

JCT600 back with a bang as sales hit new record

Dealer sees busiest week ever for used-car demand

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Bradford-based automotive firm JCT600 enjoyed the busiest week for used car sales in its history as lockdown restrictions on dealerships were eased.

After ten weeks of lockdown, the family-owned automotive retailer got off to a flying start with a 21 per cent sales uplift across its 48 dealerships compared with the same week last year.

It was also a record-breaking week for incoming sales enquiries with volumes into the business increasing by 177 per cent compared with the same week last year.

Both telephone and digital enquiries were the highest JCT600 has ever experienced in a single week and the company also saw web traffic double last week compared with the level experienced during lockdown with people spending more time and viewing more pages than before.

"After two and a half months of dealerships being closed, there's obviously a huge pent-up demand from customers wanting to change their cars," said John Tordoff, CEO of JCT600.

"While it's been a frustrating period for us, our team and our cus-

177%

The increase in sales enquiries that JCT600 had in the week following lockdown being eased.

21%

The uplift in used car sales seen in the week following lockdown being eased.

48

The number of dealerships that JCT600 operates across the North of England.



JOHN TORDOFF: 'After two and a half months of dealerships being closed, there's obviously a huge pent-up demand from customers wanting to change their cars.'

PICTURE: GILES ROCHOLL

tomers, health and safety has, of course, to be the priority and we now have measures in place to make sure our showrooms are as safe as possible."

JCT600 has dealerships throughout Yorkshire, the North East, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

In order to keep customers safe it has implemented limits to visitor numbers in order to achieve safe social distancing in the showrooms and moved to an appointment only system to manage this.

Dealerships have clearly marked flows for customers to follow as well as rigorous cleaning for all high-touch areas and hand sanitisation stations for colleagues and customers. In addition, every vehicle is sanitised, sealed and then quarantined prior to a customer interaction, and all customer areas are sanitised after every use.

In addition, JCT600 has also increased its digital processes with customers now able to reserve on-

line, take virtual test drives, use video calls and to implement an order and collect service.

It has also introduced 100 per cent paperless administration and uses home delivery services.

Mr Tordoff added: "We have spent the last ten weeks preparing for the safe re-opening of our dealerships and we're confident that we can deliver a flexible experience for all of our customers."

"We've also worked hard to keep our team informed throughout the period and ensure that returning colleagues are trained on all standards, processes and systems before they walk through the showroom door."

"We expected to be busy, but the last 10 days have been phenomenal."

"On Monday, June 8, we recorded the highest number of sales enquiries into the business we've ever had - quite an achievement for a business as long-established as ours."

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We have spent the last ten weeks preparing for the safe re-opening.

The figures show JCT600 to be bucking the trend with the automotive industry experiencing a great deal of turbulence internationally.

Research from *What Car?* magazine showed that close to a third of those who are considering buying a new car are delaying their purchase in the hope that the Government will announce new scrappage scheme-style incentives.

It comes following the news from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) that there was an 89 per cent drop in new car registrations during May as dealers across the UK had to keep their doors closed.

But lockdown has also changed buying choices too. Close to 19 per cent said that they have changed the brand of vehicle that they were considering prior to lockdown.

GENESIS OF A YORKSHIRE SUCCESS

■ The JCT600 story can be traced back to 1946 when John's grandfather, Edward Tordoff, helped establish Tordoff Motors.

■ Later, after the death of his father, Jack Tordoff bought the shares for all of Tordoff Motors Ltd and went on to build a new showroom next to the original garage.

■ The company name was coined when Jack bought a Mercedes 600 bearing the registration plate 'JCT600' - Jack's initials and the car model which led him to create the brand name that is now known today.

■ The firm is now run by Jack's son, John, but Jack remains as chairman.

BRIEFLY

'Health Hub' to get community fit

Harrogate: Energy supplier CNG Energy has joined forces with Harrogate Rugby Club and Ashville College to launch a new way of keeping the local community fit.

Harrogate Rugby has worked with Sculpt Digital to develop a 'Health Hub' which enables users to receive expert training and it plans to launch the initiative by inviting the community to take part in covering the 804km distance from their ground in Harrogate to Twickenham and back.

Just Eat's merger talks with US giant

Deal: The company behind Just Eat has confirmed it is in talks to merge with American takeaway business Grubhub.

Just Eat Takeaway.com, which was itself formed through a merger earlier this year, said it is in "advanced discussions" with Grubhub over a plan to combine the two businesses. It said the board "notes the press speculation in relation to a possible combination of the businesses".

JD Sport to reopen stores in England

Retail: JD Sports said it will reopen all its 309 stores in England across shopping centres, high streets and retail parks from June 15 as lockdown restrictions ease further.

The group will also open its high street and so-called open air stores in Northern Ireland from June 12, but shopping centres there will remain closed. Peter Cowgill, executive chairman, said the firm had taken precautions for staff and customers.

Business

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Zig Zag to stay afloat thanks to emergency loan package

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A stage lighting company that has worked with some of the world's biggest bands from Nirvana and ZZ Top, is to remain in business after securing a loan from the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS).

Leeds-based Zig Zag Lighting provides lighting and production equipment for live music events and has provided the lighting systems for events like Slam Dunk Festival and, most recently, Jamie Cullum's 2020 UK tour.

The business was hit hard by the coronavirus shutdown. With all of the tours and events Zig Zag was due to work on cancelled or rescheduled until 2021, the company was left facing major cashflow issues and was forced to furlough employees and let down dozens of freelancers who had hoped to work on the shows.

However, it has secured its future with the support of an emergency loan from Lloyds Bank.

Zig Zag managing director, Neil Hunt, was able to secure a six-figure loan from CBILS to allow the business to cover the cost of re-scheduling work and pay for main-



AND ACTION: Zig Zag Lighting provided equipment for the Jamie Cullum tour.

tenance of equipment and premises.

Mr Hunt said: "I started Zig Zag Lighting back in 1985 and we've been running successfully for decades. Nothing prepared me for the impact of coronavirus."

"This should be the busiest time of the year for us and instead we're facing a completely empty summer schedule. Not only will this new money cover our overheads but it'll mean we can come out of

the pandemic in a strong position, ready to bring lighting magic to concerts once again."

Gary Whitaker, relationship manager at Lloyds Bank, said: "Coronavirus has had a huge impact on the entertainment industry and on businesses within its supply chain. Zig Zag Lighting is facing significant uncertainty on when it can resume operations but Neil and the team have their sights set on better times ahead."

I'Anson to create 20 new jobs after acquiring 13-acre site

Animal feed manufacturer I'Anson Brothers has completed the purchase of a 13-acre employment site where it will create up to 20 new jobs.

I'Anson, which currently employs 90 staff, will shortly begin the construction of a 23,000 sq ft feed mill and new site service road at Dalton New Bridge, near Thirsk in North Yorkshire.

The sale price was undisclosed.

Managing director Chris I'Anson, great grandson of Christopher I'Anson who founded the company in 1900, said: "This is a very significant investment for our company and is the major

part of our strategy to secure 50-year further growth for the longer term sustainability of our business and the future generations of our employees, customers and family."

The mill, which received planning permission from Hambleton District Council last year, represents the largest investment in I'Anson's history.

I'Anson's headquarters will remain in Masham, where it will continue to manufacture a range of micronised feeds, speciality rations and horse feeds.

The Dalton site will focus on the production of bulk farm feeds.

Whitbread cash call secures £900m for investment

Shareholders in Whitbread have agreed to invest more than £900m in the Premier Inn owner as part of a major rights issue.

The company said the equity raise will help improve its "financial flexibility" after being forced to shut sites in the face of the coronavirus outbreak.

Whitbread chief Alison Brittain said the move means that the firm is in "a position of strength to continue to invest, increase market share, support our colleagues and guests and create significant value for shareholders".

Whitbread has 18 open hotels in Germany and 49 open hotels in the UK. Ms Brittain said it is ready to reopen the rest of its UK hotels as soon as it is given the go-ahead by the Government.

Hudson Contract calls for quango payments to end

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Construction companies overwhelmingly want to scrap direct funding of the CITB quango, according to the biggest ever independent survey of business views on the effectiveness of the quango's multi-million pound levy scheme.

The damning verdict from 87 per cent of respondents will undermine CITB's ability to claim industry support for its levy-raising powers.

Hudson Contract, which polled its customer base of more than 2,500 construction SMEs, is proposing a radical rethink of training provision in the industry.

If Government wants to maintain a construction specific training levy, HMRC should collect payments in real-time instead of 18 months in arrears under the outdated CITB system.

This would save hundreds of millions of pounds of spending on running costs and questionable schemes and apply fairly to all firms carrying out construction work.

Ian Anfield, managing director of Hudson, said: "It is strikingly clear from our survey that a vast majority of construction SMEs see no point in CITB and get no value from its levy and grant scheme."

"The fact that most companies deliver their own training activi-

ties regardless of CITB underlines the irrelevance of the quango in a modern economy.

"Its heel-dragging response to the coronavirus crisis highlighted its instinct to put self-preservation above any support for the sector."

"We are calling for wide-ranging reform and are proud to provide SMEs with a trusted voice in this important debate about the development of skills in our industry."

"That so few are members of consensus federations shows the unrepresentative nature of many trade bodies."

"They claim to speak for the sector but in reality are compromised by the millions of pounds in grants and other funding they receive from CITB."

In its alternative model, Hudson proposes the following five-point action plan:

■ Scrap the 2020 levy bills now with no collection this year at all. This is a valuable step to help all SMEs in the sector struggling with cash flow.

■ Scrap all levy not yet collected from previous years. If efforts chasing arrears haven't been effective to date, what chance now?

■ Introduce real-time levy collection so it is responsive to economic cycles. Task HMRC with collection as per the apprenticeship levy.

■ Change the rate of collection to one much lower single rate for all labour and require all construction firms to pay it.



OVERHAUL: Hudson Contract is proposing a radical rethink of training provision in the construction industry following its survey.

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Managing commercial property leases during the virus outbreak.
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