

Scottish hill farmer conquers world market

Jock Bryce is the founder of Kelso-based family business Bryce Suma, a manufacturer whose tractor-mounted post drivers are sold in 15 countries around the world and his one-man tracked fencing machine, the Bryce 180 Pro, is now operating in 10 countries.

All his post drivers, which are used for a huge variety of fencing and hole-punching operations, have won top innovation awards and are constantly being upgraded for use in sectors including forestry and agriculture.

Jock is immensely proud of the fact that products produced in the Scottish Borders are being utilised around the world - seeing himself as an ambassador for his country.

"I used to farm with my father in the Cheviot Hills in the Scottish Borders. We had to leave the family farm due to his ill health and after five years of shepherding and farm management I started my own business with the focus on fencing. That was over 40 years ago", he tells in an interview with Project Plant. "I had no money and had to try and work out how to do the work easily and quickly. Of course, when I started off it was all hand work but I quickly became very frustrated due to the heavy workload and it became obvious that I had to mechanise. So I quickly went from using a handheld auger to a tractor auger, and then I bought my first post driver for £1160 and couldn't sleep at night for worrying about how I was going to pay for it. Three years later, I bought another one for £1340 and of course I had to fund the cost of two tractors as well. However, I still wanted something that would make the job faster and easier because all the work I did was on hill ground."

Jock began to build various other post drivers with improved features and performance and, in 1997, he introduced his first post driver to the commercial market.

"I've patented about 15 different features to maintain a high degree of exclusivity in the market. It has cost a lot of money but it helps me retain my intellectual property rights and will prove an insurance and lasting legacy for the family.

"Having been born, brought up and worked on our own hill farm, and then fenced on my own in hill country, I understand what's required and never liked things breaking down when in full flow in the middle of a working day. That's why we build machines the way we do.

"I'm hands-on. I'm a working man. I've got no letters to my name. My ancestors were shipbuilders and engineers in Belfast."

Jock's wife, Jennifer, looks after the administration side of the business while his sons, Andrew and Stuart, are involved in the sales, works and logistics areas. A third son, Ian, has his own carpentry business.

Bryce post drivers are used extensively in the forestry and woodland sector nationwide.

"The forestry sector generates a lot of business for us. We have many customers who are erecting hundreds of kilometres of deer and stock fencing



Jock Bryce and, below, the Bryce 180 PRO driving strainers for deer fencing

on large-scale forest plantations on hill country. We also have customers who are private landowners operating on a much smaller scale, erecting fences on private woodland for the control of deer, farm livestock and rabbit control."

"A novice can get good results very easily with these machines. They're user-friendly. All the controls are natural. "I'm not into electronics at all because of the issue of long-term reliability. We have had problems with failed electronics on vehicles ourselves. Speaking to modern-day agricultural dealer workshops and truck servicing workshops, they seem to have a daily stream of electronic issues to deal with.

"If you are out working in remote areas on your own, or even with a gang, the last thing you want is your prime machine to break down and having to get an auto-electrician to travel miles at £50 an hour to try to identify and rectify a fault.

www.brycesuma.co.uk

This piece is based on excerpts from articles published in Project Plant and Fencing and Landscaping News.