

## Negotiating junctions in a 44 tonner.

In this note, Committee Member, Neil Warden takes us through what it is like to drive one of the biggest modern articulated trucks, and how difficult it can be for the lorry driver in these times when (non-Advanced) drivers' patience and courtesy to others co-sharing the road seems to be somewhat lacking all too often.



I'm driving a Mercedes Actros, a tractor unit with a massive 15.6 litre engine developing 625bhp with a fully automatic 12 forward and 4 reverse gearbox with an optional manual shift that involves no more than simply pulling on a steering wheel stalk. This truck is a highly sophisticated machine and like a modern car, has an enormous amount of safety features. With its trailer unit, the overall lorry is 16m long, 3m wide and can weigh up to 44 tonnes gross in UK. The floor of the cab is 2m off the ground so I'm sitting way above the roof of most cars and SUVs and with 2m of internal cab space.

I'm very aware of much smaller and vulnerable road users compared with my leviathan, in particular cyclists when waiting at traffic lights. My truck is fitted with blind spot cameras and if I indicate left or right a small TV monitor on the dashboard switches on to give me a clear view along the side of the vehicle, helping eliminate the blind spots not seen by normal mirrors. In some trucks, if a cyclist is alongside and the truck starts to move and turn at a junction, the blind-spot system will automatically apply the truck's brakes to prevent contact between the truck and cyclist. Many major cities will not let large vehicles into the city centres unless they have such safety features fitted under the "Fleet Operators Regulation Scheme".



There may be up to 6 mirrors on a truck to assist the driver with their vision and position but because of their large size, they could actually add to your blind spots. Mercedes has overcome this by doing away with the mirrors altogether because on the Actros or any other model in their truck range, they have been replaced with small cameras mounted at the top of the cab doors. Then, inside the cab by the door pillar, there is a TV monitor to give a much-improved view of the road behind, without creating an additional blind spot.

Approaching junctions or roundabouts are hazards of particular concern to me when driving this vehicle. It's all too common for inconsiderate or ignorant drivers who are in a hurry to pull in front of the truck when I'm getting close to traffic lights on red or I'm nearing a roundabout. They don't want to be held up for a few seconds as the truck gets up to speed when the lights change or roundabout is clear to go. However, they forget that my vehicle is perhaps 44t and can't just stop as quickly as they can.



Roundabouts, in fact, are a common source of contact points. Rule 187 of the Highway Code makes reference to long vehicles taking another course or having to straddle lanes on approach or when on the roundabout in order to negotiate such a hazard safely. When I'm travelling in lane 1 of a dual carriageway and approaching a roundabout for example, the notorious Haudagan. I'm aware of other vehicles coming along my offside in lane 2. I need to anticipate if they will move towards the centre line as they come to the mouth of the roundabout, cutting in towards my lane. Even when I'm turning left, because of the size of my truck, the front right side needs to be closer to the centre line and I need to steer towards the centre line markings on the roundabout as otherwise, the left side rear trailer wheels could be in danger of hitting the wall or mounting the kerb where pedestrians stand on other roundabouts such as the one at George IV bridge.

The first car on my right can easily move off quicker and clear the front of my truck, however it's the 2nd or 3rd offside vehicles that are of concern. This is because the truck needs that extra bit of space and I need these cars to maintain lane discipline or better still hold back to allow the truck to use that extra road space on my right to help the trailer wheels clear the corner safely.

If you see a truck in a particular position at a roundabout or junction and wonder why, I'm sure the driver has a good reason to be there and he/she may have seen something you haven't, so please be patient. Maybe the driver will give you a big thumbs up for being courteous and considerate.

I often hear people saying that there are far too many trucks on the road and how dirty the engines are, polluting the environment as well as rants on other negative comments. But hey, look around you; everything you see at one point would have been delivered on a truck. Truck manufacturers spend millions on research and development so that their product is the best it can be for today's markets in compliance with rigorous safety and environmental regulations, set by Europe and then enforced by government agencies.

Not only that, our transport companies invest in continual training programmes for their drivers, including regular assessments dealing with their health to check their ability to drive the vehicle in the safest and most fuel-efficient manner. The driver may have had to spend anything between £3000 and £5000 in becoming qualified as a driver in the first place.

So next time your sitting in a traffic queue or at the traffic lights with a large truck beside you, spare a thought for the highly trained and qualified person driving a vehicle costing in the region of £200k beside you and give him/her room to make his/her manoeuvre safely after he/she moves off.