

# NO COMPROMISE



Privately owned Metropolitan Express Transport Services is taking on the big multi-nationals in local and regional cartage, securing important contracts and experiencing growth through attention to detail.

**T**he local transport environment is without doubt the most highly competitive area of operation. Metropolitan delivery services attract a large number of inexperienced operators with little knowledge of containing costs, actually delivering reliable service and subsequently being in business for a short period before closing the doors. But while some are in local transport for the short term, there are those who develop solid business practices and experience growth while establishing reputations for absolute service coupled with impressive attention not only to customer requirements but also to safety, such as Metropolitan Express Transport Services, a company leaving no stone unturned in aiming to continually be the best.

Metropolitan Express Transport Services has a history dating back to just 1986 when Tony Van Keulen founded the business in Melbourne. In its first year of operation the fledgling company grew to a fleet of 12 trucks. Today it is a different story with more than 150 vehicles on the road encompassing all facets of local transport from courier vans through to an extensive fleet of semi-trailers. To ably meet customer requirements, the company not only established depots in Dandenong, Campbellfield and Tottenham, delivering service solutions for clients; but set in place a business plan envied by others.

Nine years ago Sam Pantou became an equal partner with Tony and together they have focussed on sustainable growth, fleet improvement and local and interstate expansion. An analytical approach to business expansion has seen all facets of its divisions grow and the implementation

of warehousing and logistics services has attracted further interest from business in the Victorian capital.

A fleet replacement program has seen Metropolitan Express Transport Services operate one of the most modern fleets in the local transport sector, designed to deliver a high degree of reliability along with increased productivity.

“When you first establish a transport business it is difficult to go out and buy, or justify new equipment,” Sam Pantou says. “Now however, we work on a business model of buying brand new equipment. All the new trucks we buy are part of a management decision to replace them every five years or so, it will keep our fleet relatively new and staff morale at a high, it also eliminates the OH&S issues we had with the older vehicles.”

And new the fleet is. A little over two years ago planning began to replace its vehicles and 18 months ago this really kicked off, which attracted a lot of attention from various business sectors. Companies concerned with image and OH&S and Chain of Responsibility (COR) regulations certainly took note. The bulk of Metropolitan’s trucks are Isuzu, including NPR 250s with tray bodies, FVD 950s and FVZ 1400s with truck mounted cranes for specific contracts and Giga prime movers towing an extensive trailer line-up.

“All of the trucks are suitable to their application. For example Isuzu FVMs were bought for the ‘ad hoc’ work and fitted with mezzanine floors and hydraulic tailgate lifters. All of the trucks are specified to deliver on the special needs of the contracts we serve. It’s all part of providing the best in service to our customers, we don’t want to be seen as just another transport company, we want to be referred to as a partner in their business,” Sam points out.



"We made a conscious decision to standardise the fleet and I must admit I've had every other company trying to entice me to trial one of their trucks, but we've made a stance to keep the fleet mainly Isuzu. Our repair and maintenance costs have been reduced and reliability has not been an issue at all. "It is also important truck drivers are given consideration in fleet management decisions and we don't get negative feedback regarding performance, air-conditioning, heating or other minor issues and that keeps the motivation of drivers up which is half the battle," he says. "Drivers are more than that, they are the front-line of the company and set the image for our clients and if you can't keep them motivated it has adverse effects on the business in the long term. Our market research indicates customer preference for a company using suitably equipped new trucks with motivated drivers aware of their requirements to deliver the high service levels expected." The company has excelled in the service and safety stakes. Metropolitan Express does not compromise on safety in any way and with a large portion of its business

servicing the construction industry, in particular cartage of BlueScope Steel products, the company has taken every step to ensure freight is protected as are drivers and on-site workers while carrying out the transport task. The construction division was formed when the company recognised there was a need for specialised services to meet demands of the building industry, while offering the highest levels of safety. This was recognised by BlueScope Steel that awarded its local cartage contract to the company. "Meeting safety requirements, actually surpassing them, is paramount within our operations and we go that extra step to ensure nothing is compromised at any time," says Sam. "Our drivers are highly skilled professional people who have undergone extensive training in all facets of their work. They know the freight and customer requirements and undertake every load with the highest degree of safety and personalised service, delivering the very best for our clients. We are expected to deliver and we do," he says. "As I mentioned we do not regard our drivers as drivers, they are customer

service people in vehicles and at the forefront of our business, able to identify opportunities for customers and develop initiatives in which to strengthen our partnership with those we provide services for." The same goes for vehicles, and Krueger Trailers has supplied equipment to the company, custom-built to handle haulage for BlueScope. Each trailer features a three-piece rear load rack designed to match differing products and lengths and with gate pockets in the coaming rails every half metre, the racks assist in load restraint and protection for the goods carried. The trailers also feature on-board scales, Retract-A-Step retractable ladders with hand rails and Ausbinder Mark II ratchets for load restraint. It is all part of the Metropolitan Express package designed to offer the best and is closely monitored every step of the way to ensure continued safety and unequalled service. Customers are involved in the design of new equipment and technology development to keep both companies at the forefront of innovation. "It is vital to stay one step ahead of the competition when it comes to innovation and we are always working with both

suppliers and customers on new or refined products. Our aim is to deliver transport and logistics solutions unmatched by others and every effort is made to ensure we continue to be the best in the business, offering tailored, value-added services," Sam says pointedly. "In too many businesses people come in with all the bells and whistles, offering promises and then the customer never hears from them again. We have an open line of communication to all of our clients, with an open door policy, and it is an ongoing aim to introduce at least one new initiative into a customer's business each year." Efforts to remain at the top are recognised, with the company awarded new business by highly respected companies in Australia. This has been a big part of the Metropolitan Express success story across all divisions of the company. The courier division is another success and Metropolitan management has worked with customers to facilitate the movement of small consignments, often carried out by large trucks in other businesses, by vans or small vehicles. The aim is to not just contain costs but to again improve safety during transit.

"We recognised the carrying of small items on large vehicles has dangers. Those consignments are subject to some limitations in regard to restraint and obviously, they can suffer damage through being bounced around on the tray of a truck. We have eliminated the risk factors involved as well as providing a more efficient service for our clients," Sam indicates. The company is constantly looking at every aspect of its transport activities with a specific aim to make continual improvements regardless of consignment or route. It identifies where value can be added to its services, again with safety in mind. An example is the crane truck fleet. Metropolitan has made a decision to only put remote control cranes into service across its operations, pointing out that with the operator away from the vehicle and working via remote, the risk of accident or injury in this operational area is also eliminated. An interesting fact is that all safety elements in place have actually been a major contribution to the company's success. Recently a major contract was awarded to Metropolitan based on not

just its service record but safety strategies. The firm concerned had put out a tender for transportation and Metropolitan management was unaware of the fact. However on learning about the work opportunity, enquiries were made and it was found the tender was in its closing stages. What the company could offer was pointed out to the potential customer and suddenly the application period was extended to allow Metropolitan to be included in the running for the work. It proved to be a success, due to the fact the carrier was so professional in approach to the entire transport task. Metropolitan Express Transport Services is unwavering in approach to its role in trucking, working with customers and developing numerous initiatives setting the benchmark for other operators to attempt to emulate. The company is looking at establishing operations in other major capitals using the same priorities used in Melbourne. Dedication to the construction industry and its suppliers has seen the company go from strength to strength and this is active across every division and paving the way for continued expansion and success.