement.

Suspended floors - such as those by Kingspan are often limited to 800kg uniformly distributed eliminating the use of larger scissor lifts. It has also been estimated that more than 55 percent of the work done with a 19/20ft scissor lift is no more than four metres high, wasting half of



Steve Kissinger hands over the 10,000th Hybrid scissor to Martin Starck of Lift Works, who also bought the first Hy-Brid scissor lift, a HB-1030

the machines capability. Since then the market for smaller lifts and push around scissors has grown beyond the expectations of all but the most wildly optimistic, and yet it is still very much in its infancy.

Most fatal/serious falls

One factor driving the adoption of safer forms of access equipment at these sorts of heights might be the accident statistics which highlight the fact that more serious injuries and fatalities occur from falls of between three and four metres than from any other height. While this

might sound counter intuitive, there are many reasons for this being the case.

First and most obvious is the fact that more people work at these heights, thanks to the millions of ladders in use, not to mention 'make-shift' access equipment.

Then there is the sense of self-preservation, and the fact that it is not so easy to organise a homemade solution above six metres. People are more likely to plan work at greater heights and take more care than at lower levels

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when even diligent individuals will take a bit of a risk to get a quick or occasional job done, rather than have the hassle of organising a platform.

A fall from two to three metres does not sound like much of a fall, after all you could jump from that level. However if you land badly, such as on your back or worse your head, it can easily prove fatal or life changing. There are also the risks of climbing, particularly when carrying tools or materials.

Self-propelleds collide with push arounds

In the past year or so there has been a proliferation of micro self-propelled scissor lifts with platform heights of 11 to 14ft, the vast majority of them manufactured in China. They clearly go head to head with the mast type platforms such as the Skyjack SJ12, the Snorkel TM12, Bravi Sprint, JLG 1230ES or Haulotte Star 6 etc. while higher versions are available from Skyjack, Snorkel and Haulotte which tops the table with the 20ft Star 8S.

Some of the 12/13ft scissor lifts are almost as compact as the mast type lifts, but with a larger platform thanks to the absence of the mast - but that is another story. The key thing is that anyone looking for a powered platform with a working height of up to five metres will have plenty to consider, from push around to self-propelled, scissor to mast, manual or powered lift etc..

Deciding on the height is the starting point, while the overall weight can be critical due to floor loading limitations. Then maybe platform size is an issue, or perhaps capacity? Although not usually critical at this level, something like the Bravi Lui HD -which offers a 4.9 metre work height, with extended platform of 1.7 metres and 180kg capacity, yet weighs just over



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500kg - can be the solution. If 3.5 metres is sufficient, you might consider a manually powered lift. Power Towers pioneered the manual lift mechanism with its Pecolift in 2012, which uses a patented lift mechanism with gas springs and a flywheel aided crank handle to lift and lower the platform - so no battery pack, no hydraulic oil, and no electric motors or switches. Simple! When it comes to choosing a machine they all have their place but ultimately it will be a mix of height, weight, dimensions and how important driving at height is for the work to be done.

The 'Ladder Killer'

Swedish low level aerial lift manufacturer Safelift has celebrated

its 10th year in business with a new model and new export markets. Based in Växjö between Stockholm and Malmo, the company manufactures two vertical mast type lifts - the AD30 self-propelled model and the AP30 push around version - both of which offer a working height of almost five metres with a platform capacity of 180kg while weighing 320kg.

It has now added a smaller Push Around model, the PA35 with a working height of 3.5 metres, which it is marketing as the 'Ladder Killer'. It features a battery powered telescopic mast and a working height of 3.5 metres with a platform capacity of 130kg. It weighs just 223kg, has an overall width of under 697mm, an overall length of 995mm and a closed height of 1.55 metres, making it very easy to move around an office, warehouse or shop and can ride the smallest elevators. It fits between Power Towers' manually operated Peco lift and battery powered Nano.

The company is also unusual in that its sales are almost entirely online through "a unique web-based programme" which also allows potential customers in Scandinavia and most of Western Europe to request a machine is delivered for a free on site evaluation.

Another manual lift

There has been talk of competitors to the manually powered Pecolift but the only one we have details on is the new Zarges LiftMaster U, with 4.3 metres working height and a crank handle to raise and lower the platform. Details are scant but it weighs 165kg, has a platform



If a big deck and light weight is what you need then go for the Bravi.



The ELS 4.5 Junior



The GMG 1030-PA offers a special quick fold heavy duty guardrail

capacity of 120kg, and an overall retracted width of 740mm. But it also has wheeled stabilisers - due to its light weight - which extend the width to 1.65 metres and is all aluminium.

New push scissor for ceiling panels

GMG has launched the 1030-PA push around scissor lift, with a five metre work height and a total weight of 360kg. Overall width is 700mm and the overall height just 1.79 metres. Features include

two button operation, self-locking wheels to prevent movement when elevated and an excellent retractable sliding guardrail system, which allows the operator to quickly switch from full length guardrails to a smaller square which allows the platform to pass through suspended ceiling panels. It also includes a laser locator for easy positioning directly below the target work, a maintenance free sealed battery, extra large wheels and saloon style entrance.



The Safelift 'Ladder Killer' PA35



The Zarges LiftMaster U offers a working height of 4.3 metres.



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Power Towers on the move

UK-based Power Towers has been an autonomous part of JLG since the company acquired it from Brian and Sandra King and Mark Richardson in 2015. Almost exactly five years on, we had a 'virtual meeting' with current managing director Jonnie Dawson, 18 months after he moved into the role and six months after the departure of founder Brian King.

It also coincided with the move into the company's all new 9,500 square metre production facility in Leicester. The move has been complicated by the UK's national Lockdown which was implemented just a week or two prior to the planned move date.

After some careful rethinks and planning, it was carried out by a small team of managers over a longer period. As if that was not enough, our meeting coincided with a new local lockdown in Leicester, following a flare up of new Covid-19 cases in the area. In spite of this Dawson was in an upbeat mood and clearly enjoying his new role running a complete business, including the



Jonnie Dawson

manufacturing and operations side of the company. He joined JLG from Merlo in 2006 as sales director for European telehandlers, and has had a couple of jobs since then, all sales related- prior to the move to Power Towers he was senior sales director Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Having met him numerous times over the years, it is clear that he has absolutely found his niche, with a job that he truly loves, even with the challenges of Covid-19.



The new Power Towers plant from the outside

Increased integration

When JLG acquired Power Towers in 2015, it told us that it was going to take a 'Hands Off' approach and would run the company as a standalone operation within JLG Europe. Karel Huijser stated that JLG did not want to spoil the entrepreneurial spirit of the young company, which was barely nine years old, so it would be very much "business as usual". JLG was true to its word, helping the company as much as possible but leaving it to the founders to run it as before. At the start of 2019 King began a 12 month hand over period as chairman and moves towards integration progressed a little. Nothing major, but the product colour scheme changed from Power Tower's blue to a new JLG Low Level livery of

orange with black highlights. While it is a little closer to the JLG's classic orange and cream livery, it is clearly different and seems to have gone down relatively well with dealers and major customers alike.

Until then the company painted machines destined for the USA and markets where they are marketed as JLG in orange and cream, while those heading to Power Towers markets were painted blue. Now they are all the same colour – and just choosing the branding decal required.

The company is also close to completing the conversion of all Power Towers production documentation to the common JLG standards. Anyone who has been involved with a small rapidly growing manufacturer will know that manufacturing documentation rarely keeps pace with growth and as a result is not as detailed as that used or required by multinational manufacturers. Many an acquisition has been abandoned due to a lack of detailed documentation, as it can be a mammoth task.

Global centre of innovation and excellence

The new facility will become JLG's global centre of excellence and innovation centre for low level aerial work platforms and already includes a small dedicated team of



The Peco Lift in new colours...and Nano SP+ self-propelled with dual deck extension

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Longer duty cycles keep the job going. The **Snorkel TM16E** features an electric drive system for smooth and quiet operation. Saloon-door entry gates provide easy access to the platform, even when carrying tools, and a roll-out extension deck provides additional reach over low level obstacles. The TM16E delivers the tallest working height in Snorkel's line of self-propelled telescopic mast lifts up to a maximum working height of 6.87m (22 ft.) with a platform capacity of 227kg (500 lbs.) and zero inside turning radius.



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The new assembly lines promise to be a great deal more efficient, especially when the suite of new production line fixtures arrive.

engineers. Their most recent project has been adapting the product range to meet the new ANSI standards.

The new plant not only consolidates two smaller facilities with a combined area of 2,500 square metres into a single 9,000 square metre facility, but also potentially quadruples the capacity, from annual production levels that we recently estimated to be in the region of 5,000 units. The new plant will initially have two assembly lines, Line 'A' for the Eco and Peco manually elevated push around models, including the outdoor X versions of each. The Eco has a working height of 4.2 metres compared to the Peco's 3.5 metres but has a longer stowed length and at just over 300kg is almost double that of the Peco which weighs just 180kg.

Production line 'B' will assemble all of the powered models, which include the original Power Tower and Nano push around models, and the self-propelled Nano SP. The new facility remains very much an assembly plant, with all fabrications continuing to be produced by two local sub-contractors, one of which has worked with the company since

the start. One big change though is the installation of a new state of the art automated paint booth. Until now the bare fabrications were trucked across town from the fabricator next door to the original facility, to one of three paint companies, and then trucked back to the Power Towers plant for assembly. King once joked that the quality of the paint depended to some extent on the weather during the fabrications trip across town.

New paint facility

The fabrications will now be delivered directly to the new paint booth from the sub-contractor, where they will be subjected to a six stage phosphate free pre-treatment process, followed by the latest powder coating system, both employing nano technology which will provide an infinitely better paint job, while the booth also incorporates the latest powder recycling and environmentally friendly technology.

Even on a virtual tour, it is clear that the not only will the new plant substantially boost efficiency, helping lower production costs and boost production capacity, but it will also help improve quality and aid



Installation of an all new state of the art paint booth is underway.



The new facility has plenty of space for both indoor storage of stock machines and a large yard for larger JLG platforms.

the environment, thanks to an array of built in 'green' measures such as automatic LED lighting, grey water collection and recycling for a wash down in the yard, solar panels on the roof and onsite waste recycling, complete with a compactor/baler which has substantially cut the amount of material going to land fill.

Multiple loading bays

The new plant also has eight separate commercial loading bays, as it was originally built as a large distribution hub. This is another area where substantial productivity gains will be made. At the old plant trucks were loaded outside – sometimes in the road, and it could take an hour or more, especially when raining. The built in bays make it fast, easy and dry with several trucks and containers loaded simultaneously in a fraction of the time and far more safely. The same applies to materials arriving on site.

JLG product distribution

The new plant also has a substantial yard area, where an inventory of JLG boom and scissor lifts will be held, allowing customers to take a mix of products, while also freeing up space at JLG's UK distribution base in Middleton, greater Manchester.

Market development

Speaking of the market, Dawson acknowledges that the UK remains the largest for low level lifts, but that France, Spain and the Benelux countries are developing well, with Dutch International rental group Boels placing a substantial order and Dutch rental company Collé and Loxam already running a sizeable fleets.

He points out that a key factor to developing and expanding the market, is to adopt a completely different sales technique than for



larger work platforms, requiring contractors to commit to 'method change' and realise that not only can low level platforms be safer, but more importantly significantly more efficient than traditional equipment. Some contractors are conducting ongoing work at height studies, with one floor of a building using Power Towers, while another identical floor continues to use traditional equipment, such as ladders or podiums etc. They typically find that not only is the work carried out more quickly, but tradesman are in better shape at the end of the shift, avoid many of the minor trip and strain injuries while eliminating damage to raised flooring or suspended ceilings etc.

Regular fit outs

He also adds that rapid technology developments in bank offices,

trading floors or tech business mean that building 'fit outs' are occurring every 10 years or sooner, generating plenty of work for low level platforms. An increasingly challenging issue is getting large delivery trucks into a city centre project during the day, while it is relatively easy to deliver around 20 Pecos on a single 7.5 tonne truck with tail lift. The key to further growth is to get the product in front of people and demonstrate the benefits.

This year will continue to be a challenging one, but the Power Towers move is complete with the full team back on August 3rd, with the new paint booth and new fixtures, placing the business in a strong position as it enters the new fiscal year in October.



Wider adoption of low level platforms requires 'method change' away from ladders, podiums, small towers or even larger self-propelled lifts' as these typical jobs show - some in the old blue Power Towers colour.

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