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Readers Letters

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letters



Dear Ed,

Since we experienced an overturn incident earlier this month, we have further developed our internal training programmes with extended emphasis on emergency control systems, their permitted use and working environment influences/pressures. Already, it would now appear that this additional training has proven to be invaluable. In as little as three weeks, another of our operators was faced with exactly the same situation when attending another TV/film shoot on location in the UK.

After the operator had set up and tested the machine, a film set rigger working for the end client installed a scaffold staging lighting unit to the platform. The operator then proceeded to undertake a secondary working envelope test. When the platform reached its maximum height/outreach for the load in the platform, the audible alarm sounded to advise the platform had reached its working envelope limit and was about to lock out. The operator was then involved in the following conversation:

Rigger: "Can it go higher?"

Operator: "That's as high as it will go."

Rigger: "It shouldn't be bleeping, there isn't 300kg in the basket."

Operator: "It's bleeping because its reaching its limit with that weight in the basket."

Rigger: "The equipment only weighs about the same as me, so it should go higher."

Operator: "If it's bleeping, it's bleeping for a reason. The working envelope of the platform will adjust depending on the weight being lifted."

Rigger: "Can you use your 'emergencies' to go higher?"

Operator: "No, our 'emergencies' are just for coming down and can only be used to recover the platform when normal operation is lost."

Rigger: "It's only 70kg of weight and the platform can lift 300kg, other people use the 'emergencies' to take it higher."

Operator: "Our company policy is that the 'emergencies' are only used to lower the platform and cannot be used to extend it in a normal working situation."

Immediately after our operator's discussion with the rigger, he followed company procedure and reported what we consider to be a 'Near Miss' to our central operations team who then assumed control of the situation. After further discussions with site personnel, the platform was lowered back to ground level and one of the lights were removed enabling the platform to then reach the clients target area.

While we are pleased that our extended operator training programme has completely proven its worth, it is equally important to note that given the rigger's comments on site, the practice of using access platforms outside of their designed safe working envelope may be much more common than people believe. Hopefully this case will raise further awareness to all owners/operators within our industry as it is vital that we collectively challenge this mindless behaviour of those that clearly have a complete disregard for human life, or the platforms we supply, before it's fatally too late.

Mark Bell,

Managing director

Blade Access

A report on the first incident, complete with Blade's disclosure of exactly what happened can be found at: www.vertikal.net

Dear Leigh,

The Sept/Oct edition of Cranes & Access hit my doormat this morning, and with it, your comments about the way that companies do - and don't - handle their PR.

I empathise completely with what you said in your column. For 30 plus years from the mid-1980s, I earned my crusts doing editorial work for trade-and-technical publications aimed at the worldwide mining industry. I finally decided to retire at the end of 2018; the editor of my principal client at the time - a US-based magazine - kindly gave me free rein for my last article. I included this:

"Since announcing my intention to retire, several people have asked 'why?' Without question, mining writing is not the same as it was when E&MJ was founded, or when I started my writing career in 1985. At that time, mining companies and equipment manufacturers alike had on their press relations and marketing staff who understood the importance of independent reporting on their operations and products. Operating companies would organise site visits for technical journalists - not just analysts - that would result in an article covering an operation from soup to nuts. Their press people knew what represented value for money for them and maintained positive relationships with us in the media to make sure that it happened.

I suppose the change began in the 1990s, and after each recession to hit the industry, cutbacks meant fewer dedicated press-relations staff. Today, some of the world's biggest mining companies simply ignore requests for technical information, although the suspicion remains that they would be only too keen to respond if they thought it could help boost their share price.

For obvious reasons, equipment manufacturers remained helpful in gaining access to report on mines, but with one proviso: only their equipment can be mentioned, even though competitive machines are on site. Thus, the reader receives a less-than-complete picture of what is going on."

The loss of good marketing people with each recession has hit equipment manufacturers equally hard - if not more so - than the producer companies. I guess that for your business, the hire companies are the equivalent of my copper- and coal-producers. You just get the feeling that management these days is so focused on finance that they forget that there are other factors involved in corporate success. When the PR lady gets made redundant, "well, Joe in sales can handle all of that stuff" The problem is that Joe is already up to his arse in alligators making sure that his existing clients don't go to a competitor for their next machine, and as well as that his sidekick in the office has been off sick for three weeks. Getting out a response to some journo who's asking for info on a certain product, or worse still, just sent in a list of ten questions for insightful replies - that stuff just slipped off the bottom of the screen. The next thing you know, the journo's getting hell from his ad-sales man because the company concerned didn't get coverage in that last article - despite having put in three e-mail requests and four voicemail messages, to which there was no response at all.

In the end, I just got frustrated by the increasing lack of response from companies big and small. I found I had more interesting things to do than try to deal with companies who - for whatever reason - seemed to have no interest in promoting their products in print. I'd reached pension age. I quit.

Hang on in there!

Kind regards,

Simon Walker

Georg Thierer 1931 – 2021

Georg Thierer, a leading pioneer of the German powered access industry, passed away on Tuesday 26th October at the age of 89, following a short illness.

He is probably best known as the founder and managing director of German manufacturer and Genie distributor TKD. Over the years, his company sold Genie, Holland Lift and MEC, adding Grove Manlift Toucan mast booms, Liftlux, UpRight and Euro Access products to supplement his TKD self-propelled telescopic work platforms.

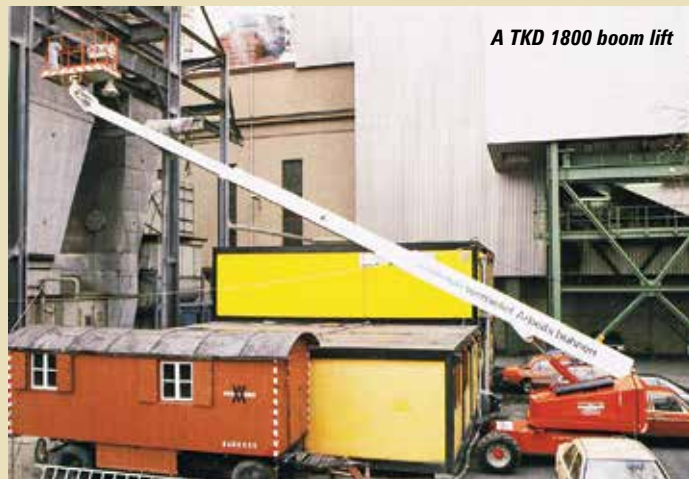
Thierer began his career in 1952, working on electron microscopy research with Carl Zeiss. After completing his studies in 1958, he joined excavator and material handling equipment manufacturer Johannes Fuchs, eventually becoming managing director of its Bad Schönborn excavator plant and business.

During his time with the company, he was responsible for a number of ground breaking developments and registered several patents, helping shape a generation of Fuchs construction machines. During business trips to the USA in the late 1970s, Thierer spotted the growth of self-propelled aerial work platform usage and recognised their potential. Back in Germany, he began developing a line of Fuchs self-propelled boom lifts.

He was keen to build a 'better mousetrap' and began with the 60ft F1800 telescopic, for which he designed an unusual triangular profile boom, which he patented. His machine also offered less tail swing than existing machines and he was proud to point out how his platform was more rigid/stable than competitor's products.

It also performed well on rough terrain thanks to a number of his designs, including true four wheel drive, extra ground clearance, oscillating axles, and a high specification hydraulic system, all of which added considerable cost. The product was greatly appreciated by German rental companies who wanted booms that matched the robust build quality of their Holland Lift scissors and Teupen or Denka trailer lifts. What's more, they were prepared to pay for it.

In 1985, Thierer left Fuchs to set up his own powered access business, becoming the Genie distributor for Germany. He later added a manufacturing operation after he acquired the Fuchs boom lift business, rebranding it as TKD. He began assembling them in a four or five bay workshop at his facility in Kronau, next door to Bad Schönborn. He also started selling MEC scissor lifts, as Genie had not yet entered that market. While at Fuchs he had formed a close friendship with Peter Kauderer, the owner of market leading platform rental company Maltech – or Mateco as it became. Kauderer helped set up the new business, with TKD standing for Thierer, Kauderer Dolinsek. Hans Dolinsek being a talented engineer who moved with Thierer from Fuchs. The Fuchs F1800 became the TKD 1800, and formed the basis for a product line, with working heights from 12 to 39 metres.



A TKD 1800 boom lift



Georg Thierer

Georg Thierer was a talented engineer and 'scientific tinkerer' with something of the mythical black forest toy maker about him. As well as his own patents and designs he contributed product development ideas and concepts to Genie - particularly on the original Z-60/34 - as well as MEC, where he promoted the mono-stack scissor design, similar to that used by Holland Lift.

His friendship with Kauderer would see him join the Mateco chief executive on trips to manufacturers, an unusual move, given that he was a competitor. But he would unashamedly participate fully in tours and new product discussions and demonstrations. He was never shy about sharing his opinions with engineers on how they could improve a design, or telling them what they had got wrong. However, he was always good natured with his observations and suggestions which were usually inciteful and valid. Given half the chance he would 'roll up his sleeves' and sketch up an idea with the design engineers during such visits. He was passionate and enthusiastic about engineering and was more than happy to share his knowledge or ideas, even if it was with a competitor.

He was always good company, debating design concepts or strategies, or any manner of other subjects. He was also a 'one off', all of which could become a little irritating, but he was also totally open, ready to listen and happy to be swayed by a counter argument. He would have a twinkle in his eye when making what he thought was a killer point in his argument or having thought of some great idea which he was preparing to share with you. He enjoyed life to the full, loved to travel to see new things and learn from what he saw and heard.

As well as his incredible energy, Thierer kept physically fit right up until the end, participating in various sporting activities over the years, including competing in endurance riding competitions, with his beloved Arabian horses, well beyond his 70th birthday. Sadly, he lost his wife around 15 years ago but still had his horses, dogs and two sons, Jörg and Frank, along with two grandchildren to keep him company.

The industry has lost yet another of its pioneers and unique characters.



The unique TKD triangular boom profile



Robert 'Bob' Dieleman 1948 – 2021

Bob Dieleman, owner and chief executive of Jake's Crane in Las Vegas, passed away on Sunday October 31st, aged 73, having been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the start of the year. Bob was the youngest son of Jake's Cranes founder Jake Dieleman, who had emigrated from Axel, in the Dutch province of Zeeland, to Canada in 1921, moving to the USA a year or two later and travelling to Boulder City, Nevada in 1931 to work on the construction of the Hoover dam.



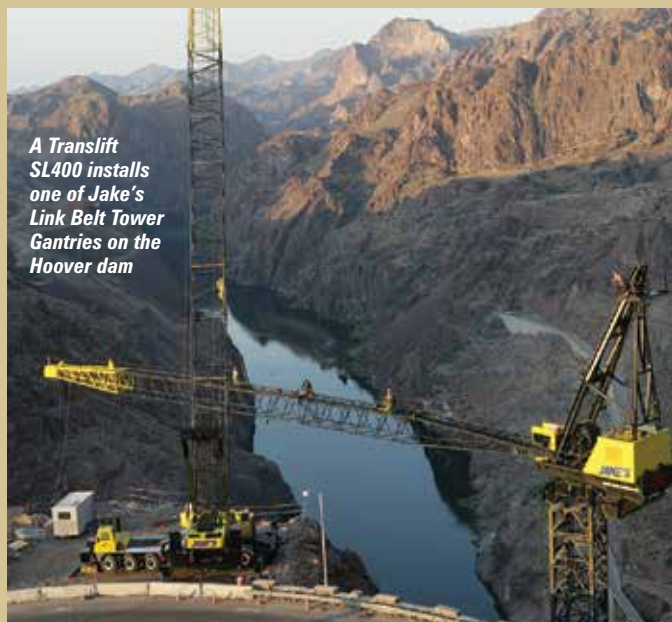
Bob Dieleman

Jake's was established in 1946, with Bob taking over the business in 1981. His brothers Roger and Richard (Dick) later went on to set up their own company Dieco Crane Services.

Jake and his sons were fans and loyal customers of American Hoist & Derrick truck and crawler cranes, buying its lattice boom truck cranes long after their popularity diminished. Under Bob's direction, Jake's became a major player in the Las Vegas tower crane market with a fleet of FMC Link-Belt tower gantries - big diesel hydraulic luffing jib cranes - which he later sold to Cornell in New Jersey after it had acquired the manufacturing rights from Link-Belt. Dieleman was above all an engineer and inventor and using his experience of moving big cranes and other loads on the road, registered numerous patents, including a 1990 patent for a system to evenly distribute vehicle weights of up to 450 tonnes.

In the late 1980s, he teamed up with ex-American Crane & Hoist engineer Jim McGie to develop a light weight, roadable 400 ton/360 tonne lattice truck crane under the Transworld Crane banner. The Transworld SL400 could run street legal in many states, relatively intact. While relatively few were ever built, he displayed it at Conexpo, and it was widely recognised as a clever piece of crane engineering.

Jake's halted its crane operations in 2010, a year after it had suffered a \$1 million plus hit from the failure of Lewis Equipment, of which it was a major creditor. The decision did however allow Dieleman to focus on his manufacturing operations and engineering. He continued to register patents, posting one as recently as 2015, for a steering system for mega transporters. That same year his daughter Crystal took over the manufacturing business, forming a new company, under the Transworld Manufacturing banner, developing and manufacturing trailing boom dollies, spreader beams and other fabrications. The business has gone



A Translift SL400 installs one of Jake's Link Belt Tower Gantries on the Hoover dam

from strength to strength and operates from the old Jake's facility in Dean Martin Drive, just off the strip in Las Vegas.

A family obituary sums up the unique nature of the man:

Bob will best be remembered as a legendary crane man with a penchant for suspenders (braces). He saw the sensibility in his trademark uniform early on as they allowed him to "work with both hands" on a jobsite more securely than with a tool belt alone.

He was an innovator and inventor, always interested in the latest technology. With a keen engineering mind, he organised, funded and spearheaded multiple significant and forward thinking heavy lift and heavy haul projects. Most notable are the JXS, a Cal-Trans compliant heavy haul trailer with a 700,000lb (317 tonnes) hauling capacity that won 13 patents and the SC&RA project of the year in 1990. And the SL 400, nicknamed the 'Crystal May,' a street legal 400 ton lattice boom truck crane. The ground breaking crane doubled the capacity of road worthy cranes at the time. Always looking towards the future, he pioneered the development of a hydrogas suspension system in the 1990's, a technology more common in Europe and "in its infancy" in America, as he would say. Although he had retired, his last work involved three patents on a manufacturer friendly Schnabel transport system, with pivoting goosenecks for rapid deployment.

Bob was a man of the world, always travelling to exotic places for some crane or another, making so many friends along the way. He would fondly recall the treacherous conditions from his years spent operating at the Trans Alaska pipeline. He shared stories of hard work growing up at, and later running, Jake's Crane & Rigging from round tripping San Francisco twice in a day, to late night tower crane jumps at any of the Las Vegas strip resorts."

bauma regular

During his working years, he never missed a bauma tradeshow, including the year the Icelandic volcano eruption kept most Americans at home he found his way to Munich. Bob was raised to work hard and 'burn rubber'. If you ever had the luxury of driving somewhere with him, it may have left you pale and white knuckled, but you always arrived quickly, and in one piece.

So many people have a story to share about him that include a crane, a German beer, or a kind gesture. His generosity and pure heart attracted people like a magnet, he would go out of his way to help people and "nice try" to anyone who attempted to pick up the tab when you were out with him. Bob was a compassionate pacifist, always there to help, but quick to remind you to be the bigger person. He believed enlightenment was the ultimate pursuit, he meditated, practiced qi gong, and devoured books about spirituality.

One of four children, he was born in Boulder City and would reminisce about riding horses through the desert with his sister. He leaves behind, wife Kay, children Crystal and Jacob and a grandson as well as his sister Kathie and brother Dick.

A celebration of his life will be held at Red Rock Country Club in Las Vegas on November 19th. In lieu of flowers, the family said: "Please do as Bob would have done and perform a random act of kindness."



A Transworld SL400

Natalina Merlo 1929 – 2021

Natalina Merlo, co-founder of Italian telehandler manufacturer Merlo, passed away peacefully at home on Tuesday October 12th in the company of her family. She was 91.



Natalina Merlo

On leaving school in 1948 she began working full time alongside her father - Giuseppe Amilcare Merlo - who had established a metal working business in the centre of Cuneo in 1911. She had spent time helping out at the family business since the age of 13, but now took on the company payroll and administration duties, while her brother Amilcare was put in charge of production.

In 1964, Natalina and Amilcare teamed up to establish a new Merlo company to manufacture equipment at a facility in the town of San Defendente di Cervasca. In February 1972, the roof of the factory building collapsed under the weight of snow, following a particularly heavy storm. A number of employees, including Amilcare, fell from a height of eight metres in the collapse, but miraculously, there were no serious injuries. The employees worked around the clock and with the support of their bank - facilitated by Natalina, who looked after the accounts. The building was completely rebuilt and back in production in the shortest of time.

Throughout the years she worked alongside her brother helping build the new company into a major vertically integrated global manufacturer, sharing the decision making and management of the growing company. Merlo launched its first telehandler, the SM30, in 1981 and then went on to introduce a string of innovations, including the first telehandler with side mounted power unit with its Panoramic model in 1987. It also produced the first Merlo Roto 360 degree telehandler in 1991.

Today, Merlo employs more than 1,500 with revenues in excess of €600 million a year, exporting around 90 percent of its production. In 2014, the two siblings received the honorary citizenship of Cuneo/keys to the city with a ceremony in the city council chambers.

She has been described as a woman with a reserved character, and impeccable elegance, who loved nature, the mountains and travel. She remained an active director of the company as the third generation of the family took over the day to day running of the business.

A colleague said: "She had a continuous and fundamental presence in the company and a deep respect for all those who are part of it. She will be remembered by all Merlo employees as a great person, who was always available and attentive to others. She will always have a place in our hearts."

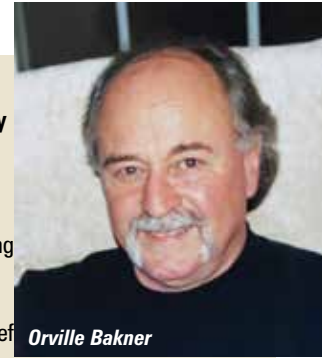
Her funeral was attended by family, friends, employees, local dignitaries and covered on the local TV news.



The first Merlo telehandler, the SM30

Orville E. 'Tudy' Bakner 1946 – 2021

Former crane demonstration operator Orville Bakner passed away in a Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, hospital on Tuesday November 2nd following complications from Covid-19, in spite of being fully vaccinated. He was 75



Orville Bakner

Born in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, he remained there all his life joining local company Grove Manufacturing in Shady Grove in 1968. It was a pivotal year in the company's history, having been acquired by Kidde, followed by the promotion of sales manager J. Martin Benchoff to chief executive. Most importantly however, Grove had just launched the first 'swing-cab' Rough Terrain crane, which helped cement its leadership of the small but growing telescopic crane market while signing the death knell for the popular cab down RTs from Galion and Pettibone that sold in their thousands for material handling work in the oil & gas industry.

It soon became clear that Bakner had a talent for operating cranes, one that he honed and perfected over the years, becoming the company's demonstration operator. So effective were the plant visits and demonstrations to the Shady Grove facility, that a dedicated customer demonstration pad and observation tower were built and his job as a demonstrator became truly full time. Customers from around the world visited, with one or two 'visitations' a day keeping the pad, its tower and Orville Bakner busy throughout the year.

His skills impressed many a visitor, a typical demonstration would involve telescoping a load out to its maximum radius within the stability area of the chart, then take it out until the crane's rear outriggers lifted clear of the ground. He would then gently bring it back within the load chart, highlighting the additional stability the company built into its products back then. He would then elevate the extended loaded boom from horizontal, a feat not possible on some manufacturer's cranes. This was followed by a slick and rapid installation of the swingaway extension and stowage. If it was a Rough Terrain crane, he would put on what he called a 'Dog and Pony' show, essentially driving the crane in a figure of eight to demonstrate its four wheel steer, while rotating the superstructure in the other direction. How he managed to keep pace with where he was on the pad or not become dizzy, no one really knew. All the while the salesman would be describing the features and benefits that were being displayed, with short wave radio contact allowing for any special requests. At the end of the 'show' he would exit the crane and stand by it, with rigger's gloves in hand.

Inevitably the customer would go down to the test pad to look over the machine, but also head straight to Bakner, asking him about the machine before climbing into the cab, where he would take them through the controls etc... Occasionally one would want to operate a little himself and Bakner remained alongside ready to intervene if anything seemed unsafe. He could also take the crane through the rough terrain area - making it look as if he was driving through a swamp, but rarely, if ever, getting stuck. If another operator was driving and got bogged down, he would shake his head almost imperceptibly and try to get to the crane and would inevitably manage to extract it without external assistance.

He became known as 'The Crane Guy' and probably helped the company sell more cranes in the 1970s, 1980 and 1990s than the rest of sales team put together. His presence was requested for dealer open days and events in order to show the cranes off in their best light and train their local operators on how to best demonstrate a crane while remaining safe. He was always utterly professional, the essence of diplomacy, good natured, patient, and a first class individual in every way. If he had any negative thoughts or comments, or was angry, few - if any - ever saw or heard it. He finally retired in 2011 after 43 years with the company.

A product of his region, he was an avid outdoors man, who enjoyed fishing, hunting trips, and spending time with family and friends. He is survived by two children, Jody and Kristi and three grandchildren on whom he apparently doted.

Long time work colleague and friend Craig Minnich was with him during the four weeks he was in hospital. Speaking just after he passed away, he said: "He was one of my best friends and a long time old hunting buddy with which I share many fond memories. He will be sorely missed."

Another colleague Doyle Bryant added: "He sold more cranes and Manlifts than we will ever know. Customers and dealers loved spending time with Orville at the demo pad in Shady Grove and at trade shows and product introductions. He was the ultimate "Crane Guy" and crane operator."



Orville Bakner at the controls

David Samuel Baillie 1934 – 2021

Former senior crane industry executive David Baillie passed away in a French hospital on Thursday October 28th, leaving behind his current wife Gabi, his second wife Linda and their children Christian and Britt, plus the children from his first marriage with Sheila - Brett and Debbie who had grown up with Linda and him.

He was a few weeks short of his 87th birthday.

Baillie was one of the driving forces behind Grove Manufacturing's phenomenal overseas growth during the 1970s that turned it into the worldwide market leader, fighting off competition from previous market leaders, such as P&H, Link-Belt, American Hoist & Derrick and Lorain etc... that by then had finally started taking telescopic cranes more seriously, having initially been stuck in the lattice boom, 'friction crane', mind-set.

Grove began building cranes in earnest in the early 1960s with truck cranes on purpose built crane carriers, followed by a swing cab Rough Terrain crane in 1968. The company had some notable success overseas, including a partnership with John Allen in the UK, using one of its truck crane chassis to develop the 22 tonne Allen Grove. It eventually acquired the business to create Grove Cranes Ltd. With a new owner in the form of Kidde, the new chief executive Martin Benchoff understood the need to broaden the company's international footprint, and opened offices in Paris and Brussels. He came to realise that in order to outrun the big, well established players, the company also required a more experienced international sales and marketing team to build and manage a strong dealer network.

The company recruited Baillie - a civil engineer by education - as vice president international marketing in February 1974 with the responsibility to make it happen. He had previously been marketing director at Allis Chalmers Overseas, based in Rome and Nice, having worked for Caterpillar in the USA, Europe and Africa. Baillie was able to use his contacts and knowledge to build a team of seasoned district managers and the required reporting channels in those pre-internet days. The company went from strength to strength. After a short spell he was promoted to senior vice president of marketing with overall responsibility for sales, marketing and customer services worldwide.

After a tough year in the 1980s, with Kidde re-evaluating its presence in the crane market, and investigating divestment options - including a management buyout - some friction broke out which led to his departure in 1986. He moved into consulting and company turnaround work, joining Alexander Proudfoot and later United Research/Gemini Consulting - which at the time was a global business with a strong focus on business transformations. He took over



Handing over an RT980 in 1979

responsibility for Gemini France, before a trial retirement in Colorado, where he had a home and did some development work. However, he switched to Italy where he and his third wife Gabi set up a home, before moving to Brittany, France in 2012. At the time said: "Although retired I am still active in teaching, writing and trying to improve my golf game."

While he was a decent golfer, his preferred game during his years at Grove was tennis. He was an accomplished player and would play regularly over the summer months with anyone that was prepared to take him on. He was also a legendary story teller and would easily take over a dinner conversation, with stories of overseas encounters or hunting trips, depending very much on his audience. He was the essence of charm, highly sociable, and someone who appreciated the finer things that life had to offer. He could also be very down to earth, having the ability to talk with ease to anyone, no matter who they were. From Willy who swept the office floors, to the most eminent Dignitary. He would also take time to speak with and listen to the most junior of trainees, as though he had nothing else to do that day. A key factor in this was his genuine love of people, and company, and his love for a laugh. Occasionally some found him to be a little too urbane and 'polished', he certainly had the 'gift of the gab' along with the intellect to make the most of it. For the young sales trainees looking to become district managers he was most definitely a great role model and mentor.

Craig Paylor, past president of JLG, owner of National Truck Body Solutions who is working with LGMG, North America sums it up well when he says: "David Baillie was the model of a manufacturing executive for many many years in the construction equipment business. I had the privilege of working for David for a few years in the early 80s at Grove manufacturing. While we only saw each other a few times these past years, he always seemed to know when to call me when the marketplace was changing into something challenging and offer advice or listen to issues, I had to deal with. From the first time you met David, no matter how young or inexperienced you were, he was one of the rare individuals, who had already reached the pinnacle of success, that would still take the time to share his experience. A rare trait we certainly could use more of in today's world! He was a worldly intellectual leader with vast knowledge in all aspects of product development, distribution, and strategic planning. The world has lost a modern pioneer and a great man. I wish I could thank him again!"

While he has been out of the crane industry for more than 35 years he kept in touch with people and would occasionally pop up at industry trade shows, initially to help promote the consulting firm he was working with at the time, but mostly to meet up with old friends and colleagues and catch up on what was happening in the crane and heavy equipment world. He had friends all over the world and there will be a great many who will mourn his passing.

I for one will be among them – Leigh Sparrow



David Baillie with son Christian at SED 2008

Morlais 'Mol' / 'Mo' Davies 1962 – 2021

Veteran UK/New Zealand based crane operator Morlais 'Mol' Davies has died following a tragic road accident on October 11th. He was only just 59.

A well-known and widely respected operator in both the UK and New Zealand, Davies began operating cranes in 1984, initially with Davies



Morlais Davies

Crane Hire in his native Wales, later moving to Hewdens and Baldwins Heavy Crane division. He moved to New Zealand in 2005 where he found work with Waikato & Auckland Cranes before moving to Pollock Cranes.

In a notice to its members, the New Zealand Crane Association said: "He is remembered as a legend in the crane industry, who was always willing to share his knowledge and experience. The association extends its deepest sympathies to his family, friends, and workmates."

He leaves behind wife Debbie, five children and two grandchildren.

