



WHO SAID KIWIS CAN'T FLY?

Maarten Durent with Cummins NZ automotive business manager Eric Carswell (left) and Cummins South Pacific area director Dan Gallagher.

Maarten Durent is a force to be reckoned with, as is the team he has built at New Zealand's Southpac Trucks which won the prestigious Kenworth Dealer of the Year Award for the first time in 2017.

Southpac sold over 230 Kenworths in 2017 and Durent is quick to reveal that, at the beginning of March, the company already had orders for more than 150 Kenworths for 2018.

"In 2017 we actually sold more Kenworths in New Zealand than the combined number of trucks sold by all our North American competitors," says the CEO of Southpac Trucks.

Durent is quick to point out that truck sales aren't the only criteria for winning the Dealer of the Year Award which is contested by Kenworth dealers across Australia, New Zealand and PNG. Overall dealer performance including truck sales, parts sales, finance and customer support are the key areas that a dealer is judged on.

"There's a lot of energy in this company... a strong 'make it happen' culture amongst a great bunch of people," says Durent.

Cummins' contribution to success.

"An important part of our success in terms of customer satisfaction has been the Cummins ISXe5," he adds with conviction. "It has made a huge difference. Also, Cummins New Zealand has got its act together with solution-focused people. We have a nice collaborative relationship."

Southpac Trucks was formed in 1994 by Maarten Durent and the late Mike Corliss with backing from one of New Zealand's oldest companies, The Colonial Motor Company, a Ford dealer. Today, Durent is part owner of Southpac with The Colonial Motor Company the majority shareholder.

"We weren't too flash in the beginning," admits Durent. "However in 2000 we started focusing on what we needed to do better by looking at dealers around the world, especially in the US and Australia."



Maarten Durent with the Kenworth Dealer of the Year trophy (centre) with from left: Andrew Hadjidakou, Paccar Australia MD; Graeme Gibbons, CEO of The Colonial Motor Company; and Brad May, Paccar Australia's director sales and marketing.



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Before setting up Southpac Trucks, Durent had seven years in parts sales and parts management with South Pacific Trucks, a Kenworth-Foden dealership owned by Carter Holt, a business that was closed down leading to the formation of the Southpac operation.

Durent makes no secret of the fact he left school at a young age – 14 to be exact. “I trained as a car mechanic, but over a five-year period I got involved in as many things as possible – assembling buses, engine rebuilding, truck wrecking, and other things. I was desperate for product knowledge so that I could get into sales.”

Aftersales support the key.

Aftersales support is the key to Southpac's success, says Durent. He points out that the company's NPS (Net Promoter Score) was “close to perfect” in 2017. NPS is a management tool that is used to gauge the loyalty of a company's customer relationships.

A lot of new customers have also come on board in recent times, from most market segments, and the K200 is the biggest selling Kenworth model due to New Zealand's overall length laws.

“The Kenworth product line-up is in really good shape, the best it has ever been,” says Durent. “Warranty costs are at an all-time low. Our relationship with the factory (in Bayswater, Melbourne) has never been stronger. Their engineering response is very good in terms of being solutions oriented.”

Durent says he analyses every single breakdown: “Staying on top of trends and reacting quickly is critical.”

Southpac Trucks today has branch operations in Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua and Christchurch employing 120 people, as well as 18 independent parts and service dealers throughout the country. ■

