



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

...from the
director's chair

Sweat the small stuff

Look after the nickels and dimes and the dollars will take care of themselves

It doesn't take long these days for any conversation with a truck driver to come around to the price of fuel. It was no different with an owner/operator I had the pleasure of meeting at the Shell SuperRigs competition in Kenly, N.C. last month, but with an interesting twist. This guy is zealous about fuel economy, and I think he has every right to be – his numbers are consistently in the high eights to low nines, and that's in American gallons.

Before all you naysayers get started, let me tell you he runs 20,000- to 30,000-lb loads, and his figures come from the engine ECM. Granted, he runs light, and the ECM numbers could be off by a small percentage, but his gallons used and miles run numbers, taken from fuel receipts and trip sheets, tally closely with the computer output.

Henry Albert of Mooresville, N.C., a 26-year veteran owner/operator who is part of the Freightliner Slice of Life program, was at SuperRigs all weekend explaining to anyone who'd listen how he gets such outstanding fuel economy.

It's not rocket science, nor does he have thousands of dollars worth of high-tech mechanical wizardry working for him.

He has a sensibly spec'd truck, he drives it properly, and he's always looking for ways to cut his fuel bill. In other words, he definitely sweats the small stuff.

And it pays off. Over a one-week period in April, his ECM produced fuel economy reports showing from 8.98 to 10.42 mpg. His average road speed ranged from 56.7 to 59.5 mph. But that's just average.

Typically, Henry tries to run 64 mph to optimize the engine speed at between 1,375 and 1,400 rpm – a critical factor in preserving fuel economy.

What's Henry's secret weapon? There isn't one. No big silver-bullet solution, no experimental technology, no magnets, no precious metals,

no exotic gases; in fact, no engineered modifications or enhancements at all have been made to the engine or the truck. It's a stock 2010 Freightliner Cascadia with a 72-inch raised roof sleeper powered by an off-the-shelf DD15 engine rated at 455 horsepower and 1,550/1,750 lb.-ft. of torque.

His trailer is a stock Utility dry van with less than \$3,000 tied up in gear designed to improve aerodynamics.

But he does have a few small tricks up his sleeve.

Henry runs Michelin wide-single tires on drive and trailer axles, but it's the mudflaps that caught my eye. He's modified them to accommodate the tires; a standard mudflap is wider than the wide-single tire, so it presents a barrier to airflow around the wheel.

He has also cut two-inch diagonal chunks from the bottom corners of each flow-through mudflap, and he uses hangers designed for tight clearance with the trailer landing gear, tapered at a 45-degree angle on the top, and lower than a standard hanger.

On the trailer, he uses a NoseCone and Side-Burn package to improve aerodynamics across the trailer front, and for better airflow around the sides, and he runs a Fleet Engineers trailer side skirt kit. You'll also find stainless steel wheel covers on all the trailer and drive wheels. To optimize rolling resistance, he uses an automatic tire inflation system to maintain a steady 100 psi in the trailer tires.

In terms of the small and innovative stuff, one of my favourites is the trailer licence plate, which he has moved from its stock position under the left-rear taillight and attached to the lower portion of the trailer body – out of the air stream.

Small stuff? "Just stick your hand out the window at 60 mph and you can feel the effect even a small exposed surface has on air flow,"

Joanne
Ritchie:
OBAC
executive
director



Henry says. If that licence plate is costing, say, half a gallon of fuel a day, it could add up to 150 gallons a year, and with fuel at \$3.50 a gallon, well, do the math. It may not seem like much in the grand scheme of things, but imagine how drivers would flip if the cost of the licence went up by that much.

I like Henry's attitude: his quest for ways to improve on his already remarkable efficiency is ongoing. "Anything that kills bugs also kills fuel economy," says Henry, which is why he tries to reduce the frontal profile of the truck any way he can, and keeps any of the peripheral equipment as directionally correct as possible.

Not surprisingly, you won't see a bug deflector or sun visor on Henry Albert's truck.

And by the way, what Henry doesn't sweat too much is the price of fuel. He's currently billing a fuel surcharge of 53 cents a mile, and his fuel costs are averaging around 47 cents, so he's actually making a six cent per mile profit on his fuel surcharge.

For any number of perfectly legitimate reasons, high eights and low nines may be physically impossible to achieve with Quads, Super-Bs and the like, but anyone running in the US can probably improve fuel economy significantly through better driving habits and diligent spec'ing.

Henry is living proof of what's possible, but don't take my word for it. Try it yourself.

And to see how Canadian owner/operators are doing in terms of fuel economy, check out the Fuel Economy Benchmarking study we just posted on OBAC's Web site: look in the Toolbox section under Green Trucking.