

cranes & access

The background of the cover is a photograph of a construction site. A large yellow HI-IL rent crane is positioned vertically on the right side. On the left, two workers wearing white hard hats and orange safety vests are visible, one holding a clipboard. The crane has the text 'HI-IL rent' and a logo on its side. Various identification numbers like '01 26 05942' and '01 26 069' are visible on the crane's structure.

October 2026 Vol.28 issue 6

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**TOP RENTAL
FLEET SURVEY**

SPIDER CRANES

SPIDER LIFTS

VERTIKAL DAYS REVIEW

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TOP RENTAL FLEET GUIDE 17

The Top 30 UK & Ireland Top Rental Fleet Guide has been rebranded and now goes way beyond that, highlighting the leading crane, aerial lift and telehandler rental fleets in the UK and Ireland as well as those that have range topping and specialist machines.

SPIDER CRANES 31

There is still an exciting buzz around spider cranes at the moment as new products arrive and new applications are discovered. The market is also changing as more diversity in terms of manufacturers and products builds on the traditional Japanese spider crane concept that kicked the whole thing off. We take a look at some of the latest developments.

EQUIPMENT FOR ARBORISTS 39

We profile Northamptonshire, UK, based, award-winning husband and wife team Tom and Renee Watters who formed commercial arb company Rockleigh almost 10 years ago. We also review the 50th anniversary APF show at Ragley Estate in Warwickshire.

SPIDER LIFTS 45

The market for spider lifts has been growing at a steadily increasing pace, which has spurred on a number of acquisitions by new entrants and even private equity players, alongside mergers and partnerships. We review these latest developments together with product launches and new innovations.

VERTIKAL DAYS REVIEW 51

This year's Vertikal Days was the largest and probably one of the best since it started at Haydock Park in 2007. The show returned for a third time to Newark Showground in Nottinghamshire with more than 300 manufacturers/brands represented, making it the largest dedicated lifting equipment event in Europe this year. Nick Johnson reports...

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Scheduled for publication in early December, the next issue of Cranes & Access will include features on Pick & Carry/Industrial cranes, Large Truck mounted lifts, A look at outrigger mats and tracking and a pictorial review of 150 years of American crane manufacturer Link-Belt. If you have any contributions or suggestions to make, or are interested in advertising in this issue, please contact our editorial or sales teams.

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ON THE COVER

A Jekko SPX532.2 spider crane from HLI Rent installing glass panels for 'The Village' at the Barolana 58 sailing regatta in Trieste, Italy. Find out more on page 36.





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COMMENT

AI: FROM HYPE TO SITE

For an industry built on steel, hydraulics and mechanical grit, the current obsession with 'Artificial Intelligence' can sound like a load of old rubbish. It is understandable why many smaller rental company owners look at the rapid onslaught of AI and its marketing, then dismiss it as nothing more than buzzwords designed to inflate software subscription fees and overcomplicate their equipment.

But dismissing it entirely is a massive mistake.

If you look past the glitzy jargon-filled promotional material and examine what is actually happening in the internal workings of the latest generation of machines, it becomes clear that AI is no longer a distant threat or gimmick. It is already here and making an impact on job sites - not as a walking robot, but hidden deep inside control boxes, telematics hubs, and safety systems. Companies that ignore it and fail to adapt are sleepwalking into technological obsolescence.

Take fleet management, for instance. For a decade, telematics providers have promised the world while delivering little more than a tidal wave of passive data, flashing amber alerts, and annoying error codes that require endless manual sorting and storing. For all but the largest companies and a few tech-savvy start-up's, it has been a burden, rather than a benefit.

AI is fixing this in a number of ways, including predictive action. Instead of waiting for a machine to break down, intelligent algorithms can cross-reference hydraulic pressure spikes, battery degradation curves, and ambient operating temperatures across thousands of machines and warn a service manager that a boom cylinder seal on a specific 135ft boom lift is likely to fail in the next 40 operating hours.

For any rental company where downtime equals dead margin, ignoring this capability isn't just old-fashioned, it is bad business.

The impact on safety is even more immediate. For years, companies have relied on operators having perfect all-seeing visibility, or ground crews paying absolute attention to everything that goes on around them, a scenario that rarely exists on a construction site or in a warehouse or factory. AI-driven camera systems and LiDAR are now able to step in to help avoid human error and oversight. They don't just display a live video feed, they think and differentiate between a pallet of bricks and a person stepping into a blind spot, calculating trajectories in real time to gently override controls before an incident occurs.

Naturally, the cynics will argue that this is just another layer of costly electronic nanny state intervention that weakens operator skills. But is it? With most countries facing a chronic, systemic skills shortage, less experienced operators are often thrust into increasingly complex environments.

AI isn't replacing them, it is acting as a digital co-pilot, constantly calculating complex load charts, compensating for boom deflection, overly enthusiastic controller movements or wind gusts.

The lifting market has always adapted, transitioned from lattice boom cranes to telescopes, from mechanical to hydraulics, and more recently, from diesel to electric power. The digital transition is no different. It is time to cut through the tech-bro hype, stop treating AI like a sci-fi gimmick, and recognise it for what it actually is: the most powerful tool for efficiency and safety we've been handed in a generation. Those who choose to ignore it are likely to see their competitors outperform and outmanoeuvre them.

Mark Darwin

Comment and feedback is most welcome via post, email or phone stating if we may publish them or not: editor@vertikal.net