

Memoirs of a semi retired Driver – Driving an AEC Mammoth Major

By Rod Garrity and Doug Gray

Doug Gray's driving career started at the age 16, with the family firm. Now at the age of 80, he is still driving, delivering new Kenworth and DAF trucks throughout New Zealand to body builders or clients for Southpac Trucks. Recently he has been known to put in 14 hour days relief driving for Garrity Bros driving a silage truck. This is his story of a Wairarapa legend – an AEC Mammoth Major with the first 3 deck stock crates in the area and the rather large loads it carried.

In the early 1940s, Doug's family, together with other carriers in Masterton, had amalgamated to form Transport Wairarapa. This company was one of many of the amalgamations that occurred but have since passed by the way side.

In 1967, a brand new ergonomic cabbed, eight-wheeled AEC Mammoth Major was assembled in the workshop of Corry, Wright and Salmond in Thorndon, Wellington. This truck was to hold a significant place in the road transport history of the Wairarapa. It was to be the first three deck stock unit to operate in the area and worked for Transport Wairarapa based in Masterton.

Owner, Bill Hargreaves, paid the grand sum of 9,000 pound for the truck and

proceeded to drive the cab and chassis up from Wellington to the company's depot in Masterton. Long-time driver Doug Gray was allocated the AEC - fleet no. 26, registration CV6953.

Doug and engineer Alan Pickett built a 24 foot flat deck and a three axle trailer for the truck. The rear bogie of the trailer was made up of old Ford 5 stud axles on 8.25 tyres, which came out of an old Atlantic tanker. The front had 10 stud axles with 1000x20 tyres. The front springs were very soft and had to be modified later. The brakes on this trailer were air over hydraulic and always caused a lot of problems. The complete unit measured 63 feet long.

Even then the only way the trailer could get a COF was to remove the crate before taking it to the testing station behind a smaller Bedford. Once the crate was off, with a bit of luck, the wheels might skid. Behind the AEC the combination was definitely over length.

The crates were the third and fourth three deck stock crates produced by McIntosh Brothers of Palmerston North. The first and second crates had gone to Foleys Transport of Waipukurau. The crates arrived as frames only – primed and undercoated - and were then boarded in by Doug and the rest of drivers at Transport Wairarapa before being painted and placed on the truck.



Doug Gray aged 17 driving 1938 Ford V8, Hood Aerodrome 1942

The truck had a 691 cubic inch, 6 cylinder diesel engine with a rotary fuel pump, developing only 187 horsepower. It was fitted with a six speed gearbox, a four speed auxiliary box was added later. This gave the machine a flat out top speed of 45 MPH. It was a very under-powered truck. A farmer who lives on the Main Road near Carterton, once made the comment that he thought Doug was a very steady driver and he had never seen him speed in the AEC. Doug didn't have the heart to tell him that he was driving the truck flat stick – as fast as it would go.

The first load the AEC did was a load of wool from Beder Brothers in Masterton to the rail. The first load of sheep included 408 ewes, which weighed 41 ton 11cwt. This was the normal size load for this truck and it carried even heavier loads than this regularly. With so many axles (a large number for the time) on the road the traffic cops would ignore it as they could only pick up individual axle weights and it looked to have plenty of axles - four wheelers looked easier pickings.

Doug reckons he was never photographed as much as when he drove the Mammoth →



Major He was forever trimming the trees in the area and would arrive at farmer's properties where he would proceed to pull the excess willow branches out of the crate. The crates were so high compared to the norm that one Christmas he got tangled in the town's Christmas flags and had to be helped through Greytown. Doug kept a running tally over a 5 month period and got up to 77,000 sheep and that's not counting the cattle he carted.

The sack load of peas (pictured) came from Waikohi, on the East Coast of the Wairarapa, to Levin & Co in Masterton. It had a 27 ton 4cwt payload. Doug and Peter

Brasier Snr went out on a Friday afternoon and helped load 5 smaller Bedfords and trailers with peas so they could use the elevator to load this line of blue peas. The elevator brought the bags to about a foot above the deck height from where they had to be neatly hand stacked on the deck. Doug wheeled the whole load off on the Saturday morning.

A typical day during the season would see Doug start work at 4am loading lambs from trucks left in the yard overnight - usually around 700 lambs. These were then taken to Gear Meat Company in Petone or the Wellington Meat Export, at Ngauranga over

the Rimutaka hill - a trip of around 2 hours each way. On his return he would usually go out to Homewood Station on the East Coast, reload and deliver a second load to Gear Meat or Meat Export.

With its low bumper and set back front axle, the AEC posed a few problems for Doug - many a time he has had to get his shovel out and trim the edges of fords or creeks so he could get through.

The truck stayed in the fleet for 18 months and travelled 50,000 miles but it became a victim of the Japanese truck manufacturers push to supply trucks to New Zealand (but that is another story). It was sold to a logging operation in Winton in the South Island. 🇯🇵



At 80, Doug Gray is still driving trucks.

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