

IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Insider's ranking of owner-managed businesses (OMBs) in the South West highlights the broad range of companies leading the way in the region. **Chris Ward** takes a closer look at some of those on the list

NASA UMBRELLA

3 Nasa Umbrella, part of Bristol-based Nasa Group, is a fully FCSA Accredited specialist umbrella, CIS and accountancy provider. The business started out as Nasa Consulting in 2006, a personal service company (PSC) accountancy firm aimed at helping temporary and flexible contract workers with everything related to setting themselves up as a PSC – from bookkeeping and tax to foreign income management.

While there is a caveat to turnover figures at Nasa because of the service it offers, which create significant cashflow as part of the process, the business has been on an impressive incline in terms of growth, with profit before tax rising from £1.37m to £2.99m over the past five years.

The growth has led to diversification and David Greene – who founded Nasa Group alongside minority shareholders Alex Spendley and Pippa Elsey – also set up ESOS Energy in 2015, working as an energy audit provider to help clients such as University of the West of England and Bristol City Council.

"Our daily ability to make the decisions of owners as well as the decisions of directors keeps the business very agile," says Nasa Group managing director Greene.

"We can work to a longer term strategy, but we can also flex that instantly where we see changing market trends or competitive demands for our service. Also, having three owner directors gives the best of decision-making on any non-consensus."

GREGORY DISTRIBUTION

8 Gregory Group started life in North Tawton, Devon, hauling coal by horse and cart. Over 100 years later it is a £335m turnover national business providing market-leading logistics solutions to customers across the UK.

Chief executive John Gregory joined the business in 1984 as a fourth generation family member, at which point there were 41 employees, 36 vehicles and £1.1 million



turnover. The company has grown exponentially since, acquiring a number of competitors along the way including Pollock, ARR Craib and Hayton Coulthard. John Gregory remains in his role as chief executive but the day-to-day running of the business sits with Angela Butler, appointed managing director in 2018 after seven years as finance director.

"We have a unique family business culture which means that despite our scale we remain agile and flexible as we support our customer supply chains and drive continuous improvement," says Butler.

With a fleet of over 1,000 vehicles, over 3,000 employees and over 1,600,000 sq ft of warehouse space, Butler says that the firm continues to pride itself on building long-lasting trust-based relationships with its customers, while pushing the mandate for environmental change.

"Looking to the future, we'll be doing more of the same, while focusing on delivering our excellent service with a lower carbon footprint," she adds. "We are leading the way in the industry by setting a target to be net zero by 2038. It's ambitious but look what we've achieved so far through our ambition."

MOLSON

11 Molson Group has risen to become the UK's largest independent dealer of equipment and machinery in the construction sector.

A good description of what the business does might be the construction industry equivalent of a car dealership like Dick Lovett or Helston Garages. However, where the difference lies in the scale of the operation, with Molson products ranging from mini excavators you'd use to dig a hole in your garden to mega machines such as the Sennebogen 895 E Hybrid – a 420-tonne monster-sized scrap handler that has a 40 metre-long picker, and takes 16 lorries to transport and three months to put together.

The firm was founded by Robin Powell and business partner Jonathan Wilson in 1996. The duo started out on a small strip of land outside Gordano services on the M5 that required precision air traffic control-style logistics to get machinery up and down the narrow two mile-long lane it was connected to. Products were shipped in from as far afield as Japan and Malaysia before being



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Molson machinery

sent to construction sites across the UK.

Within ten years of starting out, Molson was a £12m turnover business but it is since 2007 that the company's turnover has really started to jump – increasing every year and reaching £285m in 2023. It took investment of £6.3m from BGF in 2018 to acquire a fellow market leader in Finlay Group, before taking a further £11m investment in 2019 to expand and improve its own offering, including digitising its sales process.

The firm has 16 sites across Great Britain, has sold machinery to customers in over 70 countries and has a headcount across its group of over 400 – 180 of whom are based in Avonmouth, Molson's headquarters and central hub since 2001.

Jonathan Wilson stepped down as joint group managing director of Molson in late 2021, but Powell remains at the helm, and is forthright about the company's future, which has included expansion in the US with the acquisition of Powerscreen.

"If we can do one thing in this business it's retain that DNA of being customer-focused as we grow. It's difficult but not impossible. It's a challenge but it's one you have to invest in," says Powell. "We try and think differently in everything we do."

NUMATIC INTERNATIONAL

16 Vacuum cleaner manufacturer Numatic International was founded by the enigmatic Chris Duncan in 1969, in a shed in Crewkerne, Somerset. Duncan remains chief executive in his eighties, having struck gold in 1981 with the design

and launch of the world-renowned Henry, which sold thousands in its first year and continues to be the company's flagship brand.

Sales of Henry and its associated family of products continue apace, with an estimated 10 million sold since the original product's inception. Numatic now also sells a wider range of domestic and industrial machines.

Numatic moved to its current location of Chard in Somerset in 1990, and now has 1,000 employees. In 1995, subsidiary companies in Paris and Johannesburg were established to provide support for increasing overseas activities in these regions. Further subsidiaries followed with Germany in 2002, The Netherlands in 2004, Switzerland in 2014, Portugal in 2015 and Spain in 2018.



Numatic International's famous face Henry

Turnover at Numatic increased from £157m in 2019 to £236 in 2023, with profit before tax at £22m.

HILLS UK

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Edward Hills founded Swindon-based Hills in 1900, as a one-man business manufacturing bricks. The

company, now trading as Hills UK and the Hills Group, continues to be privately owned and family-led, broadening its portfolio of business activities over the years to include recycling and waste management, quarrying of aggregates and production of ready-mixed concrete, and building new homes. It is a dynamic regional business which, while centred on Wiltshire, has stretched its boundaries into neighbouring areas.

Hills Waste Solutions is now the flagship part of the business, offering a range of specialist waste management and recycling services to the public and private sector. Mike Hills, fourth generation family member, heads up the group as chief executive, and helped build turnover of over £136m in 2023.

In May 2024, Hills appointed Ed Dodd as deputy chief executive – he has been with the business for close to 20 years.

"Ed has played a key role in Hills Waste Solutions and has been pivotal in developing the business," said Hills. "His appointment as deputy chief executive is just reward for his contribution and I look forward to working with him in the next stage of his career."

The company has over 700 employees across multiple sites.



IT'S GOOD TO TALK

If approached in the right way, family get-togethers can present a great opportunity to discuss your financial plans

Conversations about money are rarely straightforward, particularly when they involve family. Your financial plans could be an area of strong debate, where different emotions, values and expectations collide.

That's why it's a good idea to take advantage of a time when your family is together to discuss your financial plans and ensure you're all on the same page. Here are some of the issues to consider:

1. Include everyone's views

Decisions are usually best made together as a family, but it's unlikely everyone will see things the same way. Get them involved now to avoid disagreements later.

2. Plan ahead

Before your family meeting, put together a loose agenda covering the topics to discuss – for example 'my will', 'charity gifting' and 'inheritance plans' – and give everyone a copy. This will help everyone to stay on track and make sure you cover all the areas you want to discuss with your family without forgetting anything.



Rebecca Tunstall

3. Make a list

Note down administration points like the whereabouts of information that your family will need after you die – like your will and powers of attorney. Include contact information for your financial planner, accountant, tax adviser and other professionals you deal with, and don't forget details of your online accounts and identities.

4. Speak to a financial planner

Once you have some action points, speak to your financial planner and solicitor about the next steps in making them happen. They'll work with you at every stage to strike the right balance between giving money away and retaining control, whilst helping you stay financially secure for the rest of your life. In addition to this, they could also be party to the meeting and act as a neutral, third party to help keep discussions on track, especially if people's views differ.

“Decisions are usually best made together as a family, but it's unlikely everyone will see things the same way. Get them involved now to avoid disagreements later.”

Our experience is that things work best when families have open conversations, include everyone in the process and get organised. By talking about areas like long-term financial planning, gifting and plans for your wealth before and after your death, you'll have peace of mind knowing everyone is informed.

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Trewithen Dairy cream tea

CORNISH FARM DAIRY

52 Cornish Farm Dairy is the trading name of Trewithen Dairy, which has been owned and run by the Clarke family for over 25 years.

Bill and Rachel Clarke started out with their own herd, bottling milk at night and delivering it themselves early the next morning. They cooked clotted cream themselves, in open trays, and potted it by hand. By 2001 the business had become so successful that the family sold their herd and moved full time into producing milk, cream and, more recently, butter and yoghurt.

Son Francis Clarke now heads up operations, working alongside a talented and committed management team and with more than 250 employees. Trewithen products are available in national supermarket chains including Asda and Tesco.

Mark Moody, head of marketing at the company, says building the Trewithen brand has been key to expansion:

"Our vision is simple – to be the leading Cornish provider of premium dairy products, delighting our customers with exceptional quality and taste," he says. "We have an exciting year ahead as a family business, which will see the launch of the new re-brand which reflects the journey we are on, who we are today, and where we want to be tomorrow."

Coinciding with the re-brand, Trewithen has launched a Barista Milk in over 650 stores nationwide and will be launching new Cornish-inspired flavoured yoghurts.

"The innovation, growth and quality of the products is testament to the 250 employees,

all their expertise and commitment, our farmers, and our products: the family's bigger than ever, and it helps us every day to drive the business forward," adds Moody.

MITCHELL & WEBBER

60 Mitchell & Webber has been trading in the South West for over 130 years. The family-run heating oil supplier's roots go back to Frederick Webber buying himself out of the Navy and establishing a packman's round, delivering goods in and around Truro. With sons Eustice and Ned, he purchased a 200-gallon tank and set up a paraffin business.

At the same time Ernest Mitchell was taking over his family's blacksmith business,

Webber Bros. In 1953 Mitchells became a branded distributor for a major oil company as did Webber Bros, in 1954. In 1966 the two families combined operations and took over another distributor in the Falmouth area.

A key year for Mitchell & Webber was 1993, building a 1.8m-litre oil terminal at Scorrier near Redruth, allowing the company to become a standalone oil distributor.

Today, headed up by brothers Robert and John Weedon – the sons of the fourth generation family member involved in the business, Alison Mitchell – the company has a large fleet of tankers to distribute its oil, ranging from a 35,000-litre articulated trailer down to a 5,000-litre small tanker. It operates across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset.

The business is expanding into new and sustainable oils such as HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil). In 2024 it welcomed a visit by a government select committee to Cornwall to highlight the benefits of renewable fuels.

"It's a privilege to work alongside my brother as both owners and managers, as we share a vested interest in the work we do – pioneering positive change within the industry in these important times," says managing director John Weedon.

"Moving forwards, our main goal is to establish hydrotreated vegetable oil as the go-to alternative heating fuel for off-gas grid customers, which will help all these homeowners to decarbonise throughout the country, building on the success of our renewable fuel trials in the village of Kehelland."



Mitchell & Webber's John and Robert Weedon



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SOUTH WEST OWNER-MANAGED BUSINESSES 2024

RANK	COMPANY	LOCATION	TURNOVER £M	PRE-TAX PROFIT £M	EMPLOYEES	YEAR END
1	OVO	Bristol	6,730.0	(1,652.0)	5,287	Dec 22
2	NORTON	Plymouth	1,260.5	(4.2)	11,258	Jan 23
3	NASA UMBRELLA	Bristol	790.5	3.0	4,707	Apr 23
4	LUSH COSMETICS	Poole	657.1	3.3	12,704	Jun 22
5	GREEN BRITAIN	Stroud	550.6	49.7	756	Apr 23
6	SANDERSON SOLUTIONS	Bristol	490.5	10.5	486	Jun 23
7	CITY WEST COUNTRY	Exeter	349.2	8.6	647	Dec 22
8	GREGORY DISTRIBUTION	Exeter	335.6	11.9	2,992	Oct 22
9	HERITAGE AUTOMOTIVE	Salisbury	320.2	5.5	554	Dec 22
10	FORD FUELS	Bristol	304.2	8.5	188	Oct 22
11	MOLSON	Bristol	285.8	13.0	350	Sep 22
12	TROY (UK)	Exeter	281.9	(0.8)	383	Dec 22
13	DEREK RAPHAEL	Cirencester	264.9	7.4	6	Dec 22
14	VOSPERS OF PLYMOUTH	Plymouth	252.1	6.7	588	Dec 22
15	RYGOR	Westbury	244.2	3.7	531	Apr 23
16	NUMATIC INTERNATIONAL	Camberley	236.8	22.4	1,383	Dec 22
17	HOBBYCRAFT	Christchurch	211.1	(16.3)	1,472	Feb 23
18	INTERNATIONAL PLYWOOD	Stonehouse	210.3	(24.1)	76	Apr 23
19	FISH BROTHERS	Swindon	205.1	4.8	317	Dec 22
20	FORAY	Salisbury	197.5	4.7	399	Dec 22
21	STONEGATE FOOD	Chippenham	195.6	4.4	566	Sep 23
22	CLIPPER CG	Dorchester	186.6	1.3	1,677	Jul 23
23	EW BEARD	Swindon	179.9	3.9	314	Dec 23
24	OCEAN AUTOMOTIVE	Poole	173.5	1.5	252	Dec 22
25	TH WHITE	Devizes	173.1	3.8	588	Dec 22
26	BRENT CARS*	Weston-super-Mare	117.8	0.2	205	Sep 23
27	THATCHERS (MYRTLE FARM)	Winscombe	156.9	18.8	276	Aug 22
28	WYKE FARMS	Bruton	149.5	8.8	276	Mar 23
29	DAIRY PARTNERS	Stonehouse	138.9	6.9	180	Dec 22
30	CHURCH LANE (T/A CREDITON DAIRY)	Crediton	138.6	15.7	193	Dec 22
31	HILLS UK	Swindon	136.4	5.9	717	Apr 23
32	KEENWORK	Bristol	135.1	4.1	525	Dec 22
33	DE VAN AUTOMOTIVE	Plymouth	127.8	3.3	232	Dec 22
34	HOWARD TENENS	Stroud	124.1	16.1	752	Sep 22
35	4COM TECHNOLOGIES	Bournemouth	122.8	10.9	500	Jun 23
36	DUFFIELDS MILLS	Yeovil	117.9	4.1	165	Sep 22
37	PRO-DIRECT	Newton Abbot	116.1	7.8	397	Dec 22
38	MURRAY (SW)	Plymouth	115.5	1.6	292	Dec 22
39	HUNT'S FOODSERVICE	Sherborne	112.6	1.9	582	Mar 23
40	ADVANCED INNERGY	Gloucester	111.3	10.6	589	Sep 23
41	HAWKINS	St Austell	108.7	2.8	221	Jun 23
42	CG FRY AND SON	Dorchester	107.5	13.1	193	Dec 22
43	STRATOFI	Bristol	107.2	2.8	55	Dec 22
44	BRG TECHNOLOGIES	Cheltenham	106.9	45.3	91	Mar 23
45	RENROD	Trowbridge	106.7	0.8	263	Dec 22
46	SPIRE TECHNOLOGY	Verwood	103.2	1.6	63	Apr 23
47	DB FOOD	Poole	100.6	(5.4)	324	Jul 22
48	CREED CATERING SUPPLIES*	Cheltenham	101.4	4.9	397	Dec 22
49	MALVERN TYRES	Gloucester	97.5	3.1	535	Nov 22
50	HELTOR	Newton Abbot	97.2	3.5	80	Aug 22

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RANK	COMPANY	LOCATION	TURNOVER £M	PRE-TAX PROFIT £M	EMPLOYEES	YEAR END
51	SEASALT	Falmouth	96.5	5.4	1,029	Jan 22
52	CORNISH FARM DAIRY	Lostwithiel	95.9	(1.4)	263	Apr 23
53	SHERBORNE	Bournemouth	95.4	11.1	477	Mar 23
54	STONEWOOD PROPERTIES	Chippenham	94.7	1.6	328	Sep 22
55	WESTERN FUEL	Highbridge	91.4	4.4	56	Mar 23
56	CEUTA	Bournemouth	89.7	2.3	369	Mar 23
57	NEPTUNE	Swindon	89.2	(10.8)	732	Sep 22
58	AGINCARE	Portland	87.2	6.9	4,316	Jul 22
59	WORKMAN PROPERTIES	Tewkesbury	86.4	3.7	428	Dec 22
60	MITCHELL & WEBBER	Redruth	85.7	0.9	95	Nov 22
61	J&A DAVIES	Weston-super-Mare	81.4	5.4	167	Dec 22
62	MJL CORNWALL	Helston	81.4	17.8	301	Sep 22
63	COMMERCIAL CORPORATE SERVICES	Cheltenham	81.0	1.5	299	Jun 23
64	DEXTRA	Gillingham	80.6	27.8	507	Dec 22
65	LANCER SCOTT	Bristol	77.8	2.2	50	Sep 22
66	SPECTRUM MEDICAL	Gloucester	77.7	7.4	316	Dec 22
67	GENSMILE	Swindon	76.2	(5.3)	752	Mar 23
68	PERCY R BREND	Torquay	75.0	2.3	1,099	Mar 23
69	SMITH'S (GLOUCESTER)	Stonehouse	74.5	2.2	570	Sep 22
70	CHAMPION GROUNDWORKS	Liskeard	74.1	6.0	333	Sep 22
71	DCM (CORNWALL)	Redruth	74.0	2.3	122	Dec 22
72	WILTON BRADLEY	Newton Abbot	73.9	2.2	247	Dec 22
73	HYDROCK	Bristol	73.7	2.7	859	Mar 23
74	JOHN HEATHCOAT	Tiverton	73.1	8.3	474	May 23
75	WW TRUCK AND BUS	Bristol	72.7	4.6	209	Dec 22
76	CENTRAX	Newton Abbot	70.7	1.9	294	Dec 22
77	CJL (SW)	Bristol	70.7	8.1	282	Sep 22
78	P&M	Gloucester	70.6	3.8	173	Jan 23
79	OUTSOURCE UK	Swindon	69.8	0.0	153	May 23
80	EG CARTER	Gloucester	69.4	0.1	192	Jun 23
81	ALEC JARRETT*	Bristol	69.9	1.2	74	Feb 23
82	CLASSIC 14	Plymouth	68.2	2.2	142	Mar 23
83	OLSA FUTURES	Westbury-on-Severn	68.0	1.4	221	Mar 23
84	STEVE HOSKIN CONSTRUCTION	Liskeard	67.7	5.7	325	Sep 22
85	NEWLAND HOMES	Gloucester	67.1	11.3	74	Dec 22
86	CARCO	Bristol	65.7	1.7	144	Dec 22
87	SYNERTEC	Wellington	65.7	2.4	269	Mar 23
88	FWS CARTER	Exeter	65.2	15.2	291	Mar 23
89	GOONVEAN	St Austell	64.9	7.5	498	Sep 22
90	McLEAN	Shaftesbury	64.5	4.5	16	Dec 22
91	WMG PROPERTY	Wellington	64.4	2.9	123	Dec 22
92	BELL CONTRACTING	Cinderford	64.0	1.8	214	May 23
93	RJ HEATHMAN (CONTRACTORS)	Weston-super-Mare	63.7	1.2	73	Mar 23
94	UK POWER SOLUTIONS	Stonehouse	63.6	(11.0)	412	Mar 23
95	SPC CORPORATE	Westbury	63.2	4.7	173	Mar 23
96	PARKSIDE	Bristol	62.3	1.8	345	Dec 22
97	FREEMANS EVENT PARTNERS	Gloucester	61.5	3.4	118	Jan 23
98	INTEGRITY COMMUNICATIONS	Radstock	61.2	1.1	414	Dec 22
99	OFF-PISTE BRANDS	Cheltenham	60.1	1.3	40	Mar 23
100	NH CASE	Warminster	60.0	(0.3)	132	Mar 23

* rank adjusted for non 52 weeks accounting period Source Insider research, Experian MIQ 2024



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