ARAMCO WORLD
magazine

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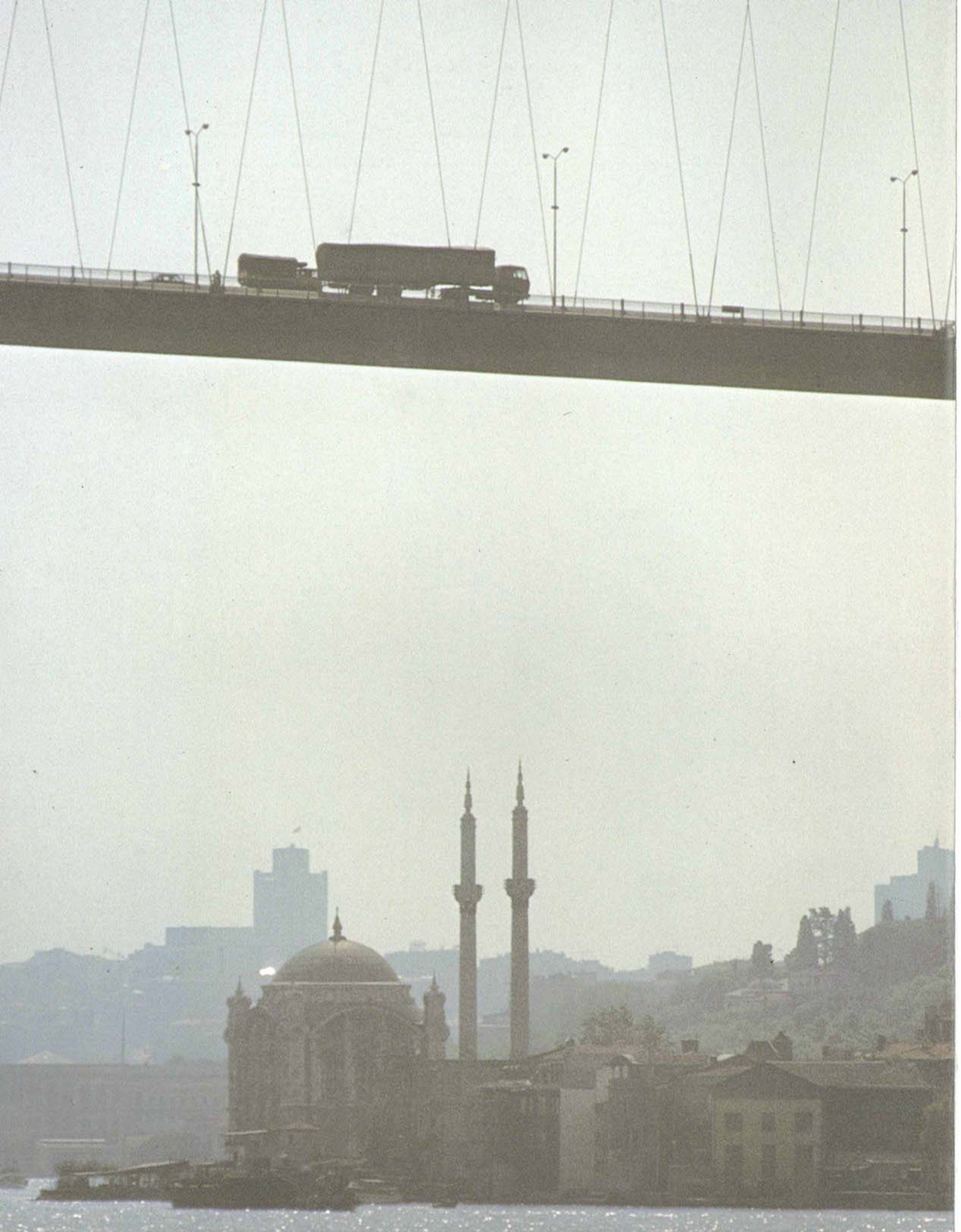
NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 1977

TRUCKERS EAST!



ARAMCO WORLD magazine

VOL. 28 NO. 6 PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1977

As numerous industrialization programs got underway in the Middle East in the early 1970's *(Aramco World,* January-February, 1977), massive imports from the industrialized world began to clog major seaports and air terminals in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. To maintain the flow of needed imports, therefore, most Middle Eastern countries turned to overland transport – great trucks hauling cargo by road. Soon, fleets of trucks were pounding east carrying thousands of tons of freight, on routes pioneered by two enterprising English drivers. For truckers, it meant a level of activity unprecendented in the industry.

To tell the story of the east-bound trucks, John Lawton, a veteran UPI correspondent now a free-lance reporter and writer in Istanbul, and Tor Eigeland, a Black Star photographer based in Spain, criss-crossed Europe and the Middle East interviewing and photographing drivers, owners, shippers and officials in most of the countries visited. They also rode with drivers on various legs of the trip and Lawton rode one rig all the way from London to the Saudi Arabian frontier.

A third contributor is S. M. Amin, the Aramco photographer who captured the reverent beauty of the Hajj in a special issue of *Aramco World* (November-December, 1974). Amin spent two weeks following the big rigs, by air and by automobile, through Saudi Arabia to destinations in Dammam, Dhahran and al-Khobar.

– The Editors

LAWTON

EIGELAND

AMIN

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Cover: From England, The Netherlands, Germany, France and Eastern Europe, fleets of trucks, pounding eastward night and day carry an ever-increasing percentage of goods to Arab countries and beyond. Here, on the final leg, a solitary truck heads south to Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. Photo by S. Amin.

◀ Crossing the new Istanbul bridge between Europe and Asia, trucks from the west haul tons of goods to the burgeoning economies of the east.

In the biggest transport bonanza of all time, it's...

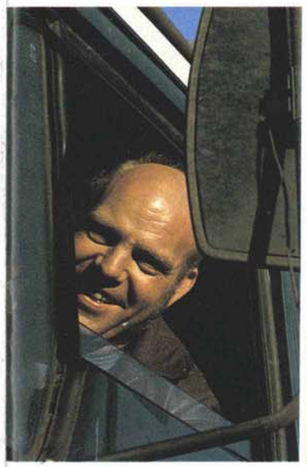
TRUCKERS EAST!

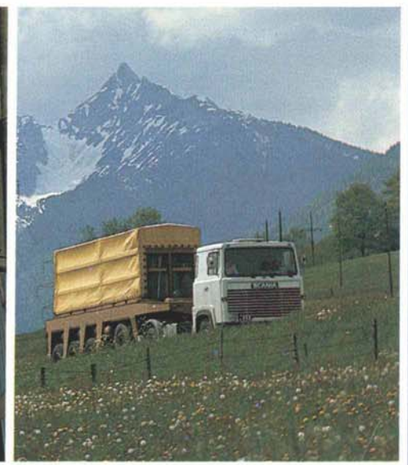
Day and night, the 40-ton, five-axle freighters pound the highways of two continents and 10 countries, sometimes racing along on broad, fast expressways, often inching and jolting along narrow rutted tracks. In the winter they creep up icy mountain roads and plow through blizzards. In the summer they face broiling heat and sandstorms. Like a column of giant ants they wheel to and fro between the factories of Europe and the import-hungry countries of the Middle East: 60-foot, 350-horsepower leviathans hauling everything growing economies can buy, from automobiles to after-shave lotion, frozen foods to printing presses.

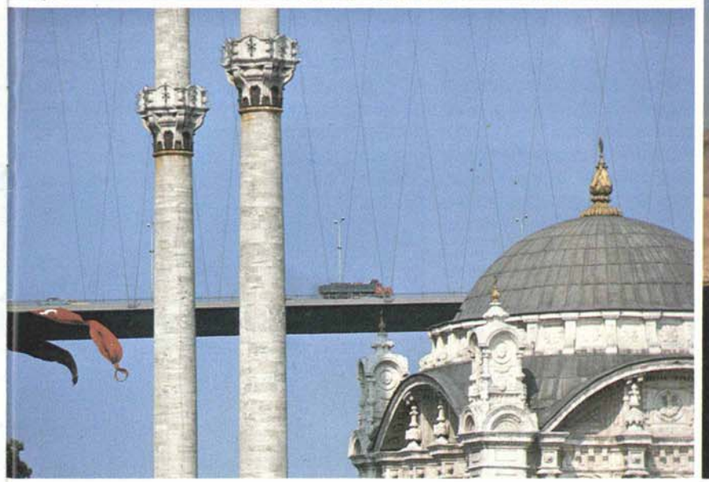
Some start from the Atlantic – where the ships off-load cargoes from America. Others start from the English Channel or the North Sea, or from loading bays behind factories in Britain, France, Scandinavia, West Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, and still others from centralized warehouses in Austria.

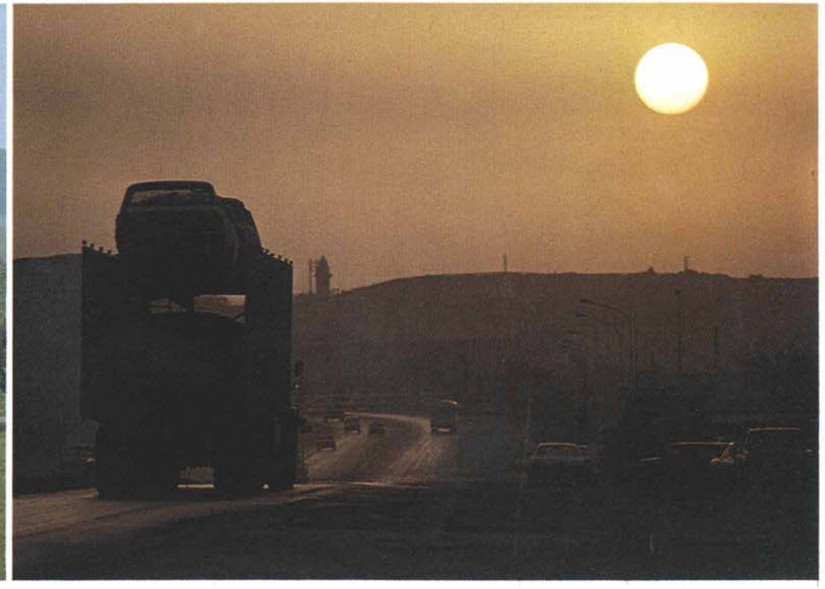
But they all, eventually, head east through the snow-capped Alps or across the plains of central Europe. And they all, at first, funnel into a single stream flowing into Istanbul and across the new mile-long suspension bridge to Asia – at the rate of 6,000 tons a day.

Then, at last in Asia, they fan out across the Middle East, hauling, some months, up to 180,000 tons of cargo worth some $270 million. For the trucking firms of Europe and the Middle East it's the biggest bonanza of all time.









Until recent years, the very thought of shipping goods to the Middle East by truck seemed absurd. Then, in swift succession, conditions began to change. The Arabian Gulf boomed and the demand for vast quanities of the industrial goods of the West soon began to clog ports from the Red Sea to the Arabian Gulf. Not long after, civil war broke out in Lebanon and the port of Beirut, a key trans-shipment point between the Mediterranean and the Gulf, was closed. And suddenly, unexpectedly, the trucks of Europe were plying the eastward trail.

For drivers it's long trail: from Europe and Great Britain to places like Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – the principal destinations – and sometimes as far east as Karachi and Kabul. And, for owners, it's a profitable trail – if they succeed. For those who get loads safely to their destination on time the rewards – up to $5,000 on a fully-loaded round trip – are great.

But so too are the risks. Bad weather, breakdowns, unexpected levies and – now a key problem – interminable border delays can plunge firms into bankruptcy overnight. For the drivers it's even worse. For they face all that and the danger of wrecks besides. Indeed, so many wrecked trucks and abandoned trailers litter the road east that truckers call it the "Ho Chi Minh Trail."

Even when things go well the grueling 8,000-mile round trip from the Atlantic to the Gulf makes tremendous demands on drivers and machines. Self-sufficiency is the rule of the road. Rest and repair facilities are rare. And, east of Ankara, roads snake over 9,000-foot summits, and, further on all but disappear beneath the shifting desert sands.

Until the recent completion of a new desert highway, for example, hardly a day would pass without at least one 40-tonner sinking into the sand while traversing a 70-mile stretch of unpaved track between the Jordanian border and the start of the 500-mile Tapline road to Dhahran in eastern Saudi Arabia.

Because of such breakdowns, but also for other reasons, drivers have often run out of money or been left stranded. When Turkey, for example, introduced an $800 road tax without warning, hundreds of drivers were left stranded at the borders. On another occasion a British firm went bankrupt and six drivers and their trucks were stranded enroute.

"It's like Russian roulette," said Leif Ron, a long-distance truck driver from Denmark. "When you pull out in the morning, you never know where you will go to bed that night."

Then there's weather. In winter much of Turkey is covered in ice and snow and raked by blizzards; some drivers have had to light fires beneath their trucks to keep the diesel fuel from freezing. In spring, there's mud, and in summer, sand. Along desert tracks, deceptive crusts cover treacherous layers of soft sand that can trap and hold a truck for days. "I can tell you, mate," one trucker confided, "this route is twisted in more ways than one."

Drivers, obviously, must be tough and resourceful. To allow for the unusual assortment of hazards enroute, and to keep on schedule, drivers are often at the wheel for 12 to 16 hours a day. They cook their own meals on small stoves fitted in their cabs, and sleep in bunks behind the driver's seat. And despite the discomforts and strain, they are not particularly well paid. West European drivers average about $1,200 a trip; East European drivers and others, much less. Many make only one journey, deciding immediately that they prefer the duller but lighter demands of home trucking to the trials, and sometimes illusory rewards, of the Middle East run.

On the other hand they've also developed a unique code that blends camaraderie and co-operation. "If you're in a fix," says one, "there's a good chance another truck, whatever the license plates, will stop and help."

Some drivers, to be sure, are better equipped than others. They also, in recent years, can usually depend on their vehicles: the sturdy Scania, Volvo Daf, Fiat, Mercedes and Mac 10-gear diesel articulated truck-and-trailer "road trains" which form the backbone of the Middle East trucking fleet.

The latest designs, moreover, feature steel-mesh guards to protect the windshield from missiles, heated mirrors and headlight wipers for mountain snows, and air conditioning for the desert. A few even have sinks.

Drivers, too, get some protection from the International Road Transport Union, whose blue and white TIR plates and customs-sealed cargoes usually sail through most European borders. TIR plates are not, however, much help crossing Middle Eastern frontiers, where the International Road Transport Union is not recognized and where, if a driver's papers are not in order, customs clearance can take days.

The owners, of course, have problems too – many of them stemming from success. As the great trucks proved that they could carry cargo safely and rapidly to the Middle East – and as more of them took to the road – the countries straddling the route began to raise taxes, impose quotas on the number of trucks that could use their roads, and increase restrictions. Austria, West Germany and Czechoslovakia, for example, now ban big rigs on Sundays and Turkish authorities, angered by the deafening, dust-scattering stream of trucks, have begun to demand that trucks detour around many towns and villages.

Success has also created delays at borders. In Bulgaria last summer, traffic at one point was backed up six miles from the border, and in Turkey customs formalities were holding up trucks for as much as three days. Success, moreover, has attracted predators – organized criminals who seize trucks, cargo and all.

For owners, there is also increasing competition. Large private trucking firms in western Europe, for example, have to compete with each other, with firms in Turkey, Iran and the Arab countries, and with the so-called "cowboys." These are independent individual drivers who, operating with hired vehicles and sometimes questionable documents, often try to cash in on the mushrooming Middle East trade – the fastest growing market in the world.

In addition Western firms face fierce competition from the currency-starved nations of the eastern bloc. The giant state-owned trucking firms of Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia, for example, operate more than half of the 6,000 lorries now assigned to the Middle East run.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the conditions that originally triggered or stimulated the trucking boom have changed. In Lebanon the war has ended and the port of Beirut, although still limited, is open. And in Saudi Arabia, where ports were particularly congested, the government, in a crash program to break the logjam, began to construct barge terminals. As a result, waiting times at Jiddah and Dammam were back to normal by spring. The Kingdom, furthermore, has undertaken a multi-billion dollar program to build new berths at Jiddah, Dammam, Jubail and other ports.

Similar programs were underway in other countries. Iran is planning a new $2-billion commercial port at Bandar Abbas and a $50-million computerized container terminal at Bandar Shapur. Dubai's Port Rashid is to be extended by another 22 berths – at a cost of $1.7 billion – and Sharjah is building a huge container terminal at Khor Fakkan.

The trucking firms, however, are still confident. They say that the Gulf will emerge as one of the world's top six trading areas by 1980, and predict that more and more Middle East imports will be delivered by road.

They point out too that, so far, they have found solutions to most problems. When, for example, some countries imposed quotas and route restrictions, the haulage firms instantly began to develop alternatives. One was to send their rigs piggy-back by train from West Germany to Yugoslavia. Another was to open a new route across the Soviet Union to Iran. A third was to cooperate in the creation of a roll-on, roll-off ferry service linking western European with eastern Mediterranean, Red Sea and Gulf ports.

Behind the truckers! optimism are some solid economic facts: though it costs about 12 per cent more to move freight by road than by ship, it takes a truck only a third of the time to deliver cargoes, and trucks provide door-to-door delivery to even the most remote factory, warehouse or construction site in the Middle East.

European haulage firms, consequently, are investing heavily in new trucks. The Budapest-based Hungarocamion recently added 125 vehicles to its 800-truck fleet, and has set up two 100-truck joint enterprises with Iran and Kuwait. And they are backing plans for the future – the vaguely discussed 1,400-mile highway across Turkey and the 3,000-mile north-south European motorway linking the Baltic with the Black Sea.

In the meantime, the trucks roll east – day and night, winter and summer, across two continents and 10 countries, 60-foot leviathans hauling the output of western factories to the booming Middle East in a transport bonanza beyond compare. ■

Like Vasco Da Gama and Marco Polo, Woodman and Paul did it... THE HARD WAY

Back in 1964, London ship owners and short-haul trucking executives chuckled indulgently when Mike Woodman and Bob Paul set off on the first of three trips from London to Kabul in a second-hand rig laden with Linotype letterpresses.

But it was Woodman and Paul, now co-directors of one of Europe's most successful long-distance trucking firms, who had the last laugh.

For their 30,000-mile, 12-month odyssey proved that trucking to the Middle East could be a commercial proposition, and helped blaze the trail for what is now one of the busiest overland trade routes in the world.

"True, they did it the hard way," wrote the British trade journal *Commercial Motor* in February, 1965, "but so did Vasco da Gama, Marco Polo, Columbus and Cook."

The original idea was Woodman's. While driving to England from a stint as transport officer with the British Royal Air Force in Singapore, he began to wonder if trucks could haul freight from Europe to the Middle East.

After mulling it over for a year – and deciding it could be done – he invested his savings in a 1962 Guy Warrior truck and persuaded Paul, an old friend, to abandon a thriving but uninspiring dental practice to become his co-driver. Then he went looking for freight to haul.

That, to be sure, took time. But eventually he persuaded Linotype and Machinery, Ltd. that direct, door-to-door, driver-accompanied delivery was speedier and less risky than the usual methods of sending freight to Afghanistan: a ship to Karachi, a train to Peshawar and a truck to Kabul. Linotype and Machinery, Ltd. gave him the job of driving $200,000 worth of equipment straight to Kabul.

As it was obviously a gamble – no one had ever trucked goods to Afghanistan before – Woodman quickly found that no insurance company would provide comprehensive coverage for the run. But then Lloyd's of London came to the rescue and, in April 1964, the two truckers loaded six Linotype letterpresses on a York Freightmaster semi-trailer and set off for Kabul.

The first leg was easy: they crossed the English Channel by ferry from Tilbury to Rotterdam and drove the Frankfurt- Munich-Salzburg- Graz route to the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade.

Then it got rough. "After Belgrade it was literally a track; all dirt to Istanbul," recalls Woodman. And east of Ankara it got worse, as the rig swung north along the Black Sea coast to Trabzon, crawled through three 7,500-foot mountain passes to Tehran, and bumped across the Desert of Death to Kabul.

"Dusty, bone-breaking, corrugated tracks, where the fastest you could drive was five miles an hour. Narrow mountain roads with sharp turns and loose surfaces and sheer drops on one side or the other. We got stuck countless times," says Woodman.

Customs formalities were equally primitive. In those days, TIR carnets – issued by the International Road Transport Union – extended only as far as the Turkish border, where it took Woodman and Paul five days to arrange a $17,000 bankers' guarantee to cover import duties on their cargo.

In Iran it wasn't much better. After much haggling at the Iranian border, it was agreed that a customs officer would accompany the truck across the country. "But after ten miles he'd had enough," recalls Woodman. "He jumped down from the cab and said he would take a bus."

But they got there. "The Great Britain-Afghanistan Express" arrived at its destination just 25 running days after leaving Britain. And when the machines were off-loaded the only damage found was to one crate.

The importer, Woodman said, was delighted. Had the machines come by the sea-rail-truck route, he told them, it would have taken at least three months. Furthermore, he said, because of the frequent re-handling, they would almost certainly have arrived damaged.

Relieved and triumphant, Woodman and Paul set off for home via Syria and Iraq, the southern route, where, ironically, on a straight asphalt roadway northwest of Baghdad, they got their worst scare of the trip.

"We passed a water-spraying truck coming in the opposite direction," recalls Woodman. "All of a sudden we were all over the place and jack-knifed off the road into the desert. They were spraying oil on the road, not water, to keep the asphalt in shape."

But again they made it and when the rig eventually pulled to a stop in London the distance clocked was exactly 10,000 miles. Unfortunately, Woodman says, they then learned that their tactical success was also a financial disaster. "We lost about $5,000," he says.

Undaunted, the two partners repaired their battered truck and tried again. In October, the same year, they hauled a second consignment of Linotype presses to Kabul and this time, having brought back a return load to Hamburg, wound up in the black. Four months later, after their third and final Linotype delivery to Kabul, their critics conceded. In February, 1965, *Commercial Motor*, under a headline reading "TRUCKING TO ASIA IS NO PIPEDREAM," concluded that Woodman and Paul's fledgling transport company, Astran International, would "very quickly require more than one vehicle to run to or from the East."

Just how many more, even Woodman never guessed.

Today, Astran has a fleet of 20 trucks, plus 60 chartered vehicles, shuttling constantly between Europe and the Middle East. Since the first trip to Kabul, Astran trucks have clocked about 14 million miles; in 1976 alone their massive white and bronze Scania and Volvo vehicles hauled about 18,000 tons of Middle East freight. "We doubled our operations in the past 12 months," said Woodman. "And we doubled them the 12 months before that too."

The center of Astran's booming operation today is the new 48,000-square-foot Middle East Freight Terminal at Addington, near London, in the leafy lanes of Kent.

There, chattering telex machines bring in round-the-clock reports of the drivers' progress and bustling secretaries move colored pins, denoting different vehicles, across a wall-to-wall map of Europe and the Middle East.

There too, outside the administration block, a man in a blue duffel coat and a waterproof hat hoses the dirt of 12 countries off a huge draw-bar trailer while mechanics, across the yard, tune up a tractor unit for its next trip east, and other workers in the warehouse load a Land Rover for the British Embassy in Tehran onto a Merriworth semi-trailer. The daring gamble, obviously, has been worth it.

At Astran's terminal in Kent, a drum of cable destined for Qatar's telephone system is loaded aboard a truck.

Top of page, pioneers Woodman (left) and Paul in front of one of their trucks.

On the other hand, Woodman says, it's still a challenge. "You now have asphalt all the way and customs formalities are much simpler. But despite all these improvements running time is much the same. It still takes 30 days to Tehran because of congestion."

Although Woodman now runs Astran from behind a desk, and not behind a wheel, the slim, slightly balding ex-driver still makes regular trips to the Middle East, surveying new routes, conferring with agents, and smoothing the way for his fast-growing fleet. And although Astran now handles shipments by sea and air also, Woodman still believes road is best.

"At the moment, straight-through road transport represents the most effective distribution method to a large part of the Middle East," says the man who started it all. ■

THE LONG ROUTE EAST

It was 7:00 a.m. and the white cliffs of Dover were barely visible through the morning mist. The big rigs stood wheel-to-wheel on the cold, damp dock waiting their turn to board the cross-Channel ferry to Zeebrugge. Ahead of them was a grueling, 4,000-mile run to the Middle East.

Then, with a deafening roar, the 40-ton truck-and-trailer "road trains" and the 32-ton articulated trucks mounted the boarding ramp and vanished into the cavernous belly of the ship. Moments later the ferry edged out of the harbor and our trip east had begun.

The Channel was choppy that morning, but the drivers barely noticed. Their attention was focused on the long road ahead – and on memories of previous trips. "The last time I went through Turkey," recalled one, "the snow was piled six feet high." "In just one night", said another, "I counted 30 trucks that had gone off the road." And on this trip, added still another, there would be mud.

Four hours after leaving Dover we docked at Zeebrugge. As the trailers had been sealed by British customs inspectors, clearance at the Belgian port was quick. In minutes the first truck off, a five-axle Fiat, was heading toward West Germany into a strong headwind. For one driver the long route east had already begun.

For me – and photographer Tor Eigeland – there was another stop first. Our destination was France, so at Ghent we wheeled south. We were going the same way but from Paris, another staging point on the Middle East run, another jumping off point on what truckers call the "Ho-Chi-Minh Trail."

The trail is actually a network of interlocking national highways linking West and East. Vital to the economies of countries in both parts of the world – and one of the busiest overland freight routes anywhere – it is also called "the new silk route."

Running from northwest Europe roughly southeast, the long route east crosses two continents, six time zones and more than 10 national frontiers. Running north from Italy, south from Scandinavia, and east from Britain, the Benelux, West Germany and France, it crosses central Europe in two main streams: one flowing across Austria and Yugoslavia, the other through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania to Bulgaria. After converging in Istanbul – and crossing the Bosporus into Asia – the route diverges again. At Ankara traffic forks east for Iran and Afghanistan, south for Kuwait, via Iraq, and for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates via Syria and Jordan.

In summer, with two drivers alternately driving and sleeping, the trip can be made in one week. In winter, when blizzards bury Anatolia and avalanches block the roads for days, it can take more than a month and sometimes a lot more. John Krogh, a 28-year-old Danish driver, once took 65 days to travel from Copenhagen to Tehran when Turkish snows trapped him for a week, unloading took 8 days, he was stranded without money for 10 days at the Iranian border, and had to wait another 21 days getting his crippled rig repaired. "I thought I would never get home", he said.

The average transit times, of course, vary. From London, the averages are 10-12 days to Baghdad, 12-14 days to Tehran, 12-14 days to Kuwait, 14-17 days to Jiddah, 17-21 days for the 5,600-mile distance to Dammam, and nearly 30

As early morning mist all but hides Dover's white cliffs, trucks move down the ramp to the ferry bound for Zeebrugge (previous page).

After drivers position their rigs aboard, they leave their cabs for the ferry's passenger section, carrying with them the documents that will permit their cargoes to cross ten countries enroute to the Middle East. Hours later, they drive off onto Belgian soil, clear customs and then —Eastward Ho!

days to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. As one trucker said, it doesn't really compare with long distance trucking elsewhere. The 3,000-mile coast-to-coast haul across the United States, for example, takes 3½ to 4 days.

But our starting point was Paris. We left in the rain on the Autoroute de l'Est, one of Europe's newest superhighways, and cruised through scenic northeast France to the ugly, smoke-stack-dotted heartland of West Germany's industrial Ruhr. There we joined the German autobahn network at Saarbrucken and drove to Munich over the Rhine and the Danube.

Compared to our smooth, fast drive across France, our progress now was slow. Once the envy of Europe, West Germany's now not-so-new highways were undergoing extensive repairs, reducing our speed, at times, to a first-gear single-lane crawl. Then, on Sunday, we reached the German-Austrian border near Salzburg and came to a complete halt. Hundreds of trucks, caught in the two nations' "never-on-Sunday" trucking ban, were parked three-deep, bumper-to-bumper half-a-mile back on both sides of the border—a graphic example of the conditions that are slowly raising transit times on the long route to the Middle East.

Once, according to Britain's *Economist,* trucks had a decided competitive advantage over ships, barges, trains and pipelines. "These are the four competitors to the truck. But singly and collectively they provide access to a fraction of the factories, warehouses, shops and homes to which roads give access. They are all slower in total journey time than the truck. They all have less operational flexibility."

As the bumper to bumper logjam at Salzburg suggests, however, this flexibility is slowly being strangled by a combination of prolonged border formalities and new restrictions. In addition to West Germany and Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have now banned truck travel on Sunday.

Long-distance truckers are finding it increasingly difficult to get permits to transit countries straddling the West-East route. Troubled by increased wear and tear on their highways, West Germany, Austria and Italy have imposed severe quota restrictions on trucks. Even Hungary, which briefly provided an alternative routing, is tightening up.

In response truckers have begun to "piggy-back" by train across central Europe, or by ferry from southern France to east Mediterranean and Red Sea ports. But although German railways have extended their piggy-back services through to Yugoslavia, low bridges enroute limit load sizes and the thus reduced cubic capacity, plus the high cost of rail travel, has began to boost trucking charges. As for the ferry services—now being developed through Iskenderun in southern Turkey, Latakia and Tartous in Syria, and Jiddah, Saudi Arabia—they do help. But direct overland delivery is 10 percent cheaper and takes about two-thirds the time.

Even with transit permits in hand drivers can come unstuck. Delays enroute cause many a permit to expire before truckers reach the country of issue. They must then sit it out on the border until a new permit comes through.

Fortunately for us, the drivers stalled by the Sunday driving ban at the German-Austrian border did not have to wait too long. At one minute past midnight police raised the barriers and off we roared into Austria's sugar-frosted Alps. As the trailers barely cleared overhanging crags and their slipstream caused roadside cottages to tremble, it was soon obvious why some countries frowned on the big rigs, and why the drivers complained so bitterly about the slow progress of a new highway being built parallel to the narrow, twisting road.

When completed, the new highway will link Salzburg with Klagenfurt, near the Austrian-Yugoslav border, and through a tunnel to be drilled through the Alps, connect with a planned $2-billion, 750-mile, six-lane highway extending across Yugoslavia to Bulgaria. Drivers then will be able to drive almost from one end of Europe to the other by modern high-capacity highways.

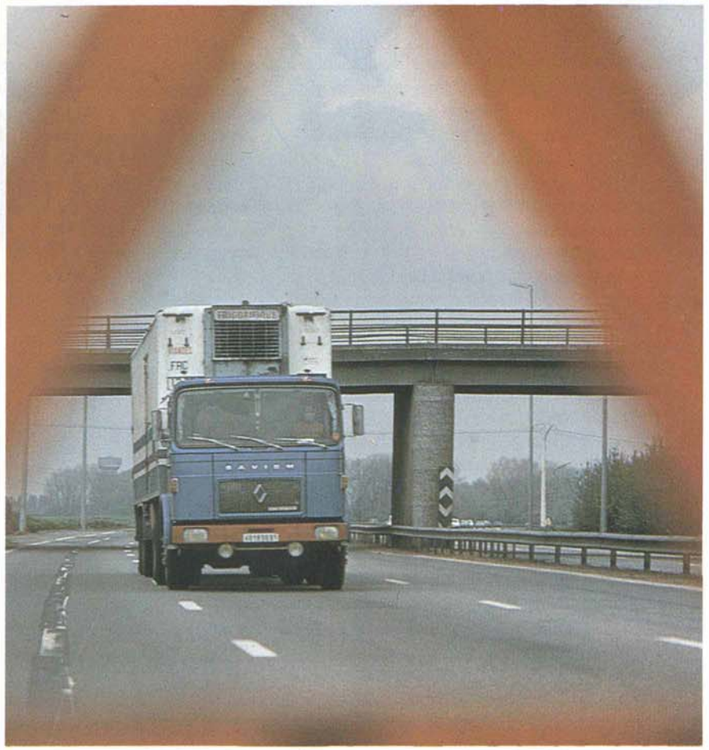
Unfortunately, drivers said, as we neared the Balkans, the highway will not be finished until 1978 at the earliest. Meanwhile, truckers must contend with the present two-lane routes across the Balkans.

As we moved on those roads we quickly saw why truckers find this leg of the long route particularly hard. Withered floral wreaths dot the roadside from Zagreb to Belgrade, sorry epitaphs to unlucky truckers. One truck we passed had most of its left side sheared off, the driver's cab buried about halfway back along the trailer. Further on, after Nis, the road twists east through narrow, unlit tunnels and along ledges hewn into the side of a rocky gorge. On one side are towering granite walls, on the other dizzy drops into the Morava River.

Then came Bulgaria, where road surfaces vary from smooth asphalt to bone-jarring cobblestones, and where phlegmatic policemen, drivers say, frequently levy on-the-spot fines. Enroute there is a medieval

Continued on page 14

From departure points all over Europe, the trucks and their cargoes head east. Some cross the Thames at Tower Bridge, others the Seine, and still others cross the canals and waterways of Holland as they set out to bring development and consumer products to the nations of the Middle East.



Continued from page 10

stone bridge, built to carry four-wheel ox carts. Miraculously, it survives the constant pounding of the 22-wheel juggernauts.

At the border with Turkey, at a post called Kapikule we found confusion. In addition to contending with officialdom, drivers explained, truckers must compete with thousands of

homeward-bound Turkish migrant workers. As we waited, the drivers began to tell stories about the stratagems that are sometimes necessary to keep on schedule.

At the Yugoslav border, for example, one trucker discovered that he lacked an important document. Undismayed, he jumped the processing sequence, starting in the middle so that his papers were not checked. By the time he reached the end of the process, a new shift of officials had come on duty, so he went back to the beginning, and blamed the omission of a stamp on the forgetfulness of the officer who has just gone off duty. Another time, at the Bulgarian border, a British driver found that insurance rates had trebled since his previous trip. As he did not have enough cash to cover the charges, the driver, an avid soccer fan, smiled at the customs officer and said, "Manchester United very good." The officer shrugged expansively and stamped a paper. Finally the driver casually admitted that Bulgarian soccer, was good too. A grin split the officer's face. "All right, English", he said, "pay at the other end."

Stratagems, however, are often not enough. Border officials may suddenly refuse to cash travelers' checks or demand an entirely new type of permit, and although the Geneva-based International Road Transport Union tries to keep track of new regulations and advise trucking firms, they are often too late. When Turkey, for example, slapped a three-cents-per-mile charge on international trucking – to help pay for the upkeep of her battered roads – hundreds of drivers without enough money to pay were stranded at Kapikule.

That incident, as it happened, triggered an international furor. To the Turks, whose road repair bill had risen to $100 million a year because of increased truck traffic, the toll was fair. But to Iran, the Middle East's main overland importer, it meant huge increases in shipping costs. And Bulgaria, whose trucking companies handle a large portion of the traffic, threatened reprisals against Turks crossing her territory to jobs in Europe.

But the Turks eventually won their case, and today a loaded rig crossing Turkey from West to East pays a tax of $800. Returning to Europe empty after discharging its cargo, it is charged $200.

And Turkish transit taxes are only part of the cost; some Arab countries also charge transit fees, which vary according to the value of the cargo.

The web of transit taxes, moreover, threatens to enmesh central Europe. Yugoslavia has announced its intention of introducing a tax on foreign truckers, and Austria is considering a similar levy. This would further increase Middle East road freight charges.

After Kapikule we joined the stream of trucks converging on the Bosporus. At the rate of one every three or four minutes, trucks trundle through the dusty border city of Edirne, pelt up and down the green hillsides of Thrace, skirt the Sea of Marmara and, finally, reach Istanbul.

Before the construction of the Bosporus Bridge in 1973 (*Aramco World,* September-October 1973), drivers say trucks had to wait between 24 and 48 hours – sometimes longer – to cross from Europe to Asia by ferry. Now they bridge the two continents in a matter of minutes, racing across the 1,000-yard span high above the city's towering minarets and busy sea lane. Again, it's

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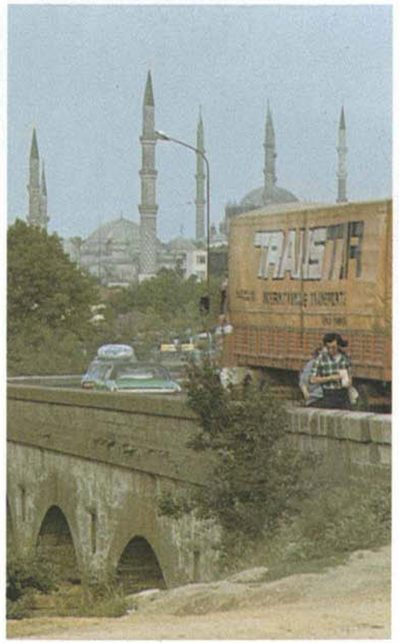
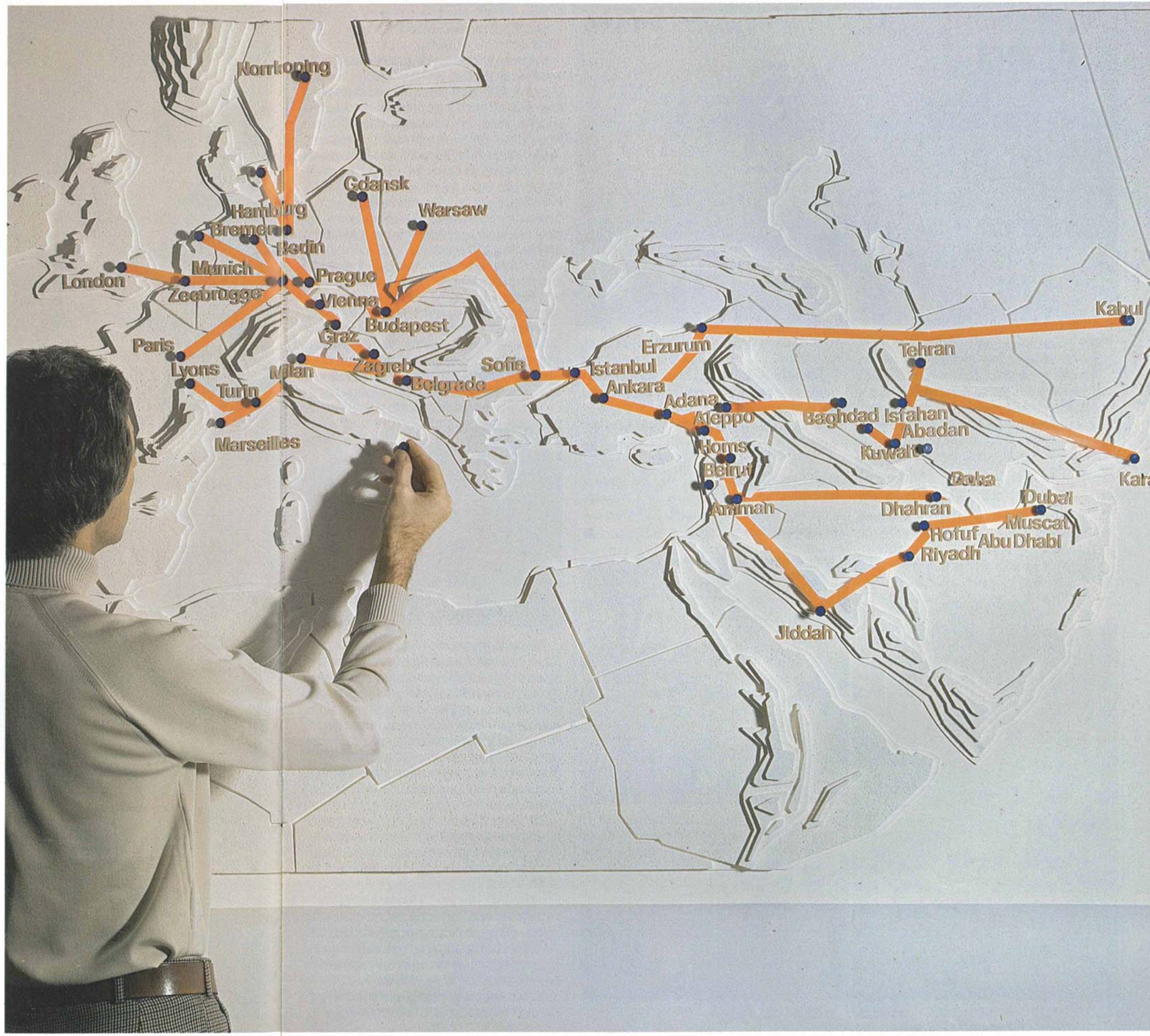


Just after crossing the Bulgarian-Turkish border, a Transtir truck rolls into Edirne en route to Istanbul and points east.



To drivers on the long route, he's the... FASTEST WHEEL IN THE EAST

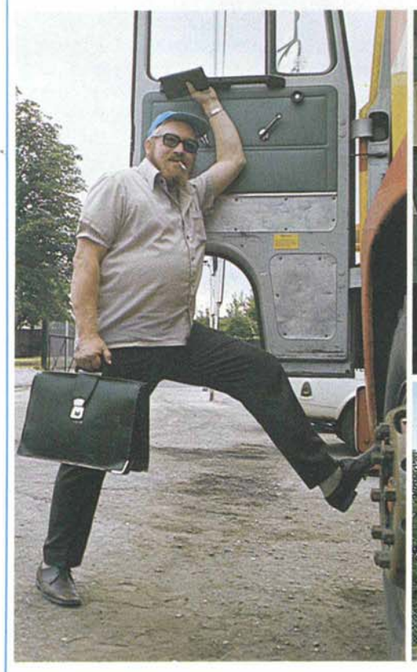
They used to call Dick Snow "the fastest wheel in the East." Close to 240 pounds, six feet, two inches tall, and looking almost as formidable as his truck, Dick Snow, with his fast 22-day round trips to the Middle East, became, in the early days of the trucking bonanza, a legend in trucking circles. One of the most experienced drivers on the Middle East run – nearly 50 trips in eight years – Snow won a reputation for stopping for nothing. "I drive from A to B as fast and as safely as possible; that's what transport's all about," he once said.

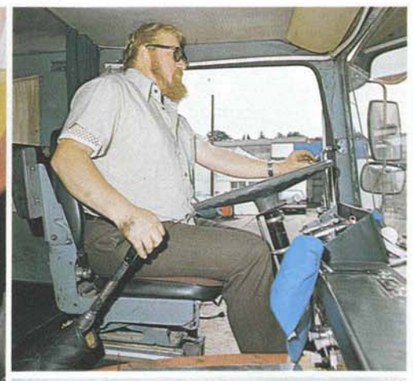
Unlike most drivers, who preferred to travel in groups, Snow was a loner. "Convoys slow you down," he said. "If you break down, you break down. Everyone goes out with the same chance."

An ex-seaman, now 40, Snow said that he took up long distance driving because he liked his freedom. "You are on your own. You are free. You can do a good day's work without worrying about regulations."

At least, he added regretfully, it used to be that way. Today's traffic regulations restrict truck drivers to 450 miles a day. "I could do that before lunch," said Snow, who considered "a good day's work about 600 miles."

Because he must now obey such regulations, and because more and more trucks are taking to the road, Snow said, it has been increasingly difficult to keep up the speed of his round trips to Tehran. The work is also getting more and more impersonal. "It used to be much friendlier," he said. "But now, well, now it's a rat race." Then he grinned. "Of course, I still plan to win the race." ■





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costly; trucks pay a $5-an-axle toll to cross the bridge.

But to Turkey, the cost is justified. From such tolls the country paid off the cost of the bridge less than 30 months after it opened and current revenues are financing a network of superhighways around Istanbul from which long-distance truckers will benefit further.

Like the Salzburg-Klagenfurt road, however, and the proposed Yugoslavia-Bulgaria highway, the advantages of this network still lie in the future. On our trip the highway soon petered out and we were back to two-way traffic. We were once again, drivers said sourly, on a hard leg of the route.

The highway between Istanbul and Ankara, they said, carries five times more traffic than it was designed for and is one of the most dangerous stretches on the Middle East run.

At Ankara, the long route to the East divides. Trucks bound for Iran and Afghanistan head east and those going to the Gulf swing south. As our drivers were heading toward Saudi Arabia, we turned south – with few regrets. The drivers had told us about the other leg of the route – through the formidable mountains of eastern Anatolia, and about the Tahir Pass, 9,000 feet high at the summit, almost impassable four months of the year. On the steep, ice-sheeted roads, trucks slide even when stationary and when it is too dangerous to brake, the only way to slow down is to run from drift to drift.

Once, our drivers said, a British driver named Gordon Pearce spent Christmas lighting fires under both fuel tanks and the engine to keep the diesel fuel from freezing after his truck stuck in a snow drift halfway up a mountain in eastern Turkey.

The temperature was 32 below zero – Fahrenheit. When the brakes froze, each of the seven axles had to be jacked up in turn to free them. Pearce and his co-driver fought a losing battle as the diesel fuel became too thick to siphon out of the tank to keep the fires going. Finally, he huddled in his cab and wrote in his diary, "All hope gone." At daybreak he discovered a road repair camp 200 yards away and spent four days there before he could drive on.

Our leg of the route, fortunately, was easier. Having wheeled south at Ankara we began to climb. By then Eigeland was in a truck with two Danish drivers and I had joined a convoy of four British trucks.

Halfway up "the box" – five forward gears, each available in high or low ratio at the flick of a switch – we were moving steadily in close file out of the smog shrouding the Turkish capital. An hour later we were in high-high gear and speeding across a rocky, arid plateau at 70 miles an hour, the landscape unfolding across the wide windshield like a travelogue in Cinerama.

Five hours after our dawn take-off, fueled with nothing but a cup of coffee and a cigarette, we stopped by the road side to warm up some sausage and beans – and to talk about the problems of eating during the long hauls east.

Ask a trucker where the best place to eat is enroute, and he will usually reply: "In your own cab." Drivers cook most of their meals themselves on two-burner camping stoves installed in place of the passenger seat, if they are traveling alone, or balanced on the dashboard if they are driving with a partner.

They supplement their diet of tinned food and milk, cereals and cookies with fresh fruit and bread bought from roadside vendors, or an occasional motel meal. If they do eat "out", it is usually at a place they know they can get egg, steak and french fries. "None of this fancy foreign food", said a British driver. "You can't afford a 'funny tummy' on a job like this."

Our meal was quick – to keep on schedule, all meals have to be. Then we washed up, stowed our gear, added our empty baked beans cans to the growing pile in the rest stop and moved out. "Give it plenty of stick (acceleration) going up", yelled Barrie

Critchlow as he gunned the lead truck forward in the direction of the Taurus Mountains.

An hour later, we were twisting and weaving around tight, hairpin bends that most drivers would have difficulty getting a car around. Occasionally, I caught a glimpse in the ravine below of a rusting wreck that had not made it.

The descent was no better. Each time we hit a pothole the beautifully sprung seat of the Scania 230 nearly catapulted me though the cab roof and the vibrations scattered my belongings stowed on the bunk behind me.

Finally, ten hours after leaving Ankara, we bellied out onto Turkey's Mediterranean coastal plain and pulled in for the night at a small service station near Adana. As Charlie Norton, with whom I was traveling, still had to go into town to telex his whereabouts to his company, I helped get the bunks ready – no easy job. Truckers carry enough food and clean clothes for the entire trip, and as they store them in the cab – along with sleeping bags, extra blankets, tools, spare parts, cooking utensils, first aid kit, dishwashing soap and toilet paper – making room for sleeping

was a major job. Space, in fact, is at a premium throughout the big rigs.

Fresh water tanks, spare propane tubes, picks and shovels, for example, are lashed to the roof of the cab; snow chains and spare tires are slung from the chassis.

For Charlie it was a short rest. I had barely closed my eyes when Charlie was drawing back the curtains round the cab. A cold wash and a hot cup of coffee, and our four-truck convoy was on its way again. It was about 7:00 a.m.

As we drove, Charlie told me still more about driving east. It was, he said, his 15th trip to the Middle East, this time with 16 tons of traffic signal equipment for Riyadh. Two other drivers in the convoy, Barrie and Dave Prosser, were both driving for Carmans Transport Ltd., carrying 22 tons of wood piling for a school near Dammam. They too were veterans of the Middle East run. The fourth, Jim Fletcher, was an owner-driver on his first trip to the Gulf. He was carrying a mixed load of oil equipment and fittings for Dhahran and Doha in a righthand-drive Volvo.

Fletcher's fee, from Antwerp to Qatar, he said later, was about $5,600. He estimated his profit after deducting running costs at $3,700: more if he could pick up a return load somewhere on the way back. "But if anything goes wrong", he said, "I could lose the lot. Everything I own is tied up in this truck."

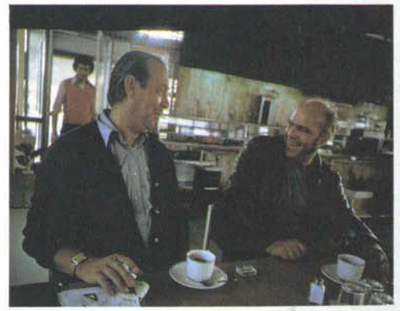
We were now rounding the northeast corner of the Mediterranean and again the routes diverged. Ours lay south towards the Syrian border while traffic bound for Iraq and Kuwait headed east via Gaziantepe, Urfa and Mardin to Zakho on the Turkish-Iraqi border.

Again, no one in our convoy minded going south; until recently, the drivers said, no truck traveled on from Zakho without a military escort, because Kurdish guerrillas were trying to block shipments into Baghdad, the capital of Iraq.

During that period, trucks once formed a convoy of 15 vehicles with a six-man guard at front and rear, recalls Janson Vick, a British trucker delivering a load of Scottish electronic equipment to a new city in southern Iraq.

Today Kurdistan is peaceful and the road surface quite acceptable. But because there are difficulties in getting Iraqi visas, the route through Syria – our route – is more popular.

At Bab-el-Hawa on the Syrian border we joined a line of about 50 trucks and, four hours later, rolled through the last checkpoint and headed for Aleppo in a driving rain. Later, in the dark, we stopped at a small filling station to fuel up, went back to look for Dave and Jim and finally headed for the parking spot where it had been agreed earlier we would spend the night. Dave and Jim were already there when we



arrived, having taken another route.

We had then been on the road for 15 hours and were all dog-tired, but Charlie and I decided to have a cup of coffee with Barrie before going to bed. As usual the talk focused on their experiences as drivers.

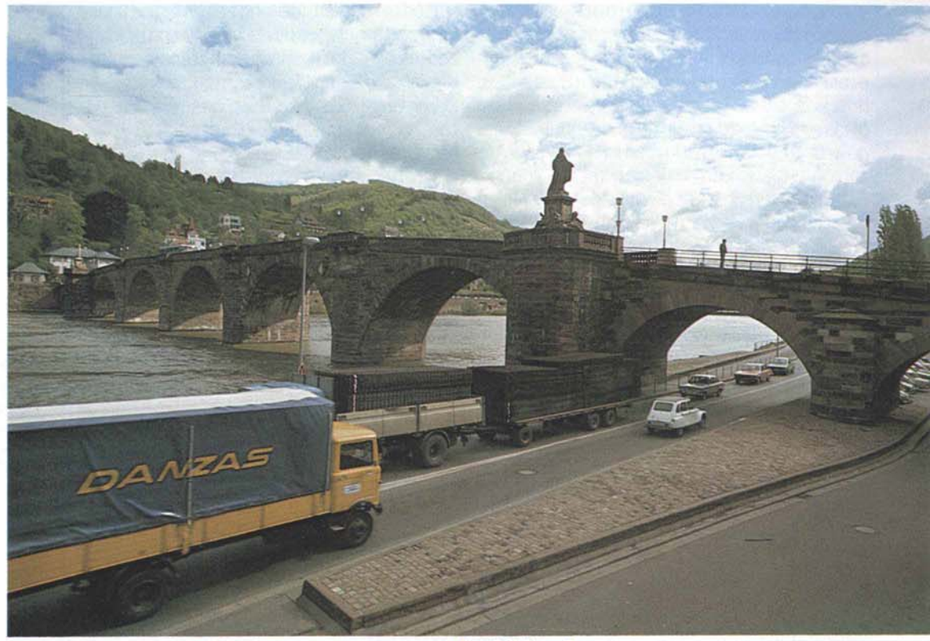
Both men had been driving trucks since their teens, living in their cabs nine months of the year for longer than they cared to remember. Barrie had tried other jobs, including a stint as a bouncer at a London night club, but had always returned to the road.

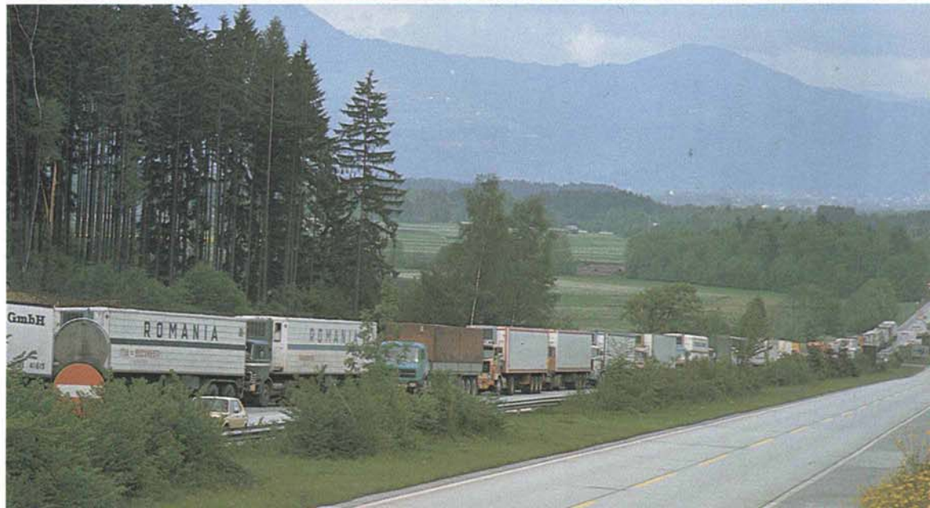
Along their route, eastbound truckers pass through the varied scenery – and face the varied hazards – of as many as ten countries.

At left, a load of portable office units rolls past Werfen Castle south of Salzburg, Austria.

Below, Dutch driver Jan Braamer and friend stop for coffee in the Austrian Alps.

At right, roads wet or muddy with melted snow make driving difficult, and cramped quarters in the cab make even the tea breaks awkward. Narrow streets and old bridges – this one in Heidelberg – foreign-language signs, the danger of accidents, and long lines at the borders add to the drivers' burdens.





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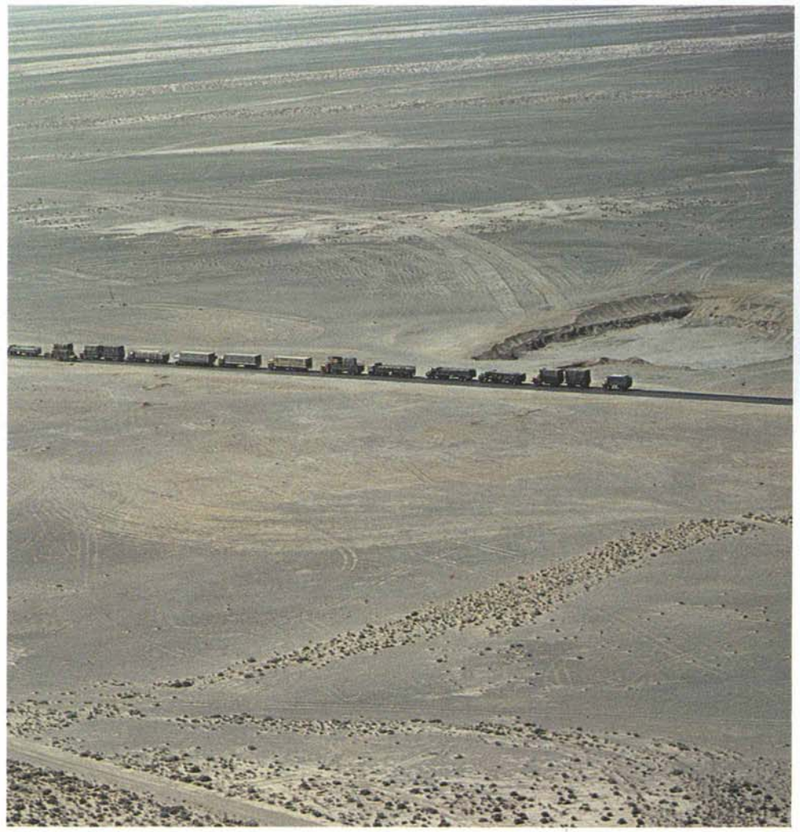
"I took this job to get away from it all", he said. "I don't like people breathing down my neck telling me how to do things. I pick up my load and it's up to me to get it there."

Charlie, a quiet lanky man in black jeans, cowboy boots and a Stetson, scoffs at some of the wild exploits of his colleagues. "Nothing ever happened to me", he says, "and that's how I want it." As I agreed, we were both pleased the next day with an uneventful run down the southerly main road to Damascus and on to the Jordanian border, where a young Palestinian ran up waving wildly. He was neatly dressed and well-mannered and all four drivers handed him their documents without hesitation.

His name was Muhammad Abu-al-Jhanzar, I learned later, and he had built himself a flourishing business helping truckers process their papers at the frontier. A refugee, he supported his family on his earnings and had



even been able, that year, to send his mother and father to Mecca for the Hajj. The amazing thing about all this was that Muhammad, 16, was a deaf-mute.

Leaving him to handle their paperwork, the drivers adjourned to the Ramtha Guest House alongside the border for double-egg, steak and french fries and luxury of luxuries – a hot shower, courtesy of one of the numerous small entrepreneurs along the route who earn good livings by providing such simple facilities for the truckers.

Here, in Jordan, the long trail diverged again, one road running south to Medina and Jiddah and then east to Riyadh, the other southeast to Al Kahfah and along the Tapline highway to Dammam. From there, a first class road continues along the Gulf coast: north to Kuwait and south to Doha.

Until recently, when the Saudi Arab government completed a new highway linking the Jordanian border with the Tapline road, truckers used to dread this leg; it was 70 miles of cross-desert travel with only scattered oil drums to mark the way and treacherous sand lying in wait. But by the time of our trip the new highway was open and, as our small convoy split up, farewells were quick as Charlie headed south for Jiddah and Riyadh, the others southeast for Dammam and Doha.

But as they disappeared into the dusk, I could still hear the melody that Charlie had played constantly on the tape recorder fitted in his cab. It was a truckers' ode entitled "Six Days On the Road." That's nothing, I thought, compared to this route. Nothing at all. ■

EVERYTHING-AND THE KITCHEN SINK

Nowhere is the scope of Middle Eastern development demonstrated more dramatically than in the variety of products delivered to the Middle East by truck.

"Cargoes include everything from a suitcase of personal effects to a whole factory", says Tony Soameson, a British trucking executive.

Initially, Soameson said, most of the goods delivered to the Middle East were related to oil production. But the past few years have seen a significant switch to consumer products, so that today trucks to and from the Middle East are carrying everything – almost literally – from A to Z. Some examples:

A *for* After-shave: *British trucker Spiers and Hartwell began Middle East deliveries in 1974. Their first cargo was a consignment of after-shave lotion for Jiddah, Saudi Arabia.*

B *for* Bathtubs: *Carmans Transport Ltd. regularly haul bathroom fittings from the British "potteries" to Kuwait. Once, though, they delivered 20 tons of rubber bands to a canning factory in Iraq.*

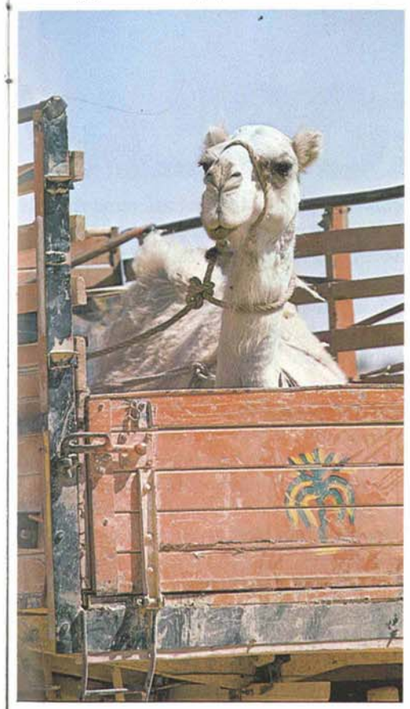
C *for* Crane: *In 1975 Herman Ludwig (Nederland) BV. diverted its entire 10-truck, Rotterdam-based fleet to Saudi Arabia. Cargoes have included airplane tires from France and a 23-ton mobile crane from Holland.*

D *for* Desalination Plant: *Drinking water in Qatar is provided by a desalination plant delivered from Britain by truck. Other overland consignments for Qatar have included an outdoor color television unit complete with mobile studio.*

E *for* Excavators: *Hydraulic excavators used to extend irrigation systems in north Afghanistan were transported by a convoy of six low-loaders. The 4,800-mile journey from South Wales to the Russian-Afghan border took 21 days.*

F *for* Furniture: *Because trucks offer door-to-door service, the furniture and other household effects of diplomats and businessmen transferred to the Middle East often go by road. So does Italian furniture to be sold in shops in Saudi Arabia.*

G *for* Gas Turbines: *Three 18-ton Ruston and Hornsby gas turbines, to help boost oil flow by pipeline from Mosul to the Mediterranean, were delivered by Astran International to the Iraq Petroleum Company. The same firm has also trucked gymnasium equipment to Iran.*



H *for* Hairdryers: *A $2.5-million consignment of Ronson cigarette lighters, electric shavers and hairdryers was transported on five 36-foot trailers to Kuwait. A helicopter that crashed on Das Island was taken to Britain for repair — by truck.*

I *for* Insulation: *One of the longest convoys ever to make the Middle East run — 17 vehicles — delivered pipeline insulation to Saudi Arabia.*

J *for* Jet Engine: *The first-ever Concorde engine to travel by road was trucked 3,640 miles from Britain to Iran for display at the 1975 Tehran International Trade Fair.*

K *for* Kitchen Sink: *Not only the sink, but all types of household appliances are delivered regularly by road to the Middle East, even as far as Oman. Equipment and fittings for hotels and offices are also transported by truck.*

L *for* Linotype: *One of the first cargoes trucked east was a consignment of Linotype letterpresses. Considered a dubious exercise in 1964, the eventual success of the 5,000-mile London-to-Kabul run helped pave the way for today's Middle East trucking boom.*

M *for* Money: *Currency minted in western Europe for a Middle Eastern nation in delivered by truck. For security reasons, shippers withhold additional details.*

N *for* Nuts: *Mars, for their bars, backload hazelnuts from Turkey in British trailers homeward-bound from the Middle East. Cadburys keep Arab customers supplied with chocolate by refrigerated truck.*

O *for* Oil Pumps: *Drills for boring wells, pumps for extracting oil, and marine terminal equipment for loading it onto tankers appear regularly on Middle East manifests. Until Saudi ports were cleared, Aramco alone took delivery of an average 20 tons each day of truck-transported equipment and supplies from western Europe.*

P *for* Pea-Processing Plant: *Astran International hauled four truckloads of British-made equipment for a new pea-processing plant in Mzeirib, Syria. Scandinavian prefabricated homes are ferried across the Baltic to Gdansk and transported by Polish trucks to Saudi Arabia.*

Q *for* Quinine: *Quinine and other pharmaceuticals are carried regularly by truck from West Germany and Italy to the Middle East.*

R *for* Rolls-Royce: *A three-and-a-half-ton Rolls-Royce limousine was delivered by trailer from London to the palace motor pool in Tehran for the Shah of Iran.*

S *for* Sand: *Thirteen-and-a-half-tons of coarse-grain sand were trucked from Britain to Baghdad for water purification. And, weighing in at 36 tons, a stone sorter and crusher delivered by Schenker & Co. A.G. from Wels in Upper Austria to Beirut was one of the heaviest single loads ever transported east by truck.*

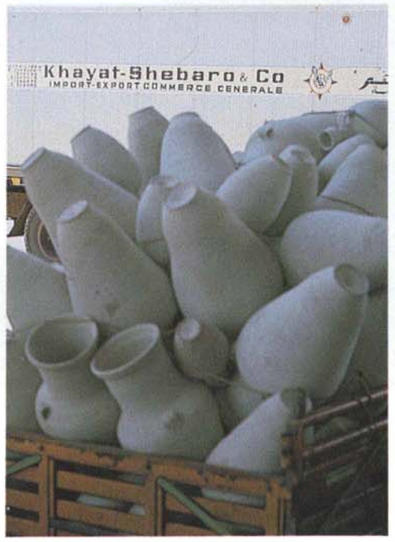
T *for* Transformer: *Another heavyweight was a 31-ton General Electric transformer to provide additional power in Dammam. The 4,100-mile journey from Britain to Saudi Arabia by special heavy-duty truck took 23 days. And if you are driving through Riyadh, watch out for the traffic lights... even they came by truck.*

U *for* Underwater Equipment: *Besides commercial diving equipment, snorkling, spear-fishing and scuba-diving gear for underwater recreation are trucked to Middle Eastern countries.*

V *for* Vateras: *One of the fastest deliveries to the Middle East was a consignment of vateras solid-state control centers needed urgently by Tarmac Construction Ltd. to complete a $9-million cement plant in Qatar. A Volvo tractor unit hauling 12 eight-foot-high, four-foot-wide centers on a special step-frame trailer made the 4,800-mile express run from Sweden to the Gulf in nine days.*

W *for* Wood Piling: *Timber for schools and other construction is hauled regularly by Carmans Transport Ltd. to Saudi Arabia. Other building materials transported by truck include wall paper and window panes.*

X *for* X-ray Equipment: *To outfit a string of hospitals being built for the Saudi Arab Government, a German firm is shipping X-ray and other medical equipment overland.*



Y *for* Yarn: *Astran International transported 12 tons of woolen yarn to Damascus to be woven into carpets.*

Z *for* Zodiac: *Copies of the Cable and Wireless magazine,* Zodiac, *were transported by truck from London to Doha for distribution to C & W Middle East employees.*

THE YUGOSLAV CONNECTION

Strain Lukovic of Yugoslavia waved his huge fist in the air to emphasize the point. "If the Bulgarians do it in 15 days," he said, "we do it in 10."

Competition? In the Communist bloc? Indeed there is. Along with such other capitalist practices as bonuses, pay incentives and price cutting – all part of an intensive effort by east European countries to earn much-needed hard currency.

So far the effort has been astonishingly successful. Huge state-owned trucking combines already field more than half of all the 6,000 trucks assigned more or less regularly to the Middle East run. As a result, some western European companies have begun to complain about what they see as unfair competition.

That, however, is not the way Strain Lukovic sees it. A large Serbian with graying wavy hair, Lukovic, is acting general director of Transped, Yugoslavia's biggest trucking fleet. He says that Transped's success on the Middle East route is due to Yugoslavia's good relations with the Arab world and to its system of employee incentives.

"As a non-aligned country, Yugoslavia has very good relations with non-aligned countries in the Middle East," says Lukovic. "Yugoslav building firms are doing a lot of work in Iraq, Kuwait and the Emirates. Transportation follows naturally."

"And our drivers," he goes on, "are not paid monthly, they are paid by results. They get a percentage of the profits. The more they earn for the company, the more they earn for themselves."

If Transped truckers work hard, says Lukovic, they can earn up to $800 a month – two and a half times the average Yugoslav salary.

And they do work hard. Drivers travel in pairs. One drives while the other sleeps, so the truck never has to stop. And as maintenance crews and administrative staff also share in the bonus scheme, they insure rapid truck turn-around and tight schedules. "It is very important to the exporter," says Lukovic, "that his goods arrive on time."

At the beginning of the 1970's, Transped was a relatively small domestic concern transporting about 100,000 tons of goods annually. Today, as a result of its aggressive policies, its 250 gun-metal blue articulated rigs and its silver refrigerated trucks carry nearly 800,000 tons of goods a year from Europe to Africa and Asia. Between 70 and 100 of its vehicles are permanently employed on the Middle East run.

Transped, furthermore, has twice won Yugoslavia's coveted "May First Prize," an industrial honor for rapid development, exceptional business results and considerable foreign-currency savings. Last year the company earned nearly $9 million in foreign exchange.

When Lukovic, 47, joined the company as a junior executive in 1956, Transped had only 400 employees. Today, it has 1,800, a growth that Lukovic atrributes to the Middle East trucking boom.

"There has been a tremendous increase in Middle East business in the past five years," says Lukovic. "And we expect it to continue on at least the same level for five years to come." He also expects that Transped will have a good share of that business. To cope with the increased tonnage, Transped is planning a joint trucking venture with Iraq and by 1980 hopes to be handling about 1.7 million tons of cargo a year and earning over $10 million in hard currency annually.

Transped, moreover, is just one of the east European trucking combines that are thinking big. In Austria, recently, some small trucking firms were approached by middlemen with takeover offers. The owners thought the offers came from a large conglomerate – but as it turned out, the "conglomerate" was actually Hungary. ■

DIARY OF A LONG DISTANCE DRIVER

Sept. 13
Left Rotterdam at 10:00 hrs. Crossed Dutch-German border at Bergh-Elten. Arrived Steigerwald at 21:00 hrs. Stopped for night.

Sept. 14
Drove via Munich to German-Austrian border at Schwarzbach-Walserberg. Four-hour delay at customs. In Graz, had breakdown so stayed overnight.

Sept. 15
Discovered in morning that large diesel tank was blocked. Continued driving on small tank to Austrian-Yugoslav border at Spielfeld-Sentilj. Arrived border at 08:00 hrs. and joined queue of 60 trucks. Finally crossed border at 17:00 hrs. Drove through Maribor and Zagreb to Novska. Stopped for night.

Sept. 16
After unsuccessful four-hour attempt to repair main tank, decided to make rest of journey on small tank only. Arrived Pojate at 21:00 hrs. Roads very bad.

Sept. 17
Drove to Yugoslav-Bulgarian border via Nis and Pirot. Crossed border at Dimitrovgrad-Kalotina without difficulties. Drove via Sofia to Haskova, about 19 miles from Bulgarian-Turkish border.

Sept. 18
Arrived border at 07:00 hrs. and joined long queue of trucks. Reached Turkish Kapikule customs at 18:00 hrs. All settled by 20:00 hrs. Drove to parking spot and stopped for night. Today had trouble with truck's brakes.

Sept. 19
Drove to Istanbul via Edirne. Crossed Bosporus Bridge and headed for Ankara. Highway ended about 18 miles past Istanbul. Then began long row of mountain passes. Driving in dark was highly dangerous . . . If we had not been careful we would have been forced off the road. Stayed overnight in mountain village about 36 miles from Ankara.

Sept. 20
From Ankara, drove in direction of Adana. Driving through Taurus mountains very difficult. After Tarsus, climate suddenly changed. We were now in the warm Mediterranean zone. At night, as I lay in the truck, someone tried to force the side window. As I sprang out of bed, he ran away.

Sept. 21
Drove via Adana, Iskenderun and Antakaya to the Syrian border post of Bab-el-Hawa, where we received a manifest which allowed us to drive to Saudi Arabia. Stayed overnight at small village about 40 miles past border.

Sept. 22
Discovered in morning that truck had flat front tire. Changed it and drove to Damascus via Homs. Roads varied . . . Stayed overnight at Syrian-Jordanian border.

Sept. 23
. . . customs inspector started work late . . . on the 70 waiting vehicles. After three hours running to and fro we were able to clear customs and drive to Jordanian border post Ramtha. There, a Jordanian manifest had to be attached to Syrian manifest for transit through Jordan.

A small army of men and boys practically tore the papers out of our hands to have them dealt with. They were ready rather quickly. It was possible to drive through Jordan only twice daily, at 10:00 hrs. and 15:00 hrs. in convoy with military escort. The passports of all the drivers were carried by an officer of the escort.

. . . We arrived at the Jordanian border post E4 at 22:00 hrs. There were two diesel pumps, but both were empty, so I had to transfer (fuel) from my large tank to my small tank with pipe and bucket. Today had been hot, but at night we had to crawl into double sleeping bags because of the cold wind. We were now on the edge of the desert.

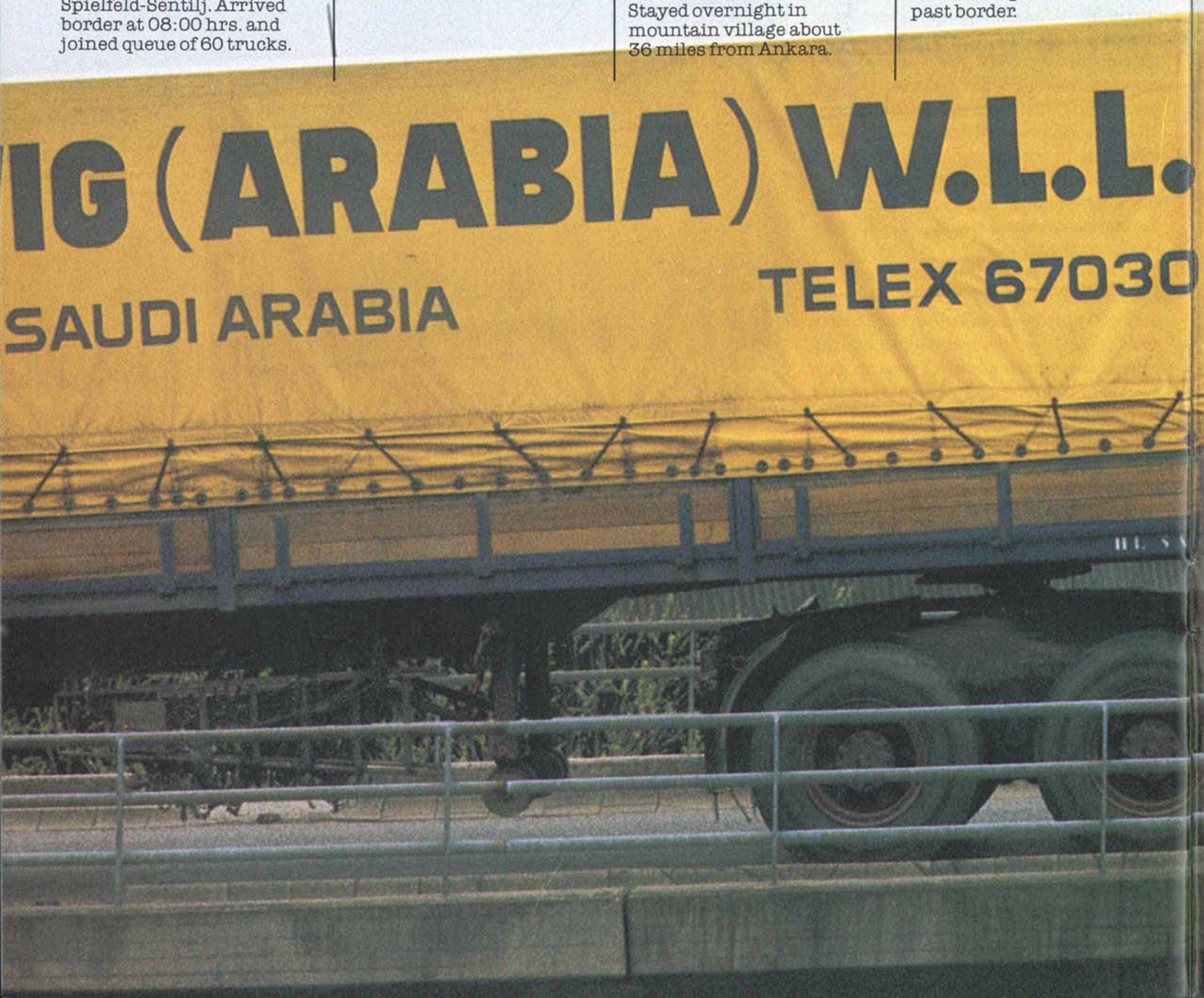
Sept. 24
The Jordanian customs inspectors began work at 08:00 hrs. and by 10:30 hrs. the 15 trucks were ready to leave. There was now no more road. After a five-hour drive through the desert sand, we arrived at the Saudi Arabian border post Turaif, where duty had to be paid on the load. This would be done next day.

Sept. 25
Customs clearance was finished very quickly and we began the long, monotonous journey along Tapline to Dammam. The road, which ran through the desert beside the pipeline, was 960 miles long and good to drive on. By 18:00 hrs. it was pitch dark and it was impossible to drive further . . .

Sept. 26
Today we were able to drive a long way. Nothing special to report except that in the morning we had to chase about 20 donkeys out from under the trailer before we could start.

Sept. 27
This morning we had to stop for about two hours because of a sand storm. We finally arrived at our destination, Abqaiq, about midday. An engineer agreed to get into a fork lift and unload our truck. By this time it was so hot we were dizzy. Showered and got ready to start return trip next day.

— Geert van der Struik,
Hermann Ludwig
(Nederland) BV ■



THE LAST WATER HOLE

Mehmet Dogme and his two sons, Mustafa and Huseyin, run one of the last water holes on the trucking route to the East.

Once a trailer camp for tourists, the Dogme & Sons truck stop began to develop when silver-haired Dogme senior realized that tourism wasn't paying off. "We weren't even getting enough customers to cover expenses," he said.

So Dogme decided to try and cash in on the growing truck traffic through Istanbul. He sent letters to European haulage firms offering lay-over services for drivers and, one by one, truckers began to schedule an overnight stop at what Dogme & Sons call Londra Camping. Today it is a port of call for 200 trucks daily.

Situated on the main highway a few miles outside Istanbul's ancient city walls, the "camp" is actually a multi-million dollar facility with parking for 1,000 trucks, restrooms with hot showers, and a coffee shop and restaurant.

As it grew in popularity, Huseyin Dogme said, the family noticed that although truckers usually slept in their cabs, many of them, on cold nights, preferred a hotel.

So, next to the truck-stop, the Dogmes built a well-kept, moderately-priced, 60-to-90 bed hotel. So that drivers could sleep peacefully, they also hired guards to patrol the parking area. There are now 15 guards on duty constantly.

In addition, the Dogmes provide a service station for trucks, an automatic truck wash imported from Europe, and a shop that sells everything from spare parts to gifts for truckers' wives. In the basement of the hotel there is even a small leather factory, where drivers can order made-to-measure clothing one trip and pick it up the next.

Last, there is a swimming pool – included in the six-dollar overnight parking fee. "There's nothing like this," said a West German driver, "from here on east."

For the Dogmes, of course, that kind of service means hard work and long hours. "Often we are on our feet for 20 hours at a stretch," says Mustafa, adding that they usually leave their homes in nearby Yesilkoy at 6:00 a.m. Usually they do not get home before midnight.

But the job has its rewards. Once, driving through Yugoslavia on vacation, Huseyin Dogme had a breakdown. "I was in a real jam," he said. "Everyone was honking their horns because I was blocking the highway."

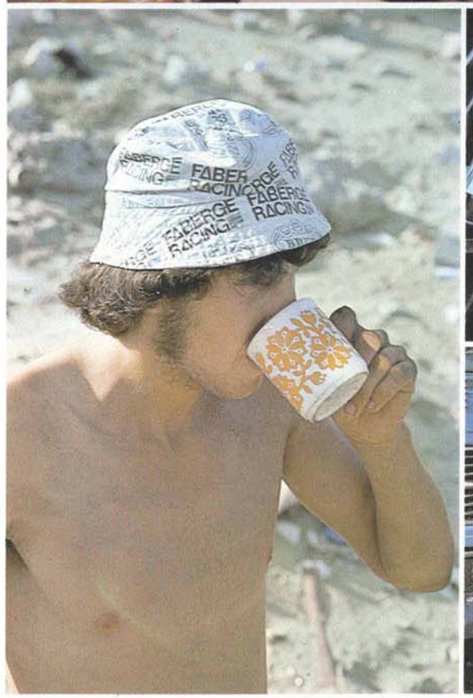
Suddenly, a French truck driver appeared, pushed Huseyin's crippled car to the roadside, got out his tools and repaired the engine. Finally he treated Huseyin to a home-cooked dinner in his cab.

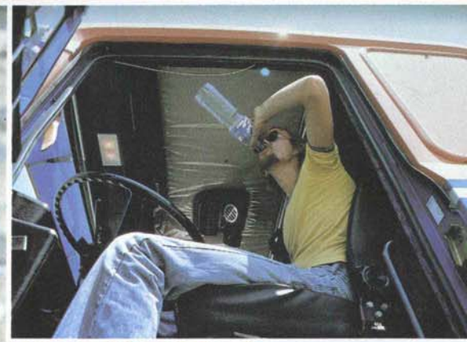
Why? Because the Frenchman recognised Dogme from stop-overs at Londra Camping. ■

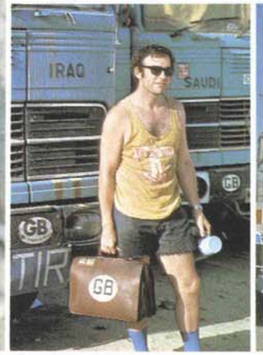
THE FINAL LEG

Once they top the Taurus mountain pass, right, eastbound truckers are on their long journey's final leg, rolling across Syria's harshly beautiful landscapes (below right) and onto the straight desert highways of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, left.

Plying one of the eastward route's shorter branches, the Turkish truck at center right carries a cargo container that arrived by ship at Mersin, on Turkey's southern coast, onward to its Middle Eastern destination.

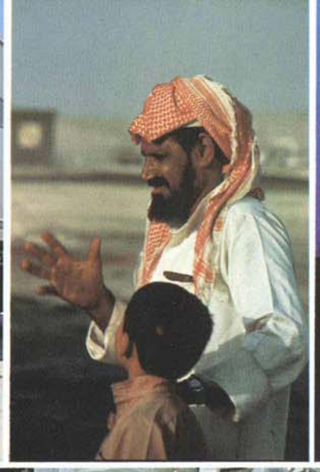


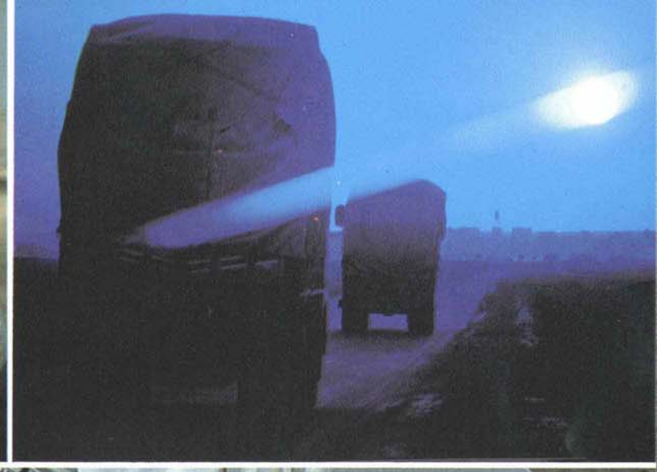


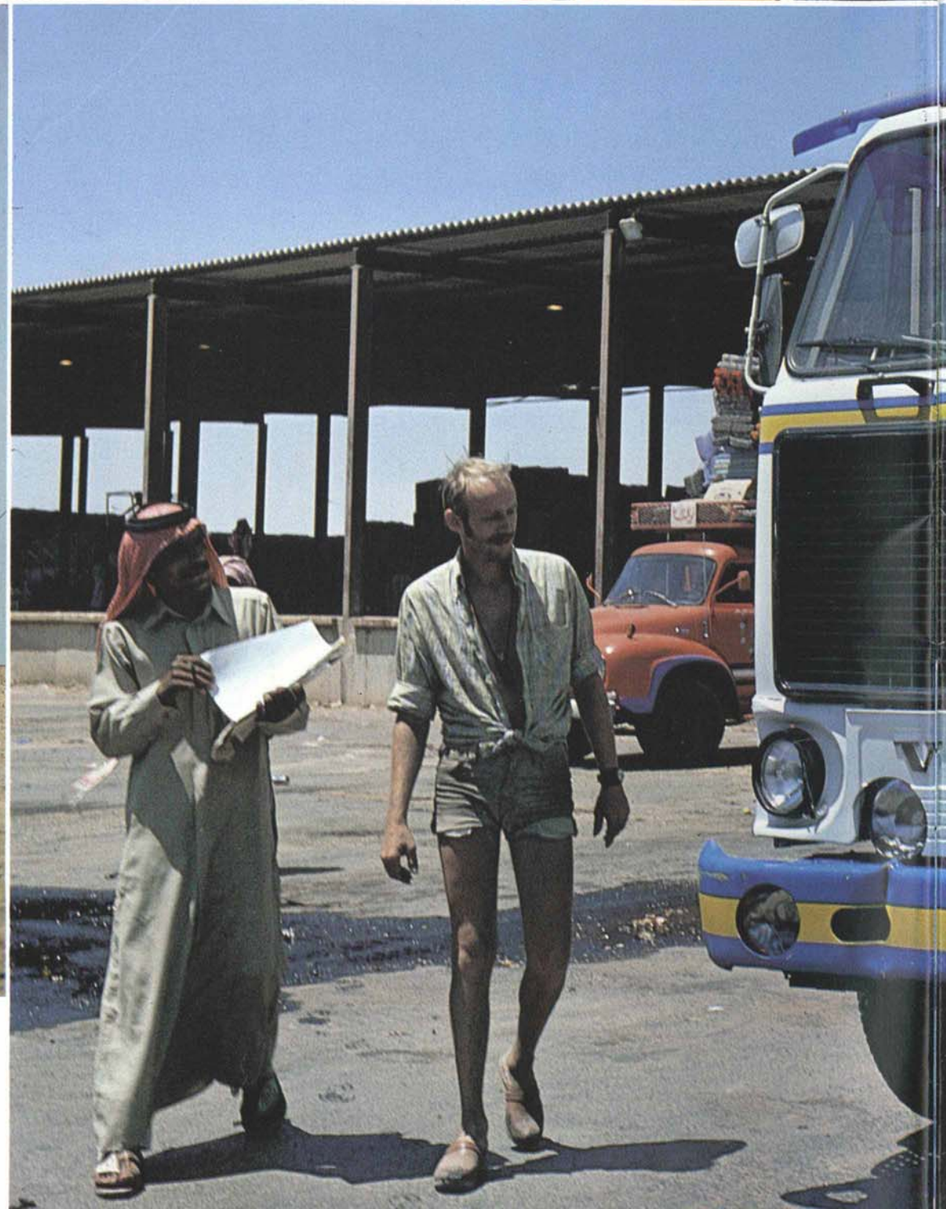


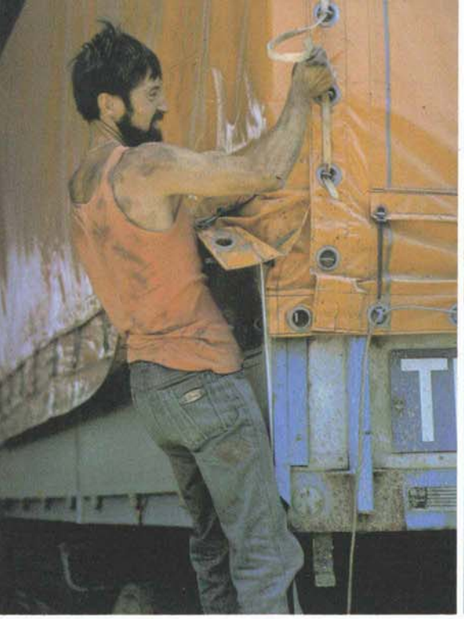
Below right, a Saudi Arab Customs Inspector and Swedish driver check documents at the Jordanian-Saudi border.

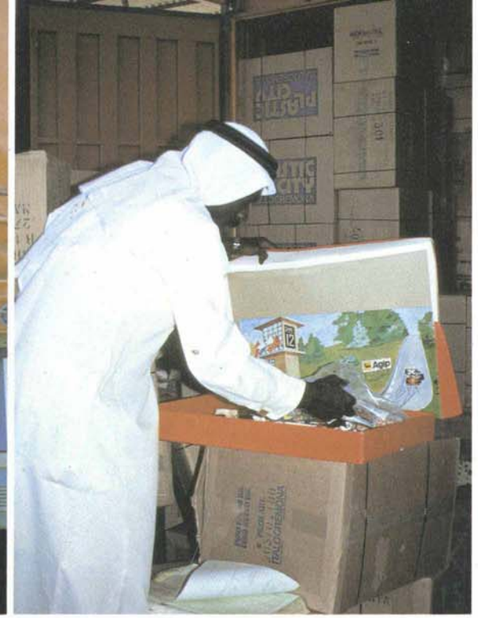
At right, scenes at a rest stop: fatigue etches lines on a Dutch driver's face: an attendant cleans the windshield of a Kuwaiti truck: and a Saudi Arab driver bids his son farewell.











At journey's end, a driver unseals his cargo; toys from Italy are inspected at customs; transformers from Austria are off-loaded at the Dhahran Electric Power Company yard in Saudi Arabia.

At right, a Saudi Arab businessman checks the condition of the cargo being unloaded at his warehouse.