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THE ULTIMATE 'ONE STOP CRANE SHOP'

Although Crowland Cranes has been serving the lifting industry for more than 50 years, its growing capabilities and product offerings have reached the point where it can justifiably claim to offer the widest range of lifting products and services in the UK if not the whole of Europe. Mark Darwin visited its facilities in the picturesque village of Crowland, 10 miles from Peterborough to meet owner Pete Issitt.

Crowland Cranes is a rarity when it comes to the range of crane and lifting equipment services that it offers, thoroughly justifying the 'one stop shop' description that was so overused in 1980s and 1990s by companies that merely offered a few different services.

Its portfolio includes crane rental, accident rescue, full repair and refurbishment - including fabrication and paint - while manufacturing steel and aluminium outrigger mats under its 'Power Pad' brand. It also designs, fabricates and installs outrigger pad storage solutions for most All Terrain crane manufacturers. At the same time its new crane sales operations take off, being the UK distributor for Hoeflon cranes along with Franna

and Ormig pick & carry cranes and the full UK range of rough terrain products from Terex, Grove and Tadano. And for the past five years has been Spierings' sole UK service partner. Its TMC Lifting subsidiary supplies parts and associated crane ancillary products, including wireless wind speed monitors and Rimwizard wheel removal kits.

Finally, the Crowland Group offers engineer certification and training for two of the UK's leading engineering companies, Allianz and Bureau Veritas, and to top it all off recently launched a Day Book software package at Vertikal Days. Is there anything else the company could specialise in?

What is also unusual - although probably not,



Franna AT22-2

given the breadth of services it offers - in that it is a customer, supplier and competitor to many companies and enjoys a privileged position of working with almost everyone in the UK crane market.

"That is why our stand was so busy at Vertikal Days," says Issitt, "because we were talking to customers on so many different levels - rental, crane mats, Hoeflons, Franna cranes - anything and everything in the lifting game. We have built a brand in the UK, that I think equals any of the major manufacturers. Several have tried to copy our business model but failed. It is hard work, but there are good rewards if you get it right."

THE NUMBERS

The Crowland group has delivered strong financials. Last year it had revenues of more than £12.5 million, with a healthy profit, an increase of eight percent on 2023. Roughly half of its revenues come from crane rental. In last month's C&A Top 30 rental survey, Crowland Cranes had the 14th largest crane rental fleet in the UK with 43 mobiles - All Terrains, Rough Terrains, pick & carry and mobile self-erecting tower cranes. Its head office is based in Crowland, Peterborough with additional depots in Norwich and Bury St Edmunds, and operates its rental fleet throughout



The Rimwizard wheel removal kit



Crowland's wireless wind speed monitor

Crowland has continually invested in its crane rental fleet - this Liebherr LTM1300.6.3 was shown at Vertikal Days



Crowland keeps a full range of Hoeflon cranes, tracked carriers and attachments

East Anglia with its boundaries of Leicester to the west and north of London to the south.

Issitt adds: "We do not and never will have operated the products we distribute, in our rental fleet. I am not going to bite the hand that feeds me. You cannot run cranes like the Hoeflons and stay regional - it is the type of crane that you put on a trailer or small truck and take it around the country. We have enough crane rental in our area - the industry knows what we do and in East Anglia and we are a force to be reckoned with - just look at the level of continued investment, including a brand new LTM1300.6.3 shown at Vertikal Days, a brand new 40 tonner and the new Böcker AK48 etc."

"The secret of our success may be down to having good relationships with everyone, I don't go back on my word...and we know cranes inside out. How many people really know the nuts and bolts of a crane - not many. There are a few in this industry who really know what they are talking about - while others can only talk."

EN13000 COMPLIANT?

One issue that has surfaced recently is claims that all Tier 1 contractors should demand that the spider cranes they rent comply with EN13000 - the mobile crane standard, rather than EN12999, for loader cranes.

"Some people are saying certain manufacturers don't comply, but do they really know what compliance means? Would a Tier 1 contractor know what EN13000 is? Ask nine out of 10 people what makes a crane EN13000 compliant, including those selling them, and they would struggle" says Issitt.

"All our products are EN13000 compliant, and for

some products EN12999 as well, we will not sell a product if it doesn't conform to the relevant, local standards. Some manufacturers claim their products are fully compliant when they are clearly lacking."

"We recently took on the Terex Franna distribution in the UK, the cranes needed some modifications to comply with EN 13000 and satisfy our requirements, while all of the Hoeflon cranes already comply."

But should a distributor have to check up on a manufacturer's compliance? "No, but as we are the distributor, I have to satisfy myself that the products comply. For example, we had written confirmation from the Hoeflon factory, but we still did our own due diligence to ensure it is 100 percent compliant, and it was all correct."

HOEFLON SPIDERS

Crowland has been the Hoeflon spider crane distributor for a year now, so how is it going?

"We have just been informed by Hoeflon that Hoeflon UK has outperformed their expectations and smashed their internal targets. Only their home market of the Netherlands outperformed us, but it's a market of 90+ cranes a year," he says. "We thought we might sell one a month but have currently exceeded 30+ cranes in the first nine months."

"The impression we get is that Unic and Maeda's sales may have slipped a little, with Unic predominantly into rental and Maeda losing ground, possibly due to local product development. Both are great cranes, very simple to operate and ultra-reliable, and therefore ideal for the general rental market. But their physical size against the compactness of the Hoeflon is

clear to see. Customers get an awful lot for their money with a Hoeflon. This week we sold another nine tonne C30e - Hoeflon's biggest crane - the fourth this year."

"The smaller rental companies with one or two machines have been getting great rental rates. I look at them and think, I spend almost £400,000 on a 40 tonne All Terrain and am lucky to get £750 a day. They spend £120,000 and get between £850-£1,000 a day. However, the hire market is becoming more saturated, which will result in lower rental rates. We are now seeing contractors looking to buy their own cranes, some are spending in excess of £100k a year on spider crane rental, so direct sales are increasing."

"Most customers appear to keep Hoeflon cranes for five to six years and then swop them out. There is a good used market growing in the UK and overseas, they appear to hold their value well. A three year old crane, for example that cost £120k has a used value of about £70k and given the revenues they are generating, that is a very good return on investment."

"We have started offering customers a buy-back option after say, 12 months - 75 percent of the purchase price - because there is strong demand. The C6e at £120,000 is still less than the price of a decent 4 x 4, and certainly will not depreciate as much! Even the C30e at £250k is not such an intimidating investment, when you consider the other options."

NEW PRODUCTS IN THE PIPELINE.

"The new three tonne C6 was shown at Bauma and should be available in the UK in January 2026. There is also the new TC1 - Gen 2 tracked carrier, seen at this year's 'Vertikal days', providing



Hoeflon attachments



Hoeflon tracked carrier



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The C6e on display for the first time at Bauma

customers with a product that can be locally modified to enable a wide range of cradles and attachments to be fitted to the standard tracked machine, including a hydraulic lift table. Hoeflon is very active and passionate with product development, and to have a manufacturer that listens to its dealer network and customers in the future design/development of the products is really important to us."

FEWER ACCIDENTS

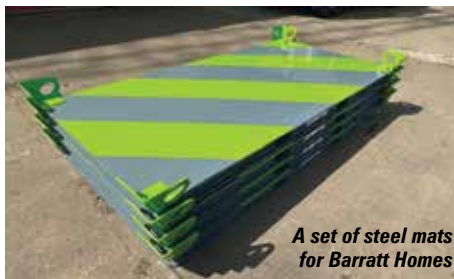
"Over the years, we have built up a good service business in the UK, although the level of repair work has definitely gone down this year. We have not lost work, but the big repair jobs just haven't been there? Work on accident damaged cranes is really quiet. We know that customers are not going anywhere else, but there appears to be fewer accidents at the moment."

Crowland says it is aware of almost every crane accident/incident in the UK and still gets the phone calls. So where has it gone?

"I think utilisation is down and crane compliance is stricter - drivers can't get away with what they used to do... Everyone is also using crane mats. Our fabrication department has grown this year, including taking on our own, in-house CAD designer/developer, and we are nicely busy making the full range of Power-Pad products."

MATS FOR HOUSE BUILDERS

"Another change is the direct sales of crane mats to contractors, including major housing developers - Barratt Homes, David Wilson, Oregon Timber, Cala Homes & Vistry Homes, etc



A set of steel mats for Barratt Homes

- ordering a set of Power Pads steel mats for each housing development as it starts, so that every crane that enters the site uses the Power-Pad mats already on site. That never happened two years ago."

Issitt says in the first six months it used more than 100 tonnes of steel, making mats for the housing market alone! "They tend to order four standard mats - 2.5 by 1.25 metres or 3.13 square metres, each mat is fitted with forklift pockets, so they can be positioned to suit the hire crane, without the need to lift into position, with a WLL60t, the capacity is more than enough for cranes up to a four axle, 100 tonner. Housing sites tend to use two and three axle ATs or aluminium truck cranes."

"The crane operator is happy because as he arrives on site, a forklift places the mats where required and the lift is carried out safely. But the end result is that I am possibly getting a lot less repair work."

WHAT IS TAKING UP THE SLACK?

"Refurbishment work and fabricating Power-Pad tackle boxes for All Terrains have really taken off over the past few years. Everyone wants to store stuff on the crane. Buy a Liebherr and it will typically come with a Power-Pad storage system."



Fabricating Power-Pad tackle boxes for All Terrains have taken off

But why don't manufacturers make them? "Pad racks/tackle boxes are a pain for manufacturers because everyone wants something slightly different, it is a personnel product and too bespoke for crane manufacturers to focus on," says Issitt.

"Experience with our own crane fleet means customers are confident that the advice provided by the team at Crowland is accurate and makes sense. It is more valuable than ever to have a knowledgeable conversation with someone who runs the equipment."

REFURBISHMENT AND REBUILDS

Crowland has a lot of refurbishment work in the works, most of the cranes that are no longer made or supported, or work for the UK Ministry of Defence.

We have recently refurbished a 1980 Shuttlelift carry deck crane that was working in a UK based oil refinery. "It was very old and totally worn out, and one of the biggest refurb we have done for its size. It was almost a full 'nut and bolt' rebuild, and costs exceeded £100,000. It would have been more cost effective to buy a new one, however the client needed that type of crane, due to the fact there is nothing currently available that complies with European standards, so a rebuild was the only option for consideration.

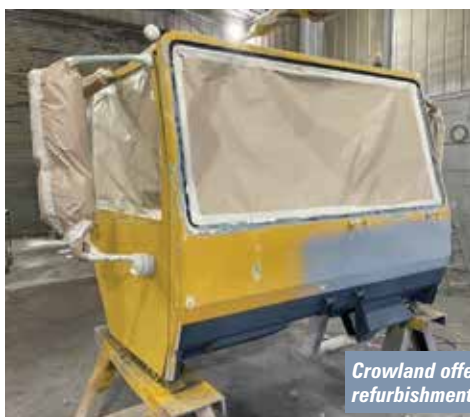


The recently completed Shuttlelift refurb

There are quite a few Shuttlelifts working in the UK, but typically, the owners won't let them go because you can't replace them and they do not want all the new technology/Bluetooth etc... just push a lever and move a spool. We have also just completed a second similar refurb on a 1988 Grove AP308 for another petro-chemical client. There is very little, if any, competition for this type of work or any replacement options to be considered."

There are a number of old carry deck style cranes still working in the UK and there is a small new replacement market for them that the Valla/Ormig models just don't satisfy. But the new cranes, made by Shuttlelift and Broderon etc, still do not comply with EN13000. Around 20 years ago, Joe Lyon at Cranes UK brought in and sold a few of the Broderon cranes, most of which we look after today. We know how to make them EN13000 compliant but can do very little when it comes to engine compliance, which were not up to the required Euro Tier levels. However, the US and Australian manufacturers are now fitting compliant engines that can be used in Europe, so maybe things will change in the future, and we could see the Shuttlelift or Broderon re-enter the UK."

"In large companies/organisations, it is often easier to get approval for a £100,000 refurbishment than £200,000 for a new crane - if



Crowland offers a full refurbishment as standard



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it was available - so I believe we will continue refurbishing this type and age of machine for some time to come."

BIGGEST REFURB IN EUROPE?

As well as refurbishing old carry deck cranes, Crowland has a five year military contract to refurbish 65 Terex All Terrain cranes - 58 AC40s and seven of the larger AC55s - all dating back to 2009.

"This military refurbishment contract, which started a year ago, is probably the biggest in Europe at the moment," says Issitt. "All 65 are being fully refurbished at our premises here in Peterborough. They come from all over the world and are shipped back to the UK for the refurbishment before being sent back into service."

"For most, it involves full boom strip/inspections, hook blocks, ropes, hoses and checking/repairing various operating systems, in addition to fitting new tyres and a new paint job. A lot of the cranes have been stood a while or had very low, operational use, causing deterioration in certain components so each machine is inspected to identify the work required. We currently have seven ACs in the workshops - some will need just 1-2 weeks of attention and then going through paint, whereas others are having new LMIs."

"However, because the new LMI is different to the original specification machine, any upgrades or component replacement has to be thoroughly documented and added to the MOD training programme, and because there are now two different operating systems, new manuals or manual inserts needs to be written...all of which is very time consuming and can be protracted."

"We are completing approximately three cranes every two months, and because there is no urgent military demand at the moment, we can stockpile cranes and work on them to suit the workshop availability. For the first time in our history, we have guaranteed refurbishment work for five years, which helps maintain workflow, particularly with the mentioned reduction in major accident work."



A Terex AT during refurbishment



MOD cranes waiting for refurbishment

OZZY FRANNAS IN THE UK

Crowland launched the 22 tonne Terex Franna AT22-2 articulated pick & carry crane at Vertikal Days. Surprisingly, Franna has never sold a crane in mainland Europe, although there are a dozen or so older models still operating in the UK.

"Terex Franna made a big thing about bringing the Franna into the UK. Crowland Cranes have supported the Franna team to ensure that the released product meets CE, EN13000 and UK road registration before actively selling & promoting it," he said.

"I think the market here will have good initial interest for replacement machines, then possibly two to three units a year, we have already sold the first unit with another on the water arriving in January. Our aim to keep a unit also in stock to reduce delivery times. The model shown at Vertikal Days needed some additional compliance work which has been completed in conjunction with the factory in Australia."

Liverpool based Roadcraft Crane & Plant purchased the first unit, it already has an older 14 tonner in its fleet. The crane has been painted by the team at Crowland in the Roadcraft livery and handover is scheduled before the end of the year.

Franna articulated cranes are everywhere in Australia. Estimates put the current numbers at around 5,600 cranes with annual sales of 200 to 250 units. Those in the UK are generally used as assist cranes, standing tower sections up, industrial movements etc.



Franna in for compliance work

DAY BOOK SOFTWARE

The most recent addition to Crowland's product offering is the CraneLogix Day Book - a new software programme designed specifically for the crane rental industry. It provides a simple, digital replacement for manual 'hire book' entries enabling crane rental bookings, driver tickets, operator allocation and fleet maintenance schedules to be handled within one simple programme.



CraneLogix Day Book

"It was our initial idea, some 10 years ago, due only to the fact that we wanted to move our crane rental bookings from a manual diary, or Excel spreadsheet entry, to something more portable and reliable, also a product that would evolve, as our business evolves. The new Day Book has proven to do that and continues to evolve as customer input and suggestions are received from the growing customer base. This is a truly organic growth business, which only works on the back of what we are doing at Crowland."

"The project started with a close friend who is a programme developer and an IT specialist that we already use," says Issitt. "My daughter Charlotte - an accountant - makes up the CraneLogix team, and since launching it the take up has been amazing. It is obtained on an annual subscription basis, with one fixed payment a year, and is supported 24/7 by humans who can talk through any problems and sort them. We are aiming to secure 20 users by close of 2025 and we are very close to reaching this target, making it a nice little business. It is also interesting to see that other rental companies have had the same problem as us. Since showing it at Vertikal Days, several other software providers now have or are going to attempt to launch a similar 'Day Book' concept - so we must be onto something... but in my opinion, you have to be in the crane rental game to fully understand what is needed."

As Crowland continues to develop, it will be interesting to see what the next new product or service will be - there can't be much left... ■

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