



LUCE

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

From steam engines to computers:

Truck technology takes off

By Jerry Breeden

THE TRUCKER STAFF

Not even the most creative inventors of that bygone era could have fathomed the technological advances that would evolve in the transportation industry after the White brothers built their first steam-powered truck in 1900.

Since then, changes have been so dramatic and rapid in coming that in-cab computers have become commonplace throughout the industry.

Trucks not equipped with them could be running the risk of becoming obsolete. Or at the very least, left so far behind that they could find themselves playing catch-up in a business governed by increasingly stiff competition.

An endless variety of excellent computers is available on today's market, and one of the major players in the field is Qualcomm Inc.

Perry Harrison, maintenance supervisor for Maverick Transportation Inc. at Little Rock, Ark., said Qualcomm laptops have been installed throughout the company's fleet of about 900 trucks.

Harrison said he is sold on the new technology and the continuing advances and adaptations being made available to truckers and trucking.

Qualcomm's FleetAdvisor system provides the hardware and software needed for a wide variety of applications, Harrison said.

The Qualcomm MVPc, for instance, offers automated mapping, routing, driver logs, driver-interfacing and enhanced work order management capabilities, plus pinpoint accuracy in calculating fuel taxes.

Harrison said Maverick drivers, like countless thousands throughout the industry, are provided laptop pagers that keep them linked to the dispatcher even while away from the cab.

And another feature that Harrison is high on is the unit's Global Positioning System.

"The GPS helps drivers improve

their dock-arrival times with increased efficiency, and can actually tell us within just a few feet where the truck is located at all times," Harrison said.

He pointed out that the GPS could prove especially beneficial in times of emergencies such as illnesses, accidents or other situations that might render the driver incapable of communicating.

"These things even have 911 capabilities, just like

your home or cell phone," Harrison noted.

Harrison said yet another "quality function" of the system is the VORAD Smart Cruise.

With the VORAD, an in-cab alarm is activated to alert the driver when the truck is getting too close to another object on either side or in front of the truck.

"It's like sonar on the highway," Harrison added.

Qualcomm can be found online at www.qualcomm.com.

Another provider of in-cab computers is ALK Technologies Inc., manufacturers of CoPilot Truck 2003 and the PC*MILER, which were designed specifically for the industry.

The combination reduces or even eliminates truck-to-dispatch telephoning time, out-of-route maneuvering and empty and deadhead mileage, according to company data.

It also enables drivers to avoid traffic congestion and construction zones which almost always translate into costly delays and even prolonged downtime.

ALK Technologies Inc. is www.alk.com online.



The Trucker staff photo by Jerry Breeden

CARRIER'S IN-CAB COMPUTERS: Maverick Transportation Inc. maintenance supervisor Perry Harrison of Little Rock, Ark., demonstrates one of the in-cab computers the company has in its fleet.

Panasonic offers the Toughbook line of notebooks that come in a full or partial magnesium case. The case is "20 times stronger than plastic [and has] a shock-mounted hard drive as well as a keyboard that can resist the hazards of dirt, dust and spills," according to company reports.

The Toughbook is, the company notes, "designed to deal with the knocks, shocks and spills that can destroy ordinary notebooks and leave the mobile professional immobilized."

Panasonic can be found on the web at www.panasonic.com.

Also available through several hardware companies that cater to the industry are such laptop attachments as adapters that can turn the cab's steering wheel into a temporary desk, and screen shields that prevent glare while providing privacy.

Whatever your needs or wants in the way of computers, the starting point for your shopping spree is as near as your own PC keyboard. But beware: you'll find more hardware, software and other goodies geared especially for the trucking industry than you ever dared dream. 