

## Long Ladders to the Alps and beyond Part 2



Dennis/Merryweather 100ft (30m) Turntable Ladder (TL). One of the wartime NFS issue TLs, this appliance, based at Chelmsford Fire Station, was in service until the early 1960s. It is seen in the red livery of the newly formed Essex County Fire Brigade at their first Annual Review in 1949. The crew are wearing the unique 'cherry red' steel helmets of the ECFB. (EFM Collection)

After the Second World War the National Fire Service remained in existence until 1948. The size of the service was greatly reduced and in anticipation of a return to local authority control, fire appliances were moved around the country to ensure that fire brigades would be suitably equipped for the future. Turntable ladders (TL) were 'high cost' items and were distributed to fire stations in areas that needed them. In Essex, one notable move was an almost new Leyland Merryweather TL from London's Dockhead fire station to Brentwood, replacing their 60ft (18m) Austin TL, which in turn was moved to the more rural West Country.

Although many post 1948 fire brigades needed to replace war weary appliances, almost all production of fire appliances was directed to the export market. German ladders made by Metz and Magirus were unavailable in the UK and as a result Merryweather and Sons was the only producer of Turntable Ladders. Supplies were very limited and were controlled by the Government. As mentioned before, these appliances were very expensive so resulted in most TLs serving for much longer than was originally intended. Some staying in service for more than twenty years.

Essex needed a replacement for the TL based at Dagenham and in 1953 was able to procure one of the first post-war Metz 104ft (31m) ladder sets, mounted on a Dennis F14 Chassis. When the Greater London Council took over the whole of the Essex County Fire Brigade's 'Metropolitan' C Division in 1965, this appliance moved over to the London Fire Brigade fleet.



Essex County Fire Brigade 1953 Dennis F14/Metz 104ft (31m) Turntable Ladder. Based at Dagenham, this appliance was transferred to the London Fire Brigade in 1965, when the Greater London Council was formed. It is pictured here when running as a spare at Plaistow fire station in the 1970s. (Photo courtesy of the LFB Museum).

With the county's fleet of turntable ladders beginning to become more difficult to maintain, towards the end of the 1950s, new TLs were needed. Fortunately, at around the same time, Merryweather and Sons introduced their completely new hydraulic turntable ladder.

In 1959 the first of these new appliances arrived in the Essex County Fire Brigade (ECFB). Five of these AEC Mercury based appliances were to serve in Essex for the next 20 years. Considered by many to be the quintessential British fire appliance, these new appliances eventually gave their ladder sets to new chassis in the 1980s.



Three of the five AEC Mercury/ Merryweather 100ft (30m) turntable ladders that served in the ECFB. From left to right the appliances are from Chelmsford, Basildon and Harlow fire stations. (EFM Collection)



The ladder set from the Clacton AEC Mercury/Merryweather on its new Dennis DFD 133 chassis in 1986. (EFM Collection)

In the 1960s a different type of high reach appliance began to appear in British fire services. Called Hydraulic Platforms, these vehicles had large articulated booms operated by hydraulic rams and were able to reach outwards as well as upwards. Many fire brigades purchased these appliances, which were made in various sizes from 50ft to 100ft. One problem with Hydraulic Platforms was the size of the vehicles concerned. The greater the height of the platform, the larger the size of the vehicle required to carry it. This restricted which fire stations could house the appliances. The vehicles also needed sufficient space to operate as the ground outrigger jacks, needed to keep the vehicle stable, added more than twice the vehicle width when operating. Essex did not operate any Hydraulic Platforms (HPs), but a change was soon to come.



Three Hydraulic Platforms following fire-fighting operations at a major fire. The folding booms are clearly shown. Note the span of the outrigger jacks. (Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service)

In 1991, the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS), as it was now called, took delivery of the first of five Aerial Ladder Platforms (ALP). This new variation of the Hydraulic Platform concept saw the lengths of the articulated booms shortened but made to extend. Fixed ladders, similar to the ladders of a turntable ladder, were attached to the extending articulated booms. Based on the Scania P113H chassis with body work by Saxon Fire Engineering and with 30m (98ft) booms made by Simon Engineering, these appliances could be operated either from the ground or from controls within the crew platform at the head of the top extending boom. These appliances were soon to show their versatility, especially on fires involving roofs and the upper floors of high structures.



1992 Scania/Saxon/ Simon Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) of the ECFRS based at Grays Fire Station.  
(EFM Collection)

In 2010 the ECFRS replaced its earlier ALPs with a new generation of Scania/Angloco/Bronto ALPs. These latest appliances are operated by computerised hydraulics and are quicker to extend and manoeuvre than the previous ALPs.



Grays 2010 Scania/Angloco/Bronto 32m (105ft) ALP at a drill session.  
(Photo courtesy of M. Ford)

What of the future? Just when it was thought the turntable ladder would be completely superseded by the Aerial Ladder Platform, a new generation of TLs has come into service. These new appliances operate faster in all of their movements and have the advantage of an articulated top extension, giving them some of the attributes of the ALP. The London Fire Brigade have recently placed several of these new 32m ladders into service and will soon be receiving three new massive 64m turntable ladders.



Seen at a major fire in Erith, South London, the new TL from the LFB's Dagenham fire station demonstrating its articulated top extension. The appliance closer to the camera and supplying the TL with water, is the Scania pump from ECFRS Grays fire station. (Photo courtesy of Alan Field)



The last remaining Essex AEC/Merryweather TL, Formerly based at Basildon, now preserved at the Essex Fire Museum, Grays. (M.Beale Collection)

M. Beale