



Press Information

Feature: Trucks that make a colourful statement

Function, quality and reliability are firmly in focus when new trucks are being developed. But as the competition stiffens, it is also important to stand out from the crowd. "Colour has developed as an important element in establishing the brand's perception," says Carina Byström, colour and material designer at Volvo Trucks' design department.

One might be led to believe that for a colour designer, life would quickly get boring in an industry where white is the main exterior colour. Because that's the way it is - the majority of truck cabs leave the factory painted white.

However, Carina Byström and her colleagues at the Volvo Design Centre have taken on an increasingly important role.

Today's rapid pace of technological development means that the world's truck manufacturers are all making considerable strides in terms of quality. Well-thought-out and forward-thinking design thus becomes an increasingly important competitive tool, helping to carve out an individual niche, emphasising what is unique in the product and highlighting what the brand represents. Good design is not just what is seen on the surface; rather, it must unite function with form. Design can also express the functional ambitions that the company prioritises.

"We lag somewhat behind the car industry in this respect, but there are clear trends in the truck industry indicating that design and colour are playing an ever-larger role in the establishment of the brand," explains Carina Byström, colour and materials designer at Volvo Trucks' design department.

For the car industry, for instance, choice of colour has long been an important consideration.

"Car manufacturers change a few colours every year, one or two new colours are added and may disappear, while others, such as silver, black and white, remain on the menu every single year," says Carina Byström.

These classic colours last the course. Despite new car fashions, where green, rust-brown and terracotta mix it with shades of grey, about 25 percent of Volvo Cars' models are



black - even though customers have fifteen different colours to choose between for each model.

For trucks, however, it is functionality that is the prime consideration. The truck serves as the working place, office and bedroom at one and the same time and for this type of vehicle everything has to work properly and service must be tip-top. White is still the predominant cab colour, both because it is the cheapest standard colour but also for other reasons.

"Between 60 and 70 percent of the trucks we sell are white because there are many customers who choose to paint their trucks in their own liveries. Our customers usually want their own corporate colours or wish to decorate their trucks with logos, patterns or stripes," relates Carina Byström.

The truck factories have a permanent set of exterior colours, unlike car manufacturers who discard old colours. At Volvo Trucks, there are between 450 and 500 colour recipes. Whenever an order arrives, the supplier mixes the appropriate colour and delivers the paint.

"Some large customers adopt certain colours as their corporate colours. They buy in many trucks. After a few years, they purchase new trucks, and they naturally want the same colour," explains Carina Byström.

This is one of the reasons why the truck industry is not as fashion-conscious as the car sector. What is more, a truck has to last many years and it must be kept looking good the whole time. For this reason, the design is more neutral, a bit like the design of furniture in public offices. Fashions in clothes and home furnishings change more quickly - out with the old, in with the new, fresh wallpaper. For Carina Byström and her staff at the Volvo Trucks colour and material department, the challenge is to identify long-term trends. The colours they choose first appear on truck cabs about five years later.

The latest trend for truck cabs right now is metallic colours.

"In 2008 and 2009 we launched about twenty new metallic colours. We only had a few metallic paints before that and we have noted considerable demand for these colours," says Carina Byström.

The interiors too feature colours selected with considerable care. The interior of Volvo's trucks are dominated right now by grey.



"We're looking at colours with somewhat warmer tones, creating a cosier atmosphere, but at the same time we want to retain our Scandinavian expression. For that reason, we're not going to offer the sort of yellow-beige tones you find for instance in American and German trucks," says Carina Byström.

She and her colleagues get their inspiration from other vehicles, from the world of design, home furnishings and trade fairs. It often starts with an idea: more blue in the red colour, for example. After that, a paint supplier is contacted who mixes the pigment and sends colour samples. Does the colour work? Does it adhere without requiring too many additional coats of expensive paint?

Paint development is a process of constant teamwork involving several groups of professionals. Volvo Trucks' design department has grown steadily over the past ten years. It employs designers, administrators, project managers and modellers. One might be tempted to believe that the economic downturn and drop in demand for vehicles hits hard at design and development. On the contrary - design becomes increasingly important.

"Together with technology and product development in areas such as the environment and safety, design is one of several important ingredients for being able to deliver competitive products in the future," says Carina Byström.

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