



Hauling Mail

On Time, Every Time

When Earl Sadler talks about his drivers hauling, he means it literally. They will be on the road running from Chicago to Atlanta, Cincinnati to Jacksonville, Kansas City to Jacksonville, Nashville to Knoxville or Nashville to Chicago carrying mail. With 110 tractors, 300 trailers and about 150 drivers, they haul a lot of birthday cards, mail order catalogs, dividend checks, Dear Mom letters - and once, live alligators.

Earl Sadler is owner and operator of the Nashville, TN based Sadler Brothers Trucking and Leasing Co., Inc. which dates back to 1928. That's when his father, who operated a Texaco station, took over the Madison to Old Hickory, TN route to satisfy an outstanding \$36 gas bill. By 1939, when Earl joined his brother in the business, they were running a few pickup trucks.

Their mail hauling operation continued to grow and in the late 60's the Sadlers sold some of the interstate routes to concentrate on the long haul interstate business. Back in '68, Earl Sadler points out, their trucks made two round trips per day to Memphis. They now make 17 daily round trips on that route alone, and eight other primary runs to and from major Southern cities. Though steady growth continues, the Sadlers try to hold it to a manageable 10 percent per year in order to keep their customers completely delighted with their service.

Reliability is imperative

Hauling the mail around the clock requires reliable equipment that's carefully maintained as well as dedicated drivers. The Sadlers' fleet of tractors consists of Freightliners, "We like to run one brand, one make," Earl says noting their preference of complete drive train and other component specs. The power train of choice is the Detroit Series 60 engines, along with Rockwell clutches, transmissions, steer and tandem axles.

Drivers enjoy, among other things, state of the art stereo systems, air ride seats and cruise control. They also like spacious, comfortable cabs so their knees aren't banging against dashboards. Some components get their attention: William Etheridge, for example says the Rockwell RM9-125A 9-speed in his tractor "shifts better" than other gearboxes he's driven.

The Sadlers also write the specs for all new trailer purchases, most of which are 53' Great Danes and Fruehaufs. As Sadler Brothers' four year contracts with the US Postal Service come up for renewal, new trailers are being ordered with the Rockwell WABCO anti-lock braking system and Kemlite's translucent fiberglass roof. Sadler says both are necessary safety equipment - ABS to reduce the possibility of road accidents and the "skylight" roofs so his drivers can see better and operate more safely.



Check the Record

The Sadlers put a great deal of emphasis on safety and are justifiably proud of their drivers' records. "Our drivers take a lot of pride in their safety with no chargeable accidents. The company has in-house safety patrols and works with the Martel Safety Agency.

Next to safety, the Sadlers are most proud of their 95.5 percent on-time delivery records. They include routes of over 500 miles. "We have maintained perfect records for a year on some routes," says Earl. "We're never late. Bad weather is the only excuse we have for running late, and that really no excuse."

There's as much competition in the mail hauling business as in any other. The Sadler's approach to the market is based on their value added service. "I don't think that anyone gives better service than we do." Earl boasts, noting his company's attention to details such as knowing, listening and responding promptly to his customer's transportation needs.

Attention to Details

The major reason for that record of success is Sadler Brothers' strict attention to details like the firm's equipment specifications and the maintenance program. Although they manage operational substations in Atlanta, GA and Jacksonville, FL, all service work is performed at the Nashville home base.

Every few minutes a truck comes into the Nashville base, each at least once every 24 hours. and mechanics check each tractor and trailer before sending it back on the road. Planned maintenance intervals come every 15,000 miles and include oil and filter changes, lubing the chassis, checking fluid in transmissions and rear ends. and adjusting brakes. They still believe in mineral lubricants, in this case Texaco. Air filters are changed every 80.000 to 100.000 miles. Trailer suspensions are greased, and trailer brakes adjusted every 30 days.

As a result, equipment breakdowns are rare. Drivers are relied upon to report even minor problems with their rigs because management wants to keep them in top shape. "Drivers are better educated today. They're more safety minded, and they truly care more about what they're doing," Earl points out.

Driver Charles Owens and Frank Harris agreed that Sadler tries hard to keep the 150 member driver corps happy. "They really listen to us. They know we want cab room, we want a reliable drive train, we want a smooth ride and we like clean equipment. They deliver it all to us," voiced the drivers.

"Rarely is a tractor kept beyond its warranty," Earl says. "At 500.000 miles, which can pile up in two to three years, it's ready to be traded." The Sadlers keep records on each tractor, and stock parts such as brake drums and lined shoes, bearings air



switches, valves, injectors, headlamps, U-joints, belts and two remanufactured axle carriers. They rely on Neely Coble to supply major items and handle warranty work.

Much of the service work is done at night when those "houses" are closed. Sadlers' competent and experienced 10 man maintenance crew handles the minor work to save the travel time to and from dealerships. As tractors age, they're given routes that are closer to home, making them more accessible in case of that rare breakdown.

Looking for Innovations

The Sadlers are quite receptive to equipment innovations in their efforts to achieve better performance, fuel economy and to maintain the high service levels demanded by the US Postal service. In 1957, they were among the pioneers using diesel engines, Detroit's in their tractors. They were one of the first to use power steering, which drivers seemed a bit leery of but quickly accepted. Sadler was reluctant to try Fuel Performance Catalyst, FPC, fuel additive but agreed to test the product. When he saw the results of the test he was sold: a 6% decrease in fuel consumption, increased horsepower and performance, a reduction in carbon buildup and a considerable reduction of visible pollutants in the exhaust. Sadler now highly recommends FPC for any vehicle and all over the road trucks but especially those hauling mail. He claims that FPC plays a major role in their ability to provide excellent service levels to their customers by increasing the overall reliability of his trucks.

Often times, like FPC, they'll try out new tractor models or new drive train components from manufacturers, and after putting on 100,000 miles or so, will solicit comments from drivers for manufacturers' consideration. "We gear every piece of equipment that we specify for maximum fuel economy and appreciate the opportunity to benefit early from the newest technical developments," emphasized Earl. "That's the reason for our success.

Sadler Brothers test run tires from major makes "all the time" Earl says. "We were amazed to get 500,000 miles off one set on a tandem. So it pays us back 100 percent. We got more miles on front tires than we ever did before - some 225,000 miles.

Sadler Brothers don't mind passing on some of the tips of equipment edges that they've learned from their trails to associates in the National Star Route Mail Contractors Association or even competitors. But not all, says Earl, who was once president and on the board of directors of the 4,000 member mail contractors association.

Success of their company, Earl says, is "100 percent hard work." Businessmen intent on early retirement need not come here for inspiration. Earl is 85 and recalls facts and figures like a 20 year old. And they still work at success every day.