

Cargo Carriers' subsidiary brings innovation and reliability

Buks Haulage Limited, a Zambian subsidiary of Cargo Carriers, brings a combination of unique trailers and reliable trucks to Central African transport.

South African bulk-haulage giant Cargo Carriers is increasingly active through sub-Saharan Africa, as African economies continue to grow apace despite a global recession. Supply chain logistics are becoming ever more important, as companies seek to move raw materials and processed goods between primary producers, processing facilities and markets in the most profitable fashion. Through its Zambian subsidiary Buks Haulage Limited (BHL), the company is achieving growing penetration into the Central African supply chain sector.

Road haulage is the backbone of African supply chain logistics - most of Africa's bulk cargo has to be moved by road at some point, whether over multi-lane freeways or single-lane dirt roads. Depending on local circumstances, the quality of these roads also varies greatly, as does the availability of vehicle maintenance and repair. The result is a number of specific challenges to be overcome if a bulk-haulage company is to remain reliable and cost-effective.

Back-loading and multi-loading improves cost efficiency

One-way traffic is one of the biggest contributors to logistics costs, so ensuring that trucks never travel empty creates an immediate saving. Established in 2004, BHL has enjoyed consistent growth in the Zambian mining and farming sectors, as a result of its ability to carry return loads on most contracts, and an innovative solution to combined loads. BHL has been using unique tanker-tipper combination trailers for two and a half years, built specifically to owner Buks van Rensburg's design.

The multi-purpose trailer concept is not new, but BHL's "Bucksta" has a side-by-side configuration of tankers and tippers, which avoids the loading problems experienced by other designs. The tippers also have galvanised hydraulic covers, to protect against theft and the elements, and the trailers can carry a payload of 27 tons, while complying with all safety and load regulations. With tankers and tippers combined on one trailer, BHL is able to transport liquid and dry bulk cargo simultaneously, making its trailers much more versatile.

"For example, we carry copper concentrate from mine to smelter in tippers," says Van Rensburg. "At the smelter, the tankers pick up a load of sulphuric acid, which is a smelting by-product, and deliver it to another processing plant in the DRC. It's used in leaching, during copper processing." Tippers can also be removed and replaced with containers, to carry flat-deck cargo. By ensuring that tankers are carrying cargo on almost every journey, BHL is able to offer much more competitive pricing than it would otherwise. The flexibility of their trailers offers a reduction in delivery and turnaround time, and savings in fuel, vehicle maintenance, traffic congestion and environmental impact - all of which translate to savings for the customer.

African conditions create challenges - and opportunities

African roads present haulers with extremely variable conditions - this applies as much to South Africa as it does to the rest of the continent, as the road infrastructure changes from region to region. The trucks pulling bulk trailers need to be up to those challenges if a company is going to maintain any kind of reputation for reliability. This is the reason that BHL, when upgrading its fleet earlier this year, opted to buy 80 FAW trucks from China, rather than a European manufacturer.

"We can service and maintain them in our own workshops," van Rensburg says. "All of the latest European models are intensely computer-based; you need computerised diagnostics and imported skills to maintain them. Spares are also much more expensive. That's just not practical in an African environment; you can end up with enormous down-time on each vehicle. So we saved time and money by opting for trucks that don't require a European infrastructure to maintain them. The customer support from FAW South Africa has just been out of this world. We haven't had a single problem."

Already active in Zambia, the DRC and Namibia, Cargo Carriers through BHL are planning continued expansion into sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the mining and farming sectors. Cargo Carriers also intends to keep extending its already considerable presence in South African road transport. By developing innovative, entrepreneurial strategies that combine load flexibility, vehicle reliability and superior operational logistics, both companies are uniquely placed to service this fast-growing market.

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