

# THE SPECIAL ONE

PROFILE: BATCH PLANT

This S730 is the best truck in the fleet. It makes no difference at all that it's the only truck in the fleet. Batch Plant's Lee Batchelor explains why it was worth waiting for



**Three of a kind:** Batch Plant owner Lee Batchelor (right) with brother Paul (left), dad Terry and a very special Scania



V8 engine production. There was no rush, though, since Batch Plant already had a perfectly functional Scania V8. Despite other manufacturers smelling blood and knocking on Batch Plant's door, Batchelor was so impressed by Keltrucks Cardiff's Richard Woodland and the Scania's specification that he was happy to wait for the truck he was determined to buy. To do so cost about £210,000, including some £20,000 to SB Components. It will be maintained by Keltruck because, says Batchelor: "I want someone to look after it like it's their own and I trust Keltruck to do that."

**STARTING OUT**

Batchelor, now aged 39, began his working life around 1996 driving construction plant for delivery trucks for Newport civil engineers Noel Fitzpatrick Ltd. As its rail business got busier, Batchelor started to work part-time as an operator in 2001. However, after various jobs in the sector, he decided to

**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

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| <b>Make/model</b>   | Scania S730 A6x2   |
| <b>Engine</b>       | DC16 108 730, 16.3-litre V8  |
| <b>Max power</b>    | 720hp (537kW) at 1,900rpm  |
| <b>Max torque</b>   | 3,500Nm at 1,000-1,400rpm  |
| <b>Transmission</b> | GRSO925R overdrive three-pedal Opticruise, 12+2 speeds. 3.8:1 final drive. Retarder  |
| <b>Suspension</b>   | Full air on all axles. Lifting third tag axle  |
| <b>Cab</b>          | S-Series flat-floor long-distance Premium sleeper. Driver+ package, including black leather seats and trim with red stitching, and V8 interior styling. Comfort package with extended storage. Infotainment+ package with 7in display and DAB radio. Additional LED lighting, catwalks and styling features by SB Components |



gamble on branching out on his own in 2014 and Batch Plant Ltd was formed. Then, as now, it was with him as managing director and sole owner. Batchelor had a dream, the timing was right, and as he says: "If you want something enough, you'll get it." Initially a training school for construction operators, it eventually became Network Rail approved and business took off. At that point, having built up the business from his savings, Batchelor was able to stop worrying.

**WORDS: COLIN BARNETT / PHOTOS: TOM LEE**

**Commercial Motor** If you're only going to have one working truck on your fleet, you may as well have one that's a bit special. That's the philosophy of Lee Batchelor, whose business, Batch Plant, operates from Pontypool in south Wales.

For the rugby town that spawned the legendary 'Pontypool Front Row', synonymous with strength and determination, it's appropriate that Batchelor's new truck should share those qualities. A Scania S730 6x2 tag, plated to 70 tonnes GCW and uprated to 80 tonnes by SB Components, fits that description nicely.

As you may have gathered from the fleet

comprising one working truck, although the total inventory is a bit larger, road transport is not the company's core activity. But Batchelor is no less of a V8-loving diesel head for that. Batch Plant's primary activity is the training and certification of plant operators in the construction and rail infrastructure sectors. As this involves ownership of a wide range of specialist plant, much of which is under-utilised as it stands by for training requirements, a secondary business hiring it out has evolved. Moving it around south Wales and beyond is where the Scania comes in.

The new Scania replaces the first D16 BPL, also a black Scania V8, from 2015, although it retains the number. Despite being ordered in March 2018, it had 16-month delivery time, partly because of the halt in

“If you want something enough, you'll get it”



Batch Plant acquired its first truck in 2015, with Batchelor as the nominated transport manager. The new Scania will be pulling any one of Batch Plant's three trailers, a four-axle Andover and a couple of three-axle Kings. The trailers are used to carry the firm's 16 or so items of plant, right up to the heaviest, a 40-tonne 360-degree excavator. Much of the plant is converted to road-rail specification, such conversions increasing the machine's cost by anything from three to five times. Correspondingly, the rental rates are some three times higher.

The volume of contractors working for Network Rail is considerable, but there is a limited pool of trainers in the UK. However, funding for rail infrastructure is of a cyclical nature, currently at a low ebb. Batch Plant trainers travel throughout the UK, and even to Ireland, although the Republic's gauge of 5ft, compared with our 4ft 8½in limits the amount of plant-related work possible.

### TRACK STAR

Quite a few operators can boast big V8 Scania's, but not many have their own private railway track.

“  
Volvo and Mercedes are good trucks, but just don't have that Scania aura  
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At one end of Batch Plant's five-acre Cwmbran outdoors training facility, though, is 120 metres of twin-track railway containing just about every feature on the main line network. These include points and overhead lines, as well as examples of the steepest slopes and cambers that will be encountered. The facility is so realistic that it gets used by Network Rail and the fire service for training exercises.

Batch Plant's workforce consists of four trainers, including Batchelor himself, two administrators and a nurse who is required to undertake plant operators' medicals. And of course, there's someone to drive the Scania – this duty falls to Paul Batchelor, Lee's younger brother, who also acts as a trainer.

Father Terry has worked in trucks all his life and Batchelor sees the new Scania as a tribute to his dad's encouragement as much as anything. He still drives low-loaders, for another company, but is always on hand to give the benefit of his experience. Lee has three children. The oldest, 18-year-old Levi, helps with the business, but his real ambition – which he is well on the road to achieving – is to become a professional Mixed Martial Arts fighter. Batchelor himself has always been interested in boxing and MMA, as demonstrated by the original paintings on the head office





different animal, albeit a rare one. The 1961 JCB 3 is said to be the oldest surviving example of this landmark machine – JCB's first to feature the sideways sliding back-hoe which has since become a signature feature of such machines. Another highlight is one of the final heritage run of Land Rover Defenders.

As mentioned, Batchelor has an interest in art. He has an impressive collection of original paintings of famous boxers, real and fictional, many by local artist Pat Killian, himself a former Welsh amateur champion boxer who specialises in live paintings of the sport.

However, the pride of the collection, another Killian original, features the original Scania V8 on a patriotic background.

**If you would like to see more of Killian's work, go to [killianart.com](http://killianart.com).**

Unashamedly an indulgent toy, the 120-tonne 6x4 tractor was driven back to south Wales from its former home in Poland by brother Paul. The restoration will be relatively easy as the bright yellow cab is good enough not to need any paintwork, although the chassis will need some rejuvenation.

Also bright yellow, 537CWD, is a

# THE COLLECTION

**Lee Batchelor might** be a quietly efficient businessman, but that doesn't stop him having a keen interest in anything with an engine. Despite turning up for our meeting in a current Fiat 500, he has a small but interesting selection of cars and bikes. Star of the collection is the Scania 164C T-cab, with its 580 V8 engine, that is awaiting restoration.

walls, but he says his training was for fitness not competition. Naturally, as a proud Welshman, he is also a big rugby fan.

There's a 14-year-old daughter, Alysha, but it's the youngest child, Jago, 12, who is most into vehicles and the likeliest candidate to join the business long term. The final family member in the team is aunty Sharon, who looks after admin and the reception desk at the Pontypool office.

Batch Plant's chosen sector requires different skills to everyday driving, even more specialised than regular low-loader operations. Every move is pre-planned and tightly controlled. The job involves lots of night-time and weekend working. When you're unloading a road-rail machine at a level crossing in the middle of nowhere late on Saturday night, all of the Scania's extra lighting begins to make sense.

The Scania handles about 50 movements a week, although the majority are relatively local as the current largest rail infrastructure project is the electrification of the GWR lines in south Wales. It's rare that a second truck is required – but when it is, Batch Plant can call on friends to answer the call.

Like most of the firm's assets, the new Scania is paid for, but Batchelor admits he is "learning to use other people's money." The Scania just has to earn its keep. Asked about its projected working life, he smiles and says: "Until the next big engine arrives. If they launch an 800, I'll be first on the list." On the competition, he adds: "Volvo and Mercedes are good trucks, but just don't have that Scania aura." Batchelor has no plans to expand further, saying: "I'm happy with what I've got." □

