

"Use of AWP should be mandatory"



Souma Ray, Director, Haulotte India Pvt Ltd

With the thrust and focus that the central government is putting on infrastructure development, the overall outlook is very positive.

Unfortunately till date there are no policies on safe working at heights, which is proving to be an impediment in the growth on the AWP industry in India, points out Souma Ray, Director, Haulotte India. He suggests that the government should enact regulation for making mandatory use of AWP's while working at height. He also talked about why a customer hiring access equipment should use newer machines.

Globally Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWP) are increasingly being used for man and material lifting. How is their adaptation in India?

The concept of use of Aerial Work Platforms (AWPs) to work safely at heights came into India with the foreign multinational companies setting up their facilities in the country. They started insisting their contractors to source and use AWP's instead of conventional methods of working at heights. However, the growth in awareness of the beneficial usage of AWP's had been diminutive and it has started gaining momentum in the last 9 - 10 years only. We as a manufacturer have been privy to this by noticing the increase in awareness in the user segment. During the first edition of bC India in 2011, visitors to our stall would come and enquire about the applications of the machines we displayed. In the later editions of bC India in 2013 and 2014, we noticed that the people are now more aware and educated in the type of machines we offer and their multifarious applications. This is a significant step forward.

However, the access equipment industry in India is still at a nascent stage as compared to Europe, USA, Australia, Asia and BRICS nations like China, Russia and Brazil. As the access industry

matures in India and users become more aware on the advantages to use of such equipment over conventional practices of working at heights, the MEWP industry shall witness an exponential growth in the years ahead.

How competitive is the access equipment market in India?

The growth and demand of access equipment is mainly driven by rental companies. However in India, rental companies still prefer procuring old and used equipment over new machines owing to the low rental rates and severe competition from smaller players. In order for the Indian access equipment sector to mature, customers should not only look at the lowest rental rates but also age and condition of machines because such equipment are directly related to safety. It is essential for customers hiring access equipment to be aware of the advantages of using newer and younger machines which have better performance, safety and thus better productivity as compared to older machines.

When it comes to new machines, the requirements are mainly driven by end-users in both government and private sector. The competition is very tough with each globally renowned manufacturer trying to compete with each other to garner business which leads to severe under cutting of prices. Added to this is the threat of cheap Chinese machines that find acceptability amongst clients who are more concerned about prices rather than the quality and safety aspects of the machines. Thankfully, clients who are able to differentiate this would certainly put their faith on a quality product albeit such machines being costlier than the Chinese ones.

Could you list at least five USPs that give your machines the competitive edge?

Haulotte is 134 years old but for the last 30 years we are in to powered access equipment manufacturing. We incorporate new technology which is better for environment and industry and adapt very fast to changes. For safety we introduced our Activ Shield Bar in 2014. This is a secondary guard for anti-entrapment situation and is patented too by Haulotte. The bar is attached on top of the control box on the platform and identifies the condition of entrapment. In an

entrapment situation, the machine stops moving up or ahead. After the machine stops we can only reverse or go down to come out of the entrapment situation. Once this situation is averted, we can start using immediately by just resetting the machine by press of a button present in the platform.

The other additional change we have introduced is a newer engine called as variable speed engine like KUBOTA from Japan which are much more silent and fuel efficient as part of model upgradation of existing machines like in our 16-metre and 20-metre articulated booms. A diagnostic tool too has been introduced called as Haulotte Diag, which can be used for fault diagnostics for all variants. We can pinpoint with this tool the location of the problem of the machine by which the user themselves can identify the problem. Pictorial description of the problem is also given. Newer models of our products will also have an Active Screen which shall capture the log of the usage of the machines, date wise and time wise. This will be very beneficial to the rental companies. We are also moving on to modular technology for various components in our booms like the platform, the side covers etc., with which only the individual parts can be changed which are damaged than the entire machine.

Nowadays access equipment are being used for facility management and maintenance work. What are the advantages of using access equipment in these application areas?

Access equipment not only helps in working safely but it also increases the productivity thus allows to meet deadlines in completion of a job. When we specifically talk about facility management and maintenance work, both cases requires working at heights. Using conventional methods can be very dangerous as well as time consuming. Use of scaffolding is an option but the time taken for erection of scaffolding and then moving it from one location to another is tedious. Hence use of mobile access platforms is the best alternative both in terms of safety as well as productivity. There has been a steady growth of awareness in these segments towards the advantages of using MEWP, which is an encouraging sign.

What are Haulotte's offering in this domain?

Haulotte is one of the few full range manufacturers of AWP's in the World. Our range includes machines from 6-metre to 43-metre and 7 different variants. The choice of the type or variant depends upon the application that the machine is required to do. That we why we emphasise doing application study for our customers so that we can suggest the best machine that suit their needs.

What will be the major growth drivers in future?

Unfortunately till date there are no policies on safe working at heights, which is proving to be an impediment in the growth on the AWP industry in India. Like developed countries, if use of AWP's is made mandatory to work at heights, then we will see an exponential growth of this industry. For example in USA, Europe and Australia it is mandatory to use an access platform when working at a height over 2 metres.

In the interest of better safety when working at heights, it is important that in India the government takes a cue of the best practices followed across the developed economies and formulate regulations which shall encourage usage of AWP's. Coupled to this there needs to be a restriction on the age of imported used machines so that only machines which are still in their serviceable state can be imported.

The awareness of the use of aerial access platforms are increasing steadily. If only some major thoughts and thereafter actions are taken regarding legislations the MEWP industry in India will witness significant growth.

As the government has ambitious plans for port, airports and smart cities development, how do you see the opportunities for AWP's?

AWP's find application across sectors where safe working at heights is a necessity. With the thrust and focus that the central government is putting on infrastructure development, the overall outlook is very positive and we are sure that there would be an increase in requirement of such access equipment across the country. This is good news for the growth of this industry and a sign of better days to come. We have already been seeing encouraging signs with numerous requirements coming up from this sector.

How are you preparing to meet future industry demand?

Haulotte being present in India as a full-fledged subsidiary of Haulotte Group with a team of experienced sales and product support personnel, constantly ensure that an optimum level of satisfaction is achieved and maintained of our customers. We and our partners are fully geared up to meet all challenges successfully. ■

How safe are your access equipment?

The following are the set of standard safety features available on Haulotte products which conform to the CE EN280 standards for safety requirements for AWP's:

- Overload system. It cuts off function from the platform when the machine platform is overloaded.
- Tilt cut-off system. It cuts specific functions of the machine which assist in increasing horizontal reach of the machine when the entire machine slope has exceeded the permissible limit.
- Radius limitation - cuts off movement for the machine if it exceeds it's designed reach radius.
- Back-up emergency system - present on the lower control box can be activated in a scenario where the operator on the upper control box is incapacitated to bring the operator down safely. Once the operator brings the machine to the normal operating environment all these features reset themselves as per design.
- Additional safety features of Haulotte AWP's include an anti entrapment system from operators on platform known as Active Shield Bar (ASB). This is a secondary guarding system for the machines which activates when the operator is trapped in a crushing situation.