

CASE STUDY

Going large

King Lifting has recently taken the bold step into the big crane class. **Rosie Gordon** found out what the purchase of a £600,000 crane involves

Each purchase of a new crane represents a major investment and a major commitment by the customer, after a sometimes tortuous decision over the pros and cons of the different options available.

Bristol-based King Lifting does not profess to be one of the 'big league' major national operators, yet as a family-run organisation, is fully committed to 'trying that bit harder'. In fact, the company slogan is 'Big enough to cope, small enough to care'.

The crane fleet, with some 60 mobile cranes, from six depots, has been built up steadily ever since founder Bob King started the business 20 years ago, mostly with 25 tonne truck-mounts, and some 50 tonne and 80 tonne all-terrains. The biggest crane in the fleet, up till this summer, has been a 6-year old, 120 tonne capacity Demag. King has been limited in some of the work it undertakes by not always having a big enough crane for some of the bigger jobs – entailing frequent cross-hires to get jobs done.

It was decided that the time had come for the addition of a much bigger capacity crane, in the 200-250t class.

The company decided on the new 220t-capacity Grove GMK6220-L, with its 72m main boom (the longest boom in the 200/250t class), and a number of other advanced operating features.

Commenting on his decision, King is frank. "We have never had a new Grove crane before, for all sorts of reasons, but we approached this new purchase with a very open mind. We visited all the major manufacturers' plants in Germany.



The 130-point Delivery/ Inspection check and full operating instruction is carried out by John Miller of Grove, together with the operator Nick Aylett



One of the first jobs for the new GMK6220-L was the placement of a 20 tonne footbridge at a new housing development near Salisbury

Overall, I was most impressed with the attention to detail and robustness of the Grove cranes.

"To some extent, it is a buyer's market – there are several extremely good cranes available, and all of the manufacturers are vying very competitively to win orders. For a lot of reasons, it is a good time to be buying a new crane."

Apart from the boom length and practical features, equally important to the end-user is the kind of pre and post-sale support he gets – all the way from getting the spec right to the hand-over and installation. You don't expect a £600,000 machine just to be delivered, and the keys and operator-manual handed over.

Following the decision to go for Grove, King visited Grove's Wilhelmshaven plant in Germany to go over all the options and finalise the spec.

Then, as the machine neared completion, King's appointed operator, Nick Aylett, with some 18 years of experience operating cranes of all sizes, went over to view the crane in its final stages. He announced his approval and it was prepared for shipment.

On its arrival at King Lifting's main depot in Avonmouth, John Miller of Grove and Graham Hill from Sam Walker took over responsibility for the



New Flagship: King Lifting's new 220t each capacity Grove GMK6220-L

installation of the crane, involving all the relevant King Lifting staff.

This included a thorough familiarisation session for the service personnel, as well as the operator and general manager, Bob Floyd and the hire-desk staff who will be responsible for accepting jobs for the crane. In fact, Floyd had already incorporated the new machine into King's sophisticated new computer-based lift-planning system.

As well as thorough product and operator training, this two-day installation procedure also included a comprehensive and minutely-detailed 130-point Delivery/ Inspection Report.

Some would say modern cranes are too complex, to the point of being intimidating. But King accepts Grove's philosophy that in order to give improving competitive performance, crane technology has to move forward. As long, of course, as the manufacturer is competent and, above all, supportive.

This is still a 'people' business, he maintains, and it's all about mutual respect and confidence between customer and supplier. "As a newcomer to the fold, Grove could not have done more to help us through this important new acquisition and its integration into our fleet."

King has the very first GMK6220-L off the production line to be delivered. But, so far so good. In its first two weeks, the crane has been busy every single day, and performed just as it should.

King has taken this bold step into the big crane class, he says, because he anticipates that there will be more and more such high-lift, high-reach work – both in high-rise buildings, and in erecting tower-cranes, radio masts and wind-turbine generators. "We've been impressed from start to finish, and we're off to a flying start!" ■