



Press Information

Fuel economy: Chris Sanders shows how it's done

After winning the Driver's Fuel Challenge Chris Sanders, from Sanders Bulk Transport, has expanded his fleet with a Volvo FH 540.

Chris Sanders, Managing Director of Sanders Bulk Transport, recently took out the Number One position in the Driver's Fuel Challenge sponsored by Volvo. Over two days in Adelaide, Chris defeated over 30 other drivers in the heats, then went on to win the final at Anglesea in Melbourne. After seeing what he could achieve in a Volvo equipped with I-Shift, Chris went out and bought one for himself.

"I was brought up on trucks, my Dad started buying Volvos back in the 1960s, and I still love driving," says Chris, "but I spend a lot of time these days directing trucking operations. When you're doing that from the cab, you need to be able to devote part of your brain to driving and part to business. With the I-Shift in the FH I can do that quite comfortably, and know that the truck is making the gear changes that I would, and is still making them at the end of a long day."

"We're out on a range of different jobs, whether it's hauling B-Doubles around the west coast at harvest time, doing short silo runs, unloading fertiliser ships or bringing grain in from Victoria. With the FH you can put the truck in 'A' and no matter what you're doing or how experienced the driver is, it's easy."

After taking over the business from his father 25 years ago, Chris has steadily built it up, with the Volvo FH 540hp joining an FH 460hp, two Mack Tridents and a Freightliner in the fleet. Now, with five trucks hauling stock feed, fertiliser and bulk products across South Australia and Victoria, fuel economy is clearly an important factor in Chris's business operations.

"I'm not about wasting fuel," says Chris, "or brakes. To me, driving well is all about attitude. You have your trip time in mind and you try to let the truck build up some power. Just because you have 18 gears doesn't mean you need to use them all. The Volvo with the I-Shift transmission goes 1st, 4th, 7th, 9th, 11th and ends up in top gear at 1050 revs without lagging, which is exactly what I'd expect a good driver to do."



"At the heats for the Drivers' Fuel Challenge, some of the drivers were burning 60 litres to go 100 kilometres," says Chris. "Volvo's driver trainer Per Hansen pulled off 39 litres so I set out to beat him, and I managed to get it down to 36."

The Drivers' Fuel Challenge has also given Chris an opportunity to change his drivers' attitudes. "I'd been getting arguments from some of them about the best ways to drive economically. Some of the blokes even asked why I was going in the competition instead of them-well, the arguments have stopped now! I've also managed to get one of my drivers to make an 8% improvement in his fuel consumption, just by changing his technique a bit."

Besides the fuel economy, Chris says the FH 540 is a very comfortable truck to drive. "It's a smooth ride, that's for sure: last week I put my coffee cup down on the engine cover and went 20km before I remembered it, and it was still sitting there, hadn't even moved. I had the beagle in the truck the other day and I swear he was watching me drive and thinking "I could do that."

Some of the other drivers originally had reservations about the I-Shift. "One very experienced bloke I have wasn't too sure about the automatic after his first day in it, so I asked him "Are you sure you're not second-guessing it?" I told him to just drive it like you'd drive an automatic car and let the gearbox do the thinking. Sure enough, next day he came back raving about it. There's more to it than gear changes though, you also get the engine brake cutting in much sooner, the moment you take your foot off the pedal in fact. This certainly saves your brake pads, although until you get used to it you can find yourself pulling up fifty yards shorter than you expected."

Chris will soon be heading back to Anglsea to compete in the Asia-Pacific Drivers' Fuel Challenge. Is he looking forward to it?

"I can't wait," says Chris, "I loved every minute of the competition, and it's a great opportunity to demonstrate how, if you have a good attitude and you understand your truck, you can travel a lot further for a lot less."

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