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Kenworth Legend 900... one of eight Cummins-powered KWs providing reliability, durability.



WOOD IS ALL GO FOR WOODHOUSE

On a bitterly cold day in Ulverstone, Tasmania, a heart-warming chat with Ross and Jan Woodhouse brings to light just how hard they’ve worked to get their family business to where it is today.

Ross, 70, speaks with a frankness that leaves little to the imagination, as he and wife Jan discuss their working life and the pride they have in their family business – RC and JM Woodhouse & Sons – that has been involved in the logging industry fulltime since 2000.

Sons Paul and Luke take care of operations while spirited daughter Sarani and daughter-in-law Sarah are responsible for administration. Sarani would have every right to feel a little aggrieved that ‘daughter’ isn’t referenced in the company name! “We desperately wanted a daughter and ended up with a tomboy,” jokes Ross.

Moving 500,000 tonnes a year.

Operating in Tasmania’s northwest, the Woodhouse log truck fleet – eight Kenworths, one Mack and one Western Star – is all Cummins-powered, moving 500,000 tonnes a year for Sustainable Timber Tasmania (SST) and Forico, while the company’s bush gear harvests 65,000 tonnes a year under a contract with STT. Three sub-contractors with trucks are also involved in the business.



Cummins Devonport operations manager Jason McLaughlan (left) with Ross Woodhouse.



Family commitment to business, from left: Paul, Sarah, Luke, Sarani, Ross and Jan.

Raised on a dairy farm, Ross Woodhouse has been involved in the logging industry, off and on, since he left school as a 15-year-old in 1964 when he started cutting pulpwood with his three brothers. He then became a bread vendor in Ulverstone, before trying his hand at logging for a couple of years with a second-hand Fiat 697 – “a lemon that sent us broke,” he recalls vividly.

Ross then got into concrete in the late 1970s, running petrol ACCO and Ford Louisville agitators before changing jobs again, buying a business in 1983 to deliver milk between Devonport and Queenstown. He mentions – through clenched teeth – that he bought a Ford Cargo as he added general freight to his milk delivery work, all the while being supported by his unwavering wife Jan.

He sold that business in 1990, then dabbled in some cartage work for Hammond Palmer and Tioxide before buying a second-hand Mack Value-Liner in 2000 which signalled the Woodhouse family's move into the logging industry on a serious basis. Even then, Ross took on an additional business, hauling general freight containers for Toll Shipping from 2005 to 2018 with up to four trucks.

Despite the challenges the Tasmanian logging industry has faced in recent years, the Woodhouse family's commitment and capacity for hard work has shone through. Sons Paul and Luke ensure the truck fleet and bush gear are well maintained which isn't surprising given their background.

“Both the boys were told to go and get a trade before they came and worked for us,” says Ross. Paul and Luke did exactly that, Paul becoming a boiler maker/welder and Luke a diesel mechanic.

Cummins support “great”.

Cummins has become an integral part of the Woodhouse operation. “The boys are settled with Kenworth and Cummins,” says Ross. “The support we get from Cummins in Devonport is great. Whenever we've had a problem Cummins has stood by us. We can't complain.”

He also rates the support from Kenworth dealer CJD highly. The eight Kenworths, a mix of T409, T909, and K200 models, are powered by ISXe5 engines rated at 525 or 550 hp which have delivered very good reliability and durability. At the time of writing, the oldest Kenworth, a 2013 T909, had clocked up 605,207 km and 16,500 hours towing a Kennedy tri-tandem B-double.

The newest Kenworth is a 2017 Legend 900 which is coupled to an Elphinstone tandem-tandem mini B-double and had done 150,404 km and 4,585 hours at the time of writing.

Interestingly, the oldest truck in the fleet is a 2003 Mack Super-Liner which clocked up 900,000 km with a Cummins Signature Gen I engine before being repowered with a Gen II. The 2007 Western Star 4900 also has a Gen II Cummins.

Although Ross and Jan talk about semi-retirement so they can go travelling, Ross muses: “I've worked seven days a week all my working life. I'd die if I didn't have something to do. I'm only 70... I don't want to retire.” ■



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