

PRESS INFORMATION

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GROUND LEVEL IMPROVEMENTS FOR ALLIANCE FLOORING

Alliance Flooring Distribution has significantly improved materials handling performance at its main warehouse in Kidderminster by working closely with lift truck supplier Atlet. Storage capacity has been maximised and the time products spend on site before delivery to customers has been minimised. The fleet supplied by Atlet includes eight reach trucks with special booms to handle rolls of carpet around the warehouse in a highly efficient and well-organised operation.

“We have been impressed by Atlet’s approach,” says Nigel Wilkes, Warehouse Manager at Alliance Flooring Distribution. “They’ve done what they said they would and, two years into the contract, the service has been excellent.”

With a heritage that can be traced back to some of the area’s oldest manufacturers, Alliance Flooring Distribution was formed in 2004 to provide carpet storage and distribution services for parent company Abingdon Carpets as well as a number of local independent and overseas producers. The warehouse occupies a number of interlinked buildings on a site that has been involved with carpet making for generations.

Alliance selected Atlet as its new supplier in 2006 when the existing fleet of reconditioned trucks, from another manufacturer, was at the end of contract. These machines had proved unreliable once the workload increased following a move to 24/6 operations. There had been a few issues with servicing and Alliance wanted to make sure its replacements would perform to specification.

TITLE GROUND LEVEL IMPROVEMENTS FOR ALLIANCE FLOORING

Atlet representatives visited Kidderminster to discuss the requirements and suggested a week-long loan of a reach truck, temporarily equipped with a carpet boom, so that the warehouse staff could carry out a proper evaluation. The drivers liked the truck and the Atlet team met them to gather feedback and arrange some modifications. This included fitting holsters for hand held barcode scanners and clipboards at convenient positions in the cab. As the existing trucks came to the end of their individual lease contracts they were replaced by eight Atlet UHS reach trucks with an identical specification that helps to promote driver familiarity and simplify maintenance.

“The Atlet sales staff have been extremely professional and have looked after us very well,” says Nigel Wilkes. “One of the problems we had with the previous supplier was that the salesman didn’t stay in touch after the original sale until the lease was nearly finished. With Atlet however we have regular contact and we know they really care about what we want.”

The reach trucks are used to handle four and five metre carpet rolls weighing as much as 450kg to heights up to 10m. A special steel boom mounted on the truck’s modified carriage is inserted into the centre of the roll which is then handled between special deep-racking storage and order assembly areas. Alliance specified a tilting carriage as this made it easier to control and position loads in this particular type of application than the alternative of a tilting mast.

One of the features on the Forte UHS reach truck that particularly appealed to Nigel Wilkes was the unique S3 Stability Support System. This automatically provides higher truck stability by governing speed and acceleration in conjunction with steering sensitivity. S3 automatically reduces the speed of truck functions in proportion to the height lifted, overrides unsafe manoeuvres and reduces jerkiness in the manipulation of the controls to combine optimum performance and productivity with maximum safety.

“We had an issue with the previous trucks and when we mentioned the new ones had the S3 system to the HSE they were impressed,” says Nigel Wilkes. “It’s a good safety feature.”

TITLE GROUND LEVEL IMPROVEMENTS FOR ALLIANCE FLOORING

Alliance also likes the ergonomic features on the trucks including mini steering wheel, tilting seat and push button controls because these help prevent unnecessary twisting when driving. Drivers on afternoon shift in particular do a lot of work and need to read labels on carpet rolls, use their scanners and read paper notes as well as operate their truck to make sure deliveries are despatched on time.

To complete its original fleet Alliance selected three Nissan electric counterbalance trucks, supplied by Atlet, for loading and unloading vehicles. These trucks, which also have special boom carriages, have shorter masts than the reach trucks which allows them to work in the loading bay and inside the vehicle bodies and containers used for shipping carpets to customers.

This busy and well-organised warehouse distributes to 14 Alliance depots across the country each day as well as direct to major retailers. Stock generally arrives during the morning and is put away in allocated racking areas using the reach trucks. As orders are received, carpet rolls are retrieved from storage areas and handled to the large automated cutting machine at one end of the warehouse. Cut carpet is rolled and wrapped before being handled, again by reach truck, to the appropriate order assembly "crib", a designated deep racking bay, for each delivery route close to the loading bay. Assembled orders are loaded onto transport vehicles using the counterbalance trucks. The majority of distribution stock is in the warehouse for just two or three days.

The business has grown and Alliance now offers wooden and laminate flooring which can be transported easily in the spare space on its transport vehicles. Packs of laminate are stored in a separate area of the warehouse complex in three bays of conventional racking. Alliance selected an Atlet OPM man rising order picker so that items can be picked from any location for complete flexibility with maximum utilisation of the available space. This was the first truck of this type used by Alliance and for simplicity the company trained a dedicated operator to use it.

TITLE GROUND LEVEL IMPROVEMENTS FOR ALLIANCE FLOORING

Batteries for the trucks are changed in strict rotation for balanced utilisation using Atlet's Space Track system. The discharged battery is hand winched off the truck directly onto a free charging position. The truck is then connected to the appropriate fully charged unit and repositioned so that the battery can be pulled onboard using a mobile hand winch that is positioned on the opposite side of the chassis to the charging point. The whole process is simple and efficient, involves no manual handling or lifting, and can be completed in a few minutes. The battery area has been redesigned so that trucks are now parked in a separate part of the warehouse rather than being charged overnight. This has simplified management procedures, reduced congestion and improved safety.

Atlet maintains the fleet and exceeds its promise of a four-hour call-out as part of the overall contract. With standardisation of components and engineers who carry significant spare parts Atlet has a first time fix rate of over 90%.

"The designated engineer who manages our servicing requirements fits in with Alliance's operation. He's built such a good relationship with our staff that he's regarded as an essential part of our team," says Nigel Wilkes.

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