

CROWN LIFT TRUCKS PROVE TO BE SUPERHEROS AT NEXT'S NEW PALLETISED WAREHOUSE WITH UNIQUE LOW-LEVEL ORDER PICKER AND INFOLINK

The key decision in selecting the materials handling supplier for both of Next's new 1.1 million sq ft warehouses in the Dearne Valley was the selection of a specially adapted order picking truck.

The application

Next required a double-pallet low level order picker that would allow operators to pick from two levels of pallets with cartons up to 3.3 metres above the ground. This solution enabled Next to maximise the number of pallets in the available picking area.

The key design criteria for the truck included:

- An operator platform that raises to 1.8 metres with built-in automatic opening and closing side rails
- Elevated steering when platform raised
- Space for two picked pallets on forks
- A shelf to pick items onto while the platform is raised
- Use of closed 4-way pallets, placed on the forks, with up to four plastic pallet collars
- Space for additional pallet collars on the truck for the picker to use during pick walks.

The order for the fleet was driven by the selection of these order picking trucks. The trucks are used to pick Homeware items from 4 miles of pallet pick aisles located on a 220,000 sq ft mezzanine floor. The sites were opened in spring 2008 and Next is currently adding to its fleet due to business growth.

Mark Eccleston, Manager Major Accounts for Crown UK, explains: "To gain as many pick locations as possible, Next wanted an additional level of racking. The low-level order pickers, therefore, needed to physically raise the driver – to a height of 1.8 metres.

"The obvious benefits of this raising platform are a dramatic increase in safety and efficiency. However, it presented Next with an entirely new problem – the absence of a suitable truck in today's marketplace," Mark said.

To combat this, Next invited a number of manufacturers to come up with ways in which a low-level order picker could be adapted to suit the application. Crown's solution was to take the GPC 3040 2.0 tonne low-level order picker and add an internal mast to lift the operator's cockpit to 1.8 metres.

Crown was selected due to a number of thoughtful design touches and the inherent efficiencies of the truck.

The uniquely adapted Crown GPC 3040

Next wanted the trucks to be able to continue travelling in any direction while simultaneously lifting and lowering the cab. Thanks to Crown's Access 123™ Comprehensive System Control, this was relatively easy to engineer. Because the system dynamically responds to operating conditions, the parameters were already built into the truck to ensure optimum safety at all times and in all conditions – even when cornering while lifting the cab, for example.

Safer to use, easier to service – Access 123™

The Crown GPC 3000 series low-level order picker is available in capacities from 2.0 to 2.7 tonnes. All models in the range come with Crown's exclusive Access 123 Comprehensive System Control which enables safe, reliable, industry-leading performance and diagnostics through an intuitive method of communication.

The system continuously monitors the factors influencing performance and safety (such as load, travel speed and steering angle) and responds with optimised performance as conditions change. Access 123 technology is complemented by the InfoPoint System™, allowing a logical and easy-to-understand troubleshooting process. The result is much faster fault diagnosis and less down time.

The award winning X10 handle

All truck functions are controlled by the award winning X10 handle. On the GPC 3000 for Next, a large information display provides battery discharge level, operational status and service messages to the operator. But the main benefit of the X10 handle is the increased operational efficiency brought about by allowing simultaneous operation of all functions with just one hand.

Ergonomic design – faster pick-rates

Crown also added a sturdy storage tray directly behind the operator. This serves two purposes.

Firstly, it provides the operator with an area to rest boxes and picked products on while working in the racking.

Secondly, because the tray is attached to the cabin and not the chassis, it lifts with the cabin and avoids operators simply dropping the picked products into the pallet from height – thus product care is improved.

Crown also developed an area within the truck to store the pallet collars when not in use. Although this is a simple design element, Crown engineers shaped the two outer edges of the area to ensure the pallet collars stay within their compartment at all times – even when cornering.

A popular addition to the workforce – superheroes!

To boost morale and add interest, the Next Operations Team came up with the idea of naming each truck, rather than assigning a number. An internal competition was held to come up with a suitable theme. In the end, Sci-fi was selected and, after receiving permission from Lucas Films and Marvel Comics, each truck has been given a 'superhero' name. From Darth Vader to The Incredible Hulk, C3PO to Wolverine, the reinforced steel cover of each truck has been adorned with a colourful graphic depicting a different character.

Ultimate efficiency – InfoLink®

It's clear from visiting the site that Next is continuously looking to improve its processes – automated pallet storage; tailor-made low-level order pickers; even a voice pick operating system whereby each operator gives and receives information through an integrated headset. This approach is further demonstrated by the decision to include Crown's InfoLink fleet management system.

InfoLink® is a wireless fleet management system that monitors and reports on a wide range of fleet usage and performance information. The system not only allows users to uncover fleet usage stats in an intuitive, reliable and easy to read fashion, but it delivers data in real time.

Via InfoLink, Next management can monitor and communicate a wealth of invaluable fleet truck usage and performance information. By bringing together truck sensors, wireless technology, integrated electronics, automated processes and insightful reports, Next benefits from simplified fleet management in real time to substantially save time and money.

"We believe InfoLink is the most advanced fleet management system available today, providing customers with easy to read management data in real time. Customers employing this system have reported a significant reduction in the cost of their fleet," said Mark.

"On its two year anniversary the site is fully operational and achieving the originally expected pick-rates and costs. The GPC 3040 low level order pickers are fundamental to this and Next is currently expanding the fleet due to growth," said Mark, adding: "The addition of InfoLink brought about complete transparency of costs across the whole fleet. With it, Next can see exactly what's going on with their fleet in real time – even down to individual trucks."

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