

The quest for the perfect dump trailer

For more than 30 years, Rick Kuntz has helped his trailer vendor perfect 25-foot aluminum dump trailers.

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Rick Kuntz is always looking for practical ways to improve his trucking operation. He's the master of simple innovation. It's a way of doing business that's led to a longtime relationship with one of the country's leading trailer manufacturers — and a spec named after him to boot.

Kuntz's story starts in 1978, when he bought a used dump truck and went into business hauling asphalt for a local paving company.

He worked hard and developed a good reputation in the local road-building community. As time went on, he was able to purchase another truck — and then another. Before long, he had a small but dependable fleet of straight dumps hauling asphalt, aggregate, and other road-building materials in and around northern Ohio — Rick Kuntz Trucking.

"We haul everything from spoil ground off old roads, to asphalt, to road salt in the winter," Kuntz says. "If it's a material related to road-building or road maintenance, we haul it."

In 1986, Kuntz decided he needed to work smarter, not harder, and started purchasing Class 8 tractors to haul materials with. This, of course, necessitated spec'ing a dump trailer that was up to his standards. The first trailer Kuntz seriously considered purchasing was an East dump trailer. He was impressed. "The quality of the build, the engineering and the frame strength was so far ahead of the other trailers I'd looked at," he says. He's been an East customer ever since.

Production boosts and bonuses

The design Kuntz settled on was a 34-foot, tandem-axle dump trailer. "In the 1990s, the turnpike here in our area was adding a third lane," Kuntz says. "There was a lot more road work associated with that project than there



Rick Kuntz started hauling asphalt with a single straight truck in 1978. As his fleet grew, he switched to tractors and East dump trailers in an never-ending effort to be more efficient and safer on the job.

were trucks available to haul materials."

Under Ohio law, straight trucks were road legal at 17 tons. But with the tandem-axle trailers, he could legally haul up to 25 tons. "And I could see the driver shortage coming, even then," he adds. "And I just knew we needed to be more productive. That was the primary driver for going to semis," he says. "It was obvious we'd be able to get more done than with our old straight trucks."

As his drivers got up to speed with their new trucks and trailers, Kuntz was already analyzing the shortcomings of his new equipment and looking for fixes.

"We had a problem with the location of the hinge-point on the dump trailers coming into contact with the pavers," he says. "On a straight truck, the dump hinge point is protected behind the truck's back tire. And that wasn't the case with these units."

Kuntz went back to East and asked its

engineers if it would be possible to redesign the dump trailers with a hinge point farther back in the design. "It took them six months to evaluate and test the frame to make sure it could handle this new setup," he recalls. "Finally, they got approval to put it onto production. The advantages were obvious."

Kuntz said the production boost his company got from the new East dump trailers was immediate. "They're not good on city streets," he notes. "Because overhead electrical lines are a problem when the body is raised. But the extra payload that 25-ton capacity gives us helps us earn smoothness bonuses on our interstate paving work, because we can pour longer stretches into the pavers with fewer resulting bumps."

Kuntz's relationship with East didn't end with that first batch of redesigned dump trailers. Over the years, as his experience with the trailers has grown, Kuntz has helped East

with numerous additional design tweaks for its aluminum dump body trailers.

“We suggested a sloped-nose front end to eliminate the ‘doghouse’ at the head of the trailer,” Kuntz says. “We were getting a lot of asphalt hung up in that area and needed to eliminate that issue.”

Kuntz also helped East move all trailer controls inside the cab of the truck — a move that is near and dear to his heart.

“I don’t want my guys to ever get out of the cab of a truck,” Kuntz says. “Initially, this was simply a convenience issue — I mean, we haul asphalt. Tar tends to get all over the place if guys are climbing in and out of trucks all day. But, as time went on, I realized that the more I could keep guys inside the cab, the less chance there was of somebody falling off a trailer or getting hit by a car or a piece of equipment. The safest place for a driver is inside the truck. And East worked with me to make that possible — and more productive to boot.”

Kuntz ticks off a series of enhancements East has made — most of which he’s had some input on. “Disc brakes on trailers have made a huge improvement in our stopping ability,” he says. “And East has gone to standard aluminum air tanks and dollies. We used to pull our hangers off of new trailers and galvanize them to withstand corrosion better. Now those come from the factory galvanized. And all of these little things add up when you’re looking for productivity and safety.”

On top of the productivity and safety benefits, Kuntz says his resale value on his dump trailers is a major bonus. “We only run them for seven to 10 years and then get rid of them because the resale value is so good,” he says. “They don’t crack, and they’re so well insulated a load of asphalt doesn’t lose more than 5 degrees during an hour’s haul.”

Today, he says, it’s not uncommon for trailer buyers to tell East they want the “Kuntz spec” for their dump trailers. Kuntz says he takes a certain amount of pride in that. “I’m not a competitive person when it comes to things like that,” he says. “I believe in sharing my knowledge and the things I’ve learned. I think that’s what makes us a better, more productive industry. When we all do better, the country does better and our industry does better.”

HOW TO MOUNT A TARP SYSTEM ON DUMP TRAILERS

Tarping is a vital part of hauling loose materials on public roadways. Getting a tarping system mounted correctly can save you a lot of headaches down the road. These tips from U.S. Tarp can help you get it right the first time.

STEP
1

FIND THE CORRECT PIVOT POINT

- This is done best using two tape measures. It is possible to use only one tape measure, but it will take longer.
- Have one person use a tape measure to measure the distance from the tarp angle to an approximate pivot point location on the side rail.
- Have a second person use another tape measure to measure the distance from the front edge of the tailgate to the same approximate pivot point.
- The actual pivot point is where the two tape measures cross and the measurements are equal. Mark the place where this happens.

STEP
2

MOUNT THE SPRING ASSEMBLY

- The spring assembly can either be mounted under the box or bottom rail, or the front plate on the spring assembly can be removed and it can be mounted through the box or bottom rail.
- If the spring assembly is mounted through the box or bottom rail, a 1-1/8-inch-diameter hole will need to be drilled for the shaft.
- Position the spring assembly over the mark created and mark the four mounting holes for drilling.
- Mount the spring assembly on both sides of the box. (Note: On a U.S. Tarp system, the respective mounting components will be labeled “D” for driver’s side and “P” for passenger side.)

STEP
3

ATTACH THE LOWER ARMS

- On the driver’s side of the box, turn the shaft on the spring assembly by hand in the counter-clockwise direction to the point where the shaft engages with the spring.
- Mount the pivot casting to the spring assembly with it pointing to the rear of the box.
- With the pivot casting pointing to the rear of the dump box, slide the lower arm onto the pivot casting.
- Repeat for the passenger’s side of the dump box, except turn the shaft in the clockwise direction.

STEP
4

ATTACH THE UPPER SIDE ARMS

- Slide one of the side arms onto one of the lower arms and lay it on the ground. Do not bolt the upper arm and the lower steel arms together yet.
- Attach the cross tube to the side arm mounted on the truck and lay the cross tube on the ground behind the truck.
- Slide two of the plastic tarp centering flanges onto the cross tube.
- Slide the pocket end of the tarp onto the cross tube.
- Slide the remaining two plastic tarp centering flanges onto the cross tube.
- Slide the other side arm into one other lower steel arm and attach it to the cross tube. If the cross tube is too long, it will need to be cut to the desired length.
- Swing the tarp arm assembly from the ground to the top edge of the rear of the dump box.
- Make sure the cross tube rests in the desired location, and attach the side arms to the lower arms.