

THE RIGHT



FOR THE JOB



When you go out shopping for new trucks there is plenty to choose from, and at the moment there is no shortage of deals on offer with some manufacturers over stocked and keen to move a bit of metal. Recently we spoke to an operator who, contrary to the current talk of economic doom and gloom, bought not one, but two, brand new trucks to service a new contract he was able to secure.

Craig Silby may be a familiar name to many North Islander operators, having been previously involved in the industry as both a transport operator and a truck salesman. Having been out of the trucking game for a while, Craig had been quietly searching out a suitable contract to return to the cut and thrust of the busy transport life.

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT WORK

Not prepared to take on any old job, Craig waited in the wings until he cottoned onto what he believed would be a good contract with New Zealand Post subsidiary Roadstar. Having secured the work, the pressure was on for Craig to find a pair of suitable trucks – the time frame was tight with only two weeks to get new trucks on the road and earning.

Under such circumstances many operators would be heading straight to one of the Japanese marques, as they generally have standardised specs and tend to hold decent stocks of new trucks. However, Craig was keen to check out the field before committing his hard earned dollars to any old pair of trucks.

NARROWING DOWN THE OPTIONS

Craig points out that it was a close run thing between bonneted American tractor units from one of the brands he previously represented, a Japanese brand, or the two MAN trucks he eventually settled on. There were a number of factors that came into play with the deal, but foremost was the availability of the trucks and the ability of the chosen dealer to have the trucks painted and ready to go for the first day of the new contract.

Craig is not a stranger to European trucks and has, in the past, run other European makes. But unlike most other operators, Craig is not afraid to try new options, tinker with specifications, and asking for, but not always receiving, what he considers would be ideal for his operation. As an operator and the person paying the cheque, he has previously been told by truck salesmen that he cannot have the product he believed would be absolutely ideal for his operation – interesting!

GOING TO THE TOP

This time, just as he was nearing the end of his search, he approached MAN Automotive Imports (NZ) Ltd, General Manager, Jason Cann, to discuss the possibility of purchasing MAN trucks. Craig had noted that MAN was eager to lift their presence and performance in the New Zealand market and that they had some attractive deals on offer.

In some respects it might be said that Craig was taking a bit of a punt, but he says he has always had a hankering to purchase a MAN. He knew that MAN had a very solid reputation overseas, but what

he had to weigh up was the dealer's commitment to the NZ market and the likely level of support and backup he could reasonably expect to receive from them.

FRUITFUL DISCUSSIONS

As can be seen, the discussion with Jason proved fruitful with the deal for two trucks done in under 45 minutes. Talking with Jason led Craig to believe that his concerns regarding service and back up, whilst pertinent at the time, were in the process of being addressed. Craig was reassured that the trucks would have the highest level of service and support, and that MAN Automotive would deliver the satisfaction he desired in the short to medium term.

(Craig's purchase occurred prior to the official announcement of Heavy Trucks in Palmerston North being appointed a full sales and service dealer for Transpacific Commercial Vehicles. This situation has proved to be ideally suited to Craig's operation with one of his trucks based in Auckland and the other in Palmerston North.)

THE PRESSURE WAS ON

Getting both trucks on the road within the two week time frame proved to be somewhat more difficult than anticipated, but Craig says that the MAN Automotive team pulled out all the stops to ensure that the freight got through on the first night as required.

It had been quite a rush to get the two trucks painted, fitted with turntables, and on the road. It's impressive that not only was the dealer doing everything in their power to get the trucks ready, but the truck painter was also working over the weekend to ensure the first truck was back as soon as possible.

Craig says that MAN lent him the demonstrator for the first few days, before the second truck was ready, and continued to let him use it whilst they fixed a couple of minor issues with the first truck. But since going on the road they have certainly lived up to both Craig and his drivers' expectations.

PROVING THEIR WORTH

The TGA MANS, a 480hp and a 530hp, are now proving their worth for Craig. There has been no problem with driver acceptance as the trucks





have one of the most comfortable cabs on the market. They have a fantastic build quality and the fit and finish are exemplary. It is the small things like the twin air ride ISRI seats, with internal heaters, that set the cabs apart from the norm – although Craig did note that the passenger's seat can 'chatter' a little when not being used.

To drive the new trucks is a dream, with more than ample horsepower under the cab and the brilliant automated manual ZF transmission backing them up. Both trucks feature cruise control, which is regularly used, and the 530hp model benefits from the inbuilt gearbox retarder which can also be used with the cruise control, maintaining a set speed on the downhill sections of the run as well.

AS PLEASURE TO DRIVE

Craig enthuses that both trucks are extremely easy to drive, and he jumps at even the slightest opportunity to get back behind the wheel. The 530hp is almost too good and it could lull the driver into a false sense of security with the sheer ingenuity of all the onboard systems. The combination of the retarder and the cruise control work brilliantly, delivering an extremely polished performance.

But stepping back into the 480hp, which doesn't have the retarder fitted, means that more attention has to be paid to the road speed and driving conditions and, Craig says, more forethought has to be given to the road ahead. While no less of a truck, the omission of the retarder is a significant change and this tends to deliver a completely different driving experience. Having said this, Craig isn't complaining about either truck as they are both extremely easy to drive.

Having the trucks with sleeper cabs has also proved a boon, especially during the winter months when weather conditions can change so quickly on the inland highways. Being the first truck out of Palmerston North each night means that Craig's driver often provides weather and route information for the following NZ Post drivers.

PERPLEXING DETAILS

Craig is perplexed by the fact that, while the cab interiors are finished to such a high standard, the small details on the outside, notably the spats that cover the step wells, are still an optional extra? Fuel economy whilst good, (they are both exceeding 2.2 km/l), has yet to reach the level Craig was anticipating, especially given the lighter all up weight of the combinations (normally around 36 tonnes all up). Craig has even gone to the trouble of fitting the trucks with 295/80R22.5 tyres to reduce rolling resistance and improve fuel economy.

Overall, the trucks have certainly met his expectations. Even talking to other owners and drivers along the road has been an eye opening experience. Not one person has derided the trucks in any shape or form. Those he has spoken to since purchasing the trucks have only mentioned the potential difficulties that he might experience with backup and service.

WITHOUT ISSUE

So far these issues have not materialised, in fact quite the opposite. When Craig's truck made its initial visit to Heavy Trucks in Palmerston North the crew downed tools and swarmed all over it. This type of reception presents an excellent first impression for those working with an unfamiliar dealer.

Craig remains very confident that the assurances he was given by Jason Cann, when purchasing the trucks, will be fulfilled and that his trucks will continue to perform perfectly into the future. As he said, when you purchase a new truck what it might be worth when it has reached the end of its life is not relevant. If you run your business anticipating a high residual value for your trucks you haven't got it right.

Given the very public assurances by MAN Automotive that they will be appointing more dealers in the future, we see little reason that Craig and MAN shouldn't have a long and mutually beneficial relationship together. **PT**





BRIEF SPECIFICATIONS

TGA 26.480 LX 6x4 Tractor Unit

Cab: LX sleeper cab 2240mm wide by 2280mm long, with twin air heated leather seats, single bunk, external locks, air kit, immobiliser, multi adjustable steering column

Engine: D2876LF12 – 480hp/353kW and /2300Nm of Torque featuring Euro III emission controls and Common Rail Fuel system

Gearbox: ZF 12 AS 2301 Astronic fully automated 12 speed

Front Axle: VOK-08

Front Suspension: 7.5 tonne rate parabolic spring

Rear Axles: HYD 1370/ HD1350 with a 4.11 to 1 ratio

Rear Suspension: 23 tonne rate (eight airbag) air suspension with ECAS

Braking: Full air with EBS/ABS braking

Wheelbase: 4275mm

TGA 26.480 LX 6x4 Tractor Unit

Cab: LX sleeper cab 2240mm wide by 2280mm long, with twin air heated leather seats, single bunk, external locks, air kit, immobiliser, multi adjustable steering column

Engine: D2876LF13 – 530hp/390kW and /2400Nm of Torque featuring Euro III emission controls and Common Rail Fuel system

Gearbox: ZF 12 AS 2531 Astronic fully automated 12 speed with ZF intarder

Front Axle: VOK-08

Front Suspension: 7.5 tonne rate parabolic spring

Rear Axles: HYD 1370/ HD1350 with a 3.7 to 1 ratio

Rear Suspension: 23 tonne rate (eight airbag) air suspension with ECAS

Braking: Full air with EBS/ABS braking

Wheelbase: 4275mm



Craig Silby is very happy with his new purchases

