

GOING THE EXTRA MILE FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS



REBRANDING TO FUTURE-PROOF THEIR BUSINESS AND TO REINFORCE THEIR MODERN, FORWARD-LOOKING APPROACH

In 1960 Ernest Aston teamed up with his son Roy Aston to form E Aston & Son which now trades as Aston Transport. They each drove a tipper lorry transporting ash and materials around the Black Country.

When the business became incorporated in November 1963, Roy moved out of the cab and into the office, which at the time was a garage at the back of the family home in Moseley Road, Bilston. Although the company celebrated its 50th birthday last year, Roy explains: "I can still remember the registration of my first lorry, a Ford Trader, FBF426. The business has changed almost beyond recognition since then, but one thing remains the same; we pride ourselves on going the extra mile for our customers."

Roy's daughter Penny (now Financial Director) started with the company in 1993 and Scott Aston (now Managing Director) joined in 1995. Although the Ford Traders were traded in long ago, the company's distinctive yellow and black livery stood the test of time. A long-time Wolverhampton Wanderers supporter, Roy admits: "In 1960, Wolves were riding high so yellow and black seemed the natural choice. We have always been proud of our local heritage, and I would like to think Aston Transport is still firmly in the Premier League even if our football team is not at the moment".

Akin to the Barclays Premier League, competition in the transport sector grows ever more intense. As Scott comments: "To stay ahead of the game, your business needs to change with the times. That's why we are currently undergoing a major investment programme to keep our fleet at the forefront. As part of the process, we are rebranding to future-proof our business and to reinforce our modern, forward-looking approach. We wanted the new logo to be sharp, clean, and dynamic but, at the same time, to build on our traditional yellow and black heritage. So far, the new livery has gone down well with customers. Many of our fork truck and access clients feel the modern look reflects positively on the image they present when we deliver on their behalf".

Alongside the transport division, Aston Transport also operates a tipper division and a roadstone division trading under the name of Mercia Roadstone Limited.



The transport division operates a fleet of 17 low loaders, all 44-tonne gvw, plus a beavertail and a flatbed with lorry-mounted crane, both 26-tonne gvw. As Scott explains, "we offer a highly specialised and professional haulage service for our clients nationwide. Most of our work involves moving fork trucks, reach trucks, sideloaders, cherry pickers, scissor lifts, telehandlers, excavators, dumptrucks, generators, site cabins and smaller items of plant and equipment. But, from time to time, we are called upon to move more unusual items – including a World War II tank and an RAF Spitfire which had to have its wings disassembled so we could transport it in two separate loads."

The tipper division operates a fleet of 15 eight wheelers, all 32 tonnes gvw, predominately for house builders, construction companies, groundworks contractors, and other construction-related businesses. Alongside Mercia Roadstone, Aston Transport offers a one-stop shop for construction clients, handling bulk muckshifts for some of the largest construction projects in the Midlands and delivering a comprehensive range of quarried and recycled aggregates to site. "In the past couple of years, we have helped changed the landscape of the region, moving over 300,000 tonnes of excavated earth to tip. We have worked on some of the most high-profile sites in the area including the Jaguar Land Rover plants at Wolverhampton and Solihull, the new A&E Department at New Cross Hospital, the Telford Box road improvement

scheme, the new Sports Hall and Library at Birmingham University, and the redevelopment of the MOD's Beacon Barracks in Stafford."

Operating one of the largest tipper fleets in the Midlands, Aston Transport provides a total waste management solution for construction sites including inert subsoil, broken concrete, hardcore, tarmac, green waste, contaminated earth and hazardous waste. "As a family-run business, we understand the importance of personal service. We believe we are big enough to offer the breadth of capabilities that clients need but small enough to deliver the level of individual service that they deserve. Price is, of course, vitally important so we use an extensive network of landfill sites and tax-exempt tipping facilities to provide value for money without compromising the level of service we offer."

To reinforce this focus on service quality, Aston Transport is currently upgrading its existing fleet with the new livery and redeveloping its website to reflect the new image. The aim is to remain one of the pre-eminent tipper fleets in the West Midlands and to further expand its low loader transport capability over the short to medium term.

As part of this investment, the Company has recently purchased 5 brand new Scania tippers complete with cutting edge telematics. This system generates a weekly schedule showing key indicators of driver performance: Coasting, Idling,

Speeding, Harsh Braking, MPG's, and CO2 usage. It also provides a Driver Support Score to rank the driver's overall performance. This % is also displayed in-cab to reinforce good driving practice. Ideally the driver should be aiming for 70% or higher. The results are discussed with each driver to improve their safe and fuel efficient driving performance over time.

Being 'green' is an important consideration for Aston Transport. The new Scania Fleet Management report calculates the total number of tonnes of CO2 produced by each Euro 6 vehicle on a weekly basis. As Finance Director, Penny Aston comments: "This really is a win-win situation here. We aim to use the report to improve driving techniques and to minimise the carbon footprint of our vehicles. At the same time, any improvement in our fuel efficiency also assists our bottom line – and with fuel being such a major cost item, anything that helps us monitor and measure performance in this area is a significant advantage."

The Company is also looking at other ways of using technology to improve its operation. The newly-appointed Workshop Manager, Dieter Hughes, is now ready to implement a computerised workshop system called R2C. R2C is a web-based system that will make 6-weekly inspection sheets a thing of the past. Mechanics will be able to enter inspection records directly into a hand-held tablet or a wall-mounted touch-screen so that the details of any service and repair are allocated to the appropriate vehicle in real-time. It will also prompt the mechanics of any advisory but serviceable items from the previous service to ensure that nothing can be missed. Dieter believes the system should help streamline operations and tighten up workshop protocols.

But he is not planning to leave it there. Once the R2C system goes live, Dieter plans to trial an electronic version of the driver daily walk-around check. The driver would simply enter the details each morning straight into a smartphone and the information would be sent directly to the R2C workshop maintenance system. This should help cut down on paperwork as well as ensuring that drivers undertake the necessary daily checks at all times.

Hand-in-hand with R2C, Aston Transport is also revamping its transport management software, upgrading the existing Haulmark software to Mandata's latest offering, Manpack 3. As well as helping to reduce paperwork, it is envisaged that this computer-based vehicle routing and booking system will improve work allocation and backload capabilities – increasing resource utilisation and reducing the Company's carbon footprint still further.

So, 50 years on from a garage at the back of the family home, times have certainly changed at Aston Transport.

This is probably best summed-up by the Company's founder, Roy Aston: "From the very start, we've always tried to think like a small family business where every member of staff is key to our success and every single customer matters to us. But, nowadays, we think like a big company as well: investing in quality trucks and equipment, presenting the right image to customers and implementing leading edge systems. Times change and, I'd like to think, we're changing with them."

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