

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Trucking is this 'young man's game'



Driving a transport is a young man's game and Ralph Kempton says most long-distance drivers have left the highway by the age of 40. Husband and wife teams are becoming more common in the west, he notes, and while women drivers are still relatively scarce, Mr. Kempton says it depends on what type of load the driver is hauling whether a woman will have trouble at the job.

(Herald photo by Maggie Hannah)

With this installment, The Herald introduces a new series of feature articles through which readers can become acquainted with professions and occupations involving Halton Hills residents from all walks of life. Here, staff writer Maggie Hannah sets the trend by examining the activities, responsibilities, training, work hours and experiences of truck driver Ralph Kempton. The Herald welcomes suggestions from its readers for future chapters of "All in a Day's Work".

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald Staff Writer

Driving a transport is a young man's game, according to a man who's been at it for the past 13 years.

Ralph Kempton has been hauling steel tubing from Lyman Tubing's Oakville headquarters to the firm's Wompeq warehouse for about five years. Prior to that, he worked for four other companies and spent a year as fleet manager for a small trucking firm.

There are three classifications for truck drivers in terms of the way the general public seems to view them, Mr. Kempton told The Herald. Transport drivers are usually considered the upper crust in the business and drivers on gravel trucks seem to be the ones that give the profession a bad image, although he quickly notes there are good and bad alike among them, just like in any other field.

While there is no special educational requirement for anyone planning to enter the field so long as they are literate enough to read road signs, he explained, the Ministry of Transport has tightened up its licensing policies in the last couple of years so that drivers must now have considerable experience on a particular type of truck before they can qualify to be tested for a particular type of licence.

Canada Manpower says drivers must be 18 to apply for a Class A licence, which is the type Mr. Kempton has. This enables them to drive any size of vehicle, including a school bus, but the tests for a bus licence include extra material on passenger safety. Although the department only requires the applicant to be 18 to apply for the Class A licence, most trucking firms prefer drivers to be at least 21, and many want them to be 25 or over.

TYPES AND SIZES
Learning how to handle various types and sizes of trucks by working for a firm

that provides training and experience is still the best way to learn the job, he says. Alternatively, prospective drivers can take instruction and testing through the Driver Training Centre at George Brown College in Toronto.

While Mr. Kempton does not disapprove of unions, he is not working for a unionized company. Most of the large transport firms are unionized, he says, but the smaller firms with fleets of less than 30 trucks are usually non-union companies.

Drivers are paid by the hour, by the mile, on a percentage basis, or through a combination of the three methods, he says. Drivers working on certain types of deliveries for a company may occasionally be on straight salary, but this is uncommon. The hourly rate for unionized drivers in Ontario is \$9.94, although this may vary depending on how close the firm is to a major city. In Alberta, the union wage is around \$10 an hour and in British Columbia, it runs around \$12 to \$13 an hour.

There is always a certain number of vacancies and a good worker should be able to find a job, although there is never a big demand for drivers. Lazy, careless and incompetent drivers tend to drift from job to job until they run out of places to go and have to leave the field, Mr. Kempton says.

Although drivers won't be expected to maintain their own vehicles, Mr. Kempton carries certain tools with him so that he could do minor repairs on an emergency basis rather than be stuck on the side of a road somewhere.

LONG-DISTANCE
Many transport companies also have independent drivers doing long-distance brokerage runs for them, since union drivers are more expensive to send on long runs where they are paid by the hour, rather than by the other forms of payment used for independent drivers.

Drivers on transports with Public Commercial Vehicle (PCV) licences are required by law to have log books which list the hours a driver spends driving, when, where and for how long he makes stops, and details on loading and unloading his trailer. Drivers on private company trucks are also supposed to keep logs but checking by the ministry is not pursued very carefully for them as for PCV drivers.

Private companies do not need PCV licences to haul their own products to market or haul such items as new machinery purchased for the company's use.

The number of transport drivers who own their own tractors and trailers and work as owner-operators for companies is on the rise, Mr. Kempton says.

The number of young couples owning and operating their own rig as a team is also rising, although this is more common in western Canada than in Ontario, he says. It is

also fairly common in the United States.

"They have a stove and fridge and TV fixed up in their bunk and, in effect, they convert it into a home," he says. "It becomes their home and they travel all over that way, driving and taking their home with them. I guess it would make a good way to see the country if you were young."

Although there is nothing to prevent a woman from driving transport and Mr. Kempton feels that women can be just as good at driving as men, he warns that women may have problems with loading and unloading, depending on what they are hauling.

WOMEN COPE
"I know a girl in the Oakville area who drives a gravel truck and another one who hauls milk toward Montreal," he says. "With gravel you just drive under the hopper to load and unloading is just as easy. The hoses for loading and unloading milk are pretty simple to handle, too, so

neither of them would have trouble. Another girl I know was hauling lumber and she had trouble heaving the chains over the load and tightening them down, so the load wasn't safe on the road and the company had to let her go. It would all depend on what the girl was hauling, whether she could do the job or not."

Mr. Kempton says he doesn't load or unload his own truck but he has to stay with his truck in Winnipeg until it is unloaded in order to move it out of the way. Then he can rest. In Oakville he isn't needed with the truck until it is loaded ready to leave.

Asked what personality traits he considers important for a driver, Mr. Kempton says they must like to be alone, since they will be on their own for many hours at a time.

"It's hard for a family man because he may be away three to five days at a time," he says. "A majority of drivers are off the highway by the time they're 40. It's not a hard life but there's a lot required of us."

Having some interest in mechanics is also an asset and will usually make for a better driver, he adds, although it is not a requirement to get a licence as a transport driver.

NOVA SCOTIA BIRD
Mr. Kempton comes from Harrmony Mills, Queen's County, Nova Scotia and has been in Ontario for 14 years.

He originally intended to become a mechanic doing truck maintenance and started his apprenticeship with a trucking firm, then discovered he enjoyed the driving and has been at it ever since.

Mr. Kempton, his wife Marlene, and their three children, aged four months to six years have lived on Main Street North in Acton for the past six years.

Mr. Kempton has no desire to drive into the United States, finding their police officers much less friendly and helpful than Canadian ones.

He also says bluntly that he's afraid of guns, which most American truckers carry. If a trucker is stopped he understands the police immediately ask for his log, his gun and his pills. They assume a driver will be using some type of medication to maintain his alertness.

"I've never had any incidents but I know enough people who have to know that I'd quit before I had to go down into that. I want no part of it."



Ralph Kempton regularly drives from Oakville to Winnipeg for Lyman Tubing. He originally planned to be a motor mechanic but has been driving transport for 13 years.

(Herald photo)

After 110 years

Firefighters look back on hard work, changes

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald staff writer

Four volunteer firefighters with an accumulated total of 110 years' service in the Acton area have tendered their resignation to Halton Hills Fire Chief Mick Holmes this week.

Sam Tennant, Don Van Fleet, Doug Mason and Harry Otterbein told The Herald last week they all feel the time has come for them to retire and leave it to the younger members of the force to provide the community with fire protection.

"After 35 years with the department, I think it's time to throw in the sponge," Mr. Tennant explained. He was elected fire chief in 1963 and held the office at least two years.

"I can't get out in time to catch the truck any more," Mr. Otterbein commented.

"Traffic's so heavy, I can't get across the corner,"

Mr. Van Fleet agreed with a chuckle.

"I always run from home, too, and I can't get up the hill fast enough to catch the first truck any more either. I think it's time to leave it to the younger boys. They're a bit faster moving, a bit more enthusiastic than we are now."

All four men are life members of the Acton Volunteer Firefighters' Association and of the Ontario Firefighters' Association. Mr. Tennant also holds a long service medal from the Ontario Fire Marshal's office in recognition of 30 years' service as a volunteer firefighter.

Mr. Tennant, 64, joined the Acton Fire Department in February, 1945; Mr. Van Fleet, 54, joined in June, 1952; Mr. Mason, 62, joined in January, 1953 and Mr. Otterbein, 63, joined in August, 1959.

"My boss at Force Electric suggested that I join the department," Mr. Otterbein recalled. "He felt it was a good move as a taxpayer to have employees on the fire department. It was in his interest to maintain a volunteer force to keep the taxes down, and he encouraged us to join."

FIRST PUMPER

When the four veterans first joined, the department had about 15 members and a 1927 Studebaker pumper which has since been purchased by the association and is on display in the fire hall. The three men who have been there longest vividly recall runs on the old Studebaker and joke about riding on the front running board pouring gas into the motor to keep the truck running. The fuel was fed by a vacuum system rather than electrically pumped and the vacuum gave out "any old inconvenient time," they say, so someone often had to pour fuel into the motor to keep it running or they couldn't get to the fire.

In the early days when the pumper was kept in front of a garage near the present hall, they also had problems with passing youngsters pulling the plug on the block heater so that it was too cold to start on winter nights. It was not uncommon for the men to have to push the engine down the street to get it running before they went to a fire.

That same engine pumped all night long when A.P. Green's factory burned in 1952, however, and was subsequently used at the fire on Wolfe's turkey farm.

The four men point to improved equipment as the major change in firefighting during their time on the force.

"Equipment today is much

more sophisticated than what we had then," Mr. Mason said, listing such items as resuscitators, Scott air packs, hydraulic saws for cutting people out of cars and buildings, and two-way radios among the newer changes.

"We used to have to rely on our axe for almost everything in the old days," Mr. Tennant pointed out.

Mr. Mason also recalled that in the beginning, they all rode to fires out in the open, even when it was 30 below zero. Now they have the van and can travel in comfort.

The two-way radio is Mr. Otterbein's favorite addition and he recalled what it was like in the old days sitting beside a creek all night manning a pump during a fire when they couldn't even get a change of mitts or a hot coffee.

ALL NEEDED
"We couldn't even send someone with a message. Everyone was needed at the fire," he said. "The radio is a great help."

None of the four men have ever been seriously injured at a fire; Mr. Van Fleet claimed his most serious injury with the department occurred in September, 1954, when the Acton fall fair directors were looking for volunteers for a game of donkey baseball. He got tossed off "the meanest donkey" he ever came across, he joked.

One of the high points of their memories centres around mutual aid between neighboring departments. Mr. Mason recalled a mutual aid call to Burlington which turned out to be simply a test of their alertness in answering calls. Acton had already arrived at the designated place and had their hoses in action by the

time the Georgetown crew arrived, he boasted.

When the men first joined the department they had to raise most of the money they received for their year's service. Points were awarded for

fires, practices and meetings and the total sum was then divided among the men according to how many points they had earned through the year.

"Since everyone will turn up

for a fire, you only got one point for that," Mr. Van Fleet explains. "But practices and meetings are necessary, too, so we earn two points for attending them."

The system is still in use,

although the value of a point may have risen considerably since the days when Acton council made a large contribution to the department if it received \$500 a year.

To supplement this, the fire-

men held a dance each year and sold tickets door-to-door. The whole town got involved and even yet the odd resident stops one of the men to inquire why they haven't been around

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Retiring Area One firefighters, from left, are Harry Otterbein, Don Van Fleet, Sam Tennant and Doug Mason. Among them, the four men have accumulated 110 years of firefighting experience with the Acton force. They resigned Monday evening.

(Herald photo)