

PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE HORSE

Words and photographs by Dean Evans



Vehicle transport specialist Carr & Haslam's new 10-car transporter trailer wasn't modified to suit the truck – the truck was modified to suit 'it'!

Three years in the making, NZ's Carr & Haslam recently registered the first of two new trucks and trailers for its Auckland-based national vehicle transport operations. And though its style may look somewhat conventional, it's the details that count and have made another step forward not just with build partners BPW, but also the Mercedes-Benz factory.

"We've got a long-term relationship with Mercedes," explains Carr & Haslam's Director, Chris Carr. "They've stood by us and we've had a really good relationship." The plan arose like many local projects do: the need for a specialised vehicle.

"We've built 10-car units before," explains Chris, "but this is the first one on the new

Mercedes-Benz Arocs platform." But the Arocs wasn't ideally suited to Chris' needs.

"With car transporters, you need all the height you can get so the chassis needs to be as low as possible. We had to change the new Arocs to suit us, more to the point," says Chris. "The Arocs is basically an eight-wheeler construction truck in Germany, and we wanted an eight-wheel road truck. We needed a very low chassis, road-going Arocs. So we worked a long time with Mercedes to be able to get the chassis height down to where we wanted."

Over a process that took three years from desire to driving on the road, the first hurdle was when Chris was first asked by Mercedes how many he wanted? "Two..." he replied.

"Two-hundred or two-thousand?" was the polite, German response. The actual order for "just two" may have raised a few German eyebrows initially, but the small numbers didn't deter either side from making it happen.

"What normally happens with some manufacturers, if you want an eight-wheeler, they build a six-wheeler on the production line, and then send it away and convert it to an eight-wheeler, which is both slow and costly. Whereas the Arocs comes down the production line as an eight-wheeler right from the word go. So we went through all that work to get a truck down their production line which had a really low cab height and low chassis height.







Front deck flips up to allow access to the cab for engine maintenance and servicing.



Hydraulic mid-deck is fitted with horsehair to minimise as much stone damage as possible.



Safety mesh ensures there are minimal to no gaps to fall between when crossing the bridges.

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“The standard Arocs chassis is around 1050mm [high], and we wanted a target of 950mm - and we ended up getting 935mm!

“We had a fair bit of engineering time in NZ as well; the factory got it down to a certain height, and the local Mercedes dealer got it down further, with axle plates and other aspects that were outside the factory production line process. It uses all Mercedes-Benz parts and is engineered by Mercedes, so there’s nothing that isn’t ‘standard’, but it’s a lot easier to do that way than change the production line for a couple of trucks.”

By comparison, the body and trailer unit was almost easy – for a vehicle transporter. Says Chris: “It took Jackson Enterprises about three months to build the first one, and around two months for the second one. It’s all built to our spec, using BPW axles, which we’ve been using since the 1990s.

“It’s good stuff,” he adds. “It doesn’t break but if something happens they stand by it. A few years back we had a technical issue with a 6-7-year old unit that wasn’t right, but the support was great. Fifty percent of what you buy is the product... the other 50 percent is the support behind it.”

Underneath is 17.5 drum BPW brakes and AL2 suspension, with Knorr Bremse brake kit and TIM. Though large, that rear trailer makes do with just two BPW axles due to the relatively light weight. “We’re not particularly heavy,” explains Chris. “We can run to 40t on that configuration, and we would seldom be above 37 tonne; we’re not heavy in ‘road freight’ terms. We’re almost always never been more than 38t, so we don’t need a weight permit, but we have a length permit, at 23 metres.” Which is almost a quarter of a football field long. Trailer builder Trevor Jackson highlights the protection angle: “There’s safety mesh down the sides, and down the full length of the truck and trailer, so if someone’s crossing from one bridge to the other, there’s no longer a gap to fall into.”

There’s also horse hair insulation between the floor and chassis rail, to ensure no stones get thrown up into the vehicles.

Running 24 hours a day six days a week, Chris says he expects to see around 350,000km a year from the new unit. And for maintenance, the front ramp above the cab flips away to allow access.

From a company that started in 1862 with horses and coaches, Carr & Haslam’s 157 year history is long and rich, with the car transport division established in 1982. Amongst its fleet of more than 50 trucks, this ‘Truck 247’, as it’s called, does its job like any other unit – just with a longer and more interesting story than most about how a few Kiwis convinced Germans to build something a bit unique.