

The rock

in a hard place

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Story Dave McLeod Photos Gerald Shacklock

Impressive as it looks, at 120 tonnes all-up, the Titan Timbers Mack behemoth is running light!



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The last of 80 tonnes of pulp logs goes onto the Titan's Mills-Tui trailers

THIS STORY BEGINS AT A LARGE ROCK, LOCATED AT a quiet junction on a road that's so off the grid it doesn't even appear on Google maps.

Te Awa junction – fondly known as “The Rock” – is deep in the heart of the Kaingaroa Forest, somewhere southeast of Rotorua.

This spot, surrounded by trees (obviously), is a well-known location for those who work within the region's forestry industry and it serves well as the ideal meeting place for us to catch up with JJ Caulfield (alias the Dog Handler) and the Mack Titan 6x4 off-highway logger he drives.

The eerie morning silence is soon punctured by the sound of a big MP10 engine-braking and through the forest gloom we spot the towering orange Titan Timber Mack...and (eventually) its iconic gold bulldog proudly sitting up high on the square bonnet.

This is immediately followed by two Mills-Tui trailers carrying a mighty load of logs – five packets of ‘em, with an all-up weight of around 140 tonnes (giving it a payload of 100t or so).

A big Titan, loaded-up like this, is an impressive sight by any standards – and one that's not often seen in New Zealand. As hard to find as the junction we're at, you might say.

There's no disputing the fact that – both for the people involved and the machinery they employ – forestry is a tough industry. And as we're going to find out today, they don't come much tougher than JJ and his big Mack.

Custombuilt for Titan Timber Company owner Gibbo Dhanjee, the Titan is perfectly suited to extreme duty – heavy loads and challenging conditions. So, in short...

ideal for the severe demands of a Kaingaroa Forest off-highway logger.

Its 600 horsepower/447kilowatts Mack MP10 heart produces 2065 lb ft/2800 Newton-metres of torque – driven through an Eaton Roadranger RTLO-22918B 18-speed manual box (which is offered as an alternative to the Mack *mDrive* automated manual on the 600hp MP10, but not on the optional 685hp/510kW, 2300 lb ft/3118Nm rated model).

The Titan Timber truck boasts an eye-watering GCM of 140,000kg. When it's out of warranty, that'll be upped to 160t.

Adding to the impressiveness is the piggyback/foldup arrangement for the first of the two tri-axle Mills-Tui off-highway trailers, linked by a two-axle dollie. The trailers are built to a 150t GCM rating and the combo stretches out to around 40 metres fully-extended.

It's the only foldup Mack combination out here in Kaingaroa capable of toting five packets of logs...and it sure does cast a formidable shadow.

It appears even more formidable thanks to the Titan's cab having been raised 50mm higher than a standard Titan (which makes it 100mm higher than a Super-Liner) – this to allow extra cooling airflow around the MP10. And there's the big Bridgestone R150-II 13R x 22.5 tyres it sits on.

Built for applications above 130t, the Titan has an extreme-duty 14mm full-frame, double-rail chassis, a 6350mm wheelbase and 2000mm after-frame, a heavy-duty front axle (9.2t rated), Mack RT2610B hub reduction rear axles, 55” multi-leaf springs on the front (with HD shocks) and comes complete with an Outback Pack that

From left to right: Mighty Mack II is the latest in a line of Macks for the Kaingaroa operation.... Gibbo Dhanjee has been 40 years in log haulage....a spare wheel well, a storage locker and heavy-duty guards feature on the 6x4...JJ Caulfield has been in logtrucks since he was a baby



includes (among other things) more durable componentry around the radiator, fuel tanks, cab mounts and driveline coolers.

The Titans have reputedly been tested in temperatures up to 55-degrees C to prove their durability. This is clearly primarily for Outback Aussie roadtrain work – where they can run at 200t or more all-up....and in 40-degrees-plus temperatures – and yes, it does appear to be overkill when it comes to the Kiwi climate and our maximum weights.

Then again, Kaingaroa – with its network of private roads, where public highway weights don't count – is a special case in the NZ setting. And the lack of wind sometimes encountered in the forest, the summer temps, extreme workload and relatively low speeds have seen regular trucks sometimes fail....mainly due to heat exhaustion.

Gibbo, in fact, reckons that the Kaingaroa off-highway work may well be even tougher than that done by higher-weight Aussie roadtrains: "They often still run at 80k or more, where we might get to 60....if we're lucky. We're up steep and we're down steep."

And hauls from the far-flung edges of Kaingaroa to Kawerau can take three hours – at 140t...and often at low

speeds and gears. In its first 30,000kms, for instance, the truck has a lifetime average speed of just 21km/h. And average fuel use that's hovering round 0.8kms or 0.9kms per litre!

After all, as Gibbo stresses, "even when we're empty we're at 40t – the same weight as a lot of highway trucks."

Still, even in this demanding, almost un-Kiwi setting, the Mack Titan has remained a rare sight, as Murray Sowerby from Motor Truck Distributors (the Sime Darby division that distributes Macks in NZ) confirms.

"The Titan has been around since 2001 and has evolved over that period. The current model has been in build for the last eight years and of that model only six have been sold in NZ."

Wait....as a logger it's rarer still: Of the six, says Sowerby, "only two have been sold for off-highway applications....both of them to Gibbo."

A welder/engineer by trade, Dhanjee is a nigh-on 40-year veteran of the logging industry. Driving his first loads of logs to the ports in 1975, then becoming a contractor in 1986, Gibbo has owned and driven five big Macks over the past 25 years (from Super-Liners and CLs to, more recently, Titans).

To Gibbo, his Titan – a truck that works around the clock for six-plus days a week and carries such heavy loads in a difficult environment – is, necessarily, "one of the toughest trucks in the world." And, with its unusual, high-capacity foldup trailer, it's probably also "the only one" of its kind.

He attributes much of his Mack brand loyalty to the working relationship he's had with longtime (now former) NZ GM Murray Sowerby: "I can't say enough good things about him. I met him back in the late 1980s when he was in sales. He and his modifications man Mark Cooksley have been outstanding – bent over backwards for us.

"In the early days, when Macks were manufactured in NZ, we spent lots of time modifying things and these changes were ultimately adopted by Mack."

In discussing the whys and wherefores of this particular Titan, he details the pluses: "It's a quiet and comfortable truck. We learnt a lot from our first Titan and made modifications on the new one – most of it around cooling. You go very slowly in the forest and with heavy weights, often 8-9km/h for around half an hour, climbing through cuttings.

"Things get hot. So everything plastic, including the sensors, had to be moved away from the engine. We

added more heatshields, a bigger radiator with alloy brackets, a different header tank....and raised the cab.

"Then we lightened things. This is a big truck, 3m wide and over 4m tall, It's 40t of steel, unladen – so we took away things like one of the exhausts. It doesn't look as good, but this isn't about the looks. Less is better out here.

"I added a ROPS (rollover protection system) cage and my own bumper. With the increased height, Mack don't make one heavy duty enough to protect the truck, so I made my own."

The 600 MP10 engine under the bonnet is a well-proven Volvo Group stalwart with an indisputable track record, and a PowerLeash engine brake that delivers up to 570hp/425kW of retardation.

But even the driveline gets a Gibbo tweak. It features Mack RT2610B (Volvo Group) hub reduction axles with diff locks and a 26,000kg rating, on Mack MIL-X super heavy-duty inverted leaf suspension, and a heavy-duty RTLO-22918B 18-speed Eaton Roadranger manual – a global go-to for this sort of work, with its 14.40:1 to 0.73:1 ratio range and a 2250 lb ft torque rating. Gibbo had the diff ratio changed, from 5.41 to 6.18, to lower overall speed.

So is there anything he now doesn't like about this

The purposeful Titan – Mack's toughest, with mods to make it even tougher – is an impressive sight at the Murupara railhead in Kaingaroa. At just under 140 tonnes it's "the usual"





Left, from top: The Mills-Tui trailer set does its Transformers-style foldup – the front trailer's bolsters folding down before it's hoisted up onto the tractor unit

Below: JJ shows his lasso-style chain-throwing as he prepares for unloading at Murupara



truck? As it happens there is one thing: "I tell you something that's no good on it – the headlights. Where the Kenworth and the Western Star off-highway trucks have seven-inch LEDs, you can't have them on the Titan. We have to have our headlights on 24 hours in the forest – and they're a dead-loss." He has tried some aftermarket LEDs, but they interfered with the onboard telematics and had to be taken out.

That aside, as he adds: "I've been in the industry a long time and we've improved the truck along the way. We've got it pretty right this time."

And what about the pretty special Mills-Tui off-highway foldup trailer set? The Mills-Tui name has been appearing on log trailers for 40 years – and the new owners aim to make products that are as enduring as the name.

The Titan Timbers combination is purposebuilt for high-productivity off-highway cartage, but Gibbo wanted more – namely a five-pocket, 10-bolster setup that he reckons is "probably the only one in the world. So getting it right took ages."

Gibbo and Mills-Tui engineering manager Jeff Miller spent many hours figuring out how to achieve the desired package, which includes BPW wide-track off-highway axles rated at 13 tonnes, steel walking-beam suspension and Bridgestone L317 13R 22.5 tyres.

Before we finish talking, Gibbo's quick to point out how, even after 40 years, he still enjoys this business: "RFH (Rotorua Forest Haulage) are great to work with – Glen Wallis manages their Timberland contract well and

Hamish Worboys, their dispatch manager, just gets on with it. There's no BS – we just do the job and it's all very easy."

Back to The Rock. Once the handshakes and introductions are out of the way, it's time to get back to work. I scale the side of the towering cab and climb inside – a feat that's not to be sniffed at, given that I'm a vertigo sufferer.

Considering the height of the Titan, I find entry to the day cab simple enough – with plenty of grabhandles and two large, boot-friendly grated steps. But JJ says that it is a noticeably bigger stretch up to the second step than that on the previous Titan Timber Mack: "It was a bit of a change at first," says JJ – "took a bit of sussing out...but all good now. I take a bigger step up."

The cab feels roomy enough, and yet cosy. There's generous use of burgundy pleated ultra leather trim throughout, a pair of ISRI Big Boy premium air seats with integrated seatbelts, black woolly seat covers, electric windows and decent-sized footwells, complete with red ambient floor lighting.

JJ looks through a Bulldog 460mm soft-touch, rubber-grip steering wheel at the woodgrain dash behind, equipped with every dial and gauge imaginable. Between us are his packed lunch boxes (there's no corner dairy or McDs out here) and two foot-level dash-integrated cup-holders – large enough to hold any oversized American "Big Gulp." What else would you expect on a truck this size?

"This is about survival! You just can't afford to stop on a hill – you'd never start again!"

JJ comes across as a Mack fan through and through – an observation supported by the Mack tattoo he sports on his upper arm. It makes him ideally suited to tell all about this new truck.

Pulling away in low/low, then seamlessly moving up from gear to gear, he soon gets the log-laden Mack up to its cruising speed of 60km/h.

A 43-year-old solo father of three (with two of them living with him and a son in the Army) JJ comes from a large and quite renowned trucking family. Way back when (in the 1950s), his grandfather Sandy Caulfield hauled native logs around the Whakatane area in an old Bedford.

He relocated to Rotorua where JJ's uncle, Gibbo, joined the business – driving a 320 R Model Mack. JJ began riding with his uncle when he was a baby and first got behind the wheel of a truck at 12...so it's safe to say he's grown up in the industry, quite literally.

Evidently, JJ was destined to be involved in the business, but the school of hard knocks saw him involved in a very serious road accident at the age of 18. It left him in a coma for several months and has resulted in a couple of decades of convalescing. He still regularly sees a neuro physiotherapist.

So what makes this new Mack Titan so special?: "It's beautiful to drive, it's got a really good engine brake...a retarder and an engine brake. Volvo's always had good retardation."

And the Eaton 18-speed? "Our last truck had a Mack box. I find this one a bit better – shorter changes. Mack's box is an excellent box but has a longer throw."

Gibbo says he would have been happy to have the mDrive AMT, but Volvo Group Australia engineers didn't recommend it for the Kaingaroa off-highway work – because it has no super-low crawler gear.

JJ has only been behind the wheel of this truck for a month but he looks like he's got the hang of things: "It's got a nice soft clutch, easy for the takeoffs. And the steering is excellent – pretty bang-on."

We're running on flat, straight tarmac at just under 60k and he certainly isn't struggling with the wheel: "I'm in low 8th and at 1400 revs," he points out (I had already told him I'd be asking!).

What does he think of the cab? "It's got a good seat, doesn't jump around a lot – but I guess that depends on how fast you go! Tarseal's better obviously."

So is this a big step up from the old Titan? "The old truck did a bit of time. It was good but it had done five years of 24 hours a day. Same Mack MP10 with 600hp." It did 600,000kms...in 19,000 hours. Gibbo says Mack reckons "that equated to around 1.6million kms on the

highway."

Taking in the instrumentation, JJ reckons "it's got everything you need. Oil and temperature gauges for everything... It's got the same buttons (as the previous Titan) – just in different positions." Gibbo also had two extra gauges installed to monitor exhaust brake pressure and exhaust heat – just to be sure that the engine/exhaust brake combo is going to be working just fine on the next descent.

I point out to JJ that he hasn't changed gear much: "Nah, on this slight pull I stay in low 8, but may move down half a gear on the slow curve ahead." As we round the curve he checks the rear vision mirrors: "We've got wider mirrors added so we've got to watch it, especially when doubles pass, going the other way. But it's good, you can see the whole length of the unit."

Here's an obvious question: Is there anything he doesn't like about the new truck? "Nah, I find everything good. But I'm a Mack fan – it's all I really know. Started with a Mack CL 700 which was lifted and then an Eg Mack V8 – which they don't make anymore, which is a pity. At one time all around Kawerau they were all, well 90%, double-unit Macks...CLs."

There is a wonderfully refreshing air of pragmatism about JJ, something that's very evident in his comments. For instance, ask him if he would have preferred the 685hp version of the MP10, he reckons: "Nah, I'm pretty comfortable with this. If you had a bigger engine it would just use more fuel!"

Quiz him about his use of engine braking over using the footbrakes most of the time: "Yeah, because I have to change them," he laughs.

We start to haul the 140t up a big pull and JJ downshifts to 7th low, where the MP10 settles at 1900 revs and 40km/h, the Mack not skipping a beat. Over the brow, JJ chooses 5th high to descend what is a reasonably steep hill – prompting a split down to avoid the truck running away at all. JJ drives so that the MP10 is never taken above 2000rpm.

Gibbo points out that early downshifting on hillclimbs isn't optional – "this is about survival! You just can't afford to stop on a hill – you'd never start again!"

"A lot of the time we grab two gears at a time – otherwise you can't keep up with it. Going up a hill is like putting the brakes on."

I take a pause in the chat and look out of the window. Travelling endless Ks along these nondescript tree-lined roads may not be everyone's cup of tea, but JJ sees this as much more than just a job – it's a longterm career that's provided a good living: "I've been in a truck since being a baby, so I might as well stick with it," he says,



Above right & top left: Woodgrain (and ultra-leather elsewhere) adds a classy touch to the seriously workmanlike Mack

Lower left: The already high-riding Titan has been raised another 50mm for Gibbo, providing better airflow around the engine...but also making for a big stretch in climbing in and out



The 685hp rating for the MP10 engine wasn't available for this truck, because it's only offered with the Mack mDrive AMT...and, since the automated manual transmission doesn't have a super-low crawler gear, Mack recommended against using it for the off-highway logging work

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beaming.

He started this day at the Murupara railhead at 3.30am, offloading the logs that the truck had picked up at the Kaingaroa Processing Plant (KPP) at the end of its previous shift.

We've met him with his second full load, en route from Straightline Road, near the Napier/Taupo Highway, back to the Murupara railhead...which we're now arriving at.

As we head into the site, JJ steps the gears down to 2nd – essentially walking speed – before pointing the Bulldog's nose dead-centre of the weighbridge and crawling the Mack onto the scales in low/low. The load is just 200kg shy of 100t – with 48.5t of logs on the front trailer and 51.25t on the rear one. Given that the combination's tare weight is around 39.5t (the foldup trailer weighs 13.7t, the back one – including the dolly and drawbar – is 12.8t, and the tractor is around 13t), we're over 139t all-up. JJ says that's pretty standard.

Once he's unchained the load – a process that looks more akin to a rodeo professional wielding a lasso – the trailers are quickly, efficiently offloaded. Having seen it freed of its heavy load, JJ slips the 18-speed into 2nd low and exits the log-handling area.

With over a 30-minute drive to the next load, it's time for the Titan Timber Mack to perform its party trick – folding the lead trailer up onto the back of the tractor. At the flick of a switch, the hydraulics take over and the bolsters on the Mills-Tui trailer are folded down before the lead trailer is hoisted up and onto the Titan. Seriously, it's like a scene from *Transformers!*

Aside from the outstanding theatrical visual effect, this system is super-efficient. It limits wait times at skid-sites and logyards – as well, of course, as providing better traction during empty running.

NZ Truck & Driver publisher and test driver Trevor Woolston climbs aboard the now more compact Titan for the drive off to Kaingaroa's northern boundary – to a skid-site where the Lealand Logging team is turning out around 740t of logs a day.

The Lealand crew has spent three months at this site, which is only about 15 minutes' drive off the Kaingaroa tarmac – along what looks to a city dweller to be a makeshift trail.

Once there, JJ unloads the folded-up front trailer and then a big John Deere loader sets to work loading pulp logs onto the trailers. Soon JJ is chaining 'em down and we head off – this time northeast to the Tasman Mill in Kawerau...in the rain. Read the *Trevor Test* on the following pages for his first-hand report on the drive.

The Tasman Mill is immense and appears to be highly automated. The Mack's 80-odd tonnes of logs are unloaded within minutes of the truck's arrival. Aside from the truck and loader drivers, the mill seems to be virtually bereft of humans.

I wonder to myself if this is the tail-end of the huge, technology-driven changes in logging that JJ was talking about earlier.

"I've seen a whole lot of changes. It's so modern and mechanised nowadays: To fell a tree you've got a machine – a Waratah – that grabs the tree, fells it, delimbs it, cuts it.... It's all technology these days. It's really good."

And Gibbo Dhanjee's Mack Titan is a prime example of the evolution. It's also a mammoth of a truck and quite frankly, in this tough forestry environment, it needs to be. The weather has been kind to us – with only a few brief downpours – and our time on rough tracks has been brief.

But still it's been easy to see how ultimately capable the Titan is at operating in this environment...and handling extraordinary weights.

In a 12-hour working day, JJ and the Titan produce epic numbers – such as three hauls, 300 litres of fuel consumed to cover 200-odd kilometres...and 15 packets (and almost 300 tonnes) of logs delivered.

The challenging, off-the-grid, hidden world of log transport in the central North Island is tough...but the Mack Titan is quite simply the rock in a hard place.



Trevor Test

IT'S OVER THREE YEARS SINCE MY LAST outing into the world of off-highway logging in the Kaingaroa Forest.

We catch up with Gibbo Dhanjee's new Mack Titan and driver JJ Caulfield – the dayshift driver on the Titan Timber unit. We couldn't be in better hands, given JJ's years of experience.

Climbing up into this beast is no easy mission as I'm awaiting a knee rebuild and with only two steps between the ground and the cab floor, they're spaced well apart. There are good grabhandles to assist but the spacings are just too much – with what must be close to a 500mm climb from the top step into the cab.

The reward is that once inside you're sitting up high and there is good vision from

up here. The cab is very well appointed, with nice burgundy trim ultra-leather throughout and a woodgrain dash. It certainly gives the feeling of luxury in this serious work truck. The driver and passenger both get an ISRI Premium Big Boy seat with integrated seatbelts.

The dash layout is very standard Mack, with all major gauges right in front of the driver – an engine diagnostic screen, tachometer, speedo, diffs, gearbox, engine temperature and air pressure. On the centre console is an array of the usual switches and on the steering column to the left is the indicator lever and on the right the cruise control lever – the latter almost redundant on the Titan Timber unit as it's hard to imagine JJ getting to use it, running in this



terrain at its typical gross weights.

We're heading east, only about 10kms from the yard, for a load of mixed pulp logs from a skid-site run by the Lealand Logging crew.

With the lead trailer stacked up on the tractor unit, the ride is very comfortable, with a lot less of the empty truck bounce.

It gives me a good chance to get a feel for the truck and to get a heads-up from JJ on its

operation.

Once loaded we head off, bound for Kawerau with a gross weight of around 120 tonnes – thus a payload of just over 80t. It's quite modest in the scheme of things around here, with loads regularly around the 140t mark.

Thankfully, despite the 120t, this truck is very driver friendly – with very good in-cab noise levels, a light clutch pedal and good gearshift feel. Any poor shifts are purely the fault of yours truly and not the truck as I get used to the heavy weights and making full-gear downshifts at around 1400rpm rather than the lugging down to 1100 that you do in highway operations.

There's also the matter of adjusting to how quickly the high weight drags the truck's speed back on any uphill...no matter how slight they look.

The 600hp/2065 lb ft rating was the only version of the MP10 engine available to Gibbo – because Mack felt that the lack of a low crawler gear made the mDrive AMT (the only transmission for the 685hp/2300 lb ft rating)

made it unsuitable for this job.

The resulting combination of the lower-power engine and the 18-speed Eaton Roadranger works fine in this job anyway.

It's not about being fast out here: Slow and steady gets the job done more safely...and economically.

The high-mounted cab really adds to the driver's vision and driving out from the skid-site on the single-lane bush track it makes positioning the truck on the narrow road very easy.

Once back on the seal it's a series of climbs and descents all the way to Kawerau.

The ride is very good despite the heavy-duty suspension. You can certainly feel the load on behind, but despite its heavy presence everything about the drive is very light and user-friendly, with excellent feel through the steering wheel and very little wander.

The pedals feel more like a car's than a truck's, with a very light clutch and low-mounted brake and throttle pedals. In fact, it takes a bit of getting used to the clutch – its very short travel only really needing toe operation rather than the whole foot.

As you start into each of the numerous climbs the weight of the unit immediately takes effect and the revs drop quickly, prompting you to grab gears early rather than late – keeping the MP10 right up in the 1400-2000rpm area. Similarly, on the downhills the load's opposite effect calls for careful gear selection – regularly dropping to third high and running the Mack PowerLeash engine brake on full power most of the time.

The PowerLeash works really well and, in fact, on the last run down to Kawerau I switch between its high and medium settings to avoid over-braking.

With my lack of knowledge of the roads we cover, JJ's constant commentary is extremely useful, including early warnings of what lies ahead. There's certainly no replacement for experience out here.

At the mill in Kawerau it's time for me to give JJ his truck back. We only very occasionally get the chance to test one of these giants of the New Zealand transport industry – and every time we do I can't help but be impressed by the guys who operate these trucks.

It's a job that takes a certain kind of driver and a certain kind of truck – and JJ is certainly that kind of driver and the Mack Titan is certainly that kind of truck. Nothing less would survive out here. **T.D**

• SPECIFICATIONS • MACK TITAN 6x4

Engine: Mack MP10, Euro 5 SCR

Capacity: 16 litres

Maximum power: 510kW (600hp)
@ 1500-1900rpm

Maximum torque: 2800Nm (2065
lb ft) @ 1000-1500rpm

Fuel Capacity: 700 litres

Transmission: Eaton Fuller RTLO
22918B 18-speed Roadranger
manual

Ratios:
Low L – 14.40 Low H – 12.29

1st low – 8.56 1st high – 7.30

2nd low – 6.05 2nd high – 5.16

3rd low – 4.38 3rd high – 3.74

4th low – 3.20 4th high – 2.73

5th low – 2.29 5th high – 1.95

6th low – 1.62 6th high – 1.38

7th low – 1.17 7th high – 1.00

8th low – 0.86 8th high – 0.73

Front axles: Mack FXL 18, rated
at 9200kg

Rear axles: Mack RT2610B
hub reduction, with difflocks,
combined rating of 26,000kg

Auxiliary brake: Mack
PowerLeash + engine brake

Front suspension: Multi-leaf
springs, with heavy duty shock
absorbers

Rear suspension: Mack MIL-X
super-heavy-duty inverted leaf

GVW: 31,800kg

GCM: 140,000kg

Gibbo Dhanjee believes his Titan is one of the hardest-working trucks in the world. There's a fair chance he's right, given that it works 24 hours a day, six days a week – loaded half of the time...usually to 140 tonnes. And much of that is at low speeds, in low gears. Even unloaded it's at 40 tonnes



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