

Truck'n on... back to the future!



TruckSure
By Trevor Toohill

Five to ten years from now who do you suppose will be driving the trucks and delivering the goods?

This is a question being asked within the trucking industry in every developed country.

There have been a number of surveys over recent years trying to determine the state of our driver work force and it is a pretty hard number to button down.

Ask any owner and fleet operator and the answer will be the same..... it is hard to get good drivers with a clean record and the experience behind the wheel.

I had a new enquiry a few months back from a company in Invercargill – they had been without any insurance for about a year!!! The problem was that the only drivers they could find had pretty dubious driving records and convictions for other 'stuff' and insurance companies did not want to touch them. We were able to help by the use of some pretty heavy excesses while they put together a new recruitment program.

On our doorstep, Australia has severe driver shortages in NSW and Victoria and in the US they are talking numbers across the country in excess of 100,000. So bad that delivery of some goods is now running consistently 2 – 3 days behind schedule as the norm.

I saw a comment a couple of years ago by driver Graham Doyle who was 73 years old at the time and was still driving interstate overnight between Melbourne and Adelaide. He has been driving since his teens and knows that even at his age drivers like him are in demand.

"People say 'when will you give it away, Doyle?' I say 'what am I going to do? It's a love-hate thing. You spend a couple of days at home and you're itching to get back behind the wheel.

But the younger generation does not see it quite the same way.

A magazine ... that's got four pages of vacancies in it and some are top companies that pay the right money, the right equipment and the right freight and no pressure - they still can't get drivers. No one wants to do it anymore."

It's just as well we have plenty of 'Doilies' still in the business because our driver stats by age are not looking that hot. The baby boomers are well on the road to retirement and as anyone who has been driving for 30 plus years knows – the body does not hold up too well.

Combine aging drivers with doubtful health and fitness and then throw in to the mix a very low recruitment rate and you have a looming problem – who is going to be driving the trucks?

This is where we have to take it back to the future and look to today's youth as the future source to rejuvenate the driver workforce.

This is actually what I really wanted to touch on in this article - younger drivers behind the wheel of a line haul or logging truck.

It is a 'chicken and the egg' situation – age vs. experience.

We need new blood coming into the transport industry but have you tried getting insurance for your truck with a 19 to 21 year old driver behind the wheel? Or for that matter any driver under 25? Not an easy task and you have to jump through a few hoops to get acceptable terms.

With recent changes to youth driver licensing it is not going to be likely that there will be many under 21 who will be eligible to drive on a class 5 licence, but that only pushes the problem out to the under 25s.

I took the time earlier this week to discuss this issue with the management of our leading transport insurers and all had a common theme – experience, clean licence and accident history, training and supervision. These are the key issues combined with pretty stiff age and experience related excesses.

It is obvious that the younger the driver the less likely it is that they will be able to satisfy these stipulations and yet it is the younger driver that the industry will be relying upon.

So the questions 'back to the future' must be asked and answered:

- Where do the future drivers come from?
- What training programs are there now to give the right skills?
- What supervision is there available to take them through the graduated steps for the various licence stages?
- How do they gain the appropriate level of experience before they 'go solo'?
- What psychological tests are there to test driver savvy?
- What ongoing education program will there be available?
- What does the future hold for the right candidate in terms of prospects and income?

These questions are being asked and answered – but not yet in this country. Programs exist in the US at a cost of between \$US4,000 and 6,000. The uptake is only fair due to this cost and the fact that driver retention is very poor. Companies are reluctant to fork out this sort of money only to find the driver up staking to the opposition. So I guess the final question must be – How do companies retain trained and qualified young drivers?

I feel that the industry must start getting serious about youth recruitment and insurers must defocus on driver age and focus on training and experience.

Is it time to have a look at a qualification system and lobby for driver apprenticeships?

Is it time to start charging freight rates that allow for driver wages to be competitive with those of a qualified tradesman – there is no doubt in my mind that the role of a professional driver should be elevated to be in line with the risks, knowledge, and skills applied by the truckie in their everyday employment.

Anyway that is just my two bits worth – what do you think? 



MultiSure

0800 287 287

www.trucksure.co.nz



TruckSure

'We've got trucking covered'