

50 YEARS OF DRIVING PROGRESS IN DEVON AND CORNWALL



STUARTS TRUCK & BUS MARKS A HALF CENTURY ASSOCIATION WITH VOLVO TRUCKS UK

A special supplement in association with

Stuarts Truck & Bus wins Dealer of the Year Award

South-west England's Stuarts Truck & Bus proudly stepped into the spotlight on stage at the Volvo Trucks Dealer Awards event in January to collect the much-coveted and magnificent Dealer of the Year Award 2018.

Volvo Group UK MD Arne Knaben and Roger Alm, senior vice-president of Volvo Trucks Europe, presented the trophy to Ross and Ryan Stuart and their senior management team.

The Dealer of the Year Award is presented to the Volvo dealer that has demonstrated the highest scores in the annual Retail Excellence Survey, coupled with outstanding business growth and customer service in all areas.

The Stuart family's business connections go back to 1946 and the company bought its first Volvo truck in 1968. Within 10 years it had established a separate company named Stuarts Commercials, which advertised itself as 'the official Volvo truck dealer for Devon'. The

Exeter dealerpoint has been expanded over the years and served the county exclusively until 2004 when service and repair depots were opened in Plymouth and Redruth. After decades concentrating on back-up, Stuart Truck & Bus started new and used Volvo truck sales in 2014, a move that has revolutionised operations. The company's Cornwall presence was recently enhanced with a move to new premises in Victoria, near Roche.



The Stuarts Truck & Bus team proudly join event host Dan Walker and colleagues from Volvo Trucks on stage to receive the coveted Dealer of the Year Award from Arne Knaben

Powering progress

Welcome to this special Commercial Motor supplement marking the Stuart family's 50-year association with Volvo Trucks. The arrival of the first Volvo F88 tractor unit in 1968, coupled to the first double-decker livestock trailer for full-sized cattle, revolutionised our business, which started more than 20 years earlier. More Volvo trucks would follow in that F88's tyre tracks and in 1977, my brother Roy and I were approached by Volvo Trucks UK and asked if we'd step in as a temporary dealer, for three months. And now, 41 years later, Stuarts Truck & Bus continues to provide a range of dealerpoint services for Volvo Trucks customers in Devon and Cornwall from three state-of-the-art premises in Exeter, Plymouth and Victoria.

The family has always worked with the ethos that 'nothing stays the same, and vision is required to progress

change'. That factor has been key to driving growth within our Volvo Truck dealership since 1977. With three generations of Stuarts now employed in a variety of roles across our businesses, the same philosophy will continue to be applied with use of the latest technologies to maximise efficiencies and deliver unparalleled levels of customer service.

Underpinning all of this progress has been our loyal, hard-working team, a number of whom have accrued long service levels. This ongoing commitment and dedication brought just reward in January this year, when Stuarts Truck & Bus was named Dealer of the Year 2018 by Volvo Trucks UK.

Thank you for reading this special 50 years supplement.

Ross Stuart

Director, Stuarts Truck & Bus

THEN AND NOW

The Stuart family's business progress since 1946 includes a 50-year association with Volvo Trucks UK.



Golden rules

This year the Stuart family marks a 50-year association with Volvo Trucks UK, firstly as a customer, before being offered a dealership



AE Stuart & Sons would operate seven Volvo F88 tractors, including this high-spec 290hp model

Company founder Alfred Eric Stuart was demobbed from the REME in 1945 and he wanted to work as a mechanic. However, his father had been a farmer and held an F licence for transporting livestock. After applying for an upgrade he obtained a B licence with a 25-mile radius. His first new lorry was an Austin Loadstar delivered in 1946, with a Tiverton Coachbuilders livestock body, which could also be stripped down to a platform for carrying hay, straw and animal feeds. Alfred's first son Roy was born in 1944 and Ross arrived in 1947. Both boys were immersed in the family business from a young age.

By 1959 the Stuarts were renting a 2.5-acre site at Westhill, six miles from their present Exeter base. The rent was cheap and a wooden pole barn was put up to house the family's lorry. They started the first distance work with a contract to move pigs to C&T Harris in Wiltshire on a regular basis. The rate was 8 shilling per pig.

By the time Ross left school, the business was expanding and when he was 17 they bought a Bedford TK. Instead of using a car, Ross took his driving test in the Bedford, which weighed just less than three tons. By Roy's 21st birthday in 1965, Alfred Eric Stuart had seen enough and did not want to continue

in the business. That left Roy and Ross to progress as they thought best. The pair's first vehicle acquisition was a 16-ton Dodge 4x2 rigid powered by a Cummins V8 engine. It started overnight cattle deliveries to London.

In the mid 1960s, the UK was entering a transport revolution as Dr Beeching's report into the railways resulted in many lines closing because of low passenger numbers and profit levels. The brothers were aware of how many cattle had been transported by rail from the West Country. The region, famous for its dairy production, had always produced a large number of store cattle. Now these beasts required moving by road and the flood gates opened for livestock hauliers such as AE Stuart & Sons. Long-distance work saw store cattle transported overnight to Yorkshire. Cattle dealer Fred King was keen for the Stuarts to expand their livestock business and requested they construct some cattle sheds. A lairage was built and store cattle from the south were soon housed in the buildings, awaiting transportation.

This depot development coincided with the arrival of an E-registered, AEC Marshall 6-wheeled rigid. The brothers felt they'd moved into the big league with this 29ft body. The AEC worked relentlessly, clocking up



The Stuarts withdrew from livestock transport two years after the arrival of this 1980 Volvo F10

2,000 miles a week, alongside the Bedford, which could transport 76 pigs per trip. The livestock haulage had expanded beyond the brothers' wildest expectations.

"In the early years, you had to put your name down to buy a new Volvo. We always bought Volvos over the phone and unseen from its sales agent Peter Halliwell in Chipping Sodbury. Peter was a true gentleman and the irony was we never met him," recalls Roy. "We never took any Volvos back in for warranty work as it may have compromised our chances of buying another one. We ordered the basic units and did our own engineering work on them, including lowering the fifth wheel for the double-deck livestock trailer and vehicle painting. The seven F88 tractor units we owned included 230hp, 240hp and 290hp examples. We also used 6- and 8-wheeler F86 rigid chassis and an F7 8-wheeler."

In 1977 Tony Mace and Mike Ellithorn from Alisa Trucks in Barrhead called on AE Stuart to talk to Roy and Ross. Stuart's well presented, all-Volvo fleet had always been on the manufacturer's radar, but it had an increased significance after Volvo had terminated the contract on its Okehampton dealership. The pair from Barrhead asked the brothers if they would like to step in for three months as a temporary dealer. They replied: "Yes, but when do we start?" The answer was "Monday."

With that short notice agreed, some Dexion shelving and a Kardex filing system were part of a Volvo truck spares delivery to Stuart's Exeter base. Further deliveries kept coming and Volvo installed a portable cabin at Stuart's premises to accommodate a sales person. A technician trainer at Volvo's Barrhead HQ joined to oversee the sales side, who also did technical training for the mechanics.

AE Stuart lorry driver Gordon Dingley came off the road and took up the role of parts manager, a job he still holds today. With all of this activity at base requiring hands-on supervision, Ross also came off the road to manage the workshop and employ mechanics.

After the introduction of O-licensing in the late 1960s, starting a road haulage business became a relatively straightforward process and the rise of vehicle leasing made it easier to acquire heavy trucks. "Almost anybody could set up a transport business and many of the new starts slashed rates," Ross recalls.

As 1983 dawned, it became clear that AE Stuart's cattle lorries were not earning money. Roy and Ross's considered opinion was that they had had the best years of livestock transport and it was time to exit the sector. So in September 1983, all the Stuart fleet of trucks was sold. The focus now would be on progressing the family's Volvo Trucks dealership together with their farming and storage businesses.

In 1977, Roy and Ross Stuart were approached by Volvo Trucks UK and asked if they would step in as a temporary dealer for three months



A RARE PEDIGREE

NUO 860G was the registration mark on AE Stuart's first Volvo truck. The F88 tractor was reportedly the eighth of its type sold in the UK and the first in south-west. The Stuart brothers first viewed Volvo's revolutionary new heavyweight vehicle at Roly Cullis's premises in Crewkerne. Roly was a self-appointed dealer of everything. In 1969, Roy and Ross Stuart designed what is believed to be the UK's first double-deck articulated livestock trailer, which was then manufactured by a Bristol-based bodybuilder. This would accommodate two decks of cattle.

The brothers agreed that the F88 was way ahead of its time in 1968, with its tilt cab, turbocharged engine and air handbrake. The insulated, steel safety cab offered by Volvo was incredible, a time when some British lorries still used timber-framed cabs. The synchromesh 8-speed gearbox and power steering were a delight to use and the 10-litre engine proved reliable and economical. Just hours after the F88 had been delivered it set off on a delivery to Exeter cattle market, before heading to Ipswich on an evening run.



New and in stock. AE Stuart & Son's first Volvo F88 tractor unit revolutionised the firm's livestock operations

Volvo Trucks' Dealer of the Year Stuarts Truck & Bus is going from strength to strength in the south-west and expanding its facilities to ensure it meets customer demand. *By Christopher Walton*

The total solution

As the touchpoint for any Volvo operator in Cornwall and Devon, and with a rich family heritage in the region, Stuarts Truck & Bus has a considerable presence across the south-west peninsula with three dealer points in Exeter, Plymouth and Victoria (just off the A30 south-west of Bodmin).

Expansion has been relatively recent in the overall history of the business, in 2004 service and repair points were opened in Saltash and Redruth. But the road ahead is never straightforward... the moves from Redruth to Victoria and Saltash to Plymouth were – with hindsight – a necessary challenge to get the business to where it needed to be, says Stuarts Truck & Bus operations director Ryan Stuart.

Space issues

Expansion issues at its previous location in Redruth, saw Stuarts open its Victoria site in Cornwall on 16 October 2017 following what it describes as a seven-figure investment. Formerly a Ford dealership, the site includes an 8-bay, drive-through workshop and ATF lane. "Redruth was down in the sticks, and the site we took on from Volvo was limited by how much you could do with it. We were never happy with it," he says, pointing out that it was especially difficult to reverse an artic and full-length trailer into it. This was clearly not conducive to an efficient operation. "We were going to move and do a new build in

Redruth, but someone said that the previous owners in Victoria could not sell their site. I'd seen it and it was fantastic."

Stuarts has never looked back. Open from Monday to Friday, 7am to 8pm, and run by depot manager Jason Hart and parts manager Chris Knowd, Victoria offers a full range of services, from truck and bus servicing, MoTs, towing, trailer and tail-lift services, and it's got a tacho centre.

Its Plymouth depot, completed in September 2004, is just one mile from the A38, perhaps unsurprisingly given its location, it handles a large amount of bus work in addition to the full range of truck services on offer. It is run by depot manager Andrew Massey, who originally applied to work for Stuarts as a technician as he relocated to Devon. But director Ross Stuart [Ryan's father] was so impressed with his attitude and application that he offered him the chance to manage the site. Ryan says: "He is absolutely fantastic. He runs it like it is his own baby. He takes a lot of headache away from us."

Exeter is the original home of Stuarts, and very much the heart of the business with its ATF lanes running approximately 20 tests a day.

Stuarts Truck & Bus has always been a business with ambitions to expand, and this reached another level in 2014 when it started new and used Volvo truck sales, which revolutionised its operations. Ryan says: "When we took on truck sales we obviously started looking at market share, and what surprised



Stuarts' dealerpoint in Exeter is the head office and home of Stuarts Truck & Bus

Below: Stuarts tests up to 20 vehicles a day at its ATF lane in Exeter

us was how small Volvo's piece of the pie in Cornwall was. Now we are high 20% in Devon and Cornwall, and we have been for the past three years. What we needed was consistent contract business. There were a lot of drop-ins and it wasn't all Volvo. Now we have a lot of vehicles under Volvo contract that are being maintained by us. You need that bread and butter work."

Customer mix

The customer set in Devon and Cornwall isn't your traditional fleet business. Ryan says that there are only three or four hauliers that operate more than 100 trucks. "Most of our customers are mid-range haulage companies where you are speaking to the owner. We like that. It works for us. And there is a lot of farming, a lot of tipper and muckaway. We don't get a huge amount of trunking."

That customer mix doesn't make much of a difference to the services the business offers, the intention says Ryan is to supply everything that Volvo supplies. He refers to it as the total solution, ranging from multi-year maintenance contracts: it offers Volvo Trucks' fleet management system Dynafleet and a genuine parts service and a recovery service. Furthermore, says Ryan: "Because we have the farm, we can do services other companies can't. For example, we have the ability to load the vehicle for brake test, with our own swing shovel, test the vehicle and unload. A lot of our competition would be telling the customer to bring the vehicle in loaded, that's a lot of trouble for them."

The focus for the coming months will be used truck sales, with the opening of the



Devon and Cornwall used truck centres. The intention is for each Stuarts site to maintain a stock of 10 vehicles, and that is evident on our visit to the south-west. Signage is up and the site is ready for anyone to come and get a feel for the stock on offer. Making it a tangible transaction, says Ryan, is an important part of the offer.

“The idea for the used trucks centre it that potential customers can come in and look at the trucks and take their pick. We’ve learnt a lot of lessons over the past four years about how to manage used truck sales. It is important to be crystal clear with the customer on a

used truck as to exactly what they are buying,” he says.

Window shop

“People like to window shop, and if you only have one vehicle on site they have nothing to compare it with. This one is tidier, but that one has less mileage, etc. It will make a big difference to people. We are looking to expand in area. We will sell out of area if someone sees it online, but we will always target customers in our area,” Ryan explains.

Stock is sourced directly from Volvo, giving quality assurance, but Stuarts also likes it when it

runs its own contract hire stock directly into used sales. “We manage the whole thing and look after the vehicle throughout its life, whoever the customer is,” says Ryan. “We know that vehicle and that it has been serviced correctly. When the vehicle comes to the end of its contract we know it is in good condition to go on and be sold. You can have much more confidence in it if you’ve managed it.”

As Volvo’s Truck Dealer of the Year 2018, the future is all about momentum, building on its reputation as a used trucks destination in the south-west and expanding its facilities to ensure customers get the very best service on offer.



Key personnel

Troy Stuart, Roy Stuart, Ross Stuart,	directors
Ryan Stuart	service manager, Exeter
Ted Benton	workshop manager, Exeter
Scott Loman	depot manager, Plymouth
Andrew Massey	depot manager, Victoria
Jason Hart	overall aftersales manager
Daniel Pierce	new truck sales director
Justin Fisher	used trucks sales director
Martin Williams	parts manager, Exeter (also the longest-standing member of staff at Stuarts)
Gordon Dingley	assistant parts manager, Exeter
Stuart Spragg	parts manager, Plymouth
Carl Cantrell	parts manager, Victoria
Chris Knowd	marketing manager
Amy Biggs	

Stuart Partners provides a number of specialised solutions for a wide and varied customer base across the south-west. In addition to its established Volvo Trucks dealerpoints in Devon and Cornwall it also offers:



ARABLE AND AGRICULTURAL CONTRACTING

With a vast amount of experience in farming and the operation of agricultural machinery, Stuarts provides the best agricultural contracting services, which means you can get the job done quickly and efficiently at minimum cost.



INERT LANDFILL

Processing and sorting more than 80,000 tonnes/year of inert waste, Stuarts also produces crushed hardcore ready for resale.



COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

With commercial land in strategic areas of the West Country, Stuart Partners helps clients looking for yard space or seeking to rent a commercial building.



EMS WASTE SERVICES

EMS Waste Services is a local company owned and operated by the Stuart family. It started from a small depot in Lymington in 1989, providing skips for Exeter and east Devon. Today it covers the entire county.



BEEF FINISHERS

Stuart Partners sends more than 2,500 beef cattle to slaughter every year and produces more than 3,000 tonnes of grain.

