

Recovered with glory

Just as commercial vehicles come in all shapes and sizes, so too do the breakdown recovery vehicles that service them. One worry on the horizon for urban operators of these long-lived units are emissions restrictions in clean air zones, reports Steve Banner

Anybody who invests a substantial sum in a major piece of capital equipment ideally wants to get as much work out of it as possible. That means it has to be capable of taking on a variety of different jobs.

That was clearly the thinking of Dunstable, Bedfordshire-based recovery operator Statham's Motor Engineers when it took delivery recently of a £210,000 DAF New CF 530 FA with NRC recovery bodywork (pictured, above).

With a gross train weight of up to 80 tonnes, and 523bhp on tap from its 13-litre engine, it usually operates as a 4x2. That gives it sufficient manoeuvrability to go to work on the overcrowded highways of London and the Home Counties - not to mention the invariably clogged M25. "The NRC crane and winches mean we can recover almost any car or light commercial," says company owner John Statham.

If the DAF needs to get to grips with something heavier, however, then it can be equipped with a detachable tag axle, which turns it into a 6x2. "It allows us to lift heavier vehicles above 14 tonnes and up to 44 tonnes, so we now have one vehicle that can fulfil the role of two," he

says. Complete with a braking system and pneumatic suspension, the tag axle takes around 30 minutes to install.

The NRC composite body features a 25-tonne sliding crane, under-lift equipment and twin winches. VDZ equipment provides a towing option as an alternative to front-end lifting if dual tow-jaws happen to be fitted to the casualty vehicle. Lighter than the stainless steel bodies sometimes fitted to heavy recovery trucks, the composite body helps the DAF return a very creditable average of 9.5mpg, despite

a considerable amount of (necessary) idling time.

While versatility is to be applauded, there is also an argument in favour of acquiring recovery vehicles primarily dedicated to particular tasks. Barking, Essex-based Boleyn Recovery and Fleet Services, for example, has invested in a Mercedes-Benz Antos 26-tonner with a 30ft tilt-and-slide bed body (and winch) built by Boniface Engineering that it uses to recover fire engines. It has an all-steel Chevron 30 Series body.

"The truck has got a capacity of 12





HYBRID SOLUTION?

Cummins may have the long-term answer to ever-tighter big city emission regulations. At the IAA Hanover Commercial Vehicle Show back in September 2018, it was extolling the virtues of its PowerDrive 6000 hybrid system as fitted to a Kenworth T370 US Class 6 15-tonner equipped with a recovery crane. Combined with a Cummins B6.7 diesel, the hybrid package is claimed to enable the truck to travel for up to 50 miles in environmentally sensitive areas using zero-emission pure electric power. Run it in hybrid guise, and it should deliver a range of over 300 miles. The crane can either be operated electrically, or by a power take-off from the engine.

Emissions can be cut by up to 80%, and fuel costs by from 40% to 80%, compared with a conventional diesel, depending on the drive cycle, says the engine manufacturer. PowerDrive can be deployed in either series or parallel guise, and combined with various sizes of diesel and natural gas engines and battery packs.

tonnes," says Steve Smith, Boleyn's managing director. "Using a slide bed means we don't have to lift and tow the vehicle, so there is no need to get under the front." That means the recovery can be carried out more quickly; and the quicker the job is done, the less risk there is that whoever is doing it will be hit by a passing driver.

"Fire appliances have quite a low overall height, so you needn't worry about striking bridges and other overhead obstructions if you put them on a slide bed," says John Coldwell, Boniface Engineering's sales manager. If necessary, the Antos can transport up to three cars instead.

BIGGER BEDS

A growing number of recovery operators are investing in bigger-capacity slide beds; and they can be specified with lifting gear, too.

So NS Clarke Transport of Rugeley, Staffordshire, acquired a Mercedes-Benz Actros 26-tonner bodied and equipped by Boniface which can transport vehicles weighing up to 13.6 tonnes on its Chevron body. The Actros is fitted with a Hyva HC 241 X crane which works with a lifting frame to pick up a car weighing up to 1.6 tonnes at a distance of 12m. The

Hyva can also hoist a vehicle weighing up to 8.6 tonnes from a position alongside it.

Primarily a haulier, NS Clarke runs seven recovery trucks. The recovery fleet's flagship is a 41-tonne Mercedes-Benz Arocs 4153 eight-wheeler with a three-stage heavy-duty Recoverer Trident recovery boom from Boniface.

Both that firm and Dave Bland Engineering - Canadian company NRC's UK distributor - report that they have plenty of orders to fulfil. "We are as busy as we can possibly be," says Coldwell.

Much of the demand is driven by the need for recovery operators to invest in Euro VI trucks if they wish to access the London ultra low emission zone and low emission zones elsewhere, without incurring financial penalties.

Also president of the Association of Vehicle Recovery Operators, Smith points out that such trucks tend to be acquired over ten- to 15-year cycles because they are so costly. He describes the need to replace them early to meet emission rules as "devastating for our industry".

Not only is it involving operators in considerable extra expense, he says, but recovery vehicle builders do not have the capacity to construct the new

trucks needed in the time available.

For that reason, they may have to send in Euro V-compliant trucks if they do not have a Euro VI model free, and either pass on the daily charge of up to £100 to the customer, or swallow it themselves. The latter course of action is the more likely one, says Smith, if the customer is a major one who puts a lot of business their way.

Retrofit emission control systems have been developed that will bring Euro V buses to Euro VI levels, and are starting to be introduced for coaches and trucks. "We've yet to see anything that would be a viable option for a recovery vehicle though," Smith says. [TE](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

DVSA update on recovery truck MOT and drivers' hours rules - <https://is.gd/ujoxek>