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RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF INTERMODAL OPERATION

The Daventry International Railfreight Terminal (DIRFT) is one of the largest inland intermodal terminals in the UK. Across its 25 acres spans a total of 10km of rail track allowing 119 trains per week to move through the terminal. When Malcolm Rail were appointed operators of the DIRFT terminal in 2008, it needed a materials handling supplier that could maximise work flow and provide a low life cost solution to the nearly 6000 lifts per week that were required.

The Malcolm Group's pioneering rail freight service was launched in 2001 and provides regular and fast daily and overnight transit between five main rail terminals with strategic access to UK wide road and rail networks and Euro links. At DIRFT, Malcolm Rail processes over 2600 units per week across 300 vehicles per day, this involves both top lift operations on the swap bodies, trailers and containers being handled.

Across the terminal the trucks need to move containers from the trains to reception sidings and storage units and from here skeletal trailers. This involves both top lift and bottom lift operations on the swap bodies, trailers, and containers being handled. Two of the trucks that Cooper recommended were bottom lift reach stackers (SMV 4531 CB5). However, bottom lift handlers are not only more expensive, they are heavier machines that suffer more tyre wear and result in greater degrees of ground wear. All of this contributes to a high cost operation. To help Malcolm Rail improve its running costs Cooper undertook a comprehensive study of container types and sizes and recommended an optimum fleet of machines that found the fine balance between operational need and cost of ownership. As Peter Astley, sales manager at Cooper SH, explained, "It would have been too simple to replace on a like-for-like basis. DIRFT had always traditionally used the fleet of long wheelbase combi machines to cover all contingencies but this does not lend itself to the most economical handling."

Malcolm Rail runs a highly efficient operation with demanding performance targets. A target turnaround of 20 minutes per vehicle across a confined site means that the container handlers need to be both powerful and compact, performing lots of turns and manoeuvres in tight spaces.

Steve Sugden, Fleet Engineer at the Malcolm Group says, “To cope with these demands, Cooper SH supplied the machines to allow a shorter wheel base chassis to be used. By also specifying slick tyres, the shorter, lighter machine can be manoeuvred quickly in tight spaces for rapid turnaround. This solution has meant that we have saved in excess of £120,000 in equipment costs across the handling operation at DIRFT without hindering the operational needs of the terminal.”

On these heavy machines, tyres play an even more critical role in productivity and efficiency of operation. Fitting the right tyres results in a more comfortable driving experience for the operator and also contributes to speed and manoeuvrability of the trucks. The laden reach stackers weigh over 100 tonnes and a set of tyres costs £12,000 per machine. With each truck currently requiring up to four sets of tyres per year, this was an obvious area to look at when it came to improving the lifetime cost of the operation.

“The Malcolm Group wanted to reduce tyre costs significantly”, explains Peter Astley. “This was achieved firstly in specifying a lighter machine – much of the tyre wear is attributable to steering in the unladen condition – when maximum weight is bearing on the steer axle – a lighter, shorter machine will immediately overcome much of this. In addition careful consideration was given to both choice of tyres and steering angles.” The combined effect of all these measures has resulted in a more comfortable ride, more space in which to turn and less resulting damage to both the tyre and the ground surface.

Cooper improved the workflow at the DIRFT site by looking at the idle time of each machine and using an idle shut down facility to eliminate unnecessary idle time and save fuel as well as improve machine throughput. In addition, Cooper introduced a bespoke service contract, which incorporates a lower charge rate when the machine is idling compared to when it is actually working. Overall this will help Malcolm Rail to achieve an extra 25% capacity in workflow.

In addition, the combination of the load sensing hydraulic technology on the Konecranes machines coupled with the bespoke machine design modifications, will help to reduce fuel

consumption by up to 30% compared to competitor's machines. Considering, these large trucks have a 12L engine and can guzzle up to 20 litres of fuel per hour, this could mean an estimated saving of up to £85,000 per machine over 12,000 hours of operation.

Warwick Asbury, Railport Manager for Malcolm Rail at Daventry, comments, "We have extremely high expectations of service standards from our suppliers. Our operation works 24 hours a day six days a week and the machines can be working up to 20 hours a day. Cooper is able to provide a more reliable service to freight operators than anyone else. The whole of The Malcolm Group operation at Daventry is maintained by Cooper's dedicated team who keep the operation running continually across the 24 hour shifts."

Rail freight is currently a growth area and is an attractive freight option for environmental reasons as well as those of speed and cost effectiveness. Cooper's contract consists of a total fleet of eight Konecranes 45 tonne reach stackers and an all-inclusive service and maintenance package. By working in close partnership, Cooper and The Malcolm Group are providing a highly efficient and cost effective operation for rail freight.

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Editor's Notes

Cooper Specialised Handling Ltd

Cooper SH (formerly SMV UK Ltd) is independently owned and is the UK's sole national distributor of SMV Lift trucks, Bauman sideloaders, MAFI terminal and RoRo tractors and DanTruck, operating across the UK and Northern Ireland. Founded 10 years ago in 1998, the company now offers total solutions for forklifts from 6 to 60 metric tones, sideloaders 3 to 45 tonnes and 25t to 45t terminal and ro ro tractors. It provides strong products and reliable service to customers who operate in the toughest applications across freight, ports, steel, transport, timber and other industries. Cooper SH's customers demand a specialised and single source supply of handling solutions in the heavy lifting market. Cooper SH, with its four high specification brands, has the engineering expertise to customise machines to specific requirements as well as provide service and support for the specialised heavy handling market.

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