

The Cummins brand has long been prominent at one of Australia's largest regional carriers, Pickering Transport.

FAMILY TRADITION DRIVES PICKERING SUCCESS

AB-triple pulled by a Cummins X15-powered Kenworth T610 moves containers of bulk wine from the Riverland region to Adelaide wharf.

One of Australia's best-known regional carriers, Pickering Transport Group is this year celebrating its origins 65 years ago.

Another notable milestone in 2019 is Roger Pickering's 45th year in the family business based in Swan Hill, Victoria. Roger began working in the company – started by his father Ted, among others, in the 1950s – as a 15-year-old. Today, as general manager, he oversees a fleet of 105 linehaul trucks, 350 trailers, 60 rigid trucks, and 350 staff across 14 depots.

Roger's younger brother Daryl is also celebrating a milestone in 2019 – 25 years in the Pickering business; he is corporate manager, responsible for looking after the administration and finance, all the back-office functions.

The Pickering group had its origins in 1954 when Lake Boga Transport was established by 15 owner-drivers as a cooperative. Two of the owner-drivers were Ted Pickering and his brother George who had started in trucking in 1950, sharing the one truck – a 1942 ex-Army Dodge.

Ted eventually became general manager of Lake Boga Transport, running it from his home in Swan Hill, while George took on the role of operations manager. The Pickering family eventually gained 100% ownership of the company along with Mildura-based Kelly's & Young Trucking, and out of that emerged Pickering Transport Group.

Honouring their fathers.

Along with Roger and Daryl, Jamie Pickering – son of George – is a member of the leadership team that is committed to building on the legacy of the company founders and continuing the family business culture that permeates Pickering Transport Group.

"The thing that drives us as a family company is honouring what our fathers did," says Daryl Pickering. "Our genuine goal is to keep the business going as a family concern for as long as possible, and we have six third generation family members working in the company to keep that goal alive."

Roger Pickering recalls that when he started in the business in 1974 "we only had one depot, in Swan Hill, and may be 15 trucks" – a far cry from the business today with its 14 depots and fleet of 160 trucks. "Most of our growth has been organic," says Daryl. "We've built strong relationships with our customers and are willing to grow with them as they expand their businesses."

The company today operates from depots in Swan Hill, Kerang, Mildura, Shepparton and Bendigo in Victoria; Euston, Dubbo, Orange and Wagga Wagga in NSW; and Renmark in South Australia. The company also has depots in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.



Transporting fresh produce from the wide Murray River region to all other points around the country is an important part of the Pickering freight task.



Top left: Roger Pickering (left) is celebrating 45 years in the family business in 2019 while brother Daryl has clocked up 25 years this year.

Top right: Early 1950s... George Pickering (left) with brother Ted and their father Bill Pickering (in the ex-army Dodge) with a load of pumpkins from the family farm. Below right: One of Lake Boga's first Internationals, a CD1840 powered by a Cummins C160.

The Pickering business is roughly one-third refrigerated freight, one-third containers, and one-third general freight. The company also has 21 rigid trucks – Isuzus – dedicated to a Coca Cola contract in which 450 to 500 cartons are delivered daily by each of the trucks to cafes, clubs and take-aways in northern Victoria and mid-western and southern NSW.

Since the company is based in the heart of Australia's food bowl, transporting fresh produce from the wide Murray River region to all other points around the country is an important part of the Pickering freight task.

Around 20 percent of Pickering's revenue stream is transporting fresh produce to Woolworths and Coles distribution centres.

For Woolworths alone, the company runs 11 B-doubles of produce daily out of Adelaide for supermarkets in regional South Australia and northern Victoria.

The company also moves around 8000 shipping containers of bulk wine a year, using a 24,000-litre bladder in the containers. These 20 ft containers are transported out of the South Australian Riverland as well as the Mildura region to Adelaide wharf. Two AB triples, operating at 107 tonnes gross, are currently involved in the task, pulled by Cummins X15-powered Kenworth T610s.

Cummins... cornerstone of the fleet.

Cummins has long been a cornerstone of the Pickering fleet. "Our relationship with Cummins is one we value highly," says Daryl. In fact, it was 56 years ago that the first Cummins engine powered a Pickering truck – a 160 hp CF-160 in an International ABD184.

The first Cummins engine to significantly advance diesel power in Australian trucking, the CF-160 was a naturally aspirated in-line six displacing 464 in3 (7.6 litres). It delivered maximum power at 2800 rpm while peak torque of 345 lb ft was at 1700 rpm.

It soon became apparent to truck operators like Ted and George Pickering that diesel engines could halve fuel bills and significantly improve life-to-overhaul compared with petrol engines.

“ Pickering Transport Group congratulates Cummins on reaching an incredible milestone of 100 years in business. To achieve longevity in business requires an enormous dedication and continuous change to remain relevant to your customers. Ted and George Pickering purchased their first Cummins-powered truck in the early 1960s and our business has enjoyed a close working relationship with Cummins ever since. This included the first ever Cummins mechanic in Swan Hill working from our own workshop. As a 24/7 regional operator who doesn't necessarily travel the major highways, aftersales service is incredibly important and Cummins has delivered and we enjoy knowing the company will stand behind its product. As transport plays a vital role in Australia's future, we look forward to continuing a great relationship with Cummins. Well done to all involved with Cummins. - Daryl Pickering.

Today, with a fleet fuel bill totalling around \$18 million a year, Pickering Transport Group is reliant more than ever on technology improvements such as those provided by the latest generation X15 Cummins to generate further cost efficiencies.

Cummins' service support has obviously been a key to the long-standing relationship. Today, around 70 Cummins 15-litre engines – mainly in Kenworths – dominate in the Pickering fleet. The latest Kenworths include four T610s and three K200s, all with their X15 engines rated at 550 hp. Fleet maintenance is carried out at four workshops, in Swan Hill, Mildura, Renmark and Adelaide.

"Most of our business is done on a gentleman's agreement basis," says Roger Pickering. Obviously, it has been a successful way of doing business for a company built on sensible goals, long-lasting relationships with customers of all sizes, a willingness to grow with these customers as they expand their businesses, and one that has the backing of loyal employees. ■