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MECHANISATION THE KEY

The equipment used by arborists has changed over the past 25 years as the growth of spider lift use has curbed tree climbing that used to dominate the industry. But is this trend about to change as other types of mechanised equipment that avoids working at height altogether become available?

The first rule of working at height is don't! If there is another way that avoids working at height... then do that. Climbing trees is physically demanding and inherently risky, which forced older, highly experienced arborists to consider alternative work or retirement. The adoption and spread aerial work platform lifts - including truck, van and pickup mounted, as well as spider lifts - has changed all that, although it has not fully replaced tree climbing. The past 10 years has seen an 'explosion' in platform sales to tree care companies as they embrace a safer and more efficient method of working at height and has enabled older arborists to continue working on the trees long after their climbing days have ended, while reducing the number of injuries suffered by younger team members.

STILL A PLACE FOR CLIMBING

However, on some tree jobs climbing remains the best, or the only option, particularly when there are dense canopies or structural tree inspections deep within the crown. These usually require a skilled climber, however, the most effective arborists are those who blend methods - using an aerial lift in combination with climbing reduces the unexpected hazards.

C&A regularly covers the latest developments in spider lifts so we will not delve into too much detail here. However, it is worth pointing out that while all manufacturers sell spider lifts into the sector, only a few offer heavy duty models to cope with the usual abuse, with built-in protection from falling branches etc. There are even fewer that offer models designed specifically to travelling over the most uneven terrain and levelling up on the steepest, most uneven slopes to work.

WORKING AT HEIGHT 101

The latest growth area in the sector is the use

of machines such as telehandlers with special attachments meeting work at height rule 101 - i.e. carry out the work from ground level. 360 degree telehandlers are now offered with lift heights of 50 metres and equipped with a grab/saw attachment for high level tree cutting are ideal for this type of work, all from the safety of a reinforced cab.

Scottish landscape management contractor, Complete Weed Control, for example opted for a Merlo Roto 50.26S Plus which has a 25.9 metre lift height combined with a GMT TTC050 grapple saw for safer tree removal which director Keith Gallacher believes has not only attracted new clients but also improved safety and operational efficiency. "This machine offers exceptional reach, allowing operators to handle limbs from various angles without repositioning the equipment," he says.

The company was involved in the clean-up operation after Storm Eowyn in January. The Merlo played a crucial role in safely and efficiently removing hazardous trees by enabling operators to work from a distance. It also made it possible to sectionalise and remove dangerous trees that would have been nearly impossible to handle without mechanisation.



**Keith Gallacher of
Complete Weed
Control and the
Merlo Roto
50.26S Plus**

"One of the most significant advantages of the telehandler and grapple saw is its ability to eliminate the risks faced by chainsaw use, particularly when working at height. Injuries and fatalities in arboriculture often stem from these hazards, making mechanised solutions invaluable. Field teams also appreciate its efficiency, often struggling to keep pace with its rapid work rate."

ARTICULATED SPIDER CRANES

Another type of equipment finding its way into the arborist's armoury is the articulated crawler crane. Matlock, Derbyshire, UK based Thompson Tree Services used a Jekko 545 V-Max fitted with a grapple saw to successfully remove flood debris - including a fallen tree - from a river reducing the risk of further flooding. The operation required precise and controlled cutting of the large timber, usually a challenging task as access was challenging, with minimal set up space. A comprehensive lift plan was needed to strategically position the crane with a clear line of sight for the grapple saw operation. The cut sections were lifted and relocated to the riverbank using the crane and removed from site in a large bin trailer. The branch material was chipped with a whole tree chipper and sent for use as biomass. We will cover this subject in more detail in future issues. ■



**Thompson
Tree Services'
Jekko 545 V-Max**

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ARB IN THE USA

The tree worker sector is one of the largest users of spider lifts in North America. And while accurate market statistics are difficult to obtain, it is generally thought that CMC is the market leader. Mark Darwin talks to Jeff Poggi, chief executive of CMC North America, about the sector and its arb specific products.

Jeff Poggi was appointed the new chief executive of CMC North America in February 2025 and although his background is mainly in the audio & automotive sectors, he has rapidly picked up the transition to access equipment having worked in Italy for about 10 years prior to joining CMC.



Jeff Poggi

CMC North America is based in a newly leased 70,000 square foot facility in Methuen, north of Boston, and was founded as All Access by spider lift veteran's Lenny and Ryan Polonski as the CMC distributor before being acquired by CMC in 2023 when revenues were around \$80 million. The deal was finally completed in February 2024 with the Polonski family continuing to manage the business until February this year.

SO, IS CMC THE MARKET LEADER IN THE ARB SECTOR?

"It is difficult to get accurate figures however we feel we have the dominant share in the arb market today, built over 15 years of hard work,"

said Poggi. "The business has grown from one distribution facility in Methuen to today where we have a network of 17 dealers with 44 locations. Thus, our ability to service, stock and support customers across the country is stronger than most of our competitors. And, we are actively building out the network further because we only have about half the country covered. We want 100 percent coverage with local dealerships within four to six hours' drive from any customer. To me that is the ideal service radius required to service and fully support the lifts."

"In addition to our dealer footprint, we support a network of about 300 different service companies, all trained and certified by us with the know-how to work on our equipment, so if there isn't a local dealer available we the ability to service customers anywhere in NA."

EXPANDING RANGE

CMC now has four ranges of spider lifts - the Arbor Pro, the rental orientated L Series and F Series, and the insulated spider lifts, including the new 90i being recently launched at the Utility Expo show.

"Our new insulated 90ft CMC 90i lift is all about working around power," said Poggi. "It was very



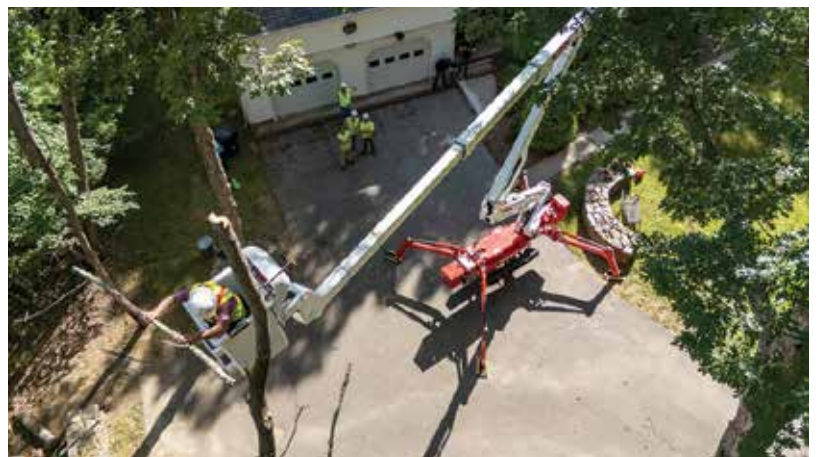
CMC Tracked Lift Truck Mount

well received and we booked a number of orders at the show."

CMC in Italy introduced the insulated boom 45kV 75i (75ft working height) spider lift globally about two and a half years ago and CMC North America has been the dominant seller. They have been very well accepted and are gaining significant traction.

"The insulated lifts are our fastest growing segment of the business because they are a new tool for utility and vegetation management companies working in and around power lines."

"We have seen good growth in that sector and will sell twice as many this year as last. Next year, we will double the insulated sales again because we now have two models to choose from - the 75i and the new 90i that has been just launched. The prototype 90i is in North America and is in the middle of a 16 city tour so all of our dealers, and many customers, will get to see it over a four month period. We have already sold out the first production batch and are taking





CMC 100 HD
Arbor Pro



The insulated CMC 123 on
a Tracked Lift Truck Mount

orders into Q1 next year. At Utility Expo we closed four sales in the first two days of the show."

"The 75i has 35ft outreach, and the 90i has 45ft of horizontal reach giving a massive work envelope. They are also lightweight - the 75i is 8,664lbs, the new 90i is just over 10,300lbs. The 75i has been configured in the US to be put on the CMC Tracked Lift Truck Mounts - an Isuzu 176in wheelbase flatbed truck weighing less than the CDL weight limits - ie 26,000lbs total gross vehicle weight," he said. "In the US that is a really important because a special drivers' licence is required to drive vehicles above 26,000lbs and there are not enough CDL drivers available to move equipment. We will sell a significant number of these trucks with the lifts this year because it is a safe way to transport the lift to site without using a trailer, reducing the safety risk and problems they can cause. The spider lift is self loading - when raised on its legs the truck can be driven underneath. The lift then lowers itself and after tying down is ready to go. This is a nice value option - the price of the truck and lift is less than the price of most bucket trucks - and it offers a lot more flexibility."

NEW VEGETATION MARKET

"The two insulated lifts have opened up a whole new market - utility and vegetation management - with companies working around high power lines that need insulated machines. Yes, they do cut trees and take care of vegetation but it is for a different purpose."

"The arb sector in the US is very much the "Joe's Tree Care" type of company - one crew, three to four guys, a truck, a chipper and you have a business doing residential work. There are thousands of these companies around the country. Then there are the larger regional players such as Bartlett Tree Experts but the majority are small 'mom and pop' shops."

"We have built our business around serving these little companies really well. But as we move into

the utility and vegetation management sector with the insulated lifts, we are dealing with a whole new clientele, working with companies such as Wright Tree Service, Asplundh Tree Expert, Bartlett and Xylem Tree Experts and other larger, multi state regional or even national players with hundreds and hundreds of crews in the field and thousands of machines. This requires a different sales and service approach and our business is growing up to become more capable to support these key accounts who operate across multiple state lines and geographic territories. This is exciting because it opens up a whole new market of business."

TREE EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTORS

CMC in New England is also a distributor for Carlton tree equipment which produces chippers, shredders and stump cutters.

"Our business operates with two different structures. In the New England area we work directly with the end users so are selling directly to the arborist community like a local dealer. Having Carlton in our mix gives us another tool to sell to the arborist and it helps them solve their equipment needs. This is it something that we are interested in expanding locally. It is also what we look for when we are appointing dealers outside of New England, dealers with complementary brands of products that feed into the arb space. Our existing dealers will often have Carlton, Bandit, Morbark, or Giant Loaders and the like, making them more valuable to the arborist."

NUMBER ONE?

"I think we are successful because of two main areas: the product and the support. The product is very compact, its overall weight is low and the vertical and horizontal reach is very good. We have a culmination of 15 years of experience in arb sector which has allowed us to refine the product over multiple innovation cycles. This is combined with a strong service and support



CMC 90i

model - in the US I have 24/7 technical support. We have five, amazing tech support guys who rotate to be on call through the night and weekend shifts. So, if anyone - in any time zone - ever has a problem you will always be able to talk to a person. This is unique in the industry. And, we have \$ millions of parts in stock in the US which is critical as sales sell the first unit and service sells the rest."

POPULAR SPIDER LIFTS

"Our two volume leaders are the 90HD+ Arbor Pro and 72HD+ Arbor Pro - they are our bread and butter machines followed by 100HD+ Arbor Pro. The most popular size for the general rental/housing market is 60ft but Arb would generally be larger. However smaller Arbor Pro's are popular down south where the trees aren't as tall such as Florida with its palm trees. We also have larger machines - 105ft and 135ft - but those have niche use cases and we don't sell many."

HOW BIG IS ARB

"Sales to the rental companies is big and one of the areas we are now looking at having had a few successes in the New England region. However more than 90 percent of sales are to the arb sector. Wherever there are arb guys we are there - for example we attend more than 60 arb related shows per year!"

"Having said that, the biggest request now is for insulated machines. That sector is growing particularly with the recent launch of the 90i and I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't have more insulated models soon." ■

