

# Spreading ambitions

Born during the boom of Liverpool's maritime history and continuously adapted alongside it, **RAM Spreaders** believes its SingFlex system to be the new norm. **Lacey Jones** reports

**S**ituated in the northwest of England, Liverpool is enmeshed in the UK's maritime history. The city's first dock was built upon the River Mersey in 1715 and for many years trade prospered. Amidst the Port of Liverpool's boom in 1800s came the opening of the Royal Albert Dock which helped to revolutionise the way the docks worked, offering fireproof and secure warehouses and hydraulic cranes which hauled heavy cargoes across the flagstones. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 40% of global trade passed through the city's docks.

It was this boom of maritime activity that would put the wind in the sails of another business and played a pivotal role in its development. Now established as a well-known spreader manufacturer, RAM Spreaders' ancestral roots began in 1876 as Ed Mills & Son. The family-run blacksmiths supported the thriving maritime city as it handled large amounts of cargo at its docks.

When containers first began to arrive in Liverpool in 1967, the then director of Ed Mills & Son, Robert A. Mills, utilised his specialised welding skills and mobile workshop to repair the boxes and other specialised equipment at ports. In 1972, Mills' knowledge and expertise led him to develop and manufacture fixed frame spreaders and spreaders for forklift trucks.

Philip Lee, CEO of RAM Spreaders, told **CM** how the company's first spreader was a 40 ft semi-automatic fixed-length top lift spreader supplied to Cawoods in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Cawoods operated short sea shipping services across the Irish Sea between the UK and Ireland.



"The model today would be classed as RAM Model 2030," Lee explained. "The spreaders we have today are far more advanced in terms of technology and performance, with the emergence of telescopic single and twin lift spreaders dominating the market for decades."

Telescopic spreaders offer a versatile lifting solution for several lifting applications, especially when supporting heavier and longer loads. These types of spreader have adjustable-length arms which can lift shipping containers of different sizes by their corners.

RAM began building the first of a family of telescopic spreaders suitable for all applications in 1985. In January of that year, the first order was placed for a telescopic spreader: a Model 1310, a side lift spreader with lifting hooks. The spreader was supplied to fit a PGS forklift trucks, which were then manufactured in Italy in the same town as Ferrari reachstackers. The unit was delivered to the customer six weeks after the order was placed.

In 1986, RAM supplied its first single lift telescopic spreader to Humber Terminals located in the northeast of England. Two years later the company designed its first reachstacker spreader supplied to HYCO, which was destined to operate in London for another union traffic company, London Container Services. "At the time, the only other reachstacker manufacturers were Belotti and Kalmar, who made their own spreaders," Lee said.

Today RAM offers its 4141 Revolver spreader for reachstacker operations, a dust-free containerised bulk handling system for all types of cranes and commodities. Outside of supplying container spreader equipment, RAM also provides other practical and efficient bulk and break-bulk handling solutions including the RAM Octo – a universal pipe handling spreader capable of handling a wide range of pipe lengths and diameters safely and securely for yard, quayside, ship and



This page:

**Left:** Robert Mills further diversified the company's interests into container handling equipment  
**Right:** RAM's first twin lift spreader

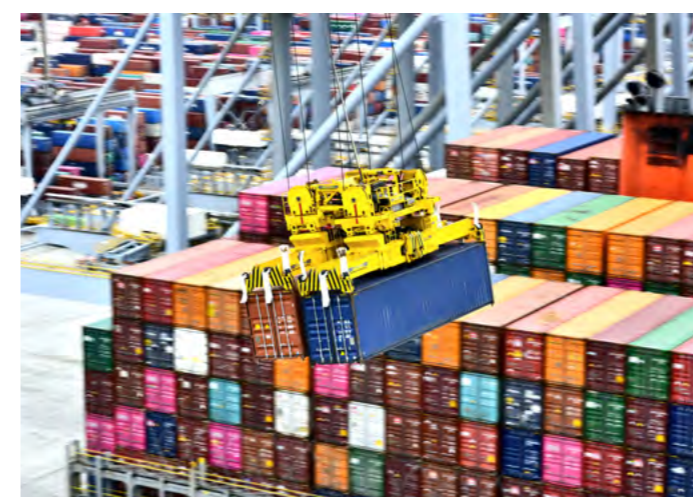
Opposite page:

**Top Left:** Arthur Mills and Edward Mills of Ed Mills & Son

**Top Right:** One of RAM's first telescopic spreaders, a Model 1310

**Bottom Left:** CEO Phillip Lee believes SingFlex will be the new norm for the industry

**Bottom Right:** 1974 spreader similar to the first spreader RAM ever



offshore operations.

"From the early 1990s, our company (then known as NSL Engineering) firmly established RAM Spreaders in the container handling industry," he added. "With clever strategic market penetration and innovation, our business grew with spreaders seen at ports and terminals worldwide."

Most notably, the company's twin lift spreader, launched some 30 years ago, has enabled RAM to establish itself as the number one supplier of ship-to-shore (STS) spreaders and is its best-selling spreader to date.

The introduction of twin-lift spreaders from RAM began with the prototype twin lift spreader built for Coastal Container Services. "Initially, the order was for a single lift spreader, but it was agreed during the contract that we would add the twin lift twistlock system at our expense to get a twin lift spreader out into the field," Lee explained.

Although, the first major contract for RAM's twin lift spreaders was agreed with MGM in Italy. The company purchased Model 2620 twin lift spreaders when it supplied new cranes to Hutchison Ports for their at-the-time new terminal in Freeport, Bahamas, which began operations in 1997.

Now the twin lift spreader integrates seamlessly into RAM's product offering as the company delivers several different versions of its twin lift spreaders to the market, including an electric powered model for customers who want to ensure a reliable quayside operation whilst being more sustainable.

A joint partnership with grab manufacturer SMAG in 2015 allowed the company further business diversification. It helped RAM to embrace new manufacturing techniques and quality standards, which elevated its product portfolio to "new heights" in quality and performance.

Lee said: "Having over 50 years of experience serving ports and terminals worldwide, the RAM Spreaders brand continues to grow ever stronger, with products including SingFlex multiple container lifting tandem headblock." Lee believes that the SingFlex will soon become the "new norm" in container handling as the company's SingFlex tandem system has been gaining popularity globally, with 150 units operating at 15 ports worldwide.

RAM Spreaders' SingFlex Twin40 headblock has been in operation at DP World's London Gateway Terminal in the UK since November 2013 and has helped contribute towards improved productivity and operating flexibility at the container terminal. SingFlex offers terminal operators tandem lift capability without the need for dual trolley cranes. Each SingFlex headblock system is fitted with RAM separating twinlift spreaders, allowing the terminal operator to handle containers both in the conventional single lift manner and in tandem mode.

The spreader manufacturer is also on-hand to support customers after they have purchased their equipment. "RAM prides itself in offering the best level of after-sales support from its vast global network of engineers, who are on hand to ensure customers maintain the reliability and efficiency of their equipment, whilst RAM's spare part hubs endeavour to pursue the quickest lead times for their spare parts," Lee explained.

The company plans to continue to expand its reach and cater its products to the growing needs of its customers in the near future, while keeping sustainability in mind. Lee said: "As an innovative company, RAM is always keen to embrace new technologies and systems and is already adopting new energy-saving methods, such as the introduction of solar energy at their manufacturing facility and clean air systems."