As a real Christmas treat we have a first-hand driver account of life at one of New Zealand's famous transport companies in the halcyon days of 1970s/early 1980s trucking. Sit back with your favourite beverage, you

PROGRESS POWER PRIDE

Progress, Power, Pride read the headline in the Tauranga publication of the mid 1960s. Reading on it also mentions efficiency, reliability, and cleanliness. It was advertising the business of one Ian Marshall Rorison. This is the story I know of this entrepreneur and leader; a transport operator for whom service was king.



A classic Rorison look in the early to mid-80s. A W Model Kenworth 6x4 and 4-axle trailer with big power. The Enterprise sported a KT450 Cummins. Photo: Ed Mansell

Setting the scene

Ian Rorison was a mentor, and his philosophies the greatest influence on my transport and fertiliser business life. In my opinion he was head and shoulders above his competition during his time in the transport and agricultural mining industries.

lan was raised in Taumarunui and moved to Tokoroa where he and wife Nora started his transport business I M Rorison Ltd in 1950, carting timber with a 1946 Chevrolet tractor unit towing a single-axle semi. In 1957 Ian and his family left Tokoroa and headed for Tauranga, where he set up I M Rorison Ltd, Bulk Haulage Specialists. Shortly after arriving in Tauranga lan changed the name again to Rorison Mainline Limited. Over time he built the business steadily, amassing a fleet of Commer TS3 truck and

his business. The move to Tauranga had coincided with the Bay of Plenty Co-Operative Fertiliser Company Ltd's works being commissioned in Mount Maunganui. Being a close friend and associate of Lloyd Saunders, owner of Midland Bulk Services Taupo, lan's trucks hauled fertiliser from Mount Maunganui to Midland's bulk facilities in Tirau, Lichfield, and Tokoroa. This provided forward loading and meant his

nine kilometres inland from

Pio Pio in the King Country.

carbonate (lime) at the Aria

mine was unique in that it

is a magnesium source

used in the manufacture of

serpentine superphosphate.

This operation would prove

pivotal in lan's master plan for

was positioned on top of the

serpentine deposit. Serpentine

The high-quality calcium

trucks could relocate to Aria, either for back loads home, or to cart Rorison Aglime to the Taranaki, King Country, Waikato, and the Bay of Plenty regions. For a period of time serpentine was hauled to Lichfield in rock form and

milled into 'fines' before being taken to the fertiliser works at Mount Maunganui. This was done purely to overcome the licensing regulations protecting rail at the time, and I shall explain more about this further

During the busy autumn and spring seasons up to 16 loads of superphosphate were carted per day from the Bay of Plenty, over the Kaimai ranges, into the Midland bulk stores.

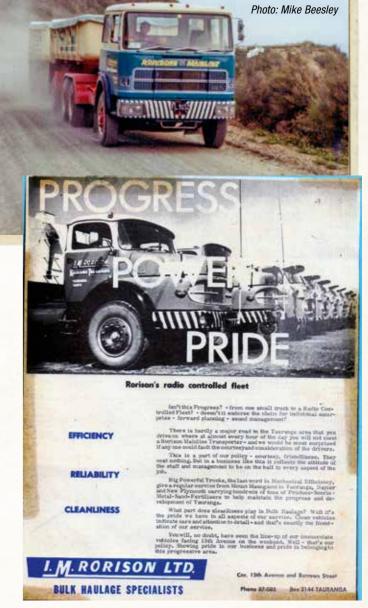
The development of farmland in the South Waikato and western Taupo saw stiff competition emerge between Bay of Plenty Co-Operative Fertiliser Company Ltd in Mount Maunganui and Morrinsville-based Kiwi Fertiliser Ltd. lan won work stocking the new Bay of Plenty Co-Op store in Te Poi on the

Waikato side of the ranges. It was not uncommon to see 15 Commers lined up in the early morning at the Mount Maunganui works, awaiting their first despatch dockets for

loads out.

There was plenty more happening also. Innovation was always a key to lan's success. Rorison Mainline Limited had three Commer TS3 4x2 tractors and singleaxle bottom-dump semi units hauling aggregate to the Tongariro Power Scheme based at Otukou, southwest of Turangi. The trucks were contracted to Fletcher Construction Ltd. and at the contract's end. two were repowered with V8 Perkins engines and set up as A-trains, towing Domett singleaxle semis and 2-axle pup trailers, able to cart 24 tonne on class 1 roads. The third was reconfigured to a bulk tipping truck and trailer.

Following on from the contract with Fletchers, Ian was offered the opportunity to tender for woodchip cartage from the newly commissioned Fletcher sawmill in Taupo to the New Zealand Forest Products Kinleith pulp and paper mill near Tokoroa. The tender was won and two TS3 Commer truck and 2-axle trailer units were commissioned. The trucks'



Rorison Fiat 697N on the

Napier-Taupo Road

old Waipunga section of the

The advertisement that demonstrated the Rorison ethos in six clear bullet points. Photo: Ian Kesner

configuration was 6x2 with lazy axles, but fitted with a Gates Tandematic belt drive between the rear dual tyres. As production at the mill ramped up, they were joined by two Mercedes-Benz 1418 bulk tipping units in 5-axle A-train configuration. Based out of the company's Miro Street depot in Taupo, the chip trucks shifted 280 to 300 tonnes of woodchip per day.

Always wanting to be a step ahead of his competition, lan chased horsepower and efficiency constantly. He was one of the first to repower

TS3 Commers with V8 Perkins engines, commissioning three in total. Other reconfigurations included building up a Hino 6x4 and 3-axle trailer capable of a 25 tonne payload. Sadly, the Hino was a dismal failure and was replaced early on with a 171kW (230hp) 6x4 Mercedes-Benz 2623, which was joined shortly after by a second unit.

In 1970 Ian became the first New Zealand owner of a 224kW (300hp) Fiat 697N 6x4, and soon after he became the official New Zealand distributor for the marque.

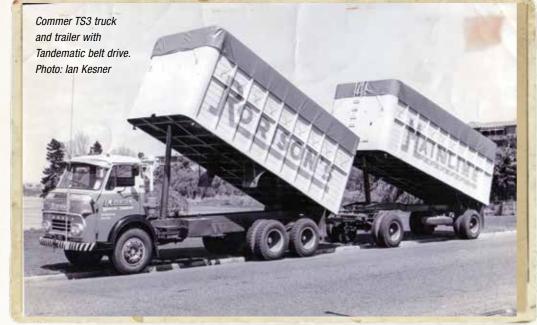
Fertiliser spreading entered the portfolio next, purchasing Pongakawa Bulk Spreaders and its fleet of five ground spreaders. The new entity was called Rorison Bulk Distributors and provided another outlet for Rorison Aglime.

lan was also part of a consortium of local Bay of Plenty businesses that established Bay Park Raceway motor racing circuit in Mount Maunganui. Others in the group included Bitumen Distributors Ltd. Graham Pearce of Pearce Motors. Whiteside's Transport in Te Puke, and Cecil Wright of Poplar Lane Quarry. Rorison Racing regularly raced a Chev Camaro at the track and other circuits, his car being driven by Dennis Marwood.

First impressions count

On my first visit to Tauranga in 1970 I drove past Rorison Mainline Limited's depot with the large fleet of TS3 Commer tippers lined up. I immediately thought 'that's who I would like to work for', and returned home to Whangarei, resigned from my employment as a milk tanker driver, and headed back to Tauranga.

Rorisons had just moved into its new depot on Hewletts Road in Mount Maunganui. I walked in off the street cold and asked for a job. Much to



my surprise, I was taken on and duly started with them on fleet number 14, a TS3 Commer 4x2 with a 2-axle Domett underbody hoist tipping trailer. So began my career in bulk tipping work.

There was no such thing as an induction or working with someone else; it was straight in the deep end. My first experience was being sent to the Metal Haulage Ltd guarry at the end of Wharawhara Road, Katikati in the western Bay of Plenty. On arrival, boss Ian Penwarden noticed I was a new driver. He approached me and said, "You a new boy on the job?"

"Yes"

"Well then, we have one rule in this quarry, see that shovel on your truck? You get up on

every load and water level it out. If you don't, I will kick your bloody arse!"

lan was a big man and meant every word he said. I duly complied with his request and so began my personal quest for doing any job to the best of my ability.

My first ever trip in a TS3 Commer loaded over the Kaimai Ranges was not uneventful either. Loaded with 16 tonne of superphosphate for the Te Poi bulk store, I was one-third the way down the Waikato side when the right front brake cylinder gave in and the brake pedal went straight to the floor. Luckily I was in low gear high-split, and I still had trailer brakes. I pulled the truck handbrake on full and managed to get

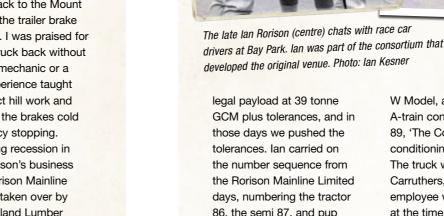
down and pull into the store to unload. With no means of communication. I unloaded and drove back to the Mount depot using the trailer brake hand control. I was praised for getting the truck back without calling for a mechanic or a tow. The experience taught me to respect hill work and always keep the brakes cold for emergency stopping.

The farming recession in 1971 hit Rorison's business hard and Rorison Mainline Limited was taken over by the New Zealand Lumber Company (NZL). A number of staff were let go on a first-on first-off basis, me included. lan retained ownership of the Aria mine in the name of Rorison Mineral Developments Limited

The tide turns

NZL was one of the companies contracted to haul the serpentine until the family earned enough to purchase number 86, 'The Power Game', A 4x2 K Model Kenworth tractor, the truck ran a 250kW (335hp) Cummins, 13-speed Roadranger transmission, and a Rockwell diff. It was fitted with an alloy bodied 2-axle semi and 2-axle pup Mills-Tui A-train.

Single drive was a popular choice at the time for hauling on class 2 roads. The rig carted a 26 tonne



tolerances. Ian carried on the number sequence from the Rorison Mainline Limited days, numbering the tractor 86, the semi 87, and pup 88. Tony Condor, and lan's eldest son Gary drove 86, with younger son Marshall filling in on double shift, hauling serpentine to a Cambridge bulk store where NZL took the product to the Bay of Plenty Co-Operative Fertiliser Company Ltd at the Mount.

> In terms of distribution elsewhere C Bridgeman Ltd in Taupo and later Nationwide Transport carted the serpentine to the East Coast Fertiliser Company at Awatoto near Napier; Mokauiti Transport carted it to New Zealand Farmers Fertiliser's works in New Plymouth, and Kohe Russling carted it to the Te Kuiti railhead for transport to Kempthorne Prosser's works in Aramoho, Wanganui.

Not long after the arrival of the K Model, another single drive Kenworth, this time a

W Model, arrived. Again in A-train configuration, number 89, 'The Cool One' had air conditioning, hence the name. The truck was driven by Melvin Carruthers, an early Rorison employee who'd gone to NZL at the time of the takeover. Mel jumped at the opportunity to come back and went on to be a long-term employee.

By 1976 a third unit had arrived, another single drive conventional Kenworth W Model. Number 94 was built from a glider kit in the company's Maranui Street depot at Mount Maunganui by mechanic Graeme Goodall. Again, with 250kW (335hp) Cummins power, it had a Spicer Spoiler transmission and was duly named 'The Spoiler'.

I had driven a log truck in Taupo after the layoff, and although it was good work, I didn't enjoy the repetitive nature of logs. Returning to Tauranga, I drove for Tauranga Metal Supplies, the quarry division of Seton Contracting. lan contacted me with the offer to drive number 94;

suffice to say, I didn't need much convincing.

The fleet continued to build as the business was rebuilt. Number 97, 'The Stirrer', was the last single drive Kenworth A-train and the first 261kW (350hp) truck in the fleet. It was fitted with Modern Transport Engineers steelbinned tippers, which proved unsuccessful.

A famous anecdote in the company's history was lan asking driver Mel Carruthers: "With that extra fifteen horsepower, will you be able to get another load in?" His tongue firmly in cheek ... mavbe!

As an interesting aside, Mel took 'The Stirrer' in for its first CoF at six months old with 113,000km on the clock. The testing officer noted the kilometres the truck had done and asked Mel if it was double-shifted.

"Yes," replied Mel. "You're looking at both drivers!'

When the road user charges regime was introduced in 1977, the 4x2 tractor units were instantly discriminated

against in favour of 6x4 and 8x4 configurations.

Number 101, 'The Clipper', was next to arrive and was the first 6x4 in the fleet. It was fitted with a Cummins KT 450. the first in the country, and was also our first Transport and General Transport Trailers (T>T) alloy bodied bathtub unit. It towed a 3-axle trailer with a 6-foot spaced rear axle

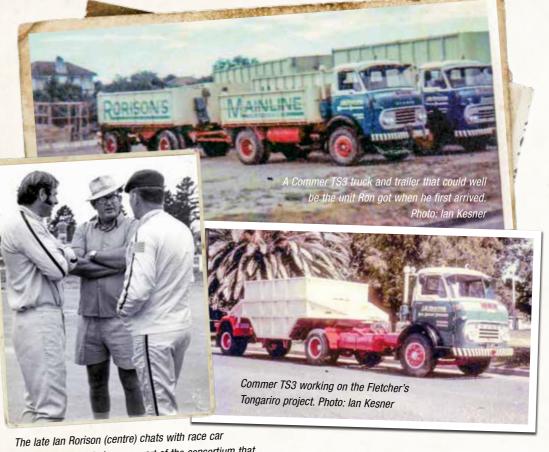
In January 1978 Cliff Guy joined as an owner-driver with his immaculate 6x4 Kenworth tractor unit and 3-axle tipover-axle semi-trailer. Cliff was based in Taupo hauling serpentine on the Aria to Awatoto run. Cliff was a real character and he drove like there was no tomorrow. Following an accident in the ice on the Napier-Taupo Road that earned Cliff his famous 'Snowman' nickname. his trailer was sold to PGF Transport Benneydale and replaced with a T>T bathtub tipper and 3-axle bathtub trailer, again with the 6-foot rear axle set spacing. Painted in RMD colours, it was renamed 'A Fistful of Dollars'.

Ghost trucks

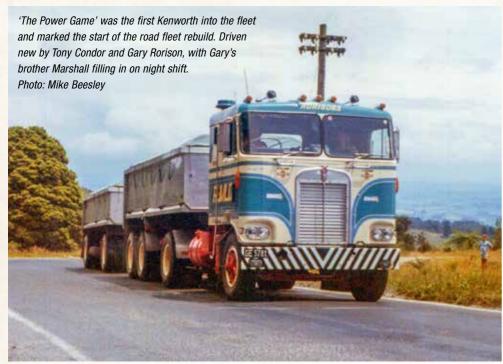
1978 also marked a change in RUC rules, and Norris Mackie of Waipukurau was quick to catch on that 4-axle trailers were much cheaper to operate. We were having a few Friday night drinks when I mentioned to lan about these 4-axle trailers and I indicated to him that if we had a tipping bathtub 4-axle trailer we could lose about seven tonne of weight on the wind-up pit scales! "One and a half tonne on the drive, and another two and a half on the two close axle sets on the trailer." lan pointed skyward and said, "I will have one of those!"

The next Monday Ian called Ian Stevenson from T>T and asked for a quote on a 4-axle tipping trailer. The reply was "We don't make 4-axle trailers lan, we only manufacture 3-axle trailers."





developed the original venue. Photo: lan Kesner legal payload at 39 tonne



"Well then. I will find someone who will!"

The next morning lan Stevenson phoned back and said, "Well okay, we will build a 4-axle trailer, but there will be no warranty." Ian Rorison just said, "When can you start?"

A few months later fleet number 103, 'The Hustler', a 261kW (350hp) K Model Kenworth with a T>T body and 4-axle trailer arrived. The first 4-axle bulk tipping trailer on the road in New Zealand. it set the fleet's new standard configuration. Driven by Peter May from new, I took the wheel at 54,000km.

'The Huslter' was a game changing truck for

the business. The first-ever 6x4 and 4-axle

T>T bath tub units it was the first of the

'Ghost trucks'. Photo: Mike Beesley

new standard configuration and first of the

What we had also presumed turned out to be correct. By losing the seven tonnes on wind-up scales we could cart a 30 tonne payload on a class 2 road with a \$30 fine for being over on the front axle. The constabulary knew we were overloaded but couldn't figure how we got away with it, unlike today. As the fleet grew, having four units like this meant you were essentially operating a ghost truck on the PNL.

Best foot forward

Next was number 105, 'Eager Beaver', a secondhand unit

purchased from Frankham Freight in Auckland. It was a truck that helped signal the change from crossply tyres to of tubeless rims. On seeing them Ian said, "I'll get those off!" "No, no, please just leave them on," was the chorus from

Carting 40 tonnes long distances in 335hp trucks meant the traditional 10-stud split rim wheels and Dunlop crossply tyre setup simply couldn't cope any longer, but it would be fair to say lan took some budging in terms of a change.

radials, and it sported a set

the rest of us. Farms Mount Maunganui. of the Waimangu hill near tyre blew. Gary was lucky the unit went right across

> "I've just blown the righthand front tyre. You better get a tyre company out here Michelins for the front of this creek."

be getting two new Dunlops, and tomorrow take your togs."

It was nothing to get three punctures a day, with Mel Carruthers once recording 20 flat tyres in a five-day week.

When the tyres flattened and the rim threw a ring, we often heard them 'tingle' off to the side of the road. It was sheer luck no one ever got hurt or one never went through a windscreen. Ian used to purchase split rims from Ray Vincent's by the gross.

We carried three spare tyres, a good jack, and a rattle gun that we plugged into the trailer coupling. The first driver back to the depot at night got the pick of the best tyres to replace the flats in his rack.

Aside from 'Eager Beaver's'

arrival, there was another stake in the ground moment that signalled the end of the inferior tyres. When Gary Rorison got 'The Clipper' new it came with a transition Firestone radial/crossply tyre set which proved useless. The truck was barely three weeks old when Gary was returning from the Hawke's Bay with a load of barley for Harvey The left front tyre blew out near the 60/8 weighbridge on State Highway 5 east of Taupo. Gary pulled up without incident, changed the tyre, then continued on his journey. Later in the same trip coming off Hickeys Flat at the bottom Waiotapu, the right-hand front no one else was coming as the centreline and ended up off the right side of the road precariously close to the edge of a river. By this time his nerves were shot. He called his father on the R/T.

and you better order me two thing, I nearly ended up in the

lan replied in a flash, "You'll

There was no reply from Gary, and the local tyre company duly came out from Rotorua and fitted a new front tyre that got him back to the depot. Gary pulled up, took out his lunchbox, overalls. tools and personal gear. and told his father. "I've had enough, get yourself someone else to drive this thing, I quit."

At 11pm that night lan called Gary at home and told him that 101 had two new Michelins on the front, to have a sleep, bring a cut lunch and overalls, and leave the depot at 5am. Gary duly turned up and carried on, but this was the turning point we were looking for. Previously, on the single drive tractor units the crossply tyres on the front and drive axle would barely last a month; 14,000km if we were lucky. Once we turned to Michelins and Bandag retread tyres we went to 50,000km, without the constant flats.

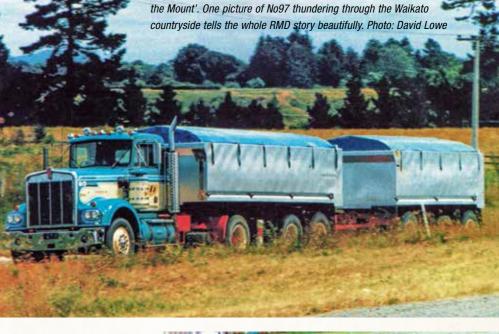
Shortly after the arrival of 'Eager Beaver' and the 'Hustler', the two remaining 3-axle wide-spaced trailers were converted to four 4-axle units.

Next came two more KT 450-powered Kenworths. number 107, 'The Enterprise', and 109, 'The Endeavour'. Both 6x4 and 4-axle bathtub units, this gave us a fleet of nine bulk units by 1981.

RMD's modus operandi at the time was supply and delivery; if clients requested our high quality Aglime, we delivered it, no doubt about it. The rebuilt company had earned a reputation for exemplary service, reliability, and a high standard of presentation. It had earned the admiration of many others in the industry and the ire of those with whom it competed.

Character-building

It was hard work and long hours. Truck cabs at least had to be washed every night regardless of knock-off time. The options were to work the hours the job demanded or be



Probably the most famous RMD photo taken was this one by

David Lowe that appeared the Cavalcade of Trucks No3 'Focus on

told, 'Put the keys on the table and let someone else in who can handle it'. It was nothing to cover a 1000km a day, and work 90 to 100 hours a week.

Coming off an airstrip one night near Te Puke following an arduous tow-in and unload situation for three of us, we were heading home to the Mount, due in about 1am. A call was made to lan on the RT to let him know where we were. The reply came, "Yep all good. Have a sleep in and kick off at five." (He meant am.)

Another, regular mission was loading ex Aria about 2pm and being told to head for home and call at Kihikihi. Being the salesman he was, lan would then attempt to find a home for the product. A call at Kihikihi might result in being told to keep coming, and call again at Karapiro. Sometimes you prayed he'd not found your load a home and you'd be told to bring it to the Mount. But more likely was a call along the lines of, "Yep, head to Midlands Tirau and tip off there". On arrival at Tirau you'd be met with utter surprise and Moss Shultz the depot manager saying, "Bloody hell, I only confirmed this order 20 minutes ago! That's service."

Then you'd call clear at Tirau, by now about 4.30pm,



Taken the year before lan's passing, the fleet totalled nine magnificent units. Photo: Ross Brown

knowing full well what was

"Yep, good on you. Just head back to Aria, load up and call again at Kihikihi."

Thank goodness logbooks prevent this sort of practice now

In 1981 Ian asked me to become transport manager and I was pleased to be given the opportunity. I learned much more about marketing and pricing transport, supply and delivery.

lan was a hard taskmaster but fair; he was quick-witted and sharp.

Hide and seek

On 12 September 1978 the Kaimai [rail] Tunnel was officially opened and it was also the first day of operations for the Commercial Vehicle Investigation Unit (CVIU), or 'Mod Squad' as they were nicknamed, after the TV show from the late 60s/early 70s. RMD Mount Maunganui and Scott's Transport from Tahuna were their first two target

At the time, New Zealand had a regulated road transport industry, whereby it was illegal to cart certain products beyond a specified distance,

in order to protect rail. In 1936 the distance was set at 50km (30 miles), relaxed in 1961 to 67km (40 miles), and again in 1977 to 150km. RMD serpentine went to all of the major manufacturing fertiliser works from the Aria mine. Destinations included Mount Maunganui, New Plymouth, Morrinsville, Awatoto, Wanganui and Auckland. With the exception of Morrinsville, they were all over the regulated distance.

Initially the CVIU used Triumph 2000 cars with one rail official and one cop in each car. The day of the tunnel opening Gary Rorison was on his way back home with a load for the BOP works (now Ballance Agri-Nutrients), and was the first driver to report over the R/T to Ian that he was being followed up the Kaimais (they took a while to perfect their tailing skills on account of trucks going slower up hills, meaning they were easy to spot). Ian told him to just keep coming home, turn off and come to the Maranui depot back through Welcome Bay. Gary did this and gave the cop the slip.

The next day was my turn. At the time we lived on 15th Avenue in Tauranga and when I called Ian he instructed me to go straight home and give him a ring. This really bamboozled

the two in the car. I parked my truck, locked it up and started walking home. I then got a yell from the car. "Hey, we want you!" When I enquired as to the problem, they asked where my load was going, to which I replied, "I have no idea, someone else is taking the truck on from here." They hung around another hour and departed. I then went back down to the truck at 9pm and went and unloaded at the works. From that point on it was a regular daily occurrence.

The smarter the squad got, the smarter we got – as did the rest of the road transport industry. Soon the rail people departed and the job was left to the CVIU alone. On the way home to the Mount we'd either go to the Midlands Tirau store, or Dalton's sandpit near Matamata and hide.

Two loads, each traveling less than 150km was fine, so hiding for an hour or two somewhere, and reappearing with new paperwork (for the same load) and continuing on was a common practice that occurred all over the country for years. Ian and the late John Dalton (JD) were old friends, and we heard some interesting stories in JD's smoko room while we were supposedly unloading and reloading.

Back then they were never interested in weighing us

(thank goodness), or our speed. We just carried on driving as though they were not behind us. All this carried on for a number of years until the permit system came into operation in 1983. Ian had a couple of very smart lawyers who defended him vigorously, and to the best of my knowledge I don't believe he was ever convicted.

In all of that stupidity and wasted energy, all the government was trying to do was stop a number of successful transport businesses trading in order to protect an inadequate rail network not run on the premise of service to clients as a priority.

lan once told me, "I would rather spend \$100k on a bulk store than buy a ticket on the rail". He was a man totally customer-focused with the philosophy: "One tonne or a thousand, treat all clients the same."

A moulder of men

As hard as he worked us, he too worked equally as hard.

Day or night the phone would never ring more than twice before being answered, and it mattered not what time you called him on the company R/T, there would always be an instantaneous "Receiving" at the other end.

lan Rorison was a man years ahead of his time. He once said, "I have shoved a hundred years into fifty!"

Unfortunately lan met an untimely death in 1982 aged 52. Garry came in to manage the business, and I stayed on as transport manager for a time. Not wanting to take on another owner-driver position following Cliff Guy's departure, I resigned. The business that I went on to start, and the business I run today, are in large part built on the business ethos lan imparted.

I believe Ian Rorison should be inducted into the Road Transport Hall of Fame for the innovation and leadership he offered the transport industry. He was a true pioneer and I am proud to have been a part of not just his history, but also the ruckus we caused.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to lan's grandson, lan Kesner, who supplied the memorabilia; Mel Carruthers; Murray Smith, and Mike Rorison, who all helped recount some of the early history.

