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If last year was quiet on the aviation front in terms of passenger travel, that wasn't to say that the GSE providers were exactly having a holiday. Work seems to have continued and if sales have suffered, at least many companies have been able to use the time to enhance their procedures and overhaul production methods.

At Chinese manufacturer Weihai Guangtai's plants, Zheng Junyue reports that the provider devoted time to upgrading the battery system on its buses. This is the same upgrade that has occurred with the company's Huyue tractor. Moreover, the interior finish of the GBD08D electric airport bus has also been tackled, resulting, she says, in a more powerful and more satisfying end product. Last year also saw Weihai Guangtai add to its portfolio a new model, the GBD10D electric VIP airport bus, which is currently undergoing a second round of upgrading.

Zheng adds that in terms of sales, compared to 2019, the manufacturer saw a drop in demand for its diesel buses but this was offset by an increase in sales of electric buses. This actually will come as no surprise to any reader in the GSE business who has dealings with China: the ongoing

Buses and steps come under the Editor's eye in this annual sector round-up.

government mandate that is focused on the environment is working. During 2020 the Chinese supplier sold over 30 units of electric buses to airports all over China, which represented an increase of 50% when compared to the previous year. At the time of writing this figure was covering over 50% of the total number of buses sold last year, and is seen as one more step towards the country's Blue Sky Defence scheme.

Good news for transport

Not everything has been gloom and doom. Perhaps surprisingly, COBUS Industries had a record year, with over 300 units delivered in 2019. That year the manufacturer received orders from Emirates Airlines/dnata for over 144 COBUS: these were delivered during 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Of those, 88 were a new COBUS 3000 XL, with an overall length of 15 metres and a special execution for Emirates Airlines. The buses included 33 passenger seats

and are mainly used for interterminal transport. All buses were equipped with a newly designed passenger and flight information system provided by LTG and adapted to the operations department by INFORM software.

Further eCOBUS were delivered to Frankfurt and Düsseldorf airports in 2020 and four will be sent to Dallas Fort Worth with a completely new designed air-conditioning system, which suits the local hot and humid weather conditions there. The eCOBUS has now been delivered to China, Europe and North America.

During the COVID-caused drop in





A refined stair offering has been one of Denge's contributions to the market

international aviation, COBUS used the time to develop digital concepts for the sales and after sales service of the company, including the re-organisation of the after sales department with new management. It also developed concepts for the future digitalisation of the product range.

COBUS has said that as a member of the IAEMA association it will participate at this year's GSE Expo in Las Vegas and at the newly organised GSE Expo Europe, which is set to take place in Paris at Le Bourget airport in September 2022.

Turkish outlook: greener

"After a tough 2020, we are now more optimistic that our industry will be recovering in 2021," declares Denge's Murat Denge. "In this period of pandemic, one of our best selling products, passenger stairs, is still popular, and demands from our customers are actually increasing. Although we have completed the R&D on towable electric-powered stairs and launched them in the marketplace, we have not seen yet the demand increase for these units, most probably because of the cost and the battery charging infrastructure limitations. However, we will be launching our self-propelled electric stairs in 2021, even though the market is still demanding



diesel versions. The main difference is that enquiries for the canopy option are increasing, with almost all of our customers specifying it as an option; and most of them are buying the canopies as a spare part to install on their current stairs. Of course, the safe docking is applied to stairs as we do to all our GSE, unless the customers do not want it, which tends to be only a few. In order to be more competitive, we have launched cabinless stairs like most of our competitors offer. We had the cabin and door as standard, but now we offer the steps without, which has been useful to our customers.

"As the diesel engine regulations have been changed in commercial trucks, we do not see much of a market in the future for units which are truck mounted; thus our intention is to turn to more towable or self-propelled units.

"Finally, we have improved our stairs in some areas, and look to have better solutions at lower cost, since our industry every year is focusing more on cost, especially after this pandemic."

Profiting from the pandemic

Noémie Papet at TLD's St Lin site says that in Europe, the pandemic has seriously affected the civil aviation sector, and in consequence sales of passenger steps have been greatly diminished compared with 2019. What has been more remarkable was the fact that 2019 was a particularly good year for TLD: current production is down by around 50%, she believes.

"We have profited

from the crisis, though, and have developed some new versions, such as the lithium-powered steps with iBS technology. Stage V engines have also been adopted, along with particulate filters, since these will be mandated by the end of this year. Beyond this have seen more connected vehicles with intuition, thanks to TLD Link. This telematics system receives information direct and is linked with other GSE similarly equipped. This allows real-time access to various parameters of the unit, allowing historical data to be downloaded and alerting clients or technicians about the operational state of their respective vehicles."

She goes on to say that at the St Lin factory the most popular product is the ABS-580-E model with its different options, such as Aircraft Safe Docking which regulates the approach speed of the GSE as it nears the fuselage. The platform extension operation is similarly governed so that docking becomes a safe and straightforward manoeuvre.

"Thanks to the integration of the iBS battery system, the electric choice is particularly interesting because that allows a true flexibility in terms of recharging and so means that the batteries are perfectly adapted to each individual client. In global terms, battery power now takes a share of TLD's output that is in excess of 50%."

Stairs and buses round-up

During 2020 sales activity and revenues were in line with reduced activity within the sector, states Mallaghan's Sebastian Koellner. "Nevertheless, passenger stair orders and deliveries have remained steady. Throughout the year we delivered passenger stairs from our diverse range of eight different towable and motorised machines to North America, Europe, Asia, Oceania and Africa.

"As an example, we delivered our self-propelled high range model, the Continental Stair, to Delta in the US, CKTS and Kansai Airports in Japan, as well as to various destinations across the African continent. The stair model offers customers wide-ranging sill heights, from narrow-body Boeing 737 up to Airbus 350 or Boeing 747/777. There are also a variety of drive options and advanced specification features. The stairs are fully compliant with AHM913, and have a full weather canopy as well as an optimised operator interface for easy operation and maintenance."

He mentions that several customers have also taken delivery of units from Mallaghan's towable stair range, with the Low Range stair being the most commonly ordered and used. He adds that fleet

customers appreciate the advantages this model has to offer.

"Our electric stair range has remained strong, with an increase in interest in the second half of 2020. European customers especially value the electric-driven passenger stair models we have on offer.

"We are always focusing on research and development and so we were one of the first GSE OEMs to offer a fully compliant AHM913 Collision Avoidance System for our relevant product groups, including passenger stairs."

He also reports strong interest in the company's Arbus 50W model from the market throughout 2020.

"During the second half of 2020 we resumed the production of our 32 bus order from Ryanair and are delivering units to their European destinations on an ongoing basis.

"The Arbus 50W is an excellent addition to our portfolio of innovative GSE products. With many options for customisation, the bus can be designed to a bespoke specification for our customers, based on their needs and requirements."

Readers who saw the vehicle in Munich



Weihai Guangtai busy with electric solutions, in line with China's green policies

at the last InterAirport will know that the 50W is the first high capacity, airport passenger bus developed by Mallaghan, and is capable of carrying up to 118 passengers. Two drop-down ramps are incorporated for PRM requirements.

Offering a durability (a galvanised chassis forms the underpinnings) and

performance characteristics and a range of product-enhancing features, the bus currently comes as standard with a diesel engine. The Arbus Electric, now under development, will be a more compact model than the 50W, accommodating up to 100 airport passengers at a time, and will be launched later this year. **ghi**

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