

EDWARDS TRANSPORT

Family firm that is **pushing** forwards



Cold store, warm heart

Over three decades Edwards Transport has grown from a one-man band to a medium-sized specialist operator. Now it is looking to expand further

Words: Will Shiers / Images: Tom Cunningham



▲ Director Mark Edwards, top right, wants better parking facilities for UK drivers. Below: Edwards Transport's all-Scania fleet includes a 1989 143.450 yard shunter

You've seen its smartly turned-out trucks on the road, but what do you actually know about Edwards Transport (Shropshire)? Probably not much at all. That's because this family-run firm has preferred to keep a low profile. However, with the help of newly appointed business development executive Tim Jordan, this is about to change. Edwards Transport is emerging from the shadows and shouting about its numerous successes.

During the past three decades, Edwards has gone from being a one-man operation to a respectable medium-sized chilled goods specialist with a list of high-profile customers, an all-Scania fleet and a 10,000-pallet capacity cold store. And it has even bigger ambitions. The company has compiled plans to build a new 4,000-pallet cold store, and

is now looking to branch out into new markets.

"We are looking to expand," says Jordan. "A lot of companies of this size are faced with the decision of whether to stay where they are or push forwards, and we are pushing forwards. I think it's wise to branch out."

Jordan is encouraging the firm to move into the ambient goods sector. "Chilled distribution is highly competitive at the moment," he explains. "We have identified openings within the ambient sector."

The company has already dipped its toe in the water by purchasing three Tautliners, and renting several more. "The venture has proved a success, and there are plans to buy instead of renting. As a company we like to acquire assets, and the entire fleet is wholly-owned," he says.

The fleet

The phrase 'you get what you pay for' might be a bit of a cliché, but it really does ring true at Edwards. In fact it forms the basis of all the haulier's vehicle purchasing decisions and helps explain why it has run almost exclusively Scania since the family business was created.

"Nothing else compares with a Scania for longevity," says MD Alan Edwards, who bought his first Swede (an LB80) in the mid 1970s. "We keep our trucks for 10 years, so need something reliable," he





LONGER SEMI-TRAILERS

Alan is not a fan of longer semi-trailers. "Whether we want them or not, there will be pressure on us from our customers to use them," he says. He sees it as another cost the company won't be able to effectively pass on, and compares their introduction to the time GVWs increased from 32 tonnes to 38 tonnes. "There was a big investment in fridges, but it wasn't matched by a big increase in rates," he says. Mark is of a similar opinion. He remembers the last time the company invested in trailers with steering axles. "They used to seize up," he says. "And it's a lot of hassle and expense when they go wrong." Fortunately for Edwards, longer semi-trailers certainly won't suit all their customers. The haulier specialises in the movement and storage of cheese, which is surprisingly heavy, so bulks out before it cubes out.

Until recently Edwards enjoyed a long relationship with Michelin, but it has now switched to Hankook. "They've just priced themselves out," he explains. "Michelins were great on the drive axles, and with a decent driver we could get 150,000km, but the Hankooks are wearing very well too."

Also until recently the firm was running Toyo trailer tyres, which Alan says worked out cheaper than having a Michelin tyre remixed, but supply has dwindled since the Japanese earthquake.

From tyres we move on to the 40mph speed limit, a subject he feels strongly about. The company has a strict no speeding policy, but Alan says being forced to do 40mph on certain A-roads is madness because of the incredible risks car drivers take in order to overtake.

Talking of topics of concern, Alan thinks it's unfair his drivers aren't allowed to stay with their vehicles during deliveries at many places these days. "It's an £80,000 truck and a £55,000 trailer, that's £135,000 worth of equipment. We pay our drivers to be responsible for that truck, yet they

says. "We did try four trucks from another Swedish manufacturer, but found they weren't built to last as long."

Alan Edwards, right, is the MD at Edwards Transport, while Tim Jordan, top right, is the newly appointed business development executive

Despite believing Scania to be the best trucks money can buy, Alan thinks the build quality has gone downhill in recent years. In his opinion the Scania 143 was the best truck built, and nothing else will ever come close. "You could run them for 10 years and barely have to touch them with a spanner," he says. He still has a 1989 143.450 in the yard, which these days is used as a shunter. "But if I spent £1,800 on an engine rebuild it could start working again tomorrow," he says.

According to Alan, modern trucks are just too plasticky and not built to last.

As well as liking the product, the company's loyalty to the Scania brand has a lot to do with local dealer West Pennine, with whom it enjoys a close relationship. And with a distinct lack of salesmen from



rival truck manufacturers knocking on the door, this relationship is unlikely to change any time soon. "We've never even seen a Renault or an Iveco rep," he says.

The company recently placed an order for 10 new Scania, which are being delivered at a rate of one a month. Ordinarily, Alan runs the company's trucks for 10 years, but this time the newcomers are replacing 54- and 55-plate trucks, largely in order to delay the purchase of dearer and more complex Euro-6 trucks.

Euro-6 anger

The subject of Euro-6 angers Alan. He is furious that the latest round of emissions regulations will leave hauliers out of pocket to the tune of £10,000 per truck. "It's disgusting," he says. "I appreciate that they have high R&D costs to

recoup, but why should we pay for it? When our fuel costs go up, we can't pass it on."

Like the truck fleet, which is maintained in-house, Alan also manages the tyres.



"Being forced to do 40mph on certain A-roads is madness because of the incredible risks car drivers take in order to overtake"



aren't allowed to stay with it when unloading.” Mark, Alan's son and a director at Edwards Transport, adds: “Rather than relax in the comfort of the cab they are forced to wait in a drivers' room with varying levels of comfort and facilities. If certain companies are worried about someone driving off from a loading bay with loaders still in the trailer, why don't they just clamp a trailer wheel?”

Transport minister for a day

Like most hauliers we visit, the Edwards Transport management team clearly have some concerns about the industry. Alan and Mark have been around trucks for most of their lives, and seen plenty of changes over the years, along with an ever-increasing amount of red tape. But of all the things that are wrong with haulage in the UK, what would they change if they were transport minister for the day?

For Alan, the answer is simple, and quick as a flash he says: “Fuel costs! With prices at an all-time high, we are now at a point of make or break for most transport companies. If nothing is done soon to help stem these rising costs it will be too late for many to recover.”

Mark says he would introduce better parking facilities

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THE STORAGE STORY

Edwards is on the verge of expanding its storage facilities with plans to build a new 4,000-pallet cold store on-site. This will take its total capacity to 14,000 pallets and in turn create more jobs.

The existing storage facility was recently upgraded with a new LED lighting system to reduce its carbon footprint and save energy costs.

The facility operates a fully integrated warehouse management system and was recently nominated for the UKWA (United Kingdom Warehousing Association) Warehouse Team of the Year award.

The company is also installing a new temperature control system that will allow warehouse manager Leigh Brown to view messages sent direct to his mobile phone, alerting him to any temperature fluctuations.

The current storage temperature range is three chambers at 7° to 9° Celsius and one chamber at 2° to 5° Celsius.

This modern multi-temperature storage facility meets all current EEC food regulations, and is extremely clean, well-organised and easily accessible.

Edwards Transport is a member of UKWA and holds BRC Accreditation in Storage & Distribution.

for drivers throughout the UK. “They need somewhere safe where they can get a decent meal, take a shower and relax. We value our drivers and are concerned about their welfare when they spend nights out. It's important they have good food, rest and feel safe,” he says.

Despite the complaints, both men still have boundless enthusiasm for their company, the industry and their staff. Neither would do anything different. “It's in my blood,” says Alan, “and besides, you never know, it might get better again. Transport today is certainly a challenge and is getting harder year on year. Without good people around us it would be even harder. We would like to say a big thank you to all our staff for their continued support.” ■

LONG-LASTING LIVERY

The fleet wears the traditional AJ Edwards & Sons livery, which has barely changed since it was designed by Alan's father some 60 years ago. The trucks' sign-writing is still hand-painted, and consequently looks fantastic after years on the road. “In fact, we know they still look good after 10 years too,” says Jordan, who has a photo of an old exported ex-Edwards truck that

was spotted in Africa still wearing its original livery.

Edwards might have beaten Stobart with the green and red livery, but when it comes to naming its trucks, the Carlisle haulier was definitely first. Edwards only started earlier this year. One of the first trucks to be personified is Henry Jake – named after a schoolboy who won a locally run truck-naming competition.

