

Careful spec'ing yields higher payloads

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Lighter-weight equipment is a quest for Jim Burg, president and CEO of James Burg Trucking Co. in Warren, Mich. He hauls steel and construction supplies on multi-axle flatbeds in 11-axle combinations that gross up to 164,000 pounds. Lower tare weight often yields more payload.

He started out working with East Manufacturing in 1990, saving 10,000 pounds by going to aluminum rather than steel B-trains.

But what he really wanted were single trailers. They're a simpler piece of equipment, don't require drivers to have a doubles endorsement on their licenses, are easier to navigate into shipping and receiving docks, and can be rear-loaded, while doubles are sometimes limited to side loading.

"By 2000, they could extrude [main] beams long enough for 50-foot trailers, and strong enough to handle side stress from the axles during turns," Burg explains. "Even lane changes were a concern to the engineers. So we went to single 50-footers on 8 axles, or 11 axles with a tractor.



A 53-foot trailer allows use of two 9-foot spreads, between axles 1-2 and 2-3, adding another 5,000 pounds of legal gross weight.

It came in 5,000 pounds lighter than a set of doubles, and we could haul the same amount of product on a single 50 as a B-train." The payload: 117,000 pounds.

Proper axle spacing is also important. Closely spaced trailer axles are limited to 13,000 pounds each in Michigan, but a distance of 9 feet between two axles allows each to gross 18,000 pounds. The 50-footer has one such spread, which gains 5,000 pounds of legal gross.

But if the trailer could be 53 feet long, two 9-foot spreads could be accommodated and another 5,000 pounds carried. So Burg worked with the state's DOT and state police

to get them on board. Police noted that with more cargo carried on each trip, fewer trips would be needed and fewer trucks would be on the road — a safer situation. Officials asked the legislature to legalize 53-foot multi-axle trailers, and it did, giving Burg a payload of up to 122,000 pounds.

"We try to match it to a customer who can gain advantage of that — two coils [of steel] instead of one, or three instead of two, or an extra skid of sheet or coiled steel, or any type of product."

With opportunity, however, comes responsibility, Burg notes. "You have to be sure weight is distributed properly. We run Michelin X-One [wide-base] singles and Meritor disc brakes. And lift axles are steerable, so they can stay down in turns and there's less fatigue on the trailer beams" and less scuffing of tire tread and pavement.

"Discs are safer and less troublesome — there are no freeze-ups in winter. And because of the rotor-caliper mechanism, there's no way a wheel can depart the vehicle if a bearing burns and fails. The caliper holds the rotor and wheel in place. We learned that by experience, and that is worth the price of admission." ■



PHOTOS: JAMES BURG TRUCKING

Going from steel B-train doubles to East aluminum doubles saved 10,000 pounds. Wide-base single tires and aluminum wheel help.