

COLOUR OF MONEY

In the first of a our three part look at pool cover options, Pool and Spa Industry reports on the results of some latest research....



With payback within seven months on residential pools, covers like this Aquatrac example, have never played a more vital role in today's energy conscious climate.

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ith payback typically within nine months on a commercial pool and within seven months on residential pools, covers have never played a more vital role in today's energy conscious climate.

Recent research carried out by energy efficiency specialist Topic UK, makes for particularly interesting reading therefore as it challenges some conventional thinking.

The company tried out eight of the best – selling swimming pool covers, supplied by five different swimming pool cover manufacturers and carried out tests on their solar efficiency. These included sponge foam pool covers, bubble pool covers and floating plastic slatted pool covers.

Computer data logging equipment, loaned and set up by Anglia Ruskin University, monitored and recorded the swimming pool temperature every ten minutes, 24 hours a day for six months throughout the summer. "One of the best forms of insulation is trapped

air," explains Topic's Nigel Rose. "All of these swimming pool covers have trap air within them.

"If you compare the pool cover thicknesses of 5-12mm to your loft insulation, which should be 270mm, all swimming pool covers have very limited thermal benefits," he says.

SOLAR IMPACT

"From May to September we get between 15 hrs to 16.5 hrs daylight hours per day in the UK, if you allowing for only 12 hrs of good daylight per day this will allow the swimming pool to absorb 600Kw of energy every day.

"This is a significant amount of free energy to put into your clients' swimming pools. You are then turning your customers' swimming pools into a 50m² solar collector far larger than any solar heating system they are likely to purchase from you. The results confirm how important it is to focus on colour choice. Nigel says: "Colours absorb or reflect light while transparent glass allows the light to pass through and heat the object on the other side. "Surprisingly the pool cover colour is the most important factor of any outdoor

swimming pool cover."

Topic tested white, blue, blue with silver underside, black and clear pool covers Nigel reports: "The clear pool cover was the best swimming pool cover at heating the pool water for free by using the sun's energy.

"The clear pool cover allows the water to absorb 100% of the sun energy, in the same way clear glass warms a green house or room, even in the winter.

"The white pool cover was the worst cover, as it was reflecting all of the sun's energy away from the swimming pool, allowing no solar gains into the pool."

DARK SIDE

The Topic survey found the black coloured swimming pool cover heated up the first 200mm of the top of the pool water to surprising temperatures of 35-45oC. But there was a sting in the tale: "It was impossible to circulate the heat from the black cover down into the rest of the pool using the filtration system," Nigel reports.

"The black cover was completely removed



LEFT: New to the UK and available through ProCapi UK, the Walu-Lock vinyl automatic safety cover is available in five different models and five colours with a three hose hydraulic system with safety relief valve for additional safety. All covers conform to the strict French safety standard NF P 90-308.

from the pool at noon on a sunny day and the water temperature rose by 5 degrees within one hour of removing the cover.”

The blue cover with a silver underside performed 80% less efficiently than the clear cover at heating the water, as the silver and the blue pigments were believed to be blocking the sun rays from entering the water.

The blue foam cover performed similarly to the white pool cover and did not allow any of the sun’s energy to be absorbed by the water. Nigel emphasises: “The cover heated the top side only but did not heat the water as effectively as the black bubble cover. This is likely due to the cover always being damp and not being completely dry which stops the heat transfer into the pool.”

As a leading British manufacturer of swimming pool safety covers, Aquatrac has recently carried out their own research into why its customers choose a safety cover for their pool.

Aquatrac’s David Grantham reports: “What became apparent is that all customers had similar reasons for having a safety cover. The interesting point was that priority varied by age group,” he adds.”

“All age groups have the same type of reasons for a pool cover but just have different priorities. Everything the customer requires is achieved with an automatic safety cover. “

Aquatrac’s survey results showed under 40s opted for a cover mainly for convenience and for ease of use as well as for energy efficiency and safety.”

SAFETY FIRST

Analysis of the survey responses of over 40s shows a much more obvious concern for safety responsibilities.

“We have four grandchildren who are here on a regular basis,” says one woman. We had to make our pool safe for them. The thought of what could possibly happen without a safety cover over the pool does not bear thinking about”.

Others are opting for ease of operation: “We installed an automatic safety cover because my husband has arthritis and could not pull a manual cover back and forth across the pool



The Coverstar deck mounted bench is now available in aluminium for longevity and the Coverstar pit mounted system now features a new flat lid with pre-made trimmed corners which can be easily retro-fitted.

anymore. “While another comments: “We kept having to fish out leaves, frogs, hedgehogs, you name it, from our pool.. Since we installed a fully automatic cover, we have found it very easy to operate and thankfully have no more nasty surprises”.

But energy efficiency is a high priority: “We were fed up with all the heat escaping from our pool and heating up the whole neighbourhood! With a good quality automatic safety cover the heat stays in the pool and our heating bills are halved”. Budget will ultimately determine the type of cover specified from the manual pool cover, to automatic covers or to the luxurious slatted cover systems that adorn many of the top end residential pools. Incorporating pre-made trimmed corners which can be easily retro-fitted.

PLAYING TO STRENGTHS

Available as a retro-fit deck mounted or pit mounted system for existing pools or in a range of installation styles for new pools, Coverstar will fulfill almost any customer requirement. The shape of the pool is virtually irrelevant as Coverstar’s powerful hydraulic drive and versatile track options can enclose almost any pool.

The Coverstar’s strength also comes from the heavy duty fabric – the Ultragard 11 vinyl composite fabric is of industrial strength, is available in a variety of colours and offers unparalleled resistance to sun, chlorine and other pool chemicals.

The cover features an exclusive heavy-duty double row of stainless steel-ball bearing pulleys which have almost triple the load bearing capacity of single row pulleys used by other suppliers.

Production of the Coverstar safety cover has moved from Certikin North to Certikin’s new



The ALBIGES from SCP is available in three different models. The unit is simple, practical and economical but still offers quality without compromise. An optional Rolltrot automatic self propelled motor drive provides effortless cover removal.

warehouse in Witney to centralise ordering and assembly, thus providing a quicker customer response.

The Coverstar deck mounted bench is now available in aluminium for longevity and the Coverstar pit mounted system now features a new flat lid with pre-made trimmed corners which can be easily retro-fitted.

SCP encourages its customers to emphasise how essential a cover is to the pool. "Without a cover, even the basic solar bubble cover, your money is going up in the smoke," says SCP's David Mathers.

"Compare it to a boiling saucepan," he says. "Put two on a hob together; one with a lid and one without, see how fast the one with a lid boils, and watch the steam from the other go up in the air."

"It's the same for a pool without a lid. With an automatic cover your pool is so much easier to look after and enjoy, which is what owning a pool is all about – enjoyment."

"I have seen pools with both an auto cover and a debris cover, where they put the auto cover to bed for a rest over winter."

"The current financial climate forces us all to look at ways of generating additional revenue to ensure the survival of our companies and our workforce," says Ian MacMath of Dripool who says the suggestion of a retro-fitted Dripool automatic safety cover allows another opportunity to speak with customers and as we all know, once a client has "Men on Site", an entire garden makeover is more than a possibility.

PEACE OF MIND

Safety Cover Sales have been the U.K. importer of the Save-T® Automatic Cover and Step-Saver® manual cover for almost 13 years. Originally imported from Cover-Pools® in the US, the cover is now supplied through Safety Covers in Europe. Cover Pools in America has been manufacturing the Save-T® and Step-Saver® cover since 1962 and distributes covers throughout the world.

With the Save-T® cover you get peace of mind at the simple turn of a key. The swimming pool is covered or uncovered in under a minute and acts as a "horizontal fence" preventing access by uninvited visitors and while there's no substitute for proper supervision, the pool is protected when the owner is not around.

The Save-T® cover can be fitted to either new pools, with the track under the copings or surround, or existing pools using the universal track fitted on top of the copings or surround. Even if you want a roman end incorporated on a new pool this can be achieved by using a "deck on deck" design.

TAILOR MADE

Paramount assembles and tailor make each of its Aquamatic cover systems here in the UK to individual requirements, enabling the company to work to a two week turn around time.

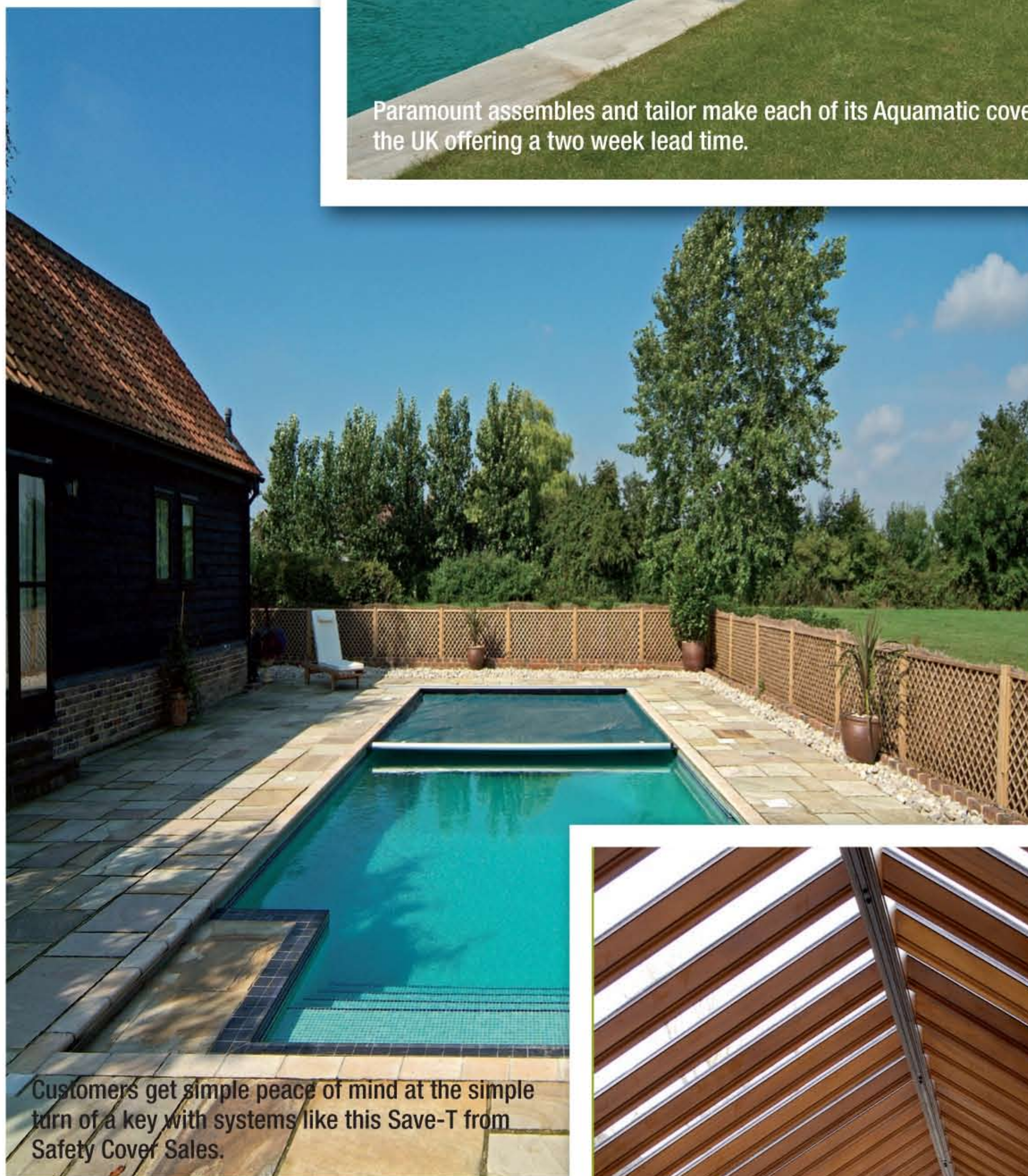
"As with all things in life, you only get what you pay for and buying an Aquamatic Cover is no exception," says Paramount's Steve Martin. "With a growing demand for safety covers now in the UK, it stands to reason that many other brands are now being imported into the UK."

Most of the cover systems look very similar such as the fabric material gliding in aluminium track into a pit or surface housing. "That is where the similarity ends. We invite pool companies to compare our specifications to these of our competitors."

Available in seven different colour fabrics, AQM cover fabrics are laminated for



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Customers get simple peace of mind at the simple turn of a key with systems like this Save-T from Safety Cover Sales.

easier cleaning and enhanced protection withstanding heat temperatures from – 30 deg C to + 70 deg C. They are hemmed protection sleeve, skew adjustment and an anti jamming device.

AQM cover systems have two independent hydraulic drive motors – one hydraulic motor to take the cover on and a second to take the cover off. Both incorporate a reverse flow manifold. Suitable for indoor and outdoor installation and requiring a small pit housing of 350mm x 450mm, the AQM cover system has an extensive 20 year warranty on the drive system and a seven year pro rated fabric warranty with warranty certificates issued upon installation. It is supplied with a hidden leading edge bar and can lift up to 10,000 kg. The AQM system offers a range of different maintenance free pit housing lids such as polymer, tiled or synthetic wood as standard. There is also a stone lid housing option for liner or concrete pools.



This pool is covered with a 500 micron Plastica bubble cover with a manual roller system, chosen mainly due to budget but also the client had his local builder construct - or tried to. Portrait Pools were called in belatedly to help out and found the construction was sound and true but all the pool fittings and pipework had been installed incorrectly.



LEFT: This pool, installed by Aquarian Pools of Dorset, is one of the first to incorporate Paramount's new 'compact drive'. Designed initially for endless pools exercise pool where they are very tight for space, the Compact enables the drive unit to be housed in very small confined space ie within 300 mm either side of the pool width. The 300 mm overhang dimension is ideal as this can be covered by a coping stone.

MONEY SAVER

A market leader in Australia, the high quality Certikin Suncap Solar blanket's unique composition offers the highest performance levels of any bubble material in the marketplace providing excellent value for money with maximum durability against the effects of sun, salt and chlorine.

The Suncap traps the sun's solar energy in the pool water significantly reducing heat, water and chemical loss. This is thanks to its improved polyethylene distribution which gives a stronger, more effective bubble. The shape and size of the bubble itself also offers greater strength, higher heat transfer and more improved insulation. The greater air space in the bubble means that less heat escapes from the pool. It has a high level of UV inhibitors and its pale, translucent top surface allows maximum penetration of short wavelengths and the larger surface area of the Suncap bubbles trap these waves within the pool water, potentially increasing a pool's temperature by up to 8°C.

FRENCH INFLUENCE

SCP looked at several manufacturers of automatic covers before introducing the ABRI range of covers that are manufactured in France.

The decision was heavily influenced by SCP's French company, who have very successfully used ABRI for many years and are now the leading suppliers in France.

ABRI options available in the UK, are about to be benefiting from the warm reception to the ABRIBlue flag bearer which comes in a number of options, including a solar powered unit.

"Their quality has remained consistently high, coupled with good technical support, these were the foremost reasons for us choosing them," says SPC's David Mathers.

"Where we have their covers on display pools, we are selling more than one a week from the show sites.



SCP UK offers the exclusive distribution of the Abridblue range of automatic covers.

"It helps for the pool owner to see and be confident, in what they are buying. One was sold recently purely on the basis that the pool owner asked if the manager was confident enough in the product to cross the length of the pool, walking on it ?

"Although first advised that it was not recommended, not wanting children to use it as a trampoline! He responded, yes quite confidently, and he duly walked across it and collected the order at the other end."

COVERING ALL ANGLES

A woman was delighted to inherit an existing pool with her new home but with three children under seven, all non swimmers, it was imperative that they made the area completely safe as soon as possible.

After discounting various possibilities, including a telescopic building and all round fencing on aesthetic grounds, they settled on a Dripool safety cover. Suitable for all domestic and most commercial applications, Dripool can now guarantee safety and heat retention on any pool size up to 30m x 10m.

The new system is hydraulically driven and utilises an intelligent gear system which controls the cover speed when uncovering; a problem that has previously been insurmountable on pools of this size. By utilising our unique winding operation, a pool of this size now provides no problem for us.



After weighing up the options, a new home owner opted for a Dripool automatic cover installation.

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