

ON THE ROLL

RENAULT IS BUSY ROLLING OUT A RANGE OF READY-TO-GO-TO-WORK TRUCKS WITH AN EYE TO BOOSTING TIPPER SALES. STEVE BANNER REPORTS.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW BUTLER

A line-up of new models, set to be rolled out over the coming months, should help Renault Trucks boost sales of its Ready for Business ready-bodied Range C 8x4 tipper chassis.

The ready-to-go-to-work Thompsons Loadmaster steel-bodied tipper and tipper/grab variants, designed for muck-away work and already available, are set to be joined by standardised alloy-bodied aggregate models produced in conjunction with Wilcox and PPG, says Renault Trucks UK’s head of product management, Andrew Scott. All will be revealed at this year’s Tip-Ex show (Harrogate Convention Centre, 30 May to 1 June). “It will hopefully be quite a noisy launch,” Scott smiles.

A Ready for Business Range C 8x4 standardised concrete mixer is also in the pipeline and will be produced in conjunction with mixer specialist McPhee. Hook-loaders, skip-loaders and sweepers will be appearing too. “If a company runs tippers then it may run those types of vehicle as well which is why dealers and customers asked for the line-up to be extended,” observes Scott. “We will have them all at Tip-Ex and have already announced the line-up at our sales conference.”

The muck-away Ready for Business Range Cs were introduced because Renault Trucks wants to increase the vehicle’s presence in the construction sector says Scott. “When it was launched back in 2013 Range C established a



good reputation very quickly, but it had a hard act to follow (Premium Lander and Kerax) and tipper operators can be a little bit conservative,” he says. “Our dealers told us that in their view we were missing a trick, and that we could improve our position significantly if we could make models available that could be turned around quickly.”

The idea was to satisfy the needs of companies that needed a tipper pretty promptly, either because they were about to start a new contract or because they had had one written off in an accident.

Targeted in most cases at small- to medium-sized operators which have not bought Renalts before – or at least not for several years – it’s an approach that has proved to be successful since the initiative was re-launched in 2017. “I know of one dealer who put a Ready for Business tipper and tipper/grab on his forecourt and sold them to a couple of customers he had never dealt with before within two weeks,” Scott says. “Over recent months all of the vehicles we’ve had built have been sold in advance of their completion, and we could have sold 50% more had we had the chassis available. “We’ve not been able to fulfil orders as quickly as we would wish.”

Chassis availability should be better later this year however, and Scott and his colleagues aim to double sales. He declined to disclose how many had found buyers to date. “What we can say though is that tipper/grabs are accounting for one-third of sales,” he responds. “We thought it would be more like 20%.”

The interest in the two muck-away models should come as no surprise, he believes. Aside from Range C’s virtues, the Loadmaster body’s reputation is “second to none,” says Scott. “We work especially closely with Thompsons director, Simon Shields, at the company’s Blackburn plant,” he adds.



With payload capacities edging up close to 20 tonnes says Scott, the 32-tonne Thompsons muck-away day-cab Range C 430.32 N3Gs currently available are powered by 11-litre 430hp/2050Nm engines. They are married to 12-speed Optidriver automated gearboxes. Fitted with single hub reduction axles and Optibrake engine brake/retarders, the trucks are shod with Bridgestone 315/80 R22.5 tyres.

With 5mm Hardox floors and 3mm fixed side panels backed by a 3mm internal liner, the Loadmaster bodies fitted have fixed front and rear posts, no centre posts and an AutoLoc R tailgate with an AutoLoc safety latch. A two-tier Cabshield headboard is installed – no bolster is required – as is rear under-run protection plus an access ladder and grab-handle positioned over the rear drive axle.



A PM four-point 1155 on-board weighing system is provided to help ensure both legality and productivity. Also present are Edbro CX15 front-end tipping gear and an electric CM1000 front-to-back sheeting system with black mesh. The specifications of both can be changed if necessary.

The tipper/grab version's specification differs somewhat. Again a Loadmaster body is fitted, but with a 4mm internal liner, a standard Loadmaster tailgate and an angled-down headboard with walkway access. No bolster is required. Other features include a black-powder-coated toolbox mounted to the underside of the body.

Binotto 269 under-floor tipping gear is installed and the crane is an Epsilon M125LC82 with a KM602-500 bucket and rotator. Again, the specifications of these items can be changed if needs be, and the sheeting system and PM on-board weigher are listed as options. Options listed for both derivatives include the substitution of a Loadmaster Lite single-skinned body for a better payload, Chapter 8 tailgate markings, rear work and strobe lights and a towing pin



DELIVERY TIMES

At the time of writing – early March – delivery times in April or May were being quoted. Ask a bodybuilder to produce a truly-bespoke tipper outside the Ready for Business programme and build slots were unlikely to arise until July says Scott, with delivery unlikely to take place before September.

A key advantage of offering a ready-to-go-to-work package with a limited selection of variations is that it makes life easier for the network’s sales people, admits Scott. “Some of the sales guys are a little nervous about selling construction vehicles,” he observes. “They know that it’s expensive to put things right if they get the specification wrong.

“They’re also aware that the operator will know a lot more about tippers than they do, and that makes some of them feel a bit intimidated,” he continues. “As a consequence we’re in a situation where just seven of them – one-tenth of the total sales force – are responsible for 70 to 80% of our tipper sales across the UK.”



He wants more sales people to engage with tippers, and would like that seven to more than double, to 15. The Ready for Business Scheme should help, he believes. “The product is so good that it will not let anybody down; not the sales person, and certainly not the customer,” Scott states.

As things stand, the muck-away Range Cs will be O-star rated so far as Transport for London’s forthcoming Direct Vision Standard (DVS), set to apply to all trucks grossing over 12 tonnes, is concerned he says. That means they will be banned from the capital’s streets from 26 October 2020 unless they are fitted with a series of approved safety devices; all of which should be easy enough to install.

They include cameras which watch all the blind spots, side under-run protection which ensures



cyclists do not end up under the vehicle, and an audible warning which sounds when the driver is about to turn left. The aim is to prevent cyclists who may be about to come up on the truck's inside from being crushed. "We will have suitable kit available," he says.

Has Scott thought about introducing a tridem Range C variant to the line-up?

"Funnily enough McPhee will be building a mixer on a tridem chassis which will probably be 1 star so far as the DVS is concerned, and we'll be taking a few people up to see it," he replies. "It won't be part of the Ready for Business programme though, and although I wouldn't say that we would never add a tridem, I think I would see it more as a bespoke build."



ETM GROUP

Companies that have opted for a Ready for Business muck-away tipper include Bristol-based ETM Group. The Renault has joined a 96-strong fleet that embraces everything from vans to skip-loaders and hook-loaders as well as tippers, and is steadily expanding.

Under the ETM Contractors banner the family-owned firm is involved in civil engineering, traffic management and repairing and maintaining highways. It handles all of Bristol City Council's road maintenance.

As ETM Recycling the company diversified into waste processing some eight years ago and it is now its fastest-growing activity. It's investing £4m in a huge recycling centre at Ashton Vale in the city. "It will propel us to the forefront of the waste industry in the South West," says commercial director, Amy McCormack.

In build at the time of writing, and not far short of completion, the site will be able to handle a staggering 150,000 tonnes of construction and industrial waste annually. It will process up to 80 tonnes an hour, with none of it going to landfill, and will handle waste delivered by third-party vehicles as well as its own fleet. "We're Bristol's biggest skip-hire operator," says McCormack. Nor do the skip-loaders confine themselves to Bristol. "We've got three going into Bath every day," she says.



IN-HOUSE WORKSHOP

It services many of its trucks in-house at its Hartcliffe Way site, maintains vehicles for third parties and has operated an Authorised Testing Facility for the past year. “We’ve invested heavily in diagnostic equipment,” says transport manager, Justin Rees. Trucks that are less than two years old are serviced by franchised dealers however under repair and maintenance agreements, and dealers will be contacted for help if a problem arises that ETM’s own technicians cannot solve.

Volvos make up the bulk of the fleet and Rees is pleased with their performance. So why diversify into Renaults? “Because we wanted to branch out and see what other makes can do for us,” he replies. “If you don’t diversify then you can become stagnant.”

Volvo and Renault are of course sister brands, but there remains sufficient divergence between them to make the exercise worthwhile, he believes.



The Range C tipper is not the first Renault that ETM has acquired, and a key influencing factor has been the aftersales support it receives from local dealer Renault Trucks South West at Avonmouth. “If we need help then they respond really quickly,” says Rees, who previously worked for Hoyer and before that DHL. “They’re prepared to put themselves out.”

Another key reason for the choice is that he has found Renaults to be reliable; and while price always matters, reliability is far more important, he says. “There’s no point in going for the cheapest truck available if it spends half its life in the workshop,” he remarks.

The tipper arrived mid-January and has been problem-free to date, he reports. “We’ve had no issues with it at all,” he states. “It’s returning eight



to nine mpg which is an improvement on the five to six mpg we've had from other eight-wheelers we've run," he adds.

Although it is a steel-bodied tipper, at present a lot of its work involves hauling aggregates; ETM rents part of a quarry. "We've had a big push on aggregate sales and they now account for £1m of revenue a year," says McCormack.

On local and regional rather than long-haul work, the Range C looks set to cover 35,000 to 40,000 miles annually.

Supported by a two-year repair-and-maintenance contract, it is being acquired under a three-year hire purchase agreement and is likely to remain in



service for four or five years. ETM does not have a rigid policy on disposals though, and only tends to get rid of trucks once they become uneconomic to repair says Rees. "If it's not broke then we don't try to fix it," he comments.

Driver recruitment is not too much of a challenge Rees says. "Now that the Severn Bridge tolls have gone we're getting drivers coming across from South Wales to work for us," he reports. "They can see the sort of investment we're putting in."

Workshop technicians are not too difficult to find either says Rees in the wake of the demise of locally-based rental fleet Gulliver's Truck Hire. "We've got five plus three plant fitters, and we're looking to take on an apprentice," he says. "We want to develop the workshop side of things."

ETM has achieved FORS (Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme) bronze status; the next step will be to go for FORS silver, says McCormack. It has already moved heavily in favour of equipping its trucks with 360° cameras and audible left-turn warning systems.





Nor is the steady roll-out of Clean Air Zones (CAZ) being ignored. Conscious that Bath is introducing one, and that Bristol may follow suit, ETM has been steadily modernising its fleet. It's now dominated by Euro 6 trucks which will not attract penalties if they enter a CAZ. Will ETM opt for Earned Recognition? – The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency's new way to prove companies meet driver and vehicle standards. "We want to go for it, but not quite yet," Rees replies.

While ETM undoubtedly places compliance at the top of its list of priorities, all the other changes that are taking place in the business will need to be digested first. Once that has happened, Rees and his colleagues will be able to devote the time, trouble and effort that will be required to implement Earned Recognition in what is clearly a fast-expanding and successful operation.