

MULTI-MODAL & MULTIFACETED

ONCE A SPECIALIST HAULIER HAS ASSEMBLED THE ARSENAL OF EQUIPMENT, HIGHLY TRAINED STAFF AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO COMPETE AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL, HOW DOES IT BOTH SUSTAIN AND CONTINUE TO GROW ITS BUSINESS IN SUCH A DEMANDING SECTOR? BOB BEECH TOOK A TRIP TO THE ALLELYS GROUP TO FIND OUT FROM ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED OPERATORS IN THIS SELECT CLUB.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CRAIG PUSEY | JASON PRIEST | ALLELYS GROUP

Specialist heavy transport is both a very demanding and capital-intensive business. It invariably takes time to get established and gain the trust of customers, suppliers and even your competitors. For most operators there are a series of progressive steps as the business grows, acquisition of new higher capacity equipment is probably the most visible sign of expansion, but there is far more to be achieved behind

the scenes to be successful. The recruitment and training of staff, the establishment of support services and the technical capability to plan, organise and make effective use of ever more complex equipment are key. Other factors include having suitable operating premises, the ability to maintain, repair and if required, build and modify your own equipment to meet customer requirements.





Further expansion invariably requires the transport company to offer a series of allied services, including transhipment and installation of heavy cargoes, which includes lifting, jacking and skidding loads into their required location. Once again, obtaining the required equipment is an expensive business and is invariably a long process.

The Allelys Group was founded 60 years ago and has grown from a simple transport business, to a multifaceted operation offering a very wide range of interrelated services which include virtually all types of heavy transport and specialist installation services, including heavy lifting, jacking and skidding. It also runs storage for everything from palletised goods to heavy industrial equipment with a lifting and transhipment capability of up to 800 tonnes. The company also operates a general haulage fleet with a wide range of vehicles and is able to offer palletised distribution throughout the UK and Europe. In addition, it's able to provide heavy crane hire of up to 1,200 tonnes capacity and specialist shipping and barging services to deliver a complete multi-modal service on a world-wide basis via its dedicated marine partners, Osprey Shipping Ltd.



This represents a considerable achievement and we think we can safely say that it is the only haulier Britain that operates some of the biggest girder bridge trailers in the UK and is also a member of a national pallet network! The Group is divided into separate divisions that work in conjunction with each other on a regular basis.

For many, Allelys will always be associated with the transportation of railway rolling stock, everything from a classic steam locomotive to the latest high-tech electric trains, this still remains a very important part of the workload and provided the springboard for expansion into many other areas of specialist transport. Right from the start it was able to offer customers a complete service, where it loaded and unloaded the rolling stock without recourse to cranes wherever possible. Specially adapted trailers with rails in the bed, prefabricated loading ramps that split into sections and powerful winches, normally mounted on the trailer neck, made this possible. It proved to be a first-rate training ground for the later challenges.



“Our first real involvement in heavy haulage, was working for Komatsu UK when they set up in Redditch,” recalls managing director David Allely. “We started moving excavators and other equipment with standard low-loader trailers. It seems strange to recall that we thought a 40/50 tonne excavator was a really big load back then. Now one of our ballasted four-axle heavy tractors weighs nearly as much, and we might have as many as four of them hitched to a big girder frame trailer!”

This led to Allelys expanding into the rail sector – particularly moving derelict steam engines from Woodhams scrap yard in Barry, South Wales. This was the beginning of the heritage railway movement that exists today. “Enthusiasts clubbed together to save engines and they required transport,” continues Allely. “We developed an efficient way of loading them, which then led to us working in the mainstream railway industry, moving new equipment.” As loads became bigger and heavier, Allelys acquired its first modular trailers in 1987, in order to reduce axle loadings and improve manoeuvrability in congested



rail yards. “It was an early Cometto trailer that had already done a huge amount of work, but it was a big improvement for us, nothing in comparison to our modern modular equipment and SPMT’s. Looking back, I seem to recall spending a lot of time lying underneath it trying to connect the steering linkages and getting covered in hydraulic oil.”

Allelys is still heavily involved in moving rolling stock, but these days there are more competitors, particularly in the heritage sector. “We’re not able to compete with some of them because of our adherence to laid-down protocols in all aspects of our business adds to our operating costs,” says Allely. “Fortunately, there is a lot of new equipment coming into the rail network and the customers insist on high standards from their suppliers. Our expansion into other markets has been driven by customer demand once we have demonstrated our capability, we have been involved in heavy machinery movement installation and storage for some time. A number of years ago we took over another Midlands-based company, a long-established specialist in this field. Their very experienced staff increased our pool of



specialist knowledge and we were able to integrate this into our mainstream operation. A number of these have either recently retired, or are due to retire soon, fortunately their expertise has been handed down to a new generation.”

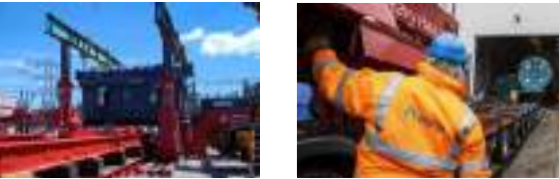
Taking the step up capacity over the CAT 3 150 tonne threshold is a big move for any heavy haulage operation, Allelys made this transition many years ago, with some of the heaviest locomotives weighing well in excess of 100 tonnes. This took gross weights up over the 200-tonne mark once the weight of a modular trailer and a ballasted tractor or two were taken into account. Also, its involvement in moving very heavy industrial equipment such as presses and big moulding machines led to Allelys shifting considerable weights on a regular basis.

Specialist transport companies have to demonstrate that they have both the equipment and the expertise before they can even tender for work at the upper end of the weight range. “Clients quite rightly, insist that you meet certain criteria, this means that you might have to make very substantial investments in



high-capacity equipment with no real assurance of regular work,” says Allely. “We were in this position when we invested in our first girder frame trailer, which was a very big step for us, we persisted and eventually got the opportunity to work in this sector of the market. We demonstrated our competence and won more work, and have continued to invest in bigger capacity trailers, SPMT’s and other specialist equipment. Our early expertise in machinery installation and other areas has allowed us to develop our range of services in the power generation industry and other fields.”

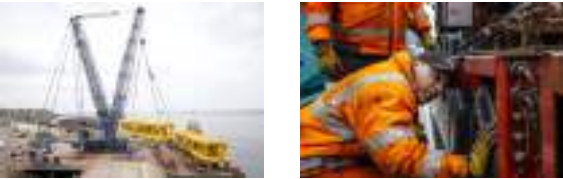
Allelys’ strategic partnership with Osprey has given the company the ability to offer complete packages which include shipping, lifting, transportation and installation services throughout the world if required. “Osprey Heavy Lift can handle the whole operation with all types of barges, heavy cargo ships, the fleet of very high capacity mobile cranes and our extensive fleet of heavy haulage, lifting and installation equipment. We work together as a team and the customer has one point of contact for all of their requirements,” explains Allely.



VEHICLES AND EQUIPMENT

While the present fleet has vehicles from a number of manufacturers, Allelys will always be remembered for using DAF heavy tractors. It's operated many of the Dutch manufacturer's products over the years and the company workshops, under the control of Pete Allely, have modified and rebuilt numerous DAFs to meet the company's own requirements. MAN has taken over at the very top of the weight range because of the absence of a suitable DAF chassis for operation at up to 250 tonnes GTW, but there is a pair of new DAF XF530 FTM 8x4 tractor units ready to go into service shortly.

The new tractors will be plated for 150 tonnes, but they have undergone an extensive programme of in-house modifications before going on the road. These include ultra-heavy-duty front and rear couplings, truly substantial chassis subframes and mounting points for ballast boxes. Other features include toolboxes, fuel tanks and other equipment. These are the latest in a long line of DAF tractor units to enter the fleet dating back to the 2800



range. Allelys was one of the first operators to take delivery of the four-axle 95 FTD models back in 89/90. These 8x4 tractors were specially engineered by DAF, working in conjunction with Dutch manufacturer GINAF, to meet the then newly introduced Special Types regulations. The use of hydraulic suspension to provide perfect weight distribution over the triaxle bogie was quite revolutionary at the time.

The company got great service from these unique tractors, rebuilding them and even retro-fitting the hydraulic suspension system to later versions of the XF95 heavy tractors that entered the fleet.

"The original FTD's did a very good job for us, we were moving up the weight range and they were



ideal at the time,” says Allely. “Our first one had the 380hp engine and a straight manual box. It was supposed to be fitted with the ZF torque converter, but there were engineering issues. It had very low ratio diffs and a deep first gear, but would only do 42mph flat out. Getting anywhere empty took a while, but it really pulled well despite the relatively low power output.

“The versions with the WSK torque converter transmission worked really well and we included a number of the original features in these later models. We also had extra radiator capacity in order to control the heat generated by both the engine and transmission at very high weights. The primary retarders in particular are very effective even at very low speeds, unlike later models they do not require



a high prop shaft speed to give maximum braking power.” This is one of the reasons why Allelys has kept some of the older DAFs in service for so long. “They are ideal when working as an extra ballast tractor on a really heavy load,” says Allely. Climbing a hill with very high weights is often a matter of using more tractors to keep it moving. Coming down the other side, with as much as 700 tonnes or more, is all about holding it back to a very slow speed without using the foundation brakes if at all possible.

“The new 530 FTM 8x4’s are a very good off-the-shelf 150-tonne tractor at a reasonable price. We run a lot of DAF’s in the general haulage operation and find the parts supply excellent, also many of the components are common throughout the range, which keeps things simple.



We did ask DAF if it was possible to have the ZF TC Tronic torque converter transmission fitted to these new trucks, but they felt they needed more engine power to make the concept work properly, but we feel that our previous experience proves otherwise.”

MAN has become the favoured make for really heavy work in recent years, Allelys has a number of them in service. “Realistically, there is very little choice when you get up to this level, it comes down to MAN or Mercedes-Benz if you want some form of torque converter/fluid coupling transmission, which we feel is essential for low speed manoeuvring at very high weights,” continues Allely. “We’ve operated both the MAN TGA and TGX versions, they have had their issues and parts supply has been a problem at times, because they are very much a bespoke truck. The



manufacturer and some dealers are now much more geared up to look after these models. The original V10 660 engine in the TGA had bearing and crankshaft issues, the V8 680 Liebherr engine has lots of power, but generates lots of heat which causes problems. The new D38 640 six-cylinder engine seems very good to be fair, it is far less cluttered than a V engine and easier to work on. We have had rear axle problems with the latest model, which is very unusual.

“But the trucks are very impressive performers when they are working – they handle very high weights with ease. We also have some Mercedes Arocs SLT tractors in the fleet, they are very good at lighter weights, but we find that they struggle a bit with the biggest girder frame trailers, especially when manoeuvring. For us at the moment, MAN is the only choice, but we keep our trucks for their full working life, so only time will tell.”

TRAILERS AND ROUTE ISSUES

Goldhofer dominates the heavy trailer fleet and has a variety of axle lines from the ST, MT and UT ranges, with two, three, four, five and now six-axle combination sets. The latest designs are now much lighter than previous generations and offer almost as much capacity. High unladen weight is a constant problem with very heavy loads. Authorities are taking a much stricter line regarding imposed loads on our underfunded and ill-maintained road system – reduced trailer weight helps in this respect. The company has a huge range of specialist beds, extension beams, bolsters and other equipment to handle almost any load, including bespoke rail beds for rolling stock movements.

Self-propelled modular trailers are an essential part of a heavy haulage fleet, Allelys has SPMTs from both Goldhofer and Scheuerle. The high level of manoeuvrability, excellent traction and high capacity make them ideal for site installation work, roll-on-roll-off operations and use where space is at a premium. The pride of the fleet are the three Goldhofer girder frame trailers, currently of 200, 400 and 500-tonne capacity. The largest Faktor 5 design shows the advances in trailer design, it weighs considerably less than a conventional 350/400-tonne capacity trailer, but carries far more payload. Also, it's less complex and easier to adjust to suit different loads, saving time and money.



Goldhofer's latest trailer tracking and swept path analysis software enables project managers and engineers to plan each move in great detail and, providing the site survey work has been carried out properly, the software is very accurate in its calculations. But getting the correct information from local and highway authorities is becoming increasingly difficult – many routes now have blanket weight bans because of deteriorating infrastructure and lack of hard information regarding bridges and other structures. In some areas this is reaching crisis levels.

Allely voiced his concerns: "The M6 at Tebay now has a 44-tonne weight limit, anything over this weight has to cross over the country via the A66 and travel on the A1. This is a ridiculous state of affairs, virtually all of the county highway and bridge records have been transferred onto digital storage and is in private hands and it's proving very difficult to access this information when required. Previously we dealt with engineers and County Surveyors who knew their area intimately, now the whole system has become something of a mess. When this is combined with the lack of maintenance over many years, our road system is in crisis in some areas, we are having to make far greater use of our own bridging systems to cross weak bridges and other structures, which increases cost and disruption for everybody."