

# CITY LIMITS

LUCAS TRANSPORT TAKES PRIDE IN THE SMALL FLEET OF DAF COMMERCIAL VEHICLES IT RUNS AROUND BRISBANE. AS A METROPOLITAN-FOCUSED CONSTRUCTION SUPPLY BUSINESS THE COMPANY VALUES THE COMFORT, DRIVEABILITY AND EFFICIENCY OF ITS TRUCKS.

Dean Lucas fell in love with trucks at a very young age. Growing up, his father delivered soft drinks on Saturday afternoons and Dean tagged along, by his own admission rain, hail

or shine. "It didn't matter to me. I loved it because that was what I wanted to do," he recalls. As the Director of Lucas Transport, Dean oversees an operation that involves seven commercial vehicles. These include five

DAF CF85s and one XF105. He added the XF105 more recently, with the intention of using it for linehaul work to drive additional revenue should business, in the sometimes fluctuating construction industry, wane.

Based out of the yard of building supplier CSR, in Cooper's Plains, a suburb in the south of Brisbane, Lucas Transport has called the location home for the past 17 years. In 2018 the family-owned business celebrated turning 25 years. The specialist carrier delivers plasterboard mainly in and around Brisbane and southeast Queensland, where it can work the picturesque coastline between Mooloolaba and Byron Bay, attending construction sites in commercial and residential industries with provisions for occasional linehaul tasks to Sydney to ensure the assets are always being utilised.

The first DAF commercial vehicle was purchased in 2003. Back then the business had been already operating for a decade, having started from scratch with the obligatory single vehicle.

As the third truck in the business, the purchase of the CF85 was something of a watershed moment.

"The price was right, and it was a nice-looking truck," Dean says. "The cab was a bit more like the inside of a car, comfortable and that was significant for me."

It began a long term connection to dealer Brown & Hurley in Caboolture. That long term relationship was forged three

years later with a defining experience when Dean considered buying another European cabover truck.

"I was offered a good deal but around that same time the CF85 engine had some issues. While it was out of warranty, PACCAR still paid for all the parts to have the engine rebuilt and I went halves with the dealer on labour costs," he recalls. "So, my loyalty has remained to them."

It's been DAFs ever since.

At present Lucas Transport runs a B-double, four single trailers and an eight-wheeler with a pig trailer. Dean suggests the newer model trucks provide his business with the best value especially in the key performance indicators he scrutinises most often like fuel efficiency and reduced maintenance costs.

Primed in different colours, each truck is detailed with signature pin-stripe down the side. The DAFs, from an aesthetic perspective, are ideal for someone like Dean who takes pride in their fleet.

"I think both DAF models look great and it makes it that much easier when you purchase the truck knowing it has a real presence when you're taking it onto construction sites," he says.

Another, more essential attribute for Lucas Transport, is the exceptional turning circle of the DAF, given the vehicles are tasked with unloading on the notoriously tight and awkward dimensions afforded most construction sites.

"I'm always thinking of ways to do a better job. For me, there's real satisfaction in going into a site and successfully unloading without causing any hassle," he says. "I love achieving that."

Always hungry for improvements to his operations, he has invested in specially engineered trailers having come across equipment from Stobart in England that is designed to give cranes and forklifts an edge in unloading plasterboard.

"For years I wanted some sort of system where we didn't have to tarp-up and yet we would still have access through the roof so that a crane can unload," Dean says. "I noticed these trailers that actually

opened out and the roof concertinaed away and I thought that was alright." After realising they were manufactured in Ireland he liaised with a local trailer manufacturer who suggested a Tautliner with a rollover roof, like those used on grain tippers.

"So I just put the two of them together and we got two of them on the road in April this year," Dean says. "We'll see the benefit when the wet season hits at the end of the year. When we get to a job site and it starts raining it's just a matter of rolling the roof out and the load will stay dry. Whereas before that we'd have to be climbing up on the trailer and rolling out tarps and we don't have to do that now."

Even though the unique combination increased his costs by \$25,000, Dean is resolved it will prove a cost effective investment over ten years, given a new tarp every year costs around \$4,500.

The construction sector is a fickle environment at the moment with much uncertainty hovering over the global economy and despite interest rates dropping to record lows it remains, for smaller transport businesses, a feast or famine proposition.

Just 12 months ago Lucas Transport was delivering 12 loads a day with occasional use of sub-contractors. At the moment Dean says demand sits at around four loads a day in addition to the interstate linehaul B-double work with the DAF XF105 he has taken on to boost revenue.

"The XF105 offers a little bit more storage for my payload but in performance I'm finding they are very similar to the CF85s," he says.

For the last 16 years Dean has enjoyed having a close relationship with Brown and Hurley. He has become friends with the dealer since that first DAF purchase back in 2003.

"He understands my business needs and makes sure any issues I have are sorted out straight away," he says. "I feel very supported by the dealer and am also happy with the level of service that PACCAR provide. They've worked hard to get things right for me." 



Lucas Transport runs five DAF CF85 vehicles around Queensland.