

# Flushed with SUCCESS

Recent years have seen a number of developments in the UK market for flushing devices. We asked Andy Burton from Thomas Dudley for an update on current trends.



Dudley Vantage concealed cistern

**C**hanges to the Water Regulations in 2001 have brought a variety of flushing devices into the UK. How do you see the market developing?

The way in which the bathroom is viewed has changed dramatically over recent years. No longer is it a necessary evil in a house but is now seen as one of the most important rooms in the home. Fitted bathrooms have grown in popularity – in much the same way as fitted kitchens 15 years or so ago.

With this in mind, consumers are demanding bathrooms that are clean, stylish and easy to maintain. Push button operated valves, and there are a number of inefficient ones, are growing in popularity but it is important to remember that they have not been in use long enough in sufficient numbers in this country to establish any credible track record of water conservation.

One obvious potential area for technological advances which springs to mind is electronically activated flushing. This is already becoming commonplace in high-traffic public washrooms such as those in motorway service stations, but the domestic sector also offers great potential.

**Is it true that push-button flush valves are continuing to win market share over the traditional lever operated syphon?**

Push button operated valves are growing in popularity but from a very small base when compared with syphons. Consumer demand is fuelled by fashion trends and valves do appear to be 'in' at the moment in non-traditional bathrooms. However, the aesthetic advantages of pushbuttons have to be balanced against the greater reliability of syphons which, unlike outlet valves, cannot leak. The syphon is still the one true waste water preventer in every sense of the word. Indeed, for commercial use, there is no substitute for a syphon.

**Are dual-flush systems becoming more popular?**

Dualflush syphons were introduced many years ago. Unfortunately, these defaulted to a reduced flush and the lever had to be physically held down in order to deliver a full flush which often wasted water. As a result, they were outlawed.

Until now, dualflush has only been available with mechanical or pneumatically operated valves. However, a new water-saving dual flush version of the Dudley Turbo 88

2-part syphon will shortly be available that complies with the Regulator's Specification. This defaults to a full flush, but delivers a reduced flush when the lever is depressed and held down. It will be available as an optional extra in most low level Dudley cisterns, supplied in Senator and Tri-Shell cisterns as standard and will be available as a spare, providing water-saving benefits in 9, 7 and 6 litre installations.

As consumers become increasingly aware of their own effects on the environment, dualflush will undoubtedly grow in popularity. However, the real driver for dualflush will be mass conversion to water meter usage. When people start to be charged for every drop of water they use, they will be inclined to use less. A great way to reduce household consumption is to only use a full flush when you have to. It is worth remembering that only around one in five visits to the toilet require a full flush, and up to 40% of household water usage is via the toilet.

**What should installers look for when choosing the right flushing components?**

The experience and pedigree of the manufacturer are key considerations.

# BATHROOMS FEATURE

Flushing devices



Dudley Hydroflow equilibrium float valve

We know from our own plumbing surveys that the last thing installers want is to fit products that result in numerous call-backs to fix niggling problems. These call-backs cannot be charged for and compound the problems of the skills shortage by tying up skilled plumbers unnecessarily. Increasing numbers of cheaper valves are being imported from abroad, and are already causing problems for installers.

## Current regulations state that new cisterns can contain only six litres of water. Is this likely to be reduced still further?

Possibly. If you look at how the regulations have changed over the last decade, flush volumes have reduced from 9, 7 and 6 litres. However, when flushing volumes are reduced all components of the WC suite have to be carefully tested to ensure compliance with the

regulations which often leads to redesigning and re-tooling at considerable cost to the industry. As flushing volumes reduce, drainline characteristics come into play and this also has to be taken into account.

## What impact, if any, have the perceived skill shortages made on product design?

Manufacturers have a responsibility to help ease the problems caused by the skills shortage. In order to be 'able to carry out work unsupervised', plumbers must be qualified to at least NVQ Level 3. At present, only around 60% of plumbers are qualified to NVQ Level 3, with almost 90% only being trained to NVQ Level 2. It takes an average of four years to reach Level 3 meaning the skills shortage is a problem to which there is, and will be, no quick answer. Simply recruiting more trainees will not provide a solution. Manufacturers such as Thomas Dudley must take the lead and design products

that make the jobs of existing qualified plumbers easier. Products should be designed not only with aesthetic appearance in mind but ease and speed of installation should be paramount considerations.

We manufacture all our products with the plumber in mind – the original Dudley Turbo syphons incorporated a revolutionary 2-part design. This enabled the plumber to service the syphon in around 5 minutes – removing the need to disconnect the water supply or dismantle the cistern. The approach has continued with the new Dudley Vantage concealed cistern. By thinking about the plumber at every stage of the development process, the Vantage can be installed in less than half the time of traditional concealed cisterns.

## Are there any other ways that manufacturers can help make the installer's life easier?

Manufacturers can work hand-in-hand with installers. We have adopted this approach for a number of years. The opinions of plumbers are regularly sought on advantages and disadvantages they perceive in products. This can highlight problems that are inherent in existing products that may not otherwise be obvious. Our new Dudley Hydroflo equilibrium inlet valves are a prime example of this. After speaking to and working with plumbers, it became clear that one frustration they face over and over again is removing the filter from inlet valves for cleaning. A screwdriver or other sharp instrument is often used which results in many filters being punctured or dropped and lost inside the cistern itself. As a result, Hydroflo valves are supplied with a special key for simple and safe removal of the filter. The float is securely retained by the float arm and cannot become detached in use.

Packaging can also be improved to clearly help the plumber install the product correctly. Many companies still provide unclear instructions. They may make perfect sense to an in-house designer who knows the product, but are extremely confusing to an installer fitting the product for the first time.

**WANT TO KNOW MORE? Thomas Dudley has an on-site training centre that provides product demonstrations and training for installers. To arrange a visit call 0121 557 5411. For more details on the company's complete range of flushing devices please circle enquiry number 604**



Dudley Turbo 88 Duoflush syphon