

# A sign of the times

Whilst Farnborough-based Tracked Access is known as the UK distributor for Palazzani equipment, it also has one of the widest ranges of pick & carry equipment available for hire. Perhaps this is because operations director, Phil Lomax, has a long history in this sector having started his career with Jones Cranes on pick & carry cranes?

In one sense, the company name Tracked Access is something of a misnomer. Yes, the company has a wide range of booms, scissors and mast booms but it also has a wide and varied range of smaller capacity pick & carry cranes. The company has built up a sizeable and diverse crane fleet including products from Maeda, Jekko, Valla and Kegiom, along with Merlo 360 degree telehandlers.

Lomax should now be a thing or two about this sector because as a young Jones Cranes apprentice he worked on many pick & carry cranes including the 971 (mobile, crawler and HLB dock models) as well as refurbishing 11-7 cranes operated by the Coal Board.

"Although Jones Cranes were manufacturing the Iron Fairy in the 1980's it continued to make strut and cantilever jib cranes for customers throughout the world," he remembers. "The main advantage of these cranes over the modern hydraulic machines was their simplicity. They could be sold into third world regions where technical skills were limited and reliability was paramount."

Jones Cranes was a brand of British-built cranes from K&L (Kryn and Lahy) Steel founders and Engineers in Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. The company was started in 1915 by Belgian refugees which then aided the World War I war effort as well as producing carbon steel castings for all manner of heavy industrial applications including cars, bridges, cranes, railway engine wheels and parts. The company was later acquired by George Cohen Machinery in the 1920's. In 1973 it merged with the GCM 600 group - formally the George Cohen 600 group - which became known as the 600 group in 1975. The company went into decline in the 1980's and closed in the early 90's. In its halcyon days it employed thousands of people and its foundry was the third largest in the UK.

Since being formed in 2005 by Lomax and managing director Tony Gettins, Tracked Access has invested more than £3 million building up its varied fleet including Maeda spider cranes and Palazzani spider lifts. However during that time it has seen rental rates for



Phil Lomax

both types of equipment (spider and pick & carry) drop significantly but this has been off-set by its expanding customer base less reliant on the construction sector.

"All of our Maeda MC405 cranes have a pick & carry facility which is a useful feature but the duties are limited. Maeda has three crawler pick & carry cranes which are superb and very popular for use in construction and utilities work but at the moment they are not widely used in industrial applications."

Lomax says that he has been very impressed by the reliability and general build quality of our Maeda fleet and the lift capacities from such compact machines which shows real progress over the cranes of yesteryear.

"Our two tonne capacity Jekko MPK20 and Valla 20e cranes have been a useful addition to our core spider crane fleet and are generally used on construction sites where there are space, height or weight restrictions," he says. "They compete in many cases with compact telehandlers but their DC power allows them to work inside

buildings. They are also light enough to be towed on a small trailer. Compare the specification of these or the MC405 to a Jones KL15 and you can see just how far technology and manufacturing has come over the last half century."

Although not pick & carry, all Palazzani spider lifts have the option of a winch for lifting materials. The smaller machines can be fitted with an electric winch where the larger machines can have either an electric or hydraulic winch capable of lifting 300kg. "While the lifting capacity isn't very high it is quite impressive at heights of 30 to 50 metres," says Lomax.

Palazzani also makes two heavy duty pick & carry cranes with capacities of 10 and 15 tonnes designed exclusively for the industrial sector. Whilst these aren't a major product in the Palazzani line-up Lomax says they are well built and reliable. Weighing just over 11 tonnes, the smaller FPB 100 crane has a maximum retracted boom capacity of 10 tonnes or 3.1 tonnes fully extended to its maximum hook height of seven metres. The units also have a handy travel speed of up to 18 km per hour.



The Maeda MC405 has a pick & carry capability



The Palazzani XTJ with winch