

Just RIGHT



Hauling B-double loads of high-cube freight with maximum efficiency for Linfox calls for dedicated prime mover and trailer designs, particularly in round-the-clock shuttle runs on the Pacific Highway. In an application that really does put breakfast cereal on the tables of Australians, **PAUL MATTHEI** reports on a couple of DAFs that are doing the job ...



Select two. The first DAFs in Neave's fleet to feature SCR emissions control. The CF85.460 on the right starred on the DAF stand at last year's Brisbane Truck Show before being purchased by Colin Neave for metropolitan pick-up and delivery duties around Brisbane.

It's a somewhat daunting but familiar scenario for a truck journalist – standing at the arrivals lounge of an airport, in this case Coolangatta, waiting to be greeted by a complete stranger who usually has either little or a lot to do with the story you're chasing.

"I'll meet you at the covered walkway," a cheerful voice chimes through the mobile phone.

I venture towards the 'pedestrian runway' stretching the full width of the building and commence the obligatory people-spotting exercise. After a couple of minutes and another phone call, I'm confident I've found the right man.

"That's you in the blue shirt, right?" I ask.

"Yeah mate."

"Good-o, I'll talk to you in a sec."

As we drive towards the depot across the border in South Tweed Heads, I contemplate the parallels between my prior experience at the airport and that of a truck operator about to purchase a brand of truck he's previously had little to do with. In both cases the eventual outcome is a bit of a mystery, but unless the plunge is taken there's really no knowing how beneficial the experience could be.

Conversing with the amiable Colin Neave who along with his wife Sharon owns C & S Neave Transport, it quickly becomes clear that his initial decision to run DAF trucks concribes to this theory. Astute and pragmatic to the core, Neave comes across as the sort of bloke who analyses

equipment on its merits and without any pre-conceived notions. That said, the vast majority of trucks they've owned right back to a Scania which kicked off Colin's owner-driver status 16 years earlier, have come from Continental stables. However, he also runs pairs of Freightliner Argosys and Kenworth K104s but concedes to experiencing mixed results with the former.

"I've got two Kenworths and I must admit they give us no trouble whatsoever. But they're the first North American trucks I've owned that haven't given us an ounce of trouble," Colin maintains.

As we arrive at the depot, a concrete apron in front of a building roughly large enough to house one semi-trailer with an office located to one side, Colin is quick to point out that he's currently searching for suitably larger premises which are apparently in short supply in this part of the world. In the meantime, he maintains a mutually beneficial arrangement with the owner of a nearby BP garage, conveniently located on a large block capable of comfortably accommodating five B-doubles. Naturally, this is where Neave's trucks are refueled.

Over the obligatory cup of coffee, the conversation returns to the variety of trucks in the company and DAF is by no means the only European brand represented. Volvo also plays a part. Indeed, the eclectic nature of the fleet is reflected in the varying roles of the Neave operation. For instance, while single-drive DAFs and Volvos on the B-double shuttle runs between

Queensland's Gold Coast and Kempsey on the NSW north coast make up the lion's share, there are also a couple of full weight B-doubles operating between Brisbane and Adelaide, two semis that do a bun run for Linfox up the coast from Sydney, as well as trailer work in and around Brisbane.

Colin's first experience with DAF can be traced back to around 2000 when he bought a new CF85 430 model, followed by an identical pair in 2003. He admits that a lack of horsepower was the main reason he'd not previously considered the Dutch marque, but equally concedes the inability of a competitor to supply trucks at the required dimensions steered him towards DAF once the 430 hp rating became available.

"At the time Volvo was unable to supply us prime movers at the length we needed so I went to (Kenworth and DAF dealer) Brown & Hurley where I ran into Peter Brown, the salesman who had actually sold me my first Volvo. He said to me 'why don't you take a look at these DAFs.' So I said to him, 'Here's the specs, can you build 'em?' Which he did."

Over ensuing years the original unit went on to clock close to 1.5 million hugely reliable kilometres with just one engine rebuild and it was with mixed feelings that Colin recently traded it on a new CF single-drive 460 model. He reckons the 430 hp rating is "spot on" for this application and goes on to describe the 30 additional horsepower of the latest unit as an "absolute bonus."



operation. He believes head-to-head competition between his two firm favourites – DAF and Volvo – is a good thing to keep each on their toes in a specialist operation requiring single-drive, day cab prime movers on an ultra-short wheelbase.

Space efficiency in trailers and prime movers alike is undoubtedly a key parameter where 36 pallet spaces are squeezed into a combination with an overall length of just 25 metres. Curiously, Colin explains there's no advantage in going to 26 metres because the allowable 20.6 metre kingpin to rear-of-combination dimension is exceeded by exactly one metre.

Trailers are 4.6 metres high and always packed to the rafters. Depending on the nature of the load carried, some feature mezzanine floors while others are simply double stacked. Being limited to nine tonnes on the drive is of little consequence since loads are big on volume but low of weight. In fact, gross weight of the complete combination rarely exceeds 42 tonnes. Still, close co-operation between Col Neave,

reduction) emissions control system, the newest CF85 obviously attracts particular interest from owner and drivers alike. Yet as we've found with other operators and drivers of SCR-equipped trucks, AdBlue has been simply incorporated into the refueling operation and is therefore almost a non-event. In Colin Neave's case, a 1000 litre IBC (intermediate bulk container) of AdBlue is stationed at the depot for daily filling while a 15 litre cask rides on the passenger side floor of the cab to cater for unexpected emergencies.

The 460 hp engine currently uses a three percent dosage rate of AdBlue which comes from a 56 litre tank mounted under the battery box. According to Colin, 35 litres of AdBlue is needed to complete the 1000 km return trip to Kempsey. He expects the rate to be slightly lowered as further fine tuning takes place. At 900 litres, the combined capacity of the diesel fuel tanks is probably sufficient for two trips but Col prefers them to be topped up at the end of each shift.



Olde Worldie charm. Attractive instrument panel features faux woodgrain surround and neatly integrated AdBlue gauge. This picture was taken at the trip's end, showing there would be enough AdBlue left for another return trip before refilling.



A place for everything. Brisbane based Steve Walters Truck Repairs performed the chassis conversion to reduce wheelbase to 3000 mm.

"From what we've done with them on the doubles for the last four years, the DAFs have done a fantastic job," he says with unbridled enthusiasm. "We run them 24 hours a day and just haven't had any issues."

Although it's early days and the new prime mover is barely run in, Neave is suitably impressed with fuel consumption that averages between 2.5 and 2.6 km/litre (7.0 – 7.3 mpg) on every trip. Yet while gross weights are relatively light at around 34 tonnes on southbound legs and 42 tonnes on the return, and liquid urea (AdBlue) consumption needs to come into the equation, these figures remain highly impressive. The Pacific Highway is, after all, a demanding stretch of road at any time, at any weight.

While glowing with praise for his Dutch delights, Neave makes it quite clear that he has no intention of becoming a single brand

prime contractors and truck and trailer builders ensures no stone is left unturned in the quest for ultimate efficiency in the entire operation.

Yet bearing such application specific dimensions, it's hardly surprising that this CF 85 wasn't put straight to work. Under instruction from Brown & Hurley, Brisbane-based Steve Walters Truck Repairs did the chassis conversion which involved removing 250 mm from the end of each rail and relocating all chassis mounted components forward into the reduced space. This shortened the wheelbase to just 3000 mm and on the quality of the conversion, Col says he is extremely impressed with the workmanship and innovation that went into the job.

SERVICE SCHEDULES

Being just the second truck in the Neave fleet equipped with an SCR (selective catalytic

As for other aspects of operation both past and present, Colin says the only issue he's encountered was a unit injector failure on one of the 2004 model 430s. This was eventually put down to a standard fuel filtration system that wasn't quite up to the task. Subsequently, all DAFs in the fleet were fitted with Racor primary filters and water separators which eliminated the problem. In fact, this has now become a standard fit on all new DAFs sold in Australia.

Each of the trucks clocks around 10,000 km every week and according to Neave, engine oil change intervals are critically evaluated. The preferred oil is Penrite semi-synthetic with 50,000 km change intervals and Colin says the most he adds between changes is a couple of litres. As an additional safeguard, he has the oil analysed every second oil change. He also trialed fully synthetic oil on two of the DAFs for three oil



MXceptional. The 460 hp Paccar engine is a spirited performer in this B-double application where gross weights are always below 45 tonnes.

changes but found it was too thin and increased oil consumption after about 30,000 km.

Turning to the subject of rubber, Colin Neave says he's satisfied with the results he's getting from Hankook drive and Toyo steer tyres. He likes Michelin on the drive also but says all things considered, Hankook comes out in front.

"So far, on a whole-of-life cost basis the Hankooks are ahead by around 1.5 cents per kilometre," Col explained. "We don't get as much mileage out of them as we do the Michies, but considering the cost difference between the two brands, Hankooks are well and truly in front."

He says in other ways the two brands are "much of a muchness."

"We've tried every brand and they're the only ones that still hang on well when the tread gets low"

As for retreads, "They're not worth it, I've never been for them," he states.

When asked what he believes is the single most important factor in maintaining an efficient fleet, Colin's answer is simple and to the point. "Don't let the trucks get too old," he says. "A lot of finance companies are pushing for two year or even down to 18 month changeover periods, especially with high mileage work."

Yet he also believes fuel economy and satellite tracking are two other vital keys. In fact, during my visit Neave was in the process of fitting TOMR global positioning and tracking systems to every truck in the fleet.

"Putting the TOMR in will help us better utilise our equipment, particularly with the local division," he claims. "It's not so much a 'big brother watching you' thing, it's for us to actually see where we're spending the money and whether we can cut costs in some areas. And we can charge customers more accurately because we can see exactly how long a truck has been waiting, for example.

"I looked at quite a few different brands but they couldn't give us the service and reliability that TOMR came up with," he remarked. "Also, a couple of other brands were very expensive whereas TOMR put a package together that worked out about \$10 or \$15 per day"

As is often the case when two people start talking trucks, the afternoon slipped by rather quickly but eventually, Colin asked if I'd drive the bobtail CF85 to the servo where the trailers waited. It was a short but worthwhile exercise for no other reason than to conclude that the ZF AS-Tronic automated transmission is one clever bit of gear. Gear changes were smooth and precise even in this no-load state and it was honestly just like driving a car.

It was an opinion that remained firmly intact over the next dozen hours and 1000 km as I shared the DAF cab with driver Garry Richards.

Formerly an interstate driver, Garry is smitten with being home every day and reckons the DAF is the 'bees knees' as far as driver comfort goes. And it quickly became easy to understand why, with the DAF displaying exemplary road manners and lounge chair comfort. At the changeover point on Kempsey's northern outskirts, the southbound B-double set was quickly switched for an identical combination loaded close to the maximum 42 tonnes gross.

I was looking forward to a stint behind the wheel and being an ultra-short wheelbase single-drive prime mover, I was curious to find from a driver's perspective how it handled the weight. The curiosity was, however, quickly satisfied. The DAF felt stable and surefooted at all times and there was certainly never so much as a hint of any 'tail wagging the dog' syndrome.

However, this was the first trip since the electronic stability program (ESP) had been recalibrated – necessary due to the 250 mm shorter than standard chassis – and a new software package from DAF in Holland had fixed the problem which had previously caused the ESP system to lock trailer wheels during cornering.

As for engine performance, it was easy to verify Colin's claim that the 460 is amply powerful for this application. The Tintenbar climb heading north out of Ballina is acknowledged as the steepest on the Pacific Highway between Sydney and Brisbane. Allowing the transmission to do its own thing in auto mode, the truck

**FT CF85.460 4X2
PRIME MOVER SPECS**

GVM: 17,400 kg
GCM: 45,000 kg
Max. front axle load: 6500 kg
Max. rear axle load: 10,900 kg

ENGINE

Paccar MX 340, six cylinder, turbocharged and intercooled
Piston displacement: 12.9 litres
Compression ratio: 16.4 to 1
Fuel injection: Electronically controlled
Max. output: 340 kW (462 hp) at 1500-1900 rpm
Max torque: 2300 Nm (1696 lb ft) at 1000-1410 rpm
MX engine brake and exhaust brake: retardation power of 320 kW (435 hp) at 2100 rpm

TRANSMISSION

ZF AS-Tronic 12-speed overdrive automated with oil cooler

CLUTCH

Single dry plate, electronically operated with self adjusting servo
Diameter: 430 mm (16.9 inch) with torsional damper

REAR AXLE

SR 1347 single reduction with diff lock
Max. design load: 13,000 kg
Ratio: 2.93:1

FRONT SUSPENSION

Parabolic leaf springs

REAR SUSPENSION

DAF 4 bag ECAS (Electronically Controlled Air Suspension)

WHEELS AND TYRES

22.5 inch Alcoa polished aluminium disc wheels with 305/ 75 R 22.5 front and dual 11 R22.5 rear tyres.

eventually settled into seventh gear for the solid pull to the top, dropping no lower than 1500 rpm.

Another unexpected situation close to Coolangatta where I missed a turn proved invaluable in testing the mettle of the DAF. Getting back on track involved hanging a left back onto the highway halfway up a steep pinch and it was here where the engine really hooked in, with the transmission responding admirably in auto mode, allowing revs to build quickly and comfortably pick up subsequent gears to accelerate safely up the grade.

For me, this was the clincher that proved beyond any doubt the competence of DAF's CF85.460 as a light B-double prime mover.

Sure, it's a something of a specialist application but combined with the excellent fuel efficiency this unit has already demonstrated on this demanding run, it's easy to conclude the Dutch brand is at least the equal of any equivalent European prime mover in the Australian market today.

And as Colin Neave has demonstrated by both his choice and application, there are cases where DAF even stands ahead of the rest. **IID**