

GOING UP IN THE WORLD



A history of Simon Engineering, the development of the powered access industry and a lifetime as an engineer, by Denis Ashworth

Ashworth was a keen engineer and from an early age found himself in at the very start of the modern powered access industry.

His book is an unusual combination of autobiography and history of Simon Engineering Dudley, a pioneer of the powered access industry and at one time, the world's largest manufacturer of aerial lifts.

The coffee table sized book, is highly readable and includes around 150 photographs and drawings from the very beginning of the industry. It is a 'must read' for anyone who is interested in powered access, the hydraulic equipment industry or in comparing modern day engineering challenges with those of an entirely different era.

The book is available direct from the publishers at £19.50, plus £4.50 postage and packing.

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A CRANE BOOK ON A COMPANY YOU MAY NEVER HAVE HEARD OF... BETOX - SUOMALAINEN TORNINOSTURI

When news of this book arrived in the office, we were puzzled. With all the years most of us have spent in the business, none of us had ever heard of the Finnish tower crane manufacturer called Betox. Clearly, not a name you would choose today.

The company was established in 1954 as Rakennusväline Oy to sell Betox branded construction equipment made by sister company Betonikone. In 1958, it began making a version of the Linden D-25 tower crane under license. The move was driven by a building boom spurred on by Finland having paid off its war reparations to the Soviet Union. As the boom reached the suburbs, and the need for apartment blocks increased as well as large infrastructure projects, demand for cranes, especially tower cranes, also took off.

By 1964 the company decided it needed a product of its own, designed to cope with the harsh local conditions. So, in 1968 it introduced the first Betox crane, the 80/100 with stronger steels and rugged basic mechanics and controls for easy service and repair. It benefited from additional experience gained over the years by importing tower cranes from Kroll, Peiner and Pignon, all of which went into the new Betox cranes.

The growth continued through the 1970s. In 1974, for example, a total of 140 new tower cranes were sold in Finland - country with fewer than 4.7 million inhabitants at the time. In 1979 the company name was changed to Betox Oy, in order apparently to "facilitate sales overseas".

As the 1980s progressed, the company responded to market demands by introducing more sophisticated electrics, more comfortable cabs and larger models, including the Betox 200 and Betox 300 and it began exporting to Sweden, the Soviet Union and the Middle East. It even sold one in South America. With rising costs in Finland and stronger competition, things became tight,

although a strong reputation for easy to obtain parts and ease of repair kept it going for a while. The recession of the early 1990s proved more challenging, though and the company could not match the global tower crane producers. Betox was sold in 1995 to A-Elementi Rakennusmies, the Potain tower crane importer, bringing to an end the short life of the Betox tower crane.

The book not only covers the history of the company with an absolute wealth of great photographs, but also includes functional drawings and all manner of other details. It was commissioned by the board of the Crane History Society of Finland, after having published a book on Finnish mobile crane manufacturer Lokomo. It chose Betox for a follow up, largely due to a huge amount of historical material available along with people who had worked with the company or its cranes.

It was written by Taisto Rintamaa, with Jari Pakkala as technical expert who said: "The goal was to create a technically accurate book that also contains colourful stories". The book has already aroused great interest in advance. The first edition consists of 500 copies.

If you are a crane, and particularly a tower crane 'anorak'/fanatic, you will love this book. It is bilingual - Finnish and English - with excellent English translation. It can be purchased from the Nosturihistoriallinen Seura ry. Price is €35 + shipping costs, and it can be ordered from the association's secretary Taisto Rintamaa.

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