A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

With news of the release of a Limited Edition Legend 900 circulating, Warren Caves looks at the background to Australia’s appreciation of trucking nostalgia.
Following on from the release of the Legend 950 as the first in the Limited Edition series released by PACCAR Australia, the Kenworth spotlight this year was turned on the Legend 900 that made the headlines as the centrepiece of the Brisbane Truck Show.

The welcome it received at that launch was nothing short of rock star proportions, according to Brad May, director of sales and marketing for Kenworth/PACCAR Australia.

Brad elaborated a little on the incarnation of the Legend Series during a recent interview with PowerTorque.

“The idea of the limited edition Legend Series had its seed originally planted out of a conversation with Mike Fowler, director of on-highway business for Cummins South Pacific, at the pre-introduction to the Cummins E5 engines,” said Brad.

“The demise of the original T950 was brought about by the lack of a suitable engine that was capable of meeting the necessary emissions targets and maintaining low operating temperatures.

“The release of the ISXe5 resulted in an off the cuff remark from Mike Fowler that, ‘These engines are so cool you guys (Kenworth) will be able to bring back the 950’.

While Brad admits that the original T950 was not a massive seller, its launch as the 950 Legend was met with a little apprehension as to whether it would stack up in the sales arena. This niggling doubt, as history now tells us, was unnecessary as the allotted 75 units sold out in 40 hours.

Born out of those early conversations is what we now have as the second instalment of the Legend Series, a range of historically significant Kenworth models long since passed production, morphing into a modern day equivalent workhorse with all the modern advancements in technology, engineering and efficiencies, whilst maintaining and recreating the style and character of the period to produce the 900 Legend.

“The Legend Series is our way to celebrate our history and to remind our customers that we have been here for a long time, and at the same time in some small way to pay tribute to all those operators who have purchased our trucks over the years, and to celebrate our journey together,” said Brad.

“Reaching back into our history books to recreate these models has been a major project necessitating recommissioning old tooling and moulds and in some instances remanufacturing components no longer available.

“Old badges were remade for these projects, and with items like the gauges we went to VDO and had them handmade to complement the authenticity of the trucks. It’s this type of ‘factory’ refinement that we believe our customers want from a limited edition. They don’t want something that they could have done themselves”.

A LEGEND IN THE MAKING

While we didn’t act upon that idea straight away, sometime later when discussions were being had on how to stimulate sales activity in general, it was suggested, ‘What about that 950 idea?’ That, coupled with a retrospective moment around the same time spent looking at pictures of my father’s own W-model, led to it all starting from there”.

PowerTorque ISSUE 80

15
The Legend 900 is very much a working truck designed to hold its own in the modern transport landscape. As with its original T900 namesake, it is designed for use across many applications, featuring the Cummins X15 engine (painted, black with a red rocker cover, reminiscent of an N14) @ 525 horsepower and 1850 ft-lb of torque driving through an Eaton 18-speed manual transmission down to 46,000 lb differentials.

Design features include traditional doors and door handles, with airlift windows, and the availability of 36 or 50-inch sleeper cabs in Aero 1 or flat roof design (a dovetail air deflector is included with the aero version). Of course, a split-screen windscreen is featured with a two-piece stainless-steel sun visor, while bullet-style cab marker lights and dual round air horns sit atop the cab.

Side-mounted exhausts include a wraparound cover, just like the old T900’s, with exposed chrome elbows and seven-inch pipes.

Stainless steel scuff plates adorned with Legend 900 logo on the door openings and gearstick boot surround, and the obligatory glovebox-mounted wooden plaque identifying build number, give no misconception that you are riding in a Legend.

A traditional flat dash layout houses the handmade heritage style chrome bezels for the white-faced gauges, plus traditional Kenworth bug toggle switches with backlit graphics and a four-spoke leather steering wheel.

The traditional Kenworth bug and Legend 900 logo is also embroidered into the seats, adding to that limited edition feel.

While these trucks are not necessarily designed to be relegated to show-pony status, we do have it on good authority that, as with several of 950 Legends, a few of the 900 Legend models are slated to be parked away maintaining their fresh-out-of-the-stable gleam for years to come.

Sales and ordering procedures were a little different for the 900, being that after notifying dealerships in advance of the order date, potential purchasers were given enough time to weigh up their options. It was decided, after the oversubscription of the 950 Legend and subsequent disappointed bidders, that the 900 Legend would go on sale for one day only, without a limit on numbers ordered. This resulted in a final tally of trucks ordered being a little over 250 units, an impressive result by anyone’s standard.
Legend 900 #1 has the auspicious title of “Steady”, a fitting tribute to Allan Stead.

Allan Stead was a 38-year veteran of the Kenworth story in Australia, starting out as a mechanic at the St Peters dealership in Sydney and progressing throughout varied roles within the Kenworth company. According to Brad May, “What Steady didn’t know about trucks wasn’t worth knowing”.

Although Allan retired around eight or nine years ago, his name is still heard around the factory floor and is held with high regard. Some of the younger employees have never met Steady, but they certainly know of his influence through the yarns. He is very much a legend around Kenworth, so, with that being said, it seemed only fitting to tribute the Legend 900 #1 to Allan.

Sadly, Allan passed away earlier this year, and his name and his contribution to the Kenworth Australia story will live on in the Legend 900 #1.

As promotional duties draw to a close for #1, life will become a little more sedentary at The Road Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs, where the truck will stand for posterity for her foreseeable future, with the occasional special event to build up the oil pressure.

When asked about another instalment in the Legend Series, and whether we might see a W Model or something along those lines? Brad May, after a short pause, offered a “We’ll see!” response.

“The Legend Series is still evolving, and we have every intention of launching another instalment at some point. Just what and when that will be is not known, but it will be a series with an end date,” concluded Brad.