Canadian Contractors Have Found That Suppliers with Rear-Mounts Can Reach New Heights

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– Jeff Irrgang

By Michael J. Major

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Matt Daly, however, says that nonrear-mounted cranes “have become obsolete during the past 15 to 20 years. You just don’t see them around anymore. We’ve never had a problem with a rear-mount or gotten into an area and said, ‘Oh, gee, I wish we had gotten the front-
Although they have many advantages, when the rear-mounted cranes were introduced into North America, they caught on in Canada but not in the United States. Pictured above is the Fascan Fassi, which is manufactured in Italy by Fascan but was designed for the wallboard market in North America.

mounted crane.’ There’s no danger of the rear-mounted crane toppling over. It’s engineered so it’s just not an issue.”

How is it possible that there is such an extremely divergent point of view between two building suppliers like Irrgang and Daly? The answer, simply, is that Irrgang is American and Daly is Canadian. Irrgang is vice president of Eldersburg Builders Supply Company, Sykesville, Md. Daly is general manager of Clare Interior Building Supplies, Limited, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Bernie Faloney Jr., president of Fascan International, Inc., Baltimore, Md., estimates that more than 99 percent of U.S. cranes are the traditional ones mounted behind the cab, and less than 1 percent are rear-mounted; in Canada, the percentages are just the reverse.

Irrgang, Daly and Faloney all agree that the rear-mounted crane has many advantages, especially for
the wall and ceiling industry, with only a few very minor disadvantages. But, before exploring what they have to say about the rear-mounted cranes in themselves, let’s first take a quick backward look into history and see why there is such a strange situation of this machinery being so popular in Canada while being, at the same time, so relatively unknown in the United States.

**Only In America**

“My opinion is that Americans get set in their ways,” Daly says. “They find what works for them and decide to let well enough alone.” The result of this attitude, says Daly, means that when the rear-mounted cranes were introduced into North America, they caught on in Canada but not in the United States.

Faloney suggests that when the rear-mounted cranes first came into existence, U.S. manufacturers could only mount a crane behind the cab due to equipment and road clearance considerations. “When the possibility of rear-mounting came into existence, the inertia of the status quo came into effect in the United States. Nobody wanted to change because the rear-mounts seemed like a radical idea, and the conventional cranes had been accepted. In Canada, however, the rear-mounts had been required and accepted for other industries such as foundation and roofing, so it did not seem like such a radical idea.”

Another anomaly of the situation is that the rear-mount distributed by Fascan, which is called Fassi, is manufactured in Italy. But Fassi was designed not for use in Italy, or anywhere else in Europe, where craftsmen still use plaster by hand—it was designed for the wallboard market in North America.

Fassi, Prentice and Palfinger are the oldest and largest suppliers of rear-mounts in the United States. Cromach has had an offering on the market, on and off since 1990, and the Palfinger model arrived just this year. Not all are like the Fassi, built specifically for the wall and ceiling industry. Daly reports that in addition to the Fassi, he uses another foreign-build machine made by the German company Hiab and distributed out of Toronto by Atlas Polar. Daly says that in terms of performance, “I’d notch them as identical.”

Irrgang, who has nine rear-mounted cranes and purchased his first Fassi about eight months ago, says, “You can only rear-mount certain kinds of cranes and certain brands. Some, like the Prentice crane, can’t be conveniently rear-mounted because they are too heavy. And every state is a little different in terms of what they allow you to put on the rear axle.”

The only disadvantages to the rear-mount, says Irrgang, is that it puts two-thirds of the weight on the rear axle, which makes it a little harder to situate load on the truck and to scale the load. Also, you have to have an air axle to push the weight forward to the front of the truck or else the front is too light, which makes it hard to steer. With
the air axles down all the time, there is more wear and tear on the tires.

Irrgang adds that the subframe makes the cost a little higher, perhaps a $5,000 to $10,000 difference from a regular model. However, given the fact that this is an expensive piece of equipment, costing about $140,000, this extra $5,000 to $10,000 is a relatively little amount, especially compared to the other benefits. “The advantages far outweigh the disadvantages,” says Irrgang. “I use the rear-mount every day.”

It should be noted that the cost factor is one that affects someone like Irrgang, who provides the equipment for the contractor for any particular job. A contractor is not likely to own a piece of equipment like this. And, Irrgang says, the contractor doesn’t pay any more for using this machine. The main reason the contractor should know about it is to find a supplier offering one so he can increase the overall efficiency of his job.

**Benefits Are Far-Reaching**

But, if costs do not directly affect the contractor, the fact that they do have an effect on a supplier like h-t-gang might be a key factor in such a machine becoming more available. He points out that his rear-mount can back up directly to the building, instead of pulling in frontward to get the behind-the-cab mounted crane as close as possible. This adds about 10 feet more reach. “With that extra 10 feet, my rear-mount can reach 41 1/2 feet and can compete with a 50-foot crane,” says Irrgang. “There’s about a $20,000 difference between a 40- and 50-foot crane.” Faloney adds that the Fassi offers two models, the one reaching 41 1/2 feet and the other 56 feet.

The basic advantage, Faloney says, is that the rear-mount “allows for a shorter truck envelope and increased realized radius. You can back up to the building and get closer to your delivery point because you are not obstructed by either the outrigger, truck cab or the deck as you would be with a standard behind-the-cab mount.”
Also, Faloney adds, residential machines are basically designed for three floors, but the rear-mount can allow delivery to the fourth or fifth story.

Another big advantage, Daly says, is that the rear-mount comes with a remote control. “The driver just gets out of the truck, plugs the remote in the back section of the crane, and can operate the crane in a matter of seconds,” he says. “He doesn’t have to crawl up to fit into the chair to operate the crane. And still another great advantage to the rear-mount is that if you’re delivering material to an upper floor, you can go up to that floor and operate the crane from there with the remote. With the front-mount, you have to sit in your seat. This has to result in at least a 20 percent time savings.”

Still another advantage, says Irrgang, is that servicing the crane is much easier and more efficient. “On a conventional rig, where the crane is mounted behind the cab, it’s difficult to get to. The rear-mount is much more accessible for oil, greasing and other maintenance, as well as repairs.”

The process for acceptance in the United States may be slow, at least at first. For, as Irrgang says, a rear-mount is not the type of equipment someone in the United States is likely to just go out and buy. For him, it was a time for truck turnover anyway, and most people wait at least a couple of years before replacing a rig like this.

But Irrgang also suggests that, now that the ice has been broken by some pioneers like himself, and as word gets around, the benefits of the rear-mount will become too obvious to ignore; its popularity will inevitably grow. As Irrgang says, “Once people see it in operation, they think it’s a good idea.”

In other words, they’re no longer laughing. CD

About the Author
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