

By Tina Caparella

Loader Makes a Hauler's Life Easier

Rendering is a tough business, and perhaps one of the more strenuous jobs in the industry is dead stock hauling. It's physically demanding, can be time-consuming, and can often pose personal safety and biosecurity risks. But some dead stock haulers and renderers have found a new way to make a difficult job easier.

Several years ago, Tim Postma of Sioux Valley Rendering in Rock Valley, IA, was looking for a less backbreaking way of doing his job as a dead stock collector. After a Thanksgiving dinner conversation with his tow-truck driving uncle, he decided to search the Internet for some type of truck-mounted lifting and loading equipment. There he came across a company named Scaffidi Commercial Trucks.

"I stumbled upon a truck they already had with a Serco log loader and went from there," Postma recalled. He worked with Brian Stanley at Scaffidi, and together they spent hours developing the best way to equip a truck to eliminate the physical labors of hauling dead

stock. Some time later, the rendering knuckleboom loader was born.

Most dead stock is collected using a cable or chain to load the animal into a trailer, meaning the driver must physically step onto the client's property to attach the chain to the animal that is then pulled into the container by a winch. Once the animal is loaded, the driver must then climb into the open rendering trailer to remove the chain. Long-time haulers can be quick at their job, but it's a labor-intensive operation that comes with the risk of injuries.

With the knuckleboom loader, the collection driver never steps foot on the ground or touches the dead animal. There is no pulling, manual lifting, or climbing into the trailer either, eliminating the backbreaking aspects of the job.

"There is basically no work involved," Postma confirmed. "I rarely get my hands dirty." In fact, prior to the development of the knuckleboom loader, Postma and his father, Vern, were both considering getting out of the dead stock hauling and rendering business

because of the physical demands of the job. Since using the loader over the past three to four years, Vern has postponed his retirement and is now actually having fun, according to his son, a fourth generation hauler.

Postma said his clients are impressed with the quickness of the loader – he is generally at each collection stop for about one minute – which has cut collection times down by two hours a day for each of the company's three trucks. Sioux Valley Rendering services about 40 to 60 customers per day, per truck. Each truck is equipped with a loader capable of collecting up to 3,900 pounds (lbs.) of material at once.

While a loader can easily be mounted on an existing truck, some modifications are usually necessary and, at about 4,000 lbs. each, a loader adds additional weight to an already heavy truck. Despite the sticker price, which some have said is "up there," Scaffidi's Stanley said clients have told him the loader is life-changing, explaining that some older haulers who were looking at retiring because of the physical toll of their job, have continued to work now that the loader does all the manual labor.

Collection clients are also impressed with the biosecurity aspect of the loader. No longer are drivers dragging animals and chains across the ground, and because drivers remain on the truck, the possibility of transmitting any potential pathogens from farm to farm is mostly eliminated.

The knuckleboom loader is manufactured by Kesla in Finland and Scaffidi, based in Stevens Point, WI, is the North American distributor. Models range in size from just over 2,000 lbs. of lift at 10 feet with an 18-foot, eight-inch reach, to "as big as you'd like to go," Stanley said, with one such loader capable of lifting over 7,700 lbs. with a 30-foot reach. Most knuckleboom loaders customized for the rendering industry include a z-folding boom, for easy stowing while dumping, and modified grapples, plated in on the



The new Kesla knuckleboom loader eliminates the physical demands of being a dead stock hauler.

sides for “scooping” purposes.

Kenny Behrendt, a Minnesota dead stock hauler for the past 12 years, said the loader is “excellent” and has made it easier for him to hire drivers, who now don’t get within 20 feet of the dead stock they’re collecting. Behrendt boasted that the loader is a cleaner system, saves time and fuel, allows for more frequent collection, and is safer than using a chain, which has led to a few lost fingers. He began using the loader three years ago on each of his four semi-tractors after hearing about it from Postma. Behrendt primarily collects hogs and cattle and delivers them for rendering to Central Bi-Products in Redwood Falls, MN.

Darris Dehncke, a contract hauler for Central Bi-Products for 21 years, installed a Kesla knuckleboom loader on his straight truck two years ago after seeing it in action on another hauler’s truck. He said it’s the only way he will ever pick up dead stock. Dehncke is impressed with the cleanliness of the operation – he now wears tennis shoes and shorts to work, something he never would have done prior to installing the loader – and noted that farmers like the loader because it picks up “everything.” The equipment is so easy to operate that Dehncke’s 16-year-old son controls the loader most of the time and has decided to follow in his father’s footsteps.

“It’s not a very complicated piece of equipment,” Dehncke pointed out. Besides the sanitary benefits, it saves him about two hours a day and allows the trailer to be filled to capacity. “The loader pays for itself every day,” he stated.

Not all of Scaffidi’s Kesla knuckleboom loaders are mounted on trucks. Sheldon Andrews decided to install a stationary loader in Iowa Protein Solutions’ new plant in Estherville, IA, that came online in December 2008. Originally a smaller loader was installed, but after being impressed with the equipment, five feet of concrete was poured to handle a loader capable of lifting over 7,000 lbs. with a 30-foot reach. Andrews said the loader can empty a 45,000 lb. trailer load of poultry and porcine material directly into a grinder in about 30 minutes. He trains many employees to operate the loader who all enjoy running the equipment, which features an enclosed cab complete with a heater for those chilly Iowa winters. Andrews learned about the loader from

a few of the company’s contract dead stock haulers that are using them, like Tyler Pedersen of TNT Rendering.

Pedersen has been a cattle farmer all his life and a dead stock hauler for three years. When he learned of the loader from Postma, it was the first piece of equipment he added to each of his trucks when he began his own company two years ago. Pedersen said it makes the job of dead stock hauling easier and he’s not exhausted after a day of work. TNT Rendering has four trucks, one straight and two semi-tractors, that feature the loader. He and his drivers are also able to complete more stops since the loader makes it faster to pick up the material.

“And there’s a lot less risk than climbing in and out of a box,” Pedersen added.

According to Stanley at Scaffidi, stationary-mounted knuckleboom loaders can feed grinders, augers, and conveyors; are quicker than a wheel loader or bobcat for moving product; and offer a smoother operation and less moving components for maintenance. The loader operator works from a high visibility platform, reaching around material to pick up and separate. Stanley said the loader is expected to have twice the life cycle of a wheel loader, and when run by electricity, there are zero emissions in an enclosed facility. **R**