

# GARDEN STATE



DAF trucks enable O'Connor's Transport to get into tough spots.

coupled to trailers with mounted powerpacks to pump the woodchip and soil on landscaping jobs. The vehicles are almost certain to encounter difficult-to-reach locations, which is to say John depends on high-end manoeuvrability as his operators navigate anywhere from cemeteries, construction sites and playgrounds. "The CF85s are very good economical machines to have as a prime mover," he says. "Aside from the comfort and reliability, two of their strongest qualities, they possess excellent manoeuvrability and that's a major consideration given the nature of our work and the locations we need to access. Building sites are often a mess. So it's important to have a truck that can get into tight places I can tell you." Pulling power, insofar as it's not essential for the tasks of blower trucks, is nevertheless ample on the DAF CF85 with its 460 horsepower engine. "We have two operators on all our blower trucks which means cab space is critical and DAF excels in this area," he says. "Our team of drivers is split down the middle between the DAF drivers and Yank

drivers," he says to demarcate those staff that appreciate the European trucks and those who like the Kenworths in his fleet. "As a ride the Kenworth driver appointment has been vastly improved," John says of the prime movers he dedicates alongside the DAFs for hauling limestone which have a gross concessional mass (GCM) of 68.5 tonnes. The DAFs, however, offer the agility he needs working around the Gippsland area where O'Connor Transport has its head office. "It's all about access," he says. "It's also a good economical option and the workshop guys are happy working on the DAF. The MX-13 motor is solid." Because of the unique specifications on their equipment O'Connor Transport maintains its own workshop with eight staff. Half are mechanics with the other half hired on as boilermakers. There are 45 employees in total across the business. The powerpacks for the blowers are also used on a Rigid 6x4 with SCR technology, EBS, and in semi-trailer configuration. With a 25-strong commercial vehicle fleet, O'Connor Transport uses a mix of tippers, B-doubles and truck and dog

trailer. It carts bark and woodchip around Gippsland and up north into Southern NSW and they move pine bark out of Mt Gambier on the South Australian border. John says the company provides services for raw materials specialist Sibelco, which involves moving 2,000 tonne of limestone from Buchan to Traralgon each week. Several DAF XF105s, with its recognised roomy cab, have been assigned that job. Like so many commercial road transport companies the core of the business has changed since its inception. According to John his father was initially in business with machinery and trucks for log carting and lime manufacturing for farming. "This was back when raw pine bark was crushed with a hammermill," he says. "My father was one of the first to do that." Despite graduating with an economics degree from Monash University in Melbourne, John, in partnership with his brother David, took over the limestone business in 1976. By the 1980s, as garden shows on TV exploded, John found his business model was again adapting to the vicissitudes in the market.

A 40 YEAR COMPANY WORKING IN GARDEN SUPPLIES, O'CONNOR'S TRANSPORT, COUNTS ON DAF TRUCKS IN A RANGE OF APPLICATIONS INCLUDING THE BLOWER TRUCKS IT USES FOR A THRIVING LANDSCAPE SUPPLIERS BUSINESS IN SOUTHERN VICTORIA.

Attaching coiled hose into the upper reaches of an office tower, some seven storeys above the ground, requires operational expertise. It's part of everyday operations, however, for O'Connor's Transport, a raw materials distribution specialist that makes use of blower trucks that are assigned an array of challenging tasks, not least of

all defying gravity by ensuring scoria and chip bark is pumped into high rise buildings for the garden designs in reception areas, mezzanine levels and corporate vestibules. Together the hoses, which affix to a feeder on the trailer, need to measure out to 120 metres in some cases and extend beyond balconies and building ledges into the towers. A manual electric crane is sometimes hired for these

jobs provisional to the extreme heights operators might need to scale. It's a specialist job not without its challenges. The preparation and subsequent clean-up, as strewn debris is par for the course, might take up to four hours, and requires two operators. O'Connor Transport Managing Director John O'Connor, says his business depends on DAF CF85s, which are



O'Connor Transport carts bark and woodchip around the Gippsland district.



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John O’Connor  
O’Connor Transport Managing Director

“That changed our thinking as there was real demand to process these landscape products,” he recalls. “Garden supplies were suddenly everywhere with new housing estates feeding into the building industry and there was Burke’s Backyard and a growing trend in DIY gardening.” In the next decade O’Connor Transport were manufacturing pine bark in the 1990s, a process that involves grinding it and screening it. There were other revenue streams to explore. Part of its advance into the 21st century saw O’Connor Transport invest in waste timber recycling. As to the evolution of his business John is mostly philosophical.

“There’s been nothing planned. All I do is react,” he says. “Once you buy the first

truck then you’re already on your way to buying another.” The business, according to John, involves plenty of gear including grinders, screens, shredders and hammermills. Head office is in Morwell, one of the bigger towns in the Gippsland district in Southeast Victoria. The company also runs a second facility in Dandenong South. The industry as John views it has been hit with many challenges over his 40 years working within it. Its dynamic nature and many moving parts across technology, logistics, fluctuating markets and boom or bust economies mean there will be more. He says the ongoing driver shortage is very much relevant to daily operations, and that there are many barriers in the way of

attracting younger drivers to the industry. “Good young drivers are hard to find and there’s lots of reasons for this,” he says. “Truck driving is not an easy job and with congestion in cities some of the drivers won’t have a bar of it. There are many more boxes to tick now when it comes to compliance and that is good thing for increasing safety for all of our workers. But we need to consider how to make it easier for young guys and girls to transition into the sector. In the ‘70s and ‘80s 14-year old kids would start out washing trucks, driving them in the yard to get familiar with a truck and the equipment and that was itself necessary to an education in safety and later expertise.” In 2007, O’Connor Transport branched out into investing in blower trucks and the DAFs have been a part of the fleet ever since. John says he has continued to invest in safety, per industry standards, adding dashcams and GPS to the blower trucks. “I’m giving them the benefit of the doubt. It’s as much about protecting my drivers on the road. In that sense the dashcams do more good than harm,” he says. “We ordered three DAFs for their suitability in multiple applications and we’ve seen that. Their versatility is as good as any other truck for the task.”

# CF85 AND XF105 + ECAS = PERFECT BALANCE



DAF CF85 and XF105 6x4 prime movers feature Electronically Controlled Air Suspension (ECAS) to control the ride height of the chassis for improved drivability and loading or unloading. Axle Load Monitoring (ALM) calculates and monitors the axle load, for the perfect balance of comfort + safety + efficiency. So Do The Math and contact your local DAF dealer to arrange a test drive.

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