

Reputation, reputation, reputation

Hanbury Riverside has drawn customers from far and wide for more than 30 years. CM discovers its reputation precedes it

By **Will Shiers**

WEST THURROCK-BASED used truck dealership Hanbury Riverside has sold a two-year old Daf XF to a customer in Aberdeen, one of many it has sold to the same haulier over the years. When that customer, or indeed any of its other Scottish customers made the journey south they would have passed an awful lot of Daf dealers, which begs the question, why travel all the way to Essex to make the purchase?

"It's because of that," says director Glyn Davies, pointing to three words printed on the company's *CM* advertisement, "reputation, reputation, reputation!"

"We have worked incredibly hard to build up this reputation," says fellow director Lee Smith, whose face appears in *CM* more frequently than the editor's, "and we work even harder to maintain it."

One of the keys to the company's enviable reputation is the quality of its stock, in particular the incredible detail that goes into preparing everything that graces its

forecourt. The company specialises in one-year-old to three-year-old, top-of-the-range tractor units, but were it not for the tell-tale number plates you would be forgiven for thinking they were newer.

"When I first started in this job I decided to wash a truck, then I vacuumed the interior and polished the dash and windows," remembers Smith, who worked for his father Ron before the latter retired in 1997, selling the company to Davies "My dad came out and said 'what are you doing? It's not a car!' but it was to me."

This was the start of an obsession for cleanliness, which today includes such attention to detail as dry cleaning all cab curtains. The same care is lavished on the trucks' exteriors too, with all dents and scratches being removed.

Davies says: "We look at the trucks as though we are buying them ourselves, and say what is offensive about this vehicle? It might be a little dent or a chipped bumper. So then we remove all of these objections. By removing

objections you stand more chance of selling the vehicle." "You only get one chance to make a first impression," adds Smith.

All Hanbury Riverside trucks have a full main dealer service history, and are in perfect mechanical condition when they're parked on the forecourt. Any defects are dealt with, and if they suspect a clutch might be borderline, it is replaced. The same mentality is applied to tyres, which are always in above-average condition.

Davies, who famously comes from a haulage background and has clocked up 50 years of experience in the industry, remembers how his father used to buy the occasional used truck. He says they would turn up in the yard, then sit around for several weeks waiting for numerous modifications and a coat of paint. But things are very different at Hanbury Riverside, where all trucks are fully prepped to customers' exact requirements on site, including painting if required, and ready to work the day they are delivered.

But while the pair claim to offer the best used trucks in the industry, they acknowledge that they aren't the cheapest. Davies points to a two-year-old Volvo FH500 on the forecourt, which has a £65,000 price tag. He says you could easily find a similarly aged and specced truck for between £2,000 and £3,000 less at numerous other dealerships. "But what that extra two or three grand buys you is peace of mind," he says. "If anything goes wrong with that vehicle we will stand by it and put it right."

"You get more bang for your buck with us," adds Smith.

Sourcing stock

Davies has had a relationship with the truck dealership since the 1980s, and used to dispose of Russell Davies trucks through the site. Today the bulk of the dealer's stock (it usually has about 20 trucks on its forecourt) is sourced from its own successful contract hire businesses.



Down by the riverside: Glyn Davies, below left, and Lee Smith share the same passion for trucks

It takes two to tango

Glyn Davies and Lee Smith are like chalk and cheese, and you wouldn't expect a partnership between the two to work – but it does. While Smith runs the business on a day-to-day basis and is normally on site, Davies tends to put in an appearance once a week. "But I'm on the phone to Lee three or four times a day, bouncing ideas off each other," he adds.

Both men are hugely complimentary about each other, with Davies praising Smith's sales techniques and Smith admiring his partner's business acumen. "You can't have a better person in your back room than Glyn, with his knowledge of the transport industry," says Smith.

While they have totally different styles, what they share is a passion for what they do. "This isn't a job, it's a way of life," says 67-year-old Davies, who sold Russell Davies to Securicor, and later Hanbury Davies to Wincanton. "I don't need to do this," adds Davies.

"But I do!" says Smith, with a smile.





It has 350 vehicles on its fleet, the bulk of which are top-spec Euro-6 Daf XF and Volvo FH4 6x2 tractor units in Euro-5 and Euro-6 guises, but do include a growing number of rigid construction vehicles. It has recently added 15 FH16 750s. Contract hire deals typically last for two years, but when the used market is buoyant, rental customers might be offered a replacement after 18 months, allowing Hanbury Riverside to sell them sooner. "Contract rental is not our core business," explains Davies, "it's a pipeline to our sales business."

Another source of used stock is fleet purchases, normally from companies experiencing financial difficulties or ceasing trading altogether. "One of our great strengths is the robustness of our balance sheet, which puts us in a strong position to respond to such opportunities," says Davies. "A lot of people can show interest in buying fleets, but not everyone can write the cheque."

The customer is always right: Hanbury Riverside's loyal customers include Stephen (left) and Darren Seymour of Seymour Transport

Trucks are also bought from main dealers, typically a Scania from a Volvo dealer or vice versa. Smith says they will buy any marque of truck "as long as they meet our quality standards" and come with a full service history.

It never ceases to amaze Davies how some OEM dealers pay so little attention to preparation. He says he recently viewed some Dafs that were dirty and had rubbish in their cabs. "Used trucks are very much the poor relation of the main dealer," he says. "The new truck is their main objective and the used ones are normally stuck around the back. They put most of their attention into selling new and used is often a bolt-on afterthought. Here it is our core business."

A typical customer

Today, a typical Hanbury Riverside customer operates between five and 30 trucks. Wind the clock back two decades and it used to have a lot of owner-operator customers too, but they have largely disappeared. "I used to call Saturdays owner-driver days because we used to have so many here," recalls Smith, "but these days you rarely see them." Davies believes many are prevented from entering the industry by the high entry threshold.

Despite selling in excess of 250 trucks in a typical year, the company has significantly fewer walk-in customers at its site. This is because an estimated 95% of its customers are confident enough to buy their trucks unseen.

The dealer has customers all over the UK, including as far afield as Northern Ireland, the north of Scotland and Cornwall. It boasts of having a loyal client base, and so far this year 27% of its sales have been repeat business. Smith says some customers have been loyal for more than 30 years, citing MJS Transport (Cambridge), L Buxton & Sons (Brentwood), Seymour Transport (Chelmsford) and RF Transport (Tilbury) as companies that purchased used trucks from them in the early 1980s and in 2015 too.

"I was always taught, not to sell a man one lorry, but to sell him 10," says Smith. "To do that they have to keep coming back, and they do that because we look after them." ■



Company history

Riverside Commercials was started by Ron Smith in 1982, and was later run by himself and his two sons Lee and Graham. Fifteen years later, when Smith was looking to retire, it was bought by Hanbury Holdings. Phillip West, former financial director at Russell Davies and Hanbury Davies, has a firm grip on financial controls and reporting.

Today the business, which has been at its present location since 1988, is headed up by Lee Smith. It employs eight people, who have worked there on average for 16 years each.