



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

A new vehicle is providing experienced crane operator Mark Clowes with a different working experience, as Steve McQueen discovers

Vehicle crane-operating specialist Mark Clowes is 10 years into a second stint with the Staffordshire company Reid Freight Services. He recently renewed his crane-operator licence and, after 10 years behind the wheel of an 8x4 Volvo FM12, is finding that the new Iveco Trakker Hi-Land with its PM65SP mounted crane is a completely different working experience.

The 12.9-litre 13/410hp Cursor engine sitting inside the new Iveco 8x4 has greater pulling power and better fuel economy, along with additional operational flexibility thanks to its ability to travel and work inside the London Low Emission Zone.

Moreover, the PM65SP mounted crane is lighter and has a greater lifting capacity and reach than the ageing Bonfig lift model it replaced.

And therein lies the challenge.

The previous lifting technology meant that, given his experience, Mark could get almost any job done. The PM65SP is a much more complex piece of kit that has an inbuilt set of safety parameters that ensure that, unless they are observed, he cannot proceed with a job.

'It's all about safety,' says Mark. 'There are no short-cuts. With the other one, you could manage. For example, if

you were lifting on the driver-side only it was possible, in theory, to place only two outriggers out on the driver side and one at the back. With this one, all four outriggers must be out before you can even start to lift anything.'

With this extra margin of safety come potential operational issues.

'The outriggers come out over 10ft, while the vehicle is more than 8ft wide,' says Mark. 'So, with all of them out, the vehicle footprint is virtually 30ft wide. That means there may be places at some sidings where you cannot get all the outriggers out. That means a great deal more thought and preparation has to go into each job.'

FAR MORE OPTIONS

Like its predecessor, the crane has a multifunction radio remote control, but the PM65SP has a screen menu that offers a greater number of slew, lift, jib and extension options. There is also a degree of diagnostic information in the event of equipment problems, which can arise.

From its depot in Stoke-on-Trent, Reid Freight Services operates a range of activities, which include warehousing, distribution and pallet services, but the company has built its reputation as a heavy-haulage specialist in rail stock service and support.



The warehouse is stocked with heavy train wheels and axles, while the traffic office is on 24-hour standby in case of an incident, such as a rail-stock fault or a derailment.

'Advances in railway maintenance mean the industry is moving towards bogie exchange (the 4- to 5-tonne set of wheels at one end of a wagon, or hopper lorry) rather than individual wheel replacement. Vehicles such as Mark's will be increasingly demanded,' says his boss Dave Reid, who drew up the Trakker Hi-Land's specification, along with his son Craig, who runs the workshop.

'You can't get a standard eight-wheeler haulage vehicle chassis any more, so this one is basically a tipping chassis that has been custom-built,' says Dave. 'They added to its length and moved the bogie back. It's slightly shorter than the one we had but we can extend the chassis for longer loads.'

'The Trakker Hi-Land is also equipped with a drawbar for use on

our latest contract, with DB Schenker. That will enable us to put two more bogies on the back and that will be a key element of the job's profitability as the contract moves forward.'

DB Schenker provides a repair and maintenance service for suspension systems fitted to rail traffic. That involves axles and wheels with a diameter of between 500mm and 1400mm. Mark's regular routine often begins at the bogie refurbishment depot in Stoke, but his journey could end at a railway siding almost anywhere in the UK.

'I'll often be loading out of Stoke,' says Mark. 'That might be a bogie frame without wheels, or a complete bogie with all the braking systems in place for a hopper lorry, or coal lorry. It might be a case of lifting the bogies on to the track next to the hopper lorry, but sometimes you have to lift up the hopper lorry to swap over the bogie. If that's the case, I'll drop the replacement bogie on the track (in

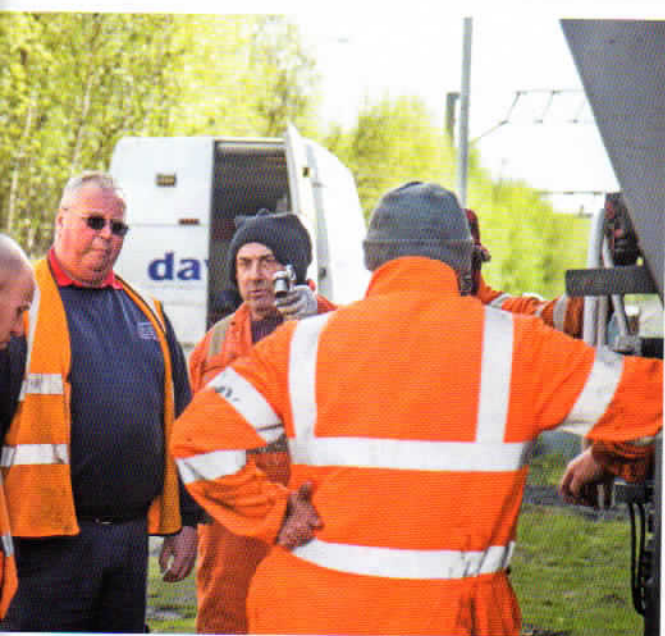
front or behind) and lift the hopper lorry with chains, so that the old bogie can be slid out. I'll then drop the carriage onto axle stands, pick up the old bogie and move it onto the back of the truck. After that it's just a case of picking up the hopper again, removing the axle stands and sliding the new bogie into place.'

Thankfully, in most cases customers supply engineering teams to help out with the logistics, but Mark is in charge of the lifting.

ASSESSING THE JOB

Every job starts with the same routine. 'It's a case of assessing the job,' says Mark. 'For a straight lift, it's a question of pulling alongside. I'll make sure the ground is stable, check for overhead cables and the direction of any drains before deploying the outriggers. The pads that go underneath the outriggers help to distribute the weight more evenly. Then it's a question of whether to use slings or chains. That decision depends on the weight. You hitch up, then lift steadily, as many of







the loads we have to deal with have no lifting points.'

His vehicle is equipped with trough storage space on the sides, where the chains and slings are stowed and easily accessible. Side lockers for tools and safety equipment – orange hi-vis, hat and goggles, for example – are inside the cab. A side ladder provides easier and safer access to the upper chassis areas, while LEDs along the front and sides increase overall visibility.

Strobe lights on the front grille and at the rear pulse three times to alert anyone not in a position to spot the two high-profile warning beacons on the roof. There is a pair of operational lights on the headboard and one more on either side of the platform.

A bogie frame might weigh about two tonnes but a TF25 bogie, with all the braking systems still in place, could

be nearer the four to five tonnes mark. Occasionally, the bogies are bigger still. At such times the lighter crane provides vital additional carrying capacity that improves the profit margin on a job that often has very little mileage involved.

CATHEDRAL WAREHOUSE

'For example, there's a regular job at a "cathedral warehouse" just outside of Derby,' says Mark. 'That is basically a big shed where they repair locomotives. The job is to reverse in, they drop a bogie onto the back of the truck with an overhead crane and I'll then drop it somewhere else on the site. It could be onto the track, it could be onto a concrete or gravel pad at the trackside. I could be on site there all day, repeating the same sort of thing.'

Mark is also involved in longer runs

on another of Reid Freight Services' well-established contracts, delivering containers fitted with water de-ionising and purification systems. These are used as long-term support services by a host of users, from manufacturers of contact lenses to power stations.

'We need to use the crane because the plants are built inside 20ft containers and weigh something in the region of around eight tonnes,' says Mark. 'They have to be lifted into place at a variety of different locations with varying ground conditions and they could be on site for several months.'

It's on runs such as this that Mark experiences the greater comforts offered by the 12-speed automatic gearbox and the high-roof sleeper cab, while Reid Freight Services enjoys the benefits of a more economical and high-performance truck.

FACT FOCUS

- Name: **Reid Freight Services**
- Established: **1980**
- Based: **Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire**
- Specialist activities: **Heavy haulage, distribution and pallet services**
- Fleet: **30 vehicles, 40 trailers**

Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow

During the week, Simon Reid can be found behind the wheel of an 8x4 Reid Freight Services truck, usually with a train carriage on the back, travelling at an average speed of about 40mph.

At the weekends, though, he is transformed into a truck racer for Reid, averaging 70mph and a top speed of more than 100mph. In 40 races, over eight rounds, he'll be chasing the 2014 Class B (up to 1000hp) British Truck Racing Association Championship.

Simon's first victory came at the final meeting of last season, his rookie year. An impressive series of podium places in earlier rounds means that despite eight races with mechanical problems, he's already collected more silverware than his father achieved over seven seasons of racing during the 1990s.

According to brother Craig, the designer and chief engineer at Reid Motorsport, the secret of truck racing success is to drive a Class B truck with Class A (up to 1200hp) specifications and components, wherever possible, which is what he's tried to achieve this season.

The Iveco Stralis cab might match the profile of the rest of the vehicles in the Reid Freight Services fleet but underneath it's an ERF with a sub-frame, Class A dampers and an M11 engine. The fuel tank has been redesigned; there is a larger intercooler as well as a bigger turbocharger. The brake discs are standard but water-cooled. Glassfibre moulded bumpers complete the look of a mean machine.

Follow its progress at, in date order, Brands Hatch, Pembrey (Wales), Thruxton, Nürburgring (Germany), Snetterton, Donington Park, Pembrey and Brands Hatch.

