

Transport Topics

Freightliner Displays SCR Engine Technology for Customers at Tennessee Truck Dealership

By Frederick Kiel, Staff Reporter

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Freightliner dealer TAG Truck Center held an open house here for customers earlier this month to demonstrate a 2010 tractor that uses selective catalytic reduction and answer questions about the emission technology Freightliner will use to meet tougher emission standards.

The demonstration included experts from truck and engine makers who explained the SCR technology, and representatives of firms putting together the diesel exhaust fluid distribution network the trucks need to operate on the road.

“We had probably 125 people who attended the event, coming from about 50 fleets,” Gary Dotson, co-owner of TAG, told Transport Topics. “Even though they had done a lot of reading, they were still apprehensive about the new technology, until they could actually see it for themselves.”

The June 3 open house at TAG was an example of how some dealers across the United States and Canada are trying to educate customers before the rapidly approaching deadline of Jan. 1, when for the first time in years, fleet executives will have to decide between two radically different technologies.

All truck and engine makers except Navistar Inc. will use SCR, which cuts nitrogen oxide in the exhaust by injecting a mix of urea and water, enabling a catalytic converter to change the NOx to nitrogen and water vapor.

Only Navistar, manufacturer of International trucks, will use exhaust gas recirculation to reduce NOx.

The fleet executives said their “No. 1 concern was the increased cost of the new system, and probably their second worry was whether they would be able to find a supply of DEF,” TAG co-owner Tommy Earl told TT.

“We had people coming in throughout the day, generally fleet owners with their maintenance director, definitely the people who will be making the buying decision,” Earl said.

FedEx Express, Memphis, Tenn., is a buyer of Freightliners and sent 15 people to the event, Earl said.

Daimler Trucks North America sent a Freightliner Cascadia, accompanied by technical and sales people. Freightliner will offer engines from Detroit Diesel Corp., owned by DTNA, or from independent engine maker Cummins Inc.

Two medium-duty hybrids also were on display, both with Cummins engines and Eaton Corp. electric-diesel hybrid systems.

“I learned there’s not as much concern over fuel efficiency and degradation of miles per gallon as many of us feared,” Mike Hopper, chief financial officer of Ozark Motor Lines Inc., told TT after he attended the event.

“The previous EPA-mandated changes of 2002 and 2007, which depended upon EGR that recirculates cooled exhaust gas back through the engine, both decreased fuel efficiency,” Earl said. “We were able to tell these customers that the 2010 was the first EPA-mandated system that would offer increased fuel efficiency,” which he estimated to be about 5%, because lower levels of EGR are required.

“That was our main response to questions about increased costs: that greater fuel efficiency would eventually pay back most of the upfront costs,” Dotson said.

“The availability of urea was another of our concerns,” Hopper said. “We learned about the mixture and what would be required to operate it, which is important because we plan to install bulk urea tanks at our installations.”

Hopper said that the TAG event was valuable.

“It was very hospitable,” he said. “A variety of exhibitors were there, both from the truck and engine makers, and more importantly, major component makers, who we usually don’t get to talk to, and they were all willing to share their knowledge.”

Hopper said his company, based in Memphis, Tenn., plans to buy 2010 trucks as part of its normal rotation.

“We have no fear of 2010, partially from what we learned here,” Hopper said. “We won’t make any pre-buy this year, but we plan to buy our usual 150 to 175 new trucks next year. Since we always try to get through the winter months without taking delivery of new trucks, we won’t be getting any 2010s until sometime next spring.”

Dotson said that TAG has received about 15 orders for 2010 Cascadia models with SCR systems to be delivered this year, orders from several fleets that wanted to evaluate them, including FedEx Express.

“What was a happy surprise was about two-thirds of the fleets that attended our event told us they have seen significant increases in freight demand in just the past 30 days,” Dotson said. “Many told us they plan to buy 2010 trucks from us, but the news about increased freight finally happened was great news.”

Charles Culverhouse, sales manager for EZ Fuel and Tank Solutions, Duluth, Ga., which will produce bulk DEF containers, explained how the fluid would be available next year.

Culverhouse said that most who attended TAG’s event “were under the impression it was no big deal in storing this material,” but he stressed that DEF “can’t be treated like diesel or gasoline because it is a chemical and has to go into climatically controlled containers, with special stainless steel piping, and specialized dispensing equipment is needed.”