



Watch your back - extra-heavyies remain 70% 'vrot'

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▲ No license discs - an official writes up yet another violation.

After the national outcry over the Fields Hill tragedy in KwaZulu-Natal, where 22 died with more post-accident deaths, it's natural to expect there might be a tightening of truck safety standards – especially on the N3 and M13 route into Durban. Not so.

During a specialist exercise conducted by 'FleetWatch Brake & Tyre' Watch teams at the beginning of November, 41 trailer combinations were tested and 29 were suspended from going any further. That's a shocking 70% failure rate! Does this differ from the past as *FleetWatch* has now tested well over 450 trailers? No! There is no improvement as the average 70% failure of truck combinations is a consistent national average, no matter which province where this exercise has been conducted.

Driving safety expert and commentator, Rob Handfield-Jones, in *AutoForum* October 2013 says that the "Government is entirely culpable". This all makes it too easy for consignors to side-step



their responsibility in going for the lowest road transport rate and truck owners to feed on greed. It's clear that the 'lowest rate' can only be achieved by operating the oldest vehicles, overloading, under-maintaining, hiring the lowest-paid drivers and stretching hours on the road. And as Chris Barry, MD of truck insurers HCV, puts it, "South Africans live with a culture of denial". What's it got to do with me as consignor if the transporter I have selected runs an unsafe road

▲ This truck, carrying a huge load of logs and had no brakes to talk of. Brake boosters were missing as were slack adjusters and in the one drum, the brake shoes rattled around with plenty of clearance between the brake lining and braking surface of the drum. This truck went direct to the holding yard.



transport business in contravention of the Regulations?

Drivers are clueless when it comes to trailer foundation brake maintenance. Adding to this, if a driver refuses to drive a combination with obvious retardation weakness, he loses his job and another is waiting to take his place – that’s the reality of the industry.

People only change their behavior if there are consequences for not matching behavior standards. If we entirely donate behavior change to our Government, who is seemingly constantly beset with corruption scandals, then the national road accident stats will never change. Yes, the Government is not there to market the law and have meetings over Regulation amendments – the law must be enforced. But the entire road transport logistical chain must bear a share of the logistical problem – from consignor to consignee to identify and raise standards. Or do we continually gravitate to the lowest factor?

▼ Slack adjuster missing - no brakes. How can the mechanic not see this?



▲ Brake booster missing – no brakes. Again, how can the mechanic not see this? And all of this on one truck.

The *FleetWatch* exercise has a specific mandate to focus on brakes and tyres while trailer connectors – fifth wheels in particular – have been added. For time reasons trailers are never disconnected from trailers to measure wear on rubbing-plates and kingpins for abnormal wear and Regulation compliance. The second fifth wheel in an interlink combination is the connecting component that takes more strain and wear than the fifth wheel on the truck tractor and many combinations never get disconnected frequently enough to clean fifth wheels and rubbing plates. One could safely assume that most trailers are hopelessly out of trailer connector wear-tolerance and that the Jost team at *FleetWatch* is observing the tip of an iceberg.

There are items not in the law books which far exceed the limits of truck safety. One rig pulled off for inspection showed wheel-hub oil leaks on every trailer axle. One hub with a severe leak created a very hot wheel hub that could easily be experienced with a naked hand when felt between the rims mounted to that hub. This overheating is a situation that accelerates seal failure leading to hub-seizure and a major road incident – a truck cannot be removed from the road for shocking maintenance in this case but only be give a citation for oil leaks. The remedy should actually be that the vehicle owner is immediately faxed with a warning that should on-road failure occur he/she will be prosecuted to the full extent.

Never mind vehicle safety it’s clear that truckers are **not** caring for other road users.

- Logs for securing cargo against movement are left loose on the trailer deck to fall onto the road
- Loose unused bolts, for securing a spare wheel that is not fitted, are rattling around to free themselves and fall onto the road
- Damaged and missing wheels flaps create additional spray to



▲ Tread chipping - indicating highway bias tyre being used in severe underfoot conditions.

create blind spots in passing. Many wheel flaps do not comply with Regulation 217 dimensional requirements

- Reflective tape is damaged and dirty – who cares if you can be seen?
- Tail lamps show a long period of ingrained road detritus that has never been cleaned. This is in direct contravention of Reg. 158 and Reg. 184 (5) & (6) where lamps must also be ‘reasonably clean’. 69% of fatalities on the N3 occur at night and rear end shunts dominate so just getting the rear lamps clean and visible is a major step forward.

Ranting against the Government and revving entrenched gravy-train bureaucrats for our horrendous road accident stats has not changed anything in 20 years. This is much more complex than enforcement alone and a seemingly impossible cultural change of care is needed. RTMS (Road Transport Management System) is one answer and a multi-facet, integrated approach will slowly get us there. In the meantime let’s get efficient enforcement in place. Don’t sell strategize and sell safety – just enforce it!

Watch your back – 70% of the truck trailer combinations out there are ‘vrot’. □

Reference:

http://www.accidentspecialist.co.za/pdf/news/brake_and_tyre_watch_review_nov_2013.pdf