



The Overseas Buyer's Guide to Importing Used Machinery from the UK and Europe

What to check, what it costs, and where buyers go wrong

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Why look at the UK and European market at all

The UK and continental Europe — Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, France, Scandinavia — have some of the deepest used construction and agricultural machinery markets in the world.

Years of large-scale civil infrastructure, farming, and forestry work have put serious volumes of well-maintained, well-documented equipment into second-hand circulation. Manufacturers whose machines are hard to find in quantity in other markets are common here. Machines with full dealer service histories are not unusual. Specification and attachment options that rarely appear in other markets can be found without enormous effort.

The result is that a buyer in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, or elsewhere who needs a specific machine in a specific configuration often has a better chance of finding it in the UK or Europe at a reasonable price than in their own market — even after the cost of shipping and import is accounted for.

That last part is the important one. Access to the market is not the problem. The problem is everything that sits between spotting a machine on a listing site and having it working on your site.

The two halves of the job

Importing machinery from the UK or Europe involves two completely separate jobs. Most buyers underestimate the second one.

Half one: finding, assessing, and buying the machine

- ☐ Searching across multiple sources (dealer stock, auctions, private sellers) — no single platform shows everything

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- ☐ Identifying machines that match your specification, hours, condition, and budget at the landed price, not just the asking price
- ☐ Verifying that the seller is legitimate and the machine is as described
- ☐ Inspecting the machine in person before any money moves
- ☐ Negotiating the purchase and handling the paperwork to complete the sale

Half two: getting it from there to your door

- ☐ UK export declaration
- ☐ Cleaning the machine to the biosecurity standard required by your country — every destination has requirements, and the standard matters
- ☐ Freight to your port, in the right container type or RoRo/breakbulk depending on machine size
- ☐ Import customs declaration and duty in your country
- ☐ Any country-specific biosecurity requirements on arrival
- ☐ Delivery to your site

Most buyers are comfortable with the idea of half one, even if the distance makes it uncomfortable. Half two is where the surprises arrive — and where the costs beyond the sticker price accumulate.

Assessing a machine and a seller from a distance

The single biggest risk in any overseas machinery purchase is paying money for a machine you have not seen in person. Listing photos are marketing. What they show is selected; what they do not show is the rest.

What to check on the machine

- ☐ Operating hours: displayed hours should match the machine's visible wear. If the hours seem low for the condition, ask why
- ☐ Undercarriage on tracked machines: tracks, rollers, sprockets, idler wheels. This is the most expensive wear item on a tracked machine and the easiest to obscure with a wash and a photograph
- ☐ Hydraulics: leaks, condition of hoses, response on cylinders and rams
- ☐ Engine: cold start, running temperature, smoke colour, oil condition
- ☐ Structural: cracks, welds, signs of previous repair or accident damage
- ☐ Service history: what documentation exists? Dealer-serviced machines with records are worth the premium
- ☐ Attachments: condition of buckets, blades, forks — ground-engaging tools wear fast

What the listing tells you: very little, reliably. What it does not tell you — gaps in photos, vague condition descriptions, no history mentioned, no cold-start video offered — tells you more.

An inspection means arriving at the machine, starting it cold, working it, getting underneath it, and recording what you find. That is not something that can be done from a photo, a video call, or a broker's description of a broker's description.

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What to check on the seller

- ☐ Does the business exist on the relevant national company register?
- ☐ Is it actively trading, and for how long?
- ☐ Does the bank account name match the registered business?
- ☐ Is there a real physical address and a working landline?
- ☐ Does the seller apply pressure to transfer a deposit before the machine has been inspected? If yes, stop.

Fraud in the used machinery market is not unusual. It tends to follow a pattern: an unusually attractive listing, a seller who is communicative and helpful but unavailable to arrange an inspection, and pressure to transfer funds quickly before you "lose the machine." A legitimate seller will wait for an inspection. One who will not is telling you something.

The cost picture beyond the sticker price

A machine at £40,000 asking price is not a £40,000 purchase. The number that matters is the landed cost: machine at the door, ready to work.

The components of that number:

Inspection cost If you are using a buying agent or independent inspector, there is a cost attached. This is not optional — it is the cost of knowing what you are buying. The alternative is not saving money; it is absorbing the risk yourself.

Freight Varies by machine size, shipping method (container, RoRo, or breakbulk), origin port, and destination port. A smaller machine in a 20ft container costs differently from a large excavator on RoRo. Container consolidation — multiple machines in one container — can reduce cost per unit materially.

Get a freight estimate specific to your machine and destination before you agree a purchase price. Do not use a rule of thumb.

Pre-export cleaning Every destination country has biosecurity requirements. Having a machine cleaned to a professional standard before it loads is always cheaper than dealing with the consequences of non-compliance at the destination port. Professional cleaning costs a fraction of a port-ordered remediation.

Export documentation UK export declaration, commercial invoice, bill of lading, packing details. These are straightforward if handled correctly; they cause delays if they are not.

Import duty Varies by destination country, machine type, and HS classification. Many common construction machinery categories attract low or zero duty into countries with which the UK has trade agreements. The correct rate for your machine and destination should be confirmed with a customs broker before you commit — not estimated and not assumed.

Import taxes GST, VAT, or equivalent depending on your destination. A GST-registered business may be able to recover this through normal returns processes, but the cash outflow at the time of importation still needs to be planned for.

Biosecurity compliance at destination Country-specific. Some destinations require treatment certificates, cleaning certificates, or both. Getting it wrong can mean supervised port cleaning at your cost,

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storage costs while the machine is being dealt with, or in serious cases, refusal of entry. See the section below.

Port charges, broker fees, delivery Varies by destination port and customs broker. Your customs broker should be able to give you a reliable estimate for their fees and the port charges you will face.

The total of these items beyond the sticker price varies by machine, destination, and shipping season. The only way to know the real number for your purchase is to get confirmed figures from your freight forwarder and customs broker before you agree to buy.

Biosecurity — every destination has requirements, and they are not optional

Every country that imports used machinery has biosecurity requirements. The specific rules differ; the underlying principle is the same everywhere: a used machine that has worked in the ground carries risk — soil, seeds, insects, plant material — and the destination country does not want that risk crossing its border.

What this means in practice:

- ☐ Every machine needs to be cleaned to a professional standard before it is loaded. Not a quick wash — a contractor-standard clean with documentation
- ☐ Some destinations require specific certifications from the cleaning contractor
- ☐ Some origins and shipping seasons trigger additional treatment requirements — the most common is the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (BMSB) risk season from continental European origins, broadly September to April. The specific rules differ by destination country
- ☐ Some destinations have hard rules about when and where treatment must occur — if treatment is required pre-departure and the machine arrives without it, you have a problem that is expensive to fix at the port

The cost of non-compliance is always higher than the cost of compliance. The machine sits in port storage while the issue is resolved — at your cost, at port rates.

Specific biosecurity requirements for New Zealand (MPI) and Australia (DAFF) are covered in the country-specific guides available on this site.

Where buyers get burned — the most common mistakes

Buying without an inspection The machine in the photos is not the machine that arrives. An uninspected purchase is a guess. Sometimes it works out; often enough it does not, and the repair bill lands after the shipping cost, not instead of it.

Judging landed cost from the sticker price alone The sticker price is not what it costs to have the machine working on your site. Freight, duty, biosecurity, inspection, delivery — buyers who do not plan for these in advance consistently find that a deal that looked attractive is marginal or worse when all the numbers are in.

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Relying on one listing platform No single site shows the whole market. Machines at auction frequently do not appear on retail platforms. A buyer who searches one portal and concludes the market is thin is missing most of it.

Moving money before the basics are verified Seller not verified on a company register. Bank account name not matched to the business. Deposit paid under time pressure before an inspection is arranged. This is how fraud works.

Underestimating biosecurity requirements Cleaning requirements are not a formality. A machine that has worked in the ground for years accumulates contamination in places that a quick wash does not reach. Getting it right pre-departure is cheap. Getting it wrong at the port is not.

Not using a customs broker who knows machinery Import classifications, duty rates, and biosecurity documentation requirements are specific to machinery. A customs broker who handles machinery regularly will know the questions to ask and the pitfalls to avoid. One who does not may miss something that costs more than their fee to fix.

When a buying agent earns its keep

The honest version of this section is not a sales pitch. It is a description of what the job actually is, so you can judge for yourself whether it applies to your situation.

A buying agent on the ground in the UK and Europe can:

- ☐ Search across dealer stock, auctions, and private sales simultaneously — sources that are not all visible from overseas
- ☐ Physically inspect a machine before you commit any money. Not from a listing, not from a video call — in person, cold start, full inspection
- ☐ Verify a seller before you wire money to them
- ☐ Tell you when a machine is not worth what the seller is asking, or when the condition does not match the description, and walk away without it costing you anything
- ☐ Handle UK export documentation correctly
- ☐ Coordinate with your freight forwarder and ensure the machine is cleaned and documented to the standard required by your destination

The cases where this pays for itself most clearly:

- ☐ High-value machines, where the inspection cost is marginal against the machine price and the cost of a bad decision
- ☐ Specialist or hard-to-find machines, where finding the right one matters more than finding a cheap one
- ☐ Buyers who do not have time to monitor multiple markets across multiple sources
- ☐ Any situation where a mistake at the buying or export stage would be expensive to unpick

The fee structure at Euro Plant Finder is a fixed fee, not a percentage of the machine price. You know what it costs before you start. No purchase, no fee — if we do not find and complete a deal you want to proceed with, you pay nothing.

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That is not a guarantee of finding any machine. It is an alignment of incentives: we get paid when the right deal completes, not when a deal completes.

A note on what this guide is not

This guide describes what is involved in importing machinery from the UK and Europe. It is not a step-by-step manual for doing it without professional support — because the honest answer is that some parts of this process, done from overseas without prior experience, carry meaningful risk.

Duty rates change. Biosecurity rules change. Seller fraud is real. The right response to that is not to make the process sound simpler than it is.

If you are considering a purchase and want to understand what it would involve for your specific machine, destination, and situation — that conversation costs nothing.

Or — hand the whole thing to me.

You've just seen everything that has to go right. Here is the shortcut: I do all of it, and I have been doing it for a long time.

635 machines sourced. 23+ years in the used-machinery market. Buyers looked after across **8 countries and 3 continents**, on top of three decades in senior commercial and sales-leadership roles. I know what these machines are worth, who is really selling, what to walk away from, and how to get one from a yard in Britain to your door without a nasty surprise at the border.

You tell me the machine, the spec and the budget. I find it, verify the seller, inspect it on the ground, handle export, customs, biosecurity and shipping, and stay on your side of the table the whole way — never the seller's.

And it is not just finding the machine. Get the VAT, customs and origin structure right — as I do on every deal — and you can take as much as a quarter off what it actually costs to land it. That is money most first-time importers can leave on the table if they are not careful.

No purchase, no fee. You only pay when you have the right machine.

Tell me what you're hunting for and I will go and find it.

This guide is provided as a general reference. Rules, costs, and requirements change — always confirm current figures with your customs broker and freight forwarder before committing to a purchase. Country-specific guides for New Zealand and Australia are available on the site.

If you know what you are hunting for, tell us at europlantfinder.co.uk — we will let you know whether we can find it.

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