



## **Merlo keeps a vital service open 24/7 - the Torpoint Ferry**

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Probably few of the drivers and passengers in the million vehicles using the Torpoint Ferry service every year (in the toll direction) give much thought to the operation needed to keep it going.

And, keep going it must, according to Operations Manager Tony Whetton MBE; “We have to run a 24/7 service all 365 days of the year” he says “With at least two ferries in service – plus maintain an essential ‘blue-light’ service guaranteeing access to priority vehicles at any time!”

The river Tamar forms the eastern boundary of Cornwall and, since the Tamar Bridge Act of 1957, responsibility for both the vital bridge and ferry crossings has been shared by a joint management committee.

Using the ferry saves a hefty 25 mile journey around the Rame Peninsula for Plymouth commuters and holiday makers – so it’s understandable that tempers fray if there are delays!

Surely, since the first organised ferry in 1790, there have been maintenance and ‘emergency’ issues. The scale has changed, of course, and would have amazed Paul Carew who organised that first ferry. Now, three new 73 car ferries cross the Tamar at peak times, each pulled by two huge underwater chains of 2730 links!

The main daily maintenance issue is that of clearing algae from the tidal beaches (actually slipways) – it has to be swept, collected and dumped away from the river. This constant task was fulfilled by a 2WD tractor. But, there are heavier jobs quite impossible for a 2WD machine. Each year, one of the 41 ton chains has to be pulled through the water and replaced. The 12 ton counterweights which tension the chains run in vertical shafts and they have to be pulled out for maintenance.

These jobs required the hire of a big 4WD tractor, other work required a platform hire, then there was occasional lifting for replacement of hydraulic parts that needed a crane hire. This all added up to a big bill for Technical Supervisor, Stuart Stroud.

“Hiring equipment was costing more and more each year” confirms Stuart “When we talked with one of our suppliers, C R Willcocks, we realised there was a machine that could do ALL of these jobs – a Merlo!”

Eric Smith has driven the Panoramic P36.7 Plus for much of its 560 hours over the last year. He is unequivocal in its praise; “Absolutely brilliant” he says “Fantastic visibility and the hydrostatic drive is both super powerful and a huge safety boon in the holiday season when threading your way through a queue of traffic and pedestrians that may do anything! We change a chain every year by pulling it through the ferry and I reckon this machine is ten times better than the way we did it before.”

Regular maintenance is, however, only a part of the Merlo’s function. “Its major attraction to us” says Stroud “Was its versatility and ability to instantly change attachments to suit a need. If a hatch needs to be lifted, it’s not a safe four-man job but the Merlo does it in a tick. And the sideshift makes replacing the hatch very simple and safe. We can instantly fit the platform (this Panoramic has foam-filled tyres) or a lifting hook, to get into wherever there is a mechanical problem. We simply cannot have downtime in this job!”

So, it’s versatility that’s the key. The ability to rapidly change attachments to meet a need and the reduction in hiring is saving Stuart’s budget some £2000 every year. The reduction in aggravation in keeping the ferries moving is incalculable.

And Eric, with a glint in his eye says “It’s very good in moving dead cars and trucks, too!”