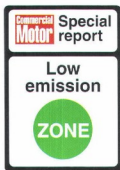


# LONDON LEZ

We find out how **JA Coles** has coped with the zone



# Tales of the city



London-based JA Coles has had to adhere to the new LEZ rules in order to safeguard its business. CM talks emissions, expense and new trucks with the three brothers who run the company.

Words / Images: Dave Young

**Britain's first** and only vehicle low-emission zone (LEZ) came into force in London for trucks over 12 tonnes GVW in February. And from 7 July, commercial vehicles over 3.5 tonnes will also be subject to the same restrictions. Basically, they have to meet strict exhaust emissions criteria in order to enter the area enclosed by the M25 orbital motorway.

To find out what this legislation has meant for London operators based within the LEZ, CM talked to the management team at JA Coles – brothers Dan, Kirk and Steve Jeakins.

This specialist removals and shipping enterprise can trace its history back to a horse-and-cart operation in Hoxton in the late 19th century (see panel). As one of the three directors, Dan comments wryly: “With current environmental legislation we may soon go full circle...”

Over the years, the firm has adapted to many challenges, not least the loss of the local Lea Valley furniture-manufacturing industry, which once comprised the bulk of their work.

The introduction of the LEZ was just another obstacle to surmount. From the initial official correspondence it became clear that around half its fleet – five out of 10 vehicles – wouldn't meet the new emissions rules.

As Steve points out: “The crucial cut-off date was October 01 registration, not, as some firms came a cropper on, anything with an 01 plate. Anything before October, you bought a pup.”

This posed a particular problem for removals companies. Their lorries spend a large part of their

life loading and unloading; consequently, they have a lower mileage than general haulage vehicles and a much longer life, typically 10 to 15 years.

To make matters worse for Coles, one of its selling points is the superb presentation of its fleet. Excellent standards of maintenance and a superb traditional livery have garnered the firm a shelf full of truckshow prizes and an enviable industry reputation. “We had to get rid of decent kit,” Steve explains regretfully.

## No exemption

The requirements of the LEZ – effectively anything predating Euro-3 doesn't qualify for an exemption from the daily charges – meant two Iveco rigid chassis, a brace of ex-Eddie Stobart 400hp MANs and a Volvo FL10 had to go. The latter was up for replacement anyway, but the others would have had two to three years' work left in them.

Fortunately, the brothers were not short of solutions to the problem.

“A lot of people panicked,” says Dan. “We sat down and thought about how to reduce the costs involved.” But he concedes it was a frightening prospect for a small family firm to be forced into renewing half its fleet.

Retrofitting the engines to meet exhaust content targets



▲ Coles' LEZ-compliant Mercedes-Benz Actros – the firm is considering acquiring another

**“The crucial cut-off date for compliance was October 01 registration, not, as some firms came a cropper on, anything with an 01 plate”**



Kirk Jeakins



▲ The introduction of the LEZ forced Coles to "get rid of decent kit" – two MANs went for export to Russia

was considered but rejected. The trucks' advanced years meant the cost of altering each one would be more than the book value, and wouldn't be recouped at disposal. The MANs were quoted at £4,000-£5,000 each for compliance conversion, the nine-year-old rigs £3,000-£3,500 apiece.

Relocating the operating centre also wasn't an option as 90% of the firm's work is within the LEZ.

Instead, the brothers removed the box bodies from the rigs. The company has always kept and altered bodies and trailers to its own requirements, keeping some in service for more than 25 years.

Replacement 7.5-tonne GVW Euro-3 Iveco Cargos on 04 and 52 plates were sourced from auctions for the first time, making an immediate saving on the dealer margin.

Next, the bodies were swapped and the old rigid chassis were sold outside the M25 area where they could still claim a decent price.

The two MANs went for export to Russia; the FL10 was sold and, sadly, probably scrapped.

### Short-term solution

Coles already had a Mercedes Actros for its overseas work (mainly to France and Spain), and is likely to acquire another. For UK jobs, units were hired in the short term

before an ex-supermarket I-Shift-equipped 4x2 FM380 was purchased. The Jenkins philosophy has always been to buy second-hand tackle and refurbish it to show condition. Fortunately, their units' low running weights (they are all downplated) meant a cheaper 4x2 axle configuration was suitable.

This prudent decision not to incur debt by purchasing brand new equipment and letting the first owner take the major hit on depreciation considerably reduced



▲ Steve Jenkins

## HOW THE LEZ WORKS

The 33 Greater London boroughs are designated a low-emission zone (LEZ), where CVs not meeting certain pollution standards are discouraged from entering by charging. The first phase came into force on February 4.

- The charge is being phased in over several years as more vehicles and tougher standards are incorporated. Initially, only diesel-powered vehicles over 12 tonnes and manufactured before October 2001 had to pay. Effectively, vehicles built to Euro-3 standards or better are exempt.
- The GVW threshold drops to 3.5 tonnes on 7 July and will include

large vans and minibuses in 2010. Emissions standards will rise in 2012.

- The charge for non-compliant trucks working within the LEZ is £200 per day, from midnight to midnight, seven days a week, every day of the year. The penalty for non-payment is £1,000.
- Income is predicted to be £5m-11m a year and cost estimated at £57m to set up and £10.7m a year to run.
- Most of the charging zone runs up to, but does not include, the M25. Small parts of the M1, M4 and the M4 spur to Heathrow airport are also included.

the financial implications of becoming LEZ-ready.

And the suitability of the I-Shift for all the city work the firm undertakes has been a revelation. Steve says: "The clutch pedal is a thing of the past."

He plans to take the automated gearshift route for all of Cole's future heavy truck acquisitions.

There's also a broader business context to be considered. As a removals operator within the LEZ, Coles has to deal with operational burdens not suffered by similar firms in provincial towns – number one being the congestion charge. Fortunately, Transport for London has progressively altered the regulations and Coles is now able to register as a small fleet and pay a monthly flat fee on account rather than rely on drivers to remember whether they'd entered the charging area and risk a fine.

Another difficulty for London removers is parking. While it's true that permits can be obtained, each London borough has to be dealt with individually, and none are quick to respond, making rush jobs an expensive, parking ticket-strewn nightmare.

These days, it's not just a matter of watching out for traffic wardens – most parking fines, as with LEZ and congestion charge infringements, are levied when vehicles are caught on a CCTV camera.

Viewed in this context the LEZ – which, unlike the week-day congestion charge, applies 24/7, every day of the year – presented a formidable obstacle to a family business already labouring to adapt to a changing market and with a higher than national average cost base.

"Some firms said they'd park up non-compliant vehicles and then just pass on the £200 daily permit cost to the customer on any jobs within the LEZ," reveals Dan. "But why should the customer pay? It's not their problem, and in any case, they'd be competing against the likes of us who were compliant and not levying a surcharge."

The location of Coles – it has storage in Tottenham and a yard at Hainault – also has compensations. "We're on the threshold of the UK's biggest and richest removals market, and the one most likely to survive any economic downturn, being only two miles from the City of London," says Dan.



▲ Dan Jeakins

## HISTORY LESSON



**Specialist North** London-based UK and international remover and shipper JA Coles can trace its history to Victorian times and the carter GW Jeakins. Today the company is run by three brothers – Danny, Kirk, and Steve Jeakins – whose father began with a single truck (a Thames Trader, immortalised as a Corgi model) in 1964 in Stoke Newington, subsequently acquiring the businesses of JA Coles and TE Pope.

Most of their work in the late 60s, 70s and 80s involved transporting finished product for the furniture-making factories based on the nearby River Lea, with a small sideline in removals. Today only the distinctive burgundy and red cab, black chassis and pompadour blue body livery with traditional gold lettering remain unchanged.

Steve and Kirk prefer to stay 'hands on' by driving, purchasing and maintaining the wagons. Dan is the strategist who recognised the need to diversify and change the fleet to accommodate new work. Today their 10-strong truck fleet undertakes family, business and overseas removals, and Coles also packs and transports containers, acting as groupage consolidator for international relocations. The firm is developing new operations in the Manchester area and frequently travels into Europe.

Highly regarded in their specialist market, the company is a member of the RHA, BAR and Fedemac and accredited BSEN 12522. For more information see [www.colesremovals.co.uk](http://www.colesremovals.co.uk)

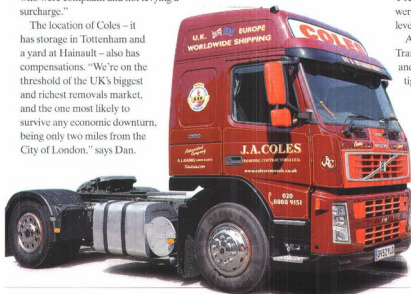
**"We are all residents of London and have young families who appreciate clean air as much as anyone else. These things have to be done."**

The brothers are not anti-LEZ, but separate their personal and professional views. "We are all residents of London and have young families who appreciate clean air as much as anyone else. These things have to be done," Dan reckons. However, Steve points to anomalies in the way the LEZ was introduced: "The benchmark should be meeting the standard, not the year of manufacture."

To support his argument, he cites taking a non-compliant T-registration truck for its annual test where its emissions were measured as being below the Euro-3 benchmark level. Thus, it met the technical, but not statutory, criteria.

And there's more pain to follow soon. Coles' four Transits will be covered by LEZ legislation in 2010, and will have to be replaced. Emissions levels will be tightened to Euro-4 in 2012.

"Another tax for London," conclude the brothers. ■



### Further information

LEZ map: [www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/roadusers/lez/areaofoperation](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/roadusers/lez/areaofoperation)

Chart of standards: [www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/lez/vehicles/2535.aspx](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/lez/vehicles/2535.aspx)

Eminox: [www.eminox.com/emissions/emission-regs.shtml](http://www.eminox.com/emissions/emission-regs.shtml)

Clean Diesel Technologies: [www.cdti.com/lez](http://www.cdti.com/lez)

Energy Saving Trust: [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/leet/citychemes/lowemissionzones](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/leet/citychemes/lowemissionzones)

UK Air Quality Archive: [www.airquality.co.uk](http://www.airquality.co.uk)

British Association of Removers: [www.bar.co.uk](http://www.bar.co.uk)