



Truck-mad Tom firing 30

BY WALLY BOWATER

After 44 years in various areas of road transport Tom Ryan has scaled down and specialised his operations.

Tom Ryan Cartage Ltd has been a registered company since 1985 but Tom Ryan has been in transport since the end of his school days in 1971.

In fact, he was involved with his father's meat delivery business, Westfield Transport, even before he finished his schooling at Marcellin College in Mt Albert.

Being 'truck mad', he was twice caught by the transport authorities driving without a licence before he turned 16.

Westfield, originally owned by Alvin Bonney, was purchased by Tom's father Peter, who was assisted by Tom.

Under-age, Tom applied for a special driver's licence but was turned down. So he sought the assistance of Bill Anderson, a powerful union delegate. Two years later, the HT licence turned up and Tom was legally in business, driving an Austin for his father.

There had always been the desire to 'do his own thing' and in 1979 Tom purchased a Bedford and started hauling products for Manukau Timber. The company operated as Tom Ryan Transport until 1985 when it was incorporated as Tom Ryan Cartage Ltd.

From this point, Tom Ryan Cartage (TRC) grew, expanding into other areas of transport. It acquired McKeevers Transport in 1998, offering general freight and container transport services, following this a year later with the acquisition of

Waiheke Freight (which offered a daily freight service to and from the island) from Subritzky Shipping Line.

Lightning Transport was acquired from the receivers in 2001, being followed by the purchase of Phillpott Carriers' container division (from Roadfreighters) in 2002. These expanded the container transport, general freight and storage divisions of the business.

Up to this point, Tom Ryan Cartage had operated out of its current workshop depot at Galway St, Onehunga, a location that continues to provide full workshop facilities to the fleet, including a panel and paint service.

The year 2002 was a big one for TRC, for as well as the procurement of Phillpotts, the company expanded into the old McKeevers trucking yard and offices in Alfred St, Onehunga, which remains the primary base of operations today.

Searoad Logistics Ltd (a coastal shipping service) and Island Cartage Ltd (offering frozen and chilled product delivery services to Waiheke Island customers) were both incorporated in the same year.

Another big move came in 2004 when TRC opened a general freight and container service for the Canterbury district, operating out of a depot in Riccarton.

This led up to the height of the structure of TRC with 300 odd units and over 250 full time staff in 2007 and proved to be the tipping point for TRC.

"The company has always been a family



Allan Spillhaus (seated) and Tom Ryan coordinate day to day operations.



TRC staff (left to right): John Hammond, Willy Howard, Eddie Cope, Ralph Herewini, Peter Barrett (Hiabs manager), Rajinesh Chand, Yunis Ali, Eric Donovan and Stu Pirie, lining up with some of the fleet.

years on

operation, with Tom controlling all aspects of its direction” says Alan Spilhaus, company general manager, “and it proved too much of a handful for this form of governance”.

A South African, Alan Spilhaus joined Tom Ryan Cartage in 2002, progressing to his current role as general manager. Alan assisted Tom to



Larger truck mounted cranes require a five axle chassis to keep within axle weight limits.

analyse the structure of the entire company and formulate a plan of rationalisation.

Part of the restructuring saw TRC sell off its Christchurch division to Northern Southland Transport in 2009 and its container division to L.W.Bonney & Sons the same year. It also shed the Waiheke operations to Sealink/Freightlink in 2012.

For most of the 30 years TRC has been operating, the core business has been in crane truck services. When asked the secret to success, Tom provides a single word answer – “service”. Indeed, it would seem the employees understand this and remain key in providing solutions for customers.

“I have always tried to pay my drivers a fair living wage, lifting the market at times,” says Tom. “I feel this is only fair. If there are no drivers, the trucks don’t move.”

A key member of the Tom Ryan ‘family’ is Hiab’s manager Peter Barrett, who has been with the company for more than 30 years. He is always offering options to customers, ensuring he has the right driver and truck to get the job done.

Over the years, Tom’s daughters have also been active in the company. TRC has progressed with developing technology and innovative transport systems, offering solutions to the customers’ transport requirements.

The company has been dedicated to safety in the work place and compliance with the equipment.

“We are involved with staff training and our aim is to exceed all work-place safety requirements” says Alan, “because the philosophy of Tom Ryan Cartage is based on ‘customers first’.

“Therefore, we have to ensure that our customers receive the best possible service, carried out in the safest possible manner at all times, even if, on occasions, it may take a little longer.”

Tom has been a petrol head all his life and has reached the top of his game on a few occasions. He achieved the status of North Island Mini 7’s champion before graduating to Super Minis (Mighty Minis).

More recently, he has achieved good results with his Honda Civic (third in the 2-litre class) and Nissan 350Z while competing in the New Zealand ‘Targa’ Rally.

TRC has faced challenges over the years but its situation has never been as critical as some of the time wasters and scandal mongers within the industry have made out.

“We had one occasion a few years back where, at our depot, we had a drive-through system,” says Tom. “Because some idiots decided to use it as a race track thoroughfare, we decided to close the back gate. Suddenly, according to the ‘stories’, we had ‘closed up shop’. It made us chuckle at the time.”

The reality of the TRC situation today is that the company is a stable business running a series of Hiab crane mounted trucks, LCL sea freight and airfreight trucks, temperature controlled and DG transport alongside storage, pack and unpack ATF warehousing services, and truck and trailer units running waste disposal services between Hamilton and Hampton Downs.

The company employs 96 full-time staff (no owner drivers) using 87 trucks including some of the largest truck-mounted cranes in the country – 53 trailers and 18 other vehicles.

TRC has in the works six new trucks for 2015 including what may be the largest truck mounted crane in this country. The crane will be fitted to a new high end 10-wheeler tractor unit and still be within the maximum legal axle limits without a permit.

“We have rationalised our entire operation to bring us back to our original core business which was the operation of crane trucks” says Tom.

“The company has retained long-time staff at the centre of operations. We totally value our staff and their regular contact with our valued customers”.

“There are occasions where a customer will request a particular driver for a job and in almost every case he will get that driver. We relish that sort of request and try our best to fulfil it.”

TRC is in the transport industry, specialising in crane trucks and tailored customer solutions, and has no intentions of going anywhere else. It is a specialist company and proves it on a regular basis. □

One of TRC’s truck and trailer combinations operating on a waste disposal contract.

