



# PICKING AND CHOOSING

TASMANIAN HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM CHRIS AND WENDY RAYNER OPERATE A TRANSPORT AND WAREHOUSING BUSINESS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION – BOTH REGARDING THE EQUIPMENT THEY USE AND THE WORK THEY TAKE ON. Story by Peter Shields

It's tempting to think of Tasmania as an isolated, far-away island somewhere off the coast of Australia, but the reality – as so often – is much more complex. With a population of just over half a million, the apple isle is an important contributor to the Australian economy and has developed a sizable road transport industry. While the freight task itself is not unlike the one faced by transport businesses on the mainland, those handling it have had to develop some unique characteristics to cope with the effects of being isolated from the rest of the country. For instance, all interstate

freight involves ships or aircraft instead of trucks, and while there are no longer any passenger rail services, intrastate rail still plays an important role in moving cargo around Tasmania. The result is a different competitive dynamic between stakeholders in what is a tightly knit local trucking community. What's more, the weather can be extremely challenging, with snow blocking the highway network during the cold season and strong winds engulfing it in spring. From a regulatory perspective, however, Tasmania is following the lead from the mainland – it is a signatory to the

Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) and as such the rules and regulations for transport businesses are in line with most of the country. Maybe it's that consistency – at least on the surface – that is tempting more and more operators to start afresh in Tasmania, says Chris Rayner, Managing Director of Rayner Transport. Chris has seen many an owner-driver come to Tasmania to break into the small local market without any knowledge of its unique characteristics, but says it's a "fallacy" to think it'd be any easier to make a living on the island. "Here in Tassie, there seems to be always

## FAST FACT

Rayner Transport's first DAF truck is still working after travelling more than one million kilometres, with Chris Rayner saying there is a degree of sentimentality at play to keep his 'number one' going on the first engine. As well as being sentimental, Chris admits to being slightly superstitious, too. "I will not have 13 of anything, so our dealer knows when we get to 12 trucks, it will have two sales at once to take us to 14."

someone who will start off a transport company using their retrenchment money," he explains. "They reckon if they own the truck outright with no finance to pay they can run for a lower rate, but at some point they have to replace the truck – and that's when they strike trouble." According to Chris, the steady influx of hopeful operators from the mainland has created an environment where long-term operators are unable to increase their own rates despite having more than one reason to do so. The blow-ins are usually gone after three or four years, but are replaced by the next batch of people "buying themselves a job," as Chris puts it. The upside, he adds, is that his company can take on new contracts when these operators eventually withdraw, but often

at short notice. As such, he says his fleet has to be prepared to adjust quickly and must be 100 per cent reliable when it is called upon. "Reliability is our key value proposition in this volatile market. We are here for the long-term, and we make sure our customers know that," he explains. "We are putting the money into the trucks to give them confidence that we're not just another country transporter that's here today and gone tomorrow. It's no good me going to a customer and saying I can do this, this and this, and then not being able to deliver." Rayner Transport is based in Tasmania's second largest city of Launceston, some 200km north of Hobart. The company traces its history back to 1 January 2000, when Chris started running a daily

**FAST FACT**

Chris 'Salty' Saltmarsh, now General Sales Manager at truck dealership, CJD, appealed to Wendy Rayner's involvement in the partnership between the two companies by having a suspended seat with armrests fitted to the passenger side of the first truck he sold to the couple.

**FAST FACT**

Across the Rayner business, several rigid trucks are attached to pig trailers with a load capacity of 22 pallets. As a number of loading points, particularly in Hobart, have restricted access, pig trailers are considered advantageous because they can be quickly disconnected to increase manoeuvrability.



shuttle between the north coast towns of Burnie and Devonport, driving an ageing Isuzu with 800,000km on the clock. The original plan was to remain a single truck operator – not unlike what most are hoping for that arrive today – but after just a few months Chris saw the opportunity to pick up a new contract and grow the business, so a second truck was purchased and another driver employed. Sixteen years later that driver is still with Rayner Transport. As demand for his services increased, Chris assessed a whole number of different truck brands on the mainland to make sure he would be able to deliver on his promise of flexibility and reliability. Upon his return, he then formed a

business relationship with local truck dealership, CJD Equipment, to build and maintain his ever-growing rigid fleet. Starting out with a demonstrator truck to assess over a number of weeks, CJD eventually got the couple on to the DAF brand. "We'd had a couple of other trucks from a different brand before we went with CJD that caused us some issues; and the backup service from both the parent company and the local people was disappointing," says Chris, who – albeit not one to hold a grudge – reckons he wouldn't buy another truck of that brand again. In the hope to avoid any future disappointment, the relationship between the Rayner family and its new

truck supplier runs especially deep: When a new contract recently dictated that four new trucks with specialised refrigerated and curtain-sided bodies were required within four weeks, CJD General Manager, Chris Saltmarsh, hunted up three suitable new trucks from the mainland and sourced another low mileage unit within Tasmania.

In January this year, Rayner Transport subsequently took delivery of its tenth DAF truck, with the intention to eventually have the entire fleet made up of the single brand. Chris says such standardisation will have many benefits for the company – including driver familiarity with the product and a range of technical and servicing advantages. Chris says the type of work Rayner Transport performs is ideal for the DAF automated manual transmission (AMT), for example: "An AMT is certainly not just useful around town. If you're going across the Nullarbor you'll spend a lot of time in top gear, but not down here. Why would you want to be changing gears all the time if you don't have to? As a driver I wouldn't want to go back to a crash box either."

While the fleet changeover has been meticulously planned already, the journey to get there has only just begun, says Chris – pointing out that there are now several Japanese trucks in the fleet that have come along as part of the purchase of another freight company. The intention is to progressively move the older ones over to the DAF product, though, not least to reduce fuel consumption across the new entity. Since switching over to DAF, the Rayner fleet's average fuel economy has improved from 2.2 to 2.4 kilometres per litre, Chris says, so the potential savings could be sizable. Many Rayner-branded trucks are equipped with refrigerated and curtain-sided bodies that provide the flexibility to move products such as fruit juice and confectionary along with more general type of freight. A seven-day per week fruit and vegetable service heads south to Hobart, for example, and similar chilled fresh products are carried



to the Tasmanian north coast on a five-day week basis.

As added value, Chris has also invested in warehouse facilities and associated services, which continue to grow in conjunction with the increase in Rayner Transport's freight business. The company also has a non-competitive, mutual alliance with a Hobart-based carrier that includes access to depot facilities in the state capital; and shares a depot in the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong to simplify the connection with the nearest capital city on the mainland.

In a move to counteract the influx of competition from the mainland, Chris and Wendy say they are now focusing on "transport solutions rather than just point-to-point movement of goods" – and with some success.

The expansion into warehousing has been appealing to many a mainland client, who have taken advantage of Rayner Transport's ability to split loads and then deliver smaller consignments to their customers' clients.

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Chris Rayner  
Managing Director of Rayner Transport

"The warehousing service also creates additional line haul work and there has been significant growth in container transport," says Chris. Cargo can reportedly range anywhere from snack foods, building materials and hospital requirements to pet food. The overwhelming majority of the work is contract-based, with Chris trying to avoid 'one off' deliveries or courier services. In line with that, sub-contractors are only used infrequently if specific needs arise. By understanding the unique characteristics of the apple isle,

Rayner Transport has achieved some enviable growth over the past decade and a half, and realistic plans are in place to continue that trend into the future. "We won't ever be the biggest," says Chris. "But we are well placed to keep smaller operators at bay that undercut rates without thinking ahead. They do a great job but can give us a great headache as well. By choosing who we work with – both on the customer side and from a supplier perspective, our fate remains firmly in our own hands." **PM**