



*GOODWOOD REVIVAL: Traditional canvas was in demand at this event.*

With wetter summers leading to massive surges in last minute demand for marquee contractors, the industry is faced with an even more pressing need to train its staff to NVQ level. **Chichester Canvas** puts the case for training and talks about a return to traditional canvas at the Goodwood Revival meeting.

# New qualifications

LAST YEAR'S very wet weather saw marquee contractors' industrial washing machines working at full pace, and Chichester Canvas is just about recovering from what it describes as "a very stressful year coping with the weather's seemingly constant assault on outdoor events".

Very often it has been the takedowns that have had to cope with the worst of the conditions where problems have varied from muddy and wet equipment to transversing vehicles across waterlogged fields.

But the event market has been an active one for the firm and many others, with stronger enquires, presumably due to public demand for more high quality, leisure time. Chichester Canvas as a group has concentrated on satisfying existing clients that cannot be discarded for short term gains, whatever carrot is dangled in front of it.

Organisers now seem to be more conscious of ensuring that their chosen contractor is not only a member of the Performance Textiles Association, but also that staff are qualified and skilled in their jobs. Until the recent introduction of the NVQ qualification in temporary structures, there was no recognised qualification for workers within the industry.

This training programme now recognises the need for a more professional approach to an industry that involves 20,000 people in erecting and furnishing temporary structures in the UK every year. This is a

positive step to achieving higher standards in the industry and the company believes it will not be long before clients will demand that contractors have staff qualified up to this standard.

Chichester Canvas says it is fully committed to training staff to obtain these qualifications, especially as its joint managing director Robert Callaway-Lewis is the chairman of the MUTA marquee executive committee.

A spokesperson for Chichester says some marquee jobs can be particularly labour intensive: "While we offer a versatile range of marquee structures to our clients from traditional canvas marquees and structures to the state of the art aluminium framed pavilions we are seeing a trend towards canvas, which we believe is both a fashion trend and recognises the public's desire to use environmentally friendly equipment."

"At the Goodwood Revival Meeting held in September we were being asked more and more to provide a substantial proportion of our 150,000 sq ft plus tentage in traditional canvas structures, which recognizes and complements the unique atmosphere that Lord March and his event team have created over the years."

The event involves marquee construction on a large scale, attracting more than 120,000 people and recreating racing from a past era, while the crowd joins in the magical theatre atmosphere by dressing in period costume.



“The exacting brief on our tentage is for a high proportion of our supply in cotton canvas covers, exposed wood poles and definitely natural rope,” says Chichester. “These tents are then often themed in World War II regalia and serve as restaurants and bars for the public and press attending the event, while watching historic aircraft fly overhead as well as the priceless grid of cars competing in anger around the track. Evocative tent names such as Spitfire, Hurricane and Lancaster abound and stir the public’s memories of the era.”

To add to the traditional tentage the event also recreates the special atmosphere of the original racing track by contracting us to supply 398 car pit shelters in a design seen in the 1950’s.

The shelters are manufactured to Goodwood’s specification and then erected with a large team working on stilts - drawing much attention and camera activity from the H&S officers.

It took a team of 20 men three weeks to build the structures. Chichester says: “We knew the ropes of the event literally, having been involved since its inception in 1998. It is almost becoming a labour of love especially for the car fans in the team, including our group managing director, who always seems to turn up at the build up on a regular basis.”

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On the Goodwood contract, Chichester also supplied aluminium pavilions, but this unique event looks to unique tentage, which is slowly returning to popularity both in the event and wedding markets. We all know frame tents still rule at events, but the re-emergence of traditional canvas tentage as exemplified in this event is a trend that cannot be ignored, says Chichester.



*ORIGINAL ATMOSPHERE: Car pit shelters followed the 1950's design.*