



Three of Wiltshire Concrete's new 54-vehicle Renault fleet at the company's base near Devizes

Total Transport Fleet Replacement

Wiltshire Concrete opt for all-new Renault vehicle fleet as they look to grow the business and expand their geographical reach

Wiltshire Concrete are a family firm run by husband and wife Kevin and Tracey McQuaid, along with brothers Phil and Jeff Brown, from their head office, concrete plant and transport depot on the Hopton Park Industrial Estate, near Devizes.

After 14 years running second-hand trucks, mainly DAFs, the firm has replaced its entire fleet with 54 new Renault vehicles. Kevin McQuaid explained why the partners went for such a radical change. 'We were lifelong DAF people although we always bought second-hand trucks,' he said. 'We bought them and maintained them in our own workshop, but as trucks have become more technically challenging, we decided to go down the 'new' route. It's a big step for a company like ours to spend that kind of money.'

The move has seen the company's workshop handed over to Renault dealers Sparks Commercials, who supplied the new vehicles, so repair and maintenance (R&M) will still be carried out on site. This was a major reason for replacing the whole fleet at once rather than in stages.

'It was a case of 'we can't go half new, half old', because of the workshop, so we thought we'll go the whole hog and we'll go new,' said Mr McQuaid. 'The £1.4 million a year saving on running the workshop and employing 10 fitters will almost cover the rental cost of the new trucks. We're not losing any staff, thankfully. Most of my staff here have got HGVs anyway, so some of them have gone to drive trucks.'

'If everything goes according to plan, we

should be cost neutral but with a much more efficient fleet. We'll be able to do the same amount of work with 54 trucks compared with what we used to run, which was in excess of 70.'

As the name implies, Wiltshire Concrete produce a range of construction products, including ready-mixed concrete, blocks and aggregates, for supply all across Wiltshire. They have gradually added to their service offering and now provide waste collection, skips and road sweepers too, so their diverse fleet includes concrete mixers, tippers, tractors with tipping trailers, skip lorries, road sweepers and wagon and drag block lorries.

The decision to switch to Renault rather than stick with the tried and trusted Dutch brand was not made lightly. 'We shopped around,' said

Mr McQuaid. 'That wasn't as easy as you might think. We talked to all the dealers and had demo vehicles in from all the manufacturers before we decided to go with Renault.'

'I'm not necessarily concerned what the badge says on the truck. As long as it delivers what I've sold in the back of it, I don't care what it is. Just as long as the price is right, the service is right, the support is right, and I have confidence that the people are going to look after us, because it's a new and exciting venture for us.'

The McQuaids were impressed by Swindon Renault dealers Sparks Commercial, especially with the personal service provided by the dealer principal. 'We met with Mike Sparks and I felt good talking to the man who owns his business, the same as I own this business. I'm passionate about this business, he's passionate about his. To me that's brilliant,' said Mr McQuaid.

'We had deals on the table with DAF and Mercedes and Renault. We'd looked at half a dozen, but we narrowed it down to those three. My heart said go with DAF because we've always had DAF, whilst Mercedes looked like the better product, but Renault offered the best package, so we went with them in the end.'

The new rigid trucks are on operating leases while the artics are on contract hire, all with full R&M, and will be replaced at various intervals depending on the cost and complexity of the body. 'Some will be turned over after three years, others at five years and the mixers after seven years, said Mr McQuaid. 'Different trucks have different life spans, which seems odd to us as we've never had a truck under 10 years old before. 'Why are we getting rid of that truck? It's only five years old!' he joked. ➤



The Wiltshire Concrete management team (l-r): Jeff Brown, Tracey and Kevin McQuaid, and Phil Brown

Wiltshire Concrete's new 54-vehicle fleet comprises:

- 6 x T480 6x2s with sleeper cabs
- 15 x C430 8x4s with Abba tipping bodies
- 3 x C430 8x4 tipper grabs, Abba bodies with Palfinger crane (Epsilon Classic)
- 10 x C430 Xload lightweight chassis with 8m Hymix bodies
- 10 x C380 6x4 with 6m Hymix bodies
- 2 x D16 4x2 road sweepers (Johnston)
- 5 x C460 6x2 rigid block grabs with flatbed body and Palfinger crane, plus VGB towing hook
- 3 x D18 High 4x2 with Palfinger skip loaders.

One of Wiltshire Concrete's new C430 8x4s with Abba tipping body





One of Wiltshire Concrete's five new C460 6x2 rigid block grabs with flatbed body and Palfinger crane plus VGB towing hook

'The tractors are on contract hire and we will change them every three years. The artics run 24h a day so they run up the mileage a lot quicker,' he continued.

Delivery of the Range C, T and D trucks (see panel) started in late 2018, at a rate of four or five a week, with the last of them delivered and put into service before the end of the summer this year.

Another part of the reasoning to go new was to improve the company's image and retain drivers. 'When trucks start getting older, they break down more often, they look old and you can't retain drivers because everyone likes to drive new trucks these days, said Mr McQuaid. 'They'd rather go and work for another firm because they've got brand new trucks. They won't come and drive our 20-year-old relic that doesn't have air-conditioning.'

Kevin McQuaid is also expecting to make significant savings on fuel. 'Our old trucks are doing, on average, 5 miles/gal, whilst the new ones will do 7 miles/gal and, driven properly, might even do 8 miles/gal,' he said. 'It doesn't sound a lot but over a fleet of 54 vehicles, that's a huge saving.'

'They did say if you don't have air-conditioning you get an extra mile per gallon, but we decided we'd go with the air-conditioning to make it better for the drivers. These guys live in these trucks for 10h a day, so we've got to try and make them reasonably comfortable.'

Wiltshire Concrete is the trading name for Wiltshire Heavy Building Materials Ltd, and the company has gradually expanded its range of services and geographical reach

having started out by supplying ready-mixed concrete locally.

'On the back of that, customers would say to us, 'we need to get some stone in before we have our concrete', and we would have our own lorries bringing our stone into here, so we'd say, 'we can deliver you some stone', and that's how the aggregates side of the business started,' explained Mr McQuaid. 'Then they would say, 'we need a skip', so we bought a skip lorry. Now we have three skip lorries and about 300 skips.'

'Then customers would say, 'we can't start doing that until we get rid of this muck', so we started using our tippers to do the muckaway. We then added the road sweepers and that's how the business evolved. And because we make ready-mixed concrete, customers started asking for blocks, so we had a look at that too and now we make 6 million blocks year.'

Wiltshire's customers are in diverse industries but tend to be smaller businesses that value personal service over the cheapest price. 'We've got a big agricultural market and there is a lot of house building in Wiltshire, especially around Swindon,' said Mr McQuaid. 'A lot of the things we're doing are relatively new to us, like the blocks and skips, so we are growing.'

'We supply blocks to anyone local. The multinational companies can be very difficult to deal with. You might ring somebody in Yorkshire, for example, to buy blocks for a house you're building in Somerset. You find that with concrete and aggregates too. My market here tends to be farmers and they don't want to speak to somebody in the Midlands, to ask them to 'send some more concrete down

to my farm'. Having that local knowledge of the market is important to us, which is why we go out and see our customers.'

However, the local market in Wiltshire was restricting the firm's growth, so the McQuaids established Berkshire Concrete in Bracknell with an initial seven vehicles and plan to roll out their successful operating model even further afield.

'All the things we do are for the same group of customers,' said Mr McQuaid. 'We tend to do the whole works for them, and we're now trying to replicate that in other locations. We have just started doing this in Wokingham under the banner of Berkshire Concrete and we want to do the same thing in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire.'

Tracey McQuaid added: 'If we do any more in Wiltshire, we'll have to reduce our prices and we don't want to do that. We want to carry on doing what we're doing in Wiltshire and the only way our business can really expand is to repeat that model in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Hampshire. That's the way the business is going to grow.'

While Wiltshire Concrete are not yet hampered by low-emission zones, part of the rationale for buying into new Euro-6 trucks was the expectation that such restrictions will be coming to a city near them soon. 'It isn't really an issue for us today,' said Mrs McQuaid. 'But it will be next year or the year after, because Bath is getting a low-emission zone and we put quite a bit into Bath. Now they're talking about Bristol and Reading having them. We don't go to Manchester yet, but the bigger cities are all going that way.'

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