

Unsung heroes



AS THE DUST SETTLES ON WHAT HAS BEEN AN INCREDIBLY SUCCESSFUL RUGBY WORLD CUP, WITH THE PLAYERS RIGHTLY LAUDED AS SPORTING HEROES, BITA SECRETARY GENERAL **JAMES CLARK** LOOKS AT SOME UNSUNG HEROES BEHIND THE SCENES.

Forklifts are the enablers behind the scenes moving things into position, loading and unloading goods and equipment – the unseen hands that make things happen



An estimated 400,000+ rugby fans from around the world were welcomed to the UK during the course

of the Rugby World Cup, joining fans here in a sporting extravaganza which is predicted to have given a near £1bn boost to the economy.

As part of this figure, visitors were predicted to have spent as much as £870m, with ticket holders spending on food and drink alone expected to be around £32m in the 11 cities which hosted the games across England and Wales.

But think of the logistical and materials handling task of satisfying these legions of hungry and thirsty fans. Logistics is a vitally important industry. Estimated to be worth over £93bn to the UK economy, it employs one in 12 of the working population – some 2.3 million people across 196,000 companies.

The Rugby World Cup is like any large showpiece event, be it a major sporting occasion or a spectacular musical production, in that it is made possible by forklifts doing their humble, but essential, work.

When people turn on a tap and water comes out, nobody really considers where the water comes from or what happens behind the scenes – and the same applies with logistics and materials handling. Forklifts by the nature of their operations in warehouses and other commercial environments are often hidden from public view, but they play a crucial role in the UK economy, especially in the era of online shopping and just-in-time delivery.

UNSEEN HANDS

According to figures from the Interactive Media in Retail Group (IMRG), in 2013 UK shoppers spent £91bn online, with an estimated spend of £107bn in 2014.

The most recent figures from IMRG showed that in the second quarter of 2015, online sales growth was double that in Q1, and in June alone online sales were up 18% year-on-year, equating to £9.3bn spent

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So it's something of an understatement to say that online shopping is big business. As it continues to grow supply chain operators face even greater pressure as customers demand ever faster and more flexible delivery times – but do people ever stop and think about how all their orders get to them? The fact that they don't is testament to the smoothness with which this work is carried out.

Most people outside the industry have a very limited idea of what a forklift is and are unaware of the wide variety of vehicles that come under this banner, and the many different applications they have. From the arrival of goods from overseas in giant containers at ports around Britain – unloaded by the real giants of the industry – though loading onto lorries, we then move onto reach trucks stacking items in warehouses and pallets of goods being moved by specialist pallet trucks.

Forklifts are involved at every stage of the journey of goods from ordering to delivery, and their numbers are growing after the drop in orders following the 2008 crash. Oxford Economics, which produces annual economic and market analysis exclusively for BITA members, has forecast with total shipments of fork lift trucks to hit 30,399 units, representing a growth of 10%.

While the world reflects on a great tournament, and UK plc basks in the satisfaction of a job well done as the host country, not to mention the boost to the nation's economy, let's spare a thought for the unsung heroes – the men, women and their machines which played a huge part in making it all happen. ■



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