

A Power-Starring role

BY BRYCE BAIRD

After more than 7,600 earthquakes in little over a year, Christchurch now resembles 1945 Dresden rather than the little slice of old England it used to emulate.

The central business area is now a waste land inhabited by cranes, diggers, trucks and other machines working around the clock on demolition duties, and many suburbs have the axe hanging over them.

There are probably more hydraulic cranes at work per square kilometer in the central city than anywhere else in the world at present, and for every digger, there is a small army of trucks streaming in and out of the CBD red zone supporting it.

Amongst those trucks at work is a fleet of red Texco rigs, one of which is a newly minted Iveco Powerstar that almost looks too classy for this type of work.

The phrase 'red zone' usually denotes a nightclub strip or ladies-of-the-night zone elsewhere in the country, but in Christchurch's CBD it is the ultimate 'no go' area – uber verboten. Entry is carefully scrutinised through army manned checkpoints and even the truckies have their passes checked in and out with every load they cart, no matter how many times they might come in and out during a day. Familiarity means nothing in this zone.

It's a surreal existence in there. Even for those who have spent their lives in the city, it can be hard to pinpoint where the hell you are at times as so many buildings have been dropped.

They reckon that of about 1800 significant sized buildings in the CBD red-zone, 1600 will be demolished by the time this is all over, and mere words on the page can never come close to revealing the devastation behind those manned checkpoints.





Texco's latest Powerstar is nicely finished – alloy tool boxes both sides, 100 litres of AdBlue, it has plenty of room in the spacious ADN cab which is well laid out, easy to use, and features electronic readout and dials for all the important information.



It's enough to make grown men cry, and the loss of life aside, which is another very sorrowful and separate tragedy in its own right. Watching the death throes of what was once such a beautiful city is dispiriting even to those long hardened by it.

However, there can be little room for emotion when it comes to deconstructing a city centre and those men involved in the process have learned to put their feelings aside and just get on with the job.

Texco driver Doug Milne has lived much of his life in the city and has seen first hand just what an epic job is ahead of Christchurch, firstly with the demolition and in the future, the reconstruction.

He pointed out that "demolition isn't a major part of our work," under normal circumstances, but like hundreds of other drivers, he's found himself entering the CBD red-zone on a regular basis. However, Texco truck foreman Jason Stephens tries to ensure that the new two-axle tipulator on Doug's new Iveco Powerstar gets low impact loads that aren't going to mar the Guy Norris Engineering Ltd tipulator's good looks.

Even though chaos reigns, there are still remnants of normality in Christchurch. There is plenty of signed off work around the city that still has to be done, and Doug could be found working all over the city switching between ongoing projects and demo clean up work.

The deep red Texco rigs are just one face of a business that has a much admired reputation in the construction industry and it offers a breath-taking range of services.

The Powerstar works for Texco Excavating Ltd, which is one of a group of companies that includes Texco Drilling, Texco Engineering, Texco Steel, and Texco Remediation amongst other wings of the business. Company founder and Managing Director John Townshend is widely respected around Canterbury for his energy and vision in the fields he is involved with, and that red cloaks a diverse and often highly specialised range of trucks and machinery working around Canterbury.

In addition to the nine heavy trucks in the Excavating fleet they have over a dozen excavators from 5 to 33 tonne, a 40 tonne Hitachi off-highway dumper, three Hitachi front end loaders, four vibrating rollers, recycling screens, graders, and rock breakers involved in the exca-

vating side of the business, and their drilling fleet is just as impressive and boasts some of the latest European technology including an ICE resonance free Vibro. This machine is crane mounted and allows the installation of casings and sheet pile with the minimum of vibration. Other machines in the drilling inventory include a 50 tonne crawler crane, drills, excavators, augers and sheet pile installers.

Around 65 staff work in the drilling and excavating section of the business, which has clocked up an impressive résumé over the years that includes many of the biggest projects undertaken in the region.

Texco's capabilities basically encompasses the ability for a client to deal with the one civil contractor from concept investigatory drilling right through to completing the last piece of asphaltting. They've undertaken some impressive jobs including bridge construction for Ontrack on the West Coast rail line that included investigatory drilling as well as placing 1200mm bored piles 18 metres deep, the piling for Downers at the Bromley Sewerage Plant and the anchor piles for the Christchurch Art Gallery amongst a long list of others.

It would be easy to fill a book with Texco's activities and their trucking fleet shuttles between many of their various activities, which keeps the job interesting Doug pointed out.

At 57, Doug has spent a fair portion of his life behind the wheel and has clocked up 30 years of driving since 1980. Driving a tipulator is a relative novelty for him and he said that he, "still consider myself as more of a freight driver than bulk driver."

Doug started with Williams Gwatkins Ltd which was taken over by Nelson Transport Holdings (TNL) which then was absorbed into Transpac.

As Nelson and Blenheim didn't have a rail link (and still doesn't), TNL was allowed to operate as a 'Notion Rail' that allowed it to step outside the distance limits in the pre-deregulated era. So relatively early on in his career Doug and his fellow TNL drivers were doing long distance driving long before the rest of New Zealand. Naturally, with deregulation and the advent of Transpac everything blew wide open and TNL was one of the first at the starting gates to gear up for the long distance work.

After his apprenticeship as a forklift driver, he was allowed into a Leyland Hippo with

TNL, and then with Transpac he drove a 2632 Mercedes V10 tractor unit.

For much of his Transpac days he was a "single runner" which could see him run anywhere, anytime with any load. He's done his share of lugging 60kg bags of oysters, boxes of vegies and other fresh foods and everything else under the sun before our industry became more efficient and loading became increasingly mechanised.

By the time Transpac fell over, Doug was a dispatcher, but had no problems getting another driving job. He worked for an owner-operator for a couple of years doing over night work on vegies driving an International T2650 tractor before joining Dave Wilder at Wilder Transport and spending 11 years driving the lime-green Mercs.

After Wilders bit the dust, Doug went to work for John Kerr, an Owens owner-operator, doing a Cadbury's mail Picton swap, "but you end up living your life backwards," he pointed out and decades of shift work had started to wear him down to the point where he wanted to have a more structured life.

He'd had his eye on Texco as a company that "stood out to me," and when he managed to join them he was put onto an FL80 "wheelbarrow" doing small deliveries and tight work around the city, work he really enjoyed, "I was really impressed with the Freightliner, it would go anywhere. It was a hands on job, we did a lot of on-site cartage and one-off deliveries."

The jump to the new Iveco Powerstar after five years meant a change in job description, as the big tractor worked under a tipulator that eliminated it from doing the tight work he'd been used to.

"I'm actually more impressed with this than I thought I would have been," he confessed, and with 15,000 km clocked up, Doug is quite taken with the truck, particularly the automated transmission.

The truck is the crème of the Iveco Powerstar crop at the moment being one of the first Euro 5 compliant trucks to reach our shores, and he reckons that it's "just really easy to drive."

It didn't take long to see where his enthusiasm was coming from quite early during our time with him, that EuroTronic II transmission is a sweet bit of kit, and bolted to the Cursor E5 it makes for an impressive drivetrain that is completed by Meritor RT46-160GP 20.9 tonne rear axles riding on Hendrickson Primaax PAX 460 air-bag suspension.

It's a pairing that's proved itself, but Iveco aren't limiting themselves to this option. They are revisiting the past and are offering an enhanced range of engine and transmission options to tempt those with American drivetrain yearnings back into the fold. Cummins engines and Roadranger transmissions are back on the spec sheets and you can even pair a Cummins with a EuroTronic II if you want.

However, we suspect the Cursor EuroTronic pairing is still going to be the most popular option, and it certainly fitted in with Texco's desire to stay at the cutting edge of the game and be as green as they could.

Having one of the first Euro 5 trucks on tipping work in Canterbury is a statement that they are investing in the future and while they will probably see little operational benefits in the short term, in the longer term they know that it will pay dividends as a company willing to embrace new and clean technologies.

The Powerstar's Cursor achieves E5 by using SCR (Selective Catalytic Reduction) to achieve its minty breath, and this powerplant has earned a lot of respect since its introduction.

Iveco shrewdly paced their entry into the automated transmission market after the giants of the industry such as Mercedes-Benz had proved the way the technology was headed. ZF supplies transmissions to a number of truck manufacturers who develop their own software to shuffle the cogs and having a ZF transmission is as much a statement of reliability these days as having an Eaton Roadranger on the far end of the gear-stick once was.

The ZF-based EuroTronic II 16-speed over-drive 16AS2360TO OD automated transmis-

Driver Doug Milne still considers himself to be a line-haul driver at heart after an interesting career on the highways, but now enjoys bulk work and is very impressed with the Powerstar tipper he pilots around Christchurch.



sion is a true two pedal affair able to be operated in full auto mode or manual shift control, and has crawler ratios for low speed work.

In all honesty, we knew the transmission wasn't going to get much of a work out in this truck, which spends most of its time working around Christchurch which is mostly as flat as a Don Brash joke.

The day kicked off by being loaded out of the Parklands Rest Home on Papanui Road where Texco were excavating and preparing the ground works for the upcoming build. The water-table was within a metre or two of ground level, shockingly close, and Doug wryly pointed out, "this is Christchurch now."

Pulling out into the busy Papanui Road showed one of the strengths of having an automated transmission, "you can concentrate on the traffic, there is one less thing to think about," He does reckon though that the auto isn't as fast off the line as a manual transmission and pointed out that it changes through the ratios at its own pace. Doug is certainly impressed at how well the tranie operates, and described it as "almost intuitive." Even pulling out of deep quarries he finds that he's happy to leave it in auto as it just "chugs out, it just doesn't seem to baulk," he commented.

This truck came into the yard well-dressed for a construction rig and wears a 350 litre fuel tank one side, and a split 250/100 litre on the other for fuel and hydraulics. Then there's the 100 litres of AdBlue, that's around a tonne of liquids if filled up, Doug pointed out. He doesn't need that much range, and with the still tight engine returning 1.92km/litre at present, that's a 1152km range! Not bad for a construction spec tipper!

The 12.9 litre Cursor E5 is rated at 336kW (450hp) and produces 2200Nm (1622lb/ft) of torque @ 1000rpm. There are 373kW (500hp) and 418kW (560hp) options that run 2300Nm (1696-ft/lb) and 2495Nm (1840ft/lb) of torque respectively.

As gutsy as the Cursor is, we can see why

some might want an ISX Cummins, as with 362kW (485hp) and 2508Nm (1850lb/ft) of torque from 14.9 litres, the American engine has the edge in the torque stakes, but not by as much as you might imagine. Just 1% difference in torque between this engine and the Cursor in 560 horse mode. However, that's an irrelevance for the Texco operation where the extra beef isn't needed in this application.

"I'm a town driver now, the auto certainly makes life around town easier. I can just look at the traffic, and the traffic is certainly a challenge!" he pointed out. Spot the understatement. In the Eastern suburbs, the roads are more like 4x4 proving grounds, with many streets closed and the traffic shoehorned into suburban streets ill-equipped to handle high densities of slow, weaving, stop-start traffic.

After dumping the load of soil at a local pit on the outskirts of town, Doug heads into the Isaacs quarry near McLean's Island to pick up ten cubic metres of pit run gravel. The 980C Cat loader biting into the gravel face has 44,000 hours on it he pointed out, "that's impressive," he said.

In one of those quirks of fate, Christchurch although devastated to a degree beyond understanding unless you are living through it, is a city that is uniquely positioned for its rebuild. Located on the edge of what is probably the greatest alluvial gravel plain in the world, the unique topography of Canterbury has blessed Christchurch with an unlimited supply of the best ready-mix gravel in the world.

Christchurch has long been the capital of cheap ready-mix, and the close proximity of an unlimited supply of river gravel that only needs to be screened and not crushed to obtain the necessary mix. This is about the only up side of the catastrophe that has befallen the city.

That's probably a small consolation to Christchurch, but Doug takes a keen interest in the job, and like everyone involved in the rebuild, knows the enormity of what is ahead

The Guy Norris Engineering trailer impresses with plenty of nice touches and a rugged build. The Powerstar has all the electronic drama including EBS on the trailer and a plethora of other acronyms can be found on the spec sheet.

This Cursor is Euro 5 compliant and impresses with its quietness and smooth delivery through the EuroTronic automated transmission.





This Texco Powerstar is one of four in the fleet and they get to see the damage to Christchurch up-close and personal on a regular basis. (Below) the Price-WaterHouse building may not be quite as distorted as this in real life – but it's coming down nevertheless due to significant earthquake damage. Powerstars are a common sight around Christchurch as New Zealand Trucks has carried on from the highly regarded Southern International that preceded it with the same standards of service.



of them and has his theories about what's likely to happen over the next few decades of the rebuild. Being in a new truck, Doug is likely to have a window seat of the rebuild, and he's happy to have it.

"I can only compare this to Merc's and Scania's and I have to say that this is right up there with them," he said. "...and its as good as an old Leyland Hippo to get in and out of," he surprised us by saying. "The ease of access is brilliant, we have to get in and out 50 times a day and you just step into this."

Doug's not a tall man, he's kept himself trim, and looks dwarfed by the cab by his propensity to sit way back, with the steering wheel down low. He particularly likes the flat floor, and said "I'm very impressed with the cab. Everything is finished nicely on this truck. Lift the bonnet and it's clean and uncluttered space under there."

As the day progressed we dropped that load of pit, and then headed into the red zone of the inner city to take out a couple of loads of demo bricks in behind the old 'Robert Jones Building,' as many still refer to it.

The newly minted Iveco and semi-trailer makes for an incongruous combination as it crawls into the scene of devastation. It's an eerie place. The Iveco, big and impressive as it is, cuts a lonely figure as it crawls out of leveled building sites into near deserted streets that once would have been as bustling as Auckland's Queen Street in rush hour. This is the new normal.

Doug passes through the army checkpoint, goes through the dust wash and points that angular snout toward Lyttelton.

We pass through the tunnel, noting the cracks and talk of how disastrous it could have been for the city if the tunnel collapsed. The other route into or out of Lyttelton, Evans Pass, is impassable due to boulders and damage and may never open again. Deemed too dangerous.

Out of the tunnel and into Lyttelton. More devastation. Buildings half down, many gone, many soon to go. Stubborn little Lyttelton.

Shattered and broken but still functioning despite the odds. Miraculous and fortuitous. Without the port the city may well have withered on the vine.

Doug off-loads past the container terminal where the Port is extending its land.

There's a constant stream of trucks and trailers, tractors and semis tipping on the reclaimed land and Doug points out one quirk of the Iveco that, "isn't really a hassle, but does require more thought," he said. When the PTO is engaged the Iveco will only allow either second, fourth or sixth to be selected, and when tipping Doug will hold the combination on the trailer brake, as "if I touch the (service) brakes the engine will drop back to idle."

"You have to be careful of your gear selection when spreading as well," he pointed out. "If you are in too high a gear and select the PTO it can suck more power out of the motor, and bog if it's in the wrong gear and you are on a hill."

In his opinion, he feels the engine brake isn't as good as a Jacobs Brake on its own, but being electronically connected to the transmission gives it plenty of backbone Doug reckons. "If I put the exhaust brake on and slam on the brakes, I swear it'll drop down five gears in one go! I'm impressed with how well it stops, it just puts its nose down and stops!"

Doug keeps the exhaust brake permanently on stage one, and the ITB (Iveco Turbo Brake) will hold the combination coming down the tunnel into Lyttelton at 50kph in 15th, and the transmission will drop to 13th and then 10th with a light touch of the brake pedal for the round-about at the end of the tunnel, "nothing is a drama."

On the steady pull out of the city to the tunnel mouth the Iveco loafed up the hill in 14/15th at 60kph at 1500rpm, but Doug said he could have worked it a little harder and gone up at 80kph and 16th, "but there's no need."

The Powerstar is unique to Australia and New Zealand and gained a lot of traction due to first



Taring at 9,000kg for the Iveco six-wheeler tractor (with half a load of fuel) and 5,450kg for the trailer – the combination can cart 20-tonne.

appearing on the market as a Euro conventional equipped with American engines and drivetrain which made for a popular option for those who'd grown up with International.

With the advent of the Cursor and EuroTronic, those sumptuous Yank offerings disappeared off the menu. Now, Cummins and Roadranger are again reappearing as options, but don't hold your breath waiting for Detroit Diesel or Cat to reappear, for obvious reasons.

Has the Cursor and EuroTronic II gained enough credos to hold back Cummins and

Roadranger dictating the decision at buying time now that they are back on the table? Time can only tell, but it does seem that going to a fully European drivetrain did affect Powerstar sales, a situation made more painful by the world-wide recession.

It would seem that Iveco is listening to the market and hedging its bets with the Cummins ISX option however, it wouldn't surprise us if buyers stay with the Cursor and EuroTronic now that it's had the chance to prove itself.

In the Powerstar, the Cursor and EuroTronic

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offers a quiet, frugal on the juice, well proven combination that offers the largest conventional cab on the market, impressively larger than any of the American conventional competitors we can think of.

You'll get Knorr disc brakes up front, and Meritor S-Cam drums on the drivers, but with an option of discs. There's Wabco E 4-channel ABS/EBL and ASR trailer ABS facility, an air suspended cab and a quirky and unmistakably European, (Italian) interior and console that sets it apart from the American offerings. Access and comfort levels are impressive and the view from the cockpit is as good as it gets.

It's got a GVM of 24.5 tonne, a GCM of 65 tonne and an optional GCM of 90 tonne depending on the configuration and American diff and suspension.

This Active Day cab is 2280mm wide, 2980mm high and has a turning circle of 17,200mm on the 4800mm wheelbase, and 17,900mm on the 5000mm version. Wall to wall is another 850mm.

Texco have a long history with International and Iveco. Even though they have plenty of other brands under the colours, their core fleet is Iveco as are a number of others around Christchurch engaged in this work. Loyalty runs deep in Canterbury, and the ghost of the now long gone Southern International lives in the number of Powerstars running around the city.

As the Christchurch rebuild gears up, we'd expect more Powerstars to go on the road draped in Texco red, and if Doug's opinion is anything to go by, the drivers are going to have a comfortable decade or so watching a new city rise from the ashes.



Texco has a significant profile in Christchurch and has been involved with many of that city's most important construction projects over several decades. We predict that many of the already long serving staff members within the Texco Group of companies will see their working lives out helping rebuild this broken city.

SPECIFICATIONS

IVECO POWERSTAR ADN 6X4

GVM:	24,500kg
GCM:	65,000kg
Wheelbase:	4800mm
Engine:	Iveco Cursor E5
Capacity:	12.9 litre
Maximum power:	450hp (336kw)
Maximum torque:	1622lb/ft (2200Nm) @1000rpm
Transmission:	IVECO EuroTronic II 16AS2630TO OD automated 16-speed Rear axles: Meritor RT46-160GP
Ratio:	3.73:1
Rear axle capacity:	20,900kg
Chassis dimensions:	257 x 89 x 8mm
Front suspension:	Parabolic springs with anti-roll bar
Front axle:	IVECO 5876
Front axle capacity:	7,500kg
Rear suspension:	Hendrickson Primaax PAX 460

Steering:	ZF 8098 power-assisted
Brakes:	Front: 432mm Knorr disc brakes. Rear: Meritor S-Cam 419mm diameter drum brakes with automatic slack adjusters. ABS/EBL with ASR
Auxiliary brake:	IVECO Turbo Brake (ITB)
Wheels:	8.25 x 22.5 10-stud steel disc
Tyres:	Front: Michelin XZE2, 295/80R22.5. Rear: Michelin XDE2, 11R22.5
Electrical system:	24-Volt. Multiplex computerised CANBUS integrated wiring and systems control network
Cab:	IVECO Active Day, all steel conventional control day cab with low roof. Four-point cab mounting system with air suspension and dampers at rear.

Features:	ISRI air suspension driver's seat with headrest and integral lap-sash retractor seat belt. ISRI fixed passenger seat with lap sash retractor seat belt. 90° opening doors with electrically operated window and low-level visibility forward window. Storage lockers. Aerodynamic powered and heated mirrors, with a flat and convex spotter mirror on each side and a kerb view mirror on the passenger side. Climate control Air conditioning. Heater/demister. AM/FM radio/CD player with steering wheel controls. Dual roof-mounted air horns. Iveco Colour Display (ICD) instrument panel with electronic speedometer and tachometer, fuel level gauge, engine coolant temperature gauge, and ICD displays for air pressure, system voltage, engine oil level, pressure and temperature, engine coolant temperature.
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