

Extra safety mirrors are vital on telehandlers that are able to rotate in order to provide all-round visibility, such as with this 21-metre Roto machine.

**As UK Forks embarks on the re-profiling of Britain's largest telehandler hire fleet, C&A caught up with its new divisional director Rob Coxton to ask, Why?**



"In the UK, continuing urban regeneration favouring brown field developments, combined with the construction of taller buildings and the use of uneven or restricted sites, means the market is demanding longer reach telehandlers, and those fitted with stabilisers," according to Rob Coxton, divisional director of UK Forks, a division of Harrogate-based specialist equipment hire firm, Vp Plc.

"The gradual re-profiling of our fleet means purchasing larger machines at the expense of smaller ones and straight-mast forklifts to reflect the latest needs of our key markets," he explains.

"There is a distinct, accelerating shift towards higher lift capacity, and longer reach machines, which is directly attributable to the evolving nature of house-building in the UK in terms of their designs, and also planning regulations such as PPG3.

"Government-driven urban regeneration also means that developments are increasingly located on uneven or restricted sites, or those with a building in place which is being re-used, such as old mills being turned into luxury apartments. This also determines the type of telehandler required by the market."

Despite this general trend, however, it would seem that the smaller machines are not being made entirely redundant. "There is a significant increase in requests for machines with a five-metre reach, such as 'Buggiscopics' and JCB 520-50s," continues Coxton. "This is because of their capability to operate inside large structures, scurrying about and carrying materials in order to feed larger machines outside which complete the lift."

At the other end of the scale, demand is also increasing for the 21-metre Roto telehandlers, according to Coxton. "Rotos are attracting increasing interest from builders undertaking high-rise construction projects which require a flexible materials handling solution," he says. "Rotos are ideal because they can perform the duties of a forklift, access platform and a crane within a single package on a rough-terrain platform."

## Spring cleaning

"Mid-range, in-demand machines, such as the 14-metre Bobcat telehandler, are also proving popular because of that little extra reach offered, but as a compact, manoeuvrable package."

### OUT WITH THE OLD. . .

UK Forks will be announcing the completion of a series of fleet investments across the firm's national network of depots this Spring. "Health and safety also remains a growing priority," says Coxton. "Our customers are becoming even more safety conscious, which means a growing preference for machines with stabilisers.

"We have recently noticed a dramatic shift in demand from un-stabilised 9-metre machines to stabilised 10.5-metre machines, although we can also provide a 9-metre Dieci model with stabilisers. We have a vigorous health and safety policy, which includes the availability of a range of safety devices on our machines such as high-viz decals, reversing alarms, convex mirrors and rear-view cameras."

For some time now, UK Forks has been working with customers such as Taylor Woodrow and Wimpy Homes to develop machine safety, while also assisting the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in studies to determine the best visibility aids.

"Even though our customers are enjoying a prosperous period, rental rates remain keen and we are constantly having to drive down costs," Coxton explains. "I do not foresee, however, a rates collapse as once occurred with powered access where excessive fleet expansion triggered over supply.

"The plant hire industry has more than enough suppliers vying for market share, which provokes tough competition. Telehandler hire is a relatively mature market, which has grown organically through proven performance and demand. UK Forks is now reasonably well-established and has necessarily moderate growth aspirations which we wish to achieve both organically and through acquisitions. I want us to capitalise on a business model which offers national capacity and centralised control supported by regionally-based sales and engineering staff and mobile fitters.

"One challenge," continues Coxton, "is to dispel any perception that we are a remote, faceless national organisation. We offer the strength and security of national control, but also staff at our depots, or in the field, that are every bit as local to whichever development site or contractor requires our services."



**This dash-mounted display monitor of a Manitou MT1233S supplied by UK Forks receives images from a camera on the rear of the vehicle, providing the driver with an easy rear view to eliminate blind spots, while also aiding safe reversing.**