



In it for the long haul

BEFORE life in the timber haulage industry, Harvey Cracknell helped head up a very successful family vehicle hire company, a job he had from boy to man. On a shared holiday with his brother Oliver Cracknell, in Fort William, they dreamt up the idea of making one lorry two. On their return, Harvey searched the internet to find his new truck and trailer, which was purchased from Ferguson Transport, also in Fort William. After an overnight trip on the train, and a long drive back, Cracknell Timber Services was born.

The day Harvey got back, Oliver was involved in a nasty accident that saw the company straight away back to one lorry. The following weeks saw the duo share duties - with Harvey at the wheel and Oliver on the crane. Soon, disaster was to strike a second time. This time, Oliver injured his knee, which put him out of action for several months. The time had arrived for Harvey to complete the job - in his words, "I was really being thrown in at the deep end." Harvey was the one who tended to be office bound, while Oliver was the whizz with the crane. Harvey was never really a natural on the crane; he found it difficult at first and had to work at it day in, day out.

As time passed, the brothers felt they were working for different goals. They chose to separate the company and work alongside one another, a move that saved both their sanities.

Harvey continued to build up his customer base with his Dennison trailer and rear-mounted crane, pulled by his Volvo FH480. In the beginning Harvey found it demoralising with work on the crane extremely tough but,

with time, it got easier. As he says, pulling up to a well-stacked pile of timber really helped to ease the frustration.

As things progressed for Cracknell Timber, Harvey opted to upgrade his trailer to a Dennison with a front-mounted Epsilon M120L. The change, says Harvey, was a revolution - life is so easy now!

Harvey's aim is to get three to four deliveries each day across the bridge and where possible one on the back overnight certainly makes the day worthwhile.

As luck would have it, most of the work is fairly local, so the demand to stay out is limited.

The company work mainly for other local companies, serving BSW in Cadnam and AJ Charlton's in Frome, with timber supplied via Wessex Woodland Management along with a few others.

When asked about his frustrations in the field, Harvey is quick to say a well-stacked pile of timber is very much appreciated, stating that, on the whole the forwarder drivers are neat at their job and proud to place a good pile. He admits that his forte is not loading untidy timber; it goes on as he finds it. Another gripe he has is vague directions and poor access, topped off by poor tracks. As Harvey says, when the weather changes you really do have to think where you put

your truck, as getting stuck could result in some hefty callout charges.

Early 2017 saw Cracknell Timber start their own timber yard. The idea came about as a result of all the timber they take into these mills. Why not collect some of this finished timber? The yard is slowly getting stocked with all aspects of fencing timber along with basic construction timbers and profiled timber. Supplying cladding is something they are slowly getting good at.



Above: Loaded and awaiting delivery to Verdo Renewables in Andover, collected from their local estate.

Left: Harvey was always the deskbound brother.



At the time of our visit, quotes were being received for a new Wood-Mizer sawmill.

"Having the lorry and the 'on-field' knowledge of timber availability is a real plus for us," said Harvey. With this forward step it seemed only natural for the company to look into gaining its own FSC and GiB certification. Harvey had just started the ball rolling with this at the time of our visit and, as this goes to print, the company is now fully FSC and GiB certified. They have also now opened a new retail timber yard, in addition to the older yard.

When asked about his future plans and aspirations, Harvey says a driver for the truck once the yard kicks on will be a must. His concern though will be finding the right candidate, a task he says will not be simple - finding a driver that can operate both the crane and truck is a job in itself. To top things off they must also be able to understand the different species they have to collect - picking up larch when it should have been pine would result in a costly mistake.

Harvey has three young children and school holidays see them sharing the cab and pestering for a night out in the double-bunked truck. Will they come into the business? Who knows. "I like the idea of having a family business," says Harvey, "but whether they will share the dream needs to be seen."

In closing, we asked Harvey his thoughts on the current state of the timber market. He replied, "Timber seems to be getting cut at an alarming rate, with little replanting happening. What I do see though is a lot of solar panel farms popping up all over these estates. Is the option of quicker, easier money more appetising than the long haul of waiting for trees to grow?"

Hopefully not.

Graham Mole

Left: Western red cedar ready to be cut for cladding.