

# A SURE BET

*Multi-million-dollar loads are all in a DAF's work – Words by Warren Caves, Images by Torque it Up.*

The “Sport of Kings” draws large crowds of ambitious punters to racetracks around the nation, immersing themselves in the culture of this noblest of sports. When the horses jump from the gate, vocal crowds attempt to spur on their chosen thoroughbred to win.

Well before race day, specialist horse movement logistics companies work behind the scenes to meet the needs of the industry. Horses are not only transported to racecourses to compete; they also travel for trials and between spelling farms.

But whatever the reason for travel, the safety and good health of the horses are paramount, to ensure the valuable animals arrive in tip-top condition for their owners and trainers.

Additionally, broodmares and stallions – some individually worth many millions of dollars – have to be moved between studs for breeding purposes, and also arrive from overseas needing to be transported around the country. Thousands of yearlings also require transport when sale time comes around.



# GOLDNERS HORSE TRANSPORT

A prominent name in the specialised horse transport business is J.G Goldner. Established in Adelaide in 1945, John Gustav Goldner, aided by his wife Ethelene, began transporting horses from Adelaide's Morphettville racecourse. This service continued until John's passing in 1978, at which point the family business came under the control of his daughter, Beryl.

Over the years, the business has expanded to become the dominant horse transport operation between Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Scone and Brisbane.

The equine transport business was sold approximately five years ago and is now under the directorship of its chairman, representing a private investment firm based in Melbourne.

Clare Oxley, the CEO of Goldners Horse Transport, met with *PowerTorque* at the company's new purpose-built facility in the western Sydney suburb of Len Waters Estate, to provide an insight in to the 27,000-plus horse movements it facilitates each year, plus the performance of the five DAF CF prime movers that carry out much of that demand.

The new facility will amalgamate the operations from previous locations at Warwick Farm and Ingleburn, with Len Waters Estate specifically chosen for its easy access to the M7 motorway and its zoning for livestock.

"We needed to select a location that enabled horses to be transported efficiently, with the goal of minimising the time horses spend on the trucks," Clare explains. "We pick up the horses from locations across Sydney in our smaller rigid trucks and bring them here, where they can be stabled for a time before being loaded onto our semi-trailers for interstate transfers. This limits any undue stress on the animals.

"The problem with keeping horses on trucks for long periods of time is that they can suffer travel sickness. The natural position for horses, being grazing animals, is for their heads to be down. This is not practically possible during transport.

Equine transport is a very refined niche industry, with only a handful of large-scale operators in the field. Goldners ranks as the largest in this sphere, with a mixed fleet operation comprising a total of 16 trucks.



***"It's very hard to teach horse skills to a driver. We find it much easier to teach a person with horse skills how to drive a truck"***



Included in this are three earlier-model DAF prime movers. A further two DAF CF prime-movers were purchased in December 2018 and March 2019, with negotiations between Clare Oxley and Gilbert & Roach in Huntingwood. Other vehicles in the fleet include three Mercedes-Benz Actros, with the remainder made up of Hino rigid trucks.

“We needed to expand our fleet and, although I evaluated several options, I was reluctant to introduce another brand, which focused the choice to either DAF or Mercedes-Benz. By evaluating input from our drivers and from a cost perspective, it didn’t make sense to go any other way than with the DAFs,” Clare explains.

“We wanted to lease a single-drive 4X2 DAF through the PACLEASE programme until our purchase timeframe came up. Although at the time it didn’t have a truck of our particular specification, PACLEASE at Gilbert & Roach sourced a brand new truck for us suitable to our requirements. This was subsequently leased to us until we completed its eventual purchase, with the lease payments being subtracted from the purchase cost.

“All of our DAF trucks return to Gilbert & Roach at Huntingwood for repairs and servicing at 30,000km intervals, with the extended workshop opening hours until 10pm being a massive help in terms of flexibility. We simply drop a truck off late in the afternoon and pick it up in the morning, so we are not having to hurry to get the trucks to a workshop by 4 to 5pm.

“Our drivers seem to prefer the DAFs for the work we do. They find that the steering seems better weighted for our particular configurations and the DAFs handle the poor-quality roads and driveways well that are encountered regularly when heading to rural stud properties.

“With 95 percent of our work made up of racing, paddock and stud transfers for thoroughbred racehorses, reliability of our equipment is paramount.



## FEATURE



Clare Oxley,  
J.G. Goldner CEO

“We cannot have multi-million-dollar horses left stranded on the side of a freeway and to ensure this does not occur we keep our fleet well-maintained and compliant. The commonality of the fleet together with good after-sales service is also critical to us. We don’t have any set roll-over timeframe for vehicle replacement, we just evaluate our equipment regularly and monitor performance.

Trailing equipment is also unique to the equine industry, with an individual capability of 10 to 15 horses and featuring moveable gates to accommodate single horses or mares with foals. The individual compartments are all camera-monitored from within the truck cabin, so the driver can act upon any transport issue with the horses quickly. A fully compliant strapper seating area is also available within the trailer.

With such an expensive and often unpredictable cargo, Goldners drivers require a unique skillset over and above that of a typical operator. With driver shortages being experienced across the industry, this adds an extra layer of difficulty to recruitment.



# GOLDNERS HORSE TRANSPORT

“The welfare and safety of our clients’ horses is paramount and it’s with this in mind that we only employ drivers with excellent horsemanship as a priority,” she says. “It’s very hard to teach horse skills to a driver. We find it much easier to teach a person with horse skills how to drive a truck, and we employ our personnel with this philosophy in mind. This is what makes our business stand out from the competition, we only employ highly experienced horsemen and horsewomen.”

With many of Australia’s leading trainers, owners and breeders entrusting Goldners to handle their horse transport logistics, it’s easy to see why drivers play such a pivotal role. Live payloads, at times worth in excess of \$100 million, require a competent handler to ensure your \$5 each-way at Randwick on Saturday has the best chance of getting up. 

