THE ERF STORY

Mr. W. F. Gilbert,
96, Bassett Road,
Leighton Buzzard, Beds.,
says :—

"With a 7-ton load I average 20 m.p.g. I do quite a lot of driving myself and can assure you that I enjoy driving my 'E.R.F.' quite as well as my pleasure car."

A Typical Testimonial

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H. Tuckwell & Sons, Ltd.,

Builders' Merchants, Contracting Carmen, etc.,

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March 31st. 1934

GET/RP

Messrs. E.R. Foden & Son.,
Sun Works,
Sandbach,
CHESHIRE.

Dear Sirs,

With reference to the E.R.F. Diesel Lorries we have purchased from you. These vehicles are giving complete satisfaction and the fact that we have ordered five of them three being repeat orders is adequate proof of the excellent results being obtained.

The easy manner in which they can be manoeuvred in awkward places and their ability to withstand really hard work without mechanical trouble is a great asset.

The finely built chassis and cab, with excellent brakes, steering and controls coupled with the famous Gardner Engines which are very reliable and extremely economical with fuel, make these vehicles in our opinion the best proposition on the road.

Yours faithfully,
H. TUCKWELL & SONS LTD
H. E. Tuckwell Secretary

from a purchaser of FIVE E.R.F. lorries

INTRODUCTION and CONTENTS

Welcome to Built in Britain, *a celebration of nearly 60 years of ERF and independent heavy truck manufacturing in Sandbach, Cheshire. On 28 April 1933,* Commercial Motor *carried a small news story announcing that Mr E R Foden was taking over a disused works for the purpose of making oil-engined vehicles. Today his son Peter still runs the company that bears his father's initials. And ERF continues to feature the self-same qualities up on which the company was founded all those years ago – not least the policy of buying the best components available, and building them in the strongest frame.*

In 1933, its 'buy, don't-build' philosophy was regarded by many of its rivals as folly. But they soon learnt the error of their ways. Indeed, 60 years on that self-same policy has allowed ERF to flourish and grow strong when others have long since fallen by the wayside. But that was then; this is now . . . . .

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REED BUSINESS PUBLISHING

1930s

1930 Unemployment reaches t
1932 Japanese capture Shang
Chancellor **1936** Jessie Ow
1938 Chamberlain promises "p
Civil War ends; World War Two be

ERF was born in the terrible shadow of the great depression of 1930. Convinced that steam power was obsolete and that Foden – the family firm – was already behind the times, Edwin Richard Foden and his son Dennis branched out on their own. They had decided that diesel-engined lorries, and not Foden's clanking steam dinosaurs, would pave the way forward.

It took courage and conviction to leave the business he had inherited from his father, but Edwin Richard had a vision. He had foreseen the death knell of the steam lorry in the closing days of World War One and the 1930 Traffic Act with its restrictive practices merely reinforced his suspicions. Also, the insurance companies were baulking at the idea of underwriting welded steam boilers. He knew that times were changing.

Foden's management did not share his forward thinking, however, and a boardroom wrangle ended with Edwin Richard "retiring" in 1932. Little did they know that by 1933 he would be back with a vengeance, fronting E R Foden and Son Diesel with his son Dennis.

It was not long after his departure from Foden that neighbours began to notice lights burning through the night at Hilary House, the family home in Elworth. The ERF diesel lorry was being born in secret. Edwin Richard, at the age of 62, was fighting back with Dennis and two former colleagues: Ernest Sherratt, later to be chief designer and technical boss, and George Faulkner, who became works manager.

"We worked in a lean-to conservatory," says Sherratt. "It was very comfortable, and not at all ramshackle" and by Easter 1933 the first ERF prototype was at the design stage. The company made its debut at The Motor Show in Olympia later the same year.

"People didn't take us seriously. They said 'what can they do, just three men and a boy?' But we didn't worry," Sherratt recalls. "We just got cracking with a little factory on land rented from a local coachbuilder called Jennings. We

wo million; R101 airship disaster
hai **1933** Adolf Hitler appointed
ens dominates Berlin Olympics
eace in our time" **1939** Spanish
gins

could build six lorries at a time, and we were so busy getting the job right first time, we never bothered with a research and development department."

It was a two-axled six-tonner, called the CI4 that started it all, and Edwin Richard wrote, in his very first sales brochure: "legislation has decided that the wagon must have an unladen weight of under four tons. Therefore my son and I have decided to manufacture a vehicle in this taxation class and have included the strongest frame, the most powerful engine, a robust gearbox, sturdy axles, coupled with efficient and powerful brakes."

He saved the punchline for the end. "We are building this on totally different business methods which we know will reduce very considerably overhead charges, and in that way our customers will reap the benefit." The brave founders of ERF had not only gambled on a new company with a new product in difficult times: they had also decided to revolutionise the way vehicle manufacturers went about things.

They bought in the components. It may sound simple enough today, but it was heresy at the time when industry leaders like Foden, Thorneycroft, Albion, AEC, Leyland et al made everything in their own foundries and machine shops.

"That was our key difference, and time has proved us right," says Sherratt. "We could switch supplies around by buying in." The axles came from Kirkstall. The cabs were

This was the truck that started it all, with its Gardner diesel engine, David Brown gearbox and Kirkstall axles. Leighton Buzzard operator W F Gilbert bought it on 1 September, 1933.

put together by Jennings, the engine was the four-cylinder 4LW Gardner and David Brown supplied a four-speed transmission.

The company did, however, make its own radiators out of aluminium. The braking system used the then-new vacuum-hydraulic principle with Lockheed supplying the hydraulics and Clayton Dewandre the servos. The first chassis was supplied on 1 September 1933, just six months after the company's birth.

More models were to follow, and customers soon began to sense that ERF was a badge worth following. Haulage in the thirties was even tougher than it is today. One early customer told the company, "The day I can't overload an ERF, I'll stop buying them." ERF won a reputation for strength and the small family firms which bought ERF in the beginning were soon joined by big fleet buyers like Reliance Tankers.

At the end of 1933 ERF had made 31 trucks and had redefined the seven to eight ton load capacity concept in British commercial vehicle design. Production reached 96 vehicles in 1934; 115 in 1935; 210 in 1936; 352 in 1937; 413 in 1938; 434 in 1939 and 427 at the end of the decade. In just seven hectic years ERF's annual production rate had increased fourteen-fold.

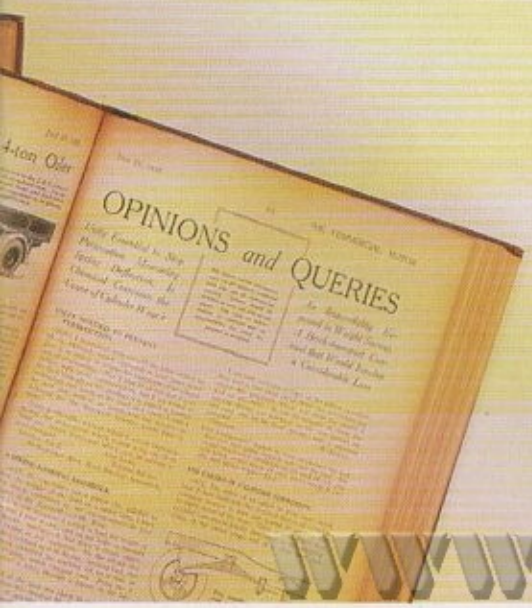
Meanwhile in 1935 ERF built its first six wheeler – made to order for Hall's Toffee. "That was rather funny, actually," Ernest Sherratt recalls. "Hall's ordered our first six-wheeler and Reliance Tankers the second, and while we were building the latter they came back and said 'could you make it an eight-wheeler?' We did, of course."

That year was a watershed in other ways. The original company name, E R Foden and Son Diesel, was causing confusion, claimed Sandbach neighbours Foden, and ERF was born as the official marque name. It was also the beginning of the run-up to World War Two.

The 1937 line-up of a 4×2, 6×4, 8×4 and twin-steer 6×2 were all in production. Simple and strong, the CI4 truck that had been present at the company's birth was also its sole product for the Ministry of Supply at the start of the war.

The beginning of World War II meant that ERF's designs for future trucks had to go on the back burner.

Tough times had bred a tough competitor, and ERF's sturdy little truck was fighting its way forward on all fronts. Designer Ernest Sherratt, however, had other ideas and he was already plotting the shape of things to come. War wastes so many things, not least progress, and ERF was just biding its time.



Edwin Richard Foden, whose initials are now a legend in the British truck industry, knew even in the late 1920s that diesel-engined vehicles would dominate the future and that steam power was dying.

Mr. E. R. Foden Starts New Company to Make Light Oilers.

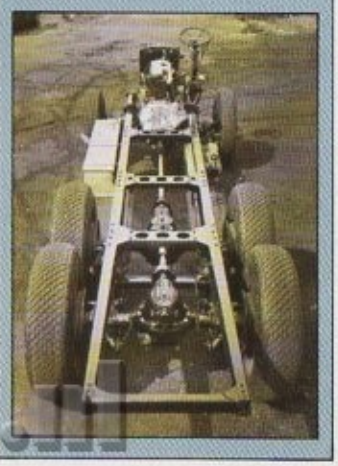
It is understood that Mr. E. R. Foden, formerly managing director of Fodens, Ltd., Sandbach, has decided to take over a portion of the Imperial Chemical Industries' disused works at Cledford, near Sandbach, for the purpose of making oil-engined vehicles of the smaller type. The firm will be known as Messrs. E. R. Foden and Son. Mr. Foden is the sole proprietor, and his son, Mr. Dennis Foden, the manager.

It was in July of last year that Mr. Foden resigned from his position as managing director of Fodens, Ltd.

from The Commercial Motor 1933.

(. . . in the event, ERF started up in a small building at Jennings).

The chassis for ERF's first six-wheeler.



STEERING THE WAY

In 1933, the very first ERF featured axles produced at the Kirkstall Forge in Leeds – home today of GKN Axles Limited – Kirkstall Division.

For over half a century, ERF Trucks have been guided on their way by steer axles from the Kirkstall Division, Leeds plant.

Today, the highly successful ERF range uses the GKN S63 front steering axle as standard equipment. Its flexible design, light weight construction and capacity up to 7100 kg makes it ideal for all models from 17 tonne rigids to maximum weight tractor units.

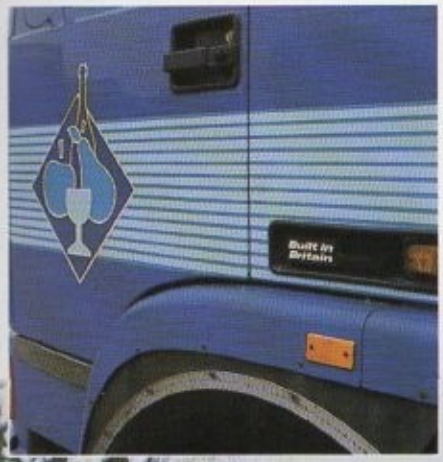
We don't really need to say more.

GKN Axles
Kirkstall Division

Abbey Road, Kirkstall, Leeds LS5 3NF. Telephone: (0532) 584611 Telex: 55109 Facsimile: (0532) 586097

The Showering family has been in the brewing business for all of 250 years; it's best known as the name behind Babycham. One of the ingredients in the company's formula for success has been its ERF trucks.

DRINKING TO SUCCESS



The Showering name was bound up with the West Country town of Shepton Mallet at a time when the horse served as the engine of road transport.

Some 250 years ago, the Showering family was brewing cider and beer in its pub. The Kilver Street brewery was built by the present generation's great, great grandfather on a site that still forms part of the modern factory complex.

Showerings started long before ERF, but its rise to prominence began, like ERF, in the 1930s. In the 1920s the four Showering brothers, Arthur, Herbert, Francis and Ralph, took over the business, and by 1932 they had set up as a private company.

From then on things began to move fast. The brothers began to distribute their products in small Bedford trucks but by the mid-50s, ERFs would be covering over three million miles a year for the family.

The explosion in the distribution end of the business tied in with the success of the Showerings' most famous drink, Babycham. In the late 1930s Francis Showering began to develop new

techniques for fermenting fruit juices. The 'fruit' of his labours was his pear juice-based moneyspinner Babycham in 1946.

Present-day fleet engineer at Shepton, Rodney Neale, takes up the story: "Quite soon the first ERFs were phased in to replace the old Bedfords. They proved reliable and economical and eventually took over."

By 1953, when Babycham was launched nationally, ERFs had become Showerings' standard vehicle in a fleet of 58. There are now 60 trucks and 50 trailers based at Shepton alone, with 450 CVs in the national fleet.

The organisation now distributes throughout the UK and into Europe from Shepton, Attleborough in Norfolk and trunking depots at Huddersfield and Cardiff.

Showering retains its name, but the company is now part of the Allied Lyons group. The corporate image has not dented Showerings' fortunes. The fleet is growing and the vehicle requirement for 1988 was a hefty £750,000.

"We look at specific needs for our distribution tasks," says Neale. "We tend to replace like with like but are always looking for the ideal vehicle. Whatever the requirement, it's my job to choose the best beast for the job."

Neale runs trucks of different makes back-to-back on identical jobs in order to find his best tool for the job.

Whatever the choice the vehicles have to be sturdy animals because Neale expects his 38-tonners to last eight years, or some 800,000km.

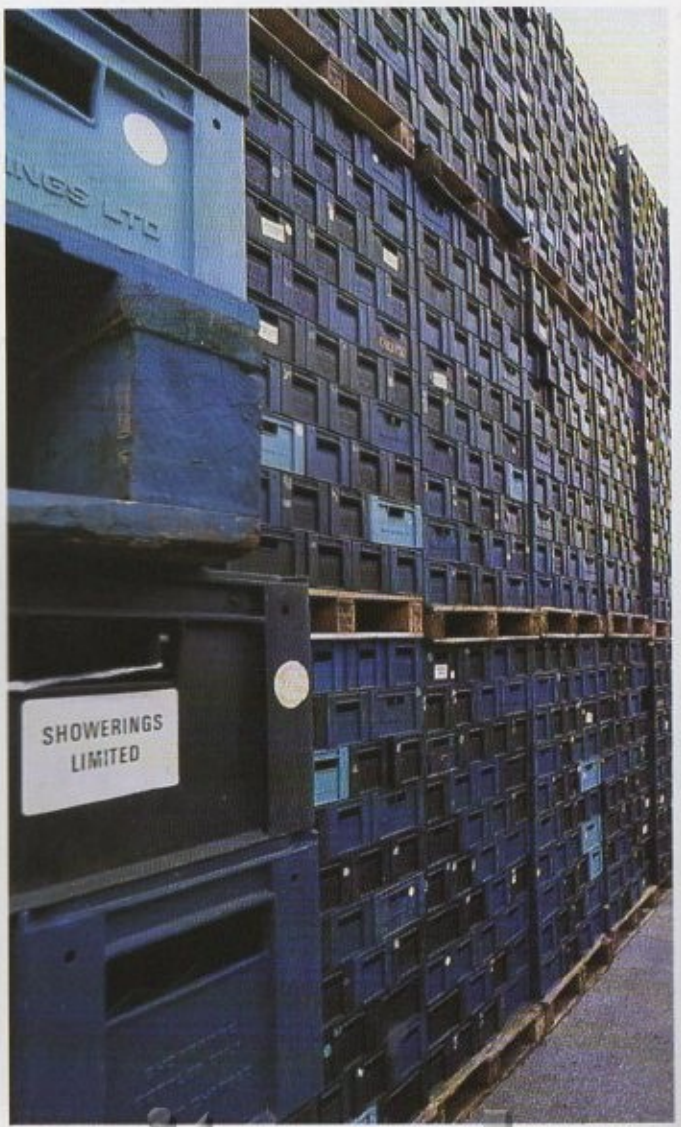
To look after them Shepton employs 23 fitters for maintenance, repairs and some bodybuilding. Skilled fitters, as elsewhere in Britain, are in desperately short supply: "It's taken us nearly a year to get three good fitters," says Neale. Backed by the considerable financial clout of Allied Lyons, Showerings buys its vehicles outright. Lyons gives it an agreed budget for purchases rather than leaving its subsidiary to take out high-interest loans.

"The big artics are used for trunking work and to serve wholesalers like Asda, but the same distribution system sometimes has to serve individual pubs so we need a full range of vans and trucks," says Neale.

Shepton and Attleborough run everything from 3.5-tonne vans to 16-tonne rigids and 38-tonne artics. Each driver is allocated his own vehicle; a policy which Neale finds makes the trucks last longer.

"When a driver is very familiar with the vehicle he gets to know the smoothest, most economical way to drive it and he takes a personal pride in it," he says.

Neale believes that ERF has made a major contribution to the Showerings success story and sees no reason why that contribution should not continue: "If the trucks can beat the competition in terms of strength, weight-to-payload, costs and reliability, then we'll buy them."



"Give us the tools and we will finish the job."

WINSTON CHURCHILL FEBRUARY 1941

In Britain's darkest hour, the nation turned to its manufacturers for help. And they responded, building tanks, guns and aircraft for the nation's fighting forces. Some, like ERF, also raised funds to pay for desperately needed weapons. Others, like Ayrshire Metal Products, responded by building steel sections for Bailey Bridges and temporary airstrips from which the mighty Spitfire could fly. Over the last 40 years, Ayrshire Metal Products has developed its connection with the road transport industry to become a leading UK manufacturer of truck chassis sidemembers. Ayrshire Metal Products understands the needs of today's truck builders and with our current major investment programme we will have the tools to support ERF well into the 21st century.

AYRSHIRE METAL PRODUCTS plc.,
IRVINE, AYRSHIRE KA12 8PH,
SCOTLAND.
TELEPHONE 0294 74171.
FAX 0294 75447.
TELEX 77238.

1940s

■ ERF built its 4 × 2 four-wheeler flagship right through to 1945 and the close of World War Two, but wartime shortages meant that the army's preferred Gardner 4LW diesels could not be supplied in sufficient numbers to satisfy the ERF production lines: 400 chassis a year had been planned at the outset of the war and 434 were built in 1939/40, before the rot set in.

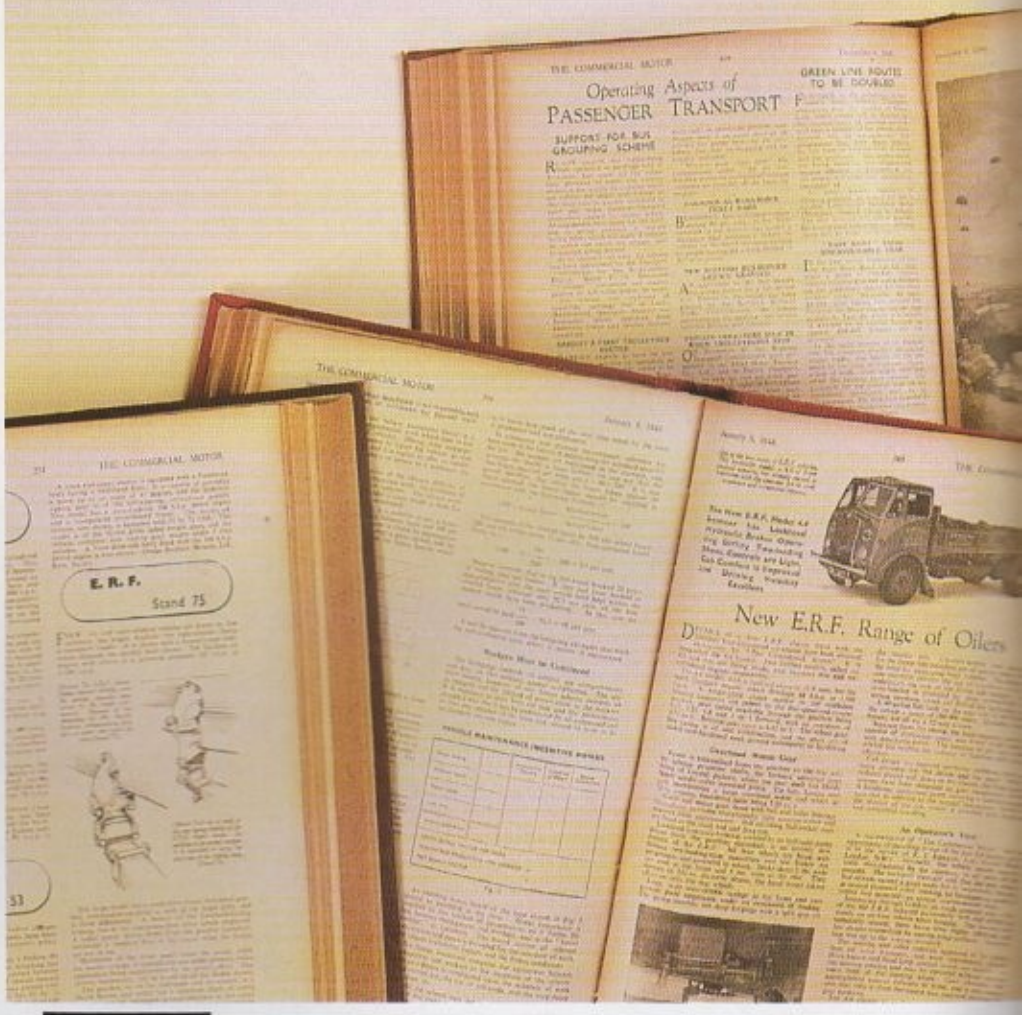
Only 427 chassis were made in 1940/41 and 360 in 1941/2. This dwindled to 322 and 248 in the following two years with output down to 237 in 1944/5.

"We certainly did not make a lot of money out of the war," recalls Ernest Sherratt. For the first time in the company's short history, engines made by other suppliers were fitted to keep things moving as quickly as possible.

AEC 7.7-litre diesels, similar to those fitted in the Matador gun tractors, were used. The military took the Gardner-powered trucks: civilian buyers got the substitute vehicles. Standard CI4 units were used by the Royal Army Service Corps in the Normandy landings.

The CI5 was powered by a five-cylinder Gardner diesel, the 5LW. It had appeared several years before the start of the war to suit operators unhappy with the power of the four-cylinder engine.

While the civilian and military ERF trucks shared the same basic design there were a number of differences on the latter – not least to its radiator grille: the army eschewed chrome in favour of



1940 Dunkirk marks Britain's
tters London; Japanese bomb
ings in Normandy **1945** Berlin
use the atomic bomb against Jap
vice created; State of Israel foun

paint. Headlamps were made smaller and had blackout cowls fitted. Side windows were opened by hand rather than by mechanism to reduce production costs. The most unusual modification to the military ERF was the fitting of a special detector plate at the front of the truck which changed colour in the presence of poison gas.

Every soldier comes home from war with the memory of heroic deeds pinned like a medal over his heart. Their tales may grow taller in the telling, but are generally rooted in fact. Many tales from World War II include trucks.

One involved a well-worn ERF working for the RASC in France, close to the action. It hit a mine which blew the vehicle clean into a neighbouring field, tearing the body from the chassis, puncturing the sump and ruining the tyres. The crew miraculously survived, to haul themselves and the remains of the truck's body back together again. They fixed up the sump, salvaged tyres from abandoned trucks and re-fitted the ERF for the road. The cargo of essential rations was gathered up from surrounding fields and thrown back on board. Within five hours the ERF was back in the war.

With annual production below the 250 mark at the end of the war, and steel rationing a fact of life for the foreseeable future, ERF had to battle on with the same dogged persistence as that little truck in Normandy. It was 1957 before the company could top its 1939 production total, after a long, slow slog through the grey years of post-war austerity.

Lack of raw materials, finance and skilled men meant that any changes had to be kept to a minimum. Despite this CI4 and CI5 rigids sold well, as did the lightweight OE3 model which used the 3.8-litre Gardner 4LK diesel. As soon as the 4LK engine was available it was fitted and the model renamed LK44.

In 1948, however, a new and more rounded ERF appeared. It became known as the "Streamline" cab with its elaborate, curved grille and flush headlamps. Design boss Ernest Sherratt had put many years of frustration and delay into the new truck, along with more recent modifications like the 1946 arrival of an Eaton two-speed axle.

The Streamline had a stronger chassis, better brakes, and was not built with an integral cab but with a curved dash plate which mirrored the line of the radiator. Customers could buy the chassis and fit their own coachbuilt cab if they did not want the ERF standard cab.

The 1940s closed with nationalisation of the haulage industry and the creation of the forerunner of today's National Freight Consortium. The political move made no difference to ERF: it was already popular with British Road Services (BRS), the company that would become the keystone of Britain's nationalised road transport market.

Indeed, ERF was by now so well established, that no-one could think of it as a Johnny-come-lately. It was gearing up to take the truck world by storm with a radical truck design – but that tale belongs to the brighter era of the 1950s.

This beautifully coachlined ERF CI5 appeared at the start of World War Two.

As the lights went out all over Europe, ERF's war effort was to produce hundreds of its sturdy little four-tonners every year.

1941 The blitz sha-

1944 D-day land-

1948 National Health Ser-

Manchester Co-op relied on ERFs to deliver Britain's milk during and just after the War. With few trucks being built, the Gardner-engined four-wheelers had to battle on until well into their old age...

WARTIME MILK RUN

For the first eight years that mechanic George Hunt worked for Manchester Co-op milk division, new trucks – and spares – were like gold dust. It was wartime, and Britain was concentrating its energies, including vehicle production, on winning the fight against Hitler.

Hunt joined the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Rhyl operation as an apprentice in 1942, aged 16. No new trucks were being built, and pre-War ERF tankers were kept busy collecting milk from local dairies for delivery to the Midlands.

But the Gardner 5LW-engined three-tonners, with David Brown crash gearboxes, were tough. "We didn't have a lot of trouble," he recalls, "although we were keeping vehicles long after they should have been scrapped.

"They were slow revving and did 200,000 miles (320,000km) before being stripped down. The more mass-produced Morris Commercials, which we also ran, wouldn't do that."

But there were problems. After 320,000km the Gardner engines became caked in grease, and Hunt remembers "digging with a shovel to get at the valves – there were no detergent oils in those days".

He served five years' apprenticeship and still works at the Rhyl depot, with three years to go to his retirement. "Mechanics then were more like craftsmen – they were pretty much able to do everything themselves."

Because he had no experience of working before the War, Hunt accepted the lack of spare parts as normal. Make-do-and-mend even extended to welding broken valves.

Relief man

Occasionally he drove the ERFs as a relief man. The runs (maximum speed 30mph/48km/h) lasted from 7am until 3pm and took the trucks along narrow North Wales lanes. "The Co-op milk lorries actually widened the roads, which were built for a horse and cart," he recalls.

Every scrap of cargo space was used: an extra top deck was built behind the cab to carry 12 churns and six more were carried on a tailboard.

Hunt was 19 when the War ended but trucks were still hard to buy for the next five years.

Most manufacturers were using pre-War designs and many operators got hold of ex-army vehicles.

The Co-op's faithful 5LWs were eventually replaced with bigger ERF tankers, and these in turn were succeeded by ERF eight-leggers powered by 150 and 180 Gardner engines, and then by E10s.

Today the Co-op's milk division at Manchester runs about 90 E14s with 25,000-litre semi-trailer tankers. Based at five depots, they deliver to Co-op-owned and other creameries, all of which are controlled by the Milk Marketing Board.

One of these, Cricklade Creameries in Swindon (see picture), has nine ERFs among its 13 artics. The milk division also operates 107 17-tonne and 24-tonne tankers about 20% of which are ERFs, on its milk collection runs to farms.

Long cab life

According to the division's group transport manager Sid Cartwright, who has been with the Co-op for 30 years, ERF's policy has changed little since the 1940s. "They still use the same system to build a vehicle to your specifications, and the cab still has a long life."

The Co-op also runs ERFs on its supermarket dry goods distribution operation. Although it has used a lot of Iveco Fords and Renaults in the past few years, it is moving more to ERFs, says vehicle product manager Peter Fallon. Now about half its fleet comprises E6s and E10s.

An ES6 17-tonner has been touring three of its 19 depots; Swindon and Bristol look likely to place orders. At its all-artic Newton Heath depot in Manchester, about 90% of its 60 vehicles are ERFs.

Few people realise that the organisation is one of the biggest retailers in Britain and that the Co-op's unique structure, with a network of local co-operative retail societies, means power comes from the bottom, not the top, says Fallon. The central Co-operative Wholesale Societies are contracted like any other third party supplier, and "if our price doesn't suit them they go elsewhere", he says.

1950s

1950 Petrol rationing ends; val of Britain **1952** King Ge Tensing conquer Everest; Dylar Suez Canal **1958** "Busby Ba First hovercraft built

■ The death of Edwin Richard Foden in December 1950, at the age of 80, was a body blow to the company, his family and the Sandbach workforce. He was admired for his acute business brain, renowned for his sense of humour and respected for his brand of leadership that had nurtured ERF's 'family' atmosphere.

Dennis became managing director and Peter Foden, then only 20, was made a director, ensuring that ERF would live on as a family concern.

The first three years of the decade were tough, with steel rationing remaining in force until 1953 and ERF struggling through the morass of death duties that had followed on from Edwin Richard's death.

The solution was to go public and shares were offered in 1954, just after Peter left Sandbach for his two years' National Service in The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers where he was eventually commissioned and spent most of his time in Germany with the Sixth Armoured Division.

By the early fifties a new cab was emerging that would shape ERF's future and take it into the booming 1960s. Dennis shared his father's flair for design and had sensed that a radical change was needed. In 1952, prototypes of a new and rounded cab fronted by a small oval radiator grille began to appear. The profile of the cab front was about eight feet in radius and its unusual rounded shape led to the use of glass fibre panels for the first time.

Chief designer Ernest Sherratt was delighted when he saw the new truck taking shape. "It was exciting," he says. "We were being adventurous, doing things that no-one had done before."

A young design engineer at Jennings called Gerald Broadbent was responsible for the distinctive flowing lines, and christened it the "Klear View", or KV cab. Today Gerald runs Boalloy, one of the country's most successful bodybuilders and trailer manufacturers, with the best-selling Tautliner design to its credit.

"I still think that the KV cab is beautiful," says Sherratt. "The curved windscreen was Gerald's idea and the whole thing was my pride and joy when I first saw it. I still have to say to people, even now, that their cabs are too square and too box shaped. A little bit of curvature makes all the difference. Operators fell in love with the KV. It was far in advance of anything else on the market at that time – no


14 m.p.g. with 10-ton Payload
21½ TONS CL

Korean war begins **1951** Festi-
rge VI dies; **1953** Hillary and
Thomas dies **1956** Nasser seizes
bes" die in Munich air crash **1959**

Dennis Foden took over when his father Edwin Richard died in 1950 at the age of 80.

doubt about it."

The Gardner engine was specified as the KV powerhouse and the truck became a legend. Many stayed on the road for more than 20 years, working hard until they dropped. "The chassis retained the post-war design," Sherratt recalls. "it only changed in minor detail."

The KV first showed its elegant lines in 1956 and the Gardner 6LX diesel, which was to live on for years, first appeared in 1958. The KV and the 6LX immediately hit it off, driving through a six-speed David Brown box. In the same year, however, a decision was made to offer customers more choice and different engine options.

Purists moaned, of course, but Charlie Butts of Butts in Northampton leapt at the chance and took the first ERF KV eight-legger with a Cummins engine towards the end of 1958. This was the beginning of ERF's switch to Cummins, leading to the strong relationship that the two companies have today.

An ICI quarry at Buxton took the first ERF KV with a Rolls Royce diesel at about the same time. A number of people at ERF felt that the operators were buying unnecessary horsepower, but it was now company policy and ERF knew that what the customer wanted, the customer got. And that was that.

In August 1958 ERF fitted the first disc brakes to a heavy commercial vehicle – but they proved to be too expensive in service and were withdrawn in favour of more conventional drum brakes.

The maximum gross vehicle weight in 1958 was 24 tons, but a 32-ton limit was just around the corner and better stopping power was going to prove a key ingredient to operating at higher GVWs. At the end of the 1950s no-one seemed to like artics, and drawbars were ruled out as uneconomical because the law required a brakeman inside the cab and alongside the driver at all times to brake the trailers. While the technology of disc brakes was still in need of development, their appearance on an ERF chassis was a further pointer to the company's ability to stay ahead of the game and dare to be different.

The KV pushed sales up and the 1959/60 annual production total reached the 500 mark for the first time in ERF's history. The KV was versatile enough to appear in a number of guises, most notably as a bonneted rigid, called the 54GSF.

ERF nicknamed the snub-nosed beauty as "Sabrina" in light-hearted tribute to her resemblance to a movie star of the era.

Other manufacturers tried to emulate the steamlined, rounded appeal of the KV cab shape, but failed.

Its look today defines 1950's style and design – quirky but utilitarian, futuristic and optimistic, imaginative and resourceful. After two hard and gloomy decades, the good times were coming.

The late 1950s were happier times for ERF, and Ernest Sherratt recalls the era fondly. The Suez crisis and de-nationalisation followed by re-nationalisation were temporary but insignificant hiccups for the truck market, he says. "But we were making steady progress all the time, and we were making money."

"Peter took to the company like a duck to water, and the motor industry as a whole was booming." The 1960s were not going to be a let-down.

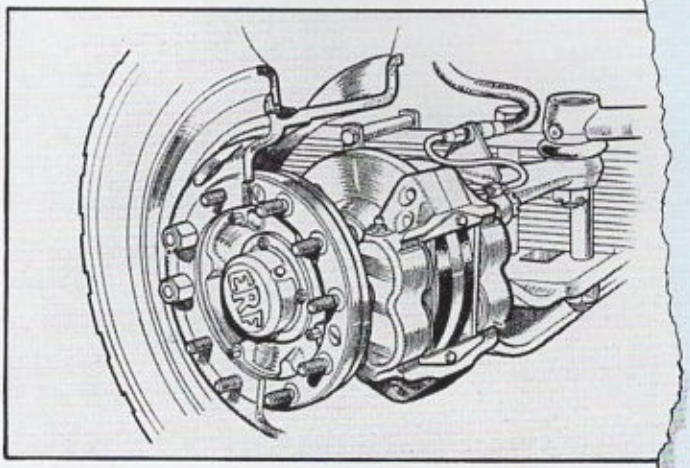
The rounded, streamlined KV cab was a revolutionary design when it first appeared in 1952.

Extract from Commercial Motor - AUGUST 29, 1958.

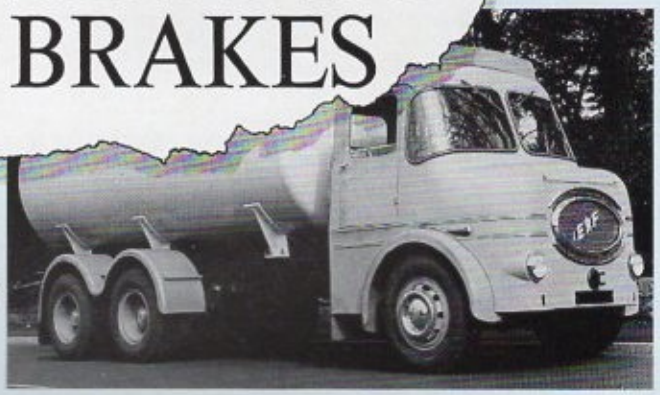
Disc front brakes are employed on one of the new E.R.F. chassis announced today, and to be exhibited at Earls Court next month. E.R.F., Ltd., Sandbach, Ches., thus become the first commercial-vehicle manufacturers to fit disc brakes to a standard chassis. They are installed in the new 54G dumper, which will be seen at the Show in the demonstration park.

The disc brakes fitted to the 54G dumper are Girling type 46 units. The discs are 15⅝ in. in diameter and the friction pads are ⅞ in. thick, there being two sets of pads per disc. So far it has been possible to actuate this type of brake only hydraulically (except for mechanical hand brakes), and because a disc brake has no self-servo effect, some form of servo has to be applied to the hydraulic circuit. Consequently, an air-hydraulic system has been used for the front brakes, whilst the rear brakes are straight air-pressure cam-operated units.

Girling type 46 disc brakes are used on the front wheels of the new 54G dumper. The discs are 15⅝ in. in diameter and the segmented friction pads are ⅞ in. thick. There is one calliper assembly per disc.



E.R.F. FIRST WITH DISC BRAKES



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...today Lucas Automotive supply E.R.F. with—

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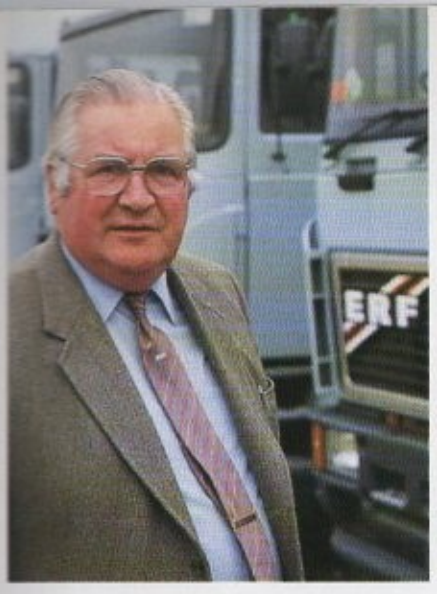
HEAVY DUTY ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT,
TACHOGRAPH INSTRUMENTATION,
AS WELL AS FOUNDATION BRAKES.

Lucas Automotive

ERF 4 x 2E Series



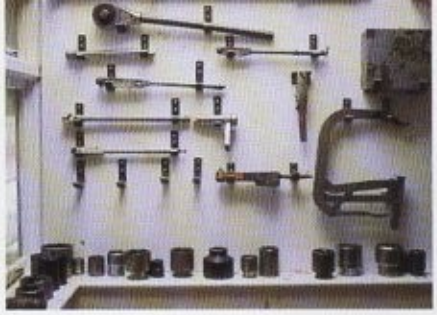
ERF helped Richard Read's family haulage firm through some hard times in its early days; he has returned the compliment by helping to sell hundreds of ERFs to become dealer of the year. His all-ERF haulage company is doing very nicely too. . .

MUTUAL APPRECIATION

In the 42 years Richard Read has run his family haulage business in Longhope, Gloucestershire, he has bought and operated hundreds of ERF trucks. Nothing strange about that you might think, but Richard Read is also an ERF distributor, and last year won the ERF dealer of the year award.

Since the late 1950s Read has sold hundreds of ERFs. He retains an infectious enthusiasm for the marque: "They're right when they say they are the best oil-engined vehicle in the world," he declares. "I have been very pleased working with ERF. They are a family business like us."

Read bought his first ERF in 1957. It was a Gardner-engined 64G tractive unit (his first tractor), which he purchased direct through ERF's general sales manager Harold Sansum. The 64G cost just over £4,000.



"At the time it was the Atkinson versus the ERF as far as I was concerned," Read recalls. "They were always pricier than the Leylands or the Albions, but I wanted to try the ERF because of the quality. They're a hand-made vehicle with the best components."

He was so pleased with his 64G that within months an ERF eight-wheeler joined the fleet. Read's business was growing fast and by 1959 there were eight ERF trucks with the company.

Embarrassment

Suddenly, disaster struck. One of Read's major customers, H & G Thins, went out of business. This caused Read some embarrassment– he had recently ordered three ERF eight-wheelers, and now found himself unable to afford two of the trucks on order.

"I told ERF I wanted to buy all three vehicles, but couldn't afford to pay for them," says Read. "ERF's managing director, Dennis Foden, told me have one now and pay for it and have the other two and pay for them when you can."

Read took delivery of all three trucks, using them on a major new contract at the local Sudbury Paper Mill. Within 13 months he had paid off the cost of the two extra trucks.

"I wrote to ERF and asked how much interest I owed them," he adds. "Dennis Foden just told me, 'buy more ERFs from us'."

Read went one better. He went to his cousin in Hereford and sold him an ERF 6LW for his low-loader business. He also sold a 4LW to a local potato merchant and another 4LW to HR Robinsons of Hereford.

"I sent all the orders through to the Sun Works, and they sent me a cheque for commission together with a letter asking if I would be the ERF distributor for Gloucestershire and Herefordshire," he says.

Businesses

Within three years of buying his first truck from ERF, Richard Read was building not one but two businesses around ERF trucks.

Being both a haulier and a truck distributor makes a great deal of sense, argues Read. "We know what the customer wants," he says, "Hauliers want a straight talking approach and we supply them with the vehicle to suit the job."

The new ERF ES6 is a case in point. Read has sold a "fair few" of the vehicles to local operators in the farms and forests of Gloucestershire and Herefordshire who need a compact truck with a good payload. Read is careful to try new ERF models in his own fleet first. "As a distributor," he says, "we must be able to talk to our customers and give them an honest answer about a vehicle."

Six acres of land at Longhope provide the base for both of Read's businesses. There is a 40,000ft^2 warehouse, with a further 130,000ft^2 planned. There is a weighbridge and a tachograph calibration centre, and there are also plans for a vehicle wash.

There are five repair bays, four service bays, two paint shops and facilities for bodybuilding and alterations to chassis (during *CM*'s visit the company was fitting a lifting third axle on an ERF E10). The parts department is impressive, containing comprehensive spares for ERF's current range, plus some anomalies, like parts for products from the long-defunct British Trailer Company.

Read continues to look for growth in his business. Though the haulage fleet now numbers 25 vehicles (as against 87 in the 1960s), there is plenty of work to be had. Together with his general manager Bob Dowle and his son Richard Junior, Read is searching for new depots in Kent or the North.

"We're still looking now," Read explains, "but half the land available is rented. We would rather have freehold because then you've always got a bob or two behind you."

Success in the haulage business (turnover £2.2 million last year) and as an ERF distributor (turnover £2.3 million last year) has put a bob or two behind Richard Read, who takes delivery of his 12th Rolls Royce in June (registered RRT 1). "Last year was our best ever," he says: "We have done pretty well with ERF all the way."

AS TRUE NOW AS THEN. AND THEN SOME.

DRIVER ECONOMY/DRIVER POWER **ERF**

3,000 ERF vehicles have an extra reliability feature – Cummins pacesetting power.

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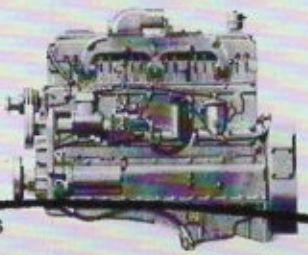

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1960s

As Britain emerged from the post-War austerity of the fifties, the sixties appeared as a truly brave new world – the "swinging" world of The Beatles, miniskirts, motorways, flower power, political scandal, irreverent satire and, of course, that 1966 football World Cup victory.

If the 1950s were years of consolidation for ERF, the sixties were years of rapid technical advance and innovation (not least as a result of legislative changes). But the decade began under a cloud with the death in October 1960 of Dennis Foden, who had been managing director since ERF's inception in 1933.

A month later Peter Foden, then only 30 years old, took over the daunting job of leading the company. As he would recall much later: "There seemed to be a vacant chair and nobody about to fill it".

ERF had earned steady profits during the late fifties but had the potential to do much better. Peter Foden set about bringing in a programme of changes to realise that potential sooner rather than later.

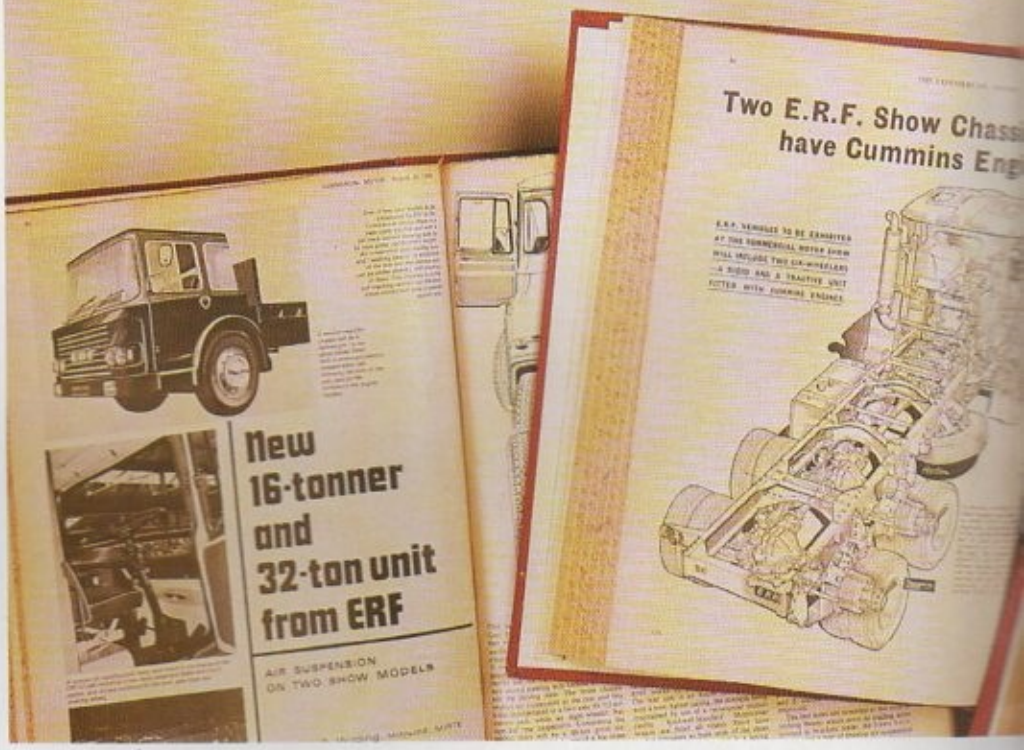
On the product front the company continued to push forward. In 1961 it launched one of the first "environmentally sensitive" heavy trucks – the 88.R eight-wheel rigid with rubber suspension and, at at time when diesel power units predominated in heavy CVs, a quieter Rolls Royce petrol engine. It won orders from the likes of Shell BP, delivering to hospitals and the Houses of Parliament, where minimum noise intrusion was paramount.

While the old KV cab had clearly been successful a replacement was well underway by the early sixties, again using the talents of designer Gerald Broadbent, who had worked on the original KV design at Jennings.

The result of his work was the stylish, curving LV cab, based again on glassfibre external panelling, which bowed in at the 1962 Earls Court Motor Show.

A year later *Commercial Motor* was describing the LV as "having the best appearance of any cab currently being offered on British heavy vehicles, while its interior puts it well into the Continental 'luxury' classes".

If 1963 was a good year for ERF, with annual production reaching



1960 American U2 spy plane
Gagarin first into space **1962**
Train Robbery **1965** Winston
walks in space **1967** Israel wi
on the moon

some 800 vehicles, it was less favourable to road haulage's traditional rival, the railways, with the publication of the controversial Beeching Report. The railways' loss was quickly transformed to the road hauliers' gain, with subsequent benefits for the truck makers.

Another legislative change that was to have a major impact on the Sandbach-based company was the 1964 Construction and Use Regulations, which permitted the use of 32-tonne gross-weight articulated vehicles. ERF had long been expecting the change and was quick to capitalise on it.

That same year Cummins engines were noticeably featured in ERF trucks at the Motor Show, demonstrating the company's intention to extend the choice of power units in its vehicles beyond the legendary Gardner.

ERF's growing domestic success was matched by an increasing export trade, with trucks being sent to places as far afield as Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

While hauliers were still smarting from a 50% increase in road tax, in 1965 ERF remained committed to technical improvement. During a tour of the United States, chief engineer Ernest Sherratt was sufficiently impressed by the 'fail-safe' spring brake concept developed by American engineering company MGM to try it out for himself. ERF approached the Ministry of Transport for permission to evaluate 50 sets of the spring brakes. The Ministry allowed the test, which eventually led to the adoption of spring brakes as standard on virtually every heavy truck sold in the UK.

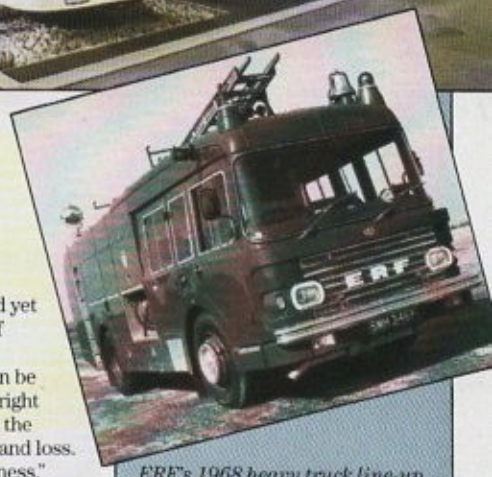
If hauliers were impressed by what ERF had to offer, the notoriously hard-to-please stock market was also "quite pleased with what it got," according to a contemporary report, when pre-tax profits rose to $345,911 on turnover up 30% to $4 million.

The desire to build ever better trucks spurred further product changes, including the use of the Fuller Roadranger twin-countershaft gearbox which would soon become the standard gearbox on a large number of UK-built heavy trucks.

After the launch of a new 16-tonner cab at Earls Court in 1968, along with a three-axle tractive unit with air suspension, ERF displayed two new export models with steel cabs at the Brussels Show in 1969 – the first time it had taken part in a Continental exhibition.

Not that the proliferation of new models was allowed to get out of hand.

Shortly before his retirement in 1969 Ernest Sherratt, interviewed by *Commercial Motor*, reinforced that fact: "It is possible to provide an optimum specification and yet retain a valuable degree of standardisation. This is a difficult exercise, but it can be done. To the operator the right specification can mean all the difference between profit and loss. Getting it right is our business."



ERF's 1968 heavy truck line-up at the Earls Court Show (top) along with an HCB Angus 'Firefly'-bodied ERF fire engine.

Obituary

We regret to announce the death of MR. DENNIS FODEN, chairman and managing director of E.R.F., Ltd., Sandbach, on Monday. Mr. Foden, who has been managing director of the company since its inception in 1933, was the son of the late Mr. E. R. Foden. Mr. Dennis Foden, who was 60, was at the *Commercial Motor Show* only three weeks ago.

MR. E. P. FODEN TO HEAD E.R.F.

IT was announced on Wednesday that Mr. E. P. Foden, youngest son of Mr. E. R. Foden, is to succeed Mr. Dennis Foden as managing director of E.R.F., Ltd. Mr. Dennis Foden's death was reported in *The Commercial Motor*, of October 14.

Mr. E. P. Foden joined E.R.F. after studying at North Staffordshire Technical College and, except for military service as a R.E.M.E. officer, has been associated with the company ever since.

downed over Russia **1961** Yuri Nelson Mandela jailed **1963** Great Churchill dies; Russian cosmonaut ns Six-Day War **1969** First man

Jock McBean built his general haulage business up the hard way – from two trucks, a Nissen hut and total capital of £165 to a thriving operation with 25 trucks – every one of them an ERF.

RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Jock McBean glances proudly along the row of 22 ERFs lined up in the yard of his premises at Kirknewton, a few miles to the west of Edinburgh: "I've wanted to line them up like this for a long time," he says, "but this has given me the excuse."

It is also an excuse for McBean to review the fruits of his 29 years in the business as a general haulier. J B McBean Ltd was started up in August 1969 with £165 when McBean's previous employer went out of business. "I had just two trucks," he recalls, "and two drivers. The trucks went years ago, but the drivers are still with me." His original premises were Nissen huts on the Mid Camps Industrial Estate, and McBean's yard is still on the same site, although now expanded to cover five acres, with 60,000ft^2 of warehousing.

McBean's first ERF was bought in 1970: a two-axle tractor with a Gardner 6LW engine. Although it was underpowered, it managed regular return trips to London, with multi-drops on the southbound trips and loads of Brillo Pads on the way back. Since then McBean has owned 70 or 80 ERFs, and his present 25-strong fleet is 100% ERF. "I've tried other makes," he says, "but I keep coming back to ERFs."

Back-up service

A major factor in the successful operation of the company's fleet is the back-up service McBean receives from local distributors James Bowen & Sons Ltd, of nearby Newbridge. McBean says, "Bowens are there seven days a week to supply what we need, so I don't need to tie up money in a large spares stock. All I hold here are the quick-moving items – bulbs, tyres, brake shoes and the like."

Not that major items are needed very often: "We keep our tractors for four or five years, but work them hard – maybe 80 or 90,000 miles a year. So when we sell them, they've done around 350,000 miles, and often we've not had to carry out any engine repairs on the Gardners at all. All we've usually had to do on the ERF tractors is reline the front brakes."

While he is enthusiastic about ERF and Bowens, McBean is less polite about other manufacturers: "Most of them have never come near me, and others only seem interested in the really big fleets. One Scandinavian builder only condescended to send a salesman to visit me because they considered that my fleet was now big enough to warrant their attention." That salesman did not stay long at McBean's premises.

Sweetness

So is all sweetness and light with his ERFs? McBean can only think of one real problem with them: "Windscreens. You just have to look at the trucks lined up outside and you'll see that quite a few windscreens are cracking."

Six of McBean's ERFs are rigids – two eight-wheelers and four four-wheelers – but the rest are artics with a variety of Crane Fruehauf trailers.

Although the company is very much in general haulage, it also gets involved in specialist areas. McBean is part of Eagle Express, providing a next-day parcels collection and delivery service on the west side of Edinburgh, but Jock is only too aware of the cut-throat nature of this growing business, and will continue in parcels only as long as the return is right.

McBean also has low-loader trailers for large loads: among the loads he has carried have been World War 2 aircraft en route for museums throughout the country. The new regulations this year have forced Jock to think about a new unit, a three-axle tractor and a five-axle trailer, but at a cost of around £100,000, he is approaching the purchase with good Scottish caution.

It is clear that McBean is very much a family firm. Jock is managing director and his son Keith is learning the business; daughter Karen runs the office and Ruth handles invoicing. Keith and Karen are directors of the company, along with Raymond Millar, who is in charge of maintenance in the well-equipped, purpose-built workshop area, and who has been with McBean almost from the start.

There are 36 staff, and many have been with the company for a long time. The drivers each have their own truck, and Jock explains that the turnover of drivers is low. "I can't remember when a driver left us," adding, "voluntarily, of course."

Jock McBean clearly recognises a winning formula, "ERF have been good for the business," he reckons, "but it is equally important to get quality drivers. Add to that a list of good customers, and you can't go far wrong."

1970s

1970 Pakistan tidal wave kill
mon Market; Duke of Windso
1975 Andrei Sakharov win
Presley dies **1978** First "test
Thatcher becomes Prime Minis

150,000 **1972** Britain joins Com-
dies **1973** Vietnam war ends
Nobel Peace Prize **1977** Elvis
tube" baby born **1979** Margaret
er

If the sixties was a decade of unfettered optimism, the start of the seventies was marked by an overriding air of uncertainty. Driven by proposals that 44-tonne trucks should be allowed on British roads, manufacturers tentatively began to build vehicles capable of operating at the higher weight.

Without clear guidelines it was, as a contemporary editorial put it, a case of "designing in the dark", but that didn't dissuade ERF, which had a prototype 44-tonne tractive unit ready in time for the Scottish Motor Show in October 1969.

Following a hysterical anti-juggernaut campaign, however, the idea of a 44-tonne UK truck limit would not be mooted again in this decade, but this setback did no harm to ERF's fortunes and in July 1970 it released figures for the financial year up to March 1970 which showed record breaking pre-tax profits and sales of £734,700 and £9.7 million respectively.

Possibly those figures encouraged the start of the sometimes bizarre on/off battle by ERF to buy Atkinson Lorries. After a series of bids from ERF, and counterbids from Sandbach-based rival Fodens, Atkinson finally merged with Seddon of Oldham. Seddon Atkinson was in turn acquired by International Harvester and finally bought by the Spanish company Enasa.

The biggest news of 1970, however, was not the battle for the big 'A', but the Earls Court Motor Show debut of the ERF A-Series. Despite its obvious visual similarities to the old LV, the A-Series was much more than a cosmetic project.

Beneath its cab major innovations included standard power steering, longer springs and bigger dampers which gave a better ride and handling. Weight had also been saved in the redesigned frame, but without compromising strength. Power was provided by the latest Cummins and Gardner engines, including the 240hp Gardner 8LXB.

After a short demonstration spin at the show, *Commercial Motor* declared it "a very easy vehicle to drive with excellent brakes".

Following its savaging over the 44-tonne issue at the hands of the press, the road haulage industry received welcome support from Transport Minister John Peyton. At the official opening of ERF's new £1 million-plus Middlewich service centre in November 1971, he insisted that the heavy lorry was an enormous 'benefactor' to the community.

In 1972, long-awaited changes in Construction and Use Regulations finally allowed operators to run maximum-weight 32-tonne artics on four, rather than five axles. This helped to stimulate truck sales, although the first signs of a downturn in the economy were being noted by truck makers.

Although ERF remained staunchly convinced of the advantages offered by a glass fibre cab, in 1972 it extended its product range with a 'British-spec' version of its all-steel export cab.

A futuristic, all-steel cab also figured on ERF's striking 'Eurotruck' heavy tractive unit, which broke cover at the Brussels Motor Show the following year.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s ERF had been at the forefront of commercial vehicle technology – particularly through its use of glass-fibre cabs. But with the arrival of the B-Series it broke new ground with the adoption of "hot-pressed" plastic panels.

Until 1974 ERF's method of cab production was long winded, with panels hand-laid in open moulds.

For the B-Series, however, they were produced by laying a coating of plastic resins over fibre glass, but these materials were then placed under pressure in a heated enclosed mould with a catalyst to form the finished panels. These were then attached to a strong steel subframe.

The new SMC panels were dimensionally much more accurate than hand-produced components and were, of course, corrosion proof.

The SP ('steel/plastic') cab was clearly a major achievement in the development of composite materials and it would become the basis of the cab used on today's E-Series models.

By now the domination of Gardner engines in ERF trucks was being tested: by the middle seventies as many operators were choosing Cummins or Rolls Royce power units as those specifying Gardners. The mid-seventies also saw the disappearance of the David Brown gearbox as Fuller became the first transmission choice.

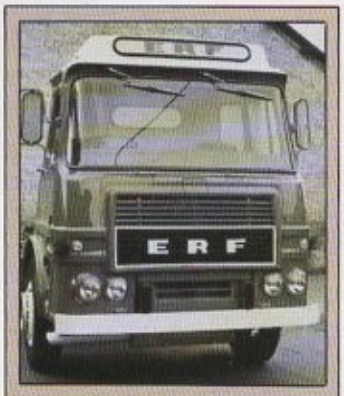
The development of the B-Series, however, was not without its price. Together with a fall in heavy truck sales, and the growing impact of Continental competition, it would have a serious effect on the company's finances.

Despite strong South African sales and "encouraging results" from its new ERF Fire Engineering division, the company finished 1976 with a loss of £118,000.

Self-appointed experts were quick to forecast its demise. ERF put the gloom merchants back in their place by bouncing back in 1977 with a £1.7 million profit.

By 1978 it was in an expansionist mood, having announced plans to complete a new assembly plant in Wrexham which would initially build the company's new M-Series middleweight rigids. The Welsh site was to be part of a £10 million expansion programme which already included the new Middlewich service centre.

In little more than a year, however, that optimism would be severely tested by the start of a calamitous recession.



The A-Series took the industry almost as much by surprise as the original CI4 ERF 30 years ago.

The B-Series soon proved itself to be a popular choice with Britain's road transport operators.

ERF's striking "Eurotruck" boasted a 14-litre Cummins engine providing up to 420hp.

DRIVER ECONOMY/DRIVER POWER **ERF**

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EATON
Truck Components

Reprinted from *Commercial Motor* ERF Supplement March 1972

Wincanton hasn't grown big by making foolhardy decisions, or by picking the wrong equipment. Before specifying ERFs it ran a rigorous series of comparison tests. ERF beat the rest and has continued to do so by winning repeat orders every year.

TRIAL OF STRENGTH

■ This was the decade when Abba hit the charts, Watergate hit the headlines, Sebastian Coe hit the record books and ERFs hit Wincanton Distribution's fleet.

Known in the 1970s as Wincanton Transport, the Somerset-based tanker firm took its first A-Series ERF in 1971. It obviously felt that this could be the start of something big when it dubbed the truck *River Eden* (all Wincanton vehicles are given a name – a habit which dates back to 1932 and a truck called *Smiler*).

Yet it was not until the mid-1970s that Wincanton finally committed itself to ERFs, and even then it made the manufacturer prove itself before it took out its corporate cheque book.

Mike Hughes: helped set up Wincanton's tough vehicle comparison tests.

The decision to go for the ERF B-Series came in 1975. Wincanton wanted to expand its fleet but was unsure of what vehicles to choose because of the demise

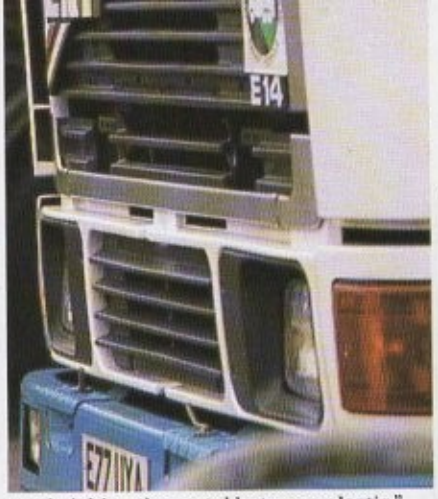
of Guy, the uncertainty of Atkinson and AEC's move into the British Leyland empire. The company decided on vehicle appraisal – and was determined to make it tough.

It borrowed 10 vehicles from leading manufacturers, including ERF, rating each on its "total cost concept" as former chief engineer Mike Hughes recalls. Maintenance, reliability, fuel consumption, running costs and performance were all studied carefully.

Drivers, operations staff and fitters were all asked to fill out forms giving their opinions on each vehicle: Wincanton even timed parts changes.

ERF came out on top – it was both reliable and economical: "In the ERF you could change a clutch easily within four hours whereas other trucks could take up to a day and a half," says Hughes. "It was also the only vehicle which had parts prices which actually decreased during our tests."

As well as its victory in the comparison tests, ERF was chosen for its new cab design. "One of our biggest problems with vehicles in the 1970s were the steel cabs which would rust within two years, but the B-Series solved this problem by



sandwiching the metal between plastic," says Hughes.

The ERF truck used on the comparison test was actually bought by Wincanton on 31 January 1976 and named *River Thames*. Hughes proudly records that in five years of being fully operational, and another five on shunting work, it never had a cab rust problem.

Since that appraisal in 1976, ERF has won a new vehicle deal from Wincanton every year. In July 1978 the tanker operator took delivery of its 100th ERF, appropriately named *Centurion*.

Over the years the two firms have built up a close relationship, and Wincanton now has 391 ERFs in its fleet.

"Even after 1976, ERF kept to the spirit of the appraisal. We told them during the tests what we wanted from them and ever since then they have done everything we have asked. ERF has responded to every call for help," says Hughes.

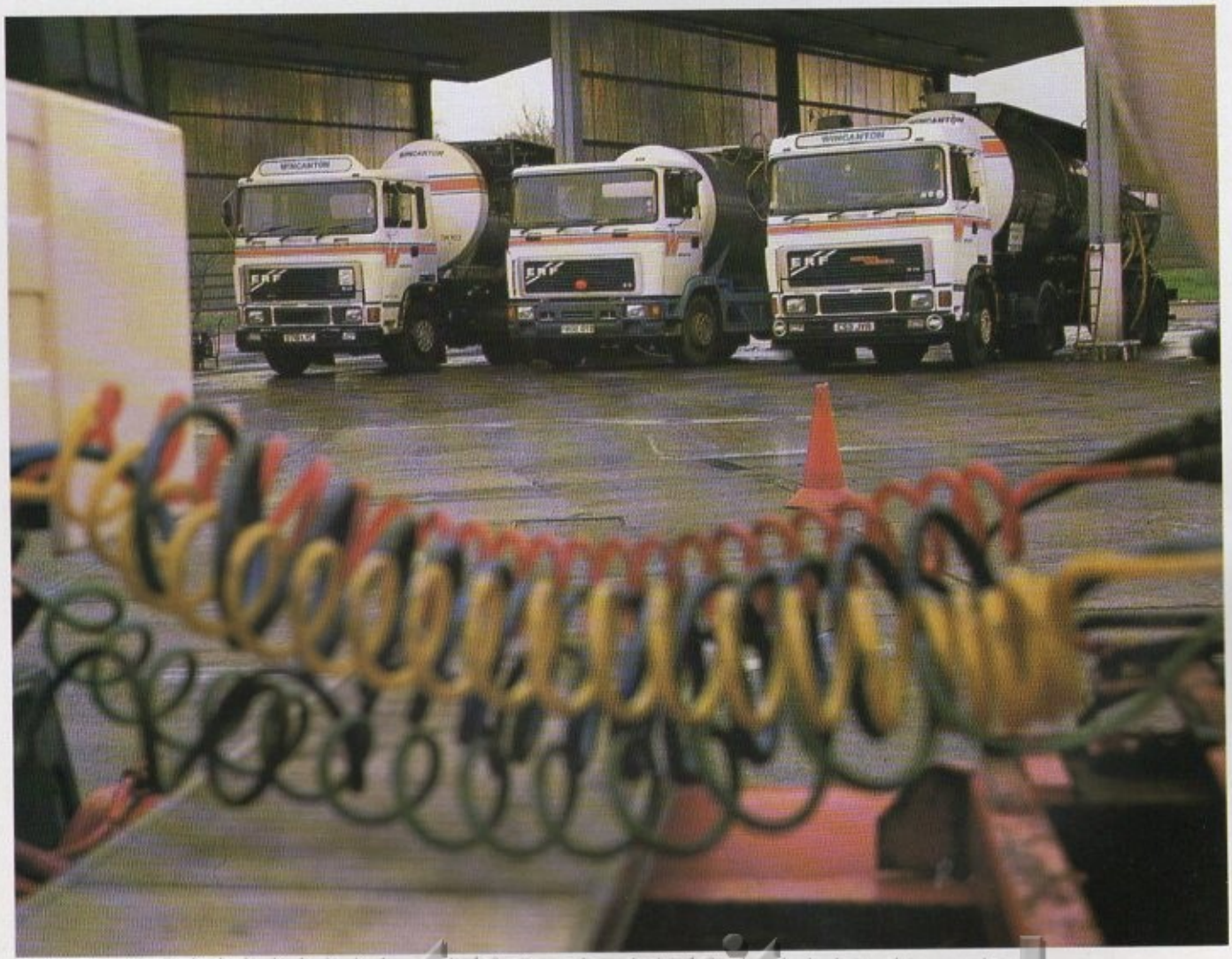
Expansion

The 1970s was a decade of rapid expansion for Wincanton. It established its livery on Britain's roads and founded its nationwide haulage network. In 1973 the firm merged with Miers Transport and in 1974 it took over Ipswich hauliers Reece Brothers. Wincanton diversified into temperature-controlled transport and moved into contract hire.

Much of what is familiar about the company today was established during the 1970s – including its ERFs.

Since then Wincanton has developed into one of Britain's biggest distribution companies and ERF into a major truck manufacturer, currently increasing its hold of the commercial vehicle market.

It is a partnership which Mike Hughes believes will continue. Of all the marques he has had experience of, ERF wins his vote because "they are economical, make good common sense and have the best goddamn brakes I have ever seen!"



TODAY'S DRIVING FORCES

Goodyear 'G' Series, the leading range of high technology, top performance truck tyres for the modern transport industry.

And the ERF E10's, the powerful, ERF Trucks ***heavyweight trucks selected to complement Goodyear's new liveried fleet.***

Two of today's major driving forces working in perfect partnership.

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TRUCK TYRE TECHNOLOGY TO TRUST GOODYEAR

1980s

To describe the recession of the early eighties as "serious" would be to indulge in the Great British habit for understatement – for the truck manufacturers it was catastrophic. Within five years just about every major European manufacturer was forced to implement a major cost cutting and staff reduction programme (the favourite euphemism was "rationalisation") simply to survive. In 1979 a total of 79,855 trucks and artics above 3.5 tonnes were registered in the UK. By 1982, the market had plummeted to 44,301, with the artic sector taking the worst hammering.

1980 SAS storm Iranian Emb
comes President **1982** Arger
bombers attack Harrods **1985**
er **1986** Chernobyl nuclear acc
Armenian earthquake kills thous

As ERF's managing director Cyril Acton would later recall: "By May 1980 it just collapsed on us. At the end of 1979 we were building 16 trucks a day. In the depth of the recession it was 16 a week – the bottom just fell out of the market."

Ironically, at the start of 1980 things were still looking fairly rosy for ERF. In January it announced that it had been offered a $5 million loan by the European Coal and Steel Community to finance its expansion programme, including an assembly plant at Wrexham. By September of that year, it was making "further redundancies" among its Sandbach workforce, which would eventually be trimmed from 1,400 to just over 600 by the end of 1983, with the factory on a two-day week.

Not all was gloom and doom, however: the following month ERF revealed a trio of new "Weightsaver" models in time for the Birmingham Motor Show, comprising a Rolls-Royce-powered tractor and a six and eight-wheeler.

Speaking at the Show, Chairman Peter Foden warned operators of the dangers of falling standards, particularly on maintenance, as the haulage business tore itself apart with desperate rate cutting.

At the same show the news broke that ERF's Sandbach neighbours, Foden, had been bought by the American truck builder Paccar.

Despite the strong competition for work, 1980 would hold some joy for hauliers. After 15 months of deliberation, the Armitage report on *Lorries, People and the Environment* recommended a maximum 44-tonne limit for articulated trucks on six axles.

But it was to be some two years before Transport Minister David Howell bit the bullet and pushed through watered-down legislation allowing 38-tonners. The start of 1981 was marked by two black spots. On 10 January ERF reported that because of the depressed state of the UK truck market, and the "withholding" of financial support from the Department of Industry, plans for the Wrexham assembly plant would have to be abandoned.

The following week, the company announced pre-tax losses of $2.5 million, and put its Fire Engineering division up for sale.

There was still plenty of interest in the new C36 Trailblazer tractive unit when it debuted at the Scottish Motor Show, complete with a Spicer gearbox in place of a Fuller. But a more radical vehicle appeared a year later at the Birmingham show in the shape of the 'Project QM' middleweight chassis with full air suspension and an unusual rear axle located by a large A-frame.

1983 was anything but a dull year for ERF. In June the question on everybody's lips was "Who's buying ERF shares?", following a report in the *Mail on Sunday* – quickly denied – that the Dutch truck maker Daf had been buying them. Whether there really was a mystery buyer or not, the share price certainly went up.

The biggest story of the year, however, had yet to come. Following months of press speculation, ERF confirmed that it had agreed in principle with the Japanese truck maker Hino to assemble a range of 12-15-tonne middleweight trucks at its Sandbach plant, using Hino chassis, cabs and axles with British engines. "Production starts in time for a launch early next year" *Commercial Motor* confidently reported in July.

Then exchange rates, the traditional stumbling block of international deals, came into play: an unfavourable change in the value of the Yen killed the agreement stone dead before it got off the ground.

Nonetheless ERF remained firmly committed to the middleweight market. In autumn 1983 it unveiled its own M16 16-tonner complete with a revised C-Series cab, and as ERF began looking at the opportunities beyond its traditional heavy truck home ground, it began making a number of significant changes to the way it sold its products.

Most of ERF's sales and marketing activities had previously been carried out by its dealers and distributors, but in 1983 it set up its own marketing and sales force.

In parallel with this the company decided to further rationalise its product range, concentrating on building its trucks using the most suitable components. The result was the CP ('Common Parts') Series, launched the following year with a no-nonsense Cummins engine/Eaton gearbox/Rockwell axle combination which would prove highly popular with hauliers.

By June 1985, Peter Foden was confidently reporting that ERF was back on the road to profitability, with a new range on the way.

A year later his prediction was proved correct. By January ERF had bounced back into the black with a $1.3 million pre-tax profit, and less than four months later the E-Series tractor debuted with a more aerodynamic, squared-off, SP4 cab complete with an all new interior, marketed as a "New refinement in pedigree".

As truck buyers came flocking back over the next two years ERF was well placed to take advantage of the new business, with a modern range and a production line churning out 17 trucks a day by early 1988. By the end of the year it was 21 a day.

With the return of sales came better earnings, and pre-tax profits for 1987 rose from $718,000 to a cool $5.61 million. By the end of 1988 ERF had also registered 3,740 trucks in the UK to win 10% of the market above 16 tonnes.

The next big news from ERF in 1988 was the signing of an agreement with the Austrian truck maker Steyr, under which ERF would use the all-steel Steyr cab on its attractive new ES6 17-tonner (launched at the 1988 Motor Show, along with ERF's new range of E8 light tractors and multi-wheelers), while Steyr would receive plastic components from ERF in return. The new ES6 and E8 trucks would remain loyal to the Cummins/Eaton/Rockwell team.

As the decade draws to a close, ERF's process of product renewal is by no means over. It is about to expand its previous driveline options by offering the choice of the new Perkins TX Eagle engine in an additional range of trucks designated the E12. In the words of a former president of the United States, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

Top: ERF's own factory-built dropframe rigid chassis. Below: The new steel-cabbed ES6 rigid at 17 tonnes.

assy **1981** Ronald Reagan be-
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Mikhail Gorbachev new Soviet lead-
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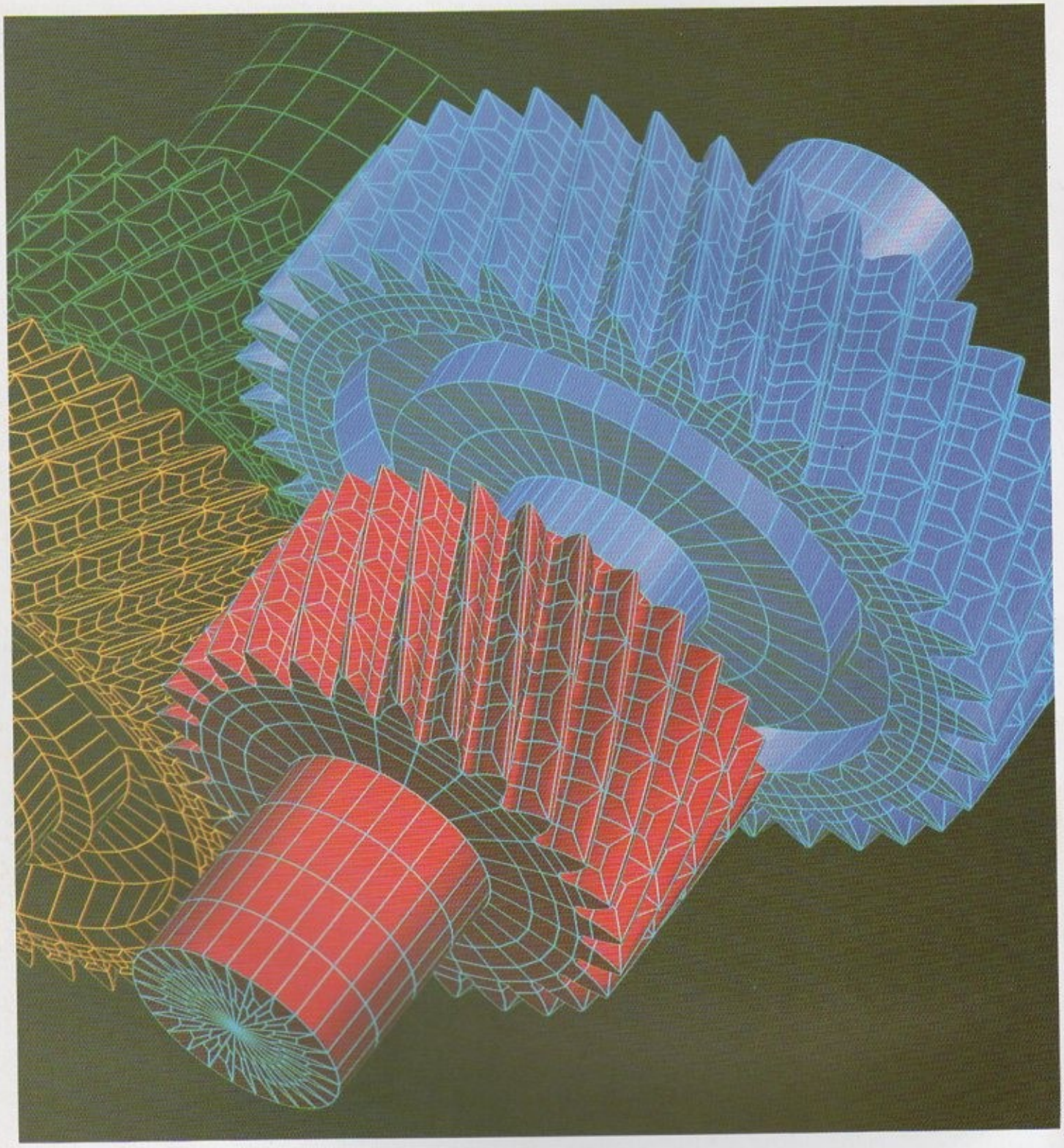
ands

ZF. The Driving Force.



Today's cars, commercial vehicles, agricultural and construction machines are now much more comfortable to drive, safer to operate and more economical to run.

This quiet revolution is the result of many improvements. Not least the continual design advantages incorporated in ZF steering systems, transmissions and axles.

The continual success of the ZF Group stems from the innovative expertise and comprehensive know-how of its workforce, which now numbers 32,000 employees. And with an annual turnover exceeding £1·5 billion, it is not surprising that ZF is the world's leading transmission and steering system specialist.

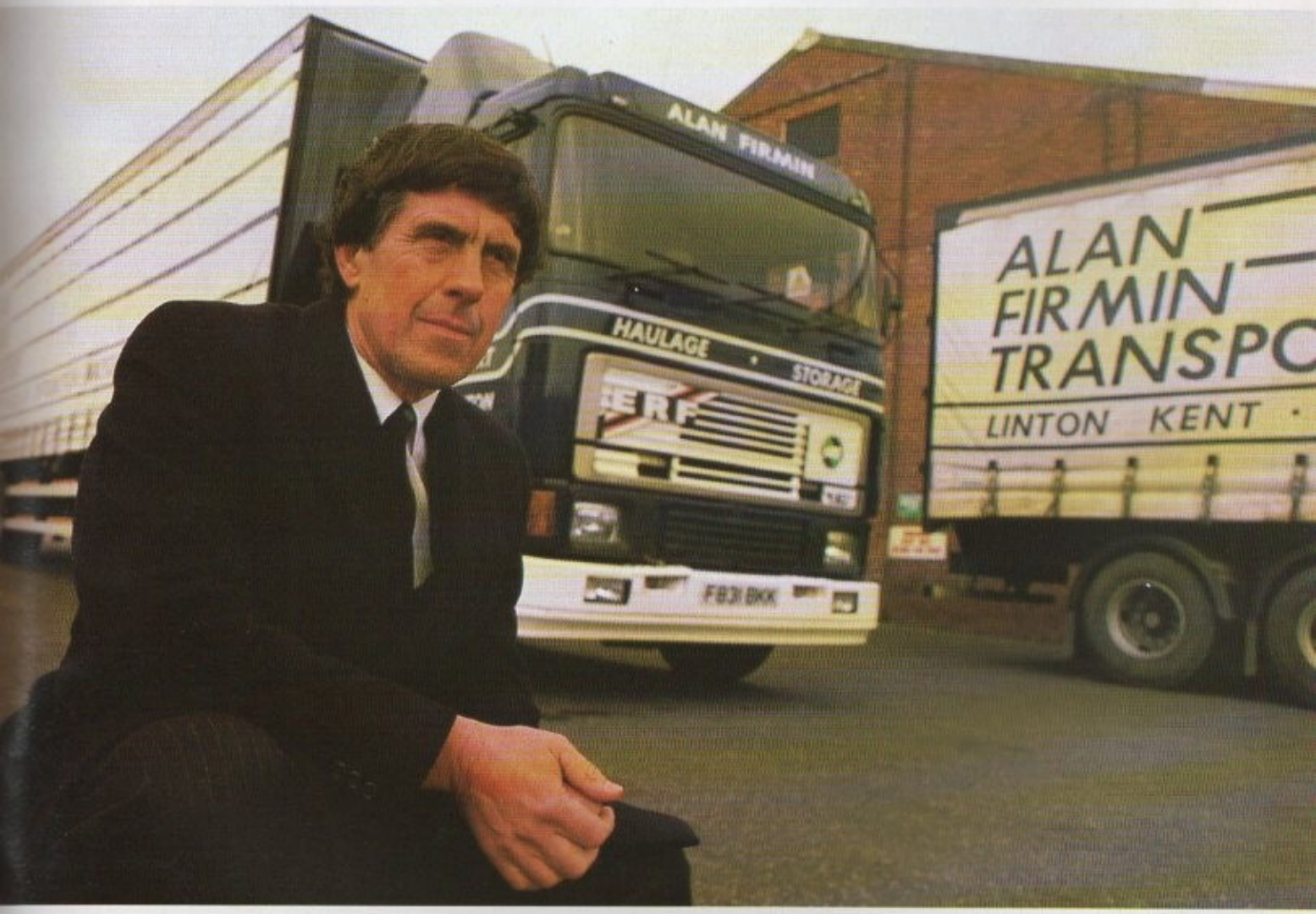
To find out more about ZF products just quote 'The Driving Force' and write to:–

ZF Gears (Great Britain) Limited, Abbeyfield Road, Lenton, Nottingham NG7 2SX. Tel: (0602) 869211. Telex: 377062. Fax: (0602) 869261.

Gearboxes, Steerings, Axles.

There is nothing backward-looking about Kent-based Alan Firmin Transport: it is a company with a will to prosper, by staying ahead of the game. That attitude extends to using Eaton SAMT semi-automatic gearboxes in its new ERFs.

AUTOMATICALLY SUNSHINE



Semi-automatic transmissions are still treated warily by British hauliers: they cost more to buy and are generally seen as the stuff of fitters' nightmares. Alan Firmin Transport could not disagree more, and has decided as policy to fit Eaton's Semi-Automated Mechanical Transmission (SAMT) in all its new ERF tractive units.

What's more the move to SAMT (based on the popular Twin Splitter gearbox) has the backing of Firmin's drivers and fitters. How did it whip up such support, and why did it specify ERF as the chassis supplier?

"We demanded a high specification,

Bob Willard: "we're looking for reliability, economy and excellent value for money."

including full air management, low-profile tyres, auto chassis lubrication, night heaters and a good quality radio/cassette player," says distribution manager Bob Willard. "Needless to say we were also looking for reliability, economy and excellent value for money."

They haven't been disappointed. Willard enjoys an excellent back-up service from his dealer. And his team of five fitters, who do most of the essential maintenance on-

PERFOR

Since the introduction of the 'E' series, ERF have never looked back.

In 1986 our sales totalled 1,604 units. In 1987 they rose to 2,501 units. And in 1988 they leaped dramatically to 3,740 units. Overall, a staggering 25.6% increase in market share.

And we've followed that with an incredible start to 1989. The E8.265 Tractor has been voted 'Truck of the Year', by Transport News of Scotland.

And the E10.325 Tractor has been awarded 'Testers Choice', by Commercial Motor. Two top accolades, for two of our most versatile trucks.

Tractors, rigids or tippers. For long, medium or short haul. Whatever type of haulage you're involved with, you'll find a truck that's perfectly suited to your business.

What's more, our payloads and fuel economy are amongst the best in the business, so you can

MANCE.

1988

be confident that an ERF will deliver your goods, reliably and economically.

Why not put an ERF to the test?

We think you'll be surprised what an exceptionally good buy both our trucks and our range of ERF approved parts are.

Contact ERF Sales on (0270) 763223 soon, for more information, or the address of your nearest ERF distributor.

Because we think there's every chance that this year will be even more successful.

And you know what success breeds, don't you?

THE PERFECT TRUCK RANGE

ERF LIMITED, SUN WORKS, SANDBACH, CHESHIRE CW11 9DN. TELEPHONE 0270 763223

site in Firmin's modern workshop, know that they have quick and easy access to spares. The drivers enjoy greater comfort and less fatigue as a result of the semi-automatic transmission and well-designed seating and controls, and operating costs have proved to be very acceptable.

"We are now specifying SAMT boxes for all new vehicles, including the five ERF 325s with Cummins engines which were delivered this year," says Willard. "The clutch is only used when starting and stopping – at all other times the gear changes are fully automatic. This leads to longer engine life and less wear and tear on both the driver and the transmission."

Fuel consumption is also very good, averaging at 37.02lit/100km (7.63mpg) without the SAMT box and 35.94lit/100km (7.86mpg) with the semi-automatic transmission. "Many of the curtain-siders which we use when carrying bulk paper are loaded to the maximum height of 9ft 10in (3.0m) and this can affect consumption," he adds.

Alan Firmin Transport is well aware that the outward appearance of its vehicles is critical in maintaining the company's image. There is a Wilcomatic washer on-site and drivers are expected to wash their vehicles every day. To maintain a good appearance longer the company chooses two-pack paint: "We find two-pack much better than polyurethane, which tends to discolour," Willard explains.

The average age of the fleet is about three and a half years; the company normally replaces vehicles after five years' service. Its policy of preventative maintenance not only brings advantages during the working life of the vehicle, but also maintains a high resale value. "We sold one vehicle recently for what we understood would be less arduous work," says Willard, "and have since discovered that it is in fact making regular trips from the southern counties to Scotland twice a week – and still proving to be both economical and reliable."

Firmin's quality-first policy is equally apparent when it comes to their drivers. They are all well rewarded for their hard work and loyalty, and there is a service-standards bonus in addition to a substantial pension and life insurance. Each driver usually stays with one vehicle, and Willard likes to make everyone feel that they can come to him if they have a problem. "Our turnover of staff is minimal, in fact most of our drivers have been with the company for over 10 years," he says. "One has been with us since 1955."

The firm has exemption from the Road Transport Industry Training Board because of its in-house training schemes. "We train our own staff on a six-to-eight-week programme. It's better that way, as we know the training that a driver has had." All drivers are trained to Hazpak standards and regular drivers are given assessments.

The company was founded by Alan Firmin in the 1930s as a sideline to his farming activities. "We have over 700 acres of farm on which we grow hops, apples, wheat and barley, not to mention a large flock of sheep. We also have a rare speciality – Kent cob nuts," says Willard.

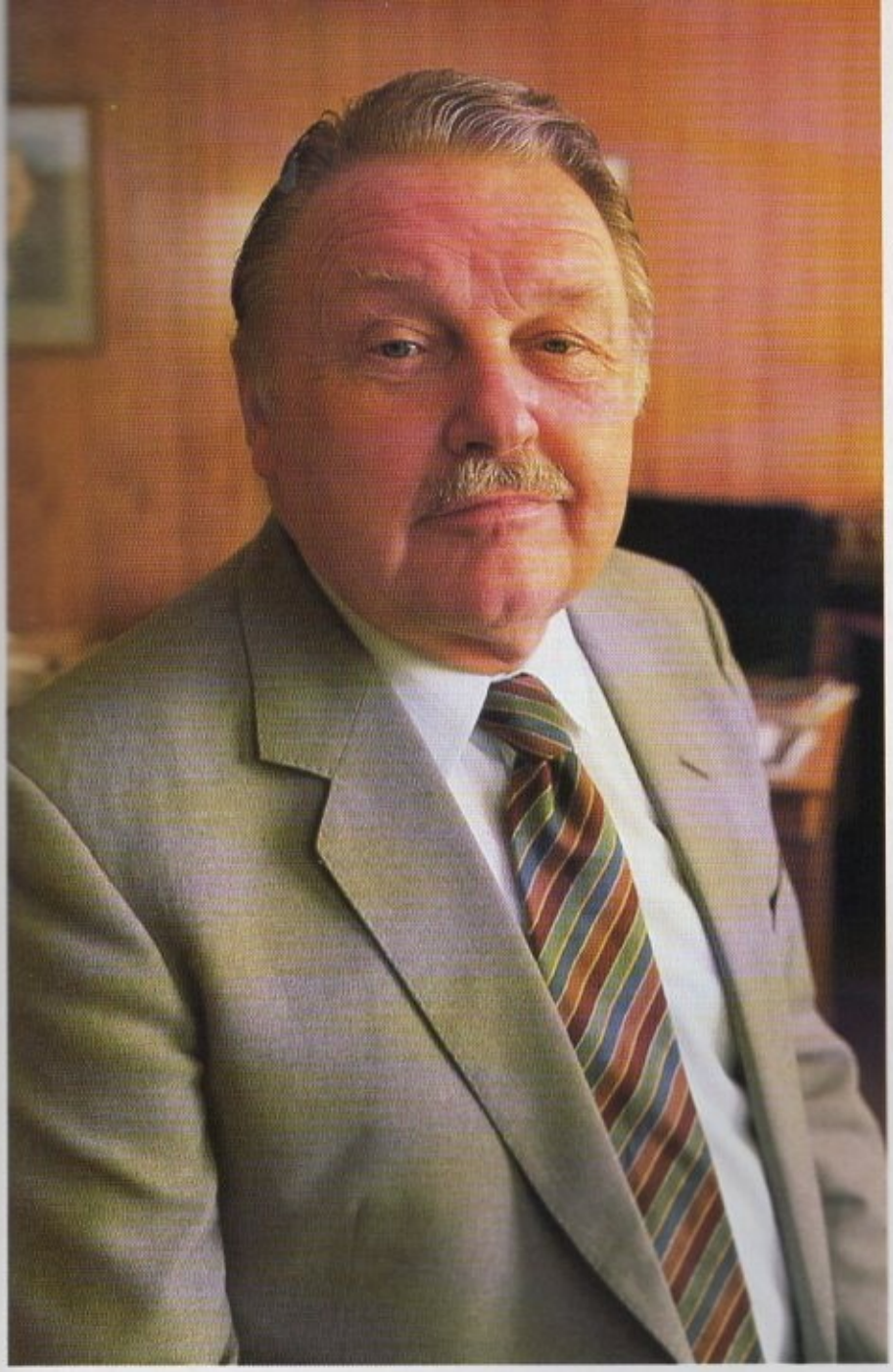
He has been with the company since 1959 and is something of a CV enthusiast: along with his colleagues he is in the process of restoring one of the original Firmin vehicles to be used for local carnivals and rallies.

In 1968 the Firmins entered into a partnership with transport company H W Coates of Cosby, Leics, to form the Firmin Coates Group in order to provide a national depot network.

Much of Firmin's work is bulk paper with customers nationwide. The firm also stores paper products, and the Firmin Group has been involved in warehousing, property management and forklift trucks.

Under Bob Willard's leadership, Alan Firmin Transport has moved away from general haulage to contract distribution. It now has some 452,000ft^2 of storage space.

The company has its eyes firmly set on the Single European Market – having a base in Kent near the proposed entrance of the Chunnel suddenly seems like a very good idea.



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

No one knows the truck manufacturing business better than Peter Foden. Not surprisingly he has strong views about the likely future of road haulage in Britain; how it will be affected by 1992, and ERF's place in it.

Even ERF's fiercest rivals would concede that the company's rise over the past five years has been little short of meteoric – but how will Britain's leading independent heavy truck builder fare in 1989 and into the 1990s? Can its profits and market share maintain their ascent? ERF chairman Peter Foden tempers his optimism with a healthy regard for the cyclical nature of the business: "If they don't, we would be going out of business. But I can't say that between 1989 and 1999 that there will be continued growth."

"The motor industry is well known for its switchback nature," says Foden. "If the market dropped by 25% our profitability, along with everybody else's, would be under pressure. So there's no question of a straight – line sales graph going up all the way. We'd obviously like it to, and I'd love it to, but it won't. We'll try not to fall down any holes on the way, that's the main thing."

Downturn

After two record years, ERF – like its competitors – is watching the market closely for the first signs of a downturn, but if there is a fall, Foden is not convinced it will be as hard as that of the early 1980s: "I think there's going to be a hardening of the market. I don't believe it can keep going up – but who knows?"

Trying to predict what the market will do after 1989, says Foden, is impossible. "But there does seem to be a certain amount of confidence in the industry, and growth in the transport business. Many of the vehicles that were bought in the early eighties (or rather the lack of vehicles bought) is beginning to show through, and replacement business has been a significant factor in the past year or two."

"I don't expect we'll see a massive growth in the number of vehicles on the road, but their utilisation is much higher than it used to be, and they wear out more quickly, and therefore they'll need replacing more often," says Foden.

Observers

The advent of the Single European Market (SEM) in 1992 will inevitably have its effect on the motor industry, but Foden does not believe that its impact will be as big as many observers are predicting: "There's not suddenly going to be a massive change in business, it's just not going to happen overnight. But it is the beginning of an era where we will see the freer flow of vehicles, with more UK operators running on the Continent, and vice versa."

Foden says that "as far as the total volume of vehicles is concerned, it's not going to be much different because there's a free market now, and all of the European manufacturers are already well-positioned in the UK." The challenge for ERF will be to try to balance the flow of vehicles coming this way, by increasing ERF Trucks' UK market share.

"The operator doesn't want rapid changes. He's more interested in cost of operation, rather than paying lots of money for new technology . . ."

In the short-term Peter Foden feels that the most sensible route is to provide impeccable service back-up for right-hand-drive ERFs going over to the Continent, rather than produce left-hand-drive models for immediate sale in Europe. But he adds: "We believe there could be a market for LHD vehicles – maybe not purchased by Continental operators but by UK companies who will find that for a lot of the time their trucks will be in Europe and it would be preferable to have LHD vehicles, even though they are registered in the UK."

Any attack on the much larger Continental market will obviously be restricted by ERF's production capacity, but Foden stresses: "We're not shying away from the possibility of entering the European market. We've certainly had a lot of approaches and we are considering all of them."

Opportunities

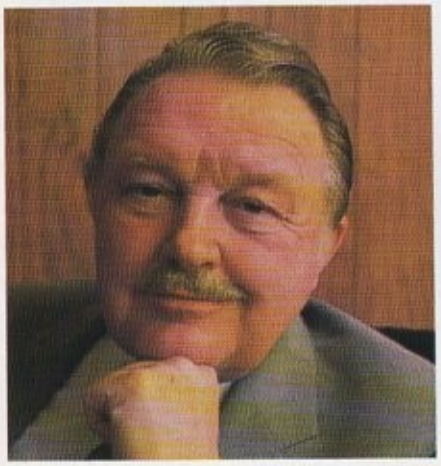
So much for the market opportunities: what of the vehicles themselves? What sort of truck will the ERF buyer of the 1990s be getting for his money? Foden says that new technology will only be used where it is necessary. He believes that legislators, rather than truck operators, will play the leading role in the adoption of new technology, particularly with the advent of tougher laws on exhaust emissions and other environmental issues.

"The operator doesn't want rapid changes," says Foden. "He's more interested in cost of operation, rather than paying lots of money for new technology that at the end of the day is not going to put any more money in his back pocket."

As a result of this, Foden predicts that the tractive unit of the 1990s will "still be a cab-over-engine with two or three axles, and I don't see how we can really change from a normal diesel engine or a conventional gearbox – except maybe with a semi, or fully-automatic transmission – and a normal hypoid bevel back axle. That's it . . . there's little else you can do. It'll be maybe 2020 before we see any radical changes to that design."

ERF will continue to refine its current product range and for the early 1990s, says Foden, "We are looking very seriously at a new cab," still with a steel/composite design. "We're also going to offer an additional range with the new Perkins TX engine, which will be called the E12 TX range."

With the collapse of the Hino deal in the early 1980s, ERF was left to concentrate on the heavier end of the market above 15 tonnes, but Foden says that even if another manufacturer from outside the EEC was to approach ERF with an offer of a smaller, lighter range vehicle for assembly at



Sandbach, "we would prefer to design and build our own vehicle."

Turning to vehicle acquisition in the nineties, Foden reports that "contract hire and leasing is becoming more and more apparent, and it's a sector we are looking at very seriously. We have to be able to offer packages to compete in this very hard-fought-over sector."

ERF also plans to sell more vehicles to owner-operators and small fleet hauliers over the coming months, while maintaining its traditional stronghold in the own-account large fleet sector: "We're encouraging our salesmen to widen our business base," says Foden.

If Edwin Richard Foden were alive today he would have little difficulty recognising the company run by his son, who feels that the ERF of the 1990s will be "a natural development of the original philosophy". Like his father, Peter Foden relishes being at the head of an independent company. He adds that the real reason for that independence "is that we prefer to be our own masters – and the fact that we've had no offers worth considering anyhow." Mind you, ERF's recent performance indicates that it is better off as it is: "If you take the pattern of the last three or four years, the shareholders have had an extremely good run, with the share price going up from about 40p to £5. Not many companies on the UK Stock Market can show that growth. If we had agreed to a deal three or four years ago at a share price of, say, 50p, I doubt whether the shareholders would have done better than they've done staying with us."

Customers

Not that Foden believes his customers only buy ERFs for anything but hard, business reasons: "We are selling our product because it's got driver appeal, it's competitively priced and meets operators' requirements. It isn't a question of 'we are in business because we are ERF and independent'. It's because we make a product that people want to buy – and we don't kid ourselves that they buy it just because it's British. If you're 10% out in price, or you're too heavy, and you're not giving the best service and backup, and your parts are expensive, you're not going to stay long in the truck business."

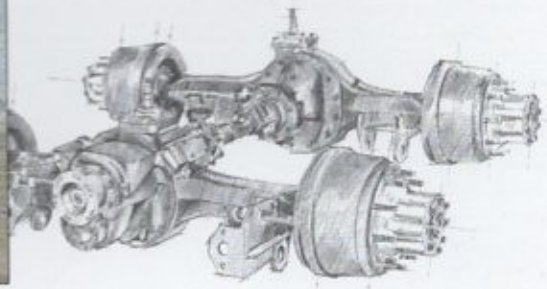
Now approaching his 59th year, Peter Foden is looking forward to the next 10 years, but will he be playing such a key role in 1999?

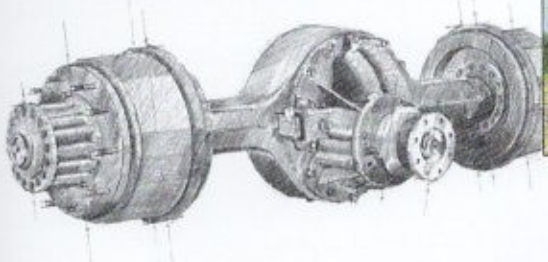
"When you get towards the end of your business career you say 'When I stop doing this what else am I going to do?' Ronald Reagan was President when he was over 70, so I don't see why I shouldn't be around playing a part at ERF when I'm 70."

"Ronald Reagan was President when he was over 70, so I don't see why I shouldn't be around playing a part at ERF when I'm 70"

ERF
TRUCKS

Driving into the future on Rockwell axles





Rockwell International

ERF have chosen Rockwell solo and tandem single reduction rear drive axles as standard equipment for all their trucks produced since 1986