

HEAVY IRON

WORDS AND IMAGES
BY VIVIENNE HALDANE



Thomas Hornblow

For Hawke's Bay owner-driver Thomas Hornblow, buying a brand-new Kenworth T659 was a no-brainer. Viv Haldane catches up with him to find out why Kenworths are his first choice.

It was hard to miss Thomas Hornblow's red Kenworth as it came into view along Highway 50 bound for Gwavas Forest in Central Hawke's Bay. It's a bit of eye-candy: gleaming red paint, standout signwriting, and if you look closer, you'll spot Aces High on the front wheel arch—Thomas' company's logo, which refers to his favourite song by Iron Maiden. You'll even find the English heavy metal band's mascot Eddie. And at only a month old—the truck is in pristine condition.

Thomas has been driving trucks for a decade now: six of those in logging and two as an owner-driver for his business Longhorn Trucking Ltd. He is currently contracted to Pan Pac Forest Products at Whirinaki, near Napier.

Machinery over stock

Driving was always on the cards for 28-year-old Thomas who grew up on a farm but preferred machinery to stock. So at the first chance to get some driving experience under his belt, he took a job with Brownrigg Agriculture, driving a mix of tractors and trucks. He worked for two years before leaving to cart metal for forestry roads with Hawke's Bay company, Gair Contracting,

Aces High cuts a striking image in Gwavas Forest



Thomas makes a final check before take off

which gave him a good insight into the workings of the forestry industry.

"I guess I've always been working my way up to where I wanted to be – driving logging trucks," Thomas says. "Even washing trucks at Farmer's Transport in Waipawa when I was still at high school gave me the chance to check out different trucks and decide what I liked best."

The first truck he owned as an owner-driver was a 2010 9800i International Eagle, cab over unit that came with his first contract with Pan Pac. He sold that in April, and then filled in for another logging contractor until he took ownership of the Kenworth in June.

The wish list

Having previously driven a Kenworth T659 for Alex Hayes at Pan Pac, Thomas says it was easy to choose his first truck.

"I knew they were bulletproof trucks, comfortable to drive, and besides, they just look cool," he says.

Thomas' rig has everything he wants. Putting it together was made easy, thanks to a team effort that included the Kenworth factories in Bayswater in Melbourne, Australia, along with a team of businesses in Rotorua. Patchells built the trailer and log gear for the truck, Darren Caulfield did the signwriting, Bigfoot Equipment Ltd for

central tyre inflation, and Brolube for the central greasing.

"The best thing about having a brand-new truck is you get to have it exactly as you want. I went into Eastern Trucks in Napier and sat down with Mark O'Hara from Southpac Trucks to decide on the specifications," he says.

"I went for the full gauge package with no blank spaces on the dashboard. I chose Hendrickson PRIMAAX rear air suspension, instead of the standard Kenworth air glide. I spoke to a few guys who were running their stock trucks on PRIMAAX and they all rated it highly. The PRIMAAX is more expensive to purchase but already, the difference in the ride and handling is noticeable, so I am happy with it. It also gives extra stability through corners and uneven roads. I haven't had a chance to test the traction yet, but that time will come the further into winter we get."

When you are driving for long hours, having a comfortable ride makes life easier. The inside of the cab is compact—"no need to carry the kitchen sink"—but there's room for all the important things.

After much consideration, Thomas decided on five-axle trailer. "It made more sense to go for the five-axle: the money you spend at the start when you are building it far outweighs the money you might spend five years down the track, turning a four-axle into a five-axle trailer."

The decision comes with its pros and cons. On the plus side, the ability to cart greater weights will probably help pay off his truck faster.

"Going 50 max straightaway means there's a three-tonne advantage in your payload," he says.

On the minus side, there's some bridge and road restrictions for five-axle trailers, and as Thomas says, "There's not a lot of Saturday work for five-axle trailers yet. But once the local councils uprate the bridges, it will free up more jobs."

Overall, Thomas is rapt with what he has.

"It is a top-notch truck and everything has been done right the first time," he says. "If I did need to go back and get something altered, Patchells were good; they invited me to come and look at the truck before they started welding, so I was able to make final adjustments. If I couldn't get up there, they'd send photos of the gear and I'd take a look and approve it. They were easy to deal with and it all worked out well and on time."

And as far as the choice of colour is concerned, Thomas says he chose red because, "until a couple of years ago, there weren't any real red trucks in the fleet. There are not many colours in rainbow that aren't at Pan Pac, so I thought I'll go red because no one else has."



Time for some paperwork as the trailer is being loaded



For the past two years, Thomas has been an owner-driver for his business Longhorn Trucking Ltd

"I guess I've always been working my way up to where I wanted to be – driving logging trucks"



Line-up ready for loading

He says he's pulled back on adding too much stainless steel because he wanted the colour to stand out.

The KW has standard road tyres, which Thomas says he'll eventually replace with grunter ones.

"If I'd known about the Michelin option at the start, I would have chosen them instead," he says. "They are far better tyres suited for the bush as they have a proper directional tread, whereas these are a highway tyre."

On being an owner-driver

As well as liking the trucks that go with the logging industry, Thomas likes the opportunities that are available to owner-drivers. If you're highly motivated, there's good money to be made in logging, he says.

Early on, he realised that's where he'd be able to get ahead. He likes the simplicity of turning up and knowing where's he's off to each day.

"We're not having to look for loads; it's all done for us via our dispatchers," he says. "We turn up, go where we are told, and at the end of the day, go home."

On the day DOW met him, he had been up since 2.30am, picked up a load from up Wairoa way, back to Pan Pac, and then up to Te Pohue for an export load out of the Napier-Taupo highway. Early starts don't bother him. "If you don't like it, you shouldn't be doing it. Like any job, once you get into a routine, everything happens as second nature," he says.

Thomas likes being his own boss, being independent, and thriving on the merits of his own hard work. He's keen to keep his wheels turning, so if there are any extra loads to do on a Saturday, he says he will be keen to jump at it. ■

Compare machinery specs at NEW EQUIPMENT

Kenworth T659

Engine	Cummins ISX15 600 with Jacob engine brake
Transmission	18-speed Road Ranger
Rear axles	Meritor 2050 foot-pound with full cross locks, power divider
Rear air suspension	Hendrickson PRIMAAX
Wheels	Alcoa Dura-Bright alloys
Extras	5" air intakes 5" exhaust pipes Gold gauge bezels
Other	Bigfoot central tyre inflation BroLube central greasing
Trailer	5-axle Patchell carts up to 11.9m in 1-2 lengths