

SERVICE DEALER

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

PLUS:

THE LATEST NEWS & PRODUCTS FOR THE
PLANT HIRE & CONSTRUCTION SECTOR



- NEWS
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- TRAINING
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November/December 2025

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

The different arms of the George Browns business have undergone significant recent changes. MD Steve Brown tells us about the challenges this created, and the experience gained

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Letter from the editor **Steve Gibbs**

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Welcome to the November/December 2025 edition of *Service Dealer* magazine.

As you will have no doubt noticed, this edition of the magazine will feel a little heavier in your hands. That's because we are delighted to bring you, our valued dealer readers, an expanded offering each and every issue from now on. Whenever your favourite magazine dedicated to the independent dealer network lands on your mat it will now be with a heftier thump, thanks to the eight extra pages dedicated to the Plant Hire & Construction sector.

This expansion to the magazine is quite deliberate and carefully considered. We know from our dealership visits and conversations that many of our readers are already in this sector - and I'm sure that many more will be interested in hearing about the potential that diversifying into a new, yet related, market could offer to their business.

The section will be overseen by expert construction and plant journalist, Dan Gilkes, so you are in great hands - because Dan knows his stuff. He kicks off our coverage of the sector this issue with a comprehensive report from the PlantWorx exhibition - where he reports that there were many machinery

exhibitors who were looking for new dealer partners all across the UK and Ireland. So, it's a sector offering real potential for our readership.

When we announced the expansion to the magazine in our *Weekly Update*, owner Duncan Murray-Clarke said, "This further evolution of *Service Dealer* demonstrates a continued commitment to our industry and investment in our skilled dealer network. Because in these fast-moving times, we can't afford to stay still." Please let us know what you would like to see covered in the section going forward - and if your dealership has a story to tell about expanding into the sector, please do get in touch.

Elsewhere in this mag, we say a fond farewell and many thanks to Les Gammie who delivers his final Diary of a Season. His insight has been fascinating and much appreciated throughout this year. Next issue we shall meet our new diarist for 2026.

But before that, we have the exciting matter of our 2025 *Service Dealer* Conference & Awards at the start of December to enjoy. We cannot wait for all our dealer delegates to benefit from the expert speakers we have lined up and to celebrate the success of all our winning dealerships.

THE TEAM

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PRINCIPAL SPONSOR

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TRADE SHOWS



Midlands Machinery Show

New look MMS show reveals details

Changes to format this month

Organisers of the new-look Midlands Machinery Show have promised live machinery demonstrations, driving experiences and business-focused talks will run alongside exhibitor halls at the event which will take place at the Newark Showground on Wednesday 19 November.

Now in its eleventh year, the show's organisers have designed a one-day format, which they say will create an environment for time-pressured visitors to "make connections, see products first hand, and get the inside line on the issues currently affecting farming."

The Newark & Nottinghamshire Agricultural Society (NNAS) organises the event in order to support its charitable objectives to promote, celebrate and champion agriculture across the Midlands region.

NNAS CEO Simon Eccleston said, "With our new format we have had the opportunity to create an event which really focuses in on what farmers want. It's a chance to speak to experts and see the new product innovations that are coming to market while retaining that social and networking aspect to the show that we know is hugely valued."

"We are anticipating the traditional two days' footfall will be condensed into the one-day format, and we want visitors to attend to see the full breadth of what the show has to offer."

Farmers will be able to meet major machinery dealers, parts suppliers and engineering specialists, while also connecting with business consultants, service providers across energy, construction and water, and innovative agri-tech companies shaping the sector's future.

Alongside the exhibition halls, visitors can enjoy a range of features such as the 4x4 driving course and a programme in the demonstration ring. New for 2025 is a UTV driving experience to test out the latest all-terrain machines.

DEALERS



RVT premises

RVT wound up

149 immediate job losses as dealers close doors for final time

It was officially confirmed on Wednesday 10 September 2025, that Tim Higgins, Edward Williams and Jane Steer of PwC had been appointed as joint administrators of dealers Rea Valley Tractors Limited, and their parent company Dunstall Holdings Limited.

In a notice posted online, it was confirmed that 149 out of 169 employees lost their jobs with immediate effect. The remaining 20 employees were retained across the seven sites operated by RVT in the Midlands, North-West England and Wales to support in the winding down operations.

In a statement, the administrators said that, as a result of difficult trading conditions over a prolonged period and inflationary cost pressure, the companies had been pursuing opportunities to secure a long-term future through a sale of all or part of the businesses.

Despite a comprehensive marketing process, no viable offers were received for the Group as a whole. Consequently, say PwC, the directors were left with no alternative but to place the companies into administration.

The administrators went on to say that they were working closely with the Redundancy Payments Service (RPS) to ensure that those affected by job losses receive their statutory entitlements as soon as possible.

Joint administrator Tim Higgins said: "Rea Valley Tractors is one of the most recognisable names in the local agricultural industry, and it's with great sadness that it has entered administration along with Dunstall Holdings. Regrettably, 149 employees have been made redundant - we know how unsettling this will be for the people affected, as well as the group's customers at this important time of year, and we will be providing all parties with the necessary support."

DEALERS

Manufacturers move to cover RVT loss

Alternative dealerships appointed

Kuhn Farm Machinery and JCB were the first manufacturers to announce moves to support their customers across Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Derbyshire, South Lancashire and Mid-Wales following the news regarding RVT.

Kuhn immediately appointed RVW Pugh to its dealer network. The manufacturer said the established dealer was ideally located to serve customers throughout the regions, and would be responsible for their full range of grassland and arable machinery, along with the brand's electronic services.

RVW Pugh has nearly 50 years of experience selling and supporting farmers, operating from three depots: Churchstoke, Powys; Holmes Chapel, Cheshire; and Lathom, South Lancashire, with the latter becoming a Kuhn square baler centre to support customers in Cheshire and South Lancashire. TR Machinery, part of the RVW Pugh Group based in Newport, Shropshire, will also stock the full range of Kuhn grassland and arable machinery.

Sian Pritchard, Kuhn UK's managing director, said the company has ensured new and existing customers remain fully supported.

"The appointment of RVW Pugh fills a recent gap in our dealer coverage, and we're delighted to have such a recognised and well-respected business joining our distribution network. Working with, and having easy access to, a supportive and dedicated dealer is a primary consideration for farmers and



L-R: Emma Pugh, business manager, RVW Pugh Ltd; Sian Pritchard, managing director, Kuhn UK; Robert Pugh, managing director, RVW Pugh Ltd

contractors. We've been proactive to ensure any impact felt by our customers, in light of these announcements, is minimal."

Commenting on behalf of RVW Pugh, business manager Emma Pugh said: "It's a hugely positive move for us across our four depots, and aligns perfectly with our customers' requirements. Some of our sales and support technicians are former Malpas Tractors employees, and, as such, possess a wealth of knowledge and experience with all Kuhn machines. This should give customers the confidence that we're fully able to provide a first-class level of sales and aftersales support right from the outset." JCB Agriculture managing director John Smith meanwhile said, "We are moving quickly to appoint new dealers for these strategically important counties in order to retain the first-class sales and service that our customers have come to expect. We expect the transition to be seamless, given the expertise and professionalism of the dealers being appointed. We would also like to thank Rea Valley Tractors for supporting JCB customers for the

past 18 years."

From Thursday, 4 September, the following changes took effect:

- **Sharmans Agricultural Ltd** extended its territory westwards to cover Derbyshire and Staffordshire up to the M6. The dealer is also investing in brand-new premises to serve customers in this area.
- **Chandlers RFM** expanded its coverage to include Shropshire and Staffordshire to the west of the M6, operating from Bridgnorth. The dealer is also planning a brand-new depot in the Market Drayton area to provide additional support.
- **John Bownes** took over coverage of Cheshire operating from its centrally-located base in Winsford. In the short term, **Emyr Evans** is providing parts and technical service support in North and Mid-Powys and the north of Ceredigion. A permanent dealer appointment for sales and service in this area will be announced in due course.

DEALERS

SBD dealers rallied to join cordless drive

Service Dealer editor, STEVE GIBBS, attends event held at McLaren's F1 HQ

Dealers from the UK and around Europe gathered in September at the headquarters of the Formula One team McLaren in Woking, for Stanley Black & Decker's 'International Outdoor Showcase.'

The two-day event saw the invited partners hear a series of presentations regarding the company's brands – DeWALT, Cub Cadet, Wolf Garten, Black & Decker and Arnold on day one, followed by a raft of hands-on product testing and demonstrations on the second day.

The meeting was kicked off by Becky Cotsworth, the company's vice president and general manager Outdoor EMEA-ANZ, who welcomed the dealers, saying the company has more products in the outdoor sphere this year than any other. Their focus, she said, was in converting professional end-users across to their electric tools. To do this, she said, they needed to work with the right dealer partners.

Becky said of the event: "This is more than just a



Becky Cotsworth

product showcase, it's an invitation to join Stanley Black & Decker on our growth journey across the outdoor industry. By working together, we can seize new opportunities, deliver exceptional value to you, our customers, and shape the future of our industry."

Various sector managers then introduced product roadmaps across the company's brands for the next year and beyond - details of which the company only wanted to share with their dealer partners in the room. The overarching theme of it all, though, was this sense of the company wishing to convert commercial users to the use of their cordless machinery.

Becky summed up the company's philosophy, saying they desire to get the best products into their customers' hands – and to do that, they need to work with the best dealers, driving traffic into their stores through increased marketing. She invited their dealers to join them on their "electrification train," concluding that "the time is now."



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COBRA

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Peter Chaloner, managing director, Henton & Chattell and Craig Footman, regional sales manager, Merlo UK

Henton & Chattell add to ag offering

Newly appointed as a Merlo dealer

Merlo announced the appointment of Henton & Chattell Ltd as an authorised dealer, effective 1 September, 2025.

The Nottingham-based company will represent the brand across the Midlands and East Midlands, operating from its newly-acquired premises in Newark, Nottinghamshire, formerly occupied by Farmstar.

“We’re delighted to welcome Henton & Chattell to the Merlo agricultural network,” commented Owen Buttle, national sales manager at Merlo UK. “Their strong infrastructure and customer base, and proven ability to deliver across both professional groundcare and agricultural sectors, make them a natural fit for our brand.”

Peter Chaloner, managing director at Henton & Chattell, added: “Our team is excited to expand our offering and support our customers with Merlo’s premium range of telehandlers. The opportunity to grow with a family-owned, engineering-led manufacturer like Merlo aligns perfectly with our values and long-term ambitions.”

PEOPLE

STIGA introduce new UK MD

Showcased ‘strategic direction’ at GroundsFest

STIGA has announced the appointment of James Gordon as its new UK managing director, who will be based out of the company’s new UK office in Stansted.

The company says James brings an impressive career of senior leadership in the consumer and B2B sectors, with extensive experience in commercial management from his time in the UK, Australia, Asia and the USA. He has held key roles at major companies, such as Kärcher, Dyson, and Colgate Palmolive, where he was instrumental in “driving market growth and operational efficiency.”

Gregory Levacher, Group SVP of sales, said: “We are thrilled to have James join the STIGA team. His leadership and deep understanding of our industry will be a significant asset as we focus on growing and strengthening our market position in the UK.”

James’ appointment coincided with the company’s attendance at GroundsFest 2025, where STIGA officially entered the professional market - which they described as a natural extension for a brand with over 90 years of experience and a history of “shifting to electric” in gardening.



INDUSTRY

Major parts changes announced

Regarding Deere, Kramp and Vapormatic



John Deere has confirmed significant changes to its aftermarket parts strategy in Europe, including the future of the Vapormatic brand.

The manufacturer is reshaping its parts offer into a tiered portfolio from premium genuine components, through cost-effective alternatives, to sustainable remanufactured solutions - which the company says is designed to give customers the right option at each stage of machine ownership.

As part of this shift, Deere’s ExtraParts programme with Kramp will be extended into further European markets. The scheme, first launched in 2017, enables John Deere dealers to supply not only Deere parts but also accessories and components for other brands - supporting customers running mixed fleets.

Meanwhile, from 1st September 2025, Kramp has taken on the full Vapormatic inventory. Following the decision to close Vapormatic’s operations, the long-established brand will be stocked via kramp.com and available through local Kramp dealers.

Kramp says the entire Vapormatic portfolio of over 11,000 lines has already begun arriving at its warehouses and will be fully integrated into its system. Customers will continue to be able to order through their dealer, or via Kramp’s online platform, with next-day delivery available.

James Child, manager of aftermarket & customer support marketing at John Deere Europe, said the changes ensure “customers have access to the right solution at every stage of ownership.”

Kramp UK country director Des Boyd added, “We’re incredibly proud to bring the Vapormatic brand into the Kramp family. By combining Vapormatic’s legacy with Kramp’s scale and service, we believe we can have a really positive impact on the industry.”

INDUSTRY



Video series to “bring land-based engineering to life”

We Are Land-based Engineering targeting the next generation

Three new videos designed to spark curiosity and inspire the next generation of industry recruits have been released.

We Are Land-based Engineering describe their videos, created in collaboration with industry partners across the land-based engineering sector, as “an engaging, accessible look into an industry that plays a vital role in everything from food production to sports performance.” On YouTube search for:

- **What makes Land-based Engineering Great**
- **Excellence starts with Land-based Engineering**
- **Land-based Engineering is..?**

Gareth Ford of the AEA commented, “The support and collaboration that went into creating these videos has been truly outstanding. We’re incredibly grateful to the manufacturers, dealers, Riseholme College and Worplesdon golf course who generously contributed their time, expertise, and resources. Their commitment has helped bring land-based engineering to life for the next generation.”

With the support of the AEA, BAGMA, and IAgRE, and in partnership with Careers Hubs, the Careers & Enterprise Company, and Countryside Classroom, among others We Are Land-based Engineering continues with its mission to reach new audiences - bringing the industry into classrooms and communities across the UK.

DEALERS



Double award winner, Reesink Scotland

Reesink celebrates their network

With dealer and MST awards

Reesink UK has recognised its dealer network with their 2024 Aftermarket Dealer Awards, celebrating exceptional standards in customer support, service, skills, and parts.

Alastair Black, technical support and training manager at Reesink UK, said: "Dealers are often the first and most regular point of contact for customers, so their service reflects directly on us as a distributor.

"The Aftermarket Dealer Awards highlight the importance of that role, and recognise the hard work, commitment and customer-first mentality that keeps our standards high across the UK."

The awards cover five categories: Excellence in Service, Parts and Skills, alongside overall Aftermarket Dealer of Excellence and Improved Performance recognitions.

This year, Reesink Scotland took home the Gold Award for both **Aftermarket Dealer of Excellence**

and **Excellence in Skills**. Mike Turnbull, branch manager at Reesink Scotland, commented: "These two awards reflect all the changes and hard work done by the whole service team in Scotland over the last year.

"Since taking over as branch manager, we have set out to implement several changes to elevate the standards of the aftersales service for customers at our Livingston branch, which has resulted in helping to reduce downtime and running costs on their Toro equipment and improving the overall customer experience."

The **Excellence in Parts Gold Award** went to the Ted Hopkins dealership, and Robert Skipp, aftersales manager at Ted Hopkins Ltd, said: "This is a fantastic recognition of the whole team's dedication to delivering the highest standard of service and support."

Reesink East Anglia secured the **Excellence in Service Gold Award**,

while the Keys Brothers from Northern Ireland were named the **2024 Improved Performance** winner. Andy Keys, company director at Keys Brothers, said, "We're delighted to have won the Improved Performance Award – it honours the hard work and commitment from everyone at Keys Brothers, as well as our focus on building strong relationships with customers, always striving to provide the best service and support, and continuing to contribute positively to the wider industry."

Keys Brothers also secured the Silver Award for Excellence in Parts, while Cheshire Turf Machinery won the Silver Awards for Aftermarket Dealer of Excellence and Excellence in Service. Finally, the Silver Award for Excellence in Skills went to Reesink South East.

Special recognition also went to Darrell Richards from Reesink South East and Norann Chambers from Ted Hopkins, who recently completed the Master Service Technician Award (MST).

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PEOPLE

Knight appoint for Scotland and the north

New area manager

Knight Farm Machinery has appointed Steve Dunning as its new area manager to oversee the needs of dealers and customers across Scotland and Northern England.

He joins an existing team of two to directly connect the Knight factory in Rutland and its manufacturing and technical teams with the support needs of those who sell, service, own or operate Knight machines.

Based in Ripon, North Yorkshire, Steve joins Knight following seven years as UK northern area manager with a major international sprayer manufacturer, followed by a spell managing retail sales across two depots for Agrovista. He began his career as a service engineer with Northern England farm machinery dealer Paxtons, before moving into sales with the same company.



“Knight Farm Machinery has a strong reputation for innovations that make operating its sprayers simpler and yet more precise,” points out Steve.

“The number of Knight users in Scotland and Northern England is growing, and I’m looking forward to working with current dealers and customers to help them get the most from their machines, while also making dealer appointments to fill the few gaps that remain in our network and making further sales directly where necessary.”

Steve joins Cliff Buck, responsible for Eastern England dealers and sales, and John Wooding, who oversees Western England, in the Knight Farm Machinery area management team.

News in brief: [Read these stories, and more, in full at: www.servicedealer.co.uk](http://www.servicedealer.co.uk)

PEOPLE



B&S make top-level appointment

Briggs & Stratton has announced the appointment of Philipp Deubel as senior director of sales, EMEA. The company say his responsibilities will include driving growth across the company's brands, such as Briggs & Stratton and Vanguard engines, Billy Goat, Ferris, Simplicity and Snapper.

PEOPLE



Technical support & training manager

Reesink UK has announced the appointment of Alastair Black as its new technical support and training manager, taking over from Lee Rowbotham, who has become the company's new Geolink and digital specialist. He will be responsible for overseeing technical training across Reesink UK's network, for both internal teams and dealer partners.

PEOPLE



Nearly 100 years of service

Colin Harding and Medwyn Evans, from RVW Pugh Ltd, were both presented with the prestigious Royal Welsh Agricultural Society's (RWAS) long service medal recently at the Royal Welsh Show. This is awarded to individuals who have served over 40 years consecutively in the agricultural industry with no more than three employers.



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Strategies, insights and inspiration

Resilience for dealers is on the agenda at December's Service Dealer Conference



Comedian Stuart Goldsmith, kicking off the 2025 Conference with his keynote address on the subject of 'Resilience'

Taking place on Thursday 4th December 2025 at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon, the *Service Dealer* Conference has as its theme this year, **Resilience**.

Through keynotes, seminars and the ever-popular, smaller-grouped breakout sessions, our dealer delegates will be treated to a full programme that will arm them with strategies and insights they can take away and put into practice at their businesses.

We know that resilience for dealerships isn't luck - it's a skill that can be honed, improved and nurtured. *Service Dealer* owner, Duncan Murray-Clarke explained, "In a time of constant disruption, resilience isn't

something dealerships stumble upon by chance - it's something you build, practice and reinforce. That's why we believe that this year's conference is so important.

"We're really excited about our speaker line-up that we have curated. From Stuart Goldsmith's surprising, thought-provoking take on the resilience required in the comedy industry, to our customer insight sessions, the agenda is built to challenge assumptions, spark fresh thinking, and leave delegates with practical nuggets of inspiration.

"We can not wait to see as many of our readers from across the UK and Ireland independent dealer network as possible in just a few weeks' time."



Charlie and Nick to set the tone for the Awards evening

Service Dealer is thrilled to announce that crowd-favourite, Charlie Baker will join us once again as our *Service Dealer* Awards compere.

Charlie never fails to get our Awards audience going. With his versatile talents as a stand-up comedian, actor, and highly acclaimed jazz singer he always adds that special zing to our evening's event.

Joining Charlie for the first time will be comedian Nick Page. With some comics there's a moment where you ask yourself 'I wonder how much of this is true?', with Nick Page you might hope it isn't true, but somehow know that it is, mostly. His shows are full to bursting with stories from a life lived on the edge of (self-inflicted) disaster.

In his shows there are no songs, props or padding, just stories packed with jokes from start to finish. In the last few years he has won the prestigious title 'English Comedian of the Year',

performed at comedy festivals in three continents and been awarded the Operational Service Medal by the British army for numerous gigs in warzones, doing everything from shows in Camp Bastion and Kandahar for 5000 troops at a time, to being helicoptered to perform for 20 soldiers in a patrol base in the desert.

He's reached the live finals of Britain's Got Talent despite having never watched the show. A typical week in the UK might see performances in pubs and theatres before a weekend run at a comedy club. Between cruises and expat bookings he's now performed in over half the world's countries and even kept busy during Covid lockdown performing over 100 online gigs from a studio in his garage.

We are looking forward to both Charlie and Nick bringing the laughter to our event celebrating the best in our marvellous dealer network.

Our 2025 Sponsors

The following organisations have confirmed their sponsorship of the 2025 *Service Dealer* Conference and Awards. We'd like to welcome them on board and thank them for their support and input.

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First look at the 2025 conference running order

The first look at the schedule for the day's running order at the *Service Dealer* Conference has been released. Please be aware details might be liable to last minute alterations.

Welcome Duncan Murray-Clarke

Keynote Stuart Goldsmith

Coffee break

Customer Insight Ian Beecher-Jones
JoJo's Vinyard

Breakout session 1

A: AI rebooted - New tools, real value, and smarter thinking.

B: How to forge ahead - A lived experience mental health playbook

LUNCH, NETWORKING & SPONSOR SHOWCASE

Welcome back Duncan Murray-Clarke

Customer Insight Jim McKenzie MBE
Celtic Manor Resort

Another Perspective Gary Whitney
Smartlawns Limited

Coffee break

Breakout session 2

A: AI rebooted - New tools, real value, and smarter thinking.

B: How to forge ahead - A lived experience mental health playbook

Conference close Duncan Murray-Clarke



2025's Dealer of the Year awards

Entries are in and judging is in full swing!

The categories that you, our *Service Dealer* readers have been entering in your droves this year are:



There are also special award categories this year:



In addition, of course: all those considered for entry will be put forward for the prestigious **2025 Overall Dealer of the Year Award**



Bigger, better, buzzier!

The third staging of the new show on the turfcare scene delivered for visitors, exhibitors, and dealers. *Service Dealer* editor, STEVE GIBBS, reports from Stoneleigh



The third staging of GroundsFest took place once again at Stoneleigh Park, and, straight off the bat, I must say this was the biggest and the best edition of the show so far.

Post-show the organisers informed us that a total of 9,037 were in attendance across the two days – and I do feel that the team that put the event together must be praised for putting on such a vibrant show, which was clearly satisfying for both visitors and exhibitors alike. I only heard enthusiastic words from everyone I spoke to across the two days - whether they were punters who'd come through the gates to have a look around, or stand-holders there to meet customers, colleagues and peers. The show managed to generate that

all-elusive buzz that every trade event would desire to be known for.

I also think that this year the show really lived up to the 'Fest' element of its name - and not just with the DJs, bands and social event after the show on night one. On top of this, I certainly felt that, as I walked around inside and outside the showground, there was an atmosphere that I'm not sure I've experienced too often at a trade event – one of fun. There was an undeniably pleasant, upbeat, happy vibe to the place. Of course, business was being discussed, but it seemed to me that it was very much taking place with a smile on everyone's face.

As visitors walked around, there was music from plenty of stands, food and drink were being shared by

many, there were lots of games and hands-on demos on offer - all of which helped create a unique feeling at a UK trade show. It certainly helped that the weather played its part - at least, until the show was almost over! But, whilst the sun shone, the value of an outdoor exhibition couldn't have been more clearly illustrated.

There were more exhibitors there than ever before (I'm told around 100 on top of last year), and many of the returning companies had opted for larger, more elaborate stands. It was fantastic to see just what great efforts many had made, all of which contributed to the overall impressive effect of the show's footprint. Add to these neat additions like the Machinery Nation Live arena, and the exciting spectacle

that is lawnmower racing, and it's fairly easy to see why a day or two's visit to Stoneleigh is increasing its appeal.

Dealer interest

Whilst satisfying both end-user visitors and manufacturer exhibitors, the show has also become a destination for many dealers to catch up with their suppliers. With several companies featuring dealer hubs on their stands, I feel the network was in attendance in good numbers.

Speaking to plenty of our dealer readers who I bumped into on our stand and around the show, I heard many similar assessments of how this season has been - and, frankly, that would be best described as tough! I was told that, with the weather we've experienced, sales overall have been sluggish, and, equally, service has faced its struggles through customers simply not using their machinery much. Consequently, it sounds like there's a lot of stock in dealerships around the country - with concerns now being voiced about the upcoming winter stocking demands. This, combined with just how hard it is to run a small business right now, has made for a challenging time.

But, despite this, the dealers I spoke to remained optimistic. Perhaps enthused by new products they'd seen around the show, or conversations they'd had with their suppliers and each-other, everyone I had the pleasure of speaking with were in good spirits. That famed dealer resilience was clearly on display.

I did bump into one dealer in particular, who has been showing plenty of resilience this year above and beyond the norm - who, for a change, wasn't wearing battered trainers and a running kit. Jason Nettle, of Winchester Garden Machinery, seemed to be doing pretty good for someone who had already run eight marathons so far in 2025 – and, at that point, still had another four to go! What he has put his body through for charitable causes this year is nothing short of remarkable. At Stoneleigh, Jason was telling me how delighted he was with what he had raised so far, but how he really wanted the industry to get behind him for his final push.

He was still keen for any manufacturers or suppliers to offer their sponsorship for his remaining challenges, and I know he'd love as many members of the dealer network as possible to pledge their support to his JustGiving page ([justgiving.com/team/jasons-marathon-madness](https://www.justgiving.com/team/jasons-marathon-madness)). So please do get behind Jason as he completes this crazy endeavour. He's doing something quite special, I think.

GroundsFest, for me, really hit its stride this year. I would assume it was days like the one we experienced in September that the organisers envisaged when they made the decision to launch a new show for the turfcare sector. I believe a hearty well done is truly in order.

As they plan next year's edition, we and the rest of industry will now look forward to seeing what SALTEX has in store for us this month.



Keith Christian with Jason Nettle

Innovation Award winners announced

The first-ever GroundsFest Innovation Awards took place at the show. Organisers said, "The competition drew over 100 entries, showcasing the best of new product design alongside proven favourites that have stood the test of time."

The winners were confirmed as:

Maintenance and workshop equipment – New product:

Foley Company for the 642 Quick Spin Reel Grinder

Stood the test of time: Clearwater Recycling Systems

Services – New product: Origin Amenity Solutions for Machine keeper

Transport – New product: LCVT for Side Tipping Beavertail

Tractors and implement carriers – New product: AEBI, Schmidt UK for Aebi TT 282

Tree care – New product: CMC Lift UK for CMC S20

Landscape consumables – New product: Wildflower Turf Ltd for Enhanced Wildflower Biodiversity Range

Stood the test of time: DLF Seeds for The Pro-Flora range of mixtures

Landscape equipment – New product: Westermann UK for WR870 EGO Battery Moss Brush

Stood the test of time: The Professional Sprayer People for Mankar ULV Sprayers

Turf maintenance consumables – New product: Fargro for the DCM Vital Green

Turf maintenance equipment – New product: Redexim UK for Redexim Scarivator

Stood the test of time: Redexim UK for Verti Drain

Grass cutting equipment – New product: STIGA for Nexus

Stood the test of time: Trimax for Pegasus

Around the show...

Some highlights from around the show of interest to our dealer readers included:



AL-KO/Weibang showcased a remarkable number of new machines on their stand, which always appeared to be incredibly busy with both dealers and end-users keen to learn more. Almost too numerous to mention, but generating interest were: a zero-turn that was a first for the brand; a new dual-voltage battery platform; a Solo range of five new entry-level mowers; and the Vision robotic mowers. In total, there were something like 35-40 new launches taking place at the show, I believe - which is undeniably impressive. We have a lot more about AL-KO and their future plans for their dealer partners, who they stressed to me are utterly vital to their ongoing success, with an in-depth Q&A article elsewhere in this magazine.



Husqvarna had a full range on show, with their robotic solutions in particular gaining ever-increasing attention from the professional end-users in attendance. Jonathan Snowball explained how their 535AWD Epos, for example – which can operate on 70% slopes – has exploded in popularity amongst commercial customers. He explained that the past two years have seen more and more golf customers look to autonomous methods for looking after their courses – especially since they are able to witness plenty of real-life examples on neighbouring courses.



Toro UK, who were displaying their wide-range of machines alongside those distributed in the UK by Reesink, also took the opportunity the show off to dealers a new showroom concept. Emphasising the opportunities in stocking an increased range of branded merchandise, heavily featuring the 'bullhorns' logo, the dealers could see for themselves how a shop-in-shop experience could work for their premises. I was told that the extensive numbers of their dealers that had visited the stand over the couple of days had appreciated seeing this range of merchandise perhaps for the first time.



Kress topped their two stands from last year, by going one step further with two sizable outside demonstration areas plus an indoor exhibit. I caught up with Jim Kirkwood on one of their demo plots, where they were showing a new autonomous mower, the Voyager KR800. The unit is intended to be transferred by landscaper contractors from site to site, where it can then drive itself off the trailer and get on with mowing large areas of grass. The machine, which can also be used as a manual ride-on, will be out next February, with extensive on-site testing currently taking place worldwide. Jim told me their dealers are “chomping at the bit” to get hold of the machines, which offer something new to the market.



EGO, on their centrally-located plot, were showing off what they described to me as their huge investment in new robot mowers. Due in dealerships in early-2026, the Aura-R2 models feature what the company is calling Path IQ - combining the use of RTK and a camera capable of depth perception to guarantee continuous navigation. The three units, which can cut 1,500, 3,000 and 6,000 square metres, will be fully supported for dealers with in-store P.O.S, I was told.



Cramer's John McGrady told me how the company are settling into their brand new offices and warehousing facilities in Coleshill, Birmingham. He explained how their dealer network is growing, with the company mindful to protect territory and profit margins for their partners. On the stand were new battery-powered chainsaws, a brushcutter, a more powerful blower, a new Optimus zero-turn, plus the promise of new robotic solutions in a variety of sizes to come later this year.



STIHL's prominently-located stand always seemed busy with visitors checking out new machinery - as well as giving attention to the new multiple battery-charging system. I heard that, with the ability to charge many batteries (a hot topic for professional teams making the conversion to battery kit), a solution like the CM8 is an important development to aid that transition. A potential 32 batteries could be recharged safely overnight using the system.



Stiga who invited their dealer partners to join them on their impressively huge stand, were using the show to mark their entry into the professional market. Key to this was their brand-new, large-format robot mower – which won the show's Innovation Award for Best Grass-Cutting Equipment. I was told that the unit can run for six hours on a full charge, cutting up to 27,000 square metres, and is equipped with a full suite of object detection and proximity sensors, plus an integrated camera.

PSD had a new mower from Sabo on show. The Mowlt Pro is a large area battery-powered machine for commercial use. It has a cutting width of 120cm with a rear discharge deck, or 130cm with a mulching deck. MD Chris Gibson said it was particularly suited for operation in parks or any large-scale commercial grassed area.





Price Turfcare, who were proudly showing off the Ventrac tractor, were telling me just how useful a show like GroundsFest is for spreading the word regarding their kit - and not just to the customers on-site. They were delighted to be able to demonstrate the Ventrac's capabilities on their plot, and to have visitors record video and take pictures of it in action. These images will subsequently, of course, be disseminated far and wide across social media, leading to huge numbers of potential buyers seeing what the units can do.



Boss ORV were showing their Aodes range, with MD Phil Everett telling me that customers can't get enough of the Chinese-built petrol-powered utility vehicles. He described the units as appealing to customers due to their quality of engineering and value for money - with their dealer network always growing. Also on their stand were the Yanmar range of tractors, which Phil said they are concentrating building their nationwide dealer network for.



Cobra were proudly displaying their brand-new Fortis 34" mower for professional use, which comes with either an Ego battery-powered powerhead or a Honda-engined version. Peter Chaloner told me just how well-received this new innovation had been by the professional end-users in football and cricket, who had been testing the unit - and who had demanded that a wider version be produced. The unit benefits from a range of cassettes that can be swapped in and out, and the mower can be chosen to be used with a trailing seat or as a walk-behind.



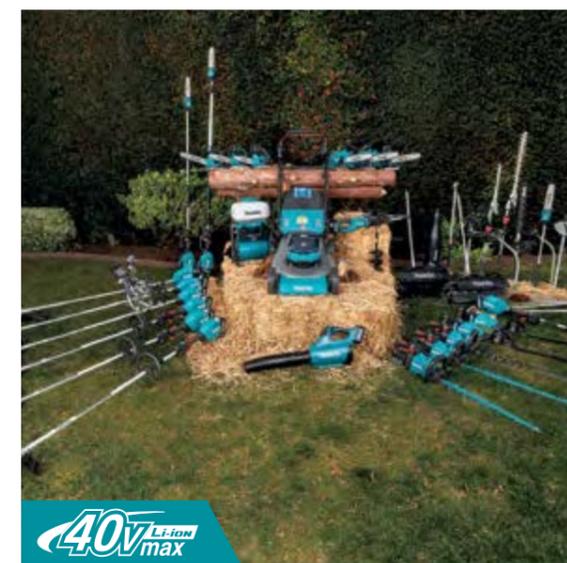
Overton were letting visitors take hold of the joysticks on a new remote-controlled mower they had trundling around their demonstration area. Known as the Mowrator, Guy Overton told me the unit had grabbed the attention of many of the turf professionals on-site, who were interested in its slope-handling abilities. Also gaining interest were the new Encore range of electric and petrol zero-turn mowers, which were turning heads due to their competitive price points.



Makita were delighted with the show, they told me, sensing a real buzz about the place. A good mix of turf professionals were seen on their stand they said, interested in their chainsaws, hedgetrimmers, blowers and wheelbarrow amongst others.

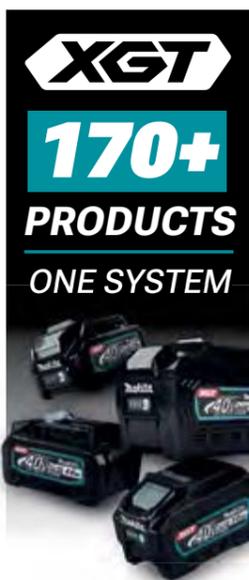


Finally, an interesting new development was the **Storm** robotic mower from Denmark, which boasted that it didn't use RTK, wire or GPS for its navigation - rather, it utilised a laser guidance system. The company said they would be slowly expanding a dealer network in the UK.



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You can't keep a good man down

Following his retirement as managing director of STIGA UK, Gary Whitney has set up a new venture specialising in the recommendation, sale and installation of robotic solutions. LAURENCE GALE Msc, MBPR, visited his demo plot to find out why he believes the technology is the future.

At this year's GroundsFest, it was fair to say I have never seen so many robotic machines on display at a trade show for the turfcare sector. Many of our notable manufactures now offer a plethora of robotic mowing and line-marking solutions.



Gary Whitney

On show were a wide offering from the likes of Husqvarna, STIHL, Stiga, Segway, EGO, Honda, Kress, Tiny Robots, Big Mow, Tuff Tank, and Mammotion, to name but a few.

It is obvious to many of us that this is the start of new way of working, an area in its ascendancy. One such industry stalwart who clearly believes this is Gary Whitney, who I recently had the pleasure of spending some time with. He has set up a new business venture – aptly named Smartlawns – which embraces the use of robotic technologies to maintain both domestic and commercial lawned areas and sports fields, including golf courses. Gary believes that, as these robots are becoming more technically advanced and reliable, they offer real potential to fundamentally change the way we go about maintaining our landscaped features.

I met up with Gary at his demo showground on a private estate near Knowle, Solihull. Gary was brought up in Balsall Common, and spent most of his working career in the Midlands. During our chat, Gary discussed his career in the lawnmower industry, starting as a mechanic at Carlton Horticultural in 1987. He transitioned to sales, focusing on Victa mowers, and later worked for Hayter, selling commercial equipment. Gary highlighted the challenges of adapting

to new regulations, and the importance of understanding customer needs. He also mentioned his role at Brophy's, where he set up a workshop and procurement system.

However, Gary is probably best known by *Service Dealer's* readers for his tenure at STIGA UK, which saw him become managing director, oversee significant growth, and achieve the highest turnover in the company's history. He retired in 2024, after 22 years with the company.

Not one for resting on his laurels, Gary was keen to keep in contact with the many of his old associates, and retain some interest in the industry. Being an ex-mechanic, he understood the potential of robotic devices, and could see a market for his services in providing advice, installation and maintenance of these autonomous machines.

Service Dealer: When and how did you start your career in the industry?

Gary Whitney: Before embarking on my career within the lawnmower industry, I served my time as an apprentice toolmaker, then travelled to Australia and gained many life experiences, including my passion for sales.

On my return, I joined a local lawnmower dealership, and worked my way up from trainee mechanic to

workshop manager and then sales manager, before leaving to take up a position as an area sales manager for an Australian lawnmower manufacturer called Victa – and then on to Hayter PLC to take another sales position within their commercial division.

SD: What experiences did you gain from working with Brophy's?

GW: Having worked with Birmingham City Council during my time with Carlton Horticulture, I gained an insight into how the council operated and the machinery they used. When CCT (Compulsive Competitive Tendering) came in in 1988, the council, like many others, put their grounds operations out for tender. Brophy's won the tender, and offered me a job as transport and plant manager to manage all their machinery operations, training and procurement, a job I did for several years.

In terms of experience, it was important we ensured that the machinery chosen was right for the job, and, more importantly, that the relevant training was given to the operators to ensure the durability and performance of the machinery during the mowing seasons.

I left Brophy's when the contract

came to an end, which enabled me to set up a landscaping business called First Pave, where we took on large landscaping jobs - mostly paving. It was a business that gave me many new skills, culminating in taking on several staff.

SD: Which brings us on to your role at STIGA ...

GW: In 2003, I was offered the role of sales manager for East Anglia and the East Midlands, with the aim of increasing sales of STIGA and Mountfield products. I spent 20-plus years with the company, and, in that time, was promoted to national sales manager and then managing director responsible for the UK and Ireland.

I was driven to ensure the importance of competitive pricing and maintaining strong relationships with dealers – a strategy that worked very well for the company.

SD: What would be the main lessons or observations you have learned from your time working in this sector?

GW: Well, the first thing I'd say is that you always need to prioritise and

really understand the user's needs and experiences. For me, having a hands-on approach - actually working alongside operators - has been a big part of that, because it's what's helped me develop better products and solutions.

I've also learned that being adaptable is absolutely key. This industry is constantly changing, and you've got to be flexible and willing to keep learning. I've gone through that myself, moving from being a mechanic into sales, then into workshop management, and eventually into leadership roles.

Another big lesson for me is around service excellence. My own mantra has always been to be 'easy to do business with,' and to treat customers the way you'd want to be treated yourself. That, to me, is crucial for long-term success.

On top of that, having a deep technical understanding really matters – knowing the equipment inside out, from the mechanical detail through to the operational challenges. That kind of knowledge underpins effective sales and good management.

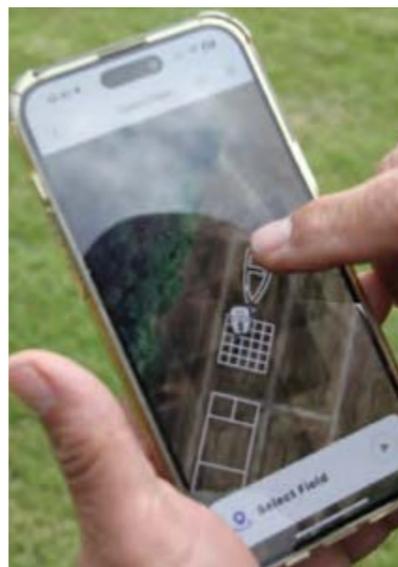
And innovation, I'd say, comes from feedback. The real improvements come from listening to users and what's happening in the field, not just relying



Gary has robots demonstrating their abilities inside a glass house orchard, cutting the grass under the trees



Echo robotic mower in use at Gary's facility near Knowle, Solihull



Setting a robot's route via the app

on what you get out of a laboratory test. There's also the importance of brand relevance — making sure you understand local market preferences, and keeping brand identities strong so they resonate with customers.

Finally, dealer support is essential. You've got to maintain fair profit margins and provide proper support if you want a healthy distribution ecosystem.

Taken together, I think all of these lessons help us as an industry tackle the challenges we're facing right now — whether that's technological disruption, shifting customer expectations, or the move towards more sustainable, user-friendly equipment.

SD: What made you want to start a new business since retiring?

GW: I wanted to stay in touch with our industry, and with the many friends and associates I came to know and befriend over many years. I still felt I wanted to help promote new technologies that were starting to come to market. I feel I can really see the true potential of robotic technologies both for the domestic and commercial sectors.

In the last few years, we have seen tremendous strides in battery technologies, improved battery life, size and performance. We have also seen the adaptation and improvement in RTK, GPS technologies that have done away with the reliance of a perimeter wire

— giving the robots greater freedom to perform in the most challenging terrains.

We are also now seeing a wider range of robotic applications, with the mowing and line-marking robots currently taking centre stage.

Many contractors are using the markers. They are so quick and reliable, and produce a great, accurate straight line — coupled with the multi choice of templates now on offer covering all sporting facilities.

As for many 18-hole golf clubs, especially those facing challenges recruiting or retaining staff, they are starting to see the benefit of using robots to cut large swathes of grass, like roughs, semi-rough and golf range

areas to help reduce the labour time spent by staff. This enables the greens teams to spend time on more important areas of the course.

And, on the domestic front, we now have a plethora of small robots that offer a valid alternative to manual mowing of small lawns.

SD: What exactly do you offer under your new business model, Smartlawns?

GW: Essentially, I promote a new way of tackling the job of mowing grass and managing sports areas autonomously.

I can offer advice on a range of robotic solutions I have on offer. I then sell, install and maintain the chosen



As well as mowers, Gary deals in robotic line-markers for sports clubs

“The key, really, is adaptability and a willingness to embrace and understand emerging technologies.”

devices over a given contract period.

I have a demo ground where I currently employ several robot mowers, working on different size lawns and large open space areas. I have even got one robotic mower operating inside a glass house orchard, cutting the grass under the trees.

I have even set up a self-charging system using a bank of solar panels that feeds an electric generator, that stores and converts the power for use around the site via RTK / GPS antenna.

I also have a line-marking robot I demo at the trial ground and use to provide line-marking services to local sports clubs and contractors, enabling me to develop my own expertise and invite potential customers to come and see the robots working and see the results of their labour.

SD: Where do you see robot technology heading in the next few years?

GW: I think the use of robotic devices is only going to grow massively over the next few years. Personally, I can see real

improvements coming through in a few key areas. For a start, we'll see more powerful robots — machines with proper full-sized rotary blades, not just the little 'nibblers' we've been used to.

Battery capacity is another one. I think we'll reach the point where robots can mow continuously for six or seven hours without stopping. And then there's the software side, which is moving fast. We're likely to see features like camera integration, Lidar, and much more sophisticated GPS and navigation systems, the ability to tackle really complex terrains, and even precise cutting height adjustments built in.

For me, it's important that, as an industry, we stay on top of this. That means testing and evaluating every new robotic model that comes to market, showing up at industry events and conferences, keeping close relationships with different manufacturers, and being open to demonstrations and feeding back to them. It also means educating potential customers about how the technology is improving, and making sure we can offer a range of robot

options that suit different terrains and different use cases.

The key, really, is adaptability and a willingness to embrace and understand emerging technologies. The future's bright - the future is robotics.

SD: Thank you

I personally enjoyed my morning with Gary. We seem to have had a similar career path and journey in this unique industry of ours. Many of the people Gary worked with, I personally knew from my time working for Birmingham City Council back in the 1980s.

It was clear from our chat that Gary is still passionate about the industry, and sees his new business model as a way of educating and improving ways we manage our landscape and open public spaces.

I look forward to catching up with Gary again soon, when he will be one of our guest speakers at this year's Service Dealer Conference, held at the Crowne Plaza, Stratford-upon-Avon, on December 4.



Gary with a grid, line-marked by a robot on his demo plot



The challenge of change

Known for its long history in both manufacturing and retailing farm and groundcare machinery, the different arms of the Brown family business have undergone significant recent changes. MARTIN RICKATSON talked to Steve Brown, MD of George Browns, to learn about the challenges this created – and the experience gained.



Steve Brown: “We need to manage ambition with expectation of what the market now is: lower stock, demand and margins is the new normal.”

The length of time a company has been in business is a pretty strong indicator of its ability to not just adapt to change, but to forecast, plan and prepare for it through decisive choices. That’s not to say its management won’t find those decisions difficult, or, with hindsight, rue the way some of them were handled. It’s being prepared to grasp nettles and make those choices, though - especially when times are tough - that can be the difference between a company’s survival or cessation.

The Browns name has been associated with farm and groundcare machinery since its manufacturing foundation 195 years ago in Leighton Buzzard. Its activities were later broadened into the dealer sector, retailing equipment to farmers and others across the area north-west of London. By the mid/late-1980s, when its primary franchise was with Massey Ferguson, it had around 50% of the local market in key agricultural products. By the turn of the century, though, there was a substantial shift, with rapid growth in groundcare and garden equipment, and farm machinery’s overall business contribution falling. Despite agriculture still being significant to the firm, it remains that way today.

“Twenty years ago, we were probably more revenue-linked to ag, but profit-linked to groundcare, and that’s still true, especially given the development across our region,” says Steve Brown, MD, since mid-2021 of George Browns.

Key franchise changes and commitments

“This drove our decision-making back in the 2004-2014 period, when, on the agricultural side, we parted company with Massey Ferguson due to conflict with Kubota, and we chose what was then an independent tractor brand in Valtra. Soon afterwards, of course, Valtra fell under the same ownership as MF, so we knew the writing was also on the wall for that relationship.

“But we were – and are – one of the longest-serving Kubota dealers, being appointed in 1978 when Kubota UK was established, and building a strong compact tractor business. We’ve evolved with Kubota over almost 50 years, and our parting from Valtra in 2014 coincided with Kubota’s push into 130-170hp tractors with the M7 series, giving us a sustained presence in agriculture complemented by Kubota implements, and latterly Kverneland, too.

“Signs across our branches declare our promise to be the ‘UK’s Premier Kubota Dealer’, and we are committed to following Kubota’s strategic direction. When these larger models were introduced, this is where we focused our agricultural efforts for larger farms. But our region’s arable farmers also need higher horsepower tractors, hence our decision to complement the M7 in our offering to these customers by more recently also partnering with SDF and its Deutz-Fahr brand, doubling our maximum power offering up to 340hp. Our aim was to ensure we remain here for all our partners by offering a broad product line to serve all customer types, and sustain a sound business model.”

Business restructuring

Arguably of even greater significance – for its team, customers and suppliers – has been the restructuring of the Brown family’s business, with the manufacturing side

sold off and the branch network reconfigured to leave four depots covering a region stretching between London and Birmingham. With both agriculture and groundcare changing radically in recent years, leading to fewer buyers and lower spending, a reduction in sites and overall headcount has been a necessary process, but a painful one, in which management has made tough decisions and may have done things differently in hindsight., acknowledges Steve.

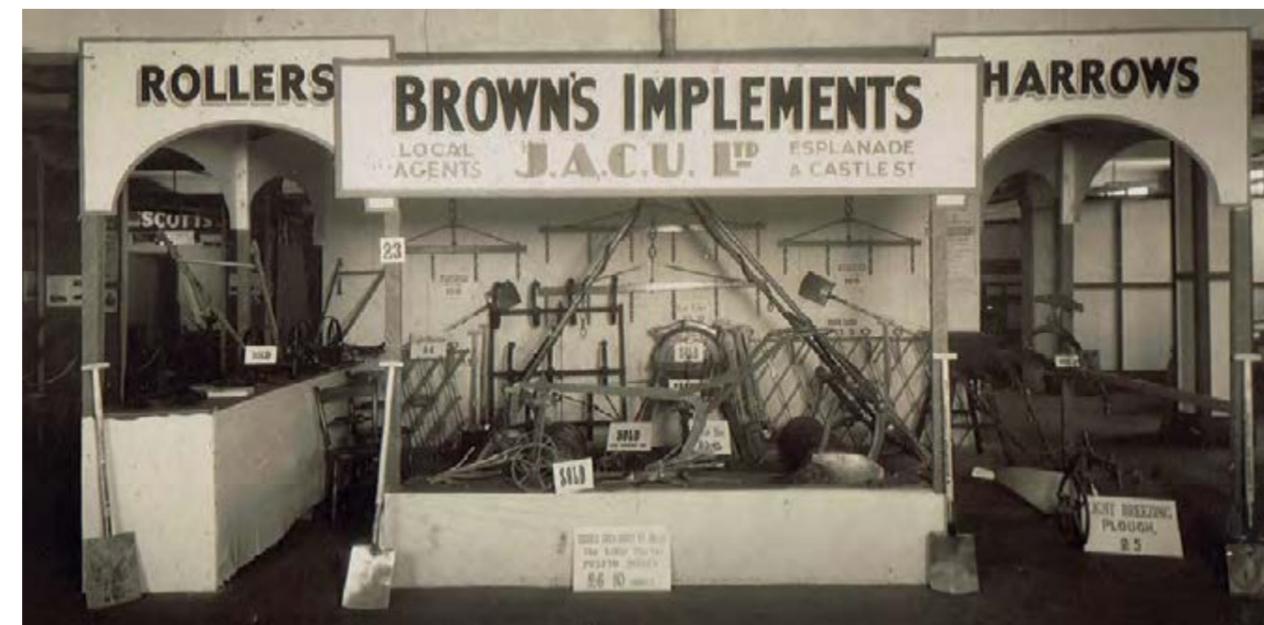
“Fixed cost reduction is vital in these circumstances. When I became MD in August 2021, we had seven physically separate sites. Now there are four, but we’ve retained our territory and covered it with a skilled team.”

The original Browns branches were established in the 1950s across Beds and Bucks, at Leighton Buzzard, Buckingham, Haddenham and Chesham. Then, driving time between depots was around an hour.

“Today, I think business customers still accept roughly an hour’s drive to a depot, but modern roads made our branch proximities less economic,” says Steve.

“In 2000, we took over the Massey Ferguson territory formerly held by Rogers Engineering from its Weedon premises in Northants, later opening a purpose-built branch in Daventry. It wasn’t at first noticeable, but did suffocate our Buckingham branch’s ability to support garden, groundcare and farm machinery in our Northants territory, and, in 2022, we vacated and let our Buckingham site.

“Our Haddenham premises near Thame supported groundcare and garden buyers, but wasn’t ideally located to serve Oxfordshire, so in 2022 we purchased new premises at Witney, west of Oxford. Initially we treated this as relocation, seeking to retain as much expertise as we could, but, while well-located for trade, the new site made some staff travel more challenging, and perhaps we should have encouraged staff moves to Chesham or Leighton Buzzard, treating Witney as a new branch.



The Browns business has been associated with machinery and equipment for 195 years, having been founded in 1830

“We then had Witney, Chesham and Daventry, plus our Dunmow branch in Essex, doing garden, groundcare and farm equipment, plus, of course, our Leighton Buzzard head office branch. Because of their proximity, we focused Chesham primarily on agriculture, with Leighton Buzzard serving not only as our head office, but plus a garden and groundcare depot, with also an angling superstore, an online distribution centre for boxed power products, our hire department, and our lorry fleet base – while also sharing site space with our implement manufacturing business.”

Different viewpoints

“Most recently, not only did we have the downturn in ag and further general cost pressures, but also different views on future direction between the 13 Brown family business shareholders, of whom seven work or had worked in the business. When you don’t have an emotional connection to a company, you consider its value differently, but that doesn’t mean either party was right or wrong. So, over the past 18 months, we’ve been negotiating a share buyback that has required some further significant decision-making.

“One of our struggles was keeping our partner franchises informed during the decision-making progress, as we felt the sensitivity would leave us vulnerable. Looking back, not discussing things with them early on led those key suppliers to make presumptions because of our moves. To me, it was about controlling the dialogue, but, in hindsight, we made survival rather than partnership decisions.

“We then made some further key decisions: ceasing manufacturing, selling the product rights to LWC, and vacating the Leighton Buzzard site in December 2024, relocating the branch operations to Chesham. Our head office was moved to a small office unit within Leighton Buzzard.

“These decisions were again painful to make, but were necessary and within our control. Even without shareholder issues, other dealers may face similar, given the current

environment. High fixed costs, low demand, supply problems, labour issues and government policy pressures aren’t going to be overcome through revenue – a lean operation and protecting cash are crucial.”

That, says Steve, meant examining fixed costs and calculating how to do a good job with less. The answer lay in a reorganised business conducted through fewer sites while maintaining coverage and service.

Restructuring process

“Our branch locations and sizes were perhaps not perfect, but starting from scratch wasn’t an option. Firstly, we sought to protect as many jobs as possible, but had to work out how many positions we needed. We’ve always prided ourselves on making our workforce feel like family, and wanted to protect this, but needed a more sustainable business model to protect our future.

“Younger people are receptive and adaptable to change, and find it less unnerving, but it’s important to us to also retain the knowledge of long-standing staff and help them handle the challenges of evolving business practices.

“We underwent a detailed redundancy process, allowing all parties time to prepare and adjust, and gave as much help as possible to those departing and those remaining. We’re still trying to shape roles for good people who we retained, but for whom we haven’t quite yet found the right fit.”

The restructured team began making greater use of efficiency tools like WhatsApp for remote parts and service support, Salesforce CRM to communicate more effectively with customers, and Ibcos Gold scheduling for service/repair work. Technicians are now despatched from home where possible, with service managers remotely uploading job schedules for them to access via smartphones. Whether at home, a branch or in the field, the sales team can also access all they need from laptops and smartphones.

“We need to create a lean business with responsible,

skilled, highly performing people, who are happy, efficient, and under the minimum possible operational strain. With this, we can afford to remunerate them accordingly.”

The second restructuring challenge was space, with a need to halve the premises footprint to cut fixed costs while maintaining revenue and customer service standards. That meant re-examining everything from stocking – amount, type and offering – to required staff parking area.

“We’ve learned important lessons about remote working, team wellbeing and communication. We significantly reduced our workforce – including the separate manufacturing business – to around 70 staff. Emotionally, that was incredibly difficult for all concerned.

“But I was and am confident that, despite the pain, the changes protect the future of the business and its restructured team. I’ve rightly received criticism, but, now we’re near the end of the process, I’m confident in what we have done, for our staff, company and customers. My aim has always been sustaining a family business with a happy team that does a great job. I can’t expect everyone to agree with what we’ve done, but the team that remains with us has pulled together, and understand what’s happened and what we’re trying to become. I have huge respect for their loyalty and ability to handle what we’ve gone through.”

Times are still tough

While the restructuring process is largely complete, and the business is on a better footing because of it, markets remain tough, with farm, groundcare and homeowner investment remaining suppressed, acknowledges Steve.

“Dealers like to talk confidently rather than admit vulnerability, while suppliers tend not to want to acknowledge to dealers that things aren’t great. But 2025 tractor registrations are likely to be half what they were two years ago, impacted by high production costs, low commodity prices and farm support reduction. Meanwhile, in groundcare,

council spending has been cut, while household income is down and inflation, interest rates and mortgages are higher, further hitting homeowner and leisure groundcare spending. But as a dealership, we need to maintain customer service standards despite these revenue challenges.

“Unfortunately, business remains at late 2024 levels, when we thought things couldn’t get worse. Despite some hoping 2026 will be better, there’s little to suggest the current challenges are short-term.

“Like our customers, we’re experiencing hardship, so must continue to do what’s required to make our business resilient. While change never stops, and more curveballs may come, we’ve already been through a process I hope has left us stable and able to cope. With the staff, fixed cost levels and franchises addressed, we need to now focus on giving exceptional customer service to help build a bigger share of the smaller market.

“As difficult as our changes were, things would have been more challenging had we done nothing. It took monumental strain and cash to make the necessary changes to a mid-sized dealer business like ours, which, according to Farmers Weekly’s dealer turnover analysis, is the UK’s 46th largest. I’m happy to admit I wouldn’t want to be one of the bigger ones.

“But I am positive despite the challenges. We need to manage ambition with expectation of what the market now is: lower stock, demand and margins is the new normal. I went into 2025 hoping for better than 2024. Once I’d realigned my expectations, I became happier, but that doesn’t change either the pain there has been or the ambition that remains.

“We’ve learned a lot on the journey, all with the best intentions, and we’re now asking customers, staff and suppliers to believe in what we’re doing. When change is required, doing nothing is dangerous. In doing something, you succeed or you learn. When we downsized our branch network, we didn’t downsize our ambition. We’re still super-ambitious, and want the best for our people and customers.”



Maintaining customer service standards despite revenue challenges is something George Browns is addressing through wider adoption of technology



Following its restructuring, the George Browns business now covers its territory from four depots in Essex (shown), Bucks, Northants and Oxon



Running the distance for a stronger industry

Keith Christian visited Winchester Garden Machinery to meet marathon man Jason Nettle and his co-director, Amy Nocetti, to find out about Jason's Herculean endeavour for charity and their current view of the industry

Jason Nettle, director at Winchester Garden Machinery (WGM), isn't just running a business, he's running a marathon (literally a marathon a month!). While not quite the ancient Greek messenger or a Hollywood character, Jason possesses a singular determination that has seen him take on the monumental challenge of running a marathon a month for charity.

This quest, which has extensively featured in this magazine and the *Service Dealer* Weekly Update, is a testament to his drive. Jason is balancing a busy family life, running a large multi-branch dealership, as well as hitting the road for a good cause.

Jason's dedication extends far beyond his personal fitness goals. Like his father, Robin, before him, he holds a deep passion for the garden machinery industry. He actively works to foster a level playing field for dealers, offering his time to improve the sector. As a representative on the BAGMA Council, a member of the Honda Dealer Council, and a regular contributor to

Service Dealer, Jason is a respected, if busy, voice in the community.

A family business with a forward view

I caught up with Jason and his co-director, Amy Nocetti, at WGM's main office a couple of weeks after chatting at GroundsFest, to discuss both his running challenge and the state of the industry.

Amy, who manages the service and parts departments, premises and many operational tasks, is the key force behind the scenes, while Jason focuses on sales and supplier relations. As the children of WGM's original partners, Andy Hoskings and Robin Nettle, Amy and Jason lead a well-run, proud family business with over 50 years of history.

Jason's decision to run a marathon a month in 2025 was sparked by a spontaneous challenge from friends in the industry. He embraced the idea, turning it into a significant charitable endeavour to raise funds and awareness for Prostate Cancer and other national charities like Cancer

Research, Naomi House & Jackspace and St. Michael's Hospice. Concerned about the aging population within the industry he serves, Jason is a staunch advocate for men to get tested. As he puts it: "Do it now and not when it's too late!"

Jason told me that, despite being "totally unprepared" at the start, with no time for a proper training schedule - aside from enjoying some 5K runs with his 11-year-old son, Finley - he has persevered, overcoming injuries to meet his goal. Amy even ran the first marathon alongside him, with colleagues joining for parts of others. By the time this edition of the magazine is in your hands, his incredible charitable quest will have just one final hurdle to complete - which should be a memorable one!

Jason says his running has come with a number of injuries, including a strained Achilles tendon and a few blisters (including a rather nasty one in a critical place!). But he has refused to give up, believing that the benefits from running outweigh any temporary negatives.



Jason Nettle with Amy Nocetti at the WGM HQ - photo courtesy of BAGMA

Working together for a better tomorrow

When the conversation turned to the business year, Jason was honest that the season had presented challenges. However, he maintained a positive perspective, noting that the business is resilient enough to handle occasional quieter periods. Importantly, he remains optimistic about the relationship between dealers and suppliers / manufacturers, especially when looking ahead.

Jason is confident that the supply network will understand the realities facing dealers, particularly in light of stock carryover from the current year, and will adapt pre-season ordering demands to work in partnership with their dealer networks.

Jason and Amy highlighted a core challenge: the need for new talent and skilled technicians in the industry. They also noted how the

rise of robot and battery-powered machinery requires new skillsets in the workshop, something the industry must collectively address.

Fostering greater industry collaboration

One of Jason's strongest beliefs is in the power of open dialogue and collaboration. He believes more people need to speak out constructively and dedicate time to discuss industry issues, encouraging manufacturers and suppliers to work even more closely with dealers.

Jason is an advocate for a collective approach, stressing that both sides of the equation - dealers and suppliers - need each other to secure the future and overcome present-day business challenges. His efforts on various industry councils and his private, forthright discussions with companies not fully supporting the

dealer network show a commitment to resolving issues through partnership, not public criticism. The goal is always to find solutions that benefit everyone, strengthening the entire supply chain.

As he approaches the finish line of his marathon quest, Jason embodies the very spirit of endurance and commitment he champions for the industry. His efforts serve as a reminder of the power of passion and working together.

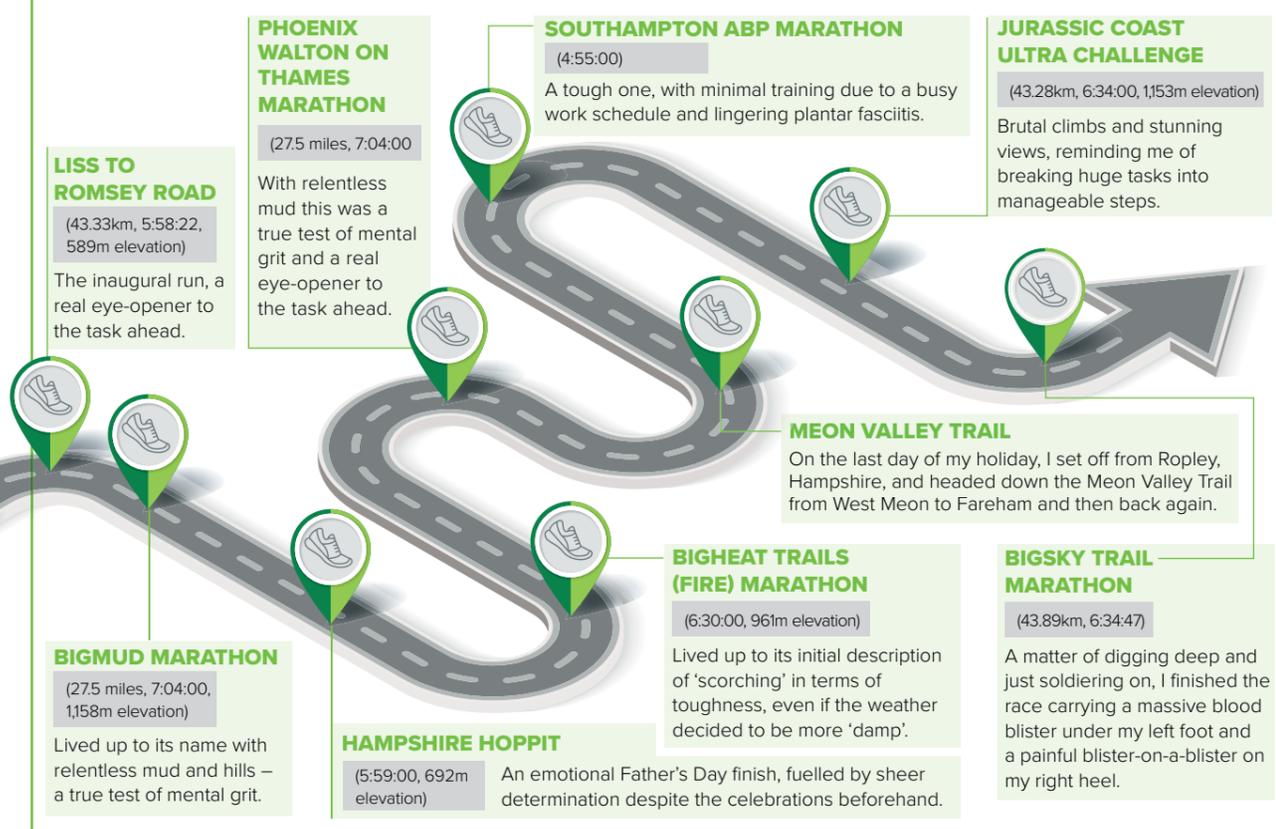
An appropriate quote I found from an unknown source, that I believe sums up Jason's endeavours this year, is -

"When you run, you are not just running for yourself, you are running for everyone who has ever believed in you."

Keep it up, Jason - your goals are almost achieved, but your efforts will continue to inspire.

Jason's marathon year

At the time of going to press, Jason's marathons so far this year had comprised:



Plant Hire & Construction



Latest news for the sector *Edited by Dan Gilkes*



Dan Gilkes, features editor of *Service Dealer's* new Plant Hire & Construction section, introduces the sector to the magazine - and says there's plenty of manufacturers looking for new dealer partners

Adding to the mix

Welcome to the first dedicated Plant Hire & Construction section in *Service Dealer*.

Many machinery outlets have an interest in multiple industry sectors, across the construction, agricultural, groundcare and forestry businesses. With that in mind, we are expanding coverage to the plant sector, where there are plenty of manufacturers looking for dealer partners and multiple opportunities on offer.

PlantWorx, the largest construction equipment show of the year, has just taken place at the Newark Showground, with many exhibitors offering UK customers a first chance to see equipment that was initially launched at the massive Bauma exhibition in Munich, in April. There were still a few launches that hadn't made it to Bauma, though, giving visitors an exclusive global preview.

It was the event's first time at Newark, the previous exhibition having been held at the

old East of England Showground in Peterborough in 2023. As such, it was difficult to compare attendance directly. There was certainly a buzz among visitors though, with organisers claiming that UK equipment sales volumes are currently 10% ahead of 2024, year-on-year.

While that level of optimism may not have been repeated on every stand, there were sales taking place, with unexpected orders and interest from across the UK.

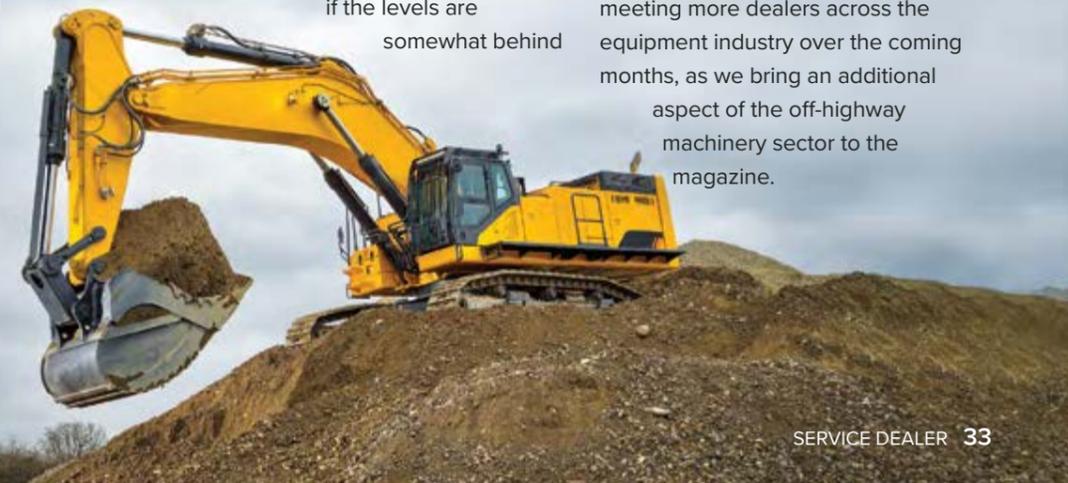
There is little doubt, however, that business confidence remains less than buoyant, and the prospect of an Autumn Budget in the coming weeks is doing little to lift the mood. Construction output is said to have grown slightly in the three months to the end of July, and anyone driving around the country cannot fail to see the amount of housebuilding that is going on, even if the levels are somewhat behind

the government's planned numbers. Significant public investment in infrastructure, education and water utilities should also be driving future growth into the coming year.

In terms of equipment development, the main drivers are still electrification, connectivity and automation, and there was plenty of evidence of all three at the show. In particular, while sales remain relatively slow, there are very few manufacturers not offering at least one full battery electric model in their lineup today.

As battery costs continue to fall and efficiency rises, there is little doubt that electric machinery will come to play a growing role in the UK construction market. It is just one of the topics that we will be looking into in more depth as we develop the plant and equipment coverage within *Service Dealer*.

I look forward to getting out and meeting more dealers across the equipment industry over the coming months, as we bring an additional aspect of the off-highway machinery sector to the magazine.





Digging deep at PlantWorx



DAN GILKES reports from Newark, where major brands unveiled their latest plant machinery for UK buyers

Construction equipment buyers headed to the Newark Showground in September for the PlantWorx 2025 exhibition, the UK's largest plant and machinery show this year.

Beneath mainly sunny skies, visitors were able to see many of the machines in action, on digging plots around

the site, with the majority of the UK's leading suppliers showing new equipment for the first time at a UK event.

With *Service Dealer* adding construction equipment market to our broad spread of coverage, we headed to PlantWorx to catch up with the latest news. These were some of the models to catch our attention.



As a proud part of the construction industry, we're pleased to support the new Plant Hire & Construction Equipment section

TORO >>>

Groundcare specialist
Toro has launched the **Dingo TX 1000 Turbo**, building on the success of the original compact tracked Dingo TX 1000.

Available in narrow or wide track layouts, the ride-on Turbo is powered by a Stage V-compliant 18.4kW (24.7hp) Yanmar diesel engine. This drives through Toro's Smart Power system, which automatically adjusts traction speed to maximise engine, auxiliary and traction torque. An auxiliary foot pedal maintains hydraulic flow to the attachment, freeing the operator's hands to control ground speed and attachment positioning.

The loader has vertical lift arms with a 2,060mm pin height, making it easy for operators to load into larger skips or smaller trucks. The machine is offered with a host of attachments, from adjustable forks and grapple buckets and rakes through to high torque augers and trenchers. There are also a range of standard and high-volume buckets available.



TAKEUCHI >>>

While Takeuchi was showing two additional battery electric mini excavators in prototype form, in the 3.5-tonne TB35e and electric micro, the big news for the company was the introduction of a range of four compact tracked loaders. Already well-established in the US market, the TL6R and TL8R-2 are radial lift models, while the TL10V-2 and TL12V-2 have vertical lift loader arms.

With tilting cabs and sturdy engine access doors, the tracked loaders have a range of auxiliary hydraulic options, to power a wide range of attachments. Stage V-compliant diesel engines deliver plenty of power, and the machines have rated capacities of 835kg and 960kg for the radial models and 1,145kg and 1,865kg for the vertical lift machines.



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KUBOTA



With one of the largest stands at the show, Kubota unveiled a host of new machinery. This included the KW095 wheeled excavator (built in cooperation with Liebherr), the 14-tonne U145 crawler excavator (manufactured with Sumitomo), the company's own SVL75-3 compact tracked loader, the recently upgraded U17-5 and U18-5 mini excavators, and an electric retrofit driveline for the KX019 and U27-4 minis. This retrofit option, which was also shown in prototype form on the KX16-4, scooped the Alternative Power Innovation prize at the PlantWorx Innovation Awards at the show. The electric driveline offers customers the opportunity to remove the diesel engine from an existing mini excavator and replace it with a battery electric driveline, creating a zero-emission machine for a fraction of the price of a new full electric mini. If necessary, the process can also be reversed, when there is no longer a requirement on-site for zero emissions, further extending the versatility of the base machine. Kubota also unveiled the KX042-5, the latest midi excavator to move from the previous Dash 4a specification to the Dash 5. With a luxurious new cab, offering considerably more space for the operator, the 4.2-tonne machine now benefits from Auto Idle and Auto Stop functions, boosting fuel economy. It's upgraded hydraulic system allows simultaneous tracking and auxiliary hydraulic use, making it an ideal machine for powered attachment operation without affecting the driveline.

JCB



JCB made a welcome return to PlantWorx this year. The company was a major sponsor of an operator skills challenge at the show had some additions to its line-up to launch. This included a non-cabbed version of its six-tonne SiTESAFE dumper, which complies with the recently-introduced EN474 safety regulations.

The 6T SiTESAFE ROPS site dumper has large access gates to either side of the ROPS structure, with heavy-duty latches. The design still allows three points of contact when getting on and off the machine, and the gates provide additional stability to the operator on rough ground, without impact visibility.

Powered by JCB's 55kW (74hp) DieselMAX diesel engine, the dumper drives through a new JCB SS670 four-speed synchroshuttle transmission. Combined with a torque converter, this new gearbox is said to offer a 45% shorter gear lever throw, use 35% less gear shifting force, and offer up to 80% less gear lever play than previous models. Using 6 litres less oil than the previous generation, and with service intervals increased to 2,000 hours, the new transmission is also said to cut service costs and downtime for regular maintenance.

SANY



Chinese manufacturer Sany has further expanded its mini excavator line-up, with the addition of the SY10U micro and the two-tonne SY20C.

Both models have expandable track widths, to allow access to confined working areas. The smaller micro model has a reduced tailswing and is powered by an 8.8kW (11.8hp) engine. The larger conventional tailswing SY20C boasts a 14.6kW (19.5hp) diesel engine. The machine is equipped with proportional controls, standard auxiliary and quickhitch piping and, in cab-only form, comes with air-conditioning as standard.

Also new for Sany was the STH625E, an electric telescopic handler. Powered by a 34kWh battery pack, the five-tonne machine offers up to eight hours of operation. Maximum lift capacity is 2.5-tonnes and the machine has a maximum lifting height of 6m.

SUNWARD



Sunward has a rapidly growing range of equipment on offer, launching two additions to its mini excavator lineup at the show.

The SWE 08F is an update of the firm's micro model, weighing 1,010kg and powered by a 7.2kW (9.6hp) diesel engine. With expandable tracks, the

compact machine offers a maximum digging depth of 1,450mm.

The SWE 50UF is a completely new model, weighing in at 5.3-tonnes. Powered by a 29.7kW (40hp) engine, the machine has a maximum digging depth of 3,375mm. The mini excavator has a zero tailswing design, and fills a

gap in the Sunward range between the 3.5 and six-tonne models.

For Sunward, there are also currently gaps in its national coverage, with the company actively seeking dealers in East Anglia, in central London, Dorset, Wiltshire, and in other smaller territories. While those new partners would be expected to market and support all of the company's excavators and loaders, Sunward is also introducing a range of access equipment, plus a number of drilling and piling rigs. In both cases, the company expects to have specialist dealers for these models, as they will require dedicated expertise and backing. Interested dealers should contact country manager Rick Still to discuss.

XCMG



Chinese manufacturer XCMG's portfolio continues to expand, with the introduction of two compact loaders and a self-propelled soil compactor.

The XC7-TV12 is a compact tracked loader, while the XC908HST is a 0.8-tonne rated compact wheeled loader. The XS135 is a 13-tonne smooth drum self-propelled roller, with a drum width of 2,130mm. Offering a static linear load of up to 382N/cm, the machine is powered by a 3.8-litre Cummins engine developing 115kW (154hp).

HYUNDAI



There were two ends of the scale represented on the Hyundai stand, with the company showing its first electric mini excavator at one end, and a 40-tonne Next Generation crawler machine on the other. The HX19e weighs in at just over two-tonnes, with a full cab and the larger of two battery options.

A standard 32kWh battery pack delivers a similar six-to-eight hours of use as many of its competitors. However, customers can also opt for a 40kWh battery which delivers at least 10 hours of typical mini excavator operation. A Type 2 connector can be used with a 110V or 230V domestic supply, or there is a DC input for a 380V supply, cutting charging time to just 2-2.5 hours.

The electric mini is powered by a 13kW motor, offering a similar output to the diesel engine in the firm's HX19A. This turns the same hydraulic pump to deliver similar digging and lifting performance and the diesel machine. Though Hyundai's first step into electric machinery, it is not expected to be long before additional battery-powered models are launched.

At the heavier end, the HX400L is one of the first two machines in Hyundai's Next Generation lineup of crawler excavators, alongside the 36-tonne HX360L. Powered by Hyundai's own diesel engines, the new machines are the company's first to use full electro-hydraulic controls. This allows operators to finetune every aspect of operation, from the responsiveness of control levers to hydraulic flows and pressures for powered attachments.

Hyundai's third new machine was the HD130A, a mid-weight dozer that takes the company into a new market segment. The first machine in the country is heading to Scotland after the show, with customer DA Johnstone. Powered by a 117kW (157hp) diesel engine, the machine has a hydrostatic transmission, a choice of standard and low ground pressure tracks, two six-way adjustable power-tilt dozer blades, and a range of rippers.



MANITOU French telehandler and access pioneer Manitou took the opportunity to show two additional models at the show. The MT1440e is a battery electric version of the company's popular MT1440. Offering a lift capacity of four-tonnes, with a maximum lift height of 13.53m, the machine joins 6m and 18m electric models in the Manitou line-up.

The electric telescopic is said to offer all-day typical working, or up to four hours of continuous use, thanks to a 63kWh battery pack. The company has also developed a rapid recharging pack that can take the battery from 10% to 80% in just 30 minutes. The MT1440e uses 56kW drive motors to deliver all-wheel drive, and, with 370mm of ground clearance, the machine is a true all-terrain construction model.

Also on show was the MRT4070, a 40m working height rotary machine with a lift capacity of up to seven tonnes.

This giant model offers a 27m outreach and 360° operation, and it is Manitou's tallest, most powerful rotating machine to date. Powered by a 157kW (211hp) diesel engine, the machine drives through a CVT transmission for easy relocation on site.



AVANT TECNO Finnish compact loader manufacturer Avant Tecno is pushing ahead with the development of a battery electric range of machines, to run alongside its diesel models. While the e513 and e527 have been in production for some time, the company displayed a prototype of the larger e727, which is expected next year, alongside an e747. The machines use battery packs developed by Avant Power in Finland, with an OptiTemp jacketed pack providing greater control of the battery's ambient operating temperature. All of the machines are said to offer all-day working capability in bulk loading operations, although this will understandably drop slightly if high-powered hydraulic attachments are in use. The machines can be charged using 3kW, 6kW or 9kW AC charging, or with a rapid DC input, providing charging in just one hour. Ideal for use indoors, or in urban sites where zero-emission running is called for, the company is also seeing rising demand from agriculture and equestrian customers.



ZOOMLION Chinese manufacturer Zoomlion was making it clear that it has openings for additional dealers at the show. The company introduced the ZS090V skid steer loader with vertical lift geometry, which boasts dual throttle control, for improved fuel efficiency. The company also unveiled the ZE55GU midi excavator, with load sensing hydraulics and a luxurious cab interior, alongside the ZE27GU zero tailswing mini excavator, that boasts air conditioning as standard.

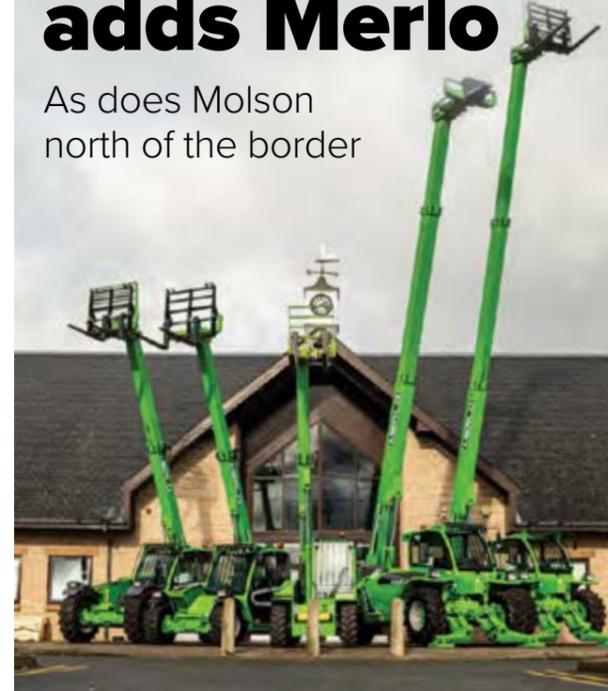


YANMAR PlantWorx provided an opportunity for many potential buyers to see the latest version of Yanmar's SV39-7 mini excavator. The 3.7-tonne machine is powered by a Stage V diesel engine developing 18.5kW (24.8hp), driving through a double variable displacement hydraulic pump. Maximum digging force is 20.8kN, or 18.9kN with the longer dipper arm option. Available with a cab or a canopy, the SV39 offers a maximum digging depth of 3,125mm, or 3,375mm with the long arm.



Ernest Doe adds Merlo

As does Molson north of the border



Telescopic handler manufacturer Merlo UK has appointed Ernest Doe Construction as an authorised construction equipment dealer.

With a network of branches across East Anglia, the East Midlands and South-East England, Doe is already a dealer for Hyundai Construction Equipment, Thwaites, Bomag, Atlas Copco and Epiroc.

The Merlo machinery line will be available from Ernest Doe's five construction branches in Albourne, Benington, Dartford, Ulting and Wymondham.

"Merlo's innovative telehandlers are a natural addition to our construction offering," said Graham Parker, sales director at Ernest Doe Construction. "Merlo's reputation for quality fits perfectly with our approach."

Merlo is also expanding its coverage in Scotland, appointing Molson Scotland as its dealer north of the border. Molson will supply the full range of Merlo telehandlers, including the electric eWorker and Hybrid Roto models, with a range of lifting capacities from 2.5-12 tonnes and lift height capabilities of 5-35m.

"We've seen growing demand for high-quality telehandlers in Scotland, and Merlo's reputation for innovation and reliability makes them the ideal partner," said Alistair Murdoch, sales director at Molson Scotland.

Wacker Neuson expands GEM

Kent-based company takes on additional areas

GEM Plant Sales has taken on an expanded sales territory for Wacker Neuson across southern England.

The Kent-based company has added Sussex, Surrey and South London to its existing Kent and South-East London areas. With a wide range of compact excavators, site dumpers, telehandlers and compaction equipment, the company is backing the expansion with the opening of a second depot in Paddock Wood.

"GEM Plant Sales has been an exceptional partner for Wacker Neuson – knowledgeable, customer-driven and proactive in growing the brand," said a Wacker Neuson spokesperson.

"The expansion is a natural progression, and will allow more customers in the South-East to benefit from the high standards of expertise that GEM delivers."



Bobcat offers limited-edition minis

Only 25 of each model to be built



As Bobcat starts production of its R2-Series mini excavators, the company has released a limited run of 50 Premiere Launch Edition models. Available only on the range-topping E19 and E20z 2-tonne models, there will be 25 units of each machine built. They feature a charcoal-grey colour, with premium red-and-black cloth and leather seat covering. With an individually-numbered cab, the minis have aluminium pedals and four normally aftermarket kits as

standard. These include a direct return to tank for the hydraulics, a top guard for the cab, travel motor hose guards, and a bucket cylinder cover.

All R2-Series machines, including the E16, E17z, E19 and E20z, come with SmartFlow load-sensing hydraulics, with a closed centre, flow-sharing valve block. An upgraded engine package promises up to 18% fuel savings, with a noise reduction of 4dB(A).



Komatsu launches two-wheeled excavators

First in the class to be offered with all-wheel steering

Komatsu has increased its wheeled excavator offer, with the launch of the PW148-11 and PW190-11.

Weighing in at 14-16 tonnes and 17-19 tonnes, respectively, the machines are powered by a four-cylinder Komatsu diesel engine, delivering 110kW (147hp) in the smaller model and 129kW (172hp) in the heavier excavator.

The excavators are Komatsu's first in the class to be offered

with all-wheel steering, with a choice of three steering modes – including the ability to crab steer away from obstacles. Joystick steering is available, and the machines are prepared to work with tilt-rotators and 3D machine guidance systems. Both machines have a low transportation height of below 3.1m, while the short, 1.8m overhang of the PW148-11 makes it ideal for confined urban construction sites.



Our company lives and breathes the specialist dealer

So says Stewart Anderson, managing director of AL-KO GARDENTECH UK and WEIBANG UK, who speaks to *Service Dealer* editor STEVE GIBBS about petrol, battery, robotics and the brands' expanding portfolios

Service Dealer: It's been a while since *Service Dealer* has caught up with AL-KO & WEIBANG. Can you bring me up to speed with any new developments the UK company has seen these past couple of years?

Stewart Anderson: There has certainly been a lot going on, which all came to light this year with the new ownership for AL-KO. Primepulse (the previous owner) and Daye are both listed on the stock market, so there was a lot of red tape to overcome across all the different countries. Stefan Kober wanted the right partner to take on the brand for the future. Daye was the perfect choice, as their manufacturing ability is in areas where

AL-KO was lacking. As you will have seen at GroundsFest, the first phase of our new portfolio was launched with new tractors, petrol and battery mowers, robotics and more. Actually, as I'm answering these questions, I am currently sitting in the airport travelling to Germany to present the next phase of our product development for 2027 and 2028. I can't help but feel the excitement and anticipation for what's to come, and I'm sure our dealers share the same sentiment.

Regarding WEIBANG, the last two years have seen remarkable growth, a testament to our product development. Our Velocity high grass mower range and new VCT low vibration petrol

engine range have truly transformed the business, instilling a sense of optimism and confidence in our future.

SD: How are your different product areas and brands faring?

SA: WEIBANG has been exceptional in developing new engines that were previously lacking in the market, offering high power and torque with low vibration, which has dramatically boosted sales of petrol products. Our core customer is the professional contractor, who works exceptionally hard and needs a product they can rely on to earn a living. Our product has been developed to meet their demands with powerful, high-performance and



Stewart with the new WEIBANG product development ...

low-vibration products for all-day use, with exceptional durability and unrivalled spare parts support. To demonstrate this, our first-time pick rate is frequently at 100%, which we are very proud of.

For AL-KO, we are very fortunate to have the Comfort and Premium Tractor ranges, as well as the MaxAirflow lawnmowers, which, in my opinion, are the best collecting machines in the world out of the box. Despite the brand's growth in 2024-2025, the focus has been on our 2026 new product lineup, which was launched at GroundsFest. Feedback from customers at the event was superb, and this has carried over into the pre-season, with sales significantly up.

SD: You recently teased about this brand extension for 2026. What can you tell us about that?

SA: I recall being at AL-KO when I was 21 years old, and all I wanted to do was develop new products. Over the last few months, I've been reliving my youth, and I have absolutely loved it. For AL-KO, we have several phases in our long-term plan, with Phase One focusing on introducing competitively priced entry-level tractors, petrol lawnmowers, robotic lawnmowers, and battery products that sit below our

existing ranges. These were areas we lacked in the past, and judging by the feedback so far, they are likely to be a massive success for the brand's growth.

Regarding WEIBANG, we have developed a new petrol engine based on our customers' feedback, with the XCV225 launching in 2026 on our commercial four-wheeled mowers. Our feedback indicated that productivity is crucial for professional contractors, as time is money – therefore, they sought a robust product that could complete the job more efficiently. The new engine offers 224cc with increased power and torque, along with VCT technology for reduced vibration, allowing operators to work faster and longer than ever before. In the latter stages of development, we conducted multiple machine field tests, each lasting over 1,000 hours, and the operators were impressed by the improved productivity and reduced vibration.

We have also expanded our Velocity range with a 53cm High Grass Mower, featuring a new crank protection system that utilises an integrated clutch. Additionally, we will introduce new categories during the 2026 season.

SD: How does your relationship with your parent company work?

SA: I'm probably the person who's worked with AL-KO longer than anyone else in the company, as I started there at the age of 21. I have a great relationship with senior management, previously with Stefan Kober and now with the senior team of Peter, Sergio, Tina, Daniel, and, in the future, the relationship with the new owner is going from strength to strength. They support me 100%, as they know I'm only here to help our customers and develop one of the leading brands in the industry. I know I'm a caretaker for the brand, and I love my job.

Many people will say I'm possibly too passionate, but that's just who I am. On a day-to-day basis, between 4am and 8am, I work with our various factories in China, and, from 8am onwards, I work with Germany and Austria. Thankfully, the time difference allows me to work with both without any issues.

SD: Tell me about your company's relationship with your dealer network?

SA: Our whole company lives and breathes the specialist dealer, and has always supported the industry since our original company was established back in 1976 by Peter Rochford.

Obviously, the industry has changed with the development of e-commerce



displaying the WEIBANG VCT Engine ...

and other channels, and as a global brand, we can't ignore that. However, our primary focus is, and always will be, the specialist dealer.

I love meeting dealers. We haven't hosted UK roadshows for several years, and I miss them, so I aim to reintroduce them in the near future, along with technical seminars if that's what dealers want.

SD: What do you expect from your dealers, and what can they expect back in return from yourselves?

SA: We expect committed dealers who want to grow their business, represent our brands, and build long-term relationships. In return, we aim to offer the most comprehensive portfolio of high-quality products for their showroom, increase their profitability, and provide the best customer support in the industry. To give you an example, I review the spare parts backorder report twice a day. If something isn't available, I will either remove it from the new machine or arrange for it to be shipped from the factory, which I can do within 3 days from China.

Additionally, we ensure that our dealers have workshops with skilled technical staff, and are regularly visited by their area sales manager. We have a great team of experienced people in



and showing off the new AL-KO battery range

the office that are always ready to help our dealers.

SD: Are you looking to expand your network?

SA: Absolutely. We now have the products we have been missing in the past, so this opens up numerous opportunities for 2026. We only want to work with quality dealers with whom we can build long-standing relationships. We are not a company seeking quick business, but, rather, have dealers who want to work in partnership to develop both our businesses in the long term.

SD: Are you seeing routes to market change and adapt for your domestic and professional products?

SA: The truth is, for AL-KO, we have an extensive portfolio of products that we currently do not offer in the UK and Ireland. AL-KO works in all channels, with dealers, DIY and e-commerce. Since they acquired the Solo brand, they have had a clear strategy of AL-KO being available across all channels, and Solo by AL-KO only being available from specialist dealers to avoid conflict and margin erosion. We are a specialist dealer company, although we must work across multiple channels to survive and grow for the future, just like every other major manufacturer.

Over time, you will see more products added to the Solo by AL-KO range, including more entry-level competitive models that allow dealers to compete and generate revenue. Online markets are something we can't ignore, but we will work with dealers to ensure profitable service work for the future. Regarding DIY, we offer many products, such as smaller 18V tools and watering products, which are not typically specialist dealer products.

Regarding change, we view social media as an emerging market, with a large number of people across various age groups. It's an area we intend to be active in.

SD: With the increasing use of battery-power, how do you feel about that market becoming more competitive?

SA: We currently offer two platforms within AL-KO: the new 18/36V platform, which is ideal for smaller gardens, benefiting from the low weight and manoeuvrability of 18V tools. However, thanks to dual-voltage technology, it can also deliver the power of 36V for more demanding jobs. Our second platform is our 36V range, which is suitable for larger gardens and offers more performance and more premium tools.



The AL-KO & WEIBANG team at this year's GroundsFest

SD: Is there still space for petrol-powered machines in your portfolio, and, indeed, the marketplace?

SA: As I mentioned previously, there is still a significant market for petrol-powered machines, as these are the bread and butter for dealers and their service work. Please, don't get me wrong: battery has many benefits, and is becoming a key part of the industry, but there are some products for which they are not currently suitable, and there are some customers for whom petrol is genuinely a better choice when it comes to investment.

People have said to me that petrol is dead. I disagree: you only have to look at the automotive industry, where the leading players have all gone big on battery and scaled back petrol/diesel production. Yet, when the demand wasn't there for the battery, they redistributed investment across both platforms, which is where we will be for the foreseeable future.

If I take WEIBANG as an example, we build extremely heavy-duty commercial machines, and we have not currently found a battery solution that can come close to our latest-generation petrol engines. We will add battery in the future, but I will only do it when it meets

our performance and price criteria.

At the end of the day, my job is not to dictate to our customers what they need. Instead, it's to listen to what their dealership needs and supply it.

SD: How do you differentiate your battery-powered tools in the minds of domestic and professional end-users?

SA: We currently only offer domestic battery tools. Our 36V AL-KO platform is moving in that direction. Still, it is primarily designed for heavy domestic use and serves as a staple range for specialist dealers to complement our petrol offerings.

SD: Some dealers tell us they are uneasy with the transition to battery from petrol-powered tools. What would you say to them?

SA: Many dealers would feel uneasy about the thought of battery taking over, due to the competitive nature of the category and the potential reduction in service work. However, as I've mentioned before, a blend of the two power sources is where we will ultimately end up, which presents an excellent opportunity for dealers who are open-minded.

SD: A dealer reader wrote to us last year saying, "Electric propulsion does not adequately replace internal

combustion, yet there seems to be some blind faith that the technology will miraculously get better." How do you respond to that?

SA: If I return to my WEIBANG example, we cannot replicate the performance of our latest engine technology – which, by the way, already meets the upcoming EURO 6 regulations. In theory, we could make it work, but the amount of power required would make the product unaffordable. Therefore, until we can achieve what our customers demand, we will continue as we are.

SD: The lack of service work with battery tools is also something that some of our dealer readers have expressed concerns about. What do you say to them?

SA: I would agree with them – specialist dealers need a blend of business, petrol engines and specialised products for service work, as well as battery, to meet specific user demands. Dealers need cashflow 52 weeks a year, so service work is an integral part of that. However, for products such as robotics, I encourage dealers to focus on embracing the technology, as this is a profit centre for service work, offering specialist knowledge, storage, installations, etcetera. Robotics is a tech industry, and dealers need to establish



The RTK Robolinho robotic mower

themselves as the 'specialist' in the eyes of the customer.

SD: How important are robotic mowing solutions to your offering going forwards?

SA: I'm old-school and love traditional lawnmowers and tractors, but I also recognise the potential that robotics has in the industry. Robotics has undergone significant changes in the last 12 months, with new manufacturers entering the market and innovative advancements emerging. You need to look at our latest product from AL-KO, a compact robot that covers 500m² without any boundary wire and which features integrated vision technology.



Place it on the lawn and press 'go.' What's more, the customer can have all of this for under £600, so it's becoming much closer to traditional petrol and

electric mower price points, and will continue to do so in the future.

We have also launched a range of RTK models for lawns up to 5,000m², and have dedicated teams working on our next robotic platform, so you'll be seeing a lot more from us in the future.

SD: AL-KO traditionally have a prominent presence at many of the major professional turfcare machinery shows. Are these still important to you?

SA: Yes, absolutely. GroundsFest was our focus for this year, and the volume of people we spoke to was phenomenal. I would say that, due to how busy we were at the show, we didn't have the opportunity to speak to everyone, which was not ideal and one of the reasons we are looking at roadshows again. We will be undertaking more activities moving forward, as the next phase of new products arrives, along with UK roadshows and technical seminars. We also understand that dealers can't attend every show throughout the year, so we have built a filming studio for product videos, where we can create sales training, technical, service and more content for dealers and consumers to benefit from.

SD: AL-KO & WEIBANG are Principal Sponsor of the Service Dealer Conference & Awards this year. Can you say why that's something you chose to do?

SA: I really enjoyed our UK roadshows and dealer days, which is something we haven't done for a few years. I love speaking to dealers to share ideas, and, without these discussions, I don't get feedback to improve our business or products. It's the perfect time to speak to our dealers, and share the future of the AL-KO brand.

SD: What advice do you have for dealers during a tough season?

SA: There will always be a bad season in this industry. I encourage dealers to set aside some profits during the good years, and work with suppliers who support them with products and spare parts, offering next-day service. Do what you think is right for your business at pre-season. If you're having a tough time, please don't hesitate to pick up the phone and speak with us. Most of our dealers have faced challenges at one time or another, but we work through them together and build stronger relationships.

SD: What do you see as the future for AL-KO & WEIBANG in the UK?

SA: AL-KO will experience significant growth over the next three years, solidifying its position as a genuine 'A' brand, and I believe that AL-KO will become the leading brand in the garden machinery industry. WEIBANG had the official opening of our new factory on September 30, which I had a live video feed to congratulate the team on this achievement. As we move into our new factory, we have already begun phase two of the factory expansion to meet global demand. We offer the best commercial machines available on the market today, and our goal is to become the leading supplier of commercial machinery in the UK and Europe.

SD: Thank you.



All the info on Agritechnica

New Holland, Claas and Fendt forage maize kernel crackage monitoring systems are all based on discharge chute-mounted cameras.

It's time again for Agritechnica, the world's biggest farm machinery show – taking place in Hannover, Germany, from Nov 9-15. This year, in addition to our planned post-event report, MARTIN RICKATSON previews the show and provides some info on medal-winning new products.

Despite the agricultural downturn, Agritechnica returns this November with sold-out stand space and plenty new to see.

Speaking at September's pre-show press meeting, when manufacturers reveal some of their planned launches, Lothar Hovelmann, CEO of Agritechnica organiser the DLG, noted that environmental issues, war, economics and tariffs were all impacting farmer spend and the income of manufacturers and dealers, exacerbated by moderate grain demand and global surpluses.

He said: "However, we can see positivity. Our pre-show research indicates 40% of 2,000 European

arable farmers we surveyed anticipate an upturn of sorts in the next year. Over half the dairy and the pig farmers surveyed also anticipate enhanced returns from improved prices versus feed grain costs. In the next 12 months, almost half those we surveyed plan investment in cultivation machinery, and 43.6% in tractors."

The rapid pace of agricultural growth from 1960-2020, based primarily on intensification, has slowed and stalled, he noted, but there are multiple factors developing for which dealers can offer solutions to farmers.

He told us: "Catch crops, extended rotations and reduced tillage are increasingly being preferred as European farmers' vehicles for

improving soil health, requiring new establishment answers. Labour sourcing and cost challenges also mean greater demand for automated technology."

Market and economic trends

Tobias Ehrhard, MD of the VDMA, Germany's equivalent of the AEA, noted the current economic downturn in agriculture had begun just prior to Agritechnica 2023, with Europe's machinery industry output dropping 28% since then to €11bn.

"In this part of Europe, we can see some light, though. Order intakes are rising, primarily in tractors, tillage, fertiliser and crop protection equipment.

Dealer stock levels are falling, a sign of increasing demand, and the supply bottlenecks of Covid times are past. But, although the European machinery industry is beginning an anticipated upturn, uncertainties remain and new risks emerge. Around a third of global farm equipment comes from Europe, and 70% of EU agricultural machinery export volume is impacted by the recently-announced additional US tariffs. However, we are anticipating the EU reopening negotiations to exclude European agricultural machinery."

Innovation Award winners

Some **2,700 exhibitors** from **52 countries** will fill the Hannover exhibition centre's **23 vast halls** - stand space has been sold out, despite agriculture's difficulties - and the DLG expects a seven-day attendance of **430,000**.

Some of the major launches planned for the show were revealed at the announcement of the Agritechnica Innovation Awards, judged by **36 farmers**, researchers and other agriculturists. From **243 entries**, the judges awarded **22 silver medals**, for innovations offering improvements in function and process, benefiting workload and quality, and improving reliability. Two gold medals were awarded for products presenting new concepts or changed functionality, with practical benefits for profitability, processes, the environment, energy use, workload and safety.

With a new design concept, and set to form a further range above the existing Quadrant, the new **Claas 120 x 90cm big baler** - as yet unnamed - is reckoned capable of up to 70t/hr straw

throughput and constant bale densities of 210kg/m³, with up to 235kg/m³ at peak performance. Key design criteria include a main gearbox integrated into the frame, for linear power flow. It drives two 202kg longitudinal 1,650rpm flywheels, starting one after the other. Once the flywheels are up to speed, the packer ram and then rotor are sequentially engaged, spreading the load on tractor and baler.

Claas also won silver for the CVT drivetrain management technology in its forthcoming new Axion tractors, based on algorithm-interpreted efficiency performance maps for the engine, gearbox and hydraulic system. In 'Auto Load Anticipation' mode, the system notes the power requirements and load jumps during a first field pass. During subsequent passes, engine speed and gear ratios are then automatically adjusted before these load jumps occur. With 'Fuel Optimised Load Control,' the engine operates on the lowest specific consumption curve in the partial load range. Conversely, 'Auto Droop' is aimed at full load, ensuring maximum possible power delivery to the transmission. 'Hydraulic Flow Adaption' adjusts oil delivery to implement needs, while 'Engine Boost Management' analyses and boosts as necessary the power feed from engine to PTO and transmission.

Tractor Assisted Guidance Systems (TAGS) will feature in new 'upper-mid class' six-cylinder tractors to be launched at Agritechnica by **SDF/Deutz-Fahr**. Technology includes 'lane keeping assistant,' 'cornering assistant' and 'object/person recognition' functions, like those in some cars and trucks. An additional 'Advanced' package extends this with

adaptive cruise control, with collision warning and traffic sign recognition.

Lemken's iQblue Fan Automation drill development records initial air intake volume and uses this information as a control variable depending on seed/fertiliser flow rate and the mass to be delivered. Air intake volume and the manufacturer calibrated vacuum are correlated. iQblue Fan Automation works through a simple display to automate fan control via an ISOBUS application and iQblue connect. The system can also handle large drills and combinations with multiple fans.

Amazone's AutoSpread self-adjusting fertiliser spreader technology continuously monitors spread direction and distribution distance via radar, for an electronic all-round spread pattern view, meaning spreading trays/mats are no longer necessary for spread assessments. Autonomous spreader settings generate a live spreading pattern continuously validated in the field by AI and compared with its 'digital twin' from original spreading hall tests. This enables continuous autonomous response to inconsistent fertiliser qualities. The operator is immediately alerted to any problems from worn or clogged spreading mechanisms.

Amazone also won silver, alongside **Sky** (formerly Sulky), for AI-based fertiliser recognition systems. Amazone's EasyMatch and Sky's FertiEye are smartphone solutions using image analysis and AI to determine granule characteristics and automatically determine appropriate spreader settings without laboratory or spreading tests.

Amazone's EasyMatch operates with



With a new twin flywheel concept, the new Claas 120 x 90cm big baler is reckoned capable of up to 70t/hr straw throughput and constant bale densities of 210kg/m³

Sky (shown here) and Amazone have developed AI-based fertiliser recognition systems to enhance application accuracy without tray testing.



Horsch ProActive BoomControl uses 3D radar sensor data to model the boom's target surface 5-10m ahead, then proactively adjusts it.



a reference template and uses a simple photograph to create a digital fingerprint with over 250 parameters. It compares the data with a comprehensive fertiliser database and immediately provides the correct settings, even for unknown fertiliser products. Sky's FertiEye combines a simple sample preparation system with optimised image analysis. It separates individual granules, calibrates colour and geometry, and uses this not only to calculate particle sizes, but also ballistic flight characteristics, for precision prediction of spreading width and quality.

German spreader specialist **Rauch**, whose products are marketed in the UK by Kuhn, also won silver. VarioSmart, its improved boundary spreading system, enables infinite speed 900-400rpm regulation of the right-hand disc on mechanical PTO drive spreaders. This enables more precise boundary spreading in sharply narrowing boundary spread patterns, thereby cutting wastage and contamination risks.

Developed by **Einböck** and **Claas E-Systems**, the silver-winning Einböck Smart-Hill develops the maker's camera-controlled Row-Guard hoe moving frame. A high-resolution Claas Culti-Cam stereo camera analyses colour information and 3D surface

models to precisely register slope gradient. An integrated implement computer processes the collected data in real time and automatically adjusts the hoe for drift. In combination with existing control systems, Smart-Hill is reckoned to enable higher working speeds with no impact on precision.

Horsch ProActive BoomControl uses 3D radar sensor data to model the full sprayer boom width's target surface 5-10m ahead, then proactively adjusts the boom. Radar sensor cones overlap, and the values of all sensors are compared. Consequently, distance between nozzle and target area is maintained more precisely across the full boom width. Difficulties caused by reflections on the spray fan, which can occur when using double flat fan nozzles with ultrasonic sensors, are also eliminated. Universal scanning also enables estimation of crop density, allowing the control system to be used as a smart sensor for variable-rate application.

Yield EyeQ scanner technology for **Geringhoff** combine headers uses high-resolution cameras to scan for grain heads on the ground and record pre-harvest losses. If the operator then alters header setting – by altering reel position, for example – any change in grain losses is then

displayed. Mapped pre-harvest and pick-up losses can also be used to aid further crop production decisions, and the difference between grown and actual grain yield can be calculated, particularly for potentially high loss crops such as beans or peas.

Claas earned another silver for its new 1000 series Jaguar forage harvesters, with a maximum power output of 1,110hp but a 3.30m width on 800mm tyres. Central to the all-new design are assemblies coordinated to match the widest material flow channel, with its 910mm width. A new V-Flex chopping cylinder configuration enables installation of various drum options, changing only the ring segments and knives. New headers include grass pick-ups up to 4.5m and maize headers up to 10.5m. Both are driven via two independent drivetrains. The pick-up has a tighter auger pitch and a shorter distance to the crop intake, plus direct drives via shafts and gearboxes. Reel and intake auger speeds can be controlled independently, and adjusted to chop length and forward speed.

A flatter rotor inclination is better for turning when grass is broadly distributed after tedding, because the tines' contact area with the stubble is increased, and therefore more consistent pick-up is assured, reasons **Krone**, resulting in a more consistent dry matter content. Its OptiSet development provides simple central and infinite adjustment of all rotors' spreading angles simultaneously and infinitely from 13-19° by remote control.

Claas, Fendt and **New Holland** all won silver for forage maize kernel crackage monitoring systems, which work in a similar fashion. Like Fendt's ForageQualityCam and New Holland's ForageCam, the Claas Cemos Auto Chopping assistance system uses a camera on the discharge chute. This uses artificial intelligence to analyse chopped material structure and then calculate the current corn silage processing score (CSPS), which determines kernel crackage levels. A CSPS display aids cracker gap adjustment decisions relating to current harvesting conditions.

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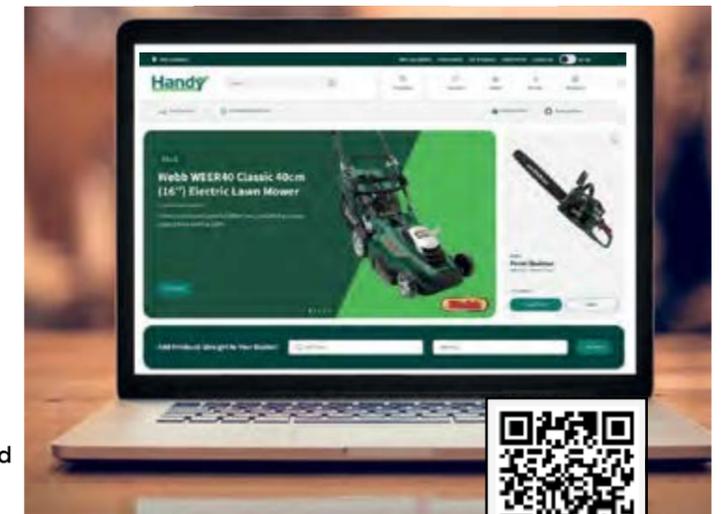
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BUSINESS MONITOR

Taking the temperature of the dealer network, sponsored by STIHL

Dealers' business down across the board

HOW HAS YOUR OVERALL BUSINESS BEEN COMPARED TO 2024?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR **64%**
 ABOUT THE SAME **23%**
 UP ON LAST YEAR **13%**

SALES WORKSHOP
 SERVICE PARTS
 STAFF %

Even workshops haven't made up the shortfall for some this year

The results of our Autumn 2025 survey indicated that independent dealers have found this season a struggle, with those who responded saying that, unlike in 2024, a shortfall in sales has not been made up for via the workshop.

On the key question of how their overall business compares to 2024, 64% who answered said it was down on the previous year - with only 14% saying it had shown improvement.

Wholegoods sales were - somewhat unsurprisingly, given all that we've heard anecdotally this year - described by many respondents (68%) as being down on last year. This is of course far from ideal when that was also cited as the most popular response to the question 12 months ago.

And unlike in 2024, when service revenue was the saving grace for many, just over half (55%) of our survey respondents told us that their workshops have seen a lower level of activity.

Elsewhere, we were told that parts sales have also seen a downturn for plenty of dealers, and most had maintained staffing levels - with no-one telling us they had increased numbers.

How have your machine sales (wholegoods) performed this year against 2024?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR **68%** ABOUT THE SAME **18%** UP ON LAST YEAR **14%**

How has your service department or workshop performed this year compared with 2024?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR **55%** ABOUT THE SAME **27%** UP ON LAST YEAR **18%**

How have your parts and accessories sales performed this year compared with 2024?

DOWN ON LAST YEAR **50%** ABOUT THE SAME **27%** UP ON LAST YEAR **23%**

How have your staffing levels been this year compared to 2024?

STAYED THE SAME **77%** DOWN ON LAST YEAR **23%**

“Your say”

We asked: navigating the ups and downs of the season, what have you found has worked particularly well for your dealership this year?

- Great start and good sales up till early July, then dead. Workshop had been very busy up till early August - a month early to be quiet.
- We have had a perfect year weatherwise unlike most of the UK, and, as usual, a personal touch and fast response works well. Robot sales are up, but response with issues has to be very quick. Good stock levels always work well, and the suppliers who match this gain.
- Robots are good, but wired robots are dead stock now. Ride-on sales are down along with high-quality machinery. Cheap machines are selling.
- The early season with the right amount of sun and rain got us off to a good start. As a relatively new dealer to the area (Nov 2023), we spent 2024 with people getting to know us and increasing our customer base. 2025 should have been better. So our sales have managed to stay similar, and perhaps increase in some areas - like handheld tools - whilst mowers have been significantly down. If the weather had been different, it would have been a spectacular year.
- We use the slower periods to refine operations, train staff. Build a financial cushion during peak seasons to cover expenses during slower periods. Try not to overstock. Keep away from bulk discounts, as this ties up capital that could be used for other business needs.
- Disastrous year. We are a small business, have traded since 1992, and usually have a turnover of around £500,000. This year, we are £150,000 down, so will make a loss.
- Service to machinery other than lawn mowers is good.
- Tight control on stock and overheads.
- Service and repairs well up on previous year, with good-quality machines and repairs. Sales well down, not even decent enquires.
- Our robot sales have finally taken off with the newer wireless ranges, after having taken on more suppliers offering more choices.

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How (and when) to raise your labour rate



Sara Hey, president of business development at Bob Clements International – the dealership development company based in Missouri, shares the insights she offers U.S. dealers with *Service Dealer's* UK readership every issue.

This issue: Sara discusses what rates to charge for your workshop's time.

Let's be real. Most dealers figure out their labour rate the same way they figure out what pizza to order on Friday night – they call around and go with whatever the neighbour is doing.

Easy, sure. Smart? Not really. Copying the dealer down the road has nothing to do with what it actually costs you to run a profitable service department.

Start with your techs

Your labour rate has to begin with what it takes to get and keep technicians. Period. If you cannot afford to pay great techs, you will be forever short-staffed, behind schedule, and praying somebody finally calls you back for a job interview.

Here is a good gut-check: you should be able to pay an A-level technician about 30 percent of your posted labour rate. So, if you are charging £90 an hour, that means you have room to pay your top tech

around £27 an hour. If your current rate does not leave that kind of margin, your maths is upside-down, and it is time to make a change.

Timing is everything

The 'when' is almost as important as the 'how much.' Do not raise your labour rate in the middle of your slow season. That is when customers have time to shop around and complain. Instead, bump your rate right before you head into busy season. At that point, your customers are more interested in getting their equipment fixed fast than they are in saving £10.

Take care of your best customers

Here is one of my favourite strategies: raise your labour rate by £10 an hour, then give your loyal customers a £10 per hour 'preferred customer discount' for buying from you. New customers come in at the

new rate. Your long-term customers feel like VIPs. And you actually protect your margins while still showing loyalty to the people who keep your lights on.

Keep your service department healthy

Your service department should be generating 15 percent of your total dealership revenue. Anything less and you are vulnerable. Sure, parts and wholegoods might carry you for a while, but a weak service department is like a wobbly stool – it will not hold you up for long.

What you can do today

- 1. Run the maths.** Can you pay a top-level tech 30 percent of your posted labour rate? If not, raise it.
- 2. Circle the calendar.** Plan your rate increase for just before your busy season.
- 3. Roll out a preferred customer discount program.** It is a win-win: more margin for you, loyalty perks for them.
- 4. Check your revenue mix.** If service is not at least 15 percent of your gross, it is time to dig deeper.

At the end of the day, raising your labour rate is not just about charging more. It is about building a service department that can attract great techs, keep customers happy, and actually carry its weight in your dealership's bottom line.



Reflecting on the season and looking ahead



In his final Diary entry, **Les Gammie**, of Gammies Groundcare, considers an early end to the season, winter stocking, and the great value of industry events.

As the year draws to a close, changes are in the air. The weather may have begun its familiar shift, but this season has felt anything but typical. An early start, an unusually lean mid-season, and now what appears to be an early finish have all contributed to a sense of unpredictability that's becoming more common in recent years - and I fear the crystal ball is about to sink.

What will 2026 bring? A difficult question, but one that needs to be considered as manufacturers begin to look for winter stock orders and yearly plans. Trying to anticipate Scottish weather has always been a gamble, but, in recent years, it feels even more so. The only real certainty is uncertainty. So all we can do is prepare the best we can, and adapt to whatever comes our way.

For us now, though, an early finish to the season means our focus is already shifting. Our workshop has transitioned quickly into service mode, preparing for the influx of machines coming in for their winter check-ups, and, at the same time, we're getting our winter maintenance equipment ready for its time in the spotlight.

This time of year, also brings about an abundance of manufacturer conferences, looking to review the year's performance and preview what's in store for 2026. These conferences are incredibly valuable. They allow us to take a step back and reflect on the challenges and success of the year, gain insights into new developments we can look forward to, and provide the all-important opportunity to catch up with our manufacturers and fellow dealerships.

However, like anything in life, these opportunities don't come without their challenges. With the majority of UK

manufacturer conferences held in England, Scottish dealers like us are often faced with additional travel time and associated costs, both regarding the time away from the depot and travelling expenses. As a dealer which represents multiple brands, the logistics of juggling all these conferences becomes even more complex, with many of these events scheduled within the same tight timeframe. Despite this, these conferences are still vital. In a time where the market and climate are becoming increasingly unpredictable, staying informed and connected is more important than ever.

One of the highlights for me recently has been GroundFest 2025. This show was everything the industry needs. We made the journey through to attend, and it was absolutely worth it. With a large outdoor setting perfect for live machinery demonstrations, it was a great way to see these machines in action while being able to speak with the manufacturers. I was amazed by just how many robotic mower brands were out there. It's clear to see how much automatic and smart technology

is quickly becoming a core part of our industry. It really was a great event which brings the industry together.

As we step into the last few months of the year, the question on many dealers' minds is: what lies ahead? The uncertainty around weather and market trends always keeps us on our toes, but it also drives us to adapt and plan more strategically than ever. There are certainly going to be challenges ahead, but we are ready to meet whatever 2026 brings, because, in the end, the grass always grows.





SME DIGEST

Advice for small and medium-sized enterprises

Edited by Adam Bernstein



MANAGEMENT

Five performance management mistakes to avoid

Poor performance can significantly impact a business, undermining efficiency, morale, and overall success, writes Kyle Williams, HR / Employment Law consultant at Worknest

Poor performance can significantly impact a business, undermining efficiency, morale, and overall success.

Effective performance management is key to addressing these issues and maintaining a positive and productive workplace where employees are motivated to reach their full potential. However, it can be difficult to get it right and it's an area where many organisations falter.

So, where do managers go wrong, what are the most common mistakes, and how can they be avoided?

Understanding this will help tackle performance management challenges while protecting the business against legal risks.

Worryingly, there are plenty of cases on the government's Employment Tribunal Decisions website involving retailers – some 2,400 if the word 'retail' is searched for, and more than 1,500 relating to unfair dismissal - (including Mrs A Robertson v Ris Retail Ltd: 4112519/2019 where the claimant was awarded a total of £26,005.20).

Getting the process wrong could prove expensive.

1 Failure to implement a fair process

The cornerstone of effective performance management is a fair and transparent process. When performance issues arise, it's important to investigate them thoroughly, providing the employee

with both time and a chance to improve.

Managers should consider factors such as disabilities or personal circumstances that might affect performance. For instance, if an employee's performance dips due to health-related issues, exploring reasonable adjustments to their workload or environment may be necessary. A consistent approach is vital – if one employee is given one or two months to improve, all employees in similar situations should be afforded the same opportunity. This consistency lowers the risk of claims for unfair dismissal, and boosts morale by fostering a sense of fairness.

Next, it would help to develop a documented performance management policy. It should include clear steps for escalation and resolution, and ensure all managers are trained to apply the policy uniformly. Utilise Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) that outline specific goals, timeframes and supportive measures.

2 Addressing performance issues as misconduct

A common mistake that employers often make is the confusion between performance issues and matters of concern that fall into the category of misconduct.

Performance issues relate to an employee's ability to fulfil their role to the expected standard, and should be

managed via the performance management procedure. This includes offering constructive feedback and support to help the employee improve.

In contrast, *misconduct* involves breaches of company policy or conduct standards, and should be addressed through the disciplinary process. Keeping these processes distinct helps ensure that performance management remains a growth-oriented exercise, rather than a punitive one.

It's important to ensure that managers are educated to identify and categorise issues correctly. Regular training and clear examples of what constitutes performance issues versus misconduct, can prevent misclassification.

3 Insufficient support or opportunities for improvement

Employers have a responsibility to provide adequate support and opportunities for employees to enhance their performance. This means more than just annually reviewing performance – it involves ongoing feedback and a structured plan for improvement.

Employees should be given realistic targets and timelines for improvement, supported by training or resources if needed. Simply stating 'you're not performing, so you're out' isn't adequate or fair, and can affect the legality of any dismissal decision. By facilitating a supportive environment and clearly

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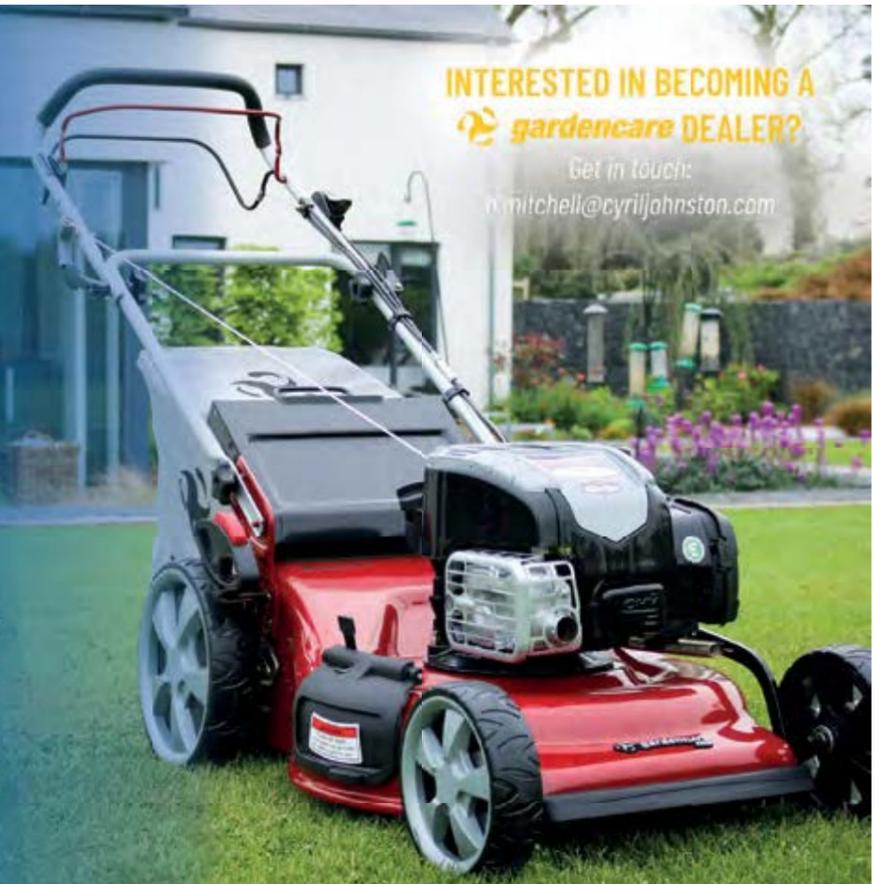
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outlining pathways for improvement, organisations can foster a motivated and productive workforce.

Employers should encourage monthly check-ins between employees and managers to discuss progress and address any concerns promptly. Providing access to professional development programmes or workshops can empower employees to raise their performance levels.

4 Inadequate documentation

Proper documentation is a critical component of an effective performance management process. Employers should meticulously document every step, from meetings and feedback sessions to action plans and follow-ups.

Thorough documentation not only provides a clear record of the process followed, but also supports any actions taken, helping to protect the employer against legal risks. Documenting the rationale behind decisions, the support offered, and the outcomes can demonstrate fairness and transparency, which is invaluable if challenged.

5 Discriminatory practices

It's crucial that employers ensure that their performance management procedures are equitable and free from discrimination. In situations where an employee's poor performance is attributable to or exacerbated by a disability, it's imperative to adhere to a comprehensive and equitable capability process.

Initially, employers should engage in discussions with the underperforming employee to assess performance-related issues and understand how their disability influences both their personal life and job performance. It's equally important for employers to clearly articulate the expected standards of work and, again, to explore reasonable adjustments.

When determining what adjustments are reasonable, the business should take into account both the nature of the employee's disability and the specific demands of their role. The objective is to establish an environment where employees with disabilities can function effectively without encountering significant obstacles.

Examples of supportive measures that could be offered to any employee

include providing additional training or support, enabling flexible working arrangements, modifying an employee's role, reassigning non-essential duties, or even adapting performance assessments or capability procedures to consider the impact of their disability.

Employers should meticulously document the discussions held with the employee, detailing any agreed adjustments or those not implemented, along with the reasons why. Additionally, employers should gather and consider all relevant evidence, including occupational health assessments and other pertinent medical information, before progressing to formal action. Keeping a record of the employee's perspective on how much time they might need to take off due to their disability is also beneficial.

Moreover, employers should not shy away from addressing performance issues simply because an employee is disabled. If an employee isn't informed that their performance is subpar and formal action is taken against them, the employer may risk facing disability discrimination and/or unfair dismissal claims.



Responding to sexual harassment complaints

According to an Acas survey, 14% of employers and 6% of employees have witnessed sexual harassment in their workplace, says Melinda Clements, HR consultant.

By now, most should be aware of new legislation introduced last October (2024), which places a proactive duty on employers to take "reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment, as defined by the Equality Act of 2010, includes "any unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature." This can range from verbal comments to actions outside of the workplace – and it's not excusable.

To be classed as sexual harassment, the unwanted behaviour must have either violated someone's dignity, or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone.

It can be sexual harassment if the behaviour has one of these effects, even if it wasn't intended. Notably, the law applies to employees, workers, contractors, self-employed, and job applicants.

As to what sexual harassment looks like, it can be a one-off incident or an

ongoing pattern of behaviour. It can also happen on calls, online or via email, as well as in person.

Examples include making sexual remarks about someone's appearance, asking about someone's sex life, telling sexually offensive jokes, making sexual comments or jokes about someone's sexual orientation or gender reassignment, displaying or sharing pornographic or sexual images or other sexual content, touching someone against their will, and sexual assault or rape.

Crucially, what some people might consider joking can still be sexual harassment.

Laws that protect against sexual harassment

Employers need to be aware of two key pieces of legislation:

The Equality Act 2010: This is designed to protect people against various forms of discrimination and harassment, including sex discrimination and sexual harassment.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023:

Brought into effect on 26 October 2024, this law focuses on preventing sexual harassment. If it has already happened, an employer should take action to stop it happening again.

Under the law, employers have responsibilities in relation to sexual harassment. They must take steps to prevent sexual harassment occurring in the first place, and also have a duty of care to protect the wellbeing of their staff, ensuring a safe and supportive work environment.

And where the harassment is committed by a third party, such as a customer, supplier or contractor, it should be treated as seriously as that by a colleague.

As to the risks employers face in relation to sexual harassment: very simply, failing to properly prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace can lead to disputes and Employment Tribunal claims, including:

Sexual harassment claims: Employers can be held vicariously liable for the actions of their employees, meaning they may be responsible for any harassment that occurs within the scope of employment.

Constructive dismissal: Employees may claim constructive dismissal if they feel they have no choice but to resign due to the employer's failure to address sexual harassment or create a safe work environment.

Discrimination: In addition to the employer, individual employees may also face discrimination complaints and legal action. Employers must ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities and the potential consequences of their actions.

Dealing with a sexual harassment complaint

When faced with an allegation of sexual harassment, employers need to act.

Treat it seriously Where an employee, worker, contractor or job applicant says that they are experiencing sexual harassment of any kind it's essential that the complaint is taken seriously. Employers have a legal duty to undertake a reasonable investigation of

the allegations.

They must not base responses or subsequent actions on whether they believe the individual's allegations or feel that the complaint is justified.

Maintain fairness and sensitivity

Next, employers need to ensure that they handle that complaint in a fair, sensitive and impartial manner. They must consider how the individual would like their complaint to be resolved. However, employers must also keep in mind their duty to protect all staff, which may require them to take further action even if they do not wish to pursue the matter.

At the same time, employers need to consider any support that may be offered to the person raising the concerns and the individual who the complaint is about. This may be an employee assistance scheme, counselling, and HR / line management support.

Ensure confidentiality The third step is to respect the confidentiality of all parties, and to ask those involved in the process to do the same. This protects privacy, prevents misinformation, and ensures fairness.

It's important to clearly communicate that breaching confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action.

Look into the complaint quickly

Allegations of sexual harassment are likely to be stressful for all, and prolonging the situation can make things worse. It's therefore imperative that the employer deals with complaints as quickly as possible, and without undue delay.

Speak to the complainant The employer must get the complainant's account, and keep minutes of the conversation. This is a fact-finding exercise to gather information, identify witnesses, and provide recorded evidence of the investigation.

If the complaint may amount to a criminal offence, speak to the individual about whether they want to report the matter to the police. A suspected criminal offence may change the way the investigation proceeds. For example, they may decide to pause the process so as not to prejudice a criminal investigation.

Address the matter in line with internal procedures

For employees, addressing the matter is likely to involve the grievance procedure, although they employer may have a separate dignity at work / anti-bullying and harassment procedure, or even a sexual harassment policy and procedure.

But for the employer, in addition to speaking with the complainant to understand their concerns, the procedure is likely to include notifying the individual accused of the allegations against them, investigating the concerns with the accused and any potential witnesses, gathering evidence (such as emails, phone records and recordings), and checking relevant policies, holding a formal meeting with the complainant (with the right to be accompanied), providing a written outcome letter to the complainant with the right of appeal, and providing a written outcome letter to the alleged harasser.

The employer may also need to consider suspending the alleged harasser, or making other temporary changes to working arrangements pending the outcome of the investigation if circumstances require.

Taking appropriate action The way in which the issue is resolved will depend on the facts of the case, but options include an informal discussion, counselling, mediation, or formal disciplinary procedures. Serious cases may result in dismissal for gross misconduct.

But if a disciplinary process is followed and a sanction is given, the accused employee must be provided an option to appeal against any disciplinary sanction.

Evaluate the process and consider recommendations

Once the process has concluded, the employer must consider any lessons learned, and implement necessary changes to its policies and procedures. Managers and staff should be informed of these updates, and provided with training to reinforce expectations and prevent future issues.

Summary

Allegations of this nature are serious, and need to be dealt with properly – and fairly. But whatever is alleged, the employer should not brush allegations under the carpet.



Products

FORESTRY

Top-handled option from EGO

For arborists' off-ground work

EGO Power+ has expanded its range for arborists and forestry professionals with the addition of a top-handled professional chainsaw.

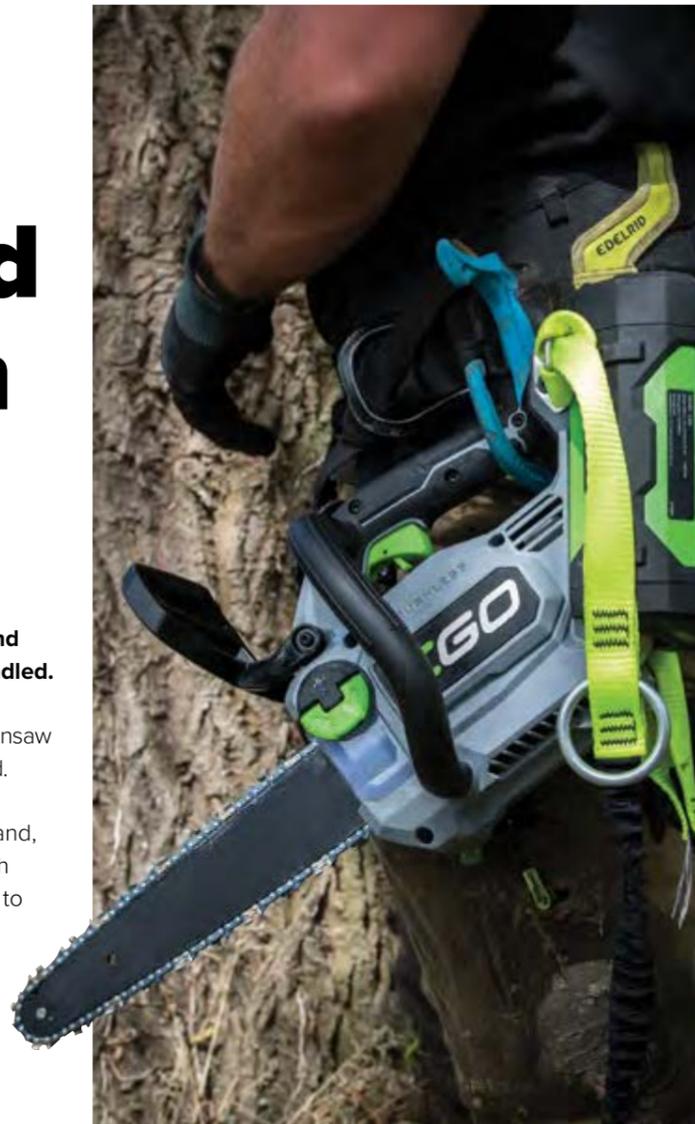
Boasting a lightweight design, the 30cm CS1200E chainsaw is suitable for tree-care specialists working off the ground. Equipped with a 20m/s chain speed, this top-handled chainsaw has a thin chain for the fine cutting of trees, and, crucially, reduces the risk of disease spreading through trees as the finer cut reduces the likelihood for fungus to grow in the grooves left by the cut.

Joerg Bauerle, product manager at EGO, said: "Arborists were front of mind when we were designing this chainsaw. Small, lightweight, and well-balanced, we have responded to requests from our tree surgeon customers for a chainsaw that is specifically designed for working high up in the trees."

The manufacturer says the chainsaw cuts through branches and logs whilst providing stability, allowing professionals to be more controlled in a volatile environment. This saw is fitted with a chain brake system to protect from a potential kickback, providing extra safety for the tool operator.

Fitted with an oil level and translucent window to help users monitor the tool, EGO say the CS1200E automatically lubricates the chain and maintains the health and lifespan of the tool, preserving it from damage. The oil tank has a 150ml capacity, which will need topping up depending on the frequency of use.

Suitable for bar lengths of 30cm, the CS1200E has 64



chain drive links for fast and efficient cutting. This tool is suited for forestry work at height and is fitted with metal bumper spikes for fast and efficient cutting. The saw also features a variable speed control that allows for a tailored and controlled experience, instead of users having to switch between fixed settings.

5 SECOND INFO

- Lightweight design
- Automatic chain lubricating
- Variable speed control
- 64 chain drive links for fast and efficient cutting
- Designed for forestry work



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COMMERCIAL

Zero expansion

Kubota's lineup increases from two to seven models

Kubota has recently expanded their zero-turn mower range from two to seven models, offering a variety of working widths, discharge options and fuel types to suit domestic and commercial applications.

The company say their offering combines manoeuvrability with accurate, quality cut performance, making them a popular choice for local authorities and professional landscapers as well as residential users. With the addition of five new models in recent years, they boast that the range now offers more versatility



than ever before.

Established petrol models include the Z1-421 and Z2-481, which feature a 42" and 48" side discharge cutting deck, respectively, with optional mulching kits available.

Launched in summer 2024 is the Z4-541 – a 54" petrol model which boasts a larger chassis to offer greater productivity to the pro-consumer market. Following this was the rear discharge Z4-541RD model, introduced later in 2024 to meet customer requirements.

In the diesel range, the manufacturer

says the ZD-1211 provides comfort and fast working with fuel efficiency, meeting needs of the professional operator.

Meanwhile, the Ze electric zero-turn range offers user comfort through reduced noise and vibration during operation. The company says the Ze-421 and larger Ze-481 are designed to exceed the expectations of environmentally conscious customers – such as contractors and local authorities – whilst still maintaining the performance expectations of conventional fuels.

AGRICULTURAL

Flagship launch from McCormick

New X8.634 VT-Drive tractor



McCormick has introduced its new flagship tractor, the X8.634 VT-Drive, which, they say, is also in contention for the Tractor of the Year 2026 award.

The 340hp model is powered by a six-cylinder FPT N67 engine, with eVGT turbocharger and Stage V compliance via the HI-eSCR2 system. A 90° bonnet opening and Matrix Cooling System aim

to simplify maintenance.

The tractor uses a ZF TMT32 CVT transmission, delivering speeds from 40m/h up to 50km/h at 1,580rpm in eco mode. PTO options include 540ECO, 1000, and 1000ECO, with a front PTO available. Hydraulic output is 212 l/min, with up to six rear and three front spool valves supplied through a separate circuit.

Lift capacities are 12,000kg at the rear and 5,000kg at the front, with electronically-controlled suspension and integrated front axle brakes standard.

The company says a new 'Clever Cab' provides increased space and visibility, a Grammer premium seat, and a DSM Plus control system with dual 12" digital displays. These offer precision farming functions, including ISOBUS, RTK guidance and customisable menus.

Additional features include McCormick Fleet Management, Remote Diagnostics, the EazyGrip automatic tyre inflation system, and a Central Grease System.

DOMESTIC

Entry-level battery expansion

STIHL launch two new batteries for AP System

STIHL has expanded its AP System range with the launch of two new lithium-ion batteries, the AP 20 and AP 30, which they say are engineered to meet the needs of domestic, semi-professional and professional users taking on lighter gardening and landscaping tasks.

Developed for select tools within the AP System, the AP 20 and AP 30 offer what the company describe as "a cost-effective introduction to STIHL's professional battery platform."

The AP 20 delivers 144 Wh of energy at a weight of 1.3 kg, while the AP 30 offers a higher capacity of 270 Wh at 1.8 kg. Due to the intelligent battery management system, these batteries have a constant level of power whether the battery is at 100% or 1% charge – meaning the tool has full power across the entire discharge cycle, for reliable performance from start to finish.

The batteries are also equipped with power boost capability, which supplies additional energy on demand when working on more intensive tasks. Designed for durability and longevity, the batteries have a working life of up to 1,200 charge cycles, making them a suitable choice for regular use.

Certified to IPX4 for splash protection, the batteries are suitable for use in damp or wet conditions. When used with the STIHL AL 301 charger, the AP 20 can be charged to 80% in 30 minutes and 100% in 50 minutes, and the AP 30 can be charged to 80% in 60 minutes and 100% in 80 minutes.

COMMERCIAL



Makita branch out

With new pruning saw

Makita has launched the UC029G 40VMax XGT Brushless Pruning Saw, which, they say, is built for high-performance cutting in landscaping and arborist applications.

The saw weighs 1.3kg (without a battery), and is described as highly compact with an ergonomic grip, making it comfortable to use for extended periods of time. Also, the tool has been designed with optimised balance for comfortable overhead or one-handed operation.

Makita say the pruning saw has a larger motor compared to competitor products, allowing for smoother cutting of shrubs and small branches. Additionally, the brushless motor ensures less friction is generated, which translates into more power and longer runtime, as well as offering the additional advantage that replacement brushes are not needed, keeping future maintenance costs down.

Quick and easy chain tensioning can be achieved without additional tools, as well as having an automatic chain lubrication feature.

Additional safety features include an anti-restart function and an electric brake. Built to withstand harsh environments and tough outdoor conditions, the UC029G has an IPX4 rating making it suitable for use even when it's raining.





Trilo get armed

Designed for easier operation

Trilo has announced the addition of a new hydraulic arm, which, they say, is designed to make the operation of the suction hose faster, easier and safer.

The hydraulic arm allows the suction hose to be extended or retracted, lifted or lowered, directly from a joystick in the tractor cab, enabling a single operator to handle the task of leaf or debris clearance. The company says this not only reduces manual strain, but helps to enhance efficiency and productivity in the field.

The suction hose is 300mm in diameter, and is traditionally mounted on the right-hand side of the S-Line and M-Line range of vacuum collectors. It can now be hydraulically extended to 900mm for suction of material from ditches, roadsides and other hard-to-reach locations. When the job is complete, the hose can be retracted for work close to the vehicle, or for safe transport.

"This development puts productivity and operator comfort front-and-centre of every task," explained Trilo's Jeremy Vincent - adding that it is now available to customers in the UK.

AGRICULTURAL

Mounted models added

TopCut 5000-2 and 6000-2 from Amazone

Amazone has added two mounted models to its TopCut range of ultra-shallow cultivators – the 5m TopCut 5000-2 and the 6m TopCut 6000-2.

Designed for stubble and catch crop management, both machines use twin knife rollers to shred and bruise residues, such as rape, maize, sunflower stalks and cover crops. Working at depths of 0-2cm, the rollers produce fine soil for stale seedbeds, encouraging weed seeds and volunteer cereals to germinate for follow-up control.

An optional three-row harrow is available for improved straw distribution and seed shake-out. The harrow can be specified in a heavy-duty version with tungsten tips, with hydraulic adjustment from the cab.

Both models can be front- or rear-mounted when used without the harrow, allowing them to be paired with disc harrows or drills for one-pass operations. With working speeds up to 20km/h, Amazone say the machines offer high output with low fuel use. Reversible knives are fitted to extend service life and reduce running costs.



5 SECOND INFO

- 5m and 6m working widths
- Twin knife rollers for shallow tillage and residue breakdown
- Optional straw harrow with HD version available
- Front/rear mounting options
- Reversible blades to extend wear life

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Shows & woes

Mystery columnist THE SPROCKET hears from dealers who have a plethora of stock and concerns regarding pre-season ordering.



just got back from a sunny day at GroundsFest, and, although this article will appear after the dust has settled regarding the endless debate about that show and Saltex, it seemed fitting to get something on paper while my old brain can download enough relevant information to fill these pages.

Into its third year, and with some very pleasant September weather, GroundsFest's first day was an undeniable success, in my opinion. There were plenty of people around from a variety of businesses, covering the retail sector, grounds care, and suppliers of various related products. The machinery sector put on one of the best displays of equipment I have seen at a show for a very long time.

My compliments to all exhibitors who really made an effort with their stands, regardless of size. The support from the land-based industry sector was clear to see in the commitment to the show, and the wonderful displays that made it a pleasure to amble around and soak up the atmosphere. Certainly, some of the main names exhibiting at the show should be congratulated on

their stands and their product and services displays.

For me, it was great to catch up with some old customers and colleagues, and to get an impression of how their 2025 season has been, and what was bugging them about their businesses and the industry in general. I have to say that most were upbeat despite a poor season, maybe because it was a lovely day and they were surrounded by likeminded people. There is no doubt that some things just don't change, and the litany of concerns about pre-season ordering, warranty payments, recruitment and retention and a lack of contact with suppliers is still there.

Stocking point!

One of the bigger concerns for the dealers I met was the amount of stock they were sitting on due to the dry weather and how they were going to deal with the demands from suppliers for pre-season orders. Some were hoping or expecting the suppliers to be understanding, and allow orders that reflected the stock the dealer was sitting on. Others were expecting a hard time, with a possible threat of a

lost franchise. A couple just said if they got pushed too hard, they would walk away. By the time this mag hits the streets, it may all be a bit academic, but, with dealer closures on the rise, I really hope there has been a lot more cooperation from suppliers in consideration of the dealers' position.

Clearly, if a dealer is sitting on thousands of pounds of unsold stock that they may have already paid for, it will be a financial stretch to commit to more with the expectation of further payments becoming due early next year. This situation does play into the hands of the dealers that import and distribute, as well as retail. These guys can drip-feed product into the dealer network at reasonable prices and in small quantities. This may be a solution for a number of small-to-medium-sized dealers, and relieve them of the payment pressures of pre-season ordering. Worth a look if you are concerned about getting buried in a financial nightmare.

Manufacturers talk about just-in-time production / supply, but it does not seem to reflect when the dealer is the customer but has to stock up out of

season, take a risk and pay for product regardless of if it is sold or not.

Just-in-time is a management philosophy and not a technique. According to the University of Cambridge, it originally referred to the production of goods to meet customer demand exactly, in time, quality and quantity, whether the 'customer' is the final purchaser of the product or another process further along the production line.

It has now come to mean producing with minimum waste. 'Waste' is taken in its most general sense, and includes time and resources as well as materials. Elements of JIT include:

Attacking fundamental problems – anything that does not add value to the product.

Quality control at source – each worker is responsible for the quality of their own output.

It is also about inventory control, which is a bit of misnomer when it comes to seasonal businesses and out-of-season supply. No manufacturer wants to be sat on inventory waiting for a selling season to start. They must produce out-of-season to be ready, but their JIT philosophy is to make it and ship it to the dealer, who then has to manage their inventory and has no benefit from the JIT philosophy.

There was also concern being expressed about the policy antics of certain large well-known brands, and the lack of trust that is creeping into the dealer network as distribution policies saturate the marketplace and reduce dealer margins even further. It may be a tough call, but, if you are not happy with a supplier, look for an alternative. It is not always the case that a well-known brand will bring in good business. As a local business, your potential customer base is there for you to influence and support. Don't let the tail wag the dog, or be bullied into decisions you are not comfortable with.

I got the impression that the lack of representation from suppliers and face-to-face contact with dealers is causing a bigger rift than one may expect. Some dealers no longer know

who they should deal with at some of the well-known brands. A bit of a Donald Rumsfeld, with his knowns and unknowns. I can remember a time when dealers were fed up with seeing so many reps, yet now it seems they would be welcomed with open arms. Suppliers take note!

Back to the show. It was great to see some lawnmower racing, although they did not look or sound like the racing mowers we used to put together using old Mountfield ride-ons and the odd 24-inch Webb or Atco with a trailed seat. I still can't believe how fast the workshop could make a mower go. Scary stuff, but fun! It was also great to be able to join in the afterparty event. The bands were good, but the bumper cars were a bit slow. There was a good crowd attending the party, and this allowed for more social time than most shows offer.

GroundsFest describe themselves as "the largest, annual, free must-attend event for grounds staff, greenkeepers, landscapers, designers and architects, gardeners and local authorities" on their website. Seems a shame that machinery dealers are not mentioned. It is reported that there were over 300 exhibitors, and attendance over the two days was just over 9000 - which is a 1000 more than last year. A great effort from the organisers to create and stick to this fairly new show.

I tend to stick to garden machinery matters, but, as an aside, there appear to be some serious issues within the tractor dealer network, with tractor sales at something like 20% below last year's numbers and some of the large dealers struggling. We have also heard of RVT going into administration not long after they split from John Deere.

Have the 'Super Dealers' got too big? Will we see any more break ups that end in the return to smaller dealers? Or is there simply no way back from the 'Super Dealer' full-line model? Maybe there will be some positive news at the LAMMA show in January.

Something for the bikers out there



I got the chance to do a bit of greenlaning in the Cotswolds with one of my

neighbours on a couple of lightweight trail bikes. We followed the legal routes provided by the Trail Riders Federation, which led us about 20 miles through the middle of the Cotswolds, from The Slaughters to Guiting Power and all points between. Roads, lanes, tracks, fields and three fords, as well as an old Roman Road - Ryknild Street, now known as Condicote Lane. This was more of a track, and heavily rutted, which, although dry, was still a bit of a challenge for old, frail riders.

A great day out, and great to see the Cotswolds other than from a road. A few grumpy looking ramblers who think the lanes and tracks are just for them but don't realise these are still legal highways, albeit old and in a state. A bit like the riders! You must have a road-legal bike, follow the etiquette rules, and be respectful of the countryside. I was wearing knee protectors and body armour in case of a fall, and a full-face enduro helmet. Full PPE, in fact. All the gear and no idea! Great fun, highly recommended, but always ride carefully.



What's on?

Status of the events correct at the time of going to press, but we advise confirming with organisers' websites and social media channels.

NOVEMBER 2025

Agritechnica 2025, Hanover www.agritechnica.com/en	9-15	Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS) www.yams.uk.com	4
GMA Saltex 2025, Birmingham NEC www.gmasaltex.co.uk	12-13	World Ag Expo, Tulare, California www.worldagexpo.com	10-12
Future Farming Scotland Expo, Aberdeen www.futurefarmingexpo.com	18-19	Executive Hire Show, Ricoh Arena, Coventry www.executivehireshow.co.uk	11-12
Midlands Machinery Show www.midlandsmachineryshow.com	19		
AgriScot 2025, The Royal Highland Centre www.agriscot.co.uk	19		
Royal Welsh Winter Fair www.rwas.wales/winter-fair	24-25		

DECEMBER 2025

Service Dealer Conference & Awards, Stratford-upon-Avon www.servicedealer.co.uk	4
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JANUARY 2026

Oxford Farming Conference www.ofc.org.uk	7-9	APRIL 2026	
LAMMA 2026, Birmingham NEC www.lammashow.com	14-15	Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London www.idealhomeshow.co.uk	10-19
BTME 2026, Harrogate International Centre www.btme.org.uk	20-22	AEA Conference 2026, One Great George Street, London www.aea.uk.com	14
Golf Industry Show, Orlando, Florida www.gcsaaconference.com	31-5/2	The Commercial Vehicle Show, Birmingham NEC www.cvshow.com	21-23

FEBRUARY 2026

Spring Fair 2026, Birmingham NEC www.springfair.com	1-4	MAY 2026	
Doe Show 2026, Ulting www.ernestdoe.com	3-5	North Somerset Show www.nsas.org.uk	4
Dairy-Tech, Stoneleigh Park www.dairy-tech.uk	4	Nottinghamshire County Show www.nottinghamshirecountyshow.com	9



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