



# LIVING DANGEROUSLY

Given the intensity of competition, finding a niche to build a sound transport business is perhaps tougher today than ever before. Still, it's not impossible and for Kiwi Shane Black, a background in dangerous goods has been certainly put to good use since crossing 'The Ditch' more than a decade ago. **STEVE BROOKS** reports.

Shane Black came to Australia in 2000 for a holiday and to catch up with family and friends. But like so many of his Kiwi counterparts, he just never went back. At least, not permanently!

He didn't come empty-handed though. In fact, beyond a typical New Zealander's obsequious obsession for men dressed in black – All Black by name and by nature – he arrived with a knowledge base and innate sense of opportunity which would in short time provide the platforms for a highly specialised transport business.

The core of that knowledge was the safe handling and transport of dangerous goods. So, with the decision made to



Shane Black. Had the knowledge, saw the opportunity, and just went for it. Without exception, Hino is the truck of choice.

move to 'the big island', Shane set about building a business from scratch, not really knowing if the experience acquired in New Zealand or the confidence of his own nature would be enough to forge success. Still, by 2002 he'd moved to Sydney and quietly researching the state of dangerous goods transport, reckoned he had something to go on. The way he saw it, and as evolution would soon show, there were many opportunities for improvement in both the compliance and efficiency of moving dangerous goods by road.

"There were a lot of corners being cut in compliance," the 43 year-old reflected. "In some cases there were real concerns with incorrect practices and dangerous goods

compliance certainly didn't appear to be high on the agenda with some companies."

Mind you, he wasn't talking about the long distance movement of bulk tonnages of volatile freight like fuel and liquid chemicals but rather, the haulage of relatively small quantities of various packaged and liquid products within the dangerous goods code in mostly shorthaul, metro runs. As time would further show, warehousing those products would also become a significant part of the business.

It all started simply enough, working as an owner-driver delivering pool chemicals on the back of a Hino GH rigid. But as Shane eagerly points out, this first customer was like so many others; its prime business was chemicals, not road transport and it wasn't long before he'd demonstrated that efficiency, service and compliance issues could be considerably improved with a dedicated approach to the transport side of the operation. "It was about educating the customer as much as anything else," he remarked.

More to the point, the education delivered quick results because in less than six months he'd put another four Hino GH models on the road.

As for the obvious preference for Hino, it too was carried over from his Kiwi experience. "At one stage I'd had 28 trucks in New Zealand and they were all Hinos," he explained. "A lot of them had been bought as 'grey imports' so their specifications were all different, but without exception they'd all been absolutely good trucks. Basically, I've just not seen any reason to change. Not then and not now."

He'd named his company PQ (Premium Quality) Logistics, based at St Marys in Sydney's far west and while dangerous goods were his main motivation, opportunity had also seen diversification into hauling foodstuffs. Shane agrees it may have seemed a strange mix with half the fleet hauling dangerous products and the other half food, but with the business then operating more than 20 trucks he insists it was relatively easy to manage the two separate operations.

Again though, dangerous goods were the specialty and coming to a crossroads created by increasing demand for both the transport and warehousing of products within the dangerous goods code, the decision was made to not only sell the food side of the operation but also implement an entirely new company platform. Consequently, PQ Logistics

**Dangerous Goods Loading Compatibility Table. At Hazstore it's the drivers' bible, defining what classes of product can be loaded together and which ones need to be segregated.**

was folded about three years ago, a new company called Hazstore formed, and a partner brought into the business who would take the role of managing director along with a 50 percent ownership stake.

The partner is Peter Boyle, defined by Shane Black as a man with extensive experience and success in the distribution field. "I suppose if you had to define our roles, Peter's the task master, I'm more the entrepreneur," Shane adds candidly.

Another big move, literally, came two years ago with the lease of a 4000 square metre warehouse and office area closer to Sydney at Villawood. With the capacity to house up to 6000 pallets, Shane is



**Hazstore operations manager Chris Etherington. Warehousing has increased dramatically in recent years, driven by a surge in offshore manufacturing and chemical imports.**

in no doubt of the site's benefit to the Hazstore operation. "Logistically it's just a far better site than what we had at St Marys," he comments, adding that where warehousing formerly accounted for around 30 percent of the company's total business, today it amounts to as much as 80 percent.

However, as newly appointed operations manager Chris Etherington points out, "That figure is due entirely to growth in the warehousing business and not any drop in demand for transport."

Furthermore, Chris says it's not difficult to understand why demand for warehousing of dangerous goods has grown markedly over recent years. "A lot of manufacturers have headed offshore so there has been a big jump in imports of chemical products," he explained. "But it's not so much the finished product being imported, more the base components that go into making a particular product. A lot of those components are kept in storage and delivered as they're required, again depending on demand."

**MINIMISING THE RISK**

The storage of dangerous goods is, Chris contends, as much a specialty as their transport but when it comes to risk factors, trucking obviously carries the greatest potential for problems. "Warehousing is easily controlled," he states. "It's largely a static environment where things don't move much, but transport is a completely different exercise and out on the road there are many potential risks."

"And if there is an incident," Shane Black chimes in, "it can quickly become a big deal with the EPA (Environment Protection Authority), Hazmat, Police, emergency services and road authorities all becoming involved. Chain of responsibility and environmental issues are major factors and that's why it's so critical, today more than ever, to ensure that everything is being done properly, with no short cuts on compliance."

Likewise, modern trucks in good, clean condition that impart a safe, professional image are a significant contributor to Hazstore's success, Shane insists. "We've never been fined for a breach of the dangerous goods code," he says with unblemished pride. "In fact, we've never had an issue and believe me, we've been checked by the authorities plenty of times."

"We actually welcome checks by authorities," Chris Etherington adds. "It shows them and proves to us that we're doing everything right."



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What’s more, compliance enforcement is no longer the ad hoc exercise it once was according to Shane Black. “The emphasis everywhere is on working within the rules and while there might be some who slip through the net, enforcement is definitely more determined these days.”

Still, it’s an adamant Chris Etherington who emphasises the complexity associated with dangerous goods compliance. “The dangerous goods code is full of riddles,” he suggests, with Shane Black quickly adding, “We take responsibility for dangerous goods away from our clients but even so, after all this time, compliance is still a minefield. The red tape is hugely complex.”

There are, in fact, nine classes in the dangerous goods code and in a number of cases, classes within the class. At the top of the chart is the classification for explosives which Shane explains is the only area not handled by Hazstore. “Explosives is a classification all to itself but we’re compliant in every other class,” he remarks. “But that, too, comes with its own issues.”

For instance, the compatibility of products that can or can’t be loaded in the same space provides the most

consistent challenge in the daily operation of the business, with Chris describing the ‘Dangerous Goods Loading Compatibility Table’ as, “... the drivers’ bible. It defines what classes of product can be loaded together and which ones need to be segregated.”

The different classifications obviously have the potential to limit loading efficiencies but it’s a satisfied Shane Black who explains that purposely designed bodies with approved segregation bays have been particularly successful in allowing a broad range of products to be carried on individual trucks.

Without any encouragement he was quick to explain, “We’ve been using Patra Truck Bodies for 11 or 12 years now and all along they’ve been willing to work with us and design bodies that suit our needs. Actually, I couldn’t ask for a better bodybuilder to work with.”

However, not all loadings are of the dangerous kind. With 10 major customers on the books including oil and lubricant specialist Valvoline, Shane explains that Hazstore has developed into a total transport service, delivering everything from cartons of promotional materials to car care products, pool chemicals,

oils and a wide range of highly specific agricultural and industrial chemicals in powder and liquid forms. There’s also the regular requirement for pumping of liquids from drums into holding tanks at various customer sites.

Generally, distances aren’t great with the business primarily servicing the Sydney region and trucks rarely going further afield than the Hunter Valley in the north, Blue Mountains to the west, and the Shoalhaven area in the south. Shane admits, however, there’s increasing client pressure to expand the areas of operation, including the possibility of a depot in Melbourne. “But that’s something we’re still thinking about,” he says cautiously.

**Happy with Hino**

Predictably, the types of trucks in the fleet are as diverse as some of the freight, from light and medium-duty rigids through to a couple of eight-wheelers with one often towing a short dog trailer. The only thing in common is that they’re all badged Hino with Shane again endorsing the brand’s reliability and cost-effectiveness as the reasons for sticking so firmly to the Japanese maker. “I’ve looked at others, sure, but I’ve never found a reason to change,” he reiterates.

With 25 employees, 14 of them drivers, Hazstore currently operates 12 trucks but as this report was being written, four new Hino FE models were on order to meet increased demand.

At the lighter end are a batch of 300-series auto models with pantech bodies for courier and parcel delivery duties while further up the scale are GD and GH units in 4x2 and 6x2 rigid configuration. Also in the medium-duty mix is a pair of 500-series FC models with Hino’s ProShift automated transmission. According to Shane Black, automatic or automated shifters are “... simply the way to go when you’re running in traffic most of the time and if there’s one area Hino could improve, it’d be to offer more models with an auto box.”

Up the weight range are a couple of FM tandem-drive rigids fitted with curtain-sided bodies and what Shane describes as ‘segregation boxes’ for conflicting classes of freight.

Something of a rarity, however, is an FM 2627 eight-wheeler model, developed locally as a ‘special build’ by Hino to test market requirements for a lightweight eight-legger. Like its six-wheeler counterparts, the 8x4 is punched by a 270 hp engine stirring through an Eaton nine-speed manual transmission and for

## SPECIALISED TRANSPORT

the Hazstore application is fitted with a 10-pallet body with two segregation boxes designed for four and six pallets respectively. Shane Black says he's more than satisfied with the truck's performance to date and furthermore, he's in discussion with Hino about a higher powered (320 hp) FM 2632 eight-wheeler currently under 'quiet' development.

Flagship of the fleet though is a recently acquired 700-series FY 3248 eight-wheeler. Dressed to impress with a smart curtain-sided body promoting Valvoline products and regularly towing a two-axle curtain-sided dog trailer, the Hazstore FY will soon be the centrepiece of a substantial marketing campaign by the oil specialist. It is, however, the truck's suitability for distribution duties that particularly pleases Shane Black.

Something of an under-rated and under-stated member of the Hino range, the FY is well equipped for local and regional work; power comes from an overhead cam 12.9 litre in-line six with common-rail fuel injection, dispensing 353 kW (473 hp) at 1800 rpm and top torque of 2157 Nm (1590 lb ft) at 1100 rpm. Euro 5 emissions compliance is achieved with the combined input of EGR and SCR systems.

An added attraction, certainly given Shane Black's liking for automated shifters, is the FY's availability of the supremely smooth ZF AS-Tronic 16-speed overdrive automated transmission. As we've found in earlier evaluations in truck and trailer combinations, Hino

Showpiece. Hino FY eight-wheeler proudly promotes high profile customer Valvoline. As for the absence of a loadsharing twin-steer suspension, Shane Black is unconcerned and delivers high praise for the model's features, particularly the 16-speed automated shifter.



and ZF engineers have done a fine job of tailoring the transmission (known as ProShift 16 in Hino parlance) to maximise the efficiency and performance of the FY powertrain. Further back, a typically robust Japanese drive tandem runs a 3.9:1 diff ratio mounted on Hendrickson's popular HAS airbag rear suspension.

An air-suspended cab, Isri driver's seat, ABS brakes and driver's airbag are all standard parts of the FY package, with the eight-wheeler built on a 5030 mm wheelbase and carrying a gross vehicle mass rating of 32 tonnes and

gross combination mass of 72 tonnes. Importantly, the truck also comes with a standard three years/500,000 km warranty.

Yet while standard fuel capacity of 400 litres probably isn't adequate for anything other than metro or reasonably short distance regional runs, AdBlue capacity of just 28 litres seems ridiculously inadequate. Paltry, in fact! But in many estimations the most notable deficiency of the FY eight-wheeler is the absence of a factory-fitted loadsharing suspension on the twin-steer assembly, effectively limiting the model's gross weight capacity to 26.5 tonnes.

Still, it's a deficiency that doesn't worry Shane Black. Yes, he's somewhat surprised Japanese engineers haven't yet developed a loadsharing twin-steer suspension for the Australian market and he certainly agrees it's an omission which limits the FY's ability to crack into a wider range of eight-wheeler roles. But as for the impact of a non-loadsharing suspension on the Hazstore operation, he says simply, "It doesn't concern me at all. Our truck's fitted with a 10-pallet body so we get more weight on the FY than we do a six-wheeler with the same size body, plus it has more power to pull the dog trailer.

"Like I said, the absence of a loadsharing suspension doesn't worry me. Not one bit."

Quiet for a moment, a thoughtful Shane Black concluded, "I'm not saying I don't look at other truck brands, 'cause I do. It's just that so far, I haven't found a reason to do anything other than look." **IID**



Rare beast. Hino FM 8x4 was developed locally to test the market for a lightweight eight-wheeler. Hazstore has no complaints.

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