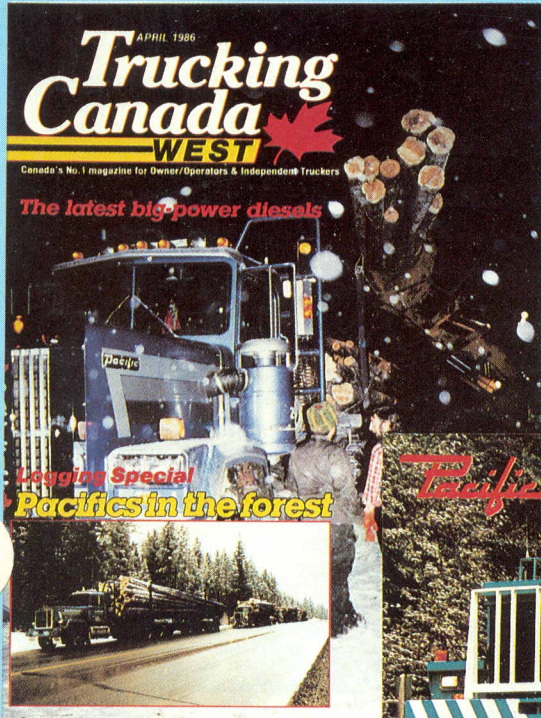


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LOG HAULER LOVES THE BUSH

To Wilf Bremner, running long steep grades is like going for a Sunday drive. He's part of a family operation that covers tough bush terrain every day.

by Heather Conn

As a teenager learning to drive truck in the bush, Wilf Bremner used to sweat with tension and fear when his dad, who coached from the passenger side of an old White, would make him come down "Ski Jump". It's part of a steep haul west of Williams Lake in British Columbia's winter interior, where you've gotta be at about 800 rpm at the top to make it down—even snow chains won't help you hold on if you take it too fast. His dad, Vic, still remembers taking the steering wheel, which was sticky wet from his son's sweat, and offering his practical, paternal advice: "You're the one who's driving. Don't let anyone tell you what to do. You gotta use your own judgement."

Well, Wilf's now 34 and with 17 years of driving behind him, he's certainly taken his father's advice to heart. I recently had the opportunity to ride with him on his 965-km round trip, hauling jackpine logs from the top of Thunder Mountain, over "Ski Jump", Sheep Creek and other hairy trails, back to the mill in Williams Lake. After running this route for four years, he can now cruise it like a pro.

He drives one of his dad's eight 1985 Pacific P-500 trucks, powered by a 475-hp Detroit 8V-92TA engine. The combination of Wilf's skilful driving and the truck's easy ride and handling made our bush trip seem more like a jaunt down the freeway. "It's just like going for a Sunday drive," said Wilf while cracking a grin.

Well, not quite. We were headed for the Chilcotin River bush country, a

rugged mountainous valley of ranches, moose, and thinned-out timber. And before we could even hit the bush road, we had to cover "The Revenge"—a gradual pull on a 9.5% grade that demands acute driver control. The bush road we'd take started at "100 Mile", past a dab of a town called Redstone, was narrow, about 121 km long, and full of S-curves. We'd end up climbing north to Chezacut at an altitude of more than 4900 ft (1500 m) where early-morning loaders waited in darkness next to log piles cut for Jacobson Brothers Forest Products Ltd.

It was already snowing by the time we hit the bush in late afternoon, and the combination of wet white stuff, -12°C temperatures, and night-fall made me wonder what was ahead.

Surprisingly, the narrow bush route offered no deep ruts and few jarring jolts. It's kept well graded with calcium that "packs just like cement", according to Wilf. Sure, we hit one small patch of ice holes caused by the freeze-up of culvert overflow, but that was nothing serious. When we did hit the occasional rough spot, Wilf would just shrug and say, "It's like riding a horse with no saddle." In our case, the three-axle straight truck was running empty at about 35,900 lb (16,300 kg) with Rockwell front axles and 46,000-lb (20,865 kg) rears, complete with Hendrickson RS-440 sus-

pension. A Brentwood tri-axle logging trailer was also along for the ride.

Wilf's driving expertise makes bush hauling look mistakenly easy. As he quickly points out, any trucker would need at least eight years of bush driving to master the road he covers every day. Training as a highway hauler just isn't good enough. He's taken out a number of drivers who've lied about their experience, only to find that luck can't replace skill on a tough bush track. In fact, the night before our trip, Wilf had taken a passenger who was petrified after riding with a trucker who claimed he had 10 years experience. This guy was shaking when he climbed into Wilf's truck after his driver had lost it on a hill and went into a slide.

"He said he had the door open ready to jump and he wouldn't go back with this guy," Wilf told me, as other truckers on the CB were retelling the event. "He said, 'I've been scared before, but never that bad.' That driver lost it and he shouldn't have had a problem. I came down right after him and there was another truck in front of me and we didn't have any trouble."

Wilf says he still finds it hard to believe how many bush haulers won't even bother to take a few minutes and put chains on.

Once we were loaded to 121,000 lb (54,860 kg) GVW, the truck and trailer stretched 75.5 ft (23 m) from the front bumper to the logs' overhang, yet it seemed to add little difference to our drive. Wilf still ran at about 56 km/h in full control.

We arrived back at his father's shop in Williams Lake—Lake Trucking Ltd.—at about 1 a.m. after roughly a nine-hour trip. Wilf said he felt so good he could go right back out again. His truck and trailer full of logs would sit until 5:30 that morning, when they'd be unloaded at the nearby mill and a second company driver would start another haul to Chezacut. This routine continues daily, and after 2200 hours of operation, Wilf's truck has already clocked 99,000 km. Lake Trucking has 11 trucks in all—nine Pacifics, a Kenworth and a White—and is able to make 18 or 19 hauls every day.

Wilf works steady nights until spring break-up, which is usually at the start of March, then spends some time repairing and painting the trucks. After that, he'll take a bit of a holiday with his wife, three sons and daughter, and then will start up again in June or July. He's part of a real family operation; his brother Dale also drives for their dad Vic, and another brother David is the company tire-repair man with mobile equipment. At 17, Wilf started out in a Hayes cabover as a short logger, then worked in his dad's shop fuelling the trucks. When he was 20 he drove his own truck—a 1979 Mack—for four years and later was a spare driver for his dad for six months. Now, he's been trucking for his father for 11 years straight.

At 57, Wilf's father Vic has 39 years of trucking behind him, both on and off-highway. He's still a spare driver for Lake Trucking, where he's president and general manager.

Last summer, he made a gutsy operational decision which caused some locals to question his sanity—he bought eight 1985 Pacific trucks at once. They came from another father-and-sons operation, the James International dealership in Kamloops, B.C., which has since sold him an additional 1986 Pacific.

As Wilf explains: "The old trucks before just couldn't do these hauls. You need a tough truck. The Pacific is pretty stable. With a tri-axle trailer, it's just super—you don't even know the trailer's behind you."

But between his tales of tricky driving incidents, his father notes wisely that regardless of what truck you're in, the real difference lies in the driver. He told me after my trip with Wilf: "If you have a hill like you guys came on last night and you're in sixth gear and all of a sudden it's starting to slide and you're revving at 2000 rpm, you're a dead man. You'll never control it. I don't care what you're driving."

"I don't care if it's a new Pacific, a new Mack, or White. If you ever blow a tire in a bad position where the front weight is on the steering axle and you're going fairly fast, you'll never control it. The loaded one will not hold the empty. I've learnt that."

So his advice is to not drive with one finger on the wheel, but always to have a good grip instead. He's had a few close calls himself and has seen enough good drivers die due to speed or carelessness.

Vic says he likes to hire local drivers, since they're the only ones who seem well enough equipped to handle the bush driving to Chezacut. Even drivers from the more northern city of Prince George, such as the one who'd gone sliding down the hill the night before, aren't always prepared for the tough Chilcotin conditions.

"You get guys up here with a class one (licence) out of Vancouver and they can't even get out of town. They don't even have a clue. You can usually tell just by looking at the guy," he says.

Yeah, the old hands sure won't let a rookie get close to their bush territory. As Wilf found out early, and as his dad still maintains, it takes common sense, good judgement, self-confidence, and a helluva lot of skill to be a successful truck logger. Anything short of that, and you won't be in business for long—especially in the B.C. bush. □



Pacific P512 hauling mahogany in Indonesia for Daya Sakti.



PACIFIC TRUCKS FOR SPECIAL JOBS

Another in our TC mini-history series, here's a look at a west-coast manufacturer that custom-builds its beefy trucks for markets right around the world.

by Heather Conn

At Pacific Truck and Trailer, an assembly line is obsolete. In fact, not a single "generic" truck has ever been mass produced at this manufacturing plant in North Vancouver, B.C. Instead, ever since this Canadian company began in 1947, it has custom-built all its trucks, using stalls and specially equipped work teams to produce a vehicle from start to finish. It currently builds **only 200 to 300 trucks a year**, so by paying individual attention to a customer's unique specs, and basically thinking big on a small scale, Pacific can back up its claim that: "We make trucks the way you want them."

Today, Pacific manufactures three basic trucks—the P500, P12 and P16—

and each one is designed for rigorous specialty hauls that demand abnormal loading or hard on/off-highway use. About 60% are sold in Canada, while 40% are exported, so you'll find these heavy-duty vehicles around the world in construction, mining, oil fields, transporting heavy equipment or any specialized payload.

Pacifics have hauled sugar cane in Hawaii, logs in Australia and New Zealand, ore in British Columbia and the western United States, and giant pieces of hydroelectric equipment in India and Africa using huge tractor-trailer units grossing as much as 150 tonnes.

As the only North American truck maker with a parts depot in southeast Asia, Pacific has trucks working in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The company is currently seek-

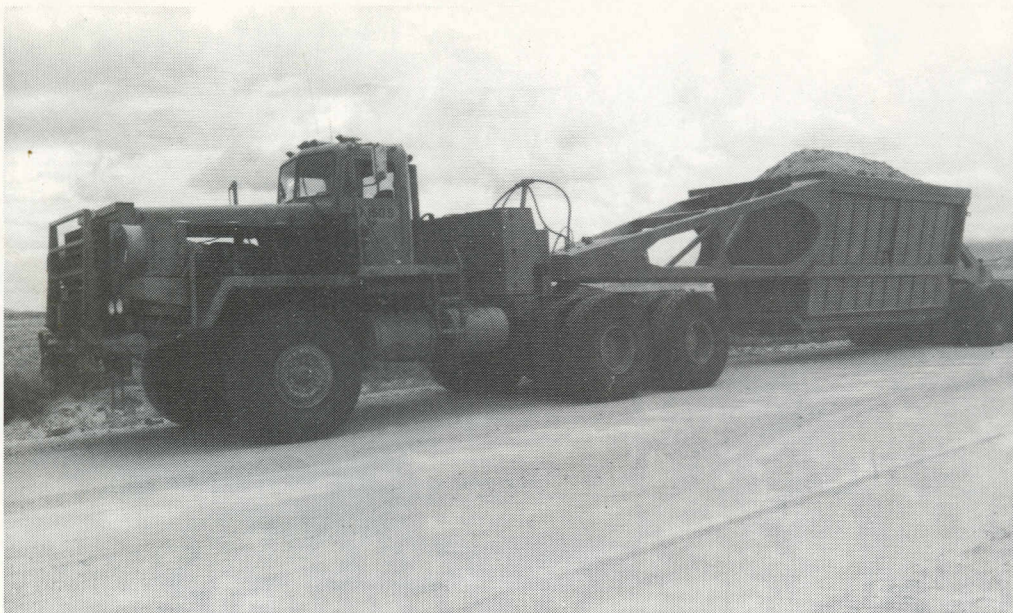
ing markets in South America, Africa, and China.

The company has also designed, engineered, and built 23 examples of what must be the most powerful on-highway vehicle in the world: between 1973 and 1984, behemoths called "highway locomotives" used to haul 250-500 tonne loads on a 700-km run for the South African Railway.

"About every half hour we talk to customers somewhere in the world who are using our product," says sales vice president Wayne Magee in his North Vancouver office. He's part of a close-knit five-man management team.

The company's history began on Canada's west coast, where its first-ever order came from the opposite coast, ironically enough, in Newfoundland. The sale was made in 1947 to Bowaters logging operation, and Pacific soon established itself in the local B.C. market, producing logging trucks and trailers for independent operators and major forest companies.

Today, Pacific retains a strong presence in west coast logging and its extra heavy-duty model, the P16, is the only new truck of its kind operating in Vancouver Island's rugged off-highway logging scene. It's fashioned partly after the Hayes HDX, since some of Pacific's engineers and



*In foreign parts:
a big Pacific P12 on
a uranium haul in
Wyoming. This one is
good for a payload
of 150 tons for a
gross combination
weight of 425,000
lb (193,000 kg).*

its manufacturing staff are former Hayes employees.

The company was founded in 1947 by Claude Thick, Vic Barclay, and Mac Billingsley who started operations on a wharf at West Coast Shipyards in Vancouver's False Creek area. Within the year, they had already expanded to a larger facility in East Vancouver. In 1953, this plant grew to include a sheet metal department and a bigger parts storage area. By then, company staff had increased from 11 to 53 employees.

In 1961 Pacific opened a parts and service operation in Prince George and started another one in Vernon two years later in order to be close to the growing interior truck-logging scene. Then in 1967 it moved to its current location at 935 West 3rd St. in North Vancouver, buying 1.7 hectares (4.2 acres). By that time, the plant was 4273 square metres (46,000 sq. ft) and housed manufacturing, a general office, a service parts depot, service repair facilities, and an OEM parts storage.

Currently, Pacific manufactures its own cabs (designed specifically for on/off-highway use), hoods, and fender assemblies, and is the only Canadian truck manufacturer to design and build its own six-rod suspension. (The suspensions are used for applications up to 120,000 lb or 54,432 kg.) Because of this on-site building of componentry, Pacific is the only true truck manufacturer left in Canada, according to Magee.

"The Canadian content in this truck is very high—the other manufacturers assemble," he says. "That puts us in a unique position in the Canadi-

an truck industry." Customers are invited to tour the plant and watch their own vehicle being built.

As the full name of Pacific Truck and Trailer suggests, the company also manufactures trailers—off-highway logging trailers that weigh 40 tons and up. However, with so many specialized trailer manufacturers in the industry, these are not high-priority products for Pacific, and the company only sells between 10 and 20 trailers a year.

To keep pace with the parts business and the increase in truck sales on Vancouver Island, Pacific opened its first full sales and service branch in Nanaimo in 1969. In 1970, it opened a parts store in Port Hardy at the north end of the island. The following year, a similar parts operation was opened in Port Alberni. Then in 1973, the original Nanaimo location was expanded with larger service facilities, and in the fall a new parts branch started in Campbell River. The Prince George operation closed that same year and merged with International Harvester's truck sales, parts, and service centre.

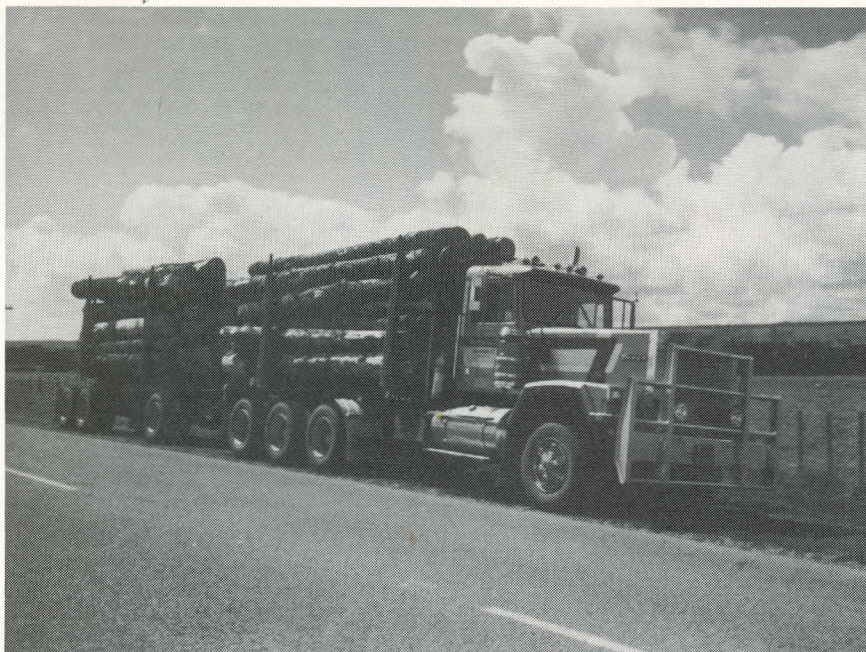
In August, 1970 International Harvester had bought Pacific, acquiring 100% of the company's shares. Bob Musgjerd, then president of IHC, said his company wanted to team up with an established, recognized west-coast manufacturer of on/off-highway trucks to offer a full range of vehicles.

International maintained a hands-off approach at Pacific, allowing the small company to grow and develop without corporate intervention. At the time of the merger, Pacific had

only four branches and four people to quote and sell its vehicles. However, as part of International Harvester it could enjoy a North American and world-wide network of dealers and distributors, with thousands of sales staff to sell its trucks. By using IHC contract prices, credit terms, and suppliers Pacific could greatly enhance its ability to buy parts and components competitively.

Then in September, 1983 International Harvester Canada sold Pacific to Kumpulan Inchcape Berhad of Malaysia, a subsidiary of Inchcape PLC of the United Kingdom. Pacific has recently established a parts depot in Singapore and an assembly operation in Malaysia, and plans to expand its presence in southeast Asia.

Pacific's most popular truck series is the P500, available in two models, the P510 and the P512 with a 10-in. (25 cm) and 12-in. (30 cm) frame respectively. The standard rated P500 GVW is 56,000 lb (25,400 kg) and it offers the sharpest turning radius of any conventional truck in the market, says Magee. Both 510 and 512 come with the choice of a fiberglass or metal hood and both types are interchangeable, due to a unique top radiator tank design that can be adapted quickly to fit either one. Even the truck's windshield—there are two front sections on each vehicle—are interchangeable. The P500 is a "universal" truck, available in either right or left-hand drive—and the "dash instrumentation doesn't know the difference," according to Magee. Such complete interchangeability



Working for Direct Transport in Murupara, New Zealand, this P10 is hauling Tasmanian logs — pine, to be specific.

and standardization are unique concepts in North American truck manufacturing, he adds, and Pacific president Stephen Mostardi says he thinks a lot more trucking companies will be moving to standardize their vehicles in the future.

"I think there's an ever-growing place for a small company like us to custom-design a product to give to the dealer as something he can offer his customers over and above the production-line built truck," says Mostardi.

The P500, introduced in 1975, virtually replaced Pacific's former models, the P9 and P10. The P9 was phased out that year, although the P10 is still exported in its right-hand-drive version to foreign fleets that want common truck parts.

The P500 is designed for both on/off and off-highway use, while the P12 and P16, with identical ratings of 128,000 lb GVW (58,060 kg), are primarily used as off-highway vehicles. Pacific oil-field trucks (6×4 or 6×6) are called "Roughneck" and "Mini-roughneck", whether in northern Alberta or abroad in Venezuela, Libya, Iran, or Egypt.

Pacific staff members are quick to point out that the company has no desire to enter the ranks of high-volume truck manufacturing. Rather than reach a mass market, it aims to serve the "niche" segment of the industry, such as select contract jobs either offshore, in the bush or in construction. To succeed, the compa-

ny must listen very closely to what its customers want and make sure that a given truck is properly applied.

This high degree of customer involvement and product follow-up is one of the company's best marketing strengths, in Magee's view. "In the large production houses, engineering people will probably never know where a truck ends up and in what application. But we live with a customer, find out how his truck is

working and make sure that he's satisfied."

Pacific's marketing consultant for major accounts is George Gray, formerly sales vice president. He spends between 30 and 40% of his time out in the bush watching the company's trucks at work. As soon as he arrives on a truck logging or mining site, he says that drivers will come running up to suggest design changes and offer suggestions for improvements. In turn, he will record all their comments, discuss them with the technical people, and possibly incorporate them directly into the next truck that's built if quality or performance would be improved.

"We're really flexible," he says. "Bigger companies can't make changes that quickly because their numbers are so high. It costs them a lot of money. We can change really quickly and we do.

"This is a challenge," he adds. "It gives you much more satisfaction once you've produced something."

Pacific's ability to release new design features into the marketplace makes it an ideal outlet for component manufacturers to introduce their products. "We're a response organization," says Magee. For example, Cummins officially introduced its NTC 444 engine in Canada at April's Canadian Truck Show in Winnipeg, but one of these engines was already in a P510 Pacific on display at the show.

The company also manufactured eight Pacifics with the air-cooled German Deutz engine. One of these, a logging truck, is sitting in a Kaleden, B.C. backyard and the B.C. Museum of Transportation, Science and Industry hopes to have it delivered some day to include in its collection.

Eighty per cent of Pacific's buyers are owner/operators, says Gray, and they're quick to phone in if something needs fixing. However, the trucks are carefully produced, he claims, with close attention to detail. For instance, the steering gear is placed high on the frame to allow for quick steering and a better turning radius. All electrical connections are fastened with nut-and-bolt closed-eyelet fasteners and all air and drive lines are gathered together, not hanging loose, to reduce friction and premature wearing. Although Pacific trucks have not gone through any radical changes over the years, says Magee, they've evolved into a highly reliable product.

Unlike a mass-produced truck, a Pacific vehicle is never delivered if there's something missing, such as a cigarette lighter, says Magee. Every Pacific truck delivered to a customer comes with its own service manual produced by the engineering department. Each one built is road-tested by Roly Niering, a 16-year Pacific veteran, before it leaves the plant. He'll drive the truck around Vancouver's north shore to make sure all systems are working properly.

"I'm the one who gets stuck with them," the former Hayes employee says with a laugh. "If they don't pass the test, when I get finished with them they will." Meanwhile, Pacific trucks that have passed the test and are out working don't seem to be wearing out—they just keep going on and on. As Magee jokes: "I wish they'd wear out—then we'd sell more."

Well, whether they wear out or not, Pacific trucks have earned a special place in the industry, both in this country and around the world. □



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