

lift torque

Autumn 2008

INVEST FOR GROWTH

One of the biggest challenges for a fast growing lift company is maintaining that momentum, to keep pushing forward either through acquisition or organic growth. By way of meeting that challenge, Apollo Lifts has secured substantial buy-out and development funding to help drive the next phase of the company's 'Invest for Growth' strategy.

Funding has been supplied by Icen Capital, a specialist investor in fast growing business services firms, in conjunction with a debt facility from The Royal Bank of Scotland. The deal, led by Apollo's managing director, Martin Bettridge, with support from his fellow directors, gives the management team the capital resources and the expertise to further develop the business.

In 2004 Apollo completed the first stage of its original management buy-out, which centred on the creation and expansion of a northern operations centre. With first phase completed, the second phase aims to rapidly consolidate the firm's position as one of the leading UK independents, with strategic acquisitions definitely an option moving forward. Icen Capital was selected by management as the perfect partner in terms of operating philosophy and business expertise.

Martin Bettridge is excited by the opportunities that lie ahead: 'We're delighted that we have Icen on board for this critical second stage - their guidance and backing will be invaluable as we look to accelerate growth even further. It's clear from our experience in the north of England that there is plenty of potential in the UK for a contractor committed to customer service and technical quality - we can now leverage Icen's financial and management support to help make that happen in our preferred timeframe. It's an extremely exciting development for everyone at Apollo and for our clients too, as there'll be additional investment in systems, processes and people to drive through a culture of continuous improvement.'

Icen's Christopher Samler commented: 'We're very pleased to be working with Apollo as they look to build on the achievements of the past four years. We've been impressed with the drive and desire of the management team, the IT-led operational infrastructure and the quality and experience of both office and field-based staff. The next phase offers up huge potential and we're committed to helping Apollo exploit that to the full.'

NEW OFFICE UP AND RUNNING

In the last issue of Torque, we reported that part of the Head Office staff would be relocating to new offices just opposite. We're pleased to report that the installations and sales teams are now happily ensconced in their purpose-built home, complete with a fast microwave connection to HQ and the latest VoIP phones with power over Ethernet.



PEOPLE NEWS 1...

Continued strong growth means that we have been busy recruiting additional staff across the company in recent months. Dave Saker and Dave Morris have joined as service supervisors in the south, while former stairlift engineer Dave Lord has been promoted to stairlifts supervisor. In the north, Mickey Bradshaw comes in as repairs supervisor, Mark Armitage as service supervisor, Robert Betts as repair/service sales and David Crofts as service sales, with specific responsibility for the Midlands. The Head Office admin team has been bolstered with the arrival of typist Karen Roder while Claire Clark joins Lesley Laidler in Castleford to handle reception and call outs.

PEOPLE NEWS 2...

There's more people news with the appointment of Ian Tasker as Apollo's first Technical Manager. An experienced technician himself, Ian will work closely with engineers, technicians and supervisors on resolving problems in the field while also helping to drive forward technical innovation, best practice, IT and procurement. Ian is keen to ensure that engineering excellence sits alongside service excellence as Apollo expands across the country.

PEOPLE NEWS 3...

Our congratulations to Nicki Wall, a key member of our accounts team. After three years of hard study, she has passed her AAT exams – a great achievement and we've been delighted to sponsor her evening class course during this time.

PEOPLE NEWS 4...

Last but not least, we're delighted to report that accounts stalwart, Kathy Brown, has become a grandmother. Grand-daughter Beau Louise was born Thursday 25th September and mother and grandchild are both doing well.

BEATING THE CREDIT CRUNCH

One of Apollo's real strengths as a business is that it is not overly dependent on any one worktype or any one sector. We have worked hard over the years to 'spread the risk' as it were and now that the first cold blasts of an economic downturn are being felt, we will undoubtedly see the benefits of that approach.

By placing equal emphasis on maintenance, repairs, modernisations and new installations and by building a diverse customer base, we are better placed to weather the imminent ups and downs. Indeed, while some of the majors have already commenced redundancy programmes, we are still actively recruiting across the board and have been able to add several very experienced people to the team.

However, while we're confident of continued success over the next 18 months, things are inevitably going to get tougher. That's why we'll be pushing for a cost-conscious but quality-led approach across the operation, from accounts and sales through to supervisors and engineers.



Cost-conscious is not to be confused with cost-cutting – we want everyone to be aware of costs, to be attuned to the advantages of greater efficiency and less waste, but we will still be investing heavily in the future of the firm. This will ensure that when the economy eventually perks up, we will be very well placed to capitalise on the opportunities an upturn offers.

Apollo Lifts was delighted to support the UK Lift Industry Charity's first fundraising event. We took a table at the Sportsman's Fundraising Evening in June and an excellent night was enjoyed in the company of the legendary Tommy Docherty. Proceeds will go to those invalidated out of the industry and to the families of those who have been fatally injured at work.

TWENTY FIVE NOT OUT

Alan Deller notched up a notable milestone recently when he completed 25 years of service as an Apollo engineer. The directors presented a Citizen watch on behalf of the company by way of recognition of a tremendous achievement. Alan joined back in January 1983, one of only a handful of field staff at the time, and when the Apollo offices were just a couple of rooms in someone's house.

It's a far cry from today's smart HQ but for Alan the biggest change has been the technology that's come into play. Where once he was equipped with only a pager, an alert on which sent him scurrying off in search of a phone, now he has the invaluable Pocket Pluto smartphone that allows him to stay connected to the Mercury Service Management System at all times.

Not only has Alan been privy to almost the entire Apollo Lifts history, he's pretty much seen and done everything lift-wise in his quarter of a century.



Managing director Martin Bettridge believes you can't overestimate such an achievement:

'Over the years we must have had hundreds of different engineers employed at one time or another. Alan has seen them all come and go and while a few are now challenging for long service honours themselves, he stands out for his loyalty, diligence and professionalism. We genuinely thank him for his outstanding contribution and hope he'll be around for a good few years to come.'

FLYING HIGH WITH CITY AIRPORT

Apollo is very proud of the prestigious contracts it has won in recent years, such as Reuters, Jimmy's Hospital and the Anchor Housing Trust. Now we are delighted to add City Airport to that list as we have recently been awarded the servicing contract for the entire airport estate in east London.



Other contract wins over the summer include confectionary giant Haribo, top rugby union club, the Northampton Saints, and the National Blood Bank in partnership with Carillion. We've also added substantially to our work for long-term client London & Quadrant, and are winning regular business from Addenbrooke's Hospital as they continue with their lift modernisation and replacement programme.

P.S. Apollo has been appointed a major supplier for Terry Lifts, one of the UK's leading providers of disabled platforms.

TRAINING UPDATE

We're delighted to announce that **Stephen Ross** completed his advanced apprenticeship in engineering earlier this year.



Training is a key component of Apollo's future success and growth and we've

invested heavily in this area. We've trained 3 NVQ4 testers/technicians in the last 12 months with a further 4 also now on NVQ4; plus we have over 12 NVQ 3 trainees across the country and two apprentices.

Twenty Questions - Lynne Franklin, Reception

We talk to the woman behind the voice!

Name

Lynne Franklin

Role and responsibilities

Receptionist and office supervisor

Qualities needed to do the job

Patience, understanding of enquiries and a sense of humour!

Biggest change you have seen in your time with Apollo?

The Management Buy Out. It's exciting to see three out of the four directors, who I had worked alongside for many years make it to the top. - A great move for the Company

Greatest strengths of the company?

The Service Management System has been, in my opinion, an ingenious system whereby we can collate and access all the information, on any lift we have on contract. Plus a strong sales team working on tenders for both installations/modernisations/service contracts.

The biggest change in your job?

The volume of calls that Reception takes - between 200 - 270 calls per day. I just love to chat!!!!

Best part of your job?

Getting to see and speak to everyone that works at Apollo - not sure that's good for them though!

Most difficult part of the job?

Definitely speaking to the elderly regarding their stairlifts - I have now adopted at least a dozen grandmothers and at least half a dozen grandfathers!!!

Most embarrassing moment?

A corporate day out when I was fortunate enough to be taken out in a power boat but unfortunate enough to get stuck in the pod I was placed in. I have never heard Martin Bettridge laugh so loudly - it took at least 30 minutes to get me out with an audience that will never let me forget!

Proudest personal achievement

Giving birth to my three lovely sons

Alternative career

Agony aunt!

Unfulfilled dream

Have none - must be too content!

Most useful desktop gadget

Aircon control - phew!

Favourite place to be when not at work

Home with hubby

Secret vices

Nice big Cornetto

Likes and dislikes

Like driving fast, hate speed cameras

Music on your car stereo

Leona Lewis

Three things you'd take to a desert island

Crate of wine, strawberries and cream and a big sun hat

Three words you'd use to describe yourself

Happy, chatty, funny



Three words you think your colleagues would use

Loud, jolly, nutty!