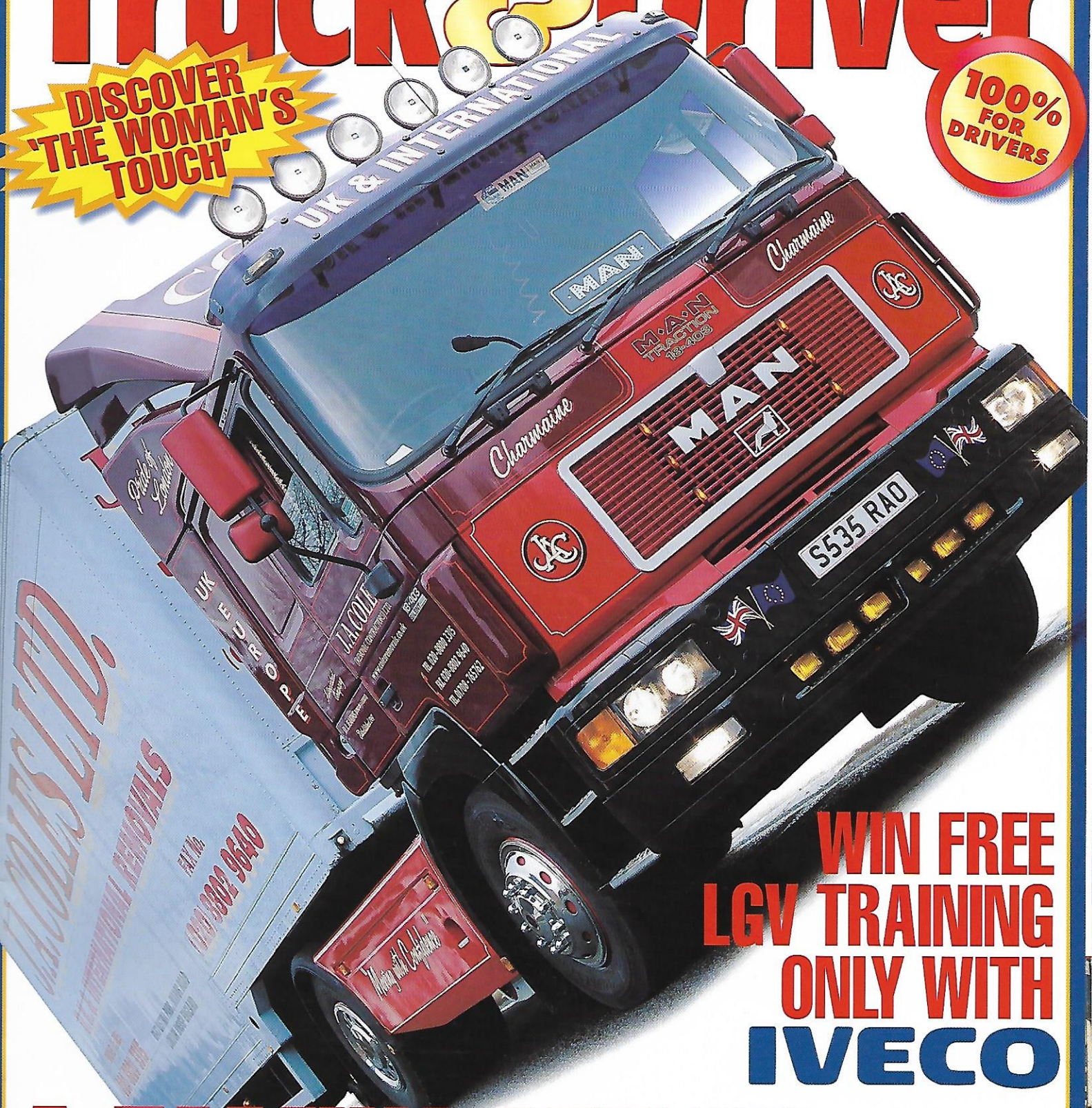


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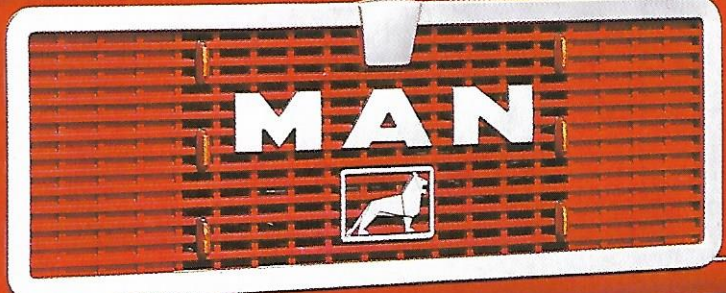
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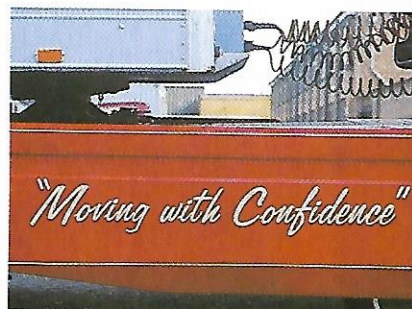
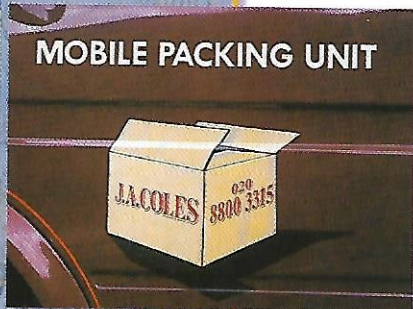


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Beautifully presented wagons – plus a host of accreditation – gives a reassuring first impression to stressed householders

Dan, Dan, the removals MAN

Small is beautiful, and the mixed fleet – including a brace of ex-Stobart, S-reg MANs – of removals firm J A Coles is prettier than most. Dave Young slopes off to Stoke Newington to meet first Dan, second Dan and the rest of the Jeakins family



Smaller trucks such as this well-preserved Iveco (above) are needed to cope with the Smoke's clogged, narrow streets. Right: August 1986 T&D; Coles ran Bedford TKs



Small hauliers, once the backbone of British road transport, are a dying breed, inexorably replaced by the rapacious rise of multinational 'logistics providers'. Family firms are in even shorter supply, so T&D was delighted to find one still flourishing close to where it started 40 years ago.

The antecedents of J A Coles Ltd go back even further than 1964, over a century in fact, but while tradition remains important this company isn't stuck in the past.

The Coles fleet, like its working methods, is a careful mixture of the old and new. In addition to two ex-Eddie Stobart MANs and several secondhand Ivecos (the oldest on a J plate), the firm also operates two modern Actros Mercs.

FOUNDED IN 1964

T&D's editor first visited them at their Stoke Newington home way back in 1986 (see August issue – right – of that year) when the family ran a smart fleet of TK Bedford Lutons and box vans.

The company was founded by Dan Jeakins with a single wagon in 1964 – although his grandfather was a carter in Hoxton in the 1890s – and has traded under the

names of Jeakins, Coles and Pope, reflecting the smaller firms acquired in the early days for their valuable operator's licences.

In 1986 Dan had 14 wagons and his oldest son, Dan – 'a scholar and the brains in the family; he gets it from his mum, Patricia', according to his dad – was at the University of East Anglia but working with the wagons at weekends.

Middle son Steve was 18, had just passed his HGV Class 3 under the Young Driver Scheme and begun to go solo. Youngest son Kirk was 14 but already able to skilfully shunt wagons in the yard and, like Steve, set on a career in haulage.

The fleet was (and is) characterised by a very high standard





of presentation; witness the distinctive and unique livery of burgundy and red cabs, black chassis and Pompadour Blue van bodies. Most of the work in the late '60s, '70s and '80s was in transporting finished product for the rapidly fading furniture industry based on the nearby River Lea, with a small sideline in removals.

Today only the livery remains unchanged. Dan junior emerged from higher education with an economics degree and a burning ambition to prove himself as a businessman. True, trucks were in his blood (he holds a C+E licence), but for Dan they are ultimately tools with which to

do a job; his real interest is in company management, cost control and business development.

PRIDE IN THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

In the intervening years Dan senior decided to take a back seat and is semi-retired, although his pride in the firm and his boys is obvious. Steve and Kirk are also directors of the family business but prefer to stay 'hands on' by driving (with an MAN apiece), purchasing and maintaining the wagons.

The younger Dan's philosophy in shaping and building Jeakins to survive the new millennium might serve as an object lesson to managers of

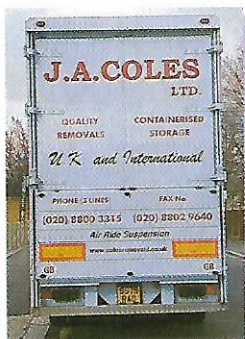
many bigger companies. As the local furniture-building business declined or moved out of the Smoke, he recognised the need to diversify and change the fleet to accommodate new work.

The original Listria Park site was developed for housing in Stoke Newington's booming property market but the firm retains an office nearby and a warehouse just up the road in Tottenham, from which they provide removals, packing and large crate storage to the middle-class populations of Stoke Newington, Muswell Hill, Crouch End, Finchley and Hampstead. Carefully targeted advertising, a website and plenty of repeat busi-





Are the female sobriquets to help jog memories of partners' names after several nights away? 'Sarah' (far right), on a J plate, is Coles' oldest Iveco



most precious piece of business acumen: knowing when to delegate, providing each son with his own area of expertise and responsibility. Dan junior, 38, is the business controller; he knows exactly what the firm's costs are, is clear on overall strategy but leaves all lorry-related matters to his brothers. In short, while Dan has the keys to the toolbox, his siblings wield the spanners.

Steve, 36, has developed valuable and marketable skills in the purchase, preparation and conversion of vehicles while Kirk, 32, provides a one-stop-shop project management service to customers. Manufacturers may not want the hassle of running their own wagons; equally they've no wish to trust a valuable

A J-reg Iveco rigid might seem elderly but remember, the vehicles are scrupulously maintained and in common with most removals vans turn in a very low annual mileage

and fragile load to just any old haulier. Kirk provides solutions to soothe away their troubles.

COULD BE FLASHIER

Sure, the firm could be flashier. As directors the boys might treat themselves to a brace of new TG-As but, with low tare weights, the 400hp MANs are easily up to the job and, since they're bought and paid for, can simply be parked up if work drops off. The unusual trailers, also owned outright, provide the necessary flexibility to tackle

almost any task. Much the same criteria apply to the rigid trucks; a J-reg Iveco might seem elderly but remember, the vehicles are scrupulously maintained and in common with most removals vans turn in a very low annual mileage.

Despite fewer trucks the firm is busy, turnover having consistently increased in each of the last 12 years. Drivers can be tough to get and keep in London and its environs but Dan tries to offer a career structure and works to create removals teams of compatible personalities.

Oldest-serving employee Ted Shirley has been with Jeakins for 29 years. Karl Handleigh, who does most of the Continental jobs and is also a mechanic, also has several years' service.

'People are always prepared to pay for quality, which is what we sell on. The trucks are mobile billboards,' claims the younger Dan, citing a host of BAR and BSI-standard accreditations. Coles won't chase low rates and the company is unlikely to get any bigger: 'This is a reasonable size; you can't keep close control of a bigger firm,' Dan says.

Dan senior looks back fondly on the firm's 40 years, grateful that, unlike many drivers, 'I never missed out on my kids' childhood. They were always with me because they wanted to be.' Rightly pleased with what he's built, he sums up the business concisely: 'You have to have your heart in what you're doing.' I'll be back in 18 years to check on progress, lads...





The Jeakins clan – from left, Steve, Dan snr, Kirk and Dan jnr – gather in Stoke Newington. Another yard is near Romford



J A COLES, AN ALL-FEMALE FLEET

long-time T&D advertiser Chris Hodge, who the Jeakins regard highly.

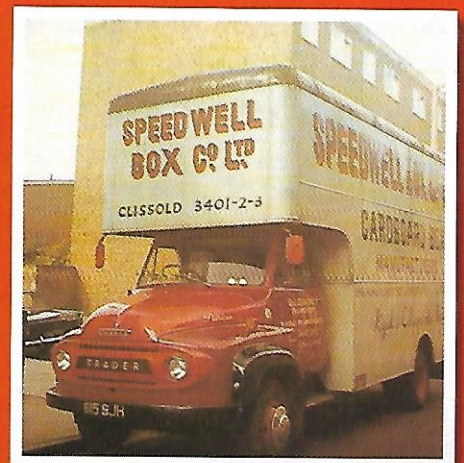
Since the Mercedes are on lease they are finished in plain white. Steve praises them for their semi-auto gearshift, which ensures they are driven properly and not rushed. Fortunately, given the nature of the firm's payload, all the units are manoeuvrable, tax-friendly, 4x2 configuration.

Further back in time when the firm ran an all-rigid fleet, the album shows a variety of Ford and Bedford chassis, including Dan's first motor (*right*) – bought from a builder and fitted with 1955 vintage bodywork – that he ran on contract to Speedwell Box Co. One subsequent body ended up on four successive chassis, getting longer on each occasion.

To complete the roll of honour: Hunter Vehicles performs cab paintwork, Premier Vehicles does bodywork (although Steve and

Kirk paint the bodies) and Mick Fowler applies the lettering and signwriting. The firm says thanks are also due to MAN dealer Allied Commercial at Barking.

Coles has 13 trailers of its own, ranging from 20ft to 40ft long, with additional 45ft stepframes rented from Hill Hire. The firm also has another yard near Romford.



Every vehicle at J A Coles sports a female fleet sobriquet: Gabriella, Sandra and so on. Some are from the Jeakins family; Steve and Kirk prudently name-check their partners on their wagons to help jog memories after several nights away.

The firm's first artic was a Cargo with a rooftop sleeper pod, soon followed by an ex-Gateway supermarket MAN. The Volvo FL10, with its unusual 3.8m wheelbase and impressive turning circle, came along with several other vehicles from Greenwich dealer and