

TRUCK

**WIN
A MAGNUM
TRUCK...**

**NEW
FACES
RENAULT
REVAMPS
MAGNUM**

**TRUCKING
THE WORLD**
**LONG DISTANCE DIARY
ACROSS EUROPE**
ERFS IN NZ
**TRUCK ART IN
AUSTRIA**



TOP QUALITY BUMPER ISSUE



60 Scenic trucking

Rupert Melmer's fleet is liveried with scenes from his region in Austria

SILO-MELMER

SILO-MELMER



Tourist attraction!



Silo Melmer's latest powder tanker was finished by Wimmerow Artful Kinetik Tirosh as a mobile billboard for the site operator's local tourist office.

Advertising is part of life these days. But persuading the local tourist board to promote your neighbourhood on a 40-tonner sounds an unlikely bet. Jonathan Reeves reports on an Austrian operator that's done just that and been paid for it!

Trucks and tourism are not normally happy bedfellows. Picture postcard villages with narrow streets lined with pavement cafes are not the ideal place to drive a 40-tonner. Austria, despite its very restrictive approach to foreign



vehicles, is dependent on road transport, railways are simply no good at climbing mountains. Winter and summer tourism forms a major part of the vibrant and thriving Austrian economy and all those tourists need food, drink and all the other modern-day facilities that can often only be delivered by truck.

TRUCK NOVEMBER 2001

However, Rupert Melmer – the boss of Silo Melmer – has achieved something that would probably be impossible in the UK. He has persuaded the tourist office for the nearby Pitztal region (where he was born) that his trucks can provide a valuable marketing tool as a mobile billboard to promote the area. Even better, he has secured a substantial budget from the tourist office to pay for the stunning paintwork on three of his vehicles.

The latest addition to the 33-strong fleet is a 460hp MAN TG-A (but proudly carrying the Austrian Steyr name), complete with a 460-hp triple axle Felsbinder tipping tanker trailer. It arrived in Septem-

ber last year at a cost of 2,400,000 Austrian schillings (about £107,000 at the time).

The paintwork – a rare mixture of free-hand and airbrush by art director Knud Tirosh – added another 200,000AS (£9000) and features two 'traditional' Alpine scenes on the trailer.

One side stars 'Seppi' – the original Pitztal old man complete with Tyrolean hat – while the other carries an unnamed beautiful girl drinking from a mountain stream (to show off the purity of all the water in the Pitztal region).

Both sides, the back of the tank and the truck cab itself, carry the tourist office's all-



important internet site address, www.pitztal.com, so the thousands who see the vehicle on the road everyday might be tempted to look it up and perhaps be persuaded to visit the area.

Melmer works full-time in the office, controlling a business with 45 employees including office and workshop staff. The company only undertakes routine maintenance and minor repair work on its trucks – the local MAN dealer is just half a kilometre away and his eldest son works there so if the truck has anything seriously wrong with it, the work goes out.

Rupert Melmer spent 30 years on the road ('I'll admit at night-time I was driving under age') but is now happy to sit behind a computer. 'I love my work... and my trucks,' he says.

STEYR APPRENTICE

He served a mechanic's apprenticeship in the Austrian Steyr factory – hence the proud and patriotic decision to specify the name on all his new MAN trucks. 'Apart from the badges they are otherwise identical to all the trucks from Munich.'

His fleet is all MAN/Steyr (including some very old machines) plus a single



Scania. 'We're testing it and got a special price,' he says.

The newest Silo truck takes on a load of 25 tonnes of cement, supervised by driver for level loading, in about 25 minutes and brings the gross vehicle weight up to 40 tonnes (the maximum weight allowed in Austria).

Unloading is via an electro-hydraulic tipping mechanism and takes up to 50 minutes – including all the pipe work connections. These pipes are carried in polished aluminium tubes along the side of the tanker to keep them presentable even in winter conditions.

Regular driver of the Steyr is Rupert Melmer's brother Johan (nicknamed Giovanni) – a 36-year-old with two sons.

This isn't the first Silo Melmer truck to carry interesting paintwork. The first one, completed in 1997, features a skier against a mountain backdrop while the second (on the road since 1999) carries a snow-boarder and lurid colours.

The rear of one of his tankers also has a great action image of skier Ben Heiss – a top local star (and in the World Cup downhill series, along with the catch phrase, 'Der Blitz aus Pitz!') and the obligatory





On holiday: sit back and watch the scenery roll by

only use 130km of Austrian road," he says. Of course, if you're using a route like the Brenner pass it's costly – about 1100AS (€50) one-way daytime, or 2300AS at night – but Melmer's machines don't often go that far afield.

Austria's working week runs Monday to Friday with unlimited hours on main roads, although night bans apply in residential areas. It's difficult to find parking areas at night and you'll find expensive units parked in grassy lay-bys outside villages.

Saturday and Sunday restrictions apply – particularly in July and August when there's an influx of German tourists and their cars.

Melmer's main work is hauling cement – from the Schretter-Cie factory at Vils to distribution centres. Sometimes the 26-tonne loads go off direct to construction sites and tunnel building. Melmer's silos can also be used to transport gypsum – and sometimes salt in winter.

Most of Melmer's work is in the Tyrol, where distances are not huge – his average truck clocks up 100,000km a year – but the going can be tough in the mountains.

UNUSUAL BRUSHWORK

The trucks go to and fro across the Fernpasse daily, notorious not because it is particularly high but because it is plagued with tourist traffic and one small crash can cause long delays.

The paintwork on the truck is the work of 48-year-old artist Knud Tiroch, who lives south of Vienna. The original idea for the design came to Rupert Melmer while he was out jogging. He thought about the design for a while and then a mutual friend introduced the artist.



The Pitztal region looks good on Melmer's trucks and the trucks look good in the neighbourhood's colours



Artist Knud Tiroch trained in Austria but learnt the technique of mixing airbrush and freehand in California

The Melmer truck features an unusual combination of airbrush and freehand brushwork – a technique Tiroch picked up in California. Although he learnt his trade in Austria he then spent a year in US

The Silo Melmer truck features an unusual combination of airbrush and freehand brushwork – a technique Tiroch picked up in California. Although he learnt his trade in Austria he then spent a year in the States. He does a lot of art design work for theatres, painting on canvases backdrops for opera – so the truck wasn't the biggest thing he'd done.

"I've also done cars, offshore powerboats – and recently a helicopter for the Austrian army. They wanted it to stand out at an airshow," Tiroch says.

His biggest project was for a power station near Graz – where he had to paint a design on the walls of a turbine room that



Silo Melmer's only Scania came at a 'special price'

was 120m square. For the latest Melmer truck Rupert put down his initial ideas in rough form on paper then Tiroch got down to business.

"There was a lot of work on paper beforehand – and one week of actual painting work once everything was prepared. But it's all done freehand!" the artist explains.

It would be nice to think we could do something similar here in the UK. But, how many tourist towns want trucks anywhere near them – let alone to pay to have themselves promoted on a truck and trailer?

It must be worth a try... as Melmer says, thousands of motorists and pedestrians see his truck every day. It could hardly pass by unnoticed!



Clean vehicles make the most of the custom job



Powder snow: Pitztal advertises winter attractions

Pitztal publicity line – looming down over the following traffic.

Melmer's trucks are kept in nice condition despite the Tyrol's conditions – which vary enormously from summer to winter. But much of his client's construction work is seasonal so some of his older trucks are off the road for three months in winter.

The gleaming Steyr is expected to earn it's living right through the winter – and like all Melmer's trucks carries chains and in the winter is fitted with snow tyres.

"Most of the main roads are well cleared and salted during daytime – but it can get tricky at night," Melmer says.

TUNNEL CONSTRUCTION

Although the building industry slows down in winter there is still regular work – for example tunnel construction continues – and there are plenty of those in the Tyrol.

Austrian fuel costs have increased recently (like everywhere) – but to us it doesn't sound too bad; 10.5AS per litre (about 50p).

For road tax there's a monthly vignette of 6000AS (€270) a year and then there's a charge for every kilometre driven. "We need to clear at least 14AS per km [64p] minimum to keep in profit," Melmer says.

Despite the anti-truck image Austria has for foreign hauliers Melmer reckons that on a local level the politicians are OK. "I know it's costly for trucks transiting Austria – but most are going from Germany to Italy and



Silo Melmer doesn't restrict its special paintwork job to promoting the local region as a tourist destination