

Repair or replace

Deciding whether to repair or replace a damaged or worn crane requires careful assessment. A range of advantages over replacement means extending a crane's service life by repairing it can be the most effective solution

At some point in the operating life of a crane or other piece of capital equipment the owner must ask the question: repair or replace? It is a question that applies equally to an old workhorse or a newer machine damaged in an accident on site or on the road. Doing the math – the cost of replacement versus the cost of repair or restoration – can often give a straight answer.

Traditionally, the common answer has often been "replace" but, increasingly, this is not necessarily the most economical solution, according to one US crane specialist. Equipment owners and insurers, including distributors, crane rental houses and even manufacturers, are discovering that repair and restoration can be the most effective solution – extending the service life of any piece of equipment is the optimal choice, explains Jay Shiffler, business development director at Wheco, a company specializing in crane and equipment repair and

restoration. And "remanufacturing" has become an industry buzzword that covers a range of capital equipment issues.

"In the past, equipment owners, specifically crane owners, have been skittish about repairing a damaged crane or restoring an older one," explained Ron Williams, chairman of Wheco. "These are highly engineered pieces of equipment and repairing them requires very specialized skills. But we are able to put the repair option back on the table."

Wheco offers engineered solutions to produce repaired equipment that is warranted, certified and often, the company claims, "better than new." From three facilities in the US the company serves markets that include contractors, crane rental companies, equipment distributors, insurance companies and manufacturers.

Technicians analyse and create an individual repair strategy for even the most heavily damaged

equipment. If the required spare parts have long lead times or are obsolete and unavailable, "reverse engineering" solutions are used. The company has fabrication and machining capabilities to make individual pieces or components.

Crane and excavator booms, equipment and carrier frames, engines, hydraulic components and systems, and electrical systems can all be repaired. "It is very surprising to see some of our before and after photos," said Williams. Wheco assures that the machines it works on emerge from the plant in as good, or better, condition than they were when they rolled off the manufacturer's assembly line. Repairs are warranted and certified, whether the job is to fix a bent or broken boom or to completely restore a damaged machine to like-new condition.

Trained and certified employees are vital: Wheco's welders, for example, are qualified to AWS standards and their credentials exceed OSHA, AWS and ANSI requirements, Williams claims. To further ensure quality, licensed third-party companies inspect and analyse completed work. "We use independent laboratories for our material analysis and independent welder qualification examiners," Williams explained. "The bottom line is that repairs completed by Wheco carry a warranty that – in many cases – surpasses commercial standards and/or the original manufacture's specifications." ■