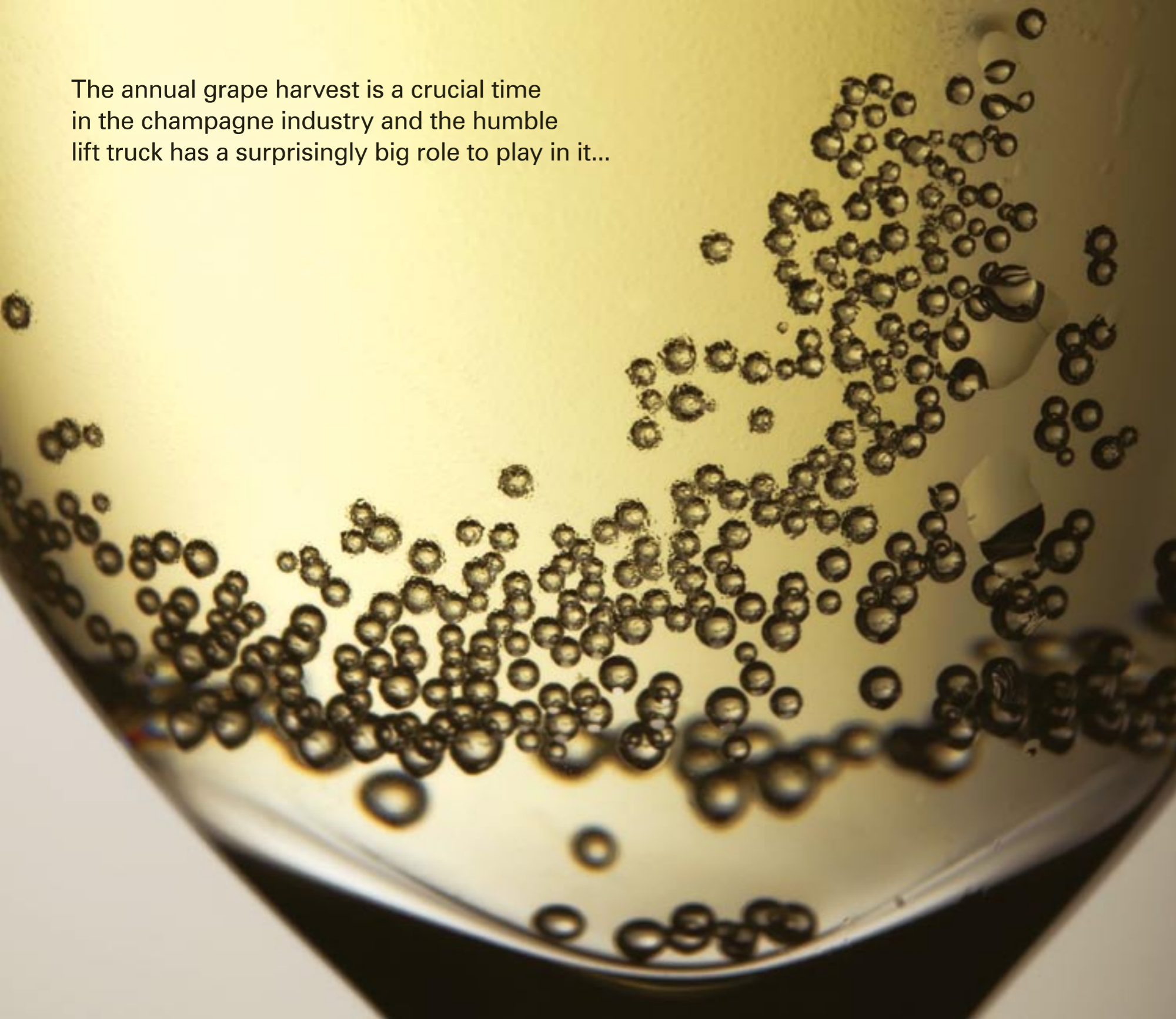


Champagne reception

The annual grape harvest is a crucial time in the champagne industry and the humble lift truck has a surprisingly big role to play in it...



Hold a glass of champagne in your hand, savour the taste as you sip at the bubbles and before too long, images of vines in sunny fields and cool, dark cellars inevitably spring to mind.

But did you know how much of the champagne harvest really depends on the humble lift truck?

Jean-Pierre Gaultier, director of used trucks and short term rental at Aprolis Location, part of French Cat Lift Trucks dealer Aprolis, certainly does. The champagne sector is a major customer for him, hiring dozens of additional short term rental lift trucks during the annual harvest in August and September every year to help cope with the sudden influx of millions of grapes.

"It's a very busy time for the champagne industry – the whole year's work is really about these three or four weeks," he explains. "The industry hires in thousands of extra workers during this period to help harvest the grapes and also has a huge peak in demand at this time for short term rental trucks."

"The trucks must be in perfect condition. You can't have any dust, grease or dirt on them..."

Gaultier's customers include the very biggest names in the champagne world, like Moët & Chandon and the Mumm Perrier Jouët group, and many other, smaller producers around the Champagne region, too.

Around 100 of Aprolis Location's 1400 strong short term rental fleet are hired out for the champagne harvest every year, all gas or electric counterbalanced trucks. "It's typically either 1.6 or 1.8 tonne electric trucks or 1.8 tonne gas trucks," says Gaultier. "But we do hire out a few 2.5 tonne units, too, where customers want to handle two pallets at once, for instance, and a few pedestrian trucks."

The trucks are usually employed in two main ways – to unload and store pallets with

plastic boxes full of grapes that have just come in from the fields, and to subsequently collect those pallets and lift them up to individual presses, where the champagne production process begins.

As incoming loads of grapes need to be check-weighed, a number of the trucks supplied to many customers are fitted with fork-mounted weighing systems. These are usually specified and supplied by the customer itself, then fitted to the trucks and passed through official calibration tests by Aprolis Location. When the short term rental period is over, the weighing systems are removed and returned to the customer.

Wouldn't it be simpler if Aprolis Location were just to supply trucks with permanent weighing systems onboard? "Not really," says Gaultier. "It wouldn't be practical for us to buy the weighing equipment ourselves as they are only really needed for this three-week period every year."

The need to get each unit officially approved, however, does add to the lead times →

1. The trucks are used to unload and store pallets with plastic boxes full of grapes that have just come in from the fields





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short term rental trucks to the champagne sector is also quite testing. "Because of the lead times involved, we have to sit down with customers and start planning in April or May, working out what trucks they require with what modifications, in which locations and at what times," he explains. "After that, we order the trucks and when they come in, we have to prepare them for delivery, which we usually do during July, and then start delivering in early August. That's easier said than done, however, because in August, of course, everyone in France is on holiday!"

"It's all about them getting the right truck, in the right condition, in the right place at the right time."

It's all just part of the ongoing challenge of delivering to this sector, however. "They are demanding customers, but they have every right to be," says Gaultier. "It's all about them getting the right truck, in the right condition, in the right place at the right time. It has to be a really professional job – and we're only too happy to oblige." ■

Is the champagne bubble about to burst?

Recent reports suggest the world may soon face a shortage of champagne thanks to a huge rise in consumption in emerging markets like Russia, China and India.

Global sales are reported to have risen from 287m bottles in 2002 to an anticipated 330m bottles this year, while the maximum number that can be produced by the Champagne area is 350m bottles a year.

Some say producers could help solve the problem by bringing to market an estimated 100m bottles they have put aside to finance their own retirements – but so far, they have been reluctant to do so.

→ required – it takes between three weeks and a month to get the official stamp of approval on the onboard weighing equipment every time. "That means we have to have the trucks in and the weighing systems to hand at least three weeks before the customer actually needs them," says Gaultier.

"Callouts in the middle of the night are common and the trucks have to be back up and running the same day."

Some of the trucks also need other modifications – where customers want to handle two pallets at once, double length forks are often used, for example. Other customers require shorter than standard forks for use with customised pallet sizes. Some also require low-mast-height trucks so that the forklifts can be used to unload trailers from the rear as well as the side.

All champagne sector customers, however, share one further requirement in common: the trucks must be absolutely pristine.

"The trucks must be in perfect condition," says Gaultier. "You can't have any dust, grease

or dirt on them, the paintwork has to be spotless and the tyres have to be almost new to cope with surfaces that are often wet and sticky."

To help make sure his trucks meet users' expectations, Gaultier uses the annual harvest to introduce many new trucks to the fleet each year. "It's not a problem as we're growing by 15% a year as it is, so we do have a constant need for new trucks and obviously, we're constantly retiring the older ones, too," he says.

Typically, the trucks are used to handle loads of 1,000kg, so there's no real strain on them from this point of view. More testing, however, is the pace of their operation, as champagne producers often work around the clock, seven days a week during harvest. All trucks are thoroughly checked and serviced as required before delivery, of course, but if problems crop up while they're at a customer, Aporlis Location must move quickly. Callouts in the middle of the night are common and the trucks have to be back up and running the same day.

"If we can't repair them the same day, we replace them," says Gaultier.

The logistics of supplying



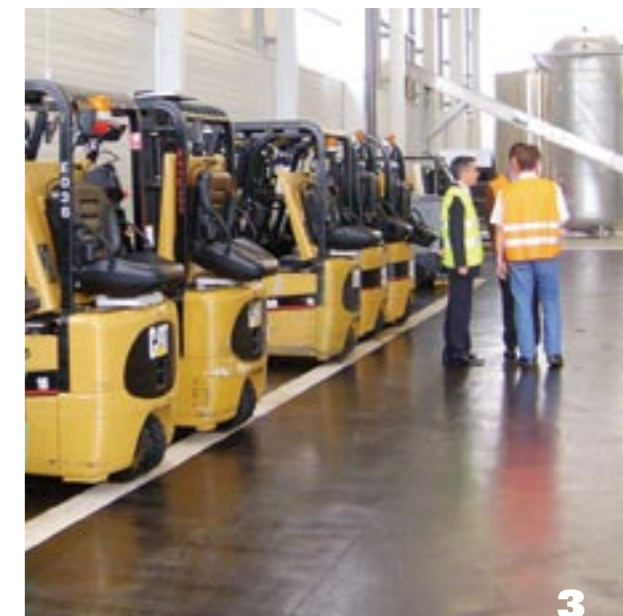
To win a free bottle of champagne simply answer the following question:

'Roughly how many million bottles of champagne will be sold worldwide in 2007?'

Please email your answer to: comment@eurekapub.eu, and add 'Champagne' in the subject line. Correct answers will be entered into the prize draw and winners will be drawn at random by the editor, Gian Schiava. Winners will be notified by email and winners' names will also be published in the next issue of **eureka**. Rules apply: Entry is limited to one answer per person. Cat dealers and personnel are not eligible to participate in this competition. The editor's decision is final. No cash alternative. Closing date for entries 30/ 11/ 07.

2. Aporlis Location supplies around 100 short term rental trucks to the champagne sector each year

3. Forklifts play a key role in unloading the grapes and keeping the presses supplied with fruit



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