

Brick and block



When RT Keedwell wanted to expand its construction fleet, the company chose Mercedes Arocs rigidids with Wessex bodies and Hiab cranes. Steve Banner reports



Specifying and building rigidids is often an exercise in optimisation. So it was with the 20 Mercedes-Benz Euro 6 Arocs 6x2 block carriers for Somerset-based RT Keedwell's 500-strong fleet.

Fitted with rear lift axles and 50mm VBG couplings so they can haul tri-axle Montracon drawbar trailers, all have been configured for 44-tonne work, running at 26.5-tonne maximum payload. Why the Arocs – all of which are 450bhp 26-tonners? "Fuel consumption [we're hoping to get 8 mpg on A roads] as well as ground clearance and the price, compared with the Scania's we ran previously," answers Robert Warren, a director of Keedwell business K&W Bricks. "We'll probably keep the Mercedes for six to eight years," he continues, adding that each rigidid will remain with the same trailer throughout its life.

Sourced through Bristol dealer City West, all of the rigidids, bar one, were bodied by Wessex Vehicle Services. Prior to that, however, they were fitted with Hiab XS144BS-2 Hiduo 14 tonne-metre grabs by Cargotec. Keedwell already operated a few second-hand Hiabs but the Mercedes-mounted cranes are its first new acquisitions. They have a maximum reach of 8.1m, are mounted at the rear of the chassis, and feature Space 4000 load-sensing and control.

"The hydraulic hoses have been routed inside the grabs' hollow beam sections to protect them from tree damage," explains Hiab regional sales manager John Abbott. Filtakleen – a filtration system that extends oil and filter change frequency from annually to every four or five years – was also selected.

An XSDrive radio remote control was specified in

each case, instead of top-seat controls. Operating the grab from ground level is inherently safer than climbing up on to the truck. "If you can use an Xbox, you can use one of these," quips Abbott.

However, the grab can also be controlled from a low-height rear platform, accessed via a fold-down step. "The platform is spring-loaded and [extends] when someone steps on it," says Abbott. "Doing so energises a proximity switch, which triggers pre-set parameters that prevent the boom from swinging round and hitting whoever is standing there." That package is Platform Logic, and another safety device prevents the grab from releasing loads accidentally.

As for the Arocs bodies, these were engineered for lightness and strength, according to Wessex sales director Alex Watson. "We've used alloy bulkheads and tailboards, plus alloy cross-bearers that support a 21mm Wisa-Trans floor," he explains. "On each side we've also fitted 1m-high, screen-printed Stronghold curtains, which fold down." The curtains have tensioners, while the vee-groove side rails have movable lashing rings with a 2.5-tonne capacity.

All the chassis were registered prior to the European Community Whole Vehicle Type Approval deadline last October. Equipping them still meant adhering to Mercedes-Benz's exacting requirements, says Abbott. "The sub-frame for the crane, for example, had to be bolted to the chassis using nuts with integral washers," he remarks.

Completing the picture, each of the trucks has been fitted with a DriveCam camera, mounted in the cab, which records events if, for example, the driver has to brake heavily. **TE**

The Arocs bodies have a 1m-high Stronghold curtain on each side, which folds down