



FRUITY ELIXIR

Hino and Harris Brothers celebrate a 30-year relationship, as Stuart Martin discovered

Truck brand Hino seems to fall into the category of being a victim of its own success.

SELLING reliable equipment does earn a brand an enviable reputation, but it's a double-edged sword. Repeat business is not as regular and the aftersales earnings – beyond maintenance schedules – are not rivers of gold.

Apple orchardist and managing director, Craig Harris, knows only too well how reliable the brand is, having had Hino trucks on the Adelaide Hills apple and cherry property for more than three decades.

The property's history stretches back to his great grandfather Alf, who leased a small parcel of land in Lenswood in mid-1899 and planted the first apple trees in 1901 that remained in use producing fruit for the next 90 years.

Cherries, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and a wide variety of different vegetables have been grown on the property since, with more land being added to the business, which now comprises around 70 acres of apples and 5 acres of cherries.

The fourth generation of his family to grow produce in the hills, Mr. Harris knows how important it is to have dependable transport for the award-winning apples and cherries; the smallest Hino in the Harris garage is a 300 917 Long, along with an FD and an FW Profia.

"We've had Hinos since the early 1980s. We've had a few different models over the years and have three now – a 4-tonner, a 6-tonner and twin-steer bogie drive 16-tonner. We've found them to be pretty reliable and just value for money," he said.



Mr. Harris said the Hino trucks had proven to be good value for money for his fruit growing operation, which involves transporting packed produce around the demanding Adelaide Hills road network, as well as journeys to and from the Adelaide plains.

“One truck is used purely for packed fruit transport from coolroom to the Pooraka markets twice a week, where we have a stall in the grower’s shed to supply the leading retailers in Adelaide. The little one and the big truck are used mainly locally up here in the hills to transport fruit to and from the local co-op and from the orchards as well,” he said.

Steep, twisting and pockmarked roads that are regular routes for his trucks can be demanding on machinery, so much so that previous brands suffered continuous brake issues until the switch was made to Hino.

“We’ve got some of the worst roads in SA where we live – we’re used to it, with plenty of corners and hills, so a bit of extra power comes in handy at times,” he said.

“If you’re in the wrong sort of truck, you could end up with 100 cars behind you, generally all-round we’ve found the Hino to be a good package,” he added.

Experience with other brands had included additional brake work beyond scheduled maintenance as a result of the Adelaide Hills region’s steep nature, but the wider application of exhaust brakes and a neighbour’s word-of-mouth endorsement of the Hino brand resulted in the switch to the Japanese truck brand.

Now a part of Toyota Motor Corporation, Hino started as Tokyo Gas and Electric Industry and produced its first motor



vehicle, the Model TGE A-Type Truck, in 1917; it changed its name to Hino in 1942 and joined forces with Toyota in 1966.

“One of our neighbours had an early Hino, it was when exhaust brakes were starting to come in to this segment of the truck market – he said they were fantastic in the hills and that’s what made us try one,” said Craig.

The business was so intent on keeping with the Hino breed that it tracked down an imported second hand medium sized twin steer FW Profia model that was better suited to its needs but is not sold in Australia.

The company’s long-term relationship with CMI Hino in Adelaide, Australia’s longest-serving Hino dealer, resulted in the dealership using the brand’s logo on its Hino KL300 museum piece.

It’s a truck similar to one once owned by the fruit grower’s neighbour as well as the first of the breed bought by the Harris family – an FF that is still going strong for its current owner elsewhere in the Adelaide hills today.

As the oldest Hino dealer in the country, CMI Hino is the current incarnation of a relationship that stretches back to 1971, when the CMV Group was a distributor of Hino trucks assembled in Adelaide’s north from CKD kits. The CMI Hino dealership at Regency Park in Adelaide is part of the family-run CMV Group, itself involved in agriculture as well as truck and car retailing since 1934.

The group was started by Sidney Crawford in the Adelaide CBD and is still run by his family today.

CMV Group joint managing director, Paul Crawford, is one of three brothers who in the early 1960s became involved with Toyota Motor Corporation through Thiess Toyota, and that led to an involvement in the late 1960s with new brand Hino.

General manager, Chris Morrison, said the Harris fruit business was typical of its bread-and-butter customers in Adelaide, using the Hino trucks as a business tool and not as a core part of a transport business.

“Our relationship with Harris hasn’t been based on sales, we’ve not sold a heap of trucks, it’s a small family business and they run a few Hino trucks.

“It’s typical of that business, they only replace them when they break them or wear them out,” he said.

“Its people who need a truck for their business to cart wares or get to their customers, they are the people we rely on and they only replace them when they wear them out, it doesn’t help us in the service department either,” he said.

CMI Hino celebrated 45 years late last year, and, as part of the event, displayed its 1970 Hino KL 300, running an EC 100 88 kW/298 Nm engine and dressed in “Harris Bros of Lenswood” livery. The KL 300, part of CMI’s extensive historic vehicle collection, has covered more than 1.6 million kilometres in its lifetime while remaining in good condition.

“When we found the old KL, it was one Paul Crawford wanted to have for the collection as we didn’t have one,” said Chris Morrison.

“We’d sold a number to market gardeners so we put a body on it in keeping with that duty, we’d had it on display but we needed to get some sign writing on it. We’d recently sold Craig a couple of trucks and he sent us a picture of one of his old trucks with the company livery, it went to a truck show in the Riverland and it won best old truck,” he said.

Mr. Morrison said the group had been a Hino dealer since 1971 and operating out of its current site since 1984. CMI Hino has been continually recognised for its ability, winning Dealer of the Year in 2013 and 2014. 