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# Lifting and access for trees

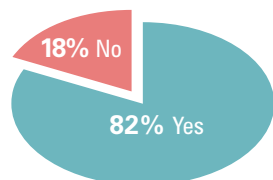
The use of powered access and mobile cranes in the tree care industry has been growing rapidly over the past 10 years or so. This is partly due to demands for safer working practices and partly due to the realisation that they can significantly boost productivity and the quality of work, while also providing greater safety. It is also helping keep the highly experienced, but perhaps ageing, workforce in the tree canopies long after their climbing days are over.

Over the past two months we carried out a survey of those working in the sector, from tree climbers to tree care company owners. It became clear that a key factor in the growing uptake of powered access in the sector was the growth in the number of spider lift manufacturers and the wider product ranges they now offer. As such, we intend to dedicate much of the upcoming spider lift feature in the next issue of C&A to looking at the latest product developments that have been tailored for this industry.

In the meantime it is worth pointing out that while powered access has helped reduce the overall number of accidents in the tree care sector, it still represents one of the largest industries for aerial lift fatalities along with crane overturns. A combination of blatant misuse and abuse, lifting loads with the platform, tree limbs striking the platform, and electrocution through contact with hidden power lines are just some of the risks involved. We will look into this further in next month's issue but for now let's focus on what those working in the tree care market think. Our wide reaching online survey

received responses from all manner of arborists, ranging from the 'groundies' on the floor to the climbers in the trees along with company owners and estate/forestry managers. Their experience levels ranged anywhere from four to 30 years with an average of approximately 14 years' in the industry. Responses came from the UK and other parts of Europe, the USA and Australia, with company sizes running from individual freelance arborists right through to companies with 30 employees or more.

## Use of cranes and aerial lifts



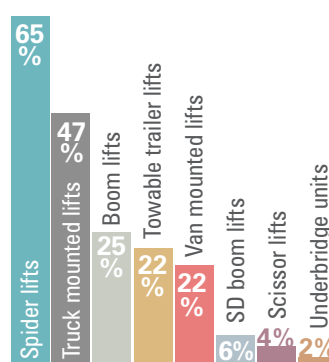
In total 82 percent of respondents said that they already use cranes and access in their work. While the use of cranes and access is definitely growing, the result is unlikely to be truly indicative of the market and more a reflection of converts keen to highlight the benefits in a survey.



Grapple saw attachments on loader cranes and telehandlers are becoming more popular

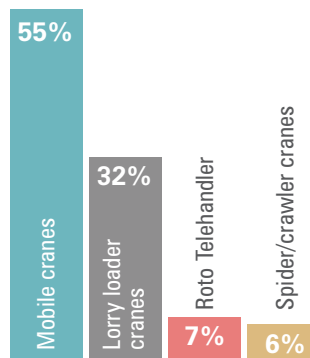


## The most used aerial lift types



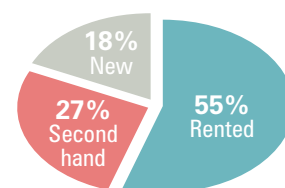
Perhaps unsurprisingly spider lifts are the most widely used lifts, followed closely by truck mounted platforms. The use of boom lifts is worryingly high given that the majority can only be used on flat solid ground. A much better option by far are the semi self-propelled 'SD' boom lifts with outriggers, however this only accounted for six percent of the total. Truth be told it's a niche product with only a couple of suppliers, and for an industry coming into powered access it's probably not well known.

## On the lifting side of things



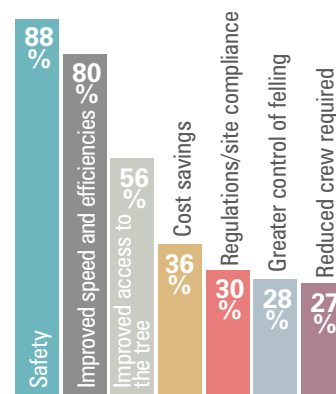
The results look proportional, but perhaps more in depth questions should have been asked relating to the exact size and type of cranes were being used.

## Typically equipment used is:



Again, this is fairly reflective of how the buying process in terms of renting first to understand the products before growing rental costs encourages investment in a new or used model.

When asked the main reason for using cranes and access the leading results were largely as expected:

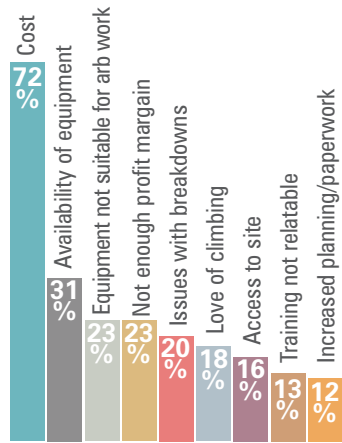


Almost every response from those who use cranes and access agreed that safety and improved speed and efficiencies were the key reason behind their use. A third of replies also stated cost savings benefits, which is encouraging given rental costs or the initial outlay for a purchase will likely put many off the idea. There is certainly an ongoing debate within the arb industry as to whether powered access offers any cost savings over the long run compared to conventional methods.

When asked what the biggest detractors were for using cranes



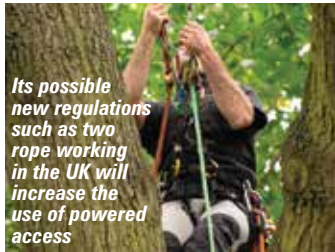
and access an overwhelming factor given was cost:



Every single response from those not using cranes and access stated cost as the key detractor, which was also a factor stated by the majority of those that are using lifting equipment. Availability, suitable equipment and issues with breakdowns were also cited, although a factor we didn't anticipate but which many people commented was access to sites. Had we included this as an option there is every possibility it would have featured more prominently, with many stating it as the only detractor from them using powered access or cranes more often.



*SD lifts which should be ideal for arborists are hardly used by the industry*

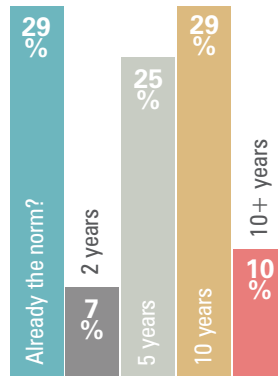


*Its possible new regulations such as two rope working in the UK will increase the use of powered access*



*Truck mounts are particularly useful for roadside applications*

## How long until lifting equipment becomes the 'norm'



77 percent responded that lifting equipment would one day be considered the 'norm' within the arb industry – although this is likely a result of a similar percentage of respondents being advocates of lifting equipment. Perhaps more interestingly, 30 percent thought it was already mainstream, with a further 30 percent thinking it would be within the next five years. The remaining 40 percent answered that it would be 10 or more years before being adopted.



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**Comments from the arb industry**

“Crane work can be some of the safest tree work you do, along with MEWP work. The biggest detraction from using them in the UK is lack of access.”

“I’m 59, with leg problems, can’t climb anymore. Using my access platform allows me to continue doing a job I enjoy.”

“HSE push the use of MEWPs in the work at height regulations. However no comparison seems to be made between the thousands of tree climbers that get 10 accidents and the hundreds of lift users that get 10 accidents. They are a tool in the box, good for some jobs but not necessarily safer than climbing.”

“Every major job should have either a crane or EWP immediately considered. Not only is it common sense but like HSE states climbing is only a last resort.”

“I think in the US powered access use already is the norm, with cranes not that far behind”



*Misjudging or underestimating the weight of a tree regularly ends in disaster*



*Only 6% responded that they use spider cranes but as their popularity grows that could change*

“At the first company I worked for the boss bought a brand new spider lift, it had constant malfunctions and to transport it was a nightmare with lots of windy roads and the spider lift being so top heavy it one day tipped the trailer over. I didn’t like it being used because it was another thing to avoid in the drop zone, and it was used most times where even I would prefer to climb because I was starting to learn how to climb.”

“The use of EWPs (Elevating Work Platform) is quicker and safer if we can access the tree with our EWP we use it. Why climb if you do not have to?”

“We need more time to develop/ understand new methods of working.”

“I am now 53 but the use of powered access for much of my work should allow me to continue tree work into my sixties.”



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"Lifting" equipment is the way forward with many jobs festering while waiting for the correct approach, kit, team to complete. It also places you miles ahead of other contractors stuck in the days of steam and slipped discs."

"In my career it usually came down to: Is the tree behind a fence? Yes: Climb the tree. No: use a bucket."

"Living in a rural area means that there is little money to pay for the work. This is compounded by the hire companies charging exorbitant rates compared to working in the towns and cities."

"In the UK the cost of crane hire is very expensive. This is off putting in the domestic sector as clients are not willing to pay such costs. Thus putting climbers in a very dangerous position, cranes are hired for jobs when trees are too dangerous to climb. I don't know what the solution to this problem is, but I'd like to see it change."

"We need to embrace and explore options. We are not helped by having a niche industry and a very 'clicky' and costly national governing bodies, the Arboricultural Association has so far proved useless in representing us on matters like CSCS cards, twin rope systems and refresher training. Not to mention the ACOP using cranes in tree work, we still adopt and use the US ACOP for best practice & compiling RAMs."

"MEWPs can be safer but definitely add risk in some circumstances, but blanket enforcement would be madness."

"One of my biggest concerns going forward is that there are companies in the UK using equipment like loader cranes, telehandlers and platforms that are simply not fit for purpose, people who claim to check are only checking their tickets or health a safety paper work but not understanding fundamental design of the machine. I understand that companies want to be able to compete in a fair market with each other. But I'm waiting for the day someone turns over one of these machines or kills someone. It will be down to the wrong machine being used in the wrong circumstances by someone who has simply manipulated the customers to believe that they are legit."

"The only real detracting factor should be zero access, using cost and poor profit margins shows that a price has been put on staff safety and welfare."



Tracked boom lifts, and in some cases tracked scissor lifts, are proving popular with arborists in the Benelux and Germany



Unimog chassis are particularly well suited for extreme off road applications – but at a price!

"I think that platforms/cranes are just another tool to be used when appropriate, I don't believe they can entirely replace climbing. When the situation is appropriate the increase in safety and efficiency is fantastic, but they come with a new and different set of dangers."

"I'd love to use cranes and powered access more often, but most workplaces are backyards in the inner city, so "no access" is the main reason. The second is that our company site is way to small (and rents are very high here) for a sufficient vehicle."

"I find when using a EWP the base unit is often in the way of the drop zone."

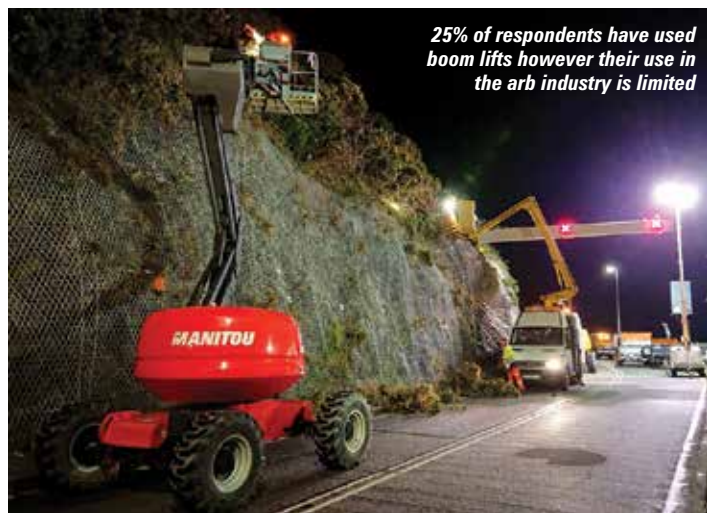
"Training has to be more geared towards the use of this equipment and equipment needs to be better designed to prevent sawdust build up in basket."

"Lorry mounted and mobile mounted cranes can save huge amounts of labour, but the cost comparison doesn't always add up unfortunately."

"I'd like to see more availability of smaller cranes and spider cranes within the industry in the UK. Most of our work is in rural areas and not suitable for larger cranes."

"I don't see using equipment as a distraction at all. It's using people in the conventional sense that gives me hassle. Using the right equipment even if it costs more than a family house is the way forward."

"Using platforms can bridge the skill gap of climbers for 80% of work."



25% of respondents have used boom lifts however their use in the arb industry is limited



For a long time Land Rover aerial lifts were a firm favourite within the arb industry