



Pers informatie

More women behind the wheel in the U.S.

The transport industry is still a male-dominated sector, despite of the shortage of drivers and calls for increased equality. However, in different parts of the world, there are crusaders who are working to bring about change and Ellen Voie is one of them. Her organisation, Women in Trucking, with the support of Volvo Trucks, has helped to ensure that there are more female truck drivers in the United States than in many other countries.

About one per cent of truck drivers in Europe are women. This is a very small number but no fewer than in many other parts of the world. At the same time, the transport industry is crying out for more drivers. In the U.S., the situation is somewhat better, as women account for more than five per cent of the country's 3.2 million truck drivers. In the U.S., the organisation, Women in Trucking, has been working for a number of years to change attitudes and norms in the industry.

Ellen Voie, the founder and president of the organisation, says that the U.S.'s current driver shortage would be adressed by doubling the number of female truck drivers to just over 10 per cent.

"There is an old-fashioned, male-oriented culture in the industry and women aren't appreciated as being capable and available," she says.

For this reason, Women in Trucking has, for example, put together a recruitment guide with tips on the ways haulage companies can attract more women to join them.

"First and foremost, the haulage companies and their male employees need to think again and dispense with their macho culture. The women in this industry are tearing down the barriers and this is a source of irritation to some men. It is still too common for women to be harassed by their male colleagues and for truck stops and transshipment terminals to feel unsafe. We are working to change this," says Ellen Voie.

Ellen Voie started Women in Trucking in 2007, after working as a recruiter for one of the U.S.'s largest transport companies and discovering that very few women even considered working in the industry - as drivers or in other areas. Haulage companies had not fully recognized that women could be a solution to both the shortage of drivers and the poor



profitability. Women in Trucking was faced with a difficult challenge, but it has now succeeded in bringing about a positive change in the U.S. As things stand, the organisation has around 2,000 members and three employees, all of whom are working actively on getting information to schools, government agencies, politicians, haulage companies and other transport companies.

"It isn't just the transport industry but also the whole of society that can benefit from more women being employed in the traditional male professions. Female drivers are often safer drivers and incur less damage to their trucks. This is something from which haulage companies can benefit," stresses Ellen Voie.

In the U.S., it is not uncommon to find driving teams in which a married couple, father and daughter or boyfriend and girlfriend undertake long-distance transport assignments together. These teams live in their trucks, which are frequently extended trailers, otherwise known as "sleepers", with a kitchen, bathroom and berths for two people. Ellen Voie believes that this culture could be one of the reasons why more women drive trucks in the U.S. compared with Europe.

- "Women have a natural way into the industry and they share the responsibility and the cost of a truck with a partner," she explains.

Volvo Trucks is a member of Women in Trucking and is actively supporting the organisation's work, including sponsorship of the organisation's Salute to Women Behind the Wheel. It is an annual event celebrating female professional truck drivers, many of whom have driven more than a million accident-free miles.

"It's vitally important for female drivers to have a strong network of role models and to understand the many career opportunities within the trucking industry, says Svajone Drabatiene, director of brand development for Volvo Trucks in North America. "We continue to work with Women in Trucking to help raise awareness and support the women already working in the industry."

In Europe, there are organisations similar to Women in Trucking in countries including the UK, France and Sweden. In the largest EU project to date, the haulage industry in Sweden conducted the "Drivers on the road" project. It was designed to increase the number of young people, immigrants and women in the industry and it was so successful that several of the networks that were created within the framework of the project are still active.

Brigitta Paas is vice chairman of the ETF's (European Transport Federation) women's committee and every day she deals with the question of bringing more women into the



industry. The ETF's plan of action for 2009-2013 states that all the member organisations must implement the necessary measures before 2013, in order to increase the recruitment of women in the transport industry. However, the work is going slowly and laboriously, even if the projects are successful and the aims are ambitious.

"As long as there is cheap labour available in Eastern Europe, the haulage companies are going to employ those people rather than existing drivers or women who are keen to start driving. I wish the associations would do more in this area," she says.

Since 1999, Volvo Trucks in Sweden has been organising what are known as Ladies' Days. The aim here is to arouse the interest of women and girls in driving as a profession by telling them about the industry, organising meetings with female drivers and giving them the opportunity to drive Volvo's trucks. So far, Ladies' Day has been a success and has attracted more than 100 participants on each occasion.

"The haulage companies that do not employ women risk losing out on valuable skills and know-how, which is neither good nor particularly smart. I am convinced that women have a great deal to offer the industry when it comes to safe, fuel-efficient driving," says Martin Bramsved, global manager Corporate Social Responsibility at Volvo Trucks.

Martin Bramsved feels that it is only natural for manufacturers like Volvo Trucks to take an interest in the people who sit behind the wheel, sell trucks or perform service.

"Even if we don't employ drivers, we are still eventually dependent on truck transport that operates efficiently and effectively. This is why we are involving ourselves in social issues such as recruitment. As we see it, it's reasonable for the industry to extend its recruitment base and regard women as a natural part of it - especially as there is a shortage of drivers."

In the past, the actual truck and its handling represented an obstacle for women. Trucks today, on the other hand, do not require drivers who have exceptionally strong arms or are especially tall.

"Truck cabs are designed for drivers to live and work in, no matter whether they are women or men and independent of the strength of the drivers' arms. For example, the drivers' seats and steering wheels in Volvo trucks are extremely adaptable and are therefore ideal for short and tall drivers alike," Martin Bramsved explains.

Earlier this year, Volvo Trucks was eager for Ellen Voie to share her experience and knowledge outside the U.S. and it therefore brought her to Sweden and the truck fair at Elmia in Jönköping. Support from the industry is contributing to Women in Trucking's



success.

"It's incredibly important that manufacturers get involved, just like Volvo Trucks is doing. After all, if there are no drivers, they won't be able to sell trucks," says Ellen Voie.

Watch an interview with Ellen Voie on youtube

Facts Ellen Voie

Age: 54

Education: technical draughtswoman, diploma in "Traffic and transport management", master's degree in communication and a truck driving licence

Occupation: president of Women in Trucking

Career: designed equipment for materials handling, traffic manager at a steelworks, transport consultant in her own company, wrote the book Marriage in the long run, Trucker Buddy, head of staff recruitment at Schneider National, founded Women in Trucking in 2007 and is the organisation's president

Family: a son aged 28 and a daughter aged 25

Lives in: Greenbay, Wisconsin, U.S.A

Facts: Women in Trucking

Founded: 2007

Founder and president: Ellen Voie

Headquarters: Plover, Wisconsin, U.S.A

Number of members 2012: just over 2,000 individuals and companies

Objectives:

To encourage women to apply for jobs in the trucking industry

To make the challenges faced by women in the industry visible

To motivate the transport industry to examine every obstacle that could stand in the way of women considering a career in the transport sector

To act as a network and forum for women in the transport industry

Facts: women in the truck industry

In global terms, female truck drivers are still very unusual. Statistics are not, however, available in many countries.

Number of female truck drivers in some countries where statistics are available

U.S.A, 5.3 per cent

Canada, 3.5 per cent

Sweden, 3 per cent



UK, 1-2 per cent
Australia, 1-2 per cent
Denmark, 1-2 per cent
Europe as a whole, 1 per cent

Organisations for female truck drivers

Women in Trucking, U.S.A
Lady Truck Drivers, UK
La Route Au Féminin, France
Queen of the Road, Sweden
NaisPark, Finland
Kitty Truckers, Slovenia
Bouna Strada, Italy
International Lady Truck Drivers Association, co-ordinates the European organisations

For more information contact:

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