

# ‘Newcomer’ not so new



**Cavanaghs Stockmaster owner Rob Cavanagh has been around long enough to know what works and what doesn't.**

Rob Cavanagh declares he's a "relative newcomer" in the livestock transport business, despite the fact he's been involved in it for close to 40 years.

"When you look at the Martins, the Frasers, the Curleys, they're respected names who've been around for a long time," he says.

Cavanagh, in his own right, is a well-known and respected figure in livestock transport and he's not afraid to voice his opinion on industry issues.

Originally from Casino in far north NSW, he grew up on a mixed beef and dairy farm, a background that gave him the experience in dealing with saleyards and abattoirs.

He started driving for Jim and Helen Savage in 1985 and then set up his own business, Cavanaghs Transport, with one truck in 1988, sub-contracting to the Savage operation, later to become Stockmaster based in Tamworth, NSW.



While his livestock work went slight awry in the 1990s – “I actually carted bananas for a while for Les Blennerhassett of Blenners Transport” – he was soon back into livestock with steady growth.

In 2010, he bought Stockmaster from the Savage family and operated that company as well as Cavanaghs Transport, which was then based in Inverell, NSW. In 2021, however, he merged the two brands for the company to become known as Cavanaghs Stockmaster Transport, based in Tamworth.

Today, Cavanaghs Stockmaster has 22 of its own trucks which can be assembled as B-doubles, B-triples or roadtrains; 10 full-time sub-contractors are also on the books. Cummins-powered K200 Kenworths dominate in the fleet, with the X15 engines set at 600 hp and 1850 lb ft of peak torque.

### **Fleet expansion**

“I’m looking to expand the business and know the company I want to acquire,” he states with conviction.. “Our focus is on working for exporters, so any expansion will be to this part of the business.”

Communicating with customers is vital, he continues. “Having gear ready when they need it, solving small issues for them, making life simple for them is what it’s all about.

“I’ve been very fortunate to have had loyal customers right from the start of my business,” he adds. “I’ve got the customers I want, I only lose the ones I don’t want.”

A feature of Cavanaghs Stockmaster’s operations is its ability to provide a ‘cattle warehousing service’ for customers by virtue of its own large set of cattle yards in Tamworth. This enables customers to assemble small lots acquired from different properties or saleyards until a full load is ready for delivery.

With a capacity for 400 head, the on-site cattle yard also has feeding facilities for customers wishing to yard, wean or feed their stock.



*Rob Cavanagh (centre) with Cummins on-highway business manager David Paddison (left) and Cummins Tamworth branch manager Cambell Carmichael*



## **Working with TWU**

Commenting on the national shortage of truck drivers – it's estimated there are around 20,000 unfilled truck driving positions in Australia – Cavanagh believes the Transport Workers' Union needs to be part of the solution.

"The labour market is crippling businesses," he says. "We're going to have to work collectively, develop relationships, to find a solution. I believe that should include working with the Transport Workers' Union."

He says that looking after drivers is critical to the success of his operation. "Our drivers get five weeks annual leave and we contribute \$1000 to their accommodation when they go on holiday. It's the drivers that have made this place, no doubt about it."

Loyalty to suppliers is another important aspect of his business. "You can't over-estimate the importance of loyalty," he says. "If you expect a supplier to be loyal to you, you should be loyal to the supplier. Good suppliers are critical to having a successful business."

He has learned from sometimes painful experience that in an industry as fiercely demanding as livestock haulage, service support is critical. "No one comes close to Cummins' support. It's all about people," he adds. "And Cummins has reinvested back into Tamworth with its new branch facility. We couldn't seriously consider anyone else."

### **"Drives me nuts"**

Rob Cavanagh is an avid supporter of associations, having held executive positions with the NSW Livestock, Bulk & Rural Carriers Association and Australian Livestock & Rural Transporters Association.

"People not wanting to join associations drives me nuts," he declares. "The associations do some invaluable work. Look what they've helped achieve – Advanced Fatigue Management, roadtrain access to locations such as Tamworth – and so the list goes on.

"All transport operators should actively be involved in an association, it's hardly rocket science!"

