

JFC reckons Bob doesn't act like a superstar....but he *is* a superstar, in the way he does his job, looks after others, passes on his knowledge

Despite the fact that he took three or four years off driving at one stage (he had to go back because he missed the trucks so much), Bob Best has still clocked 52 years or more behind the wheel



Father Bob's fabulous life

THE FIRST DRIVING JOB FOR THE MAN DUBBED FATHER BOB BY his workmates at Auckland's John Fillmore Contractors was not at the wheel....but at the reins!

Bob Best was just 10 or 11 when he'd race home from school to drive a horse and cart doing bread deliveries for Buchanans Bakery in Eden Terrace.

And now, at the age of 73, he's still driving! These days he's steering an Isuzu and a tipulator for JFC, carting bulk loads around the city. Even having taken three or four years off driving (many decades back), he's still clocked over 50 years as a truckie.

And he's a rarity who's to be treasured, reckons JFC human relations manager Matt Fillmore: "It's awesome if you can have someone like him in your company."

Although he doesn't behave like a superstar, "he *is* a superstar – because he comes to work every day, sorts out all the young guys, takes people under his wing and steers them in the right direction. He's definitely the morale booster amongst the guys if things aren't going good. He's the old steadying hand – you know what I mean.

"He knows all the tricks – no one can put one over him, 'cos he's been there and done it....20 times over.

"It's the knowledge that he has – and that he passes on. You can't buy that."

He is, says Fillmore, "a character. He's got a temper on him though! I've had a few barneys with him – and I'll probably have a few more. But it all comes right a day later."

Bob was hired about three years ago "to do a bit of part-time casual work when we were short on drivers – and ever since he's done about 65 hours a week.

"He's a pretty special guy – he just does all the basics well. Keeps a tidy truck, drives artics, drives six-wheelers, eight-wheelers....runs the weekly meat raffles, the league divvies. And he's the karaoke man at the Christmas party."

With all of those attributes, it's not hard to understand why Fillmore's decided that Bob was a perfect candidate for our *Bridgestone & Bandag Driver of the Month*.

Bob, on leave from JFC for a knee replacement, reckons he's been driving so long it's hard to remember details: "Who did I

Bob really rates the Isuzu 400 he's currently driving for JFC, but when pressed admits that he's always fancied driving a Kenworth



“I love ‘em. I love looking at them. I like to see nice trucks on the road eh. But I wouldn’t know the first thing about the bastards”

drive for? I’m trying to think – it’s been that bloody long eh. And I’ve had that many bloody jobs.”

Despite saying that, he quickly brings to mind a wonderful childhood growing up in inner-city Kingsland in the 1940s and ‘50s – and his first experience with a truck. It was a Bedford, that regularly came to the neighbourhood delivering YY softdrinks to the dairy up the hill.

“We used to hide in the grass and when he came around the corner he’d change gear in the bloody old Bedford and it was going so slow we used to run up behind and take bottles of drink out of the boxes on the back! Oh we used to be little buggers mate,” he confirms between bouts of laughter.

He started work as a labourer but soon got his HT and landed a job with inner-city carrier Thompson & Hills, carting

tins of spaghetti and peas and other grocery supplies in a Thames Trader: “Bloody old heap of shit it was. Ugly, motor in the cab, rattly.”

A shift to CS & S Kerr in Parnell, carting bagged casein suited the young rugby league player fine. Everything had to be manhandled on and off: “Oh I was fit as a buck rat.”

Then he joined his brother-in-law at Certified Concrete – driving a Commer.

At one stage he went roof tiling for three or four years. But, he says: “I missed them – I missed the trucks. I thought oh bugger this – go back to the trucks.”

All the while he was pursuing his other love – rugby league, a game he’d played from the age of seven. He played (as a halfback or a loose forward) for Mt Albert, Glen Ora and Mangere East



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Bob reckons he'll probably think about cutting back to relief driving after the end of this year

“I’ve had a great life – I love me job, I love me driving. It’s great. People who’ve never been a truck driver don’t know what it’s like – they don’t know what they’re missing”

– winning a number of premierships.

In 1961 he was asked to go to Sydney to play for Parramatta. But the sport’s administrators here wouldn’t give him permission to transfer: “Ah, I couldn’t get away from here. They never let me go. It’s not like it is now.” Yeah, he agrees, it was “miserable.”

Another big opportunity came up soon after: He was picked to play for Auckland against Great Britain – “and they told me I was ‘sposed to be going away with the Kiwis on tour. All I had to do was have a good game against Great Britain.

“And I tore the ligaments in my knee and my ankle and finished up in plaster for three months. So it cost me a trip. I wasn’t meant to go,” he adds philosophically.

He played on till his late 30s and is still vitally involved in the sport – in senior management with Auckland Rugby League.

“I’ve had a great life in football and trucking – seen the good trucks and seen the bad trucks.”

What he likes most about driving is, simply....trucks: “I love ‘em. I love looking at them. I like to see nice trucks on the road eh. But I wouldn’t know the first thing about the bastards,” he laughs.

He refuses to say what the worst truck that he’s ever driven is and when it comes to the best he ummhhs and aahhs for a moment, then reckons: “Well the Isuzu’s a good truck mate. It’s a good working truck. You’ve gotta have a truck that’s not bloody gonna break down on you all the time.”

But, if he “had to drive something super-flash I’d go for a Kenworth.” He’s never actually had the pleasure.

Then he remembers a new Foden Alpha he got while driving for Metalman recyclers: “It was like riding on a big bunch of candyfloss along the road. Oh it was lovely – that was a lovely truck.”

Fillmores has offered him a new International Eagle 9800i, but he turned it down: “I said ‘well no, I’m not the best on ‘em and I don’t want to take that when somebody else can do it better, you know.’ ”

As well as enjoying the trucks, it’s “the various people that truck driving brings you into contact with: Like everything else, there’s good and bad people. I seem to strike all the pretty good ones.”

And that outweighs “the idiots” encountered on the road – even though “they’re not few and far between now – they’re every day.”

It’s Bob’s style to get to a job and “jump out of the truck and help – do something to make the customer’s job easier. Lot of jokers say ‘what the bloody hell you wanna do that for!’ It’s the way I was brought up.”

Bob sums up the past half-century: “I’ve had a great life – I love me job, I love me driving. It’s great. People who’ve never been a truck driver don’t know what it’s like – they don’t know what they’re missing.

“Yeah I wouldn’t swap my life for anything mate – just about bugged now, but I’d do the same thing all over again.”

That’s not to say it’s been a cruisy existence: “It hasn’t been easy – we’ve had four kids and a truck driver’s wages were never, ever massive.”

He confesses that being laid-up for weeks after his knee op has “made me realise that there’s more to life than working.”

He and wife Patricia have been married now for 52 years: “I couldn’t survive without her,” he says: “She’s just tops.”

And since she’s planning to retire soon from her part-time job, he’s also “going to have to think very seriously about it.”

He’s told JFC that if he does retire at the end of this year “I’ll still be on call if drivers don’t turn up and you want someone to do a job. But....don’t call me every bloody day!” 