



Blenners

TRANSPORT



OH, WHAT A PEELING!

Kenworth and Cummins provide the high utilisation needed by Blenners to move the tidal wave of bananas from north Queensland.

Les Blennerhassett contemplates my question, then taps a few keys on his mobile phone calculator... “330,000 cartons a week,” he says matter-of-factly. That’s cartons of bananas Blenners Transport hauls out of north Queensland each week to Australia-wide markets.

That statistic highlights the magnitude of Blenners’ involvement in the banana industry in north Queensland which supplies around 94% of Australia’s banana production. It also highlights why high equipment utilisation is so important for the Tully-based family company, started in 1988 by Les and Judy Blennerhassett.

Blenners’ fleet of 150 linehaul prime movers is dominated by Kenworths with Cummins ISXe5 power, a specification that critically provides the high utilisation needed to move the tidal wave of bananas from north Queensland to capital city markets.

Diversification after Cyclone Larry.

Seventeen roadtrains alone are dedicated to banana haulage to Perth. Overall, Blenners moves around 50% of north Queensland bananas to the capital cities – a task that is carried out 52 weeks of the year since bananas are not seasonal.

In recent years, the company has also ramped up its rail business with 40 rail containers easing the pressure on the truck fleet while providing a cost-effective option for long distance transport.

Bananas aren’t the only high volume fruit transported by Blenners out of north Queensland.

“We had to diversify our customer base in 2006 after Cyclone Larry destroyed most of the banana crop.

“ We get good support from Cummins nationwide and we pay a lot of attention to our own preventive maintenance and trend analysis.”





Les Blennerhasset (left) with Cummins national automotive accounts manager Nathan Usher (centre) and regional branch manager Ralph Cremer.

We went from doing 110 loads a week to four loads. It was a testing time," Les reflects.

Mangoes and avocados from the Mareeba region on the Atherton Tablelands came to the rescue with Blennerhasset courting agricultural producers in the region for their freight work. "Last year, we moved 15,500 pallets of mangoes over four months – November to February. That's good diversification," he says.

Robust, fuel efficient.

He points out that the introduction of the Cummins ISXe5 in the fleet, and the robustness and fuel efficiency it has brought to the operation, has negated the need for another truck brand at Blenners. "There's no sense having another brand," he says flatly.

The 15-litre Cummins engines are set at 550 hp/1850 lb ft for B-doubles and 600 hp/2050 lb ft for roadtrains, and any measure to improve fuel consumption just a fraction is looked at closely in view of the monthly fuel bill of \$1.7 million.

Blenners is targeting 1.8 million km without major overhaul. A strong focus on preventive maintenance sees minimal component change-out during the life of the engine while ensuring best possible uptime.

Les points out that fleet reliability is at a level today where breakdowns on the road are rare and if an engine is involved the Cummins Support Centre with its 1300 hotline is contacted. "We get good support from Cummins nationwide and we pay a lot of attention to our own preventive maintenance and trend analysis," he says.

Maximising fleet uptime.

Quarterly meetings are held with the Cummins account team – regional branch manager Ralph Cremer, national automotive accounts manager Nathan Usher and Townsville branch manager Kevin Speed – to discuss any issues and suggest improvements. Maximising fleet uptime is the focus.



The relationship with Cummins has seen close to 150 red engines specified by Blenners in Kenworths since 2008. This year, 24 new Kenworths with Cummins X15 power have been put into service – a far cry from the days when Les and wife Judy wondered if they could afford to put one new truck on the road a year!

In fact, the trend at Blenners in recent years is to have around 22 new Kenworths enter the fleet a year to cater for business growth and also to replace older trucks. Interestingly, the manual 18-speed Eaton transmission remains the preferred stirrer at Blenners due to its durability.

Blennerhasset's knowledge of bananas and the banana industry hasn't accrued just through his trucking business. Before he and Judy ventured into trucking in 1988, their roots were in farming – bananas and sugarcane. "The reason we bought a truck in 1988 – a Kenworth T650 – was to cart our own bananas to market," Les recalls.

Understanding the customers.

The business has grown on the back of customer service – understanding the needs of farmers and providing the flexibility that has encouraged a strong relationship with Blenners Transport as a family company. "As our customers have grown, we've grown with them," he says.

Blenners' continuation as a family company long term also seems likely with Les and Judy's two sons involved in the business, Roger as Brisbane manager and Ben as Townsville manager.

The company operates seven depots in Queensland – Cairns, Mareeba, Tully, Innisfail, Townsville, Mackay and Brisbane – and offers storage and warehouse services for freezer, chiller and dry freight at its Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns facilities. The new Brisbane facility represents an investment of around \$30 million while new depots are also to be built in Mackay and Cairns.

With premium equipment brands dominating at Blenners and a long established focus on preventive maintenance and trend analysis, fleet reliability is at the high level needed to ensure customer satisfaction is the backbone of a highly successful business. Just as important to this success are the personal relationships formed over time and maintained with dedication. ■



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