

Photo courtesy of Murray Clifford, Cummins South Pacific



That link in the chain

SOME SAY THE PILBARA REGION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA IS HOME TO THE HARSH, MOST DEMANDING ENVIRONMENT A HAULAGE BUSINESS COULD POSSIBLY FACE. THAT'S WHY BULLBUCK TRANSPORT HAS ENTRUSTED **TRAILER COUPLING KITS AUSTRALIA (TCK)** TO PROVIDE A SOLID LINK BETWEEN BULLBUCK'S FLEET OF SIDE TIPPER ROAD TRAINS.

The damage the rough road network can do to a trailer coupling in the Pilbara region has long worried Graham Buckley of Bullbuck Transport in Port Hedland, WA. Capitalising on the mining boom, the family company is specialised in transporting iron ore and copper concentrate from the Telfer mine site in the Great Sandy Desert to the port – and worn out couplings are an everyday occurrence.

"We operate a fleet of 32 prime movers and 135 trailers, 128 of which are side tippers working in a road train set up, so naturally there are a few weak points down the line. The coupling is definitely one of them."

While Graham has been aware of the issue for a long time, it was only when he came across TCK Australia in 2003 that he found a solution he would approve. "The first time we got hold of the TCK product was in 2003 through an associate in the industry who trialled it in the Perth area. At the time, the kits hadn't been trialled yet," the 50-year industry veteran says. "But given the drama we had before I was willing to take a risk and give it a try as well.

We started by trialling 10 kits and that's where the TCK story really began. Realising the huge potential in the mining industry, Bullbuck soon upped its investment in the tow coupling kits – and never went back. "The tow couplings were so effective, our next order ended up being around 80 kits," Graham says. "Today, the TCK equipment forms an integral part of our road train

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business and has helped keep our repair costs in check. We now only have to replace the kits every four to five months. To us, that presents a good run considering we were looking at a single month before."

Over time, Graham and TCK Australia's Graeme Rowlands forged a strong partnership as Graeme came up to Port Hedland to experience the notorious Pilbara roads first hand and meet Graham in person. "The

meeting was great, we exchanged some ideas, got to know each other's business better and that connection has since strengthened the business relationship even more." More importantly, the trailer coupling kits still perform solidly since day one, which has been enough to convince Graham to stick with the product. "From a product point of view, the kits are easy to fit and quite durable. It helps

that they're Australian-made, because they're easier to source if we need to stock up. "The tow couplings are strong enough to withstand any type of weather, including intense dryness and scorching heat, sand, freezing conditions and wet areas. The amount of workmanship TCK have put into these kits is just first class and I wouldn't go anywhere else to seek tow coupling kits." And according to Graham, they are one reason

why Bullbuck Transport has established itself as a major bulk ore hauling force in WA's mining industry. "When we moved from South Australia to WA in 1997, there was just myself, my wife Rita and my son Phil, and a few vehicles to start with. Having fortified our home base in Port Hedland in 2001, we now have more than 50 staff on hand and more than 150 vehicles at our disposal." According to Graham, having enough vehicles in the fleet is vitally important in meeting the demands of each project. However, equally important to Bullbuck Transport's operation is the equipment Graham specifies on all 32 sets of road trains. "Working in the mining industry is obviously much different to a normal bulk haulage operation in that the trailers are subjected to a lot of punishment off-road, so our equipment must be protected at all cost," he explains.

"That's why it's absolutely crucial to fit heavy-duty equipment that can withstand all the dirt, gravel, heat and stray debris it has to face on a day-to-day basis.

"The last thing anyone in a mining operation wants is to be constantly repairing equipment or worse having to decommission a vehicle because it's been compromised by the elements. That's why we need to source the best equipment to counter WA's harsh environment – be it the trailer itself, the running gear or the coupling."

TECH FACT

TCK Australia can boast special trailer coupling kits to suit both 40mm and 50mm Ringfeder-style couplings, all locally built in Adelaide. Each kit comes with a main pin assembly, urethane wear pad, upper and lower bushes, springs, screws and nuts in one pack. In addition, TCK Australia also sells individual parts required for a coupling repair or services separately. TCK Australia has wear parts to suit the 50mm tow coupling manufactured by Italian company V.Orlandi.

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