

BACK TO SCHOOL

IN 2017 HEAVYTORQUE REPORTED ON 'STAY SAFE - BE SEEN', THE SCHOOLS SAFETY PROJECT CREATED BY HEAVY-HAULAGE SPECIALIST HUTCHINSON ENGINEERING SERVICES. **BRIAN WEATHERLEY** HAS NOW SEEN IT IN ACTION, AND RECKONS IT'S A LIFE-SAVER.

PHOTOGRAPHY: **CRAIG PUSEY**

Tough audience – two to 11-year olds. If you want to get a message over to them you've got to grab their attention fast, and keep it. Ryan Easom, transport manager with Hutchinson Engineering Services (HES) knows all about that. Regular HeavyTorque readers may recall our coverage of Hutchinson's schools safety initiative: 'Stay Safe - Be Seen', launched in 2016, in a previous issue. We thought it was a cracking idea. However, we'd never actually seen it 'live'. We have now, and feel even-more enthusiastic about it. We recently joined Easom and his colleagues from HES, along with a supporting cast

from Nottinghamshire Police, the Fire Brigade, the RNLI, plus local operators Gundel Transport Services and D L Rogers, for a safety day at Tuxford Primary Academy, located 15 miles north of Newark-on-Trent just off the A1. The school has 339 children ranging from 60 nursery-aged beginners right-through to 'Year 6' final-year primary school pupils. To get to it many have to cross the busy Newark Road that runs right past the Academy's front door, and the recent erection of a nearby light-controlled pelican crossing followed safety concerns caused by the steady stream of traffic on the main road.



Having already conducted safety days at other local schools, Easom spotted the potential for a similar 'Stay Safe - Be Seen' day at Tuxford, not least as Hutchinson's transport yard is literally just down the road at nearby Weston. He was clearly pushing at an open door. Michele Wright, Tuxford Primary Academy's family support advisor, explains: "Ryan approached us with the idea, having seen how busy the road outside the school is. We've now got our own crossing as Tuxford is a through-road for haulage companies coming off the A1 and travelling to two local industrial estates. So it's important to get the kids aware. Our community is sustained by trucks and it made sense to take up Ryan's offer."

That, in a nutshell, is how we come to be receiving a safety briefing in the school's playground at 08:30hrs in the morning surrounded by three top-weight artics, including one of Hutchinson Engineering Services' venerable V8 SLT 8x4 Actros tractors, plus Gundel's MAN TGX26.500 tag-axle tractor and D L Rogers' XF480 SuperSpace Cab. Parked next to them is a Nottingham Constabulary police car with all its roadside kit, including a stinger, neatly laid outside on the tarmac.

There's already a hubbub of excitement as children, smartly-dressed in their blue blazers and ties, start to gather in the assembly hall. Looking at their expectant faces, it's clear this is no ordinary school



day. After a cheery "Good Morning everybody" Easom starts working the room with impressive ease. "Who's seen the lorries outside? Who's excited about today?" dozens of hands shoot-up. Easom's presentation is highly-interactive. He tosses out questions to the children who respond enthusiastically. "Who knows what Hutchinsons does?" "You move stuff for people!" shouts out one small voice among all the rest.

The next question "Who likes competitions?" gets an equally-loud reply. Easom says that he wants them all to go away and think about creating a safety poster that drives home the 'Stay Safe - Be Seen' message, adding "The six winning pupils will have your poster put on our lorries ... and they go everywhere, in London, even past Buckingham Palace. Does that sound good?" The raucous "YESSSS!" suggests it is.

Amidst all the enthusiasm there's still a serious message to deliver. "Today," confirms Easom, "we're talking about staying safe near trucks. Whose responsibility is it? Is it our drivers?" The loud answer "US!!!" shows that even young children understand



the need to take responsibility for their own safety. "So how can we make it easier for lorry drivers to spot you?" questions Easom. The answers come thick-and-fast – bright clothes, high-vis vests, bicycle helmets. They're clearly thinking about it, as Easom jokes: "Have you already seen my presentation?"

He then skilfully weaves-in a message on behalf of the industry. "What do lorries do?" he asks, before continuing "Everything in this room would have been on the back of a lorry at one time or another – who knew that?" We could swear there's an audible gasp from the young audience. As we said at the beginning, when you're trying to engage young children you've got to pitch your message at the right level. The next slide shows a familiar image of an iPad. "Where does this comes from?" asks Easom. "China!" respond many, while one lone voice calls out "Apple!" to a ripple of laughter. "And how does it get here?" wonders Easom out loud. On a boat says one, in a plane says another, before a voice rings out "on a lorry!" Thus, the connection is made between familiar house-hold objects, and the trucks that brought them. It's a point endorsed by



the school's Michele Wright. "There's lots of haulage in the area and it's really important that they get this message. It's perfect to have a truck in front of them that they can touch and feel and see."

After introducing his 'team', including lorry drivers Dave, Pete and Stewart and Hutchinson's transport administrator, Kay Badger, it's time to get on with the presentation. So up-pops Trevor the Traffic Light Elephant on a large projection screen. "He's our mascot, he weighs three-tonnes," says Easom. Why the pachyderm? It's a highly-original way to get the children thinking about the weight of a lorry using an analogy that they can all grasp. And who doesn't like elephants? From there, it's just a short step to the importance of staying safe near one.

"If Trevor weighs three-tonnes, how many elephants do you think this weighs?" says Easom pointing to a photo of a Hutchinson SLT Actros on the screen, adding "Have a chat among yourselves". And they do, volubly and excitedly. He then invites the children



to call out their answers before telling them “That lorry is 15-tonnes, so how many elephants is that?” (Note the math’s puzzle in there too.)

As they work that one out Easom continues to pepper his audience with questions as the next shot appears on the screen of the Actros coupled to a trailer hauling a massive piling rig. “Now a full-size lorry like that with a full load on it, how much do you think that weighs? Put your hands up.” Up they go again. “It’s 150-tonnes” confirms Easom before querying “How many elephants is that? “A lot!” volunteers one causing Easom to break out into a broad smile.

Pointing at the STGO rig, he volunteers the information “That’s the same as 50 elephants...I certainly wouldn’t want to argue with that would you?” The response is a resounding “NO!!!” By now Easom is definitely on a roll. Referring to the 44-tonne tractor in the playground he asks the children “Who’s going to win an argument with that? So do think it’s a good idea to stay safe



with lorries?” Upon hearing a broad shout in the affirmative he asks again “Can you go a bit louder?” Well, they don’t need to be asked-twice, “YES!!!!” roar the children.

Throughout the day, each pupil will get the chance to climb into a truck to see for themselves how much a lorry driver can see from the cab. But not before Easom explains the ‘three-points of contacts rule’ when getting in and out of the trucks. He then says “The drivers want a lot of questions” which gets an even-louder response from his audience. They’re clearly fizzing with enthusiasm and can’t wait for their turn. After a quick introduction from local police officers Jason Fellows and Martin Fisher, it’s time for the first group to get to up close to the three trucks. In answer to the question “Who wants to be first?” there’s a chorus of “me!”, “me!”, “me!”

The ‘Stay Safe - Be Seen’ message is delivered by the volunteers in a number of highly-imaginative ways. To begin with each pupil is given a cone and told to position themselves around the truck so they can be seen by the drivers - a thumbs-up means he’s spotted them. Then with great patience, and good humour, the three HGV drivers safely marshal each child in and out of the cab. Dave Thearle, who normally pilots an artic for HES, reckons the day has real value: “I feel it helps the kids and probably a lot of adults too. It also helps drivers.”



Inevitably, it's not long before the first child discovers the truck's air-horns and there follows a medley of horn blasts from all three articles, interspersed with the 'nee-nah, whoop-whoop' siren from the Police car. As each new class arrives the cacophony is repeated - heaven knows what local residents think is happening. Along with being able to sit in a patrol car, at one point the children watch the officers conduct an impromptu speed check outside the school, which generates a lot of interest.

However, the most thought-provoking exercise is undoubtedly when each pupil is handed a water balloon along with the message 'That's soft, like you. A truck is hard. Now throw the balloon at the truck.' They don't need to be asked twice. A volley of balloons whistles through the air, exploding against the cab with a memorable KERSPLATT! We take our hat off to HeavyTorque's master photographer Craig Pusey who takes his life in his hands by standing in front of the children to get an 'action' shot.

It's clearly great fun, but there's no doubt that they 'get' the serious underlying safety message. Children



and trucks don't mix. The only problem is keeping-up with the demand for fresh water balloons! After lunch it's the turn of the local Fire Brigade to lay on their own demonstration, which includes showing the children all the different kit carried on a fire appliance. As each session finishes, each child is handed a goody bag with a 'Stay Safe - Be Seen' branded pencil case and luminous arm band.

So what does the school staff think of it? The reaction to the day has been extremely positive, as Wright confirms: "We've been really impressed with the [safety] team and the way they've time-tabled everything in and also got the emergency services to support them. They've done it already at a few schools and had success with it. So when they came to us with a plan they already knew what worked."

Principal Jo Witham is equally convinced it's pitched at exactly the right-level for younger children, making the 'learning' fun as well as being educational. "They're not just telling them what



not to do," she says, adding "they already get a lot of that! It's giving them a chance to get up close to the truck, getting in them, touching them – that way they're far more likely to remember the message." Wright concurs: "With this they're more likely to 'negotiate' risks." It's a good point. Raising awareness to the dangers of traffic is the first-step to staying safe. "A child usually starts off by walking to school with their parents," she says, "but as they get old they can be walking to school on their own which is when they can first start to face difficulties [with road safety]."

It's not only the children who've been able to experience the challenges truck drivers face out on the road. Having sat in the Hutchinson Mercedes Actros tractor Witham reports, "I didn't appreciate what visibility is like for a driver until I got in the cab. Hopefully the children will get an idea too. It explains to the children why it's important to be seen."

And at a time when the debate over what exactly young children should be taught continues, Witham says the safety day, while separate, dovetails perfectly in with National Curriculum. "For us it sits well within our social, moral, spiritual and cultural curriculum. It's a catch-all for everything that doesn't fit into the National Curriculum. It's really important for our community and also fits within the safeguarding agenda."



Wright then surprises us with this observation. "It's also aspirational," she says. By which we take that to mean that it could well sow the seed in the mind of a future lorry driver. Equally important, Witham sees it as an on-going opportunity to deliver a regular safety message, not least to newcomers to the school. In terms of frequency she believes: "Every other year would be nice."

Before we say our goodbyes, and as the final group of kids hurls the last of the water balloons, we manage to grab a quick word with Easom, who's clearly pleased with the day. "This is the first one we've done in Tuxford. We've added a few new things to it since we did our first course. We now tell the children 'When you hear an engine start up take two-steps back again' so a driver has a greater chance of seeing them. We've now also got the police, the fire brigade and the RNLI involved, through the Nottingham Safety Education Partnership – so it's not just about road safety." Indeed, voluntary RNLI education presenter Geoff Pearson explains "We talk to the children about

water safety in general, not just the sea. In our area we've got the River Trent which has some really dangerous weirs. We talk about keeping safe in water, also the dangers of cold water and dirty water."

Meanwhile, Easom is keen to promote the project to any operator who'd like to lay-on a similar day for local schools, and is happy to provide the presentation material as a stand-alone package free-of-charge, or even help them present it on the day. However, he admits it's not been easy getting the course adopted by a broader audience. "I'd like it to go further, like getting adopted by FORS [Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme], but it's getting to the right people. I've got this idea that works - so you take it." He then ends with an unequivocal message about the need to get more communities to appreciate the value of road transport. "The whole industry is going backwards in my view. If we can push it forward, by whatever way we can, we should do so." It's one HeavyTorque supports 100 per cent.



If any HT readers would like to help Easom spread the word, or use his safety presentation material for their own safety day he can be contacted on: ryan.easom@hutchinson.uk.com.

MEET THE TEAM

The following individuals and organisations delivered and supported the 'Stay Safe - Be Seen' day at Tuxford Primary Academy.

- ◆ Ryan Easom, transport manager HES
- ◆ Kay Badger, transport administrator HES
- ◆ Dave Thearle, driver HES
- ◆ Jason Fellows, Martin Fisher and Jo Timpson Nottinghamshire Constabulary
- ◆ Michele Wright, Tuxford Primary Academy's family support advisor
- ◆ Jo Witham, principal Tuxford Primary Academy
- ◆ Geoff Pearson, voluntary RNLI education presenter
- ◆ Tom McLafferty, transport manager HES
- ◆ Karen Booth
- ◆ Peter and Dee Chojnacki
- ◆ Fay Smith
- ◆ Mark Shinfield, Jon Lumley, Ross Collins, Richard Dronfield and Chris Fores Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
- ◆ Stewart Prescott, driver Gundels Transport
- ◆ Neil Rodgers from DLR Transport and Kevin Gundel from Gundel Transport (supplied vehicles)
- ◆ Martin James from Fenbay, sponsor
- ◆ Tink Hutchinson, HES director, sponsor