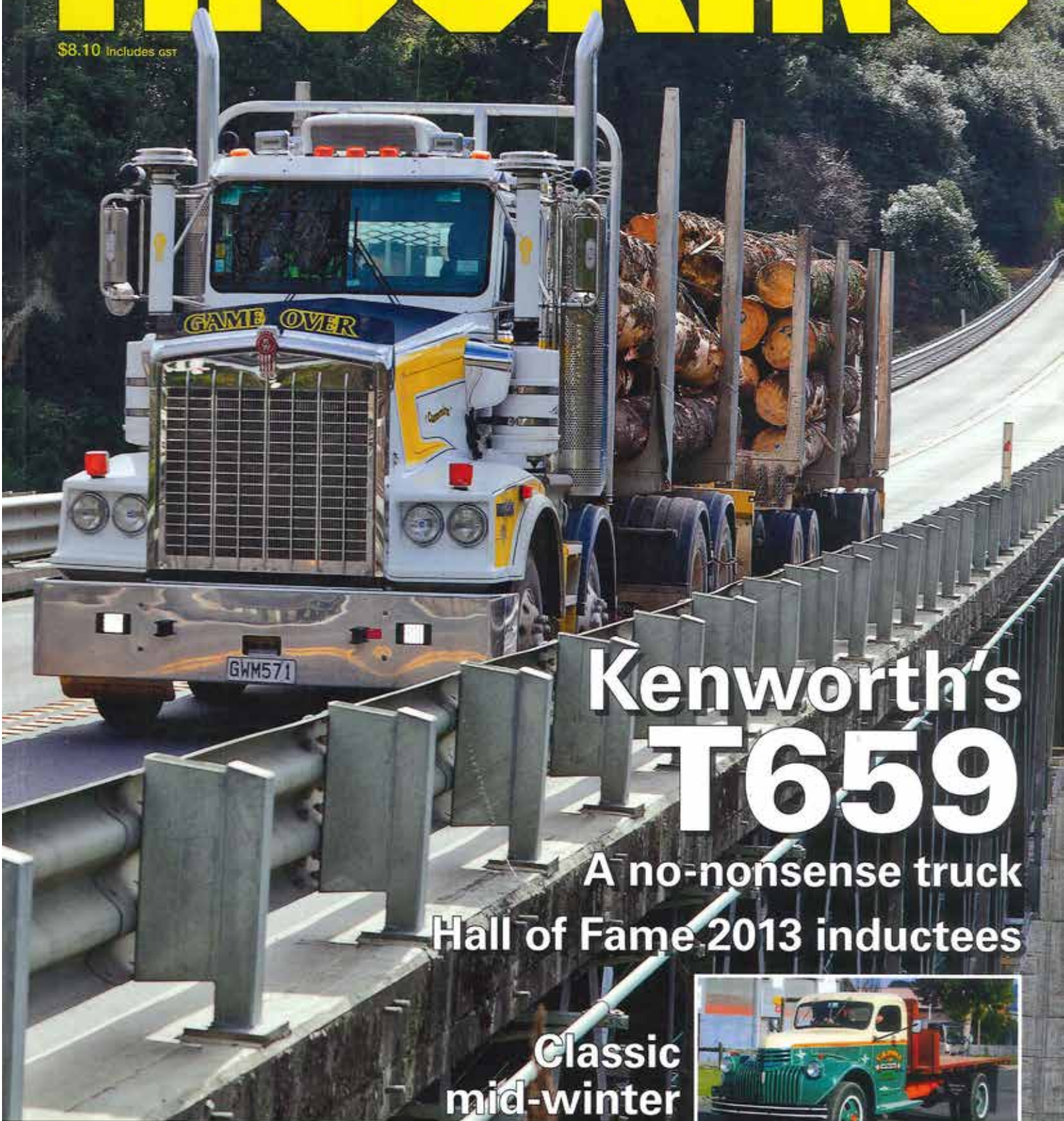


NEW ZEALAND

OCTOBER 2013

# TRUCKING

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## Kenworth's T659

A no-nonsense truck  
Hall of Fame 2013 inductees

Classic  
mid-winter  
weekend



Fairfax Media



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# No-nonsense Kenworth

BY BRYCE BAIRD  
PHOTOS JOHN MURPHY

The T659 isn't so much a case of back to the future, as forward to the past with a truck that takes its cue from an age when trucks were meant to last for decades. This is a Kenworth that was developed for the harshest of Australian conditions, so it's no surprise that it works just as well in the New Zealand bush – after it had been Kiwi-ised with another steering axle grafted under it, that is.

**T**he T600 series have become the stuff of legends in the Aussie outback, and those iconic shots of roadtrains powering through the dust in the outback with multiple trailers are just as often hooked up to a T600 series as they are a T900 series.

When the first whispers were about that the T659 might be offered as an eight-wheeler a number of the logging boys pricked up their ears. They could see that this might well be the ultimate tool for the job, so it is no surprise to find that one of the first of these new eight-wheelers went straight into the bush.

Bevan Satherley, who owns Satherley Logging, was near the head of the queue for the new Kenworth and he's placed it in a fleet that includes a T904 Kenworth, a couple of K104s, a Western Star, an Isuzu Giga and a CH Mack that was his first new truck. He's also got a 1984 Mack Superliner that he is restoring which will tow a B-train under logs when finished.

At just 33 years of age, he's done not bad for himself, and as well as having a career around trucks





HITACHI

GAME OVER

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GWM571

SATHER LOGGING

027 442



The Kraft step deck trailer has some nice touches, including lit signage

and machines, including time spent mining in Australia, he's also just set up his own logging crew, it had been operating for a month at the time of our visit, "to have better control of the whole logging process and avoid delays," he said.

Bevan's logging crew and trucks generally work for Forest Owner Marketing Services, a Feilding based company providing harvesting and marketing services to private plantation owners, mostly in the lower North Island, Taranaki and Hawkes Bay regions.

He works closely with Self Loader Logging, as well as some other logging contractors in the central North Island and East Coast, and shows some serious commitment to the industry by being one of the first to put this eight-wheeler T659 into harness.

He's got a no-nonsense attitude to the job and isn't one for embellishments, saying, "it's alright having something that looks good, but it's got to make money."

That's not to say his trucks don't look good, in fact the yellow on white livery results in a crisp presentation that doesn't look too shabby at all and even the older rigs in the fleet, such as the CH which we chanced upon a few times during our runs with the T659, still looks easy on the eye.

We hooked up with driver Lance Wichman and the T659 around 3:00am on a mild Napier morning and the sight of that big unfamiliar snout pulling into sight around the corner instantly stamped this truck as something out of the ordinary.

There is nothing of the elegance of the T408 about the T659. This is a blunt tool for the job, and Kenworth haven't made any effort to soften its looks. This is traditional spelt with a capital T and anybody that knows anything about Kenworth and Australian Kenworths in particular, knows that the T600 series is the big hammer they drag out of the toolbox for the hard jobs. It's not meant to be pretty, just functional.

"Some people don't like the look of it," Lance said, "but they are here to do a job. Some trucks are just too pretty for the bush, but this isn't!"

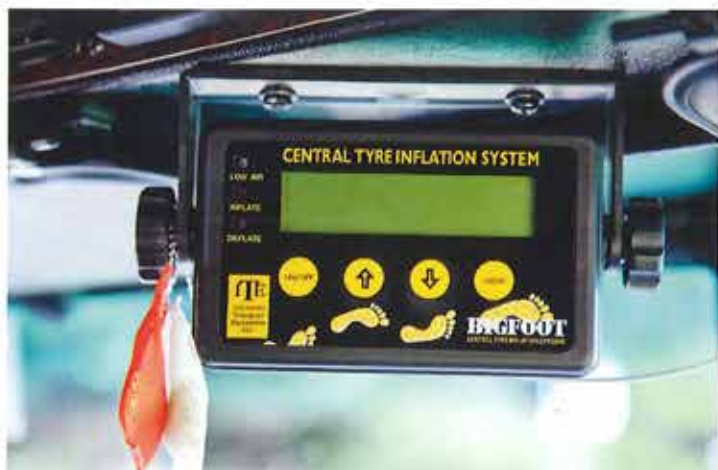
The extra axle gives the truck quite a different look to the T650 six-wheelers we've seen around



and compromises had to be made - this isn't the easiest truck to clamber into, particularly for those riding shotgun. The steps had to be cut away to accommodate the second wheel arch, and they angle awkwardly forward to give the second axle room to breathe. Still, this wouldn't be the first eight-wheeler that has had to make compromises around the extra axle, but a door that doesn't open very wide highlights that you have to be more careful with foot placement when entering this truck.

Lance came out of a K104, so he's no stranger to the peculiarities of hoisting yourself into a cab and this truck is much easier to access than

Left to right: Central Tyre Inflation provides a significant traction advantage in many of the sites the T659 visits. There isn't a spare dial hole or switch blank on the Satherley T659 console. The big snout is classic Kenworth





a K-series it has to be said.

Powering up the Napier Taupo Highway in the dark heading for the first load of the day gave us time to get close and personal with the heart of the beast, the Cummins 600hp Signature SCR powerplant under the hood.

This is one sweet sounding engine, and with the twin stacks sitting close to the cab they provide one of the best musical accompaniments you could hope for as we pull up those long drags from the Napier flatlands.

There are some good pulls up that way. If you haven't had the privilege of driving this highway, it's one of the best roads in the country for both

scenery and a good workout for a truck, but due to the amount of snort the big Cummins has, these climbs seemed a lot shorter than we remembered and before we knew it, Lance was swinging off the road and heading into Thunder Mountain on Ngatapa Station.

It's a remote run and the station has been heavily logged, however the previous crews got a bit sloppy and left plenty of good logs lying around, "and we're cleaning up what's been left behind," Lance explains.

A big solid man, all tats and beard, Lance looks like he was made to drive the T659 and he's a mine of information about the district and the history of trucking in Hawkes Bay, having spent much of his life either dragging logs or livestock around the region.

It's quite a haul into Ngatapa and as we crawl past Crocodile Pond, the Te Kooti bridge and other places on the way up to Thunder Mountain, it's hard not to be impressed by how steep this country is, even in the dark.

Lance has that big snout swinging across space as he negotiates hairpin after hairpin and he points out "that's what I like about this job, it's the places you get to see that not many others do."

This is country that requires bush radio discipline as the steepness of the climb and the massive drops mean you need to know exactly

*Unloading at Napier wharf.*





Bevan Satherley (left) and driver Lance Wichman.

where everyone else is on the track.

The tyres have been aired down to 31psi and it's getting soft and sloshy near the top of the climb where the clean up crews are working.

"I like these jobs, they are more of a challenge than flat running over tarseal, there's no challenge in that," he notes.

Coming to a short flat section followed by a savagely steep climb Lance said that, "in the old truck [K104] we used to charge through here and have a run up. You don't need to with this engine. This truck makes life easier that's for sure. You know you've got something good when you've got to slow down for the uphill corners," he added with a grin.

It's 43 kilometres to the skid from the Napier Taupo road and you can see the Mohaka River at times through the mist and early morning twilight. It's magic up there with the valleys being throttled by long sinewy fingers of fog and endless ranges disappearing in every direction you care to look.

Lance is first into the site this morning and explains that Ngatapa Station has been logged for years. Going by the deer netting that has been put in recently, not all of it will be going back under trees and you get the feeling Lance will miss the crawl up Thunder Mountain when it's all done and dusted.

He's got a great appreciation of these big landscapes, gnarly climbs and enjoys the grind in and hearing that big Cummins snarling its way up the mountain. When asked what he enjoys most about his new mount, his answer is as succinct as it gets, "the engine".

Lance knows a bit about engines, having driven trucks powered by all the American brands, as well as many of the Europeans and a few Japanese during his career.

He sums things up pretty well by saying that he's, "not a big fan of the Jap trucks, but I have driven them. I like the retarders in the Europeans and they are nice and quiet," but thinks the American iron is the one to beat,

which is only befitting a man that has a Harley in his shed.

He had good things to say about the Detroit Diesels, Cats and Cummins in equal measure, but thinks this new generation ISXe5 Cummins is very impressive under the foot. "The motors tell you what they want, just listen to them," he said, "you don't have to drive them hard to get the best out of them."

Good as the engine is, coming down the big descents back to Napier later in the morning, he points out that "I'd be up two gears with a retarder. But you drive according to what you've got."

Coming off Thunder Mountain Lance is holding second in the low box in parts, with the truck holding 1500 revs and needing no brakes. "there's no room for error on a lot of our jobs," he said, as he swung that snout into space around corners that might have a couple of hundred metres of vertical drop before landing, and his experience shows with one of the more impressive displays of driving we've seen in thirty years of doing these truck tests.

He knows how to play that RTLO as well as Jimmy Page knows his guitar and Thunder Mountain is a song Lance has played plenty of times - he knows when to strum and when to hum, as he comes down this brute of a hill, loaded to his tolerances.

He's loaded with four-metre packets this trip, which tend to sway and you can lose traction more often than six-metre loads as they lift one side or the other, "but it's not too bad on this truck," he reflected.

Fitted with Kenworth AG460 Airglide airbag suspension, the big Aussie sticks true to the template laid down for durability in this game. Meritor, Eaton, Cummins, Dana, Neway. There are no surprises in this build.

Other than perhaps the engine. This ISXe5 Cummins needs an AdBlue squirt to meet emissions and the majority of that EGR plumbing has been ditched in favour of SCR. Bevan said, "there is no way I was going to have one of them [EGR] engines."

The ISXe5 underwent the biggest field test ever carried out by Cummins in Australia for a

Left to right:  
The view from the split screen is traditional. It's impossible to keep the front guards clean, although inner mudflaps help. The engine performs very well.





*The loaded T659 heads up through the mist covered ranges surrounding Gentle Annie.*





*The Kenworth handles the steep roads in the Hawkes Bay particularly well.*

*The RedDOT air conditioning system is a classic cab roof fitting.*

new heavy truck engine and 15 engines accumulated over three million kilometres during the year before being offered to the market.

The ISXe5 features an XPI (extreme pressure injection) common-rail fuel system, one overhead camshaft, instead of the two on the EGR version, and a standard waste-gate turbocharger.

The common-rail system makes the injection camshaft redundant and allows the switch to a single overhead cam, and that single cam operates the inlet and exhaust valves, as well as the engine brake. Cummins Inte Brake is incorporated into all ISXe5 engines.

The engine develops 600hp and 1850lb/ft of torque and is returning between 1.7 and 1.9km/l at the moment, which if this day's running is typical for the truck, is impressively good given how much climbing it does in a day and how steep those climbs are.

There is a notable difference in how this engine seems to work over the EGR version as well. Despite peak torque figures being near enough to identical, the SCR doesn't have the rush of power the EGR versions seem to exhibit, power delivery on the ISXe5 engine was notably smoother over the EGR versions and more reminiscent of the Cat engines in the way they can hold on to the low numbers and pull smoothly away from them.

It wasn't that long ago that not having SCR





was a selling point, but now that the industry has accepted the concept and Cummins is offering SCR on its ISX, it would appear that a purely EGR engine may have its days numbered although Cummins still offer the EGR engine.

As you'd expect on a heavy duty truck, there is a broad range of options within that slim array of brands, depending on the operational requirements, however the engine choices are often limited to Cummins, either an ISX or Signature, but this new option broadens the choice nicely.

Dana and Meritor axles including a tri-drive option and Eaton standard or UltraShift transmission options rounds out this most classical of build specs.

There isn't a spare dial hole or switch blank on the Satherley T659 console and, as you'd expect, one of the switch arrays is designated for the full cross and lock up package, which in this type of steep country is almost a mandatory requirement.

Coupled with Bigfoot central tyre inflation, the factory rubber probably gets to perform better than it has any right to, Lance knows he's stuck with it until it runs out, but is surprised how well it works on the job. He points out that they've had a mild winter thus far which has probably helped the tyres' traction ability.

Lance has been on and off logging trucks during his career, as well as clocking up plenty of time in livestock trucks, so he knows a fair bit

about traction. He pointed out that many of the logging drivers in the region are ex-stockies or have stock driving experience and the days of logging drivers being accused of "not knowing how to back don't apply anymore," he said with a laugh. "If one thing driving livestock trucks teaches you it's how to back!"

Lance is well known in the Napier district and reckons that he would know probably 80 percent of the local logging owner drivers, and going by the CB and R/T traffic, you'd think that he was on first name basis with nearly everyone in a truck in the region.

His father drove for a small outfit when he was growing up, and at 52 years old, he's old enough to have gone through the traditional apprenticeship, starting with TK Bedfords, that most of his era underwent.

"I started at the bottom," on a TK Beddie hay carting before working for Farmers Transport on stock and working his way up into the big gear. He drove both Cat and Detroit powered Kenworths and worked much of the East Coast under Farmers colours.

He spent three years with East Coast Contractors driving an S-Line on bottom dumping and tipping work and for six months was on earthmoving gear operating motor scrapers and other machinery.

During his career he's been behind the wheel of a Signature powered Argosy working night-



shift for a local logging contractor and driven an Isuzu chip liner for a brief period that had an auto in it that, "put me off autos for life!" he reckoned.

Trucking has been central to his life and even when he wanted a break and applied for a tractor driving job, he ended up driving when a couple of the drivers in the operation ousted him and the employer offered him a truck instead of the tractor.

He drove for RFH for five or six years and apart from logging, "I've had years of carting stock around this area as well."

He's a mine of information about the country in these parts, where he's either dragged logs, carted livestock, spread gravel or helped construct roads.

Before Lance started working for Bevan he was operating a Kawasaki loader in a log yard in Napier. Bevan was happy to have the experienced driver join his operation. "When you buy a truck like that [T659], you need a good operator, they've got to come home every night," Bevan points out.

*The extra axle makes can entry a bit more difficult, but still easier than a cabover.*



Lance started with one of the K104s which had a 575 Cummins under the hoof, he said, "it pulled well, but nothing like this."

Even though we found Lance to be a laid back character, you can tell he's got a low threshold for slackers and those that don't pull their weight. Like many of us in our fifties, he's dismayed by the lack of professionalism many in the industry show, and as for those that can't be bothered turning up for work, don't get him, or us for that matter, started.

After our first load of the day is dropped at Napier Port, the next run is a lot easier in comparison, but even though it is mostly a tarmac run, the run "over the hill" is a workout for any truck.

"Over the hill" is the local slang for the Napier to Taihape route, which takes in the Kaweka Forest and is home to Gentle Annie and Bonnie Mary, a couple of legendary climbs that have to be driven to be believed.

Put it on your bucket list. Gentle Annie is one hell of a drive, and it's as classic as a bit of road can get, and is practically a national roading treasure.

Lance has plenty of stories about this road, which he said, "was a real adventure in its day", when it was mainly gravel. Even in the modern era under tarmac you can see where tyres have been spinning on some of the corners as they scabble for traction on the way up. Lance said several corners were so steep that you had to drive on the outer edge of the road when it was under gravel and hope nothing was coming the other way.

Lance isn't going all the way to Taihape however, he's pulling off into Te Mahunga Station, it's owned by Jack Roberts, and they are clearing out some old pines near the woolshed. It's an ugly load and Lance wishes he'd had something prettier when our cameras come out, however that's the nature of working woodlots, you haul out what you're given.

Inside the cockpit of the T659 is reminiscent of stepping back in time to a day when the truck designer only had a wooden ruler to create his blueprints. There's no sweeping curves to be had, or wrap around console, there's no sign of elegance other than a domed faux leather ceiling and some woodgrain to soften the effect. The dash layout is as flat as the Cummins' torque curve, but houses everything you want in easy reach. There's no digital readout, just dials and switches and a no nonsense approach to the business of being a truck. If a rattle develops, it's a few minutes with a screwdriver and you've got the dash out to find the problem.

Lance likes the view out of this big beast, as the dash sits low and makes for great vision. As you'd expect, there's buggery all room for much else than a couple of seats and a gearstick. A small box between the seats is the primary storage system and this isn't a cab where you can pile in the junk.



However, if you do need a bit more room, you can tick the sleeper option, but given the eight-wheeler version is a New Zealand only option that will be used primarily in the logging industry, we expect it's unlikely that we'll see that here.

Despite being a genetic throwback, the T650 surprised us with how well it rode.

We knew we weren't going to have load-sharing and were mentally bracing ourselves for some chiropractic work at the end of the day, especially when we saw the rigid mounted offside's seat, but this truck rode as good or better than any load-sharing Kenworth we've ever sat in.

There was no thumping at all, or bump-steering and it has to be said that Southpac really got the numbers right on this conversion. They've had plenty of time to get it right it has to be said, as there have been requests for the T650 to have an extra axle under it for sometime, but the wait

has been worth it.

The RedDot air conditioning system mounted on the roof attracts a few comments, Lance said, but it works well and actually adds to the look of the truck which makes no compromises about being a hard-core. There's not a lot of space to heat or cool, and we did note that there was a fair amount of condensation on the passenger side in the wee small hours of the morning of the cab which we figure was because the EROAD cabling was sitting over the vents and blocking them.

Even on the most severe of the corrugations heading up Thunder Mountain this truck just felt solid. Though it's early days yet, you just get the feeling that this truck won't develop the rattles or things will start falling off like some of the

more highway orientated trucks that are pressed into logging duties can do.

It's still got electric windows, and, well actually, that's about it, but that means there is little to go wrong with this truck over time.

Bevan put this truck to work as he'd had such a good run out of his first logger, a T650 and says he'll buy more T659's if this one proves successful.

Lance said that Bevan named the Kenworth 'Game Over' because "they've finally built a logging truck that will last".

Given the confidence his T650 installed in him, we reckon it's a safe bet to expect a long life from this newer generation version, and we'd predict that 'Game Over' is going to be a feature of the East Coast for a decade or two. □

## SPECIFICATIONS

# KENWORTH T659



<i>GVM:</i>	32,900kg
<i>GCM:</i>	90,000kg
<i>Wheelbase:</i>	6640mm
<i>Engine:</i>	Cummins ISXe5
<i>Capacity:</i>	15 litre
<i>Maximum power:</i>	600hp (450kW)
<i>Maximum torque:</i>	1850lb/ft (2500Nm)
<i>Air cleaner:</i>	Dual Cyclopac cowl mounted
<i>Clutch:</i>	Eaton
<i>Transmission:</i>	Eaton RTLO20918B
<i>Rear axles:</i>	Meritor RT46-160GP
<i>Ratio:</i>	4.3:1
<i>Rear axle capacity:</i>	20,900kg
<i>Front suspension:</i>	Leaf spring
<i>Front axle:</i>	Meritor FG941LA x 2
<i>Front axle capacity:</i>	12,000kg
<i>Rear suspension:</i>	Airglide AG460
<i>Brakes:</i>	S-cam drums
<i>Park brake:</i>	Spring
<i>Auxiliary brake:</i>	Jacobs
<i>Wheels:</i>	Alcoa 10 stud
<i>Electrical system:</i>	12V