



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

HANSON PLYWOOD: VOLVO FM ELECTRIC

With one eye on increasing its sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, Hanson Plywood has taken the plunge and added an electric truck to its fleet, and has found the perfect partner in Volvo

WORDS: JOHN CHALLEN / PHOTOS: TOM CUNNINGHAM

Commercial Motor

Whether they are positive or negative, there has been no shortage of opinions from those inside and outside of the transport sector about electric trucks. On the one hand, the jury is still out for a lot of people (much of it based on price, charging infrastructure and range), but on the other hand, manufacturers are pushing on regardless.

Volvo Trucks is proving to be particularly strong in this sector. It already offers a full range of zero-tailpipe-emission trucks, and suitable partners have been sought to evaluate the vehicles and tech in the real world.

GREEN AMBITIONS

One of these is Halifax-based Hanson Plywood. The company was already thinking green, having ordered five electric forklifts, and also signed up to the business certification Planet Mark. For Volvo,



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**John Lumb,
transport manager,
Hanson Plywood**



as an operator that was already actively looking to boost its environmental credentials and cut its carbon footprint, Hanson Plywood was a match made in heaven.

“We started to look into Volvo's electric truck because we felt that it was further along the EV



Leading the way: Managing Director Gary Scott is assessing the benefits of Volvo's electric vehicles

journey than other manufacturers," explains transport manager John Lumb. "Others seemed to be looking more at rigids and, with the product that we sell being very dense, these vehicles would not give us the payload that we needed. Also, Volvo gave us a comprehensive and detailed presentation, explaining the very useful route simulation software. With all things considered, we decided that was the way to go."

BUILDING THE BUSINESS

A brand-new electric truck is a far cry from where the company started out in 1987. "Back then, we couldn't afford to go out and buy new vehicles, so we invested in a second-hand vehicle, which we liveried up with our original branding," reminisces Gary Scott, owner and MD of Hanson Plywood. "Slowly but surely, over those 35 years, we've expanded the business, warehousing, staff and, of course, the fleet of vehicles. The company now runs a mixed fleet of 18 trucks – a combination of artics and rigids."

Scott says that the new addition took a lot of consideration, but believes it was important

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Gary Scott, managing director, Hanson Plywood

to push the envelope on his truck portfolio. "Volvo built a certain number of electric vehicles and were looking for the right sort of operators and people who could really get to understand how they work and fit into a fleet," he says. "But it's all relatively new and getting a battery-powered truck to pull so much weight is a challenge. We're not sure whether it's going to be a long-lasting technology on truck fleets, but so far it has gone extremely well. We're interested in seeing how it does longer term, because it is a trial of the technology. It might be a stepping stone on the way to hydrogen-powered trucks." □

SPOTLIGHT SNAPSHOT

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SPOTLIGHT SNAPSHOT

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Hanson Plywood is making many steps towards greener operations, including the company's car fleet, in which everyone is being moved across to EVs, because of the benefits to not only drivers, but also the company. "With trucks, more consideration needs to be taken about how it will work for us, but also the impact on the wider industry," says Scott. "We've got an open mind on it and are working closely with Volvo, because it is also at the beginning of this electric journey."

To support the operation of the FM Electric, a new warehouse is being built on the company's site – one that is as environmentally friendly as possible. "We are putting as many solar panels on the roof as possible," reveals

the MD. "Therefore, we will be generating our own electricity and, instead of buying fuel for a diesel vehicle, we're going to be charging this vehicle with our own generated electricity from the panels. The same applies to our forklift truck fleet. We're trying to generate as much of our own environmentally friendly electricity as we can, rather than using fossil fuels. It's all part of our carbon-reduction strategy and to be kinder to the planet generally." While the vehicle charging will be on-site, it won't be able to be completed at the same time as loading, because the chargers are positioned at the side of the building. However, overnight charging has been factored in and works well so far.

There's yin and yang when it

comes to the costs involved: the 'fuel' will be cheaper, but the cost of the vehicle is much, much more expensive. "We're not sure of the exact running costs right now because we need to run it for a longer period of time and evaluate it," explains Scott. "It's a leap of faith at the moment and very much a trial process. But it's something that we want to do, because it's an environmental challenge for us and a big environmental gain if we can make it work. It's an investment in the future. We're not quite sure how it's going to work out, but it's a bold commitment for us. Volvo has supported us to an extent because it wants to work with us to understand better the technology and whether it is a viable offering for other truck fleets."

NEED TO KNOW

Hanson Plywood now runs a mixed fleet of 18 trucks – a combination of artics and rigids

A clean break: The company is building a new environmentally friendly warehouse on its existing site in Halifax



ELECTRIC AVENUES

It might be a different way to look at operations compared with a diesel truck, but the FM Electric offers plenty of flexibility on journeys for Hanson Plywood, with either multiple shorter runs or one longer round-trip on any given day. "We've got a theoretical range of up to 186 miles, so we're not planning on going to Scotland or down to the South West with it anytime soon," says Scott. "The radius is likely to be around 70 or 80 miles before it turns around and comes back here to charge up overnight. But, obviously if we're doing local work within, say 30 or 40 miles, we can take the truck out, make a few deliveries, and then we can bring it back in and reload it without recharging."



A local hero: The Volvo FM Electric is ideally suited to making multiple, shorter runs



THE MAN BEHIND THE WHEEL

Chris Bowers, the driver designated to the FM electric, "absolutely loves it" and he was chosen because he typically covers a lot of shorter journeys for Hanson Plywood, which lend themselves to electric vehicle operations.

"Chris is a considerate, careful driver, who's interested in the technology and how it works," explains Scott. "He's also got a Class 1 licence and drives an artic, so is very experienced. We felt that – based on all of those elements – he was the driver most suited to look after the vehicle, as well as all of the promotion that goes along with it.

"He's very, very positive about the FM Electric and says it's an absolute delight to drive," adds Scott. "Specifically, he's impressed with how easy it is to manoeuvre, as well as its flexibility, the smoothness, and how quiet it is on the move. He's very impressed!"



TRUCK AND DEALER

"We specified a 4x2 tractor unit coupled to a brand-new 36ft tandem-axle rear steer curtain-side trailer," explains John Lumb. "This configuration gives us a 20-tonne payload (with the 2-tonne EV dispensation) and the flexibility to access practically any delivery point that a 6x2 rigid would." The FM electric will be working during the day, therefore giving a nine-hour window for charging on-site.

"So far, the vehicle is achieving the 170 miles that Volvo had promised, which is enough range to reach a lot of our customers in the north of England."

DONE DEAL

The dealer that supplied the FM Electric was Crossroads Volvo at Birstall. "I dealt with Jason Robinson, who seemed to have all the answers to the questions I was asking him," says Lumb, who adds that staff from Crossroads came to the Hanson Plywood site to assess the company's operations. "From there, they were able to provide a full route simulation, based on the information I'd sent them, as well as a full route cost comparison with the EV, as opposed to a diesel truck. They based the figures on the current pence per litre rate of fuel and our kWh price to recharge the truck. The figures showed a very big saving based on the routes that we could use it on."



Watch this space: Dealer Crossroads Volvo visited the Hanson Plywood HQ to see how the company functions on a day-to-day basis