

TOWING & RECOVERY FOOTNOTES

Miller's
MAKEOVER
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MOVING HEAVY METAL

Aspects of tractor-trailer recovery, both then and now

By Allan T. Duffin

There's always a bit of truth in every cliché. One in particular – “the bigger they are, the harder they fall” – could serve as the theme of the heavy recovery operator. Today, more than ever, rescuing tractor-trailers requires expertise and versatility unique to the heavy-recovery road warriors.

Bill Robertson of United Road Towing, Inc., is a 45-year veteran of the industry. After building and selling his own towing firm – “like many others, we grew one customer at a time, one truck at a time,” he said – Robertson

now serves as a consultant, traveling across the United States to each of United Road Towing's 10 branches.

“I check safety procedures, review driving habits, and train drivers, mostly in heavy-duty operations,” said Robertson. When working on the West Coast, Robertson is teamed with safety/compliance manager Paul Johnston, who works out of the company's Ontario, CA location. Johnston's responsibilities include follow-up inspections, maintaining the company's standardized safety training program, and keeping photographic records. According to Johnston, United Road Towing requires its operators to sponsor regular safety meetings to review federal and state towing requirements.

Handle With Care

During his many years of supervising heavy towing operations, Robertson has seen a number of technological changes take place. “What we're towing today is a lot more fragile,” he noted. “We have ABS brake systems, computer-controlled engines, and fairings instead of those big old tough bumpers we used to have.”

Some of the technology is quite delicate. “Sealed drive shafts require no lubrication, but if you break them it might cost you \$500 to \$800 to repair because you've damaged the integrity of the shaft.”

Many modern trailers are equipped with soft or fiberglass sides. In addition, yesterday's common 40-foot trailer has grown to 53 feet, which can create a less stable, flimsier trailer – and consequently a tougher job for the tow operator.

Kevin Farthing of Waffco Towing & Recovery in Lake Station, IN pointed out that the longer trailers “have composite walls, fiberglass roofs, and very thin floor decking. If you're not careful, these characteristics can mean disaster during something as simple as winching a trailer out of the mud.”

Farthing added to the list of improvements over the years: aerodynamic design, lower oil pans, air dams, side cab air foils, and automatic transmissions. “All of these things

require today's towman to be more experienced, educated, and given better equipment,” said Farthing. “It's no longer the old days when we used a Holmes 750 and a bumper pad.” Bill Robertson agreed and said, “Before, you'd take an ex-road tractor-trailer with half a million miles on it and then set a tow truck body on it.”

Finely Tuned

Using practical experience and consumer feedback, today's recovery truck manufacturers continue to fine-tune their products, focusing on the features that heavy-recovery operators need. “They're building us equipment to fit our industry much better,” says Robertson. Wheelbases are longer, up to 330 inches. Road differentials have been boosted from 34,000 pounds into the 46,000-to 48,000-pound range.

Robertson praised manufacturers for improved communication with customers, noting that tow companies can now order trucks from the factory with the required cross-members, air tanks, compressors, solid gearing, and transmissions.

Even with such up-to-date equipment, recovery operations are only as good as the tow operator behind the wheel. “We strive to put not one



Brian Bolus

Heavy-duty towers always face big jobs like this and much worse

more scratch than what we started with,” said Robertson, who lamented the fact that a number of towers are performing heavy recoveries without proper training or experience.

Kevin Farthing recalled several jobs where avoidable mistakes damaged the tractor-trailers being recovered, including “strapping trailers during uprights or winch-outs and not paying attention to the delicate middles.” He also noted that some towers fail to use air cushions to stabilize long or flimsy trailers.

Brian Bolus of Minuteman Towing & Repairs, Inc., which operates six

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Brian Bolus

A classic upright by Minuteman Towing and Repairs, Mifflinville, PA, the largest heavy duty towing and recovery company in Northeast and Central Pennsylvania. Minuteman has over 15 heavy-duty wreckers, including a 60-ton rotator, one of only several in the state.

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2007 335 PETERBILT

Stock# 696572, 315hp cummins, 10 speed trans, 2- 57 gal alum fuel tanks, air ride suspension **Century Model 5130**, serial# 5130-0358-i06, 25 ton boom, 2-25,000lb winches, alum body, air winch free spools



1996 KENWORTH T-300

Stock#685313, featuring a 250 hp diesel engine, odometer shows approx. 225,000 miles, 31,000# GVW, air brakes, Century 4024, 20-ton boom, 2-20,000# winches, air winch free spools, cable tensioners, 24,000# 3-stage underlift.



1992 KENWORTH T-600

Stock# 566709, 12.7 60 series detroit, 13 speed trans, midroof sleeper, 24.5 alum wheels, vulcan model v-50, serial# 2525 00268, 25 ton boom, 2-25,000# winches, air winch free spool, 7 sets axle forks.



2007 378 PETERBILT

Stock#644400, 475hp cummins, 18 speed trans, 14,320lb steer axle, 40,000lb rears, new century 5130, serial #5130-0351-i06, 25 ton boom, alum body, 25,000lb plantary winches, air winch free spools.



1991 IH 4700

Stock#339898, DT 466 185hp, 6-speed trans, 88,000 miles, air brakes, Century wrecker 712, 712-0157-c90, 14-ton boom, 2-12,000# winches, med duty truck hitch, hydraulic spades.



NEW 2006 378 PETERBILT

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2006 FORD F550

Stock#d52260, 4 wheel drive, 6.0 diesel, 6 speed trans, air conditioning, vulcan model 882, serial #882-02571-e06, 8 ton boom, 2-8,000lb winches, stainless steel body, 24' tunnel tool box.



2005 PETERBILT 335

Stock#856371, C7 CAT diesel engine, 6-speed transmission, spring suspension, air compressor on motor, Jerr-Dan 21' steel carrier, aluminum removable rails, 8,000# winch, 2 steel tool boxes with stainless steel fronts, upper floods.



2002 FORD F-550 4X4

Stock#A30112, 7.3L Powerstroke engine, automatic trans., 189,000 miles, crew cab, Vulcan 19' steel carrier, 8,000# winch, remote winch free spool, cable roller guide, Whelen strobe light bar, independent wheel lift.



1983 IH 9370

Serial#B11523, 350 hp Cummins, 9-speed transmission, 50,000# GVW, 38,000# rear spring suspension, 1988 Challenger 6800 T-1, Serial#W39100488, 35-ton recovery boom, 2-30,000# winches, air winch free spools, cable tensioners.



1987 VOLVO WHITE

Stock#120537, featuring a 430 Cummins diesel engine, 8-speed transmission, Jake brake, air ride suspension, NoMar Model 2025, 25-ton boom, (2) 25,000# winches, HD tow bar and Whelen strobe light bar.



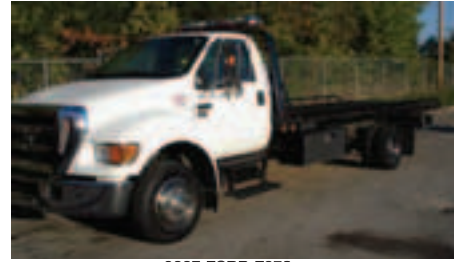
ZACKLIFT

Stock#601403 2003 z403 Zacklift.



2003 1800 KENWORTH

Stock#968831, 475hp cat, 15 speed trans, odometer approx. 450,000, 314' wheelbase, 1995 century 1050/sdu, serial # 1050-w-0143-i95, 50 ton boom, sdu 3 stage underlift, 2-45,000lb winches, hydraulic rear spades.



2005 FORD F650 -

Stock# 118620, 230hp cummins, 7 speed trans, 26,000# gvw, air conditioning century 21' steel, serial# 21s 02853 pi04, 10,000# deck, 8,000# winch, steel cab protector, cable roller guide.



1977 FORD L8000

Stock#090589, featuring a 3208 CAT diesel engine, 10-speed transmission, 210,000 miles, air conditioning, Holmes 600, extendable booms, 2 Whelen mini strobes, upper floods, Zacklift under reach, fork extenders.



1999 IH 4700

Stock#206762, DT 466, 7-speed trans, 25,500 GVW, air conditioning, Vulcan model 896, Serial#896 00503, 12-ton boom, 84" steel body, 24" tunnel box, 2-12,000# winches.



2003 IH 4300

Stock# 578629, dt466 e 6cyl, automatic trans, 205,000 miles, 26,000# gvw champion 21' steel, 10,000# deck, 8,000# winch, steel cab protector, cable tensioner, upper work lights.



1995 CHEVY HD 3500

Stock# 110654, 6.5 diesel, 5 speed trans, 15,000# gvw, air conditioning jerr dan 0808 8 ton, serial# 96039507, 8 ton boom, 2-8,000# winches, winch free spool extensions, alum body.

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TOW BUSINESS

No Money In It?

*He makes his elsewhere
but still can't give up towing*

By Ann L. Abraham

It's a habit he just can't break – towing, that is. "This business is like an addiction," says Robert Young, owner of Robert Young Auto and Truck Inc., in Roanoke, VA. "It's like smoking. You have to love it or you don't do it."

After 24 years as owner of a towing business, Young said he makes his real money investing in real estate, but still spends 99 percent of his time towing. "Most of my money is made doing other things," Young said. "That's what I meant when I said 'Towing is like a bad habit.' You really don't make any money towing."

Young, who started work as a mechanic for a towing service when he was 17 years old, now has 20 employees and about 15 trucks ranging from small wreckers to NRC rotators.

His passion for the industry is evident as he discusses some of the day-to-day challenges and practical pitfalls towers face. "There are very challenging things about this business – a lot of odds that are against you, a lot of things that you're really up against, to where you've got to do the impossible," Young said. "It's a lot of danger; a lot of excitement. You see a lot of different things."

Feeding The Habit

Those long odds keep him motivated. "Sometimes the police department will call you and say, 'We want you to come look at this, but we know you can't get it out and we'll have to call cranes and helicopters in,'" said Young. "And then you go in and take it [the vehicle] through the same hole that it went through while they're scratching their heads wondering how you did it. That's the kind of thing that keeps you going."

Part of the bad habit, as Young puts it, is that the emergency towing business is feast or famine. Long-haul towing is "more of a steady money," Young said. "What we do with police work, you know you're not going to get paid a percentage of those vehicles. The other, you know that you're going to get up and you're going to work today and you've got work."

Another problem, according to Young, is that cost comparisons are deceptive. "It's a big step from a professional company that has employees and pays medical insurance and worker's comp insurance," Young said. "So many people in our industry are treating their employees as subcontractors and not paying taxes, not paying insurance. That changes something about the quality and changes something about the cost, and so often we're compared price-wise."

*"Demand respect
by charging a
professional rate"*

Like many towing and recovery operators, Young has strong opinions about the current image of the industry. "Things are going to change one day, but everybody looks at you – and the worst are the police departments," said Young. "They don't respect us for what we do and they don't appreciate us enough to think that we should get paid."

Consider the cost of clearing an accident compared to the fuel burned, Young said, or the time wasted by



Robert Young

motorists in the ensuing backup, or look at the price of secondary accidents. Looking at it yet another way, he said, "If you can do every job that comes down the pike – everything that they need to have done – and another guy can only do 70 percent and another guy can only do 90 percent, your costs may be greater to do every job, but you're there to do everything they need."

Young's advice to other towers: Demand the respect. "You demand respect by charging a professional rate," Young said. "You expect to pay a doctor or lawyer, but you respect him for that. People respect you for doing a good job and being paid a professional rate."

"It's very difficult to explain things to people," Young said. "I had a lady from a motor club call and it was a cash call and she said, 'Well, I had it done before and it was \$50,' and I said, 'Yeah, but when it was \$50, gas was probably a dollar.'"

Lobbying For Change

Young's concern for the industry includes the hot-button issues of motor clubs and quick clearance, as well as making sure towers get paid by insurance companies he said are intent on confusing the customer.

"Motor clubs go to the General Assembly and fight for laws to hurt the towing industry because they want to keep you depressed," Young said. "But the more money any general tower makes, they spend money with vendors. When motor clubs keep the industry depressed, it really has a bad effect on our industry. I do some very select motor club work at select rates. Most of what I do is because they can't get somebody else to do it."

Young stresses the importance of training and equipment to ensure quick clearance. "Quick clearance is so

See NO MONEY, page 10

Towing & Recovery Footnotes®

Editor

Bill Candler: 757-664-3554
bcandler@traderonline.com

Contributing Editor

Cyndi Kight

Contributors

George Blumberg, Don Bruce, Scott Burrows, Darin Burt, Donna Coe, Thomas G. Dolan, Robert Dragt, Allan Duffin, Andrea Evans, Sharon Freeman, Stormin Norman Horton, Bill Jackson, Alison Johnson, Patti Lewis, Cindy McMahan, Torrey Meeks, Walt Phillips, Brian Tassina, Rod West, Richard Wolfe

National Advertising Sales

David Abraham
Sales Manager
abraham@traderonline.com
Toll-free: 877-219-7734 ext. 1

Paula Banks

Sales Assistant
paula.banks@dominionenterprises.com
Toll-free: 877-219-7734 ext. 4

Production Manager

Sunita Patel
s.patel@soundingspub.com

Production Coordinator

Courtney Pastor
cpastor@soundingspub.com

Circulation Manager

Claire Brayfield
c.brayfield@soundingspub.com

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Business Office

Dominion Enterprises
100 W. Plume St.
Norfolk, VA 23510

Contact Us:

Toll-free: 877-219-7734
Fax: 757-314-2510
footnotes@traderonline.com

Web site

www.trfootnotes.com

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Brain Stormin

with stormin' norman

Pondering Price Per Pound

Revisiting the author's billing method for some heavy-duty jobs

By Stormin Norman Horton

Judging from the nature of the phone calls I have been getting lately, I think it is time to revisit the price per pound (PPP) method of charging for certain major recovery jobs. I developed PPP many years ago and it is used by many heavy-duty towing companies across the country, but recently I have been hearing of some improper applications of PPP.

PPP is a pricing system that should be in your toolbox, but it should not be considered a "one size fits all" type of tool. When you go to your toolbox to work on a truck you have an assortment of tools. Whether you use an open-end wrench, box-end wrench, or a ratchet, you try to select the best tool that fits the need. Similarly, the PPP system is not to be used with every application.

The Fairness Test

First and foremost, the system is designed to be fair. It should be fair to the towers and fair to the customers. But how do you determine fair? The best way is to ask yourself this question, "Can I justify this bill?" If you were called into court, would you be able to explain and justify your bill and how you arrived at the bill?

So how do you justify your bill? Simple – just imagine that your heavy-duty wrecker rolled over and you're on the receiving end of the bill. How would you feel? I don't mean how do you feel about having your truck roll over; I mean would you feel that the man who charged you was being fair about the amount of his bill?

Let's face it: you are not going to like getting a bill for setting up your own truck or having it towed during a breakdown anymore than a trucking company would. That's my point. It's not about liking or not liking getting the bill or even the amount of it – it's about whether you feel he was fair in charging what he did.

Now turn around and look at your bill for the work you did but imagine it is your truck that rolled over. Would you feel your bill is justified and that it would hold up in a court of law? If you do, then it is justified and probably fair.

Second, and as I said earlier, you would not use PPP in every single situation. How do you know when to use PPP? You must answer these two questions:

1. Was the truck drivable when you completed the recovery?

2. Was the incident severe enough that the insurance company, or the safety department of a self-insured company, had to get involved?

If the answer is yes to number 1 and no to number 2, then it is not a PPP job. In other words, if the truck can be driven on completion of the job and insurance or safety is not involved, it is probably not a PPP job. However, if the answer to 1 is no, and yes to 2, the recovery will qualify for PPP as a general rule.

Here are some examples of jobs that do *not* qualify for PPP:

- You are called to recover a nose-down trailer.
- A tandem rolled off into a ditch when the driver cut the corner too sharp.
- The driver pulls off onto the side of the road and his trailer sinks into the mud; you winch him out and he drives off.

Not For Cars

Your trucking customers live and die by weight. At the scales, if they are a LTL, they charge for each package by the pound. If they are a truck load carrier then they often charge not only by mileage but have to make sure the weight meets the constraints they have. They all look at the pace report and gauge their trucking company against others on the revenue per ton-mile.

But what about the car owner? What about cars? In my opinion, using PPP for cars is not proper. One of the things that I tried to do while developing the system (and this was a business principle that you would use when dealing with any customer regardless of the business) is relate to the customer with a method and by a means that they understand.

Do your automotive customers know what a 50-ton wrecker is? Do they know what a 25-ton wrecker is? Do they care? The answer to those questions is No and they shouldn't need to care. What they care about is that their car or truck be set up quickly, efficiently, as soon as

possible, and with minimum damage done to their equipment. That is all they care about. If the car owner does not understand your equipment (and they really do not care), then why are we charging for our equipment?

Furthermore, your automotive customer does not know what his car weighs nor does he care. So you are confusing him with facts he does not understand. Not only does he not understand your tow truck, he does not understand the way you are charging him. So why confuse him?

However, if we have a means of charging customers that relates to something that they not only understand but in many cases use to charge their own customers, well, then we have something.

That something is PPP.

Double-Dipping

The other area where I have seen many problems is called "double-dipping." Can you justify why you are charging the man for something that you would not sit still for? For example: I have seen people charge some cents per pound for showing up within a 50-mile radius. Now wait a minute. If you're billing a flat rate to show up with your equipment to do a

"You would not use PPP in every single situation"

job, why in the world do you want to turn around and charge them again for your showing up when you already charged for that in the base rate?

We charged for a 50- to 100-mile zone because we traveled outside our normal trade area. But this was a minimal charge that barely covered expenses on our equipment to get there because I wanted the out-of-town jobs.

Another method is charging for the speed limit. There are two schools of thought on that: The first is that we are supposed to determine how fast the truck was going when it had an accident. I am sorry but we are neither accident investigators nor experts at accident reconstruction. Other than a morbid curiosity as to how the driver got into the wreck, it is none of our concern. The accident is what it is; it is lying where it is lying. We have to recover it.

Charging The Limit

The second method is to charge for the posted speed limit. I was told by the originator of the miles-per-hour charge that the basis for the charge was not how fast the vehicle was going but rather what was the speed limit posted on the highway.

On that issue, let's say you are out on the side of the road and you are setting up a rig for Ryder, one of your regular customers. The DOT people

are there with their barricade trucks, pylons, and light boards, and the state troopers are out there along with everybody and their brother, all providing a shield of lights around you while you do your work.

Can you imagine justifying that in court? It would probably go something like this:

Tower: We charged another two cents a pound because the speed limit said 75.

Lawyer: Well, Mr. Tower, how fast were those people going?

Tower: Your honor, they were not going 75 mph because of the traffic jam. They were actually crawling by at five mph because we had half the road blocked.

Lawyer: Okay, Mr. Tower, let me ask you this. Do you do any other work for Ryder?

Tower: Yes, we sure do.

Lawyer: Have you ever hooked up to a tractor-trailer on the interstate on the side of the road?

Tower: Yes, we sure have.

Lawyer: Were the state troopers out there?

Tower: No, sir, it was just a break down tow.

Lawyer: Were the DOT out there with light boards?

Tower: No, sir.

Lawyer: So did you have any protection other than the beacon light on your wrecker?

Tower: No, sir.

Lawyer: Well, Mr. Tower, did you charge that two cents a pound for the hazard that you put yourself in by working on the side of the interstate with the 75 mph posted and the traffic going by at 75 mph?

Tower: No, your honor, I didn't.

Guess what? You just figured out you have a problem justifying that charge. As I said earlier, you need to be able to justify what you are doing. If you cannot justify it you surely do not need to be charging for it because you will be blown out of the water if you end up with anyone who has any kind of common sense.

Any of the PPP charges that are add-on charges need to be for work that requires additional equipment, time, and labor, or if there is an additional risk to you or your insurance company, as there would be with a hazardous material.

One Or The Other

Another area that falls under the double-dipping problem is that when you use PPP, you just use PPP. You do not charge by the hour, the man, the truck, the front-end loader, etc. on top of charging by the pound. It is either one or the other. Charge by the pound or charge by time and equipment.

PPP is really very simple. If it is used properly, it is not only simple but it is a very fair way of doing things. I know this from states and police departments that have excluded PPP. In some states, like Florida, thousands of tax dollars are coming out of taxpayers' pockets as incentives for towers to get the job done quickly.

Well, PPP enables the tower to be paid well for being fast and or being good. Some state governments think it's real smart to outlaw PPP because it must be the pricing method causing problems and not the man holding the pencil and doing the calculations. No, in reality it is the man and not the method. If someone is going to rip you off, he is going to use any method available.

Some states are trying to outsmart the tower by telling him that he has to charge the hourly rate set in his zone for each truck, and that that rollover must be done in an hour, and that he is going to be paid \$250 an hour for use of a \$500,000 rotator.

What a joke! Is it any wonder that towers are bringing out every piece of equipment, their aunts, uncles, brothers, and convict labor so they can run the bill up to where it should be. And you, a taxpayer, wonder why you have to turn around and pay \$5000 out of your pocket to get the tower to get the job done quickly, especially when the tower's customer would gladly pay a fair price to get the job done quickly and get it done well. I said fair price, I did not say rip-off.

In my view, the government bureaucrats in those states are wasting tax dollars paying towers who in turn are working without getting paid fairly. What the government has done is create a system that's costing the taxpayer rather than letting the market determine a fair price.

Now when a government sets the price for towing, I am sure that they do a comprehensive cost study to make sure that towers are guaranteed a profit. What! You mean they don't?!

At the end of the day, most towers have the opportunity to use a pricing method like PPP properly that allows them to be paid correctly for what they do best. But if you use it, please use it as it was intended, as a simple system designed to treat both you and your customer fairly and with integrity. ☘

The views expressed in this column each month are the opinion of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the editorial position of this publication.

Stormins' Online Poll

Here's your chance to let towers know what's on your mind about the towing and recovery industry!

On Stormin Norman's website at www.stormins.com, you can vote (anonymously) on issues of interest to towing and recovery owners and operators everywhere – and then read about the results of the voting on Stormin's website and in *T&R Footnotes*.

Here's how you voted on a recent question:

When is the last time you and your family took a vacation?

Choice:	Percentage
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• 2-3 years ago	0%
• 4-6 years ago	11%
• Over 10 years ago	11%
• Over 15 years	0%
• Over 20 years ago	11%
• Vacation? What's that?	56%

Stormin invites you to visit www.stormins.com and vote on the next question...

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METAL

continued from page 1

locations across northeast and central Pennsylvania, echoed Farthing's concerns. "Improper rigging can be the cause of significant additional damage to the unit you're recovering," said Bolus. "Take the time to rig the wrecked units properly and don't cut corners as it will only increase the recovery time in the long run." If something doesn't look or feel right, said Bolus, "stop and assess the situation and re-hook if necessary."

What else can towers do to avoid these types of mistakes? "Talk to your peers and get their input," recommended Farthing. Relying on other towing companies for help is also an effective solution. "Call another company to help you, one that has the equipment you might need to accomplish the task."

Reality Of The Road

While taking the time to rig the job properly is sound advice, the reality of the road can sometimes make it difficult for even the best towers to perform efficient recoveries. Law enforcement and local government agencies need the roads cleared quickly to get traffic moving again, a requirement that can sometimes be at odds with the tower's job.

"Some police officials and departments of transportation don't understand how much time it can take to

recover a unit safely and properly without creating additional damage," said Farthing. "It's a challenge to appease all parties involved and also do our job to the best of our ability."

With different parties' needs bumping against each other, "it pushes the towers harder," said Bill Robertson, who noted that useful tools like air cushions are not used as often as in the past because the wrecks need to be cleared so fast these days. In some cases, offloading the wrecked trailer is required – not a popular event with law enforcement officials who want to get traffic flowing after an incident.

Robertson noted, however, that relationships between towers and law enforcement agencies have improved over time: "After being exposed to a number of tractor-trailer accidents, police officers gain a lot of knowledge. They can almost take a look at an overturned tractor-trailer and know how long it'll take to clean up, which really helps when we're trying to take the proper time and attention during a heavy recovery operation." Doing the job right is critical, said Robertson. "If you deliver a customer's equipment to him in three pieces, he's not going to be happy."

Given all of the changes on the road and in the factory, heavy towers stress the importance of proper training, both to initiate new drivers into the field and to keep them fresh through follow-up courses. "It's a bigger challenge for the drivers and equipment than ever before," noted Robertson. "You have to have more training, to show the drivers how to handle all of it."

Dangers & Damages

As towers well know, heavy recovery operators are always faced with danger as well as the prospect of damage when working particularly tricky jobs. "The liability that we are always exposed to can be greatly reduced with well-trained drivers," noted Brian Bolus. Bolus said that purchasing late-model equipment, rather than using band-aids to keep out-of-date towing vehicles on the road, greatly increases the safety factor and provides for better training. "Unfortunately, this aspect is overlooked in many towing companies."

"Our worst problem is in taking shortcuts," said Bill Robertson. "Some towers don't really have enough training in heavy recovery work. It's fairly easy to get into this industry

and onto a rotation list with local law enforcement agencies." However, strong local standards can help the situation. In California, for example, towers are required to show experience, number of trucks, number of years in business, what types of training they provide, and other data prior to hitting the road. In addition, operators are subject to background checks.

At United Road Towing, Robertson and other supervisors push what they label "recurrent" training for their operators. "We have it going constantly," he said. "No matter how long you've been in this business, if you don't learn something new every day, you're missing out on something out there." Robertson also recommended taking advantage of low-cost, high-quality training offered by state associations in addition to courses sponsored by private firms.

Paul Johnston remarked that he and Robertson perform many drive-alongs with their drivers. "We use those occasions as both teaching and learning tools," said Johnston. "We never fail to learn something new from our drivers that we can pass along to others."

Readying Operators

In addition to practical, on-the-road education, Johnston said that many things have changed with regard to driver proficiency training. "In years past we used the 'foggy mirror' test. We'd put a mirror under a driver's nose, and if he fogged it up indicating he



Paul Johnston

A California recovery job by Paul Johnston and Bill Robertson of United Road Towing, Inc.

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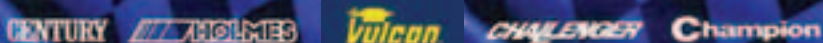


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was alive, we would put him in a tow truck. No legitimate towing and recovery operation today can use that as a standard," said Johnston. "We now talk about orientation training, recurrent training, certification training, and on-the-job training and experience." Johnston regarded his company's investment in safety programs and training as keys to ensuring "a healthier bottom line."

Kevin Farthing takes that idea one step further, recommending that in the future the federal government create a standardized towing and recovery course "for any and all towers participating

in traffic incident management." Farthing explained that this level of oversight would ensure that all tow operators are prepared for whatever happens on the road. "Too many tow companies and tow operators buy a truck, get insurance, then go to local law enforcement and request to be placed on the rotation list" without first ensuring that they have received the proper training for the job. Robertson agreed, noting that a number of companies don't make sure that their operators are ready before they begin recovery operations.

The dangers have increased over the years. In the past, "we were younger, dumber, and had more fun with it," noted Bill Robertson. "We had to work harder because we didn't have all of today's nice hydraulic equipment, air cushions, all of the new technology." According to Robertson, present-day heavy recovery is more stressful on the operator. "There's more traffic to deal with, fewer breakdown lanes on freeways if you're disabled, have a flat, or the vehicle has quit running." Many breakdown lanes have been converted to carpool lanes, making it harder for disabled vehicles to find a spot off the main road.

Safety First

With increased traffic on American roads these days, heavy operators need to maintain visual awareness while working a recovery. "One of our biggest challenges is in staying safe on the highway," said Kevin Farthing. "Never assume that the motoring public can see you or will steer clear of you."

United Road Towing recently lost one of its own in Phoenix, AZ when a hit-and-run driver slammed into him as he was preparing a vehicle for a tow. Supervisors at United's local branch were tracking its operators using a GPS system. "When dispatch noticed that he wasn't moving on the GPS," recalled Bill Robertson, "they sent someone out to check on him. They found him on the side of the road. He didn't make it." The driver who killed him may never be found.

The sad recounting of stories like these is a grim reminder of the challenges faced by heavy operators every day. For owners of towing companies, losing one of their own is a tragedy, even more so because

it's difficult to find good drivers. In the job market, transportation companies compete directly with heavy recovery outfits for the best employees. "All of these companies are looking for the same type of person, whether they're Snyder, Swift, J.B. Hunt or a towing company," noted Robertson.

Although transportation and towing companies dip into the same talent pool for employees, Robertson said

that candidates in the heavy recovery industry have a tougher job description. "The biggest challenges for a cross-country transportation driver might be reading a map or GPS and

backing into a tight warehouse dock at the destination," said Robertson.

For towers who recover tractor-trailers, the job requires additional expertise: "We might have to hook a 40-foot truck onto the front of a tractor-trailer, maneuver it through city streets, and then back the damaged trailer into a loading dock. It takes some practice."

HazMat Awareness

Heavy recovery operators need to be even more vigilant when a tanker truck carrying chemicals overturns on the highway, spilling hazardous materials onto the road. Properly trained HazMat specialists can contain the spill and deal with any environmental and physical consequences. "HazMat has a tremendous amount of short and long-term liabilities and risk that most towers don't have the training for," said Brian Bolus.



The Waffco Towing & Recovery crew: Jim McGhee, Joe Craig, Jason Tschopp, Mark Rapo, Kevin Farthing, Brandon Cotton

To protect themselves, towers should consider pre-emptive action including HazMat-specific certifications, equipment, medical surveillance programs and insurance. All of this preparation is fairly new to the industry, said Bill Robertson. "Years ago, we didn't have a clue. If it wasn't on fire, we thought it was all right."

Training with expert organizations like fire departments improved the towers' response. "For example," noted Robertson, "we learned to find the bill of lading first, so we knew what the HazMat actually was before gettin anywhere near it."

Quality Counts

Ultimately, everything starts and ends with the quality of the tow itself.

Costs, Rates & Records

The bill of lading is just one of the multiple pieces of paperwork that heavy recovery operators deal with every day. Insurance issues require another set of records entirely. According to Brian Bolus, heavy towing has changed over the years due to escalating insurance and equipment costs. The lack of industry-wide standards in equipment and training make it difficult for insurance companies to track prices and rates, which can vary widely from company to company.

"Insurance and trucking companies use prices from one towing company as a benchmark for another company without regard to demographics or individual circumstances," said Bolus. "They paint our industry with a broad brush," which is problematic since rates also vary by geographic region.

Sharing rate information is one solution to the confusion that occurs with insurance claims. "We as towers need to bridge the gap," Bolus said. "Trucking and insurance companies are often skeptical about large recovery invoices because they've been burned in the past by towing companies who charge more than they should for a particular situation."

Farthing noted that as trucking and insurance firms gain knowledge, tow

companies that fail to share truthful information will increasingly find themselves under heavy scrutiny. "Nowadays, you're paid for your knowledge and skill, not for how long you take to finish the task," he said.

Good records help simplify the sometimes difficult insurance process. "The key is to document everything and send a well-prepared invoice that describes the entire recovery," recommended Bolus. An accompanying package of photographs can be emailed to provide visual support to the recovery records. "In the past, we didn't have detailed billing so that the insurance adjuster could do his job properly," remembered Bill Robertson. "Nowadays, the billing is more detailed, so we have stronger lines of communication among truckers, towers and the insurance industry."

Robertson recommended that towing companies treat insurance companies as return customers. "You want to treat them fairly," he said. "They're a big part of your customer base." Helpful towers are invaluable to the insurer's claim process. "I have yet to see an insurance company refuse to pay a fair bill," said Robertson.

- Allan Duffin

As in any industry, there are good and bad companies doing business with customers, some of whom get fleeced. "Some towers take all of their equipment to a scene, don't use it all and then charge for it being there," lamented Kevin Farthing.

Brian Bolus agreed. "The good and bad of our industry is that the best companies don't always get the call," he said. This is sometimes due to the structure of local rotation lists. Some companies on the list fail to invest in the proper equipment, leading to delays during recovery operations. "When recoveries drag on, the highways back up," noted Bolus, adding that customers have the right to know exactly how a towing company is charging them for a job.

How can the heavy towing industry serve its customers better? Farthing stressed the importance of using properly sized equipment. "We can't be lazy or uneducated," he said. "For example, recently one company picked up a Freightliner bobtail from us. To tow the bobtail, they used a single-axle wrecker with a 108-inch wheelbase – much too undersized for the job. To add insult to injury, the driver didn't go to the axle but used the trick of dropping a chain through the pull hooks and towing on them." These kinds of shortcuts damage equipment and reputations, said Farthing.

Setting Standards

For the larger heavy-towing firms, establishing a centralized organization can be an effective way to standardize the quality of service. United Road Towing is one example of a company that owns all of its branches nationwide. While some owners

and operators might disagree with this type of consolidation, Bill Robertson believes that the industry can only benefit. "I don't think this business model ever took business away from anyone," he said. "In fact, I think it really helped."

Robertson pointed to his company's stringent set of guidelines, from uni-



URT Crew working on the edge in the California hills

forms to training to safety procedures. "If we purchase a towing firm that isn't quite up to par, we work to improve it. Then the competition responds by stepping up. In the end, everyone's business improves, and the customers receive better service."

"In this competitive industry, sometimes we're tempted to throw the next guy under the wheels of the bus," said Brian Bolus. "We need to work together and put the egos aside. That way we'll all benefit, and our industry as a whole will have a brighter future."

Bill Robertson praised heavy recovery operators, whose dedication and unique expertise make all the difference: "Once people join the towing and recovery business, they usually stay. It gets in their blood. Every day out there is different." ❖

RECOVERY NOTES

Mistakes I've Made, Part II

*More things I know now
that I wish I'd known back then*

By Bill Jackson

I have had a rich life in towing and recovery, mainly as an owner/operator. I have been able to take some chances with only a little risk to myself in order to try out new procedures that might benefit me and others. However, you really can't do this anymore, as the cost would be too great and your insurance carrier would have a seizure.

Experimenting as we did sometimes led to shocking mistakes, but from these mistakes came experience that led to beneficial practices and methods. What follows are some of the things we tried, but please remember we are talking about the 1960s here and not the present day.

The Birth Of Straps

Whenever we got a call-out to an overturned tractor-trailer, our main gear was the Holmes 750, which I thought was the finest wrecker made. Believe it or not, one early job we had led to the introduction of straps in recovery.

A tractor-trailer fully loaded to 75,000 pounds of cakes had overturned and was laying over center in wet swampland. I suspected that the trailer chassis was cracked so I rigged my 750 with two wire ropes attached to two snatch blocks, one up and over the roof and attached to the front fifth wheel, the other up and over the rear corner and attached to the rear axle frame. I extended the X7 booms on the 750 – didn't you just hate to do that? – to get height and proceeded to pull.

The lower wheels sank into the swamp but the trailer got a firm grip on the ground and started rolling up. About halfway up, there was a cracking noise and the chassis broke. In seconds, the two wire ropes cut through that trailer as it fell back into the swamp. I ended up with four pieces of trailer and heaps of cake!

Surely, we had to have something that would spread the load on the trailer sides, but what? A farmer who stood watching our efforts could hardly contain his smile. He said, "If you had asked me, you could have had one of my old thresher belts and you would have been better off."

Well, there was the idea that led to the introduction of straps into the recovery world. We sold thousands worldwide before our competition woke up.

Slip Slidin' Away

Years later, we were in Texas giving an instructional demo showing what air cushions could do. We had almost completed a roll-up of a loaded tractor-trailer with four correctly placed Jumbo cushions when the front and back end got a bit out of line.

I asked my operator to increase the pull on one wire only. To my complete amazement, all the cushions flew out! I was stunned, having thought that Jumbo cushions would never come out under a load. What could have happened?

I discovered that one cushion had been placed so that the strap that the line was pulling was between the side of the trailer and the top of the bag. As the line tightened, the gripper top on the

Jumbo caught the strap, which clung firmly to it and not the side of the trailer, and pulled the cushion out.

From this I learned never to put a strap between a cushion and a trailer or tanker side. Of course, you would never do this – or would you?

Water Weight

Our first hydraulic tow truck was a Century 10/30. I was really impressed with it, particularly after years of struggling with manual Holmes booms. The sheer ease of using hydraulic controls was a real joy. In my enthusiasm to use this great truck, I didn't bother to read the brief leaflet that came with it. I just jumped in the cab and roared off.

The job at hand was to recover a boat weighing 12,000 pounds and

*"The bank
collapsed under
one wheel causing
the truck to jerk"*

load it onto a truck. I could not get near it but had to reach out for it from the bank. I had to lift it out of the water and drive only six feet with the boom fully extended to get it on dry land.

After I lifted it, I drove forward very carefully, but the bank collapsed under one wheel causing

the truck to jerk. The end of the boom – the third extension – bent down, dropping the boat back in the water. The owner nearly cried and so did I.

The truck's instructions said that the "max load" extended was "8,000 pounds," but I never thought to check the boat bilge. It had about three feet of water in it! I learned from this to never drive with a hydraulic boom extended, but I'll bet you knew that, didn't you?

Remember To Ask

The incident you see in the photo started out quite normal. A trailer that hits a bridge usually doesn't present much of a problem since the front just crumbles and the recovery is relatively easy. This particular container, however, presented a tough problem because it dug into the main bridge beam though it was still held by the posts at each corner.

I thought about cutting the fifth wheel off, but decided to put my truck across the road. I put a single winch out to the rail post which was just visible off the right end of the bumper and back to the nearside axle.

This enabled me to do what the trailer wanted to do anyway: just lie down. As I stood congratulating myself, the police told me that the container contained cognac and we would have to wait for Customs because it had touched the ground. What I had reckoned would be a 30-minute job turned into five hours – just because I forgot to check the special conditions of that type of load. ☹



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The show is held annually at the Coronado Springs Resort, a family-oriented hotel within Disney World, with rooms available to tow show attendees at a special low rate. During the show, the family will stay busy having fun right at the resort, including swimming, game room

activities, boating on the resort's lake, and kid's events at the show. And, of course, the Disney fun has just begun when free buses take show participants and their families from the hotel to all Disney parks and attractions.



The Florida Tow Show provides more outside exhibit space than most other shows, which allows manufacturers plenty of space for demos as viewers enjoy the spring sun while learning about new equipment. Free

education and training seminars keep attendees current on the newest towing techniques and a Show Truck Contest highlights some of the most impressive tow trucks seen anywhere.

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NO MONEY
 continued from page 3

important," he said. "There are a lot of people into buying towing equipment, not recovery equipment. When you buy recovery equipment, it makes the jobs go so much faster."

"We do a lot of loaded tractor-trailer rollovers in an hour," Young said. "Generally, if we can air-bag one, it will take an hour. We try to have every piece of equipment that we may need. That's a big difference."

One-On-One

As for insurance companies and their tactics, Young cites a recent experience where he used good customer service skills to get a compliment out of what started out as a complaint call from a concerned grandfather. "I had a man call me the other day about his granddaughter who had been in a wreck and his insurance company had told him to

call and complain," Young said. "This happens more and more. The insurance companies are telling people, 'They can't charge you for this or that.'"

"Well this man had called me an was complaining, and we were discussing it and I said, 'Look, we don't want to get into a dispute. We want to sit here and talk,' and he said, 'I agree with that, but I want to commend you right off the bat. You all took good care of my granddaughter, and I appreciate that, but my insurance company told me to call and complain.'"

I talked to him for not more than 60 seconds and he said, 'I understand your situation perfectly and you're exactly right.'"

That one-on-one relationship building is key to Young's business philosophy, and part of what keeps him hooked on towing. "You never know where people are going or where they're coming from," he said. ☛

THE WORK FORCE

Workplace Mutineers

That terrific employee could leave and steal your business

By Scott Burrows

A regional towing company hired a well-trained employee who relocated to the area from out of state. That employee quickly advanced to the forefront as a top-notch worker, so much so that many customers requested that particular driver when making calls for service. The company bought him a nice truck and every toy available, along with extra, extra, extra chrome.

Who would have expected a workplace mutiny?

Sure enough, the employee left to set up his own towing business a few miles away. Other employees went with him, lured by higher commissions, and, in at least one case, an ownership stake. The owner, feeling betrayed and – much worse – suffering the loss of business he had spent years building, was at a loss for words. "That (bleep) took my key people and 44 of my top-50-paying clients!" he said. "I went from \$10,000 a week to \$5,000 a week overnight." He believes his client information was used by the competitor for a mass marketing to solicit his customers.

He should have followed the example of many large corporations and asked his employees to sign written commitments to refrain from competing against him or otherwise undermining his franchise. Such pledges can't prevent workers from

joining a rival firm or setting up a business in the same field, but they can severely limit the damage they do.

Protect Yourself

The legal protections fall into three categories.


- Non-compete agreements bar employees from competing directly with their former bosses.
- Non-solicitation agreements prohibit them from recruiting employees or clients of the business they left.
- Non-disclosure agreements (also called confidentiality agreements) forbid them from using confidential or privileged information they gleaned at their former workplace.

A single employment contract can contain all three provisions. For entrepreneurs, such agreements can be a double-edged sword. Wanna-be tow truckers who have gone out on their own can find themselves fighting legal battles with their former employers over the restrictions. By the same token, lawyers say, the contracts can be a useful weapon for small businesses in defending their turf against turncoat employees.

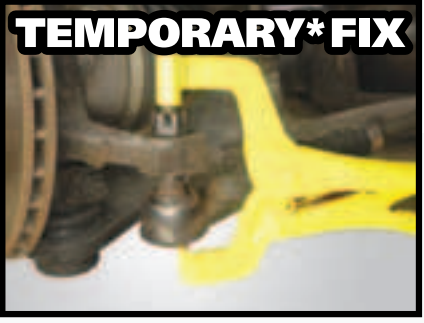
Labor experts say that in the last several years they have witnessed an increase in such agreements, especially of the non-compete variety. Though courts in many states are more likely to uphold them than they were in the past,

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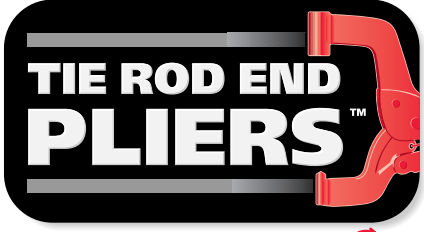
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non-solicitation and non-disclosure contracts are usually more successful than non-competitive pacts.

Some states, notably California, have sharply restricted these agreements because many employees complain that they hamper their ability to find work. For a non-compete to be effective, it has to be of specific scope, duration, and geographic area. It can't be too broad or overly aggressive as it won't be enforced.

As a general rule, contracts should be limited to one year and confined to no more than a 50-mile radius. They should also be specific about the type of work a former employee is prohibited from doing.

Avoid Big Trouble

When a Fortune 500 company invokes non-compete clauses to thwart former employees from setting up shop, they can come across as swinging a sledgehammer to swat a fly. However, small businesses are another story. The loss of just a few customers or employees can spell big trouble or even ruin.

Towing businesses need to protect their assets. It's a competitive issue. If a potential employee is not willing to sign a contract, then maybe he or she is not the right employee for you. Recruitment may become more difficult, but at least you won't spend every day worrying about whether half your staff might walk out the door.

A lot of employers have heard the message. Thirty percent of human resource executives surveyed in March 2004 said their companies required employees to sign non-compete agreements and 51 percent said they required them to sign non-disclosure contracts.

The towing industry is particularly vulnerable to poaching by former employees. Our clients are our real assets, and they walk in and out of our business environment every day.

Stopping Hopping

The motivation in cracking down is to make an example of offenders to other employees by showing that the contract they had signed "had some teeth." Make a habit of sending copies of departing staff members' non-solicitation and confidentiality agreements to their new employers. It can serve as a not-so-subtle reminder to them to keep their hands off your customers.

Still, employees who chafe under the terms of the agreements they felt compelled to sign to land jobs have some arrows in their legal quivers. Commercial attorneys urge employees to try to talk new employers out of requiring them to sign the contracts or, failing that, to seek a relaxation of the terms, like reducing the non-compete period from one year to six months.

Employees leave for better opportunities elsewhere all the time, of course, and there's not much you can do to stop job-hopping. The trick is to make sure they don't damage you on the way out. ☛

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2007 INTERNATIONAL 4300

DT 466, 220HP Diesel Automatic, Air Compressor, Century '20' 2' Steel 2-car carrier, removable rails, (2) 49' steel tool boxes, hydraulic slide, puller SP8000, all chains, tow lights



2006 CHEVROLET C4500

300HP Duramax Diesel, Automatic, Electronic exhaust brake, Jerr Dan HPL60 aluminum Cougar wrecker body, 6,000# underlift, dual 10,000# winches, simulators

75 NEW & USED UNITS IN STOCK READY TO GO!



#W2648 - 2007 INTERNATIONAL 4300

Extended cab, DT466 220HP Diesel, automatic, air compressor, Chevron 21.5ft alum. 2-car carrier, removable rail, (2) 49' alum. tool boxes, air free spool, all chains, tow lights



#W2633 - 2007 INTERNATIONAL 4300

DT466 225HP, 6-speed manual, air compressor, Jerr Dan 21RRSB 21ft steel 2-car carrier, removable rail, air shift PTO, wireless remote control



#W2626 - 2007 FREIGHTLINER M2

210HP Mercedes, Allison automatic, compression brake, (2) 40gal alum. fuel tanks, 5yr./2000,00 mile Mercedes Engine warranty, Vulcan 21ft alum. 2-car carrier, (2) 48' steel tool boxes, hot shift PTO, all chains, tow lights.



#W2529 - 2006 FORD F650

230HP, Cummins diesel, automatic, air compressor, Century 21ft alum. 2-car carrier, removable rails, (2) 48' steel tool boxes, jet stream wrecker light, simulators, all chains tow lights.



#W2547 - 2006 HINO

Automatic, 220HP 6 cylinder, 3 yr. unlimited mileage engine, Chevron 22ft aluminum 2-car carrier, 102" wide body, removable rail, (2) 49' aluminum tool boxes, jet strobe light, simulators



#W2696 - 2006 CHEVROLET C5500

300HP, automatic, electronic exhaust brake, Champion 21ft steel 2-car carrier, (2) 48' steel tool boxes, simulators, hot shift PTO, all chains, tow lights



#T3006 - 2007 CHEVROLET C4500

300HP Duramax, automatic, electronic exhaust brake, Jerr Dan 19NGAR, aluminum 2-car carrier, removable rails, (2) 36' tool boxes, simulators, tow lights



#W2544 - 2006 FORD F450

4x2 XLT Trim, 6.0 diesel, automatic, 34 gallon fuel tank, Jerr Dan QP40WPW, self-loading wheel lift, aluminum body, simulators, tow lights



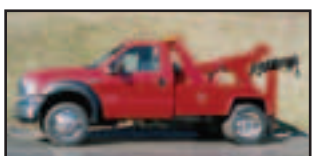
#W2680 - 2006 FORD F550

4x4 XLT Trim, 6.0 diesel, 6-speed manual, cab steps, Jerr Dan HPL60, wrecker body, 6000# underlift, dual 10,000 winches, simulators, tow lights



#W2665 - 2007 FORD F550

4x4 XLT Trim, 6.0 diesel, automatic, cab steps, Vulcan 882 dual line, wrecker, power clutch PTO, simulators, tow lights.



#W2549 - 2006 FORD F450

4x4 XLT Trim, diesel, automatic, Chevron 408TA single line wrecker, wired remote controls, simulators, tow lights.



#W2548 - 2006 FORD F450

4x4 XLT Trim, diesel, automatic, 34 gallon fuel tank, Jerr Dan MPL40 wrecker, self loading grids, dual 8000# winches, wired remote control, simulators



#W2619 - 2000 FORD F450

4x4 XLT, 7.3L, diesel, 6-speed manual, 34 gallon fuel tank, Vulcan model 882 dual line wrecker, chrome rails, visor



#W2670 - 2000 FORD F550

4x4 XLT, 7.3 diesel, 6-speed manual, Jerr Dan HPL35 aluminum dual line wrecker, 24' tunnel tool box, push bumper



#W2679 - 1999 FORD F550 XLT

7.3 diesel, 6-speed manual, Jerr Dan 19RRSB, steel 2-car carrier, removable rail,



#W2692 - 2003 INTERNATIONAL 4300

DT466 215HP, Allison automatic, air compressor, Century 21ft aluminum 2-car carrier, removable rails, chains, tow lights

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or go to www.kenworth.com and click on Merchandise. Orders also may be placed by phone at 800-791-0913.

Heavy Replicas

First Gear offers the first in a new series of heavy equipment replicas in their Construction Pioneers category. The company is the only officially licensed manufacturer/producer of Allis-Chalmers branded construction replicas.

First off the assembly line will be a 1/25 scale Allis-Chalmers HD-21 Crawler with Offset Disk Harrow. This all new 1/25 scale diecast metal crawler features free-rolling diecast metal tracks, a detailed diesel engine, and a functioning rear-mounted double winch mechanism with an authentic instrument panel.

Second is the 1/25 scale Mack B Model w/Folding Gooseneck Trailer, which features opening cab doors and hood, a detachable trailer with a realistic folding action, and positionable front wheels.

Third is the 1/34 scale Diamond-T Stake Truck. This diecast metal replica features A-C paint colors and decoration. For more information, see www.firstgearreplicas.com, or call 563-582-2071 x211.

Kenworth

Clothing

The 2007 Kenworth merchandise collection features more than 60 new items online. The line includes the new T660 T-shirt and 13 other new T-shirt designs; 10 new cap designs, including three new hats in the Kenworth outdoorsman collection; and seven new jacket styles, including men's and women's Glacier soft-shell jackets. See www.shopkenworth.com



Kenworth's new line of caps and clothing

Bike Sport Ramp

The extra-wide SportRamp permits a motorcycle to be ridden up and down while seated. For easy vertical storage, the ramp sides fold in or can be taken apart in three pieces. The aluminum pieces can withstand a load up to 1,500 pounds. The versatile ramp is not only ideal for loading a motorcycle but for lawnmowers, bicycles and appliances, any rolling product you need to get into the back of your pickup.

For more information on the Blue Ox line of sport carriers, braking systems, steering controls, towing systems, weight distributing hitch systems and accessories contact Blue Ox at 402-385-3051, 888-425-5382, or e-mail at info@blueox.us.



The Blue Ox Sport Ramp

Camobooty

Sometimes the motorcycle stands out, but the biker doesn't. CamoBooty prints are a favorite among fun-loving bikers with camouflage print gear featuring female silhouettes slyly printed on top of shirts and bandanas.

For the ladies who have a hog of their own, pink camouflage printed with the feminine form reminds the guys of what's hiding underneath the helmet and gloves.

See www.Camobooty.com or call 818-703-9202.



Camobooty biker shorts and bandannas

Lighted Vests

Lighthouse LED offers fully visible safety vests with built in LED lights for increased visibility, especially after dark. The vests use 3M Scotchlite reflective tape with super-bright LED lights that never burn out. The lights

Partnering With towPartners

towPartners has announced two new partnerships, one bringing towPartners' benefits to every agency owner in the repossession industry and the other to every owner in the towing and recovery industry.

The first phase of the partnership with REACT includes shipping memberships to nearly 4,000 asset recovery companies across the country, courtesy of REACT, a member services group that offers total business solutions, services, and support to repossession business owners throughout the country. For more information on REACT, call 866-970-7999 or visit www.REACTone.us

Jerr-Dan Corporation and towPartners have formed a similar strategic partnership to provide towPartners benefits to the entire towing and recovery industry. Over 25,000 towPartners membership for 2007 have already been shipped courtesy of Jerr-Dan Corporation and many more will be issued in the coming

weeks and months. Towing companies who have not received their complimentary memberships can request one at www.towpartners.com.

towPartners will provide these new Basic Members a large number of cost savings benefits, including quality programs from trusted brands such as Aramark, Sprint-Nextel, Office Depot, Dell, Aircharge, T-Chek and more.

With a current offering from well over 30 Supplier Partner companies and more being added regularly, towPartners is positioned to save the towing and recovery and repossession industries more money than ever. Last year towPartners saved its members over five million dollars and REACT's and Jerr-Dan's provision of these memberships promises to save the towing and recovery and asset recovery industries millions of additional dollars.

THE GEAR MART

New & improved equipment from industry innovators



Sava's Maxi-Lift Bags

are powered by two concealed AA batteries that last approximately two months and the vests are CSA and ANSI compliant.

Any company or organization interested in testing the Lighthouse LED Safety product line is invited to contact Sunrise Group for a free trial test. All safety vests and other related products can be viewed on the web at www.lighthouseled.com. Contact Sandy Macleod, Sales Manager, at 403-346-5396 or 866-346-5396, or by email at smacleod@sunrisegroup.ca

Sava Maxi-Lift Bags

Sava has developed a line of high-lift, low-pressure lifting bags for heavy recovery operations. Sava cushion options range from 8,800- to 20,000

pound capacities and use a heavy-gauge reinforced rubber composite shell tough enough for constant everyday use in all conditions.

Micro-tread rubber pads covering both ends create a positive non-slip grip on smooth trailer surfaces or ice, as well as on rough roads, dirt, snow or gravel. The thick pads also provide an extra margin of protection against damage from gravel, glass, and sharp objects.

Full-girth Nylon anchor belts provide an extra margin of safety when slipping and rolling is a safety concern. For more information, call Erik Stewart, Savatech Corp, at 888-436-9778 or see www.savatech.com.

Quick Uprighting

Matjack/International Wreckers Inc. saw a need for updated, quick-acting incident management equipment for quick clearance situations and now offer the Turbo Lift System, which has the capability of lifting a fully loaded vehicle from on

its side to upright in less than half the time with a conventional air cushion system. Now when you have to bag it, you can do it in half the time or less than it used to. Call for more info and a free demo DVD at 800-827-3555.



MatJack's Turbo Lift System

"When you have to bag it, you can do it in half the time."

Towmasters' Grand Slam

Towmasters, the non-profit education and training group organized in 1999 by a small group of towing professionals in New Hampshire, and now servicing the Northeast with members in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maryland, recently completed four weeks of the most aggressive training program it has ever conducted, with three of the nation's top trainers at the controls.

First: From October 20 through November 12, more than 160 people participated in training by **Billy Leach**, who brought fire personnel and heavy-duty towers together to learn and practice joint recovery procedures and techniques in order to improve their teamwork at major accident scenes.

Second: **Tom Luciano** trained more than 57 towers in two days with photos, discussion, and hands-on work by revisiting past recoveries and encouraging the professionals present to express their thoughts and ideas on a multitude of scenarios. Luciano then took everyone into the field to apply the techniques in real-world situations

Third: **Wes Wilburn** presented a two-day light-duty certification class. Wilburn also created real-world situations, stressing safety, teamwork, and development issues in order to promote a more professional image for the industry.

Towmasters members are allowed to attend free of charge and Towmasters helps its members by funding and discounting education whenever possible. Towmasters accepts memberships from all interested towing professionals and encourages members to help run and



Wes Wilburn instructing a Towmasters class

manage our programs. The dues are \$100 per year.

For more information, contact Brendon "Woody" Wood, president, at 603-653-3371 or Allen Lampert, secretary, at 603-778-8158, or write Towmasters, P.O. Box 584, Newport, NH 03773-0584.



Reflective vest with bright LED lights

HAULING HISTORY

Old-Timey Tow Trucks

A vintage truck show with some towing industry beauties

By John Gunnell

Baltimore was host city for the 2006 American Truck Historical Convention. The spring event filled the city's 41-acre Carroll Park with 504 vintage trucks that ranged in age from a 1917 Dodge Brothers Commercial Car to a customized 2001 Peterbilt. The classic tow trucks competing in the show this year brought back visions of the "knights of the road" who helped stranded motorists years ago.

Special features of the 2006 venue included a display of original equipment manufacturer (OEM) support for those who restore older trucks as a hobby and labor of love. Mack Trucks was the manufacturer in the spotlight and it presented an exhibit tracing "100 Years of Mack." Among the Mack units brought to the show was a 1953 BCD carrying a heavy-duty (for the time)

wrecker apparatus. The owner of this truck was Jim Walker of Manassas, VA. Even heftier-looking was Louis R. Barber's 1967 Mack B wrecker out of Millville, N.J.

For the first time ever, the ATHS teamed up with a state trucking association to plan and develop the annual convention. The Maryland Motor Truck Association helped the antique truck collectors network with local trucking businesses to generate show booklet advertising and dealer support for the old truck event.

Show Stars

The total of 504 vehicles on display was down from recent years, but there was no decline in enthusiasm. Among the most popular trucks with spectators were the old tow trucks, both big and small. There was a good turnout of

recovery vehicles representing various manufacturers. Only one Chevrolet made the trip to Baltimore. The 1940 one-ton truck was owned by Robert L. Miller of Downingtown, PA. Its manually-operated towing crane was carried in a wooden express box mounted at the rear of the handsome rig.

Lettered up to promote the Underdog Truck Service of Moonachie, NJ was a 1932 Ford BB tow truck owned by Richard C. Janesky, Jr., of Moonachie. It carried the slogan "Always bet on the Underdog" along the sides of its express box. These one and one-and-a-half-ton Fords were known as dealer service cars in the Depression era and most Ford agencies would use only a Ford truck to rescue broken or damaged vehicles in those days.

Apparently Lally's Garage was the previous user of an orange 1952 GMC 930 tow truck brought to Carroll Park by C. Stephen Deorocki of Hampton, NH. Lally's offered "24-Hour Service" and had what looks like a Holmes double-boom wrecker mounted on the just-right-for-the-job "Jimmy." A much larger 1977 GMC General tractor carrying a heavy-duty wrecker was exhibited by Richard J. Schaffer of Knoxville, Md.

Looking more preserved than restored was Colleen Guy's 1966 International DF-405 that's outfitted as a vehicle recovery truck. Guy Motors, in Mechanicsville, MD used this truck to offer "Radio Dispatched 24-Hour Service" according to the lettering on its side panels. This must have been a "quick clearance" unit in its day. It's an impressively big and sturdy machine.

Not many Studebaker trucks are seen in action today, but the 1951 Studebaker 2R16 tow truck of Moonachie, NJ's Richard C. Janesky, Jr. looks as if it could go right back to work if needed. Also wearing the colors of the Underdog Truck Service, the bright-red road warrior is completely restored and probably looks better than the day it left the dealership.

Also bringing memories back for many who ran post-World War II towing services was the 1944 Ward La France M1A1 military wrecker that Mik Tauber of Linthicum, MD brought to Baltimore. After the fighting ended in Europe and Japan, many of these trucks went on the market as "war surplus" units and wound up doing civilian wrecker work.

Any truck history buffs who want to see all these tow trucks in color (plus nearly 500 other vintage trucks) can order the *ATHS 2003 Show Time* book. This is an 88-page, perfect-bound, soft cover publication on glossy stock, showing eight trucks per page. The price is \$20 and you can order a copy by calling 816-891-9900 or visiting www.aths.org.

Note: Towman Rod West suggested the inclusion of GM restraint codes in this article and we're glad he did, since it's always nice to know what you're dealing with when you arrive at an accident scene.

See page 15 for the ATHS Show's Great Old-Timey Tow Trucks!



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2001 GMC 3500HD WRECKER, 15,000# GVW, 6.5L turbo diesel, automatic, 84" CA, Nomar hydraulic wrecker w/wheel lift & sling, fresh service and ready to work! Stk#5012-1



2000 CHEVROLET C6500 ROLLBACK, Cat 3126E, 210hp turbo diesel, 6 spd, spring susp., 25,500# GVW, 21' Century rollback, wheel lift, lo-pro, under CDL, fresh service, new rear tires, loaded! Stk#8268-1



1999 CHEVROLET C6500 ROLLBACK, Cat 3126E, 210hp, 6 spd, 25,500# GVW, 21' Century rollback, spring susp., wheel lift, lo-pro, under CDL, fresh service, new front tires, loaded! Stk#8281-1



(2) 2001 CHEVROLET C6500 ROLLBACKS, Cat 3126E, 210hp, 6 spd, 25,500# GVW, 21' Century rollback, spring susp., wheel lift, lo-pro, chrome, under CDL, fresh service, both units are very nice, loaded! Stk#8268-2 and Stk#5010-1



2006 Ford F450 XLT 4X4, diesel, auto, Jerr-Dan MPL40 self-loader with dual 8K lb winches, extendable boom, tow sling, in cab controls, Stk#N2589. Multifunctional unit



2006 Sterling Acterra, silver in color, wood grain dash, MBE 210HP, Allison auto, Jerr-Dan 21' alum., stationary head board, Stk#8280



2007 FORD F750 XLT, Cat C7 (pre emissions engine) @ 300HP, Allison 3000RDS, all alum. wheels, 33k# GVW, air ride driver, Jerr-Dan 14 Ton Integrated Wrecker, 138" CA, alum body w/composite, dual 15k winches, in cab controls, 7,500# med duty tire lift, 28k# boom, 11k#50k# underlift, Stk#N3646



2005 STERLING ACTERRA, LOADED!! MBE 210hp w/5yr. 250,000 mile warranty, Allison auto, Jerr-Dan 21' steel, removable rail, (2) boxes & More!! Stk#N5008



2006 GMC C6500 Crew Cab, Blue, Duramax 7.8L, Allison auto, w/Jerr-Dan 21' Steel, removable rails, wheel lift, (2) boxes, simulators and more!! Stk#6340



2006 Sterling Acterra, MBE 900 @ 210HP, 4yr/200K mile eng. warranty, Allison auto, Jerr-Dan 21' Shark, (2) boxes, alum. removable rails, Stk#8273, LOADED



2006 Ford F650 Ext. Cab XLT, Cummins, Allison auto, Jerr-Dan 21' Steel w/stationary deluxe headboard, (2) 48" boxes, 8K lb. winch, wheel lift, simulators, and MUCH MORE!! Stk#N3628



2007 Ford F650 XLT Reg. Cab, Cummins 230HP, Allison auto, Jerr-Dan 21' Steel w/removable alum. rails, (2) boxes, (1) basket, wheel lift, and MORE!! Stk#N3643



2006 Ford LCF, 4.5L diesel 200hp, auto, 20,500 lb. GVW, all alum. wheels, Jerr-Dan 19' alum carrier, wheel lift, tool box and more, Stk#N3627

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★☆☆☆☆ The Tow Truck Stars of the 2006 ATHC ★☆☆☆☆



Colleen Roy's International DF-405 still looks ready to roll on midnight mash-ups



Trucks like this 1944 Ward La France wrecker served both military and civilian duty



Lally's used this orange '52 GMC to rescue cars in Moonachie, NJ



This two-tone blue GMC General did some heavy-duty hauling in its day



The maker's "Pride of South Bend" slogan fits this fancy '51 Studebaker tow truck



This 1940 Chevy tow truck carries owner Robert Miler's name on its doors

The Laugh List

Retirement Choices For The Towing Industry

You can live in Phoenix, Arizona where...

- You can drive for four hours in one direction and never leave town
- You have over 100 recipes for Mexican food
- You know that dry heat is comparable to what hits you in the face when you open your oven door
- You are willing to park three blocks away because you found shade
- The four seasons are: tolerable, hot, really hot, and "Are you kidding me?!"

You can live in California where...

- You make over \$250,000 and you still can't afford to buy a house
- The fastest part of your commute is

going down your driveway

- You know how to eat an artichoke
- You drive your rented Mercedes to your neighborhood block party
- When someone asks you how far something is, you tell them how long it will take to get there rather than how many miles away it is

You can live in New York City where...

- You say "the city" and expect everyone to know you mean Manhattan
- You can get into a four-hour argument about how to get from Columbus Circle to Battery Park but you can't find Wisconsin on a map
- You think Central Park is nature
- You believe that being able to swear at people in their own language makes you multi-lingual
- You've worn out a car horn
- You think eye contact is an act of aggression

You can Live in Maine where...

- You only have four spices: salt, pepper,

ketchup and Tabasco

- Halloween costumes fit over parkas
- You have more than one recipe for moose
- Sexy lingerie is anything that is flannel with less than eight buttons
- The four seasons are: winter, still winter, almost winter, and construction

You can live in Texas where...

- You can rent a movie and buy bait in the same store
- "Y'all" is singular and "All y'all" is plural
- "He needed killin'" is a valid defense
- Everyone has two first names: Billy Bob, Jimmy Bob, Mary Sue, Betty Jean, Mary Beth, etc.

You can live in Colorado where...

- You carry your \$3,000 mountain bike atop your \$500 car
- You tell your husband to pick up Granola on his way home and he stops at the day care center
- A pass does not involve a football or dating

- The top of your head is bald but you still have a pony tail

You can live in the Midwest where...

- You've never met any celebrities, but the mayor knows your name
- Your idea of a traffic jam is 10 cars waiting to pass a tractor
- You have had to switch from heat to A/C on the same day
- You end sentences with a preposition: "Where's my coat at?"
- When asked how your trip was to any exotic place, you say, "It was different."

And you can live in Florida where...

- You eat dinner at 3:15 in the afternoon
- All purchases include a coupon of some kind, even houses and cars
- Everyone can recommend an excellent dermatologist
- Road construction never ends anywhere in the state
- Cars in front of you are often driven by headless people

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THE TOWING LIFE

A Towing Affair

Ginger Smith fell in love with tow trucks early on

By Michelle A. Ziner

Growing up during the 1960s, in an era when girls only did girl things and guys guy things, self-proclaimed tomboy Ginger D. Smith broke out of the girl-thing mold the first time she encountered a tow truck and its operator.

While traveling along a Philadelphia highway during the early 1970s, Smith's 1964 MG Midget broke down. "This was not the first time," Smith said. "There are only three reasons anyone ever owns a MG – they are either stupid, filthy rich, or madly in love with it."

When the AAA tow truck showed up, Smith had two impressions. The first was that the driver was extremely dirty and smelly. However, the second and lasting impression was a fascination with the truck. "I was truly mesmerized," she recalled. "Everything about that truck was fascinating, the noise it made, how it worked and what it was." So began Smith's love affair with the towing industry.



Ginger Smith

driving down back roads. "When this opportunity came up, it was like everything I had been around all my life and everything I had experienced all came together at once," she said.

Until then, all Smith had learned was driving. Now, she was working an AAA contract that encompassed everything. The first truck she ran was a 1980 Chevron Rebel 11 hydraulic sling truck with a cradle adapter. Smith trained as she went. Her husband coached her over the two-way radio for each call.

"I had a blast," she remembered. "All of the guys were taking bets on how long I'd last, but I was having a field day. I was just in my comfort zone." Smith also took a crash course in business, seat-of-the pants style, learning to run the office and keep the books.

On Their Own

Later, Smith and her husband separated from the auto repair shop and left the AAA contract. They had purchased a 1983 Chevy C30 with a Century Formula 1 wheel lift six months prior to leaving. It was the 144th truck of its kind out of the factory and is still on the road today. They went independent with that one truck.

Her husband drove the truck and Smith worked in the office, dispatching and supplementing the new business by working a part-time job. "This was a very sad time for me, not driving a truck," said Smith. She continued faithfully building the business over the next three years. The couple bought a 1987 Ford 6.9 diesel with a Challenger flatbed, also still in operation. "If you maintain the trucks," Smith stated, "when they are paid for, if they are still safe and in good condition, you keep them."

Smith soon returned to the road and, this time, she jumped into learning new techniques. Loading cars on a flatbed was a completely different operation for her. Once, while

How Love Bloomed

A few years later, Smith took a position at a car dealership in Clearwater, FL. The first day on the job, Smith walked across the dealership lot. On the other side, she saw a man leaning against a tow truck. Striking up a conversation, Smith discovered they were fellow employees. Smith immediately convinced her boss to let her go on some runs in the truck.

"I'm not sure which one I fell in love with first, the man or the tow truck," said Smith. She advanced from dating in the tow truck to having an occasional opportunity to drive it. Cruising along back-country roads, she felt complete. In fact, "I felt fantastic," said Smith. In 1974, the dealership did away with the tow truck. However, by then, Smith and the driver were married.

In 1979, Smith's husband took a job with an auto repair shop that had two tow trucks running on an AAA contract. In 1981, the tow company offered Smith's husband ownership of the towing division of that company with only a two-week notice. "Do you want to do this?" asked Smith's husband. "Do you want to learn to drive?"

Behind The Wheel

Once again, Smith was in a tow truck. This time, it went beyond just

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loading a pickup truck, she had a close call when the winch failed. The vehicle came flying off the flatbed, almost taking out all of the cable. Fortunately, the truck was stopped before all of the cable pulled out and possibly could have snapped and hit her.

"When a cable snaps, it is like an overgrown rubber band whipping around - it's over before you realize it," Smith said. "This is why I feel that the new remotes are such an asset to the industry. They allow the drivers to stay away from the cables and harm's way."

Growing & Changing

Over the next decade, the couple continued growing the business, enjoying the challenges, and working their "butts off," according to Smith. "I am very passionate about the business," Smith explained. "I absorb it, live it, breathe it and never give up. At times, we were asked if we had any children. To this, I would point to our trucks and answer, 'They are over there and they have six wheels each.'"

In the early 2000s, life changed. Smith and her husband went their separate ways, but Smith continued in the towing business. "This business is a hard industry, physically, emotionally and socially," she noted. "You must be a dedicated person to stay in it for the long haul and always put yourself in the customer's shoes." However, she continued, you also

need to think of yourself and your future and try to strike a balance.

When running this kind of business, said Smith, with your heart and soul in it 24 hours a day, going out and taking care of the customer is first and foremost. She thrives on the pressure. "I just get in there and do it," Smith added. "If you wait too long or think too long, you get confused; just do what is right and comes naturally."

Strike A Balance

There must be a balance though. You need a good team behind you, including skilled secretaries and office managers. If management isn't right in the office, including putting money where it should go," warned Smith, "that could be your downfall." She added, "I am very appreciative of

"All the guys were taking bets on how long I'd last"

my office manager, Barbara Woodward, who took the reins five years ago."

According to Smith, you can do a great job and the customers can love

you, but if someone isn't behind you helping you keep, you can fall apart. The paperwork side of the business is extremely important to success.

Recently, Woodward found it necessary to relocate to another state. Smith and Woodward developed a way for Woodward to continue managing the business from her new home town, using computers and phones. The business goes on running smoothly and Woodward and Smith still enjoy their working relationship today.

The Big Picture

For Smith, true success is measured by looking at the big picture. "I feel I am successful despite only running two trucks. You don't have to be the biggest," she said. Nationwide Towing has given larger companies a run for their money, she said. "Success isn't what you see when you walk out the door. It is what is in your heart and soul."

Nothing can compare to the satisfaction Smith receives when she sees the look on a customer's face when she puts their day back on track. She described it as "a look of pure relief and gratitude."

"I have received money, handshakes, hugs, kinds words," she said, "and I know today that when I die, I will know I have learned all I could and helped all I could, and that is success to me." ☛

A Towing Operator's Prayer

God, I don't know if you are up there but most people think you are, and you had better be because no one else can help me now. I'll try not to use bad words but you gotta understand: I didn't get a lot of learning when I should've!

I and my crew work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and honest to God, nobody seems to give a damn. If I have to go to court for some reason, the judge gives me a look that tells me he remembers the time when his car was towed away for overtime parking - and I know what that look means!

I'm not going to tell you, God, about all the times I have rolled out of bed at two or three in the morning to pry some guy out of a wreck. I know you know about them but somehow it never seems to count for much.

Now don't get me wrong, God, I'm not crying. Fact is, I'm making it. I've got a good little business, I'm my own boss, I'm making payroll every week on time.

I guess what I'm asking for is just some respect. Respect from the guys who tow with me, respect from the motorists and truckers we help day in and day out in all kinds of weather and at all hours, respect from firefighters and police, respect from the people I elect to give me fair and just towing laws, and, I guess, most of all, respect from you.

Anyway, thanks for hearing my prayer, God. Amen.

Original from Towline Magazine, April, 1976 with minor updating for publication in T&R Footnotes. Submitted by Bill Jackson.

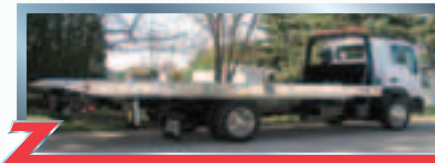
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NEW - 2007 IH 4300 w/Century 21' Vulcan Steel Carrier. DT466 - 225 HP Diesel, Fuller Ultra Shift 6 Spd Fully Auto Manual, GVW 25,500#. SP8000 Side Puller W/Hyd. Legs, Hi Dump Angle, Galvanized Subframe, Close Cross Members, Removable Side Rails, Gojack Dollies. #8218



NEW - 2006 Ford LCF w/Century 21' Alum. Carrier. 4.5L - 200 HP Diesel, Auto, GVW 19,500#. Wrecker Special Light Bar, 48" Tool Box, SS Wheel Simulators. #7731



NEW - 2007 Hino 258LP w/Century 21' Alum. Carrier. GVW 25,500#, 220 HP Diesel, Allison 2200 Auto. High Dump Angle, Stationary Cab Guard, Galvanized Subframe, 48" Tool Boxes. #8164



2004 Chev K30 4x4 w/Jerr-Dan H408S. 6.6L Diesel, Auto, GVW 12,000#. 24" Tunnel Box, Self Loading Dollies, MX7000 Light Bar W/Arrowstik. #8314



2000 Freightliner FL60 w/Challenger 21' Steel Carrier. 5.9 - 225 HP Cummins, 6 Speed, GVW 25,000#. Close Cross Members, 8,000# Planetary Winch, 2 RH & 1 LH 30" Tool Boxes. #7755



2000 IH 4700 w/Vulcan 19' Steel Carrier. DT466 - 195 HP Diesel, Auto, Axle Ratio 3:42, GVW 25,500#. MX7000 Light Bar, Stationary Cab Guard, Close Cross Members, Removable Side Rails, 2 - 48" Tool Boxes. #8184



1999 Freightliner FL60 w/Century 21' Alum Carrier. 5.9L 230 HP Cummins Diesel, 5 Spd, GVW 23,440#. RH & LH 48" Tool Boxes, RH 40" Open Top Storage Box, Stationary Cab Guard, MX7000 Light Bar. #7826



2000 Ford F550 4x4 w/Vulcan 806. 7.3L Power Stroke Diesel, Auto, GVW 17,500#. 8 Ton Boom 8,000# Winch, 4,000# Wheel Lift, MX7000 Light Bar, Lighted 24" Tunnel Tool Box, SS Wheel Simulators (BOSS V PLOW). #7709



2003 IH 4300 EC w/Vulcan 881. DT466 215 HP Diesel, Allison 2400 Auto., GVW 25,500#. 24" Tunnel Tool Box, Jet Strobe Light Bar, Chrome Hand Rails, Steel Fenderettes. #8045



2003 Chev K30 4x4 w/Century 301. 8100 Gas, Auto., GVW 12,000#. 12 Volt Portable Air Compressor, Jet Strobe Light Bar, Self Loading Dollies. #7751



2003 Ford F350 EC w/Century 311. 7.3L Power Stroke Diesel, Auto, GVW 12,500#. Tomar Light Bar, Landyard Remote Control, Rollover Light Pylon Kit, Self Loading Dollies, Chrome Hand Rails. #7468

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Tucker Is Tops

The Women of the Towing & Recovery Association of America (WTRAA) recently announced that the Tow Woman of the Year Award recipient for 2006 is Stacey Tucker of Chico Towing, Bremerton, Washington.

Each year, WTRAA selects a member who is an outstanding leader in the towing industry as a result of her significant contributions to her state and national associations, local community, and business.

Stacey Tucker was WTRAA's president from 1997-1999 and currently serves as the chair of the WTRAA Scholarship Committee. Through her efforts, the Miller Family Foundation has agreed to match funds for the Scholarship Fund up to \$50,000 through the end of this year.

In 1994, Tucker became the third-generation owner of Chico Towing. She also has founded Essential Solutions for Business, a consulting business, and Sun Select Window Tinting, a business she owns with her brother. She also does some freelance writing for a number of towing industry publications, has been the Washington representative to TRAA for many years, is past president for the Washington Towing Association, and was awarded the 2001 Washington Tow Truck Operator of the Year Award.

She has received many local awards and recognition, including the 1997

YWCA Woman of Achievement in the 2006 Kitsap Business Journal's "40 under Forty," where she was recognized as an outstanding young business and community leader.

Tucker is involved with local organizations around the Seattle area, including the Harrison Hospital Foundation, Checkered Flag Club, Project Family, and is a Paul Harris Fellow in Rotary International. She is married to John Nelson and has three children. In her spare time, She enjoys traveling with her family, camping, and participating in her children's sport activities.

WTRAA Plaques Donated

Geri Roskopf, President of the WTRAA, along with WTRAA members, presented to ITRHFM President George Connolly a recognition plaque honoring the WTRAA presidents and a plaque honoring the WTRAA Tow Woman of the Year Award recipients. The dedication ceremony, which took place at the Museum in September, is part of the continuing celebration of the 25th Anniversary of WTRAA.

Women involved in any way in the towing and recovery industry are invited to join the Women of the Towing & Recovery Association of America. Applications can be found on the TRAA website or by contacting Geri Roskopf at 262-251-0600 or geriroskopf@sbcglobal.net



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FAMILY MATTERS

Bigger & Better A large family, many trucks, years of towing experience

By Carol Hanna Branch

Community Service

Like many American dreams, the Hoppes family's massive towing enterprise began with a desire. After working as a machinist for a few years, Robert Hoppes, Sr., now 82, wanted to own and operate a business. He bought a wrecker in 1947 and began towing in downtown Portland, MI. The rest is history, as the saying goes.

Over the years, Reed & Hoppes has become an integral part of the community, especially in their pioneering work in saving lives. It was the first company in the county to own and operate the Jaws of Life to free victims from crashed vehicles. "We're kind of like the ambulance many times," Bob Jr. said.

Today, Reed & Hoppes boasts 25 employees and 22 trucks. The fleet of heavy, medium, and light duties includes a 1975 Diamond Reo Raider, one of the last 11 made. It sports a 50-ton Century wrecker, which replaced a Challenger 35-ton unit. "We're on the road all the time," said 55-year Bob Hoppes, Jr. "We try to do everybody a good job, 24-7."

In 2002, Reed & Hoppes received a plaque of appreciation for 50 years of "Outstanding Service to the Ionia State Police Post, Citizens of Michigan and the Ionia County Sheriff's Department." That same year, Bob Sr. was inducted into the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame in Chattanooga, TN.

Industry Evolution

Bob Hoppes, Jr. took over the reins for his father 10 years ago. "During high school, I ran a tow truck," Bob Jr. said. "I came up through the ranks." However, Bob Sr., who bought out Reed in 1952, still comes to work every day to oversee the operation. "To make sure we're doing everything right," Bob Jr. said.

Bob Sr. has seen the business change drastically in the nearly 60 years since he put his first wrecker on the road. He cited skyrocketing fuel prices, higher costs for insurance and the abundance of motor clubs that try to reduce rates. According to Bob Jr., fuel costs for the company can top \$20,000 a month.

It's All Relative

Bob Sr. and his wife, Florence, had 10 children. Seven work in the business. Besides Bob Jr., 5 sisters work in the office and their 32-year old brother, John, stays busy with the day-to-day operation - his favorite truck, by the way, is a 2002 four-axle Peterbilt with a Century 1060 SDU 60-ton rotator. Linda, Bob Jr.'s wife of 25 years, also helps out.

From old hand cranks, winches, and booms to hydraulic wreckers and wheel lifts, the elder Hoppes has watched the industry evolve. He recalled the days when people used to just hitch a ride with their car. Now, new trucks have extended cabs to haul five to six people and also sport large rotators.

A Little History

"The family literally grew up in the business," John said. "The original business was attached to the house in Portland." Since its beginnings on that small farm, complete with a chicken coop, Reed & Hoppes has expanded in both size and operations. Now located on a 40-acre site not too far down the road, the enterprise does more than just towing and recovery. They operate a salvage area and handle a large amount of auto transport for insurance companies with their two-, three- and four-car carriers.

Noted towman, author, and industry historian, 81-year old Bill Jackson remembers Bob Sr.'s Oshkosh with a Holmes 850 and five axles. "It was the biggest recovery vehicle in the U.S. 25 or 30 years ago," Jackson said. "We all

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Bob Hoppes' Two-Fer

One snowy day, Bob Jr. responded to a call for a tractor trailer that had rolled over by a highway and he performed a routine recovery. He then worked other jobs throughout the long day. Later, he got another call about another semi that had rolled over. Upon arrival at the scene, he glanced into the cab and recognized the face. It was the same driver who had rolled over earlier! Long day for Bob, bad day for the driver!

stood there and looked at that truck. It's as big as a house."

The Hoppes family understands how to build a big truck, Jackson said. "They're highly intelligent with tremendous drive. If they want to get something done, they do it."

Big & Small Toys

When brothers Bob Jr. and John aren't overseeing the real tow trucks, they're on the prowl for toy ones. "My brother and I collect miniature tow trucks die-cast in the 1950s and 1960s," John said. Bob Jr. has collected over 1,000 by scouring a diverse number of places, from antique stores to Wal-Mart. "And we've bought tons of trucks off eBay," John said.

While the job can be overwhelming, Bob Jr. still gets a rush from the business his dad started nearly 60 years ago. "I still enjoy it. I just like the everyday action that keeps you busy," he said.

Ernest Holmes Street

Travis W. Barlow, president of Travis Barlow Company, a specialty transportation insurer with offices nationwide, announced last month a street-naming ceremony honoring Ernest Holmes, Sr., that took place in Pooler, Georgia on December 15. Pooler is located adjacent to the City of Savannah and at the intersection of Interstate Highways 95 and 16.

Ernest Holmes, Sr. is credited with inventing the first tow truck in 1916 in Chattanooga, TN. For most of the period since that invention, the name Holmes has been synonymous with the term "wrecker." Today there are more than 50,000 companies involved in the towing and recovery industry nationwide. Examples of the very earliest tow trucks are on display at The International Towing & Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum in Chattanooga. See www.internationaltowingmuseum.net.

The street-naming honors the inventor of what has become a large specialty trucking and transportation industry serving the interests of public safety, not only in the U.S. but worldwide. Holmes wreckers are at work all over the world and have been for most of the last 100 years.

For more information, contact Mary Lee Hoff at www.marylee@travisbarlow.com or phone 800-537-7152.

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TRUCK TALK

Custom Niche

Weld Built is one of the nation's oldest builders of tow trucks

By Alison Johnson

The founders of Weld Built Wreckers & Carriers didn't get their start in trucks or cars – or anything on wheels or on land, for that matter. At first, the company was all about boats.

During World War II, co-founder Joseph Milan was an underwater welder with the Seabees, the Navy's famed construction battalions. The Seabees, established after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, built military bases, bridges, and thousands of miles of roads and airstrips for soldiers, among their many other jobs.

After his discharge, Milan joined forces with his brother-in-law, Arthur W. Nelson, to create a company called Weld Built Boats. The business specialized in converting World War II landing craft into tankers and ferries. Between those jobs, the two did custom steel fabrication and even built mobile truck rides for children. But then a New York City tower asked Milan and Nelson if they could create a tow vehicle for him. They did, and more orders soon poured in.

Since 1948, the company has been custom-building tow trucks and incorporating the many equipment innovations that have come along over the years. "One of the main challenges the towman faces is to do his job safely and efficiently and to make a profit from his efforts," said Harry Brown, general manager for the Wyandanch, N.Y. business. "Towing equipment today has to be safe, durable and easy to use."

The Company

Today, Weld Built is one of the country's oldest tow truck and carrier manufacturers. By sticking to its niche of custom work, the company has remained small despite competition from bigger public companies. According to Brown, their employees think of the business as being like an independent hardware store that has stayed open even as Home Depots have multiplied.

Weld Built has a staff of 40 that includes sales and office employees, welders, fabricators, installers, spray painters and repair specialists. The company manufactures about 10 trucks a month, Brown said, as compared to the hundreds moved by some mass producers.

Customers generally come from in or around the New York area, although some have sent chassis from the West Coast for custom work. In addition to professional towmen, customers include collision shops, automobile clubs, utility companies, the military, and various local municipalities.

To serve a growing Latino customer base, Weld Built has hired Spanish-speaking employees and posted Spanish sections on its Web page.

The Products

Weld Built offers more than 30 mechanical and hydraulic wrecker models for light, medium and heavy-duty work, with capacities ranging from three to 45 tons. All units are custom-built to the chassis supplied, with a number of options on equipment, painting and lighting. A 60-foot spray booth facility on the business' four-acre property also allows it to deliver a completely finished product to customers.

Brown said that Weld Built aims to work all possible advantages into its vehicles. The wrecker boom superstructure is in a more forward position, which can offer a lifting advantage. Medium- and heavy-duty

underlift wreckers have accessible dual rear-tailboard control stations for all operation functions, and a roller-bearing crossbar for easy swivel use.

Hydraulic carriers feature a 9,000-pound winch as standard, as well as structural body cross-members, a full-length steel chassis sub-frame, movable cat-trac to protect hoses and wiring, full-length polymer body wear pads and custom headboards.

One of the newest products is a portable, lightweight motorcycle adapter for self-loaders, which one man can safely use to transport motorcycles. Another is an electronic control system that allows operators to move wrecker equipment with fingertip motions. The controls are simple to operate and require less maintenance than cable or control rod-type linkage, Brown said.

"Our philosophy has remained the same for 55 years," he said. "Provide the customer with the product features that he desires to make his recovery vehicle the safest, most efficient, and user-friendly equipment possible."

The Customers

Long-time customers Joe and Steve Herbert say Weld Built has met that goal for their business. The father-and-son pair, owners of ATS Towing in Brooklyn, N.Y. has used Weld Built tow vehicles and hydraulic carriers for two generations.

"I do everything with my equipment," Joe Herbert said. "I abuse it. You can't beat their equipment." Herbert also likes having his equipment customized: "I know what I want – they don't mind building it the way I want it."

If something does need fixing, Weld Built strives for same-day service whether the job is changing a bulb or replacing a winch. "We know service is of paramount importance to the towing industry," Brown said. "Towing equipment vehicles are revenue-generating and should repairs be required, they must be handled as rapidly and efficiently as possible."

Happily, Joseph Milan and Arthur W. Nelson both lived to see their company's success. In fact, Nelson was a member of the first class inducted into the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame, where he was named as an industry pioneer in the 1986 ceremony. He died two years later.

Milan, now 85, is another inductee. He's also still active at Weld Built today, doing most of his work in purchasing – which means, as his small-but-resilient company closes in on its 60th anniversary, that he's still living by the unofficial motto of the Seabees: "Can do!"



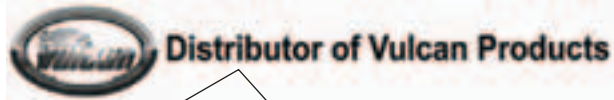
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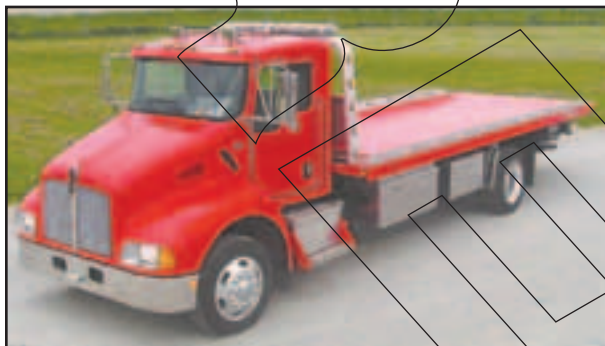
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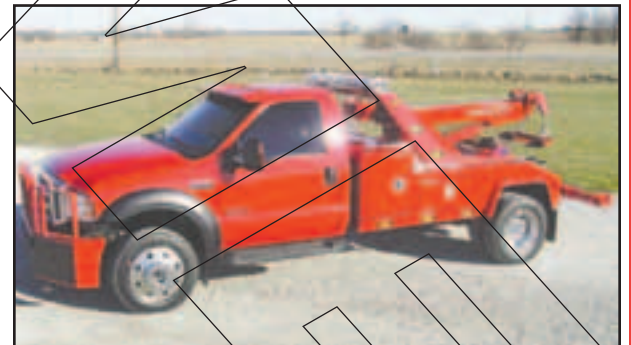
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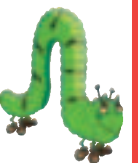
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CAT. 13SP,
1994
CHALLENGER
CH30T**



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PETE 379
550 CAT
18 SP
CENTURY
1060/SDU**



**2001
STERLING,
CHALLENGER
8807-SDU/2
50-TON STICK
BOOM, BUILT
NEW AS A
WRECKER**

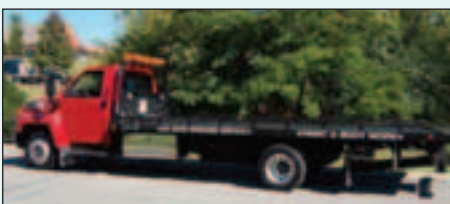


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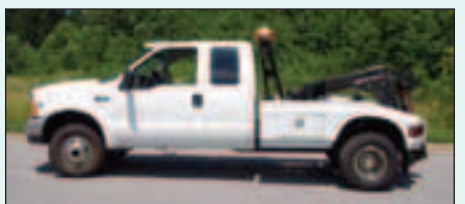
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