



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada
Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Leveling the playing field?

If a level playing field is what the OTA is after with speed limiters, let's go all the way

I don't think I could come up with a more divisive issue if I tried. I'm talking about the OTA policy initiative that would see governments mandate speed limiters on trucks in North America at some yet-to-be determined speed – I've heard rumours that 105 km/h is the number they're shooting for.

We've been canvassing owner/ops all summer, and unlike OTA members, precious few support governed trucks, regardless of the speed. So, in a nutshell, we're against the idea. But let me make this perfectly clear: we don't condone speeding trucks, weaving in and out of traffic, or chasing four-wheelers out of the passing lane because they're going too slow.

I've seen all this behavior on the road, and frankly, I think it's a blight on our otherwise very professional industry. So do we go after the few at the expense of the many? I don't think that's the right approach at all.

Whether or not speeding trucks are indeed a problem is a good place to begin the debate. I've seen a lot of road this summer travelling to truck shows across the country, from the Maritimes in June to Alberta in September, and other than the odd yahoo, trucks operating vastly above posted speed limits simply wasn't a problem. And few of the truckers I talk to report seeing great numbers of speeding trucks in their travels, with the exception of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), where it's getting dangerous to practice their trade.

Speed is an issue in southern Ontario. I drive at or slightly above the speed limit most of the time, and in my frequent travels between Ottawa and Toronto, I've seen trucks – big seven and eight axle trucks – doing 130

km/h or better along Highway 401. I'll be the first to admit this scares the hell out of me, but my answer for those clowns: enforcement. We have speed limits in Ontario, and we have cops here, too. So what's the problem? And don't let cars off the hook, either.

Some carriers have made a business decision to govern their trucks, and that's okay; it can save them fines and CVOR points as well as fuel. But those who haven't don't need to wait for the cops to pull over their speeders. It would be easy for them to identify any culprits among their drivers and take them to task on their driving habits.

In any case, excessive speed isn't the principle reason for the OTA suggesting speed limiters be installed on all trucks operating in the province (and ideally in all jurisdictions). It's about "leveling the playing field," we're told, and reducing costs.

I'm all for that. But which playing field are we talking about here?

A level playing field when it comes to truck prices would be nice. The economies of scale larger carriers enjoy when they buy 50 or 100 trucks at a time ensures better pricing than any owner/op could dream of.

Few owner/ops or small fleets enjoy the cost-saving ability to self-insure; a level playing field in insurance availability and pricing would be nice. Level fuel pricing would be nice, too. But try getting a reasonable discount when you're buying a few hundred gallons at a time. Wouldn't we love the discounts available for those who can afford to buy the stuff by the tanker load, or maybe even the boatload!

Drivers are about the only commodity left,



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and it seems that carriers who govern their engines have more difficulty in attracting and retaining drivers than those who don't. At least that's what I've been hearing.

So this is a new recruiting tool? Govern all trucks – to level the playing field – and remove any small (and expensive) advantage that some carriers seem to enjoy? No imagination. How about encouraging speed reduction and other fuel-efficient driving practices by offering bonuses to drivers who slow down, or by passing on a portion of fuel savings through higher rates for smart drivers?

My dad owned a small men's wear store in Moncton in the '60s and '70s. His stock in trade wasn't the discounts he could afford to pass along to his customers, or even a limitless selection of the latest styles. All he had to compete with was quality and service. His commitment to excellence kept customers coming back, at least until the big department stores overwhelmed his small business.

My dad exploited any advantage he could, but eventually he succumbed to a tide of price and selection he couldn't match. It was a sad day when he closed his doors, but in a free market economy, that's how it goes.

Small fleets and owner/ops, as well as the large carriers, have to get fuel costs under control. They have no choice; but government intervention is not the answer. Last time I checked, ours was still a free market economy. Perhaps the blue ribbon panel could use their collective vision to develop industry-driven solutions to the uneven playing field – but let the market pick the winners.