



Handle with care

THE **PBS SCHEME** IS FINALLY BREAKING OUT OF THE TRUCK-AND-DOG NICHE AND FINDING ACCEPTANCE IN THE WIDER TRANSPORT COMMUNITY. BUT SPECIFYING THE RIGHT SOLUTION IS AN EXPERT'S JOB, AS TRAILER FOUND.

After a half-decade long struggle to gain traction in the marketplace, Performance-Based Standards (PBS) is now a household term in Australia's competitive transport equipment industry.

Starting off in the tipper and dog segment, the concept has begun to pervade every facet of commercial road transport, from container cartage to dairy delivery. We now see quad-axle semi-trailers and 30-metre combinations used in port container transport and bulk line-haul, as well as heavy 20-metre combinations on fuel delivery or milk collection duty. PBS-approved vans and curtain-siders with more pallet capacity are also becoming a more common sight, all promising more productivity at the price of a special assessment process.

To find just what's driving the rise of the PBS scheme, Trailer sat down with Rob Di Cristoforo, Director of Advantia Transport

Consulting and eminent PBS Assessor, who is known to bring a healthy degree of commercial sensitivity to the table when advising transport businesses on PBS. According to Rob, one reason for the recent spike in PBS uptake is that the market has begun picking the low-hanging fruit. "Some approvals have been more about common sense than anything else," he explains. "Take the 26-metre B-double, for example. The regulations say you can't carry any payload on the prime mover, which has been holding back car-carriers, for example. But with PBS you can suddenly have your 26-metre B-double car-carrier, so it just made sense for many to go down that path."

Another example is loading 4.6-metre-high trailers, the PBS expert adds: "Normally you can run a 4.6-metre-high drop-deck if you download the combination by 10 per cent of GCM. If you carry birdcages on

the forward leg and pallets of beer on the return leg, it would make sense to load the beer to full mass because it doesn't sit very high inside the trailer. A PBS approval lets you do that."

According to Rob, many have simply

About

Rob Di Cristoforo is an Accredited Assessor under the PBS Scheme and Director of Advantia Transport Consulting. He is also Deputy Chair of the Australian Road Transport Suppliers Association and a Board Member of the International Forum for Road Transport Technology.

followed paths well trodden by others when jumping onto the PBS bandwagon. Owning a Design Approval doesn't give you exclusive use of that design. "Anybody who sees that truck on the road can get an approval of their own if they go through the same process. That's where a lot of PBS volume has come from."

With PBS slowly becoming more mainstream, Rob says there is now a smorgasbord of PBS Assessors and Certifiers to choose from. Rob himself became a PBS Assessor in 2011 when the market was still dominated by a small group of specialised suppliers, and has experienced the rise of the scheme first-hand. "Prices have come down since I first started in the industry. At the same time, service levels have gone up, and it's all much quicker now," he says. "That's why a lot of smaller companies are starting to get on-board, including plenty of owner-



“ More customers are asking us about PBS on the first enquiry. It's important to us at that early stage of a sale that we're able to advise them fairly quickly on what's possible. ”



operators.”
When opting for a PBS vehicle, the transport business or OEM has to involve an approved Assessor as well as a Certifier to guide them through the process. After all, PBS is all about individualisation, and someone has to make sure the design is safe to operate.

While they have distinctly different roles in the process, it's best if Assessors and Certifiers work as a team on behalf of the applicant for a smooth approval, Rob explains.

Therefore, as an applicant, it's a good idea to talk to an Assessor and a Certifier before you commit to anything.

Thanks to an unpopular quirk in the PBS Scheme, for example it's possible to obtain Design Approval for something that probably won't be granted road access –

a very heavy combination seeking broad road access is one example. A trustworthy Assessor will probably not take on a customer in the first place if that's likely to be the case.

“If I think a customer's proposal might have difficulty getting the desired access for whatever reason, I'll offer to act on their behalf and investigate through the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) or the road owners directly before committing them to significant costs,” he says. “Some companies have been burned because they didn't get that level of care from the Assessor.”

And there's even more that can go wrong if there is insufficient communication between everyone involved. “When a Design Approval is obtained before the detailed design stage, discrepancies can

arise between the approved design and the as-built vehicle during the Certification inspection,” he says. “It's the Certifier's job to determine what the discrepancies are and to discuss them with the Assessor. The Assessor can then either amend the approval accordingly, or supply written advice to the Certifier that the as-built combination still satisfies PBS standards.” Reverse Certification, on the other hand, is recommended in cases where the equipment already exists. In this method, the equipment is inspected by the Certifier before the Assessment is carried out. “When the Certifier gives the Assessor all of the relevant dimensions and specs after doing a formal inspection, it guarantees a smooth run,” Rob says.

As a result, it's best to minimise the risk of Certification discrepancies and



Fast Fact

In the Financial Year since July 2014, the NHVR received 248 new PBS applications, resulting in certification of 2357 new PBS units and 584 safer, more efficient combinations on Australian roads.



Rob Di Cristoforo and Adam Ritzinger helped *Trailer* evaluate where the PBS scheme is headed in 2015.

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allow for future truck upgrades, by building a flexible approval. As Rob explains, “Why limit the approval to one specific truck model, engine model, gearbox model and axle ratio, when a more generic approach will do? It shouldn't cost the Earth to have some flexibility.” Tyres, being a consumable item but also important in the PBS specification, are often a point of contention. “In a lot of cases you don't even need to specify particular tyres, so I avoid it wherever possible.”

With PBS becoming a rewarding field of work for manufacturing businesses across Australia, experienced Assessors like Rob Di Cristoforo are now in high demand.

One company that has benefitted from Rob's experience in the field is Brisbane-based tanker builder Holmwood Highgate. In order to truly succeed in building a PBS combination, a manufacturer needs to guide their customers through the process, says Holmwood's Roger Manning: “More customers are asking us about PBS on



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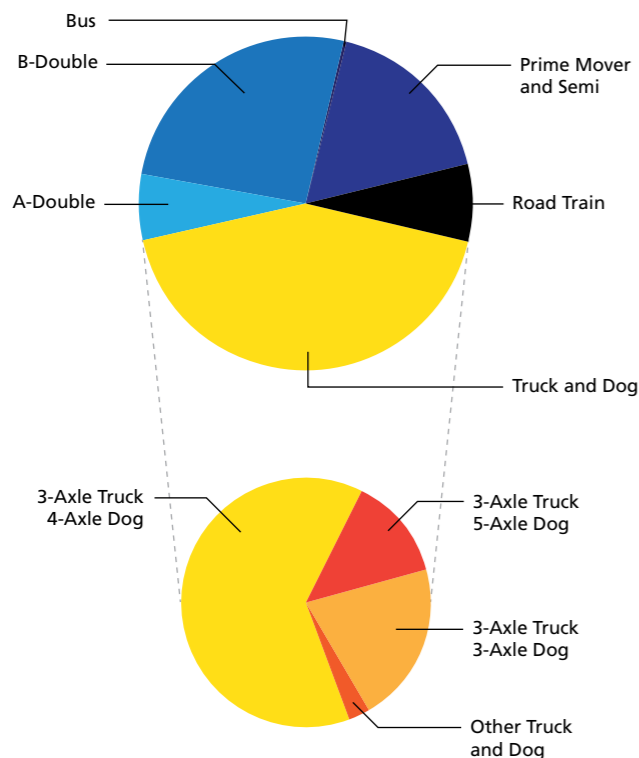
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the first enquiry. It's important to us at that early stage of a sale that we're able to advise them fairly quickly on what's possible. Therefore having someone like Rob to call or email with ad hoc questions really makes a difference to the level of service we can provide to our customers. We really value the prompt feedback." Kevin Wright, of Melbourne-based tipper


manufacturer, Hercules Engineering, has plenty of experience with the challenges of PBS as well. "We used to have a lot of headaches with our early approvals being too specific and needing to be changed all the time," he says. "Then we started getting more flexible blueprint-style approvals done through Advantia. These are perfect most of the time – but

Fast Fact

A PBS applicant can technically ask a road owner for access approval prior to committing to the application. "It all has to happen informally," says Rob Di Cristoforo. "It can take a while, but if you have the time, it's a path worth taking to minimise risk - especially since Advantia can show that a heavier combination isn't necessarily more imposing than existing traffic when considering the span lengths of sensitive structures along a desired route."

on the odd occasion, when somebody wants a bit of a different setup, Rob will either modify an existing approval to fit, or write to the Certifier if it's only a minor difference."

Stephen Hunt of Melbourne-based OEM, Krueger Transport Equipment, says PBS is on a steep, but rewarding learning curve. "When Krueger decided to get into PBS, we had a lot of questions, as you can imagine. Rob spent a lot of time helping me to understand the PBS process and how to develop a blueprint. In the end we arrived at a rather tidy blueprint in just a few weeks," he says – adding that PBS will remain an important growth market for the family business.

And Stephen is not alone with his view. With PBS becoming a household word in Australia and the number of Advantia-assessed vehicles starting to add up, Rob and the Advantia team can rest assured that new work will keep coming in. "Whenever I spot one of our babies out on the road, it makes my day," he says. "And it's definitely happening more and more often." 

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