

Hard Pressed In Preston

The team at CP Davidson have set **Malcolm Bates** – no big fan of continental side-loaders – a challenge: try a Translift “E-Maxx” sideloader on domestic waste in a busy urban environment. So with an “anti” driver and a tough round, how did it perform?

In a nation of nearly 70m people, we’re never going to be “short of skills” as politicians seem to suggest. And in the current jobs market, should we be buying expensive, imported products that could put people out of a job?

You might not agree with my simple logic, but if we’re going to judge the value of the side-loader principal as a potential replacement for conventional rear-end loading RCVs – vehicles that work best with a driver and three-man crew – then we need to be realistic, hard-headed and ask some tough questions. Like, should we be contemplating

a new, capital-intensive (that’s “expensive” in plain English) system at a time when labour rates are so stable?

We come to this question from the position that in much of mainland Europe, the side-loader is commonly used as a one man unit – a second crew member only being used to “present” the full bins, in high density areas where parked cars may create an obstruction. So why replace a conventional RCV – providing employment for a driver and three crew – with a more expensive side-loader that only provides employment for one? That’s what we’re here to get a handle on.

The side-loader in Suburbia. The Translift demount body on the Mercedes Econic chassis may look like a large truck to plug down a small residential street, but it is more nimble than it looks



Left: the key issue for the driver is the opportunity to get on enough bins easily. Here, a single and a double will need two lifts...

Right: this combination requires the single rear bin to be lifted first, followed by the double. Malcolm has got in too close to the second pair for the lift to be visible on the in-cab screen...



Far right: this results in a tight squeeze for the truck against the neighbouring hedge, but there's still room for the lift to take place

Can side-loaders really work in Britain? It depends on residents giving a damn about where they place their bins. It depends on local "yoofs" not seeing the fun in deliberately turning the bins around, so they can't be emptied. And it depends on getting a very large side-mounted bin-lifter vehicle down tight residential streets. As if all that wasn't enough to condemn the whole idea outright, the general perception is that the cycle time is going to be much slower than with a conventional rear-end loading machine. In other words, the issue of RCVs holding up busy urban traffic while they load would get worse if we adopted side-loaders. Yes, as we've already seen in Horsham, Surrey, side-loading RCVs can work in a rural (or semi-rural) location, but what about in a city of 130000 people?

Expensive And Slow?

AS YOU may have spotted, I'm far from being "pro" side-loaders, but for MVO it's my job to identify and report on upcoming trends, so I have to be prepared to test my arguments with people who hold a different viewpoint. Arguments such as side-loaders are expensive; too slow; and they require a dog's breakfast of a vehicle spec, resulting in poor residual costs compared to a conventional RCV. The final nail in the coffin? In health and safety

This is why the use of a "presenter" is vital in urban operations – there is no way of getting the truck onto these containers at the end of a cul-de-sac

critical Britain, putting a left-hand drive RCV into service, that then requires a crew member to exit into the traffic flow!

"You don't need a left-hand drive chassis with our system and I'd question the whole basis of your other arguments based on our findings. For example, with regard to working speed, we'd expect our customers to lift well over a thousand 240-litre presented bins per day, but remember we can also lift 360-litre bins, too," explained Shaun Taylor of CP Davidson. "And, the E-Maxx system uses a twin-screw compaction hopper, so it packs faster," he added.

For the last half an hour I've been playing devil's advocate to his distinctly upbeat view of the Dutch-built Translift range. At the time, we were standing on the CP Davidson stand at the latest Londonderry Garage Show. By the time you read this,

Shaun will have an interesting new unit available - but more of that later. Having explained that MVO had only just looked at the HN Schorling side-loaders, and that while I could see advantages – not least of which is a swap body capability that unfortunately almost the entire waste industry still can't grasp as a benefit – I was trying to let him down gently with a "no". He wasn't giving up.

"I don't care how biased you are against side-loaders, I guarantee that after a shift on the Translift, you'll have a different opinion," he challenged. "We'll provide the vehicle and put it on any round you choose. I guarantee you'll be picking up bins from the kerbside solely by using the camera system by the end of the shift." He's a brave man, that Shaun, but he's also shrewd. I can't resist a challenge... even if it means getting up at 5am ➔





and driving to Preston!

So here we are at the Argyll Road depot of Preston City Council. After a quick plug across country from Davidson's HQ in Chorley, we're ready to rock. Thanks to the co-operation of Duncan Coward of Preston City Council, I've got free rein of the Wychnor estate area in North Preston and, to help me, I've also got "Swampy" as my bin "fetcher-outer". I suspect this is as much because Shaun is convinced I'll be rubbish at the job, as it is the fact we're sure to get some hard-to-reach bins in this maze of 1970s cul-de-sacs and hammerheads.

"I'll do a few lifts first, so you can get an idea of what the system can do, then it's all yours," Shaun suggested. Gulp. We're in a nice suburb with lots of rather expensive cars parked beside the road at regular intervals and

The Translift side-loader is ideally suited to the 6x2 rear-steer Eonic chassis. The body pod is demountable and is compatible with hooklift trucks for onward disposal. This is a major factor in increasing productivity

what seem like stupidly tight and narrow roadways. Getting the Eonic to line up to any 240-litre bin sufficiently well for me to get on to it and lift seems tough enough, let alone getting on hundreds of them without inflicting damage! But Shaun insists that even a rookie like me can be working at "pro" speeds by the end of a shift. Normally, I'd be making my excuses at this point, deliberately breaking an arm, maybe, or catching a contagious disease so as to get off the hook, but Shaun is way ahead of that old malarky...

He knows that unlike some journos who put magazine articles together by testing nothing more than the click of a mouse on a website, it's a matter of honour for me to be able to operate the kit I get to write about. Would you respect a restaurant critic who couldn't boil an egg? So

why would anyone take notice of my views on waste collection and handling systems if I couldn't get out there and pick up a load before lunch? "Get the picture?" asked Shaun, after I've sat watching him for half an hour. And I suppose I do, meaning it's my turn...

In The Hot Seat

WHILE SWAMPY works ahead, lining up the wheeled bins into neat pairs facing the right way, I take the driver's seat. Shaun is at pains to point out the demo unit is based on a pre-registered Eonic chassis, and that the 2011 demo unit will be brand new, but that's not an issue. Everything still works as it should and even though this is a long wheelbase 6x2, I'm soon at home with the rear-steer. I'm also happy with the "X-pattern"



Left: look up! Overhanging trees can be a problem in leafy suburban streets. Luckily, the on-board camera system helps, while fold-out arms can be used to stop pedestrians getting too close to the lifter

Right: the side-loader will take wheeled bins up to 360 litre capacity, although the girth grabber lift is limited to 240s





Far left: this close-up of the bin-lifter underlines the solid construction. The unit has a sideshift action, a teleboom-out capability and a flick-out girth grabber for out-of-alignment bins

Left: Oops! Malcolm tried to catch a bin that didn't hook on to the comb correctly and dropped the lifter too late. Using the girth grabber would have been the right solution!

joystick control for the lifter, but less confident about the complex control panel out of my line of vision to the left. I'd have preferred it closer, with bigger and fewer push controls.

Shaun has half-convincing me that driving a normal right-hand drive chassis – while operating the kerbside-mounted bin-lift equipment – is not a health and safety issue. His explanations of what to look out for - and what to avoid - are also pretty spot-on. He noted I was overcompensating by driving too close to the kerb. "Remember, you have a teleboom option on the joystick and even if you don't get on straight, there's also a sideshift action," he explained. After a few painfully slow lifts, things start to make sense. Within an hour or so, I'm more adept at getting the truck lined up to the bins... and I'm getting more confident by the minute.

Pride Before A Fall?

YOU KNOW that phrase "pride before a fall"? That's me, that is. Just when I thought I was really in the groove, I fail to get one of two containers hooked-on properly. As I lift, it drops off the comb. Instinctively, I drop the lifter in a vain – and frankly daft – attempt to catch it. The Translift loader is fast, but it can't outrun gravity. So, instead of picking up the bin from Number 47, I bring down the lifter on top of it, crushing it. Oops,

sorry, Mr and Mrs Blenkinsop. Swampy makes a note to deliver a new bin the same afternoon. I make a note that unlike other systems, the Translift also has a girth-clamp "grabber" to capture out-of-line containers. I should have used it. A lesson well learned.

I also learned that using a side-loader to pick up bins in leafy suburbs involves "ups" as well as "downs". Keeping an eye on overhanging trees while lifting is vital, but made easier by the excellent wide angle side-viewing camera. But above all, I learn that it would be daft to try and instigate urban side-loader operations without a "fetcher-outer". In fact, on housing estates, it might help customer relations if a "putter-backer" was employed, too. Why? The biggest negative with side-loaders on domestic rounds is that the driver has to go up one side of the street first - then turnaround and come back down the other in order to lift the bins on the offside. That's double the mileage... and it's a nightmare in cul-de-sacs!

The new "split" system, however, should overcome that criticism. In fact, split is the wrong word here - initially, I thought Shaun meant the twin container lifters loaded into a split hopper, giving a two waste stream capability. In fact, there is no need for two compartment bodies with the demountable body pod system – you just swap one for the other. What we actually have is an ability to lift four wheeled bins –

two per side – at the same time. This means that unlike any other side-loader system, the new "Varia Split-lift" can work both sides of residential streets on the same pass. The new demo unit will be to this spec and, from initial calculations, it could lift up to 2000 "presented" bins per shift, with on-station time maximised by the swap body system.

He Was Right

SHAUN WAS right – the Translift system doesn't require an "oddball" left hooker chassis as a starting point. And no, adopting side-loaders need not result in wholesale redundancies, either. A "presenter" is needed to provide a quality urban service, so the new Varia Split-lift unit will work best with a driver and two - while still giving a potential productivity increase of over 20 percent, he suggested.

Yes, I made some mistakes, but based on my day in Preston, I'm seriously thinking of putting "side-loader driver" on my CV, just in case this journalism lark goes pear-shaped. And I'm confident too... just so long as Mr and Mrs Blenkinsop from Number 47 aren't interviewing me for the job, that is... [MVO](#)

Contacts

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At the end of the shift, Shaun Taylor of CP Davidson (left), Swampy (centre) and Sean Nixon of Preston City Council, debate Malcolm's career prospects