

Tridem test

Industry's demands on road haulage continue to push limits. Ian Norwell takes a look at two new tridem tractors: DAF's XF 510 FTM Super Space Cab and Volvo's FH-16 750 Globetrotter

Abnormal load movement specialists can either employ exotic chassis from custom bodybuilders, or go for beefed-up versions of mainstream trucks. There will always be debate about which way to go, but the major OEMs have answers and, where DAF's and Volvo's latest offerings are concerned, it's not just about raw horsepower.

DAF's heavy haulage FTM chassis was previously only available in left-hand drive, but the new XF, launched late in 2012, has brought right-hookers into the frame. Heavy haulage firm Collett & Sons, based in Halifax, now has a dozen DAF tractors among its 45-strong fleet so I joined it for a wind turbine blade movement from Immingham to Rochdale, where its new FTM tractor had been selected.

As with a lot of this work, there were no high gross weights here. DAF's tractor left the factory at 11,844kg complete with mudwings,

fifth wheel and a little fuel. Since then Collett has added a rear drawbar so you would expect just over 12 tonnes. The Nooteboom triple extending blade trailer adds around 18 tonnes, and the turbine blade another 13. So grossing at 43 tonnes, it was clearly not stretching the 510bhp, 12.9-litre tractor, but the driver was still able to assess its capability.

PULLING POWER

A 50m blade and a 42m extended trailer gives an overall length of nearly 60 metres, so I opted to ride shotgun. The driver was only on his second day with the truck, but was familiar with older versions on the fleet. He said

pulling power felt good, even allowing for the relatively light gcw, and handling was certainly impressive. DAF's Super Space Cab is well-liked by drivers for its elbow room, and this model showed the latest XF has taken a useful uplift in interior fit-and-finish.

The fact that this specialised chassis is built on the same assembly line as all other XFs in Eindhoven – not farmed out to a hot-shop, where engineering exotica are the norm – is seen as an advantage by DAF. As marketing manager Phil Moon puts it: "Since it is built from components shared with other models in the XF range, it is a very cost-effective, well supported and understood product – as well being well on top of the job."

Cab and engine are certainly standard DAF assemblies, but there is also the added strength you'd expect. Chassis rails are 310mm deep and 8.8mm thick, as opposed to 260mm and 6mm respectively on an XF for general haulage. The rails are also fully flitched. And the rear bogie is suitably massive, too, with hub reduction and the regular 13-tonne axles uprated to 16.5 tonnes for STGO work – giving a 33-tonne rear end.





Sliding under the trailer, Collett's driver commented that putting 20 tonnes on the fifth wheel made little impact on the springs, which have a seven-leaf trapezium layout with 29mm leaves. As for the choice of manual gearbox (16 speeds in the FTM), Jack Collett, renewables division manager and manager for this project, is pragmatic. "We use manual and automated transmissions across the fleet, with no special preference. If our drivers have a leaning, it would be towards a manual box."

That said, manoeuvring a 50m blade through the centre of Rochdale was a

skilled operation, with Collett's escort team and police motorcyclists working well. So after dropping the loaded trailer, I asked driver Kamil Idczak how he felt about the DAF. Plenty of positives, including special praise for the MX engine brake and ZF intarder.

"Safe downhill speed control is vital in this job. The two non-friction devices work very well together," said Idczak. I felt the same, and with heavier loads up to the FTM's 150 tonnes gcw, that would take on real meaning. The MX engine brake delivers 370kW and the ZF intarder an additional 500kW. Collett's FTM is one of the first to be delivered in the UK, and it certainly won't be its last.

What about Volvo's heavy haulage offering? The FH-16 750 is already in the top truck bracket for general haulage, although not around in large numbers. I took its new tridem 8x4 for a day's testing in the Cotswolds, with a Nootboom six-axle trailer, loaded with a 22,500kg Volvo A25G frame-steered dump truck, bringing gcw up to 65 tonnes. The first thing to say is that the Volvo's horsepower and its 3,550Nm of torque effectively negated the extra 20 tonnes. I could feel the climbing ability as well as the descent control.

SWEDISH TRANSMISSION

This truck is also built in a regular production environment, on the line at Tuve with other FHs. Chassis rail steel is increased from the standard 6.5mm to 8mm and my specimen was flitched throughout its length. It is treated much as a heavy-duty FMX tipper in this respect. Fifth wheel mounting profiles are heavier, but the rear air suspension remains as normal, and the rear hub reduction bogie's capacity is 35 tonnes.

That said, the obvious item that separates these two trucks is the transmission. I-Shift has a reputation for being the benchmark in AMTs (automated manual transmissions), and although these now dominate haulage, even pushing deep into construction, heavy haulage has not gone for them wholesale. Nevertheless, they are not one-trick ponies, and it's been software developments that have let them bite.

Heavy haulage firm Collett & Sons on a 50-metre wind turbine blade movement from Immingham to Rochdale, using a new DAF FTM tractor and a 42-metre extended Nootboom trailer

“Safe downhill speed control is vital in this job. The two non-friction devices [MX engine brake and ZF intarder] work very well together”

Kamil Idczak

Volvo's I-Shift has a wide range of sector-specific software offerings and heavy haulage is one. The FH-16 750 I drove had TP-HD (transmission program heavy duty) software, and it did what it promised. Despite only 12 forward ratios, it managed some serious hills without grinding down the gearbox too far. Also fitted with Volvo's predictive cruise control (I-See), it was a fully loaded spec.

BANG FOR YOUR TRUCK

Price is a bit of a misnomer here, because the base chassis is only the starting point. And it is also overtaken by transaction price, which has too many influences to count. For the record, the DAF XF FTM's basic chassis



list price was £117,700, which climbed to £146,040 with options fitted. The Volvo FH-16 8x4 tridem's list was £137,000, but this would include the 550bhp engine and standard spec manual. With all the Volvo extras, including I-Shift, retarder, alloy wheels, metallic finish, and the 'drive ++' trim, that basic figure moves up a gear to

get a chance to shine on its relatively flat route, but the driver could feel it. The Volvo managed to descend the 16% gradient on the A417 at Birdlip in ninth with no service brakes and the retarder alternating between second and third stages. The DAF probably does not have quite that potential, but it has three litres less to play with. [TE](#)

£189,000.

Probably the most impressive aspect of both trucks was their ability to hold a speed downhill. The DAF didn't



ALPHA

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