

# Coming of age

To outsiders the mastclimber market may look a little staid with the latest products seeming to be quite similar to those of 10 years or more ago. A lot of this is down to the fact that like a tower crane, the structure of the product itself reached a high level of refinement early on and visually little has changed since.

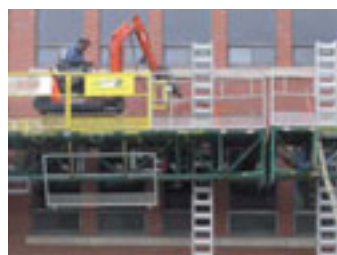
However don't let this fool you. Much has been happening in the mastclimber world. The products on the market today offer increased versatility, are easier to erect, easier to transport and offer a much wider capability to be modified for tricky applications with standard systems and components. Add to this a huge increase in the choice on offer and you have a product that offers an amazing range of capabilities.

The use of mastclimbers in the UK and Ireland has grown rapidly in recent years after something of a lull in the mid to late 1990's. New regulations and working practice rules, not to mention simple economic drivers have significantly curtailed the use of traditional tube and coupler scaffolding with contractors looking at alternatives such as system scaffold and increasingly

mastclimbers. As a result of the increased demand the number of companies offering mastclimber rental/contracting has grown considerably, which in itself is helping to increase their usage on high rise construction projects.

## A global market

One of the interesting developments of the past year or two is the 'globalisation' of the mastclimbing business. Typically the North American market has tended to prefer a different type of climber than those used in Europe.



One application for high capacity mast climbers - a mini excavator equipped with hydraulic hammer removes brickwork.

American models were in fact based on an older British concept targeted at the masonry trade. As a result they were heavy-duty products with high platform capacities up to 9,000kg, hydraulically driven by internal combustion power units with slow climb and descent speeds. At the extreme as slow as 900mm a minute! European products on the other hand tended to be lighter weight, electric powered rack and pinion models aimed more at renovation work or tasks that did not require heavy loads to be transported to the work area.



Fraco's continuous screw system



They have also introduced lighter duty rack and pinion, or in the case of Fraco, continuous screw models both of which offer significantly faster lift speeds.

Market leader Alimak-Hek recently launched its new modular range with combines interchangeable components with three mast sizes, for light, medium and heavy duty applications. The idea is of course to be able to offer all trades on both sides of the Atlantic and further afield, a tailored product without a multiplication of completely different models.

In recent years an increasing number of European manufacturers have managed to carve out a share of the North American market for themselves, probably due to the faster lift speeds, while North American, largely Canadian, manufacturers such as Hydro Mobile and Fraco have made significant inroads into Europe.

*How good is that mast?  
More than 300 metres up on a chimney.*





Ultra heavy duty! A four mast Hydromobile M series mast climber installation.

The company has in fact gone one further in that many of its components will work on both the HEK mastclimbers and transport platforms as well as Alimak hoists, providing real versatility for contractors and particularly rental companies. As part of its switch over to the new modular system HEK recently shipped the last of its MSM mastclimbers, having

produced almost 3,000 base units since it was introduced.

Another company which had already managed to bridge the divide was Finland's Scaninter Oy and its Scanclimber product range. While building its products to the European

rack and pinion design concept, it was early in offering a range that bridged the divide. The number of manufacturers producing mastclimbers is also growing with companies exporting from all over Europe and North America, including Holland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Czech Republic, Finland, Canada and more recently China. Note the absence of significant German manufacturers, this in spite of the fact that the country boasts a number of world class hoist manufacturers. In fact Germany is still very much a system scaffold market with contractors being even more conservative than those in Britain. The absence of a major French producer is a little more difficult to explain.

The benefit of all this 'global' activity is that those buying mast climbing work platforms - mostly rental companies and contractors - now have a real choice, both in the type of platform they buy and the number of alternative suppliers. It has also played a role in the expansion of many company's product lines, all in all a major benefit to users.

**The key benefits of mast climbers over façade scaffold**

UK contractors have in the past been slow to adopt new ideas and, at the risk of being guilty of a sweeping generalisation, they have not been helped by a reluctance of rental companies to spend the time and energy required to convince contractors of the benefits that mastclimbers can offer. These benefits include:

- Lower cost - mastclimbers can offer cost savings of between 30 and 50 percent over traditional steel façade scaffolding when transport, erection/dismantling, and speed of work are all taken into consideration.
- A more aesthetic appearance to the building during renovation work (building is not completely hidden by ugly tube and clamp scaffolding).
- Greater security - no ladders are required and the platform can be disabled and secured at the ground floor level.
- Greater safety - workers are enclosed within the guardrails and should have no need to climb ladders.
- Greater efficiency and quality of work - tradesmen work at the optimum height, no need to bend or stretch so they work faster with better quality work.
- More efficient material handling thanks to the ability to carry all the materials and tools to the precise working area and be right at hand for when required.

**Smaller projects**

Another development which has yet to take off in Europe is the use of mastclimbers on smaller projects such as three to four storey residential buildings for new build and even painting, rendering and guttering/fascia work.

Seems far fetched? Well the latest towable mastclimbers are relatively lightweight, can be set up quickly and provide an ideal working platform for certain types of work.

In the UK these smaller projects still employ traditional tube and clamp scaffold, often provided by local family companies. One thing is for sure, this will change. The cost of labour combined with a



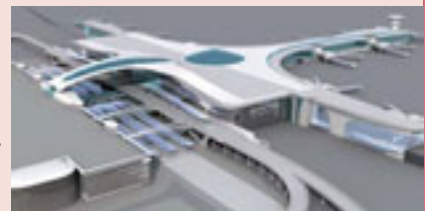
With Mastclimbers tourist attractions/city landmarks need not be covered in scaffold for years.

skills shortage and regulations such as work at height and manual handling rules will encourage the use of such climbers. One of the big restrictions on this market at the moment is the lack of availability. Few rental companies stock them, and even fewer builders, painters and other trades will be aware of them or even consider them. It is possible fast forwarding five years or so that general rental companies such as HSS, Speedy and A-Plant will stock mast climbers such as this? Watch this space.



**Mastclimbers at Moscow Airport**

The new terminal three at Sheremetievo airport in Moscow is currently a hive of activity as its fast-track construction nears completion. Among all the access and lifting equipment are a large number of mastclimbers provided by local rental company L-Tech. These have proved particularly useful on tasks such as cladding, where their height, platform size and lift capacity has proved ideal, particularly for work above 20 metres.



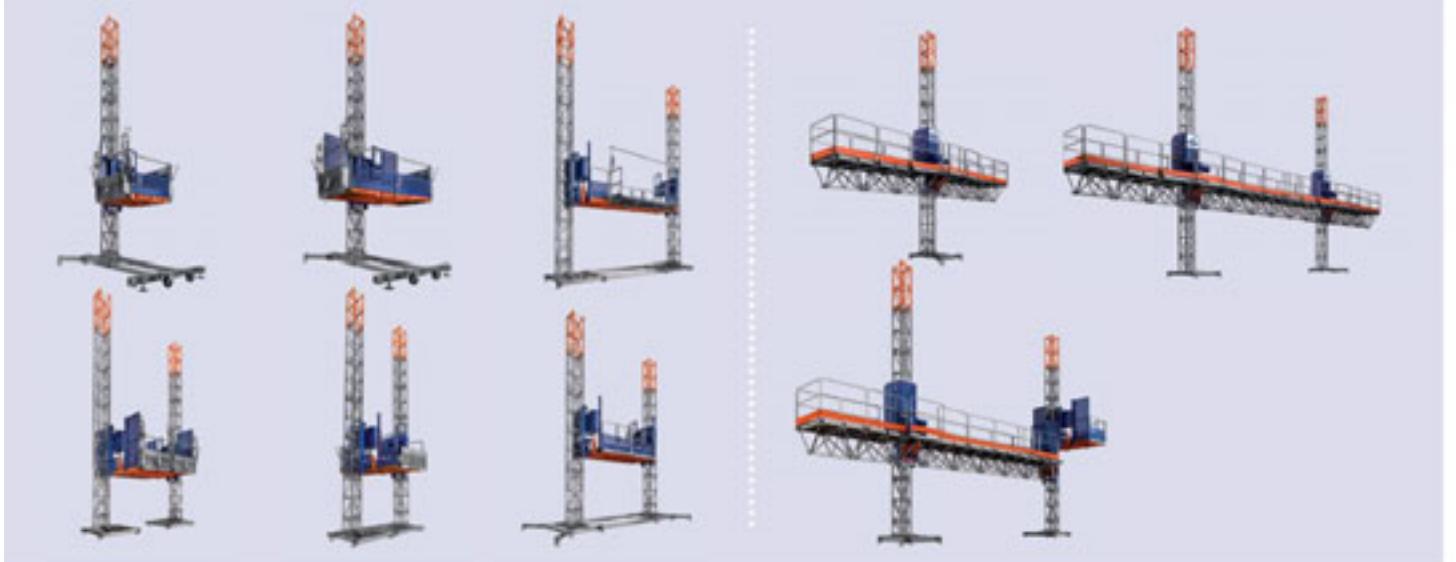
The plans for the new terminal 3 at Sheremetievo.



A series of Scanclimber mastclimbers were used to fit the upper cladding and carry out trim work on this building.

Two mastclimbers are being modified to accommodate the beams and gain clear access to the ceilings.





# **HEK Modular system: Greater flexibility with less components**

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Dubai, UAE, Dubai Silicon Oasis Residential Project Phase – I (TPM 1300SD)

Dubai, UAE, Dubai Marina, DEC TOWERS (MCM Twin)