

Sweet smell of successful management



Warehouse and hamper company **4Rosas** has to cope with huge seasonal variations in activity, deploying temporary staff quickly and effectively.

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Between February and August of any year, things can be pretty quiet at the warehouse of 4Rosas, based at La Muela, near Zaragoza, Spain. For most of the year the warehouse handles crates of wine – more than 50 different brands of French and Spanish varieties – which are exported to major retail outlets in Mexico. The operation is calm and controlled, the activities are measured and a casual visitor may wonder why the company needs a 20,000 square metre facility, of which more than three-quarters (16,300 sq m) is given over to a 15,500 pallet capacity warehouse. The answer to the politely unspoken query would be apparent in the run-up to Christmas, when a visit would be next to impossible. The calm atmosphere and regular working is transformed into a fantastically busy, 20-hours-a-day operation, as 4Rosas produces, stores and despatches over 600,000 examples of its main annual business – Christmas hampers. These contain a mixture of wine, spirits, hams and other seasonal foods.

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During the peak period, from September to December, 4Rosas has full rotation on the 15,000+ pallets. It is organised into different storage areas – unchilled food; alcohol; chilled foods like hams; and cold storage. It has wide aisles – 3.2 metres – and with a maximum reach of 6.4 metres. This means that the fetching and carrying can all be done

without recourse to reach trucks. Six electric Cat lift trucks – five EP16KT and one EP18NT model – stock shelving units, supply the different lines and load and unload at the four automatic and two manual docking bays. As the company’s activities revolve around the handling and transportation of bottles of wine and other spirits, utmost care is vital. A pallet of whisky bottles, for example, has a value of over €8,600; dropping them is not an acceptable option. That fact alone was a major influence on 4Rosas’ decision to use Cat lift trucks.

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“The mast retractor is very slim,” said Miguel Sebastian Oros, the warehouse manager. “When we have used lift trucks from other companies we have ended up breaking bottles or entire pallets by just lowering the mast. This doesn’t happen with the Cat lift trucks.” Another aspect is their actual operating profile. 4Rosas examined and tested them very carefully before buying and acceleration came under →

1. 4Rosas needs a 20,000 square metre facility, of which more than three-quarters (16,300 sq m) is given over to a 15,500 pallet capacity warehouse.
2. The trucks will be working 20 hours a day on three shifts, with little respite.



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→ particular scrutiny. When operators are under pressure and there is a lot of merchandise to get out the door, enthusiasm can get the better of cool judgement. Soft acceleration is essential and Cat Lift Trucks takes the room for human error out of the equation by building in that feature.

“We believe that it is essential that the lift truck accelerates smoothly,” said Sebastian. “In too many cases, goods have been dropped and broken simply through the operator putting their foot down on the accelerator.”

It helps operations enormously that these trucks are well-known and familiar. 4Rosas depends heavily on short-term labour during its peak periods; it doesn't want to spend a lot of time teaching the temporary staff how to drive the vehicles. It needs to have everyone working productively from the moment they get into the cab and able to perform to expected safety standards quickly, both for the operators' sakes and for the merchandise to be sold.

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“All of the operators, whether temporary or permanent, easily adapt to using the machinery,” he said. “Everyone can operate the Cat lift trucks and they can be used effectively, even with only minimum experience which, when it comes down to it, prevents safety problems.”

So, the Cat trucks have proven themselves

to 4Rosas in terms of safety, ease of handling and operation, and built-in features like soft acceleration. It would be great if the trucks were simply able to run to a standard operation, lifting pallets and moving them from delivery vehicle to goods inward shelves, then from goods outwards to the despatch vehicles. But the hamper business isn't like that. Half of the hampers go to retail customers and will probably be palletised; the other half go to individual customers. Retail orders go on a pallet, individual orders go out in individual hampers. The electric lift trucks mainly stack the hampers on the racks but they also help the power pallets to unload trucks.

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But the reality is: six trucks, no matter how good, just aren't enough in the company's peak season. Also, its permanent base at La Muera isn't large enough – 4Rosas needs to hire two more warehouses during that period. It worked with its Cat Lift Truck dealer, Berdiel Manutención, to come up with a solution that was adaptable, delivered the goods and satisfied everyone.

“This past year, we hired power pallet trucks on a short-term basis from Cat Lift Trucks NP range,” said Sebastian. “We had never tried these before but the truth is that they measured up well and we are considering buying new pallet trucks to replace the ones we have at the moment.” In total, 4Rosas hires an additional four electric lift trucks and between four and seven NPs.



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In an operation of this nature, and during the peak period especially, reliability of operating equipment is a paramount requirement. The trucks will be working 20 hours a day on three shifts, with little respite. There is virtually no spare capacity; if something breaks down, it can have a significant impact on the company's ability to deliver – and failure to deliver in the run-up to Christmas is, quite simply, unacceptable. 4Rosas works with its dealer to ensure the fleet keeps running, without interruption. What really stands out most for the company is the level of involvement and commitment from this exclusive Cat Lift Trucks dealer.

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“Berdiel Manutención offers the company life insurance,” Miguel Sebastian said. “The service they give us, especially during the campaign, is outstanding – such as coming to repair a pallet jack at 2 o'clock in the morning. You simply can't put a price on that support.” The machinery is prepared and fine-tuned through two services: one before the peak season and the second immediately afterwards. The maintenance schedule covers wheels and batteries especially but no part of the truck is left uninspected. For the dealer, it is all part of the standard level of service it expects to deliver to its customers.

“It's not just a question of preventing problems but of providing a service when it is needed. In short, your business is our business,” said Berdiel Manutención chief, Daniel Berdiel. ■

Article feedback is welcome: editor@eurekapub.eu



4Rosas facts and figures

Company:
4Rosas

Location:
La Muela, Zaragoza, Spain

Business:
Versatile food and drink warehouse, storage and distribution.

Main activity is the production and distribution of Christmas hampers.

Warehouse size: 20,000 square metres, including 16,300 square metres (175,000 square feet) of storage space, divided into cold storage, chilled areas, food and alcohol.

Capacity:
over 15,000 pallets

Moves 600,000 hampers each Christmas period

14 permanent staff plus temporary workers; up to 167 during the peak hamper season.

- 3. The warehouse has wide aisles – 3.2 metres – and with maximum reach of 6.4 metres.
- 4. 4Rosas produces, stores and despatches over 600,000 Christmas hampers. These contain a mixture of wine, spirits, hams and other seasonal foods.
- 5. The electric lift trucks mainly stack the hampers on the racks but they also help the power pallets to unload trucks.
- 6. Six electric Cat lift trucks, five EP16KT and one EP18NT model – stock shelving units, supply the different lines and load and unload at the four automatic and two manual docking bays.
- 7. 4Rosas exports to major retail outlets in Mexico.



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