



Freightliner fever?

Selecting the right trucks for the job wasn't what Boxcar Willie had on his mind when he wrote that song, but meeting local wish lists and striking decent deals are enough to stress anyone out. Brian Tingham talks to one operator taking a successful proactive and systematic approach

There's a lot to learn from transport firms' choices of vehicles – and rarely more so than when they place fairly large orders for mixed fleets. So it is with frozen foods operator Nagel Langdons, which ordered 103 new trucks and 46 semi-trailers towards the end of 2013 – some fleet replacements, the rest to meet rapid business growth requirements (*Transport Engineer*, January 2014, page 34).

Tyrone Lanaway, Nagel Langdons' engineering manager, led the team making this year's vehicle choices. He explains that, given the varied nature of the operator's work – spanning distribution and trunking operations, with a range of vehicle size, capacity and duty requirements – selecting the right vehicles involved multiple criteria. And for him, beyond the technical and commercial considerations, what mattered most were fuel performance, depot preferences and proximity of service providers.

"The aftermarket is very important to any operator, so we spent some time looking at where dealers were in relation to our depots," he states. "At the moment, we only run one VMU [vehicle maintenance unit], in Bridgwater, Somerset, so we need to depend on good, local service elsewhere around the country." Langdons does bring its bigger trucks back to Bridgwater once a year for an audit – not least to check that dealers are doing their jobs properly. But that's not feasible for the 12.5-tonners, for example, in Glasgow, so service

excellence and cost effectiveness are key.

"So then we shortlisted manufacturers according to where the vehicles will be running from, local dealer capacity and standing, and depot managers' experience and preferences," states Lanaway. The latter naturally included some technical considerations – although he says that in the 12–26 tonne rigid market, "prices and vehicle performance are much of a muchness nowadays".

Total cost of ownership

The same applies to tractor units, and here he believes that extends to fuel consumption, given the variance caused by the detail of duties and drivers. Indeed, Lanaway states that, given the broad similarity of engine emissions technologies at Euro 6 (with notable exceptions), the main criterion had to be total cost of ownership – focusing on residuals, followed closely by vehicle longevity and only then factors such as cab size, differentials, tyres and add-ons. One other word to the wise, though: look for deals. "We've found, in some cases, contract hire companies offering better rates than manufacturers, so it's worth speaking to them and finding out what's really available."

Overall, however, he says Swedish vehicles came out top. "The Liverpool depot is taking all Volvo trucks for distribution, and we're confident we'll get five years out of them. The price was affordable and residuals are better than just about anything else on the market," asserts Lanaway. He



Mercedes Actros units form part of Langdons' tractor fleet

puts Scania trucks in a similar bracket: "We were amazed at the money we got for one Scania R420 Highline 2004 vehicle recently. It had been on tramping duty for eight years and notched up a million miles, but we still got about £8,000."

So Scania also made it on to the list, with a subtle change to its tractor specification in the 2012 review. "On advice from Scania, we opted for 1:1 top gear with the reduced 2.71 diff ratio to put 56mph in the middle of the rev band. They assured us that, by doing so, the vehicle doesn't flick down to 11th on inclines," he says. And Lanaway explains that Langdons confirmed the suggestion with a local company running similar vehicles. He also says he's been very happy with fuel returns and performance during 2013.

As for the rest of his vehicles, Lanaway says he's pencilled them in for four years. "That's based on our experience of previous longevity and engineering issues," he explains. And he adds that the spread of DAF, Mercedes-Benz and Renault, making up the balance, is partly about mixing up purchasing to maintain experience of the OEMs' latest developments, particularly with Euro 6.

Scanias and Mercs

Looking at the detail, for trunking Langdons initially went for all Scania R450 Highline LA 6x2s, selecting the larger cabs because drivers are away for several days at a time. However, during the Christmas break, the firm also bought a cancelled order for 10 Mercedes-Benz Actros Bigspace 2545 Euro 5 tractors. "These entered straight into service here at Bridgwater on the tramping fleet, replacing vehicles currently hired after an influx of work following the demise of DPFS last year," explains Lanaway. "Along with our local dealership – City West – Mercedes have offered manufacturer training, local rapid response, some software for the workshop laptop and impress stock. So adding these at the right price was a no brainer."


The remaining 62 new tractor units, all on distribution, comprise: 16 DAF CF 460 Sleeper 6x2s, six Mercedes-Benz Actros 2535 L 6x2s, 20 Renault T 460.26 6x2s, 10 Scania G450 LA Sleeper 6x2s (following the previous year's successful trial) and 10 Volvo FM460 Globetrotter 6x2s.

Lanaway explains that the firm goes mostly for 450–460bhp 6x2s, "because frozen food is top end of tonnage, so it's better for the vehicle". He also

says that cabs on distribution duties are standard sleepers, but stripped of extra-comfort mattresses and some of the hi-spec kit to keep costs down – although he keeps the aerodynamics. Why? To maintain versatility: they might be pulling urban trailers during the day, but at night they'll be on trunking duties with standard, temperature-controlled tri-axle semi-trailers.

As for rigids, Langdons selected 12 Scania P280 DB 6x2 Sleepers at 26 tonnes, three DAF FA LF 180 4x2 Day cabs at 12 tonnes and two DAF FA LF 220 4x2 Day cabs at 18 tonnes. All will have Solomon dual-temperature bodies, and the latter's Slipstream aerodynamic shape on the 26-tonners, as well as level-ride Anteo slide-away tail-lifts. That choice followed trials in 2012, which revealed a 4% improvement in fuel performance on Slipstream-equipped vehicles running at average gross weights of 18 tonnes at 38mph and covering 4,700 miles per month.

Finally, on trailers, Langdons ordered 46 standard 13.6m dual-temperature Gray & Adams units, with a combination of Daimler Chrysler axles and Knorr Bremse running gear, and Thermo King refrigeration units. Lanaway explains that urban trailers are on his purchasing list, but he's currently considering SAF-Holland's new dual-steer electronic over hydraulic command system, claimed to make a 13.6m semi-trailer as manoeuvrable as an 11m urban trailer. "Argos, next door, have bought one and offered to help with driver training, because it's very different – so we'll see," he says. And he adds that, although the steering axles might add £16,000 to the circa £56,000 all-up trailer price, the vehicles would then be multi-role across distribution and trunking, saving him a total of eight trailers.

As for other thoughts, Lanaway points to telematics as a key technology – certainly to assist with continuous driver improvement, but also much more. "We obviously use it on the temperature control side, but also, for example, on front axle weighing for our 26-tonners, to ensure even loading. Our current vehicles have 9-tonne steels with Axtex weighing systems, but our new trucks will have air suspension all round, and we'll get the data remotely via the vehicle's CANbus interface and our Seven Telematics system. We standardised on that throughout, rather than using the manufacturers' own systems. That way, we get consistent KPIs for our drivers and vehicles." 

High residuals helped Scania on to Langdons' list

