# REN

COVERING THE RAMP THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAS

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 3
AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2020
www.rampequipmentnews.com

RAMP EQUIPMENT NEWS

# PARTNERSHIP POWER

## Marrying GSE with client

PLUS BAGGAGE TRACTORS • REFUELLING • POST COVID-19

Linking up: when supplier and client work as one, benefits accrue

# Hitched up

When an FBO operator talks of one of its GSE suppliers as being a member of the family, further investigation is warranted. Alwyn Brice examines that rare thing within the aviation sector: a symbiotic relationship.

"They listen to us and they appreciate our input. In fact, they bend over backwards to get things right. We work together and if I'm honest, they are concerned about our situation and our operation in the light of COVID-19." These are words of Jay R Hamby, who is Senior Vice President Operations, Central Region, for Atlantic Aviation. They are addressed to his key supplier of pushback tractors, Lektro (now part of JBT AeroTech).

Today, finding smooth-running partnerships within the aviation arena is not a common occurrence. Competition amongst handlers, GSE manufacturers and indeed airlines, is tough; so, when a customer goes on record to highlight the working relationship that his company has with a GSE provider, it is something worth documenting.

## From handling… back to Midway

Hamby's background could be considered that of old school. He's been over 30 years in the business of ensuring that passengers get from A to B and he began his career on the ramp as a handler. Gaining experience, he was subsequently appointed General Manager of the FBO at Chicago's Midway airport.

"As an Ops Manager I used to go to New Orleans to the Super Bowl event," he relates. "There was a lot of aviation activity with small jets. In 1990 I worked at a Double A event, and there we partnered with Lektro for moving the aircraft around. It was a busy period, with a lot of arrivals, and I became a great fan of the company's pushback because it was easy to operate and could be quickly moved from one aircraft to another. Of course, I was familiar with other sorts of pushback but they relied on towbars and you simply couldn't serve as many aircraft as quickly. And these events attracted hundreds of corporate jets, so quick solutions were necessary."

> "I became a great fan of the company's pushback because it was easy to operate"
>
> **Jay Hamby,**
> Atlantic Aviation

Returning to Chicago, Hamby recommended that the company he was working for at the time, Aero Services, adopt the electric Lektro pushback tugs, and in the event two were purchased, a model 8800 and a 8700. The fact that they were battery-powered was not the key consideration at the time, though, for Hamby says that he was impressed by their efficiency and that fewer ramp incidents were logged after their adoption.

"And we got a lot of snow in Chicago! The Lektros worked perfectly well there, and there was a sufficient charging infrastructure at the FBO, so there was no problem. Of course, back then the charge didn't last that long, but things have advanced since then.

"Chicago can be a testing place. A few years back there was a polar vortex there, and the temperature dropped to 40 degrees below zero. The Lektros worked perfectly well but I do recall fuel gelling in other tractors during that time."

### New brooms

After his spell at Chicago he was appointed Regional Manager, and with his growing status came the chance to make an impact on the FBO network.

"I had more of a say in company policy and I could see the advantages of using Lektro tugs. In short, I wanted to see them rolled out across the entire network."

This kind of decision was backed up when his operation was involved with the Kentucky Derby. "You'd see 600 or 700 jets come to Louisville, and we'd exclusively use Lektro tugs there. We were parking jets on runways, taxi-ways – everywhere, and we'd be working the tugs from six in the morning to eight-thirty at night. By the end of the shift the battery charge would be above 50% - that was a measure of how the technology was advancing. And we still handle the Derby traffic today."

It wasn't long before the wisdom of the investment began to bear fruit and spurred by the success of the Lektro product, other FBOs began to be supplied. Today, the number at the stations varies according to the scale of business, but anything from one to three examples will be in operation; Hamby reckons that the company probably has about 120 deployed in all.

A further bonus was the environmental factor. "This kicked in later, but really, it was something of a natural evolution for us. The Lektro tug fits the bill and they have evolved over the years and simply got better and better."

### Climatic considerations

Given the low build and seemingly lightweight stature of the Lektro tug, a casual observer might be forgiven for wondering about its suitability in extremes of weather. Hamby, though, is quick to dispel any such thoughts.

The ability of Lektro's GSE to function in extremes of weather is an asset

"Our FBO network includes several holiday resorts where snow is present and ski-ing is popular," he states. "We have operations in Salt Lake City, Reno, Sun Valley, Colorado and others besides, where it gets pretty cold, and working in snowy conditions is normal. The Lektro tug is as good as, or better than, any other type of tug that I've used at these places. Of course, you don't operate GSE with snow on the ramp but this tug will happily work on a couple of inches of snow. Because it's front wheel drive, when the plane is lifted on to the tug, there's the extra weight to stabilise the tug – a bit like ballast, you could say. We've found that the GSE works exceptionally well in the snow."

He adds that batteries have never been an issue, either. Lektro tugs run on li-ion, which is a well-proven combination. "Battery life with the older units used to average around seven years," says Hamby. "The newer equipment has a longer life, though. We still have some of the earliest tugs in operation. We tend to refurbish them and then allocate them to bases which are a little less active."

This recycling operation would seem a good idea, given the level of interest in the environment today.

### Options abound

Finally, Hamby mentions that when orders are placed, there is an Atlantic Aviation options list, for want of a better description. "We go for top of the range batteries for longevity," he says, "and we'll include a variety of tow heads. We like a three-seater configuration, so that we can accommodate the wing walkers. Seats are also upgraded and made more durable There's usually a service package for the battery – and of course we specify the paint colour.

"After-sales has never been an issue for us – we look upon Lektro as a partner, and that says it all." RGN

## Atlantic swell

Atlantic Aviation today boasts around 70 FBOs within the US, which encompass both commercial and resort type destinations. Some 3,500 staff are employed and prior to the pandemic, Las Vegas was its busiest station. Things have changed since COVID-19, though, so that today Aspen now tends to be the most active FBO within the group.

The company is one of the oldest FBO networks in the US, having begun operations in Delaware under the aegis of the Dupont family back in 1927. The group gradually grew to five stations but it wasn't until consolidation in the 1980s and 1990s, and its purchase by EAS, that things started to accelerate. Within a year, in 2000, Macquarie stepped in, and thanks to its financial muscle, around ten stations grew to the current total. Although it's a domestic network, Hamby doesn't rule out the possibility of an international presence at some future date.

## For a quick delivery

**SOMETIMES the simplest of innovations can come to the aid of the sector's handler.**

**The JBT Cargo Chute is a solution to assist in the unloading of packages from the passenger cabins of aircraft. It works by utilising existing or new passenger steps, with the chute mounting on the stair flights, whilst still maintaining access for operators up and down the stairs. Operators are able to safely slide packages in a controlled manner, eliminating the requirement to either walk down the steps whilst carrying goods or having additional operators on the steps passing the goods to each other.**

**This simple solution from JBT improves the safety and efficiency of unloading packages from passenger cabins by reducing the strain on operators and reducing the manpower required, whilst speeding up the process. When used in conjunction with a roller bed, further efficiencies can be gained by transporting goods from inside the aircraft itself.**

**Retrofittable to almost all makes of passenger stair, it requires no permanent modifications; steps are not damaged and when no longer required, the chute can be put back into dedicated passenger use.**

## Greener, quieter and more efficient

IN an attempt to minimise their $CO_2$ footprint, airports all over the world are currently replacing diesel-powered GSE with battery-powered alternatives. This applies to buses, baggage loaders, pushback tractors and many other pieces of ramp equipment.

With the launch of its 7400 JetEx 28 VDC battery-powered ground power unit, ITW GSE is paving the way for a cleaner ramp. Contrary to other 28 VDC battery GPUs on the market, the 7400 JetEx has a very high battery capacity, one that allows for days of use before it needs to be recharged. In fact, it is powerful enough to perform at least 100 starts on a full charge.

Much to the benefit of operators and staff, the purely battery-powered 7400 JetEx is very quiet and it creates neither $NO_x$ nor $CO_2$ emissions. This makes it an ideal candidate for hangars and for remote use, too.

Apart from providing a comfortable working environment, this newcomer also limits a customer's running costs, since it does not contain any rotating parts and is therefore not subject to wear and tear. The JetEx can provide power to aircraft like the Cessna Citation, Beechcraft, Gulfstream, Dassault Falcon, ATR 42 and ATR 72 and Bombardier Q Series/ Dash 8, as well as other aircraft.

Worth mentioning also is that the JetEx is so small that it can easily pass under an aircraft wing. Capable of being charged from any 50/60 Hz socket, it can supply power and be recharged at the same time. Usefully, it is compliant with the California Energy Commission.


# Surface management solutions

**DESPITE the current crisis in the aviation industry, the Port of Seattle has initiated a project for the implementation of a Surface Area Management System that includes Assaia's Turnaround AI Solution.**

**This actually constitutes a joint offering between SAAB Sensis and Assaia International. The aim of the project is that of improving efficiencies in the taxi-ing of aircraft, gate allocation and turnaround activities at Sea-Tac International.**

**Tim Toerber is the Airline Resource and Scheduling Manager at the airport and he underlined the usefulness of the system.**

**"Assaia's video analytics is crucial in providing full visibility over turnaround activities, as well as improving safety for airside operations. Its 24/7 automatic monitoring and reporting capability will help the airport, airlines, air traffic managers and ground handlers to better understand safety-related issues and thus reduce the number of incidents airside."**

**The system is due to to be implemented at 85 aircraft stands at the airport in the first quarter of 2021, a time that popular opinion believes traffic volumes will be creeping up once again.**

**Max Diez, Assaia's Chief Executive Officer, adds: "We are very happy to have won an airport such as Seattle-Tacoma as one of our first customers for a full roll-out and as our initial full-scale deployment in North America. The airport is the fastest growing airport in North America and operates inside a very constrained apron footprint, which makes it an especially compelling customer, as we can showcase the benefits our system brings to complex airport operations."**

**Seattle-Tacoma has witnessed tremendous growth in recent years and handled over 50m passengers in 2019, seeing 450,000 aircraft movements: amongst its biggest customers are Alaska Airlines, Delta and Southwest.**

**Assaia's Turnaround AI Solution is a readily available system that is currently being used by more than two dozen airports and airlines around the world.**

# All-electric cargo loader underlines trend

BATTERY power is here to stay: JBT's latest Ranger cargo loader is available in an all-electric, 7,050 kilogramme capacity configuration. Powered by 48 kWh li-ion batteries, the electric Ranger provides a reliable, low maintenance operation, with no emissions and lower operating costs. The Ranger is easy to operate and its front axle leaf spring suspension contributes to a smoother driving experience, while the long-established HeliRoll conveyor system makes for easy container handling on the main deck.


Designed for higher speed duties (24 kilometres/hour) to facilitate multi-gate operations and quick aircraft turns, the Ranger benefits from Aircraft Proximity Detection assistance to reduce any chance of aircraft damage. Side mounted, fold-down panels allow easy access to all maintenance components, electrical systems and hydraulic units while troubleshooting is made simpler with JBT's PDM-assisted diagnostics.