

DriveLine

Econic -
Pride of NZ
Fire Service



Sprinter Takes Dental Health to NZ Kids





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The end of 2009 is fast approaching and this year has certainly been an interesting one for the industry and for New Zealand's economy as a whole. This issue of Driveline is full of articles on our truck and van customers who are all enjoying advances and growth within their own sectors. From the NZ Fire Service with the latest Mercedes-Benz Econic long-reach aerials rescuing and fighting fires in high rise buildings to a fleet of mobile dental vans which enables technicians to remotely address the dental health of children nationwide.

We introduce our first fully integrated dealership Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans representing all the group's brands of heavy and light commercial vehicles under the same roof and talk to Keith Andrews about his aim to make Keith Andrews Trucks Ltd the market leader in the bus and coach industry.

We're looking forward to a positive year in 2010 with continued growth for all our brands and wish all our customers success for the rest of the year.

Ian Walker
General Manager - Commercial Vehicles
Mercedes-Benz New Zealand Limited

DriveLine Contributor

One of New Zealand's most experienced motoring, motorsport and road transport journalists, Jon Addison was Chief Reporter of the Auckland Star and editor of The 8 O'Clock sports paper before becoming founding editor of the industry leading magazine New Zealand Trucking, a role he held for 15 years. He now specialises in light commercials and has twice driven Mercedes-Benz Vito vans in the Energywise economy rally, winning the class driver ranking on both occasions.

Issue 09

With its low-slung Mercedes-Benz Econic cab and unusual axle configuration the New Zealand Fire Service's latest appliance is certainly noteworthy, but its sophisticated fire fighting equipment makes it really spectacular. 02

Brighter smiles across the country - that's going to be the outcome as a fleet of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter mobile dental clinics ranges through schools and communities, assessing the oral health of youngsters and educating them and their parents. 04

Fulton Hogan's new Freightliner Century Class tractor unit is hot stuff - and not just because it's the North Harbour branch's flagship. Its load of bitumen is also hot, and is kept that way by advanced new technology. 06

Wonderland Tours owner Raymond Lee named his company for the South Island's stunning scenery and he ensures his customers share his feelings by showing them around in the biggest Mercedes-Benz Sprinter luxury coach on the road. 07

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Wellington-based Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans has become the country's first integrated Daimler Trucks dealer, with the Japanese Fuso brand joining Mercedes-Benz, Freightliner and Sterling under a single banner throughout the lower North Island. 09

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Econic Is The Long Arm Of The Fire Service

Few heavy trucks are more specialised than fire appliances and none in the 824-strong New Zealand Fire Service fleet are more sophisticated than the Mercedes-Benz Econic long-reach aerials designed for rescue and to fight fires in high-rise buildings.

In fact they are so specialised they are the only appliances in the fleet that are imported fully built, rather than as bare cabs and chassis ready for local fitment of their fire-fighting gear.

The global market leader in truck-mounted hydraulic platforms, Bronto Skylifts, builds the appliances at Tampere in Finland on Econic chassis ordered from New Zealand and shipped directly from Mercedes-Benz in Germany. The first was commissioned by the Fire Service just over three years ago and the fourth is due to arrive later this year, and will be the first Euro 5 compliant unit.

Once in New Zealand the Econics require only installation of locally compliant 230-volt battery charging and engine heating systems and locker fit-outs to be ready for fighting fires.

The Econics have the longest reach among New Zealand fire appliances, with a working height of 32 metres enabling them to access 12 storeys high. Operation at 32 metres requires a highly sophisticated vehicle and extensive operator training, says the Fire Service National Fleet Manager, John Allardyce.

“For example, siting the appliance at a fire has to take into consideration factors like heat and smoke and wind load on the boom,” he explains. “We need to operate at arm’s length in case of a building collapse. “And we have to take into account the reaction forces from pumping water at 4500 litres a minute,” he adds. “They can cause the platform to flex a couple of metres.”

The sophistication of the appliance helps the fire fighters. For example, if the stabilising outriggers can’t be fully extended because of site restrictions, the on-board computer takes this into account when calculating the safe operating envelope. Reach can be as

important as height, such as when getting above large factories to cut off the spread of a fire.

Delivering significant volumes of water from a safe vantage and rescuing people trapped by flames are the main functions of the Econic Bronto Skylift appliances.

A telescopic water-way along the main boom carries water from a pumping appliance beside the aerial to a monitor on a three-metre fly boom

For rescue work there’s a cage rated at 400kg – sufficient for four adults – and a telescopic ladder up the side of the boom, which can be rotated 360 degrees.



The cage can also be hydraulically pivoted 45 degrees to align it to the side of the building even when the appliance can’t be sited squarely on to it.

The stabilising outriggers extend hydraulically, their landing legs are also hydraulic and there’s a central automatic leveling system. Load cells connected to the stabiliser and boom hydraulics feed data to an on-board computer, which calculates the unit’s safe operating envelope.

John Allardyce says the 21-tonne machine has a crew of two – driver and fire officer – and is usually called in after other appliance crews have assessed a fire situation.

While their Bronto Skylift fire fighting equipment makes the appliances rare in New Zealand, the Mercedes-Benz Econics on which they are

mounted are also unusual, and not just for their low-mounted cabs. For a start, they are in 6x2 configuration, with a mid-mounted steering axle just ahead of the drive axle.

“Fire trucks have to be able to go everywhere, even in cities like Wellington with tight streets all over the place, so manoeuvrability is vital for us,” explains John Allardyce. “The 6x2 Econic actually has a better turning circle than a 4x2.”

The Econic chassis and 7.2 litre 330hp engine are similar to those used in the Mercedes-Benz Axor, although the fire appliances are fitted with Allison World Series automatic transmissions with retarders.

With airbag suspension on all three axles the Mercedes-Benz appliances also offer a smooth ride and with disc brakes and ABS all round they stop securely.

Safe handling is a priority for the Fire Service and John Allardyce says the forward-mounted Econic cab allows the heavy telescopic boom to be carried as low as possible, reducing the vehicle’s centre of gravity and improving its cornering ability.

“It also enables them to fit into our fire stations in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, where we operate the big 32 metre aerials,” he adds.



Sprinters Ensure A Brighter Smile On Wheels



A government initiative to improve the oral and dental health of children and adolescents throughout New Zealand is becoming a reality thanks to a fleet of Mercedes-Benz Sprinter cab and chassis vehicles.

The vehicles have been commissioned by the 21 District Health Boards to operate at the front line of the project as mobile dental clinics where youngsters will have their teeth and oral health assessed.

Some 48 of the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter mobile clinics will ultimately travel from school to school around the country identifying those in need of treatment and educating them and their parents about oral health.

Another 50 larger truck-based and semi-trailer mobile clinics will tour schools to carry out the

dental work identified during assessments in the Sprinters.

The mobile dental clinics project arose from a Government initiative about four years ago to improve the dental health of children and adolescents by measures such as upgrading community dental clinics and improving the training of dental therapists. Ultimately a number of clinics may be handed back to schools for other uses, others are being refurbished or upgraded, some new clinics built and the mobile clinics were established.

"The mobile clinics will operate on a hub and spoke basis, based on a larger dental clinic where specialised treatment can be done," explains District Health Boards New Zealand (DHBNZ) Project Manager Don Shewan.

"Some of the mobile clinics will replace clinics at schools while others will augment school clinics."

He adds that the mobile clinic system is established and operates in parts of the United States, England and Australia. "But nowhere else has the same extent of coverage as New Zealand will have," Don Shewan points out. "A number of DHBs have already been operating mobile clinics, but this is the first time there has been one standard and concerted strategy throughout New Zealand."

The contract to build the mobile clinics was won by Hamilton-based Action Motor Bodies, with CI Munro a part of listed Tourism Holdings Ltd. The final design was the result of input from District Health Boards, a team of dentists, dental therapists and biomedical engineers and Action Motor Bodies Business Unit Manager Chris Devoy.

The Sprinter-based Level One assessment units are supported by 12 mid-sized surgical units and 38 two-axle semi-trailers.

Although outwardly stylish for coach-built vans, with aerodynamic "Luton" sections above the cabs, careful integration between the cabs and bodies and polished aluminum chequer-plate lower sections, it's inside that the Sprinter-based mobile clinics are really stunning.

For a start, they meet the same standards required for patient areas in hospitals and use heat pumps to maintain a constant interior temperature, regardless of ambient conditions. Along with hot and cold water supply from stainless steel tanks, 12 volt and 230 volt power supply and the expected dentist's chair and associated equipment, there are full digital x-ray units. "The mobile clinics have wireless capability," adds Don Shewan. "A digital x-ray can be emailed to a central database and accessed from another mobile unit when surgery is being performed."

To ensure a stable working platform for dental therapists the vans are equipped with powerful hydraulic Bigfoot Automatic Leveling Systems. The Sprinter chassis are strengthened to enable the vehicles to be completely supported by the hydraulics.

The Mercedes-Benz Sprinters chosen for the clinics are 515CDI cab-and-chassis with 150hp diesel engines and fully automatic transmissions. Standard features like Adaptive Electronic Stability Program (ESP) and powerful disc brakes with ABS anti-locking and electronic force distribution were among the reasons Mercedes-Benz vehicles were selected.

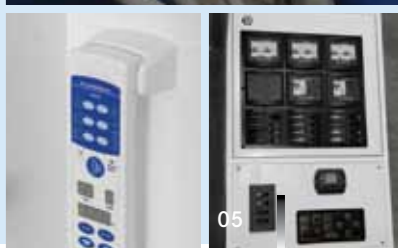
"Even though they are relatively large vehicles District Health Boards insisted they had highest safety features along with being easy to drive," says Don Shewan. "District Health Boards decided on automatics so dental therapists

could drive them easily."

One of the challenges faced by Action Motor Bodies was to keep the finished vehicles light enough to be driven on Class One (car) driver licences. This was achieved by using 38mm insulated laminated walls on alloy framing, with lightweight plywood or PSP multiboard in the interiors.

But it's probably the attention to detail that's most impressive in the Sprinter mobile clinics. For example, the fold-out aluminum chequer-plate entry steps have been carefully designed for easy use by both small children and the tallest adults.

The first four Mercedes-Benz Sprinter mobile clinics are already being used by District Health Boards to assess the dental and oral health of youngsters in Christchurch, Hawkes Bay and Northland, with the full complement of 48 due to be commissioned during the next three years.



Freightliner Flagship Is Hot Stuff



The loads it carts are invariably hot, but the first Freightliner Century Class tractor unit in the familiar colours of civil contracting and roading company Fulton Hogan is hot stuff, too.

Based at Fulton Hogan North Harbour, at Silverdale, the spectacular 8x4 Freightliner pulling a quad-axle bitumen tanker may be the company's flagship in the region, but it's winning more plaudits for its operating efficiency than for its appearance. For a start, the 30,000 litre tank has New Zealand's first thermal blanket wrap insulation system, which results in minimal heat loss for the bitumen during transport. "We have temperature gauges on the tank and they are checked regularly," explains Fulton Hogan North Harbour transport manager Bruce Ryan. "The bitumen is at 150deg C when we load it and there's very little heat loss in transit. Although there are heating elements they are really only needed overnight." The blanket wrap saves around 800kg compared with a typical stainless steel insulated tank, and

low tare weight was one of the driving forces in selection of the Freightliner. Fuel economy and the potential for an extended operational life were the others. "We took those factors into account and stacked the Freightliner up against other trucks from Japan and Europe," says Bruce Ryan. "The Freightliner came out clearly on top." The twin-steer tractor unit is a 120-inch day cab Century Class unit powered by a 14-litre 60 Series Detroit Diesel engine rated at 470hp and 1850ft/lb. It drives through an 18-speed RTLO18918A-AS3 Auto Shift gearbox and 46,000lb Meritor diffs on Freightliner Airliner suspension. The new quad-axle semi was made by Fulton Hogan's engineering workshops in Dunedin and, like the Freightliner tractor unit pulling it, has disc brakes on all axles. In fact, along with efficiency Fulton Hogan stresses operating safety and the Hendrickson Intraax trailer suspension was chosen for

its low centre of gravity, which increased the rig's stability. The truck is also speed limited to 90km/h for both safety and fuel efficiency. Bruce Ryan says the Fulton Hogan Freightliner delivers hot bitumen mostly to asphalt plants in Auckland and Silverdale, collecting the product at the Auckland tank farm or from as far afield as Marsden Point and Mount Maunganui. With a 5000-strong team Fulton Hogan describes itself as a major trans-Tasman civil contracting company with interests across a broad range of products and services in the roading, quarrying, civil construction, infrastructure maintenance and land development sectors. The company was founded in Otago in 1933 by Jules Fulton and Bob Hogan, grew rapidly throughout the South Island in the 1960s and expanded into Australia in 2000. In 2002 it was named New Zealand company of the year.



“The Freightliner came out clearly on top.”

A Sprinter In Wonderland

In the toughly contested South Island tour coach market operators may not be able to show their customers a better snow-clad mountain or a bluer lake - but they can ensure a more enjoyable experience by offering a higher standard of coach. Experienced Christchurch operator Wonderland Tours Ltd is doing that with the first maximum-sized Mercedes-Benz Sprinter coach in New Zealand. Owner Raymond Lee says the reputation and image of the Mercedes-Benz brand among his mostly-Asian tourists was a significant factor in selecting the Sprinter for his smaller, more exclusive groups. "It's a factor we certainly advertise with our tour agents in Asia," he says. Raymond Lee formed Wonderland Tours a decade ago and now operates seven coaches, up to a 38-seater, from his base in Bishopdale. As the company name suggests, the firm specializes in showing visitors the spectacular scenery of the whole South Island. "We previously had a 12-seater Mercedes-Benz MB140 for the smaller groups and it proved to be quite a good vehicle," he says. "So naturally we looked at Mercedes-Benz again when it came time to replace it." That led him to Richard Field, the Light Commercial Vehicle Sales Manager at Armstrong Prestige, who developed detailed spread sheets to compare the Sprinter with rival vehicles in the 18-seat coach class. "With the Sprinter it would have been possible

to fit an extra row of seats and have a 21-seat coach - 20 passengers plus the driver," Richard Field explains. "But Wonderland Tours wanted greater luggage capacity, so settled on the 18-seat configuration." Adds Raymond Lee: "It's still the biggest Sprinter coach in New Zealand, so far at least." The coach is based on a Sprinter 518 CDI Extra Long van with a potent 184hp 3.0-litre V6 diesel engine driving through a six-speed manual gearbox. Raymond Lee says he considered an automatic transmission but feels the manual gearbox gives the professional commercial vehicle driver greater communication with his vehicle. The Sprinter was imported as a coach, but without seats or carpet and some features, such as an automatically retracting entry step, required to meet New Zealand Passenger Service Vehicle regulations. Richard Field says this work was carried out in Christchurch by Hale Manufacturing to a standard that is at least the equal of the best from Europe. Raymond Lee says the spread sheet calculations that took the Sprinter's purchase price, low fuel consumption, long service intervals and low whole of life operating costs and broke them down to cost-per-seat were a major factor in choosing the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter for the latest addition to his fleet. But operational aspects also made the Sprinter a clear choice - such as the large tinted windows, "which enable our customers to enjoy the best views of our scenic wonderland," he concludes.



Customer Trucks



Unique Argosy

The first Freightliner Argosy twin-steer tractor unit with a 110-inch raised roof cab to go to work in New Zealand – and probably the world – is now carting temperature-controlled freight between Auckland and Palmerston North. The spectacular tractor unit pulls a quad-axle Fairfax refrigerated semi-trailer for owners John Butler and Dale Kutia, who trade as J D Carriers out of Whenuapai, west of Auckland. It replaced a 6x4 Argosy after a million kilometers. Features inside the massive cab include a wide double bunk with a fridge drawer underneath it, an upper single bunk and a flat screen television with a DVD player.

Sales consultant: Ron Price, Trucks & Trailers Ltd



Southern Spreaders

A trio of new Mercedes-Benz Axor 4x4 fertiliser spreaders can be seen in the paddocks of Southland in the familiar colours of Andrews Transport Ltd.

The new 1833AK Axors replace three 1828 Atego spreaders, which have been on duty for the Balfour-based firm since 2000, mostly in the Balfour-Riversdale-Gore area of Southland.

With their distinctive dual wheels on the steer axle as well as on the drive axle, the new trucks pull three-axle self-loading bulk trailers to the farms.

Sales consultant: Barry Sherer, Trucks South Ltd



Actros Heavyweights

Extra-heavy chassis and running gear enable a pair of new Mercedes-Benz Actros tippers to cart payloads of 20 tonne and more in Dunedin's Blackhead Quarry.

The 3344K Actros 3 six-wheelers replace two older Mercedes-Benz tippers. The new trucks are powered by Mercedes-Benz OM501 Euro 4 engines, driving through Mercedes-Benz G240 16-speed gearboxes.

With heavy-duty steel springs on all three axles, steel dump bodies and uprated chassis and running gear, the Blackhead Quarries Ltd Actros tippers have a gross vehicle weight rating of 35 tonne.

Sales consultant: Barry Sherer, Trucks South Ltd



Axor Bitumen Sprayer

When it comes to bitumen spraying few machines can match the accuracy of this new Mercedes-Benz Axor six-wheeler with its French Rincheval tar sprayer. That's because the management computer for the Axor's OM457LA engine interfaces directly with the sprayer's computer to match the truck's speed with the sprayer's output for different spray patterns. The 2643K/36 has been put to work by Blacktop Construction Ltd from its Port Timaru depot and can be spotted re-sealing highways and county roads anywhere in the South Island. Driver Sam Henry gets the best out of the 428hp engine through a G210 16-speed gearbox, the 6x4's power train giving him ample performance to tow a four-axle bitumen tanker.

Sales consultant: Gerald Stanley, Trucks South Ltd

First Integrated Daimler Truck Dealer

A new era for Daimler Trucks began in July when Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans was appointed as the first fully integrated dealership representing all the group's brands.

This brings Japanese Fuso trucks under the same roof as the German Mercedes-Benz trucks and vans and North American Freightliner and Sterling trucks for sales, service and parts support.

"For us it means the opportunity to present products to potential clients at every level," says Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans CEO Richard Wharton. "We go right through the horsepower range and right through the size range – there's a van or truck for every application."

The new dealership covers the North Island south of Taupo, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, with headquarters in Western Hutt Road, Petone.

Phil Wheelans had a background in trucks before establishing national heavy equipment hire operation The Hire Company in 1996. He and former National Business Development Manager for Mitsubishi New Zealand Richard Wharton joined forces to establish Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans at Petone at the beginning of last year.

In July 2008 the company purchased long-standing Palmerston North truck dealership Jolly & Mills, which has continued unchanged apart from falling under the Phil Wheelans Trucks and Vans name. Manawatu trucking identity Ron Berg has stayed on as the Palmerston North branch dealer principal. With the purchase of Jolly & Mills the organisation became the largest Fuso truck dealership south of Auckland and with the integration of the other Daimler Trucks brands becomes one of the largest heavy truck operations in the country.

"In February we're opening a new \$5 million facility at Trentham, which will become a transport hub," says Richard Wharton. "As well as a truck display area, service workshop and parts centre we will have an engineering company equipped to build truck bodies, along with a sand blasting and painting operation. It will be a real one-stop shop."

The company already has sales offices in Napier and New Plymouth and a presence in Taupo with The Hire Company and Richard Wharton says that by the time the operation is at full strength throughout its area it will employ more than 50 staff.

"One of our key strengths is the synergies between the hire company and the truck sales and resales business," he adds. "The Hire Company operates over 1000 units, including a range of trucks from two-and-a-half tonne up and this offers all sorts of options for our customers, including being able to offer hire vehicles while the customer's truck is being serviced."

And he says the Daimler Trucks appointment provides an "exciting opportunity" through the ability to offer the widest range of trucks and vans in New Zealand, from a Mercedes-Benz Vito van, through the Fuso Canter, which is the biggest selling single truck model in the country, the Fuso Fighter and Shogun fleet trucks, light but powerful and fuel efficient Sterling and Freightliner trucks, high-tech Mercedes-Benz Atego, Axor and Actros trucks and Detroit Diesel engines to 250-tonne heavy haulage machines.



Mercedes-Benz Aims High In Bus And Coach Market

Mercedes-Benz is back in the New Zealand bus and coach industry and aiming for market leadership with the appointment of Keith Andrews Trucks Ltd as national bus and coach dealer.

“Mercedes-Benz is the market leader in Western Europe and dominates the Australian market,” says Dealer Principal Keith Andrews. “It will take some time to get our range complete but our objective is to become number one in New Zealand. That’s what gets us out of bed each morning.”

The new national dealer starts with probably the most complete range of passenger service vehicles in the country, beginning with the Mercedes-Benz Vito van in the 8-11 seat class, then the Sprinter in the 12-20 seat sector, the Mitsubishi Rosa as a 24-seater and covering the larger end of the market with Mercedes-Benz vehicles ranging from 35 to potentially 50 seats.

“However the bus and coach market is very specialised and we’re currently evaluating the European specifications to determine which models will suit New Zealand operators

without too many changes,” Keith Andrews explains.

Whereas around 250,000 buses and coaches are sold around the world each year, the total New Zealand market is approximately 1000 units, some half of which are at the large end. And even that small market is subdivided into three specific sectors: luxury tour coaches, the school bus and charter sector and low-floor city buses.

Keith Andrews says his range includes models that are leading contenders in all of those sectors and the first job will be to ensure operators around the country become familiar with them.

He said the Daimler Trucks emphasis on the heavy truck market had led to the bus and coach market being neglected, but the Mercedes-Benz brand remained strong and its return to the sector was well received at the recent New Zealand Bus and Coach Association annual conference in Auckland, where a number of the current models were displayed.

While the existing Mercedes-Benz van dealers

will continue to market Vito and Sprinter buses and coaches around the country, Keith Andrews Trucks will include them in the overall range and will have sole responsibility for the larger buses and coaches.

Keith Andrews describes buses and coaches as “a little bit of a passion” and is personally directing the renewed push into the market, although he expects in time to appoint a passenger service vehicle sales specialist.

A car mechanic by trade, he has spent his whole career with Todd Motors and Mitsubishi dealerships. After representing New Zealand overseas in yachting he was assigned to sell boats as Todd Motors held the Chrysler outboard agency.

“But in the late ‘70s there didn’t look to be much of a future in boats and Todds moved out of the marine industry, so I decided to try my hand at selling trucks,” Keith Andrews says. “There was a lot of upheaval in the industry at the time, with deregulation of the road transport industry and the appearance of used imports, so it was certainly challenging.”

In 1992 he established Keith Andrews Trucks

“It will take some time to get our range complete but our objective is to become number one in New Zealand.

That’s what gets us out of bed each morning.”

Keith Andrews



with a staff of five and just four years later opened his present flagship dealership in Whangarei, where the staff now number around 40.

“The timing was perfect,” he laughs. “As soon as we opened the doors the economy nosedived and we almost went broke.” However the fledgling operation survived to become one of the largest Fuso truck dealerships in the country, covering all of the North Island north of Auckland Harbour Bridge.

Right from the start buses became an increasingly important part of the Keith

Andrews Trucks operation, particularly when the Rosa joined the Mitsubishi vehicle range in 2000. For the past half dozen years the dealership has also been marketing Mercedes-Benz Vitos and Sprints, both in van and passenger service vehicle forms.

While a lot of bus and coach sales result from calling on transport operators and coach builders, Keith Andrews says his team will also respond to enquiries from customers anywhere in the country: “You ring us and we’ll be there,” he promises.

Service, repairs and parts for the buses and

coaches will be handled by the Daimler Trucks national network.

Keith Andrews is clearly relishing the opportunity to indulge his passion for buses and coaches in meeting head-on the challenge of taking Mercedes-Benz to the top of the New Zealand market.

“Because it’s such a specialised market every vehicle is different,” he says. “Along with a variety of seating layouts, the choice of factory or coach-built body and different axle configurations possible, even the engine location has to be taken into account.”



Big Is Better For Five-axle Sterling

A big increase in payload and reduced Road User Charges sounds like every truck operator's dream, but the first five-axle Sterling on New Zealand roads has achieved both targets.

The spectacular concrete agitator truck is the first of six 10x4 Sterlings being put into service by national ready mix supplier Allied Concrete as part of a 20-truck order.

"We will be using them in places such as Blenheim and North Taranaki where there are longer lead times and like Christchurch and Auckland, which are relatively flat and open," says Bob Officer, the General Manager of Allied Concrete. "They won't be used in places like Dunedin or Wellington where the leads are short and the streets are steep and narrow."

While the majority of Allied's fleet of around 300 mixer trucks are 6x4 or 8x4, the extra axle in the 10x4 provides the capacity for a larger bowl, enabling it to deliver about 7.4 cubic metres of concrete – approximately a cubic metre more than an 8x4 can manage.

Along with the extra payload, the fifth axle under the Sterling chassis maximizes the rig's Road User Charges efficiency.

While it might seem straightforward enough to bolt on an additional axle, development of the rig took the combined efforts of Allied Concrete staff, Trucks South Ltd product support manager Graham Woods and the Sterling factory in the United States.

"With long-term durability in mind we decided to accept the weight penalty of a much heavier high tensile steel chassis than normal, built at the Sterling factory to the right length so there's no need for fitching," explains Graham Woods. "The truck arrives here as a three-axle unit with an extremely long rear overhang."

The second steer axle and a tag axle behind the drive axle bogie are fitted in Auckland before the bare truck is sent to Goughs Engineering in Christchurch to have the bowl and associated equipment fitted.

The tag axle is connected to the truck's rear air suspension and drops to the ground to take a share of the load when weight on the drive axles exceeds 13 tonne. Once the load has been delivered the tag axle lifts automatically to ensure the best possible traction for the drive axles.

"The driver was on an 8x4 before and reckons the Sterling will get in as far even on soft ground," says Bob Officer. "The only downside really is it's a little less maneuverable."

The Sterling is an LT7500 with a Cummins ISC diesel engine rated at 315hp. Its gearbox is an Eaton RTO11909ALL, which is essentially an eight-speeder with three crawler gears, equipping the truck for ultra-slow speed work like pouring motorway barriers.

Whereas Allied Concrete's 8x4 Sterlings are on Hendrickson rubber rear suspensions, five of the 10x4 mixers are on Hendrickson air and the sixth will be trialled on Freightliner air suspension.



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