

Great British haulage inventions

Britain is best – we can all agree on that. But did you realise that UK inventors originated practically every part of the haulage industry? And CM played its part



(The) Commercial Motor

Where would the haulage industry be without a journal to inform, entertain and occasionally castigate it? There have been motoring magazines for longer than you might imagine (the current US trade monthly Automotive Industries



The freight exchange

The Haulage Exchange is an excellent British innovation that is working well (and now being adopted in the US, too) and it is an impressive use of technology, but yet again, Commercial Motor got there first.

In August 1914, the Great War having just begun, CM set up 'The Commercial Motor Freight Exchange'. It was intended to help "reduce waste mileage and empty running," given the uncertainty of rail and sea transport at the time: "The trouble for any owner... is to know how to get in touch with a return load". Operators were asked to send details of their activities to the CM offices by post or telegram (to 'Pressimus, Holb., London'):

"We request that the maximum of notice shall be given, that the load capacity, make, horse-power, and average point-to-point speed of any vehicle be notified to us, and that the matter of fixing rates be left to our discretion as a general rule." The magazine promised to send backload information by telegram within 24 hours.

Unfortunately this ambitious plan didn't last. Just three weeks later the editor admitted that the railways were relatively unaffected, and although CM had successfully dealt with 47 requests, "despite our best efforts, we were unable to fit together the offers or requirements in a very much larger number of cases".

CM was still convinced that the idea was a good one: "We are satisfied that a good case exists for... permanent 'Freight Exchanges' or 'clearing houses for traffic offering and required'. The work involved is quite beyond our capacity at the moment, but it shall not be forgotten."

But, would today's operators be happy for CM to fix their rates? Answers on a telegram, please...



Transport Exchange Group's Haulage Exchange and Courier Exchange operations are the model of a modern, fully connected IT-driven service: available vehicles are shown on a live map display and all communication can be sent via the internet.



The Blaze bicycle light: okay, so it's perhaps a bit early to call, but we think the Blaze bicycle light might be a great transport invention. It's a bright white light, plus a laser that projects a bike-shaped green image on the road ahead, giving drivers a signal difficult to ignore. We doubt it will make truck drivers love cyclists any more (or vice versa), but the Blaze is a highly visible step in the right direction.



Pallet networks

Palletline, founded in 1992, claims to have been "the world's first hub-and-spoke distribution system dedicated to palletised freight", and we see no reason to argue. While loose consortia of hauliers operating together to extend their reach have been around since haulage began – and the railway companies' road freight services provided national coverage more than a century ago – the pallet network is a model that operators appreciate and that customers can relate to. Now any local operator can have nationwide or even international reach and a steady stream of business, while remaining commercially independent.