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NOBODY BELIEVES ANYBODY?

by **Rolf Lockwood**



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As if on cue, I had an e-mail a week ago back from the purchasing chief of a prominent Canadian company looking for help with 2010 engines. Not a trucking outfit, rather a manufacturer in the food world, and with a fleet of trucks much larger than I would have guessed -- a few hundred of them in several locations across the country. A mixed fleet of different brands and ages, managed locally but nowadays purchased centrally. A bit of a

hodge-podge, frankly, not least because the work the trucks do changes somewhat from location to location.

Could I come to a meeting of those territory managers and address the subject of 2010 engines? Sure, I said, warning that I'm neither engineer nor chemist. And so yesterday I met them, a good bunch of guys with a ton of experience in running trucks, many of them with PTOs. All of them had been through the previous two rounds of engine emissions rules in 2002/04 and 2007. There were no rookies in that room.

But they found themselves needing help. They wanted a neutral opinion on the SCR vs EGR debate, having realized that they were unable on their own to distinguish between the claims of the various motor makers. A couple of these managers in larger centers like Toronto had been to presentations put on by the truck or engine manufacturers, but they seemed no further ahead than those in the nether regions who'd been able to do nothing but read about the coming diesels in magazines like mine.

I WROTE "AS IF ON CUE" at the start of this piece because my editorial in the May issue of Today's Trucking covered exactly this topic of product knowledge, about engines in particular. I recalled the confusion that reigned supreme when truck operators contemplated buying new post-2002 machines. Only at the last minute, I wrote, did the majority of truck buyers realize that things were different, that they'd have to make a new kind of spec'ing decision. And they weren't prepared. Similarly in the run-up to the 2007 EPA rules, but a little less so.

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Today's Trucking
451 Attwell Drive
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So here we are again, I wrote, fearing that people don't really understand what's going on with 2010 engines.

That editorial was prompted largely because I had heard that the managers of one very large U.S. fleet were full of misconceptions about the diesel technologies of next year. Normally a very savvy, buttoned-down operation, but they're confused. So where, I asked, does that leave the 30-truck fleet in Prince Albert?

And a week ago I had my answer -- it was a much bigger operation than 30 trucks in northern Saskatchewan, indeed it was a major private fleet, but they were preparing to make a big decision about buying 2010 trucks on what amounted to a wing and a prayer. So I spent a day whipping up a quick and dirty Powerpoint presentation and delivered the facts as I know them.

After a couple of hours of engine chatter, I was asked the big question: do we buy trucks now to avoid the expense and uncertainty of the new engines or do we forge ahead, stick with the existing trade cycle, and get 2010 machines?

My answer, as you might guess, was something less than black and white.

And the main lesson I took away? Right now, sadly but predictably, nobody believes anybody.

DETROIT DIESEL AIMS TO CHANGE THAT, of course, like all the other engine makers. Detroit took a major step in that direction when it delivered its first two 'BlueTec' customer demo units to Schneider National earlier this year. They were integrated into the fleet to deliver real-world experience with the new SCR technology. They're Freightliner Cascadias with DD15 engines, and at this point they've logged about 50,000 miles each.

Steve Duley, vice president of purchasing for Schneider National, says they keep close tabs on the units and provide Detroit with feedback every day, including responses from drivers and technicians.

So far, nobody's sending that feedback to the likes of me, but early reports from other engine makers say customers who've tried 2010 SCR engines like 'em just fine. Drivers especially.

That said, as I told my private-fleet audience yesterday, the slow rate of truck sales now and maybe through much of next year means that it's going to be quite a while before there's enough experience to judge properly. A year from now we'll have a serious clue about 2010 motors, but I'd guess it will be nearer two years before we have a real fix on it. And maybe longer before we're sure.

LONESTAR WINS BIG AWARD. In its inaugural ATD Commercial Truck of the Year award program, the International LoneStar was recently named the winner by a committee of journalists assembled by the American Truck Dealers association. It was one of five nominees for the new award, the others being the Freightliner Cascadia, Kenworth T660, Mack Titan, and Peterbilt Model 386.

The LoneStar was chosen "because of its design, innovation, quiet cab, and space utilization," said past ATD Chairman George Grask, who announced the winner at the group's recent convention in Washington, DC.



ATD announced in October, 2008, that it will recognize the best medium- and heavy-duty trucks by current model year sold in the U.S. -- not Canada? -- each year with an award. Only a class 8 truck was chosen this year, but in 2010 there will be two awards: one for heavy- and one medium-duty truck from class 3-7.

Have a look at www.atd.org for more info.

IT LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING FROM ANOTHER GALAXY, reads the press release, and that must have been going through the mind of one of our readers who spotted the futuristic truck pictured here on the road recently. We tracked it down and found it's yet another creation from famed German designer Luigi Colani. It's been touring the eastern U.S. for the last couple of weeks before ending up on display in St. Louis, Missouri.

The 'Rolling Reinhausen' tour is the brainchild of Reinhausen Manufacturing, a German maker of power transformer components. They have nothing to do with trucking, but they know a good promotion when they see it. If you want a close look, you'll need to hurry -- the truck and its show trailer are at the AISTech 2009 Iron & Steel Conference and Exposition at America's Center in St. Louis until tomorrow. The tractor is based on a 2004 DAF XF95 cabover with a 12.6-liter DAF motor.



Colani, now 81, has been working since the 1950s on the development of extremely aerodynamic trucks, among countless other things. This particular creation is good on the fuel-efficiency front, but at 8.7 mpg (US) pulling 80,000 lb, it's not altogether earth shattering. I've done nearly that myself with very ordinary trucks and bigger diesels.

But I didn't do it with anything like this much style.

Colani, by the way, designed the first carbon racing bike and since 1995 he's been engaged in what's called his life's work near Shanghai – the creation of a 'science city' that somehow recreates the human body in form and function. Called Eco-City, it does without fossil fuels altogether. At the other end of the scale -- way at the other end -- his portfolio of industrial design includes lighters and ashtrays. Yep, he's a smoker.

I've met the man, briefly, and to say that he's both flamboyant and wildly egotistical is to understate the case. But I'm mighty glad the world has people like him. Have a look at www.colani.org for more information. It's worth the trip.

AND FINALLY A SHOUT-OUT TO PARE CENTRE DU CAMION VOLVO and its team of technicians who won the recent Volvo VISTA 2009 competition. It aims to select the top dealer service and parts personnel and to highlight technician excellence. The dealership is in Levis, Quebec.

VISTA is a tough hands-on competition but the winning team was up to the task. They were Daniel Blais, Benoit Raby and Mario Labrecque, and this wasn't their first win -- they also took top spot in 2003. This time they beat out 148 other three person teams from 85 Volvo dealers across the continent.

Congrats, lads!