

## Choosing a trucking company: Hiring Operators and Truck World 2014 Evaluation

I attended the 2014 truck world in Toronto last month. I met hundreds of operators, many of whom have read my articles. It was a great honor and pleasure meeting those who came out. While I was there I performed an informal survey and found some interesting trends amongst the respondents.

I met and introduced myself to about 1050 operators (that's how many cd's I handed out). If I had the time I also asked what age of truck they owned. Most operators were very polite and co-operative. Here are some of the results.

- 75-80% of operators drive pre-emission trucks.
- about 35-40% drove 2003-2007 and the rest 2002 or earlier
- I had one 1985, two 1990 and about fifteen 1994-1999.
- a whole bunch of 2000-2001
- and I met two who openly stated they deleted
- FYI, about 15-20% wore duck dynasty paraphernalia (happy, happy, happy).

While I was there I had several longer conversations with operators. They expressed concern about the future of their older trucks. Even though they were very happy with its performance they were more concerned about trucking company policies on equipment age. If they had a ten year old tuck, where could they put it? Which companies would hire trucks that old?

That's a fair question! It's an answer that many will be asking for both now and in the future. It's a management policy decision that will have to be visited and revisited possibly for years to come.

For those that had trucks 2008+ most were very new (still under warranty). When asked about how their emission maintenance was going they were split about 50-50, half were not worried about their future because they had no maintenance problems... "yet" (with a grin and a knock on wood), while others were clearly concerned because there was a day coming where they would start having to pay the bills.

Operators, without a doubt did not trust the emissions maintenance. There were many with very serious animosity.... passionate about the intrusion into their business.

I also met a lot of ex-operators who openly claimed they would "never do that again". For those who explained why, they mostly blamed maintenance and fuel surcharge (fuel cost issues). They may not all be able to pin-point the exact problems in the industry but they all expressed the same shotgun diagnosis... too many problems, not enough cash.

Operators (present or prior) are not dumb... at least not most of them. The current operator equipment demographics show one thing... operators didn't trust the new equipment, and therefore didn't buy it. They kept their old trucks and just re-built, re-built, re-built. If hind-site brings any value to the debate, they may have been a lot smarter than others who took claims at face value. However, virtually all of them (90%+) are still worried about the future implications of emission maintenance.

There is a very old saying, "...a wise man sees danger and avoids it, a foolish man rushes on and suffers for it...". If ever that proverb can be applied, it would be to the operators in the last 15 years. As an accountant (exclusive to lease/owner operators) I have seen first-hand the: lost savings, insolvencies, and bankruptcies that were the direct fault of emission maintenance. I do not have to inform operators of this... they already know... they have known for a long time.

If companies want to entertain operators for the future, they will have to accommodate more than just paint. They will have to accept equipment age. If some don't, their competition probably will. It's an issue that will not go away for some time.

## **MY FACINATION**

One of the most interesting features I found at Truck World was the hydrogen application. I have always been a proponent of hydrogen usage. However, my personal views are tempered by three issues, the hydrogen technology is: under-capitalized, undervalued and under-engineered.

The science is astounding but the application has bad experiences, bad press and possibly some industry opposition. Under short term initial testing though, the system produces phenomenal results (low emissions and lower fuel consumption). What I believe is the most damaging however, is the test trucks at the side of the road with holes in their blocks (not a minor issue). However, it begs a question, if Orville and Wilbur Wright had crashed at Kitty Hawk NC... would we not still have developed the airline industry?

Failure is only the end for those who quit. I believe hydrogen will be a serious part of the transportation industry in the future, even if that means the engines are made entirely of ceramics. The advantages are too high, the alternatives too costly (as we have seen).

Some brilliant trucker (or mechanic) will figure a way to overcome each of the many problems and make it consistently work, if not in all applications than in enough to make a significant impact.

These of course, are my personal views but I do know several operators who are testing their own systems on their own trucks. Never underestimate the power of a motivated independent person. Most all of life's advancements came from a dusty garage.

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