

# Building the Future

*There seems to be a lot of talk about developing the country, laying the foundations for jobs and growth and building new homes for an expanding population. This is not a new agenda at J. K. Williams Ltd ... they've been doing exactly that for over 60 years ...*

story + photos ■ **australian truck photography**



When they come to write the history of a place they're always quick to celebrate those who opened the roads and the bridges, but never remember the people who built them. J.K Williams Ltd. has been building roads and bridges in and around Sydney's Western Suburbs since 1958. In the Penrith council region, the company is virtually a household name, having developed the subdivisions for approximately 76 per cent of all housing lots in the area.

It's fair to say that J.K. Williams Ltd. laid

the foundation for modern Penrith, but when Jack Williams first arrived in the region it was mostly market gardens.

Jack landed from Dubbo via Wollongong with a young family, an ex-Army truck and bulldozer. He got a start at Australian Blue Metal Ltd's St Marys quarry; working seven days a week on local building projects. At the time the Commonwealth Government was in the process of selling off Department of Defence (DoD) land in the district that had been WW2 munitions factories. The Feds were developing a plan with local councils to

attract more industry to the region, with the authorities promoting Penrith as Australia's first satellite city.

The aim was to sell the DoD land to industry, which would then build the new factories that would become the engine room for the country's post-war manufacturing revival. Factories need workers, and workers need somewhere to live, and the Council's plan for an instant workforce was to open large areas of land for housing subdivision. They were hoping this would initiate an exodus from Sydney's metro suburbs lured by the opportunities for work and cheap homes.

The passenger rail to Penrith was electrified and proposals were well underway for the construction of a freeway out from Parramatta. Jack Williams was quick to realise the opportunities opening up around him and, in 1958, he finished up at the quarry to



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begin work on the emerging subdivisions. He set about hiring a team of close mates who were experienced, competent equipment operators.

Jack’s word was his bond, and he and his team were quick to earn a reputation for hooking in, getting the job done right – on time and on budget.

Fast-forward to today and the company Jack and his mates built now has a workforce in excess of 170 employees, with 140 pieces of large equipment. It’s bright-yellow chassis and blue cabs are easily recognisable and sets the company’s equipment apart. And that’s they way they like it.

“Our earthmoving fleet has virtually doubled in size in the last three years, and the trucks are catching up!” chuckled JKs maintenance manager, Warren Sheppard.

The transport fleet includes 13 heavy trucks, another 12 medium rigid, and three

dedicated T3 Kenworths. Over the past 12 months it’s added six new Kenworths to the fleet; two T609 prime-movers and four T409 tipper body prime movers pulling PBS-approved quad-dogs. These trucks are an addition to JK’s fleet and wear the blue and yellow to help the company meet an increasing workload.

“We’ve found Kenworth’s custom engineering is basically what we’d been hunting for in a truck,” Warren said of the new trucks. “And we’ve been able to put together the T609 spec with a Drake 5x8 float that’s fully adapted for our work.

“It’s probably one of the most customised trucks Gilbert & Roach’s salesman, Michael Mortensen has put together and to date, the results have been fantastic!”

The company generally favours bonneted trucks, and the T609 was optioned with a 28-inch IT sleeper on a 4300mm wheelbase.

In turn, the Drake float was designed to keep the unit within the 22m length limits, which allows JKs to run the unit without the need for over-length permits.

With the float opened up to 3.5 metres wide, JK’s can put 70 tonne over the five axles compared to regular travelling which allows for only half that.

As well, a shorter prime mover means better manoeuvrability.

“Being civil engineers, we can find ourselves in some tight areas where accessibility is not the best to say the least. Also, with its sloping bonnet, daylight doors and peeper windows, the operator can be in control of his position and know exactly where he is,” stated Warren. “Some of the sites the trucks have to get in and out of are not easy, and the Kenworth is second to none for visibility.”

The T609’s are rated for 150 tonne, with an extra cross member to better take the strain if JKs decide to use a dolly. Also, most heavy-hauliers would option six-rod over the drive, however JK’s have gone with the optional Neway 20,865kg rated AD 246/10 airbag suspension. A heavy-duty DANA D52-



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Left: Shaun Symonds is the driver of the T609 with JK’s maintenance manager (right) Warren Sheppard



190 at 23.5 kg tandem drive puts the power to the ground.

While the majority of its work is around Sydney, the company does have projects in country NSW, which explains the 28-inch IT sleeper. The drivers are usually home most nights, however when called out on an over-night country run, the IT bunk is sufficient.

“If the truck is away for any extended periods, we’ll put the driver into a motel,” Warren added. “Our work is spread out, we’ve recently completed the north-west rail station that’s part of Sydney’s new rail system where we excavated a hole 20m wide, 22m deep and 200m long!”

“We’ve just started a project on Hayman Island, which will be challenging. Getting the machines across by barge plus all of the quarry material will be interesting.”

With Sydney house prices defying gravity in the metro region, the pressure is on to open up new housing estates and to further develop the Western Sydney region. Consequently, the increasing appetite for residential accommodation, which equates to more subdivision, more roads and more infrastructure development, has fuelled JKs workload. The pressure might be on, but talking to Warren it’s obvious that safety has not been sacrificed in the rush to meet project deadlines. In fact, workplace safety is a major priority and it influences JK’s choice of equipment and how it’s fitted out. “Obviously, everyone is going for higher payloads, so we’ve pursued the PBS (Performance Based

Standards) path for our truck and dogs. On the safety side of things, we always stick with disc brakes. The braking efficiency is a lot greater than it is with drums; the maintenance is heavier though, but we accept that.

“We’ve got collision control in the front bumper, with the operators setting the forward distance depending on whether they’re in the country or city. There’s drag torque control (DTC) in the T409s, so if there’s any sudden heavy move in the steering wheel that alerts the Kenworth’s EBSS system which applies the brakes.

“We also fit lane departure indicators, load discharge alerts and door alarms, which alert the driver if the door opens and the park brakes are not applied.

“From our perspective, it’s imperative that everyone gets home from work at the end of the day. We do not compromise on safety,” he emphasised.

Ergonomically, Warren says that the T409 and T609’s cabs are ticking all the boxes, with their sloping bonnets and large rear vision mirrors.

“We’ve had no complaints from our drivers. They’re easy to get in and out off, while the driver’s controls are well laid out and functional. All of the trucks are fitted with Eaton UltraShift autos.

“It’s a company policy that we stick with autos, basically for driver fatigue. We try and make the driver’s job as easy as we can.”

The latest Kenworths have the Cummins ISX e5 engines.



“The results to date have been very good. Fuel wise and performance the Add Blue engines are well ahead of the EGR Cummins,” he continued.

JKs purchase its Kenworths from Gilbert & Roach, dealing with new truck specialist, Michael Mortensen.

“He looks after us extremely well. Any service issues, we only need run them past Michael and they’re dealt with straight away.”

Presentation is a big thing at JKs, and the company goes to a lot of trouble painting its machinery to ensure uniformity. According to Warren they have a painter permanently employed; painting new equipment or refurbishing older machinery.

“Obviously Kenworth being a customised truck is a big advantage to us. We can have our chassis rails yellow and our cabs blue. They’re sign written at the dealership so they go straight to work when they get to us.” he

explained. Company policy is one truck, one driver with a spare driver who floats among the fleet to cover absent drivers.

JKs try and maximise driver hours, and being accredited in BFM (Basic Fatigue Management) means the company closely monitors driver shifts.

“We give our drivers each weekend off, and they don’t touch the truck as far as maintenance goes. They’re greased by the workshop, and we use a sub-contractor who comes in fortnightly to wash the trucks.

“They’re fuelled every night by our yard hand, so all the drivers have to do each morning is check their oil and water.” stated Warren.

There are two T350s in the fleet, one is utilised as a water cart and the other a prime

mover. There’s also a T359 pulling a custom built spreader trailer, which can deliver its payload up to four metres from the rear of the trailer. The T359 is particularly versatile and is used to fill trenches and put sand onto median strips.

“It’s two years old and doing a great job. It’s extremely manoeuvrable and serviceable; they’re a great little truck. We have fitted it with a long drive to limit the amount of clutch abuse we can have with the spreader trailer and it’s working really well.”

Warren started with JKs in 2000 as a plant mechanic, repairing equipment in the field. As the maintenance manager he brings 25 years experience on the tools and has a good idea of what works and what doesn’t. For Warren, and for JK Williams Ltd, Kenworth delivers a premium product that ticks all the boxes ... safety, productivity and durability. 📌

