



The big Western Star is already becoming a familiar sight out on New Zealand highways – here heading through the Waikato with one of the company's cranes on board

A very heavy Star

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WHEN BAY OF PLENTY'S POLLOCK CRANES went shopping for a heavy-haulage tractor unit to tow a new low-loader transporter, it couldn't find anything suitable...anywhere in New Zealand.

Not so surprising really, considering the Pollock Cranes team specifically wanted a prime mover with a 260-tonne gross maximum capability, to easily cope with its biggest shifts – including moving its own large cranes around the country. And to future-proof it with a capability beyond its current 180-tonne GCM needs.

It was soon obvious, says Pollock Cranes' operations manager Thomas Slater, that the choice was either get something brand-new and purposebuilt, or buy

secondhand in Aussie.

When they spotted a giant Western Star Constellation 6964 FXC roadtrain prime mover for sale, on an Australian truck website, they called in the help of NZ secondhand truck and trailer dealer AllRoad to secure the deal and import the truck.

The result? The recent commissioning of the Pollock fleet's new flagship – a spectacular 2013 model Western Star tractor unit...with the required 260t GCM and suitably heavy-spec running gear.

The big sleeper cab 6x4 has a Cummins ISX 16-litre engine rated at 600 horsepower/473 kilowatts and producing 2050 lb ft/2779Nm of peak torque, with



Clockwise, from top left: The TRT six rows of eight platform trailer arrived a few months before the new tractor unit. Pollock Cranes' heavy-specialist Peter Hinton is the lucky man now in charge of the Western Star...the truck has retained its Aussie-given Vilin 2 nickname the 6964 FXC with a relatively modest load...the interior is absolutely top-end spec

an 18-speed Eaton Roadranger RTLO-22918B manual gearbox, plus an Eaton AT-1202 two-speed auxiliary transmission.

It has Sisu FR2P32 hub reduction diffs, rated at 31.5 tonnes, on Hendrickson RS650 walking-beam suspension, rated to 155t. Upfront it has an 8.6t Meritor FL-941 axle, on taper-leaf springs.

Its past life in Australia also saw the truck specced with six long-range fuel tanks, big alloy bullbars, an icepack aircon system for the sleeper, high-rise air intakes and exhaust stacks, plus a stainless dropvisor and an onboard weighing system.

The big unit was built for Heavy Haulage Australia – the company that was the star of an Aussie reality tv series, *MegaTruckers*.

MegaTruckers reckoned it was about the people who hauled “huge loads across the treacherous Australian terrain to the most difficult-to-reach places on earth.”

But HHA was put into voluntary administration in mid-2015, reportedly with \$AUS65million of debt. At the time the 16-year-old business, started and co-owned by Jon Kelly – the key figure in the *MegaTruckers* show – had 120 staff, 55 prime movers, 120 trailers and 15 cranes...all of which, the voluntary administrators said, would be sold off.

Australian newspapers reported at the time of the company's failure that HHA had always prided itself on buying top-quality gear and staff – quoting the high-profile Kelly: “We've spent a lot of money on buying the best equipment.”

But the voluntary administrator said the company's fixed cost base was too high and reckoned it had been buying machines with specifications “beyond what's required to get the job done.”

According to AllRoad the ex-HHA Western Star is the only one of its kind in NZ...and was one of just four built.

Pollock Cranes completed the purchase after flying to South Australia and spending a few hours checking

out the big prime mover, which had only clocked up 130,000 kilometres.

It's understood the truck hadn't been used since HHA went under: Thomas Slater confirms that it had “sat still for two to three years.”

For that reason, once the Western Star arrived in NZ, Pollock Cranes ordered-up a complete refurb, to restore the tractor unit to as-new condition.

Says Slater: “It got painted and everything got polished – and what needed replacing got replaced. All the shiny bits.”

“It was blue (HHA's livery) but we painted it into our company colours – orange. It was basically a complete strip-down and rebuild – everything re-polished and brought back to brand-new.”

Emt Workshops in Mount Maunganui was responsible for the refurb – spending about 50 hours to strip it... and 250 hours to put it all back together.

Says Emt's Mike Dean: “We pretty much stripped it down to be sandblasted and arranged to get it stainless steel polished, and then refitted everything.”

Thomas Slater says his brief was simple, to the point: “This is the biggest truck in the country – I don't want it back anything but immaculate!”

Nationwide Transport Refinishers (NTR) did the chassis sandblasting and repainting, NTR's Ross Harris explaining: “We've been involved with Pollock Cranes for many years and their pet hate is colour variations between different shops, so we keep colour consistency on everything we do for them, using the Resene Chromax HDC paint system.

“Everything had to be removed from the truck – including the diesel tanks – and then blasted and painted. It was a major job. A full respray from the ground up. We had it about three weeks but all-up it took a good six weeks for the whole job.”

Mike Deans says that because the Western Star “had been sitting for a while” all the brightwork was meticulously polished: “Although there was nothing



wrong with it, it needed polishing because they do lose their shine after a while. It had been looked after though.

“We were asked to strip it right down and make it look like a new truck again. It had to look new and if you didn't know better, you'd think it was.”

“It was also our responsibility to get the certification and CoF and all that drama done.

“It's a big, heavy-duty road-going truck that can cart big loads and there's nothing like it in NZ other than off-highway ones, so it created quite a bit of interest.

“There was a lot of paperwork involved to get the vehicle certified for NZ roads but it went very smoothly, with just a few minor hiccups.”

One thing that wasn't changed from the Western Star's former life with HHA is its nickname – Vilin 2. It

now also has a matching Vilin2 personalised licence plate.

The Pollock Cranes paint job was completed with spectacular striping and murals of cranes and a masked man – to suit its nickname – the work carried out by Marty's Signs at the Mount.

Since it's gone on the road for Pollock Cranes, the Western Star has been busy shifting cranes, heavy machinery, rail wagons...even an oil rig.

Thomas Slater says all of the cost and effort involved in getting the truck brought in from Australia and having it extensively refurbished has been worthwhile: "To drive our cranes on the road costs X amount of dollars – and for us to drive them onto the truck and transport them is half the price, because of the road user charges. It's Jacinda's fault!"

Not that he begrudges having the big rig and its eight-month old six rows of eight TRT low-loader on the 14-truck Pollock Cranes fleet: "Oh f*** – it's perfect! I wouldn't change a thing. I take my hat off to Mike Dean."

And it doesn't stop at its looks: "It pulls really hard. Goes really well uphill with a good load on. I had the first load on it myself."

Best of all, says Slater, even with the shipping and the refurb costs, the low-kilometres tractor unit came in at a bargain price – less than two-thirds of the cost of the only real alternative, a new Kenworth.

With the TRT platform trailer currently in a six rows of eight configuration, with a two-axle dollie added, the unit is capable of comfortably shifting loads weighing 100 tonnes... "but everything is rated to a 130t payload."

Adding extra axle modules onto the platform trailer will allow that payload...with a 180t GCM. The Western Star itself tips the scales at 14.5t and the whole unit – the TRT transporter and dollie included – tares at 53t.

At present, Pollock's biggest crane is a 6400 Grove (with a 400t lifting capability), which weighs 76-78t.

As Pollock Cranes' heavy haulage driver, Peter Hinton – a specialist in over-dimensional loads – explains: "We wanted the 260t rating in case we get more axles on the new trailer."

The FXC, he says, "goes very well...does everything it's supposed to and is a very comfortable ride too." He adds that it's "got everything in it," including a fridge, microwave, tv, king-sized bed and walk-through cab.

AllRoad's David Parsons says it's "a very special truck," with a high level of factory customisation and the inclusion of "everything – from a microwave to a digital tv.

"We're really proud to have imported it for Pollock Cranes. At the end of the day, the nature of our business is delivering what the customer wants and having a happy customer." 

The finishing touches to the refurbishment project involved the intricate striping and mural work, carried out by Marty's Signs.

