

# Chopping and changing



Highly popular on the continent, swap body systems have been instrumental in delivering many advantages. Brian Wall reviews the technology's relative merits and asks why it is less prevalent in the UK

Swap body systems – effectively a load-carrying container that can be separated from the truck, similar to an ISO container – have proved a winning formula on the continent, bringing far greater transport flexibility, particularly when used in drawbar combinations. German manufacturer Krone, for one, has recently begun expanding its production, with the prospect of winning more business.

Yet swap bodies haven't been embraced with the same enthusiasm in the UK. Richard Owens, group marketing manager, Don-Bur, explains: "Swap body systems, in the truest sense of the phrase, are not that commonplace in the UK, primarily because of the limitations of the rail infrastructure, where it is not feasible to fully utilise the multi-modal aspect of this type of equipment. In mainland Europe, where large quantities of goods can be trunked via rail, the multi-modal nature of the system provides a simple cross-over with local delivery units, which can complete secondary and last-mile deliveries."

That said, similar 'demountable' units are readily employed in a host of situations in the UK to give operators far more flexibility. "For instance, a driver can drop off a couple of demount units with full loads at a delivery bay, without having to wait for the goods to be offloaded, and perhaps pick up one

that is empty and be back on the road at speed," Owens points out. "Turnaround time is negligible."

Typically, demount units in the UK – such as the Don-Bur units pictured above – go hand-in-hand with drawbar combinations, providing the longest available load footprint afforded to maximise trunking potential, he states. (While the maximum legal length for articulated HGVs is 16.5m, those carrying swap bodies can extend to 16.65m.) They are commonly combined with two or even three demount units. "A complete drawbar demount rig will typically consist of a prime mover, drawbar trailer, chassis installations fitted to both, and compatible demountable units. Commonly, though, an order may just comprise a prime mover chassis installation to suit existing demount units." Each order, or part order, is engineered to be compatible with existing equipment.

At the destination, the isolated prime mover unit can then take a single demount box to one last-mile destination before returning to collect and deliver the other demount unit to a different local delivery point, he says.

The other advantage is the use of demount units to provide 'warehouse' space. 'Delivered' load can be retained safely in the unit, sitting on a warehouse yard until required. "In the case of curtainsider marques, for instance, it is perfectly practical to offload directly into 7.5t rigids or vans to complete deliveries," says Owens.

Demountables in the UK tend to be restricted to parcel carriers, tyre manufacturers and retailers, particularly those that offer home delivery for large, bulky items, such as kitchens.

## CULINARY SUCCESS

While acknowledging the different European approach, Cartwright

## SWAP BODIES FOR LCVS

A swap body system for 3.5t and 4.25t light commercial chassis debuted at London's Freight in the City exhibition last month (see also show review, p11). The 12V electric YoYo MultiDrops system, capacity 1.5t, promises to load and unload refrigerated boxes, dropsides and cages, by mounting a special rail system on the chassis and frame underneath the load. The entire mechanism is controlled by a single operator, via a two-button handset. The system stops movement if the load is detected to be overweight, unbalanced, if the grade is too steep or if the load hits an obstacle. The company says that vehicles up to five years old can be retrofitted.



***“The demount units are the most effective way of transporting furniture orders from our main depot into large cities, as we can quickly swap the body and often make two separate delivery runs with the same truck”***

James Stokes

technical director Lionel Curtis also points to how demountables have scored heavily within certain sectors of UK business. “Take kitchen companies, for example. All the units can be picked at their warehouses for delivery to a whole housing development, where the demountable then remains until the fitters are ready to carry out an installation. So, it acts as a secure store as well.” Equally, demountables are a preferred means of transport for many pharmaceutical companies when moving goods between depots from a central distribution centre.

Curtis points to the long history of swap body systems, from the 1980s onwards. “Demountable manufacturers come and go, developing a whole variety of offerings – hydraulics, wedge, rollers – along the way, all with their own pluses. Innovation has led to the advanced systems we have now.”

One company to benefit recently

by ordering two new drawbars is Morecambe-based specialist furniture carrier F Edmondson & Sons, which is now operating with increased capacity. The vehicles have low-ride Mercedes prime movers and Cartwright trailers, using bespoke Cartwright demountable boxes and chassis equipment.

“The two new drawbars, which have interchangeable demountable boxes, now have an extra 20% volume capacity over our existing drawbars and an extra 10% capacity over our 13.6m Cartwright mega trailers,” confirms F Edmondson & Sons director Russell Edmondson. He points particularly to the improved operational efficiency and reduced carbon footprint the vehicles have brought.

“A demountable drawbar combination means that deliveries that were previously inaccessible for articulated trailers can now be easily reached using just the prime mover,” he adds. “Furthermore, the lower floor height of the demountable boxes also makes loading and unloading furniture much easier and safer.” Trials for home deliveries with the drawbars have been so successful that the company has sent them abroad, where again their operational advantages have been clearly identified.

**INNER CITY DELIVERIES**

Lancashire-based office furniture manufacturer Senator has also taken delivery of new drawbar trailers and demount bodies – from Tiger Trailers – to help boost efficiency for inner city deliveries. The order consists of two 26-tonne DAF rigids with custom demount bodywork, each hooked to bespoke tandem-axle drawbar trailers. Tiger has also supplied four 13.6-metre tri-axle box vans.

The new box vans will operate on trunking routes across the UK, while the drawbar and demount combinations will join Senator’s fleet of similar vehicles,

**CAPACITY SURGE**

Trailer manufacturer Krone is engaged in what it describes as a “significant” increase in its capacity to produce interchangeable systems and dry liners at its Herzlake site in Germany, in order to take advantage of positive market demand. Managing director Bernhard Brügggen confirms that production output will be doubled to more than 25,000 units by 2020. “We have already laid the foundation for this production offensive with the introduction of automatic component production in Herzlake,” he comments. “Our swap body systems and dry liners stand for high product quality, combined with numerous innovative load-securing solutions and are therefore in high demand on the market, as evidenced, for example, by our market share of around 70% for swap bodies. In addition, there is a significant increase in demand, which is also generated by the booming online trade.”

each effectively doubling the efficiency of deliveries by halving the number of journeys required from its Lancashire depot. “The demount units are the most effective way of transporting furniture orders from our main depot into large cities, as we can quickly swap the body and often make two separate delivery runs with the same truck. It’s a solution that really works in our favour,” says James Stokes, Senator’s head of logistics.

Each demount body features a hot-dip galvanised steel subframe, with four heavy-duty beams and two retracting location cones, each with ISO twist locks. The rear LED light units were designed to suit Senator’s existing demount bodies, while also avoiding any potential damage from the Anteo tail-lift. Each body also has four robust and durable swing-down legs, said to be ideal for Senator’s quick-change delivery approach. **TE**

