

PRESS INFORMATION

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NEW BREED OF TRUCKS FOR PEDIGREE WHOLESale

Pedigree Wholesale has switched to Atlet warehouse trucks in a combination of contract hire and outright purchase at its main distribution centre near Nottingham. By aligning the make-up of the fleet to its precise materials handling requirements, the pet and aquatic products supplier has reduced the number of trucks required, increased efficiency and cut downtime as well as saving on its previous repair and maintenance bill.

“If you’re offering a service you have to invest in the equipment to deliver that service,” says Darren Willetts, Group Operations Manager at Pedigree Wholesale Midlands. “You pay a bit more for Atlet up front but it’s what you get for the money that matters.”

Pedigree Wholesale is one of the UK’s leading suppliers of pet and aquatic products, including live fish, to the independent retail sector. Its operations are carried out from a national network of five distribution centres strategically located throughout the UK with the main site and head office at Gamston, Nottingham. The company also owns a seed mill for preparing bird food. The business has grown significantly in recent years and when Pedigree Wholesale reviewed the materials handling operations at the main distribution centre it decided to make some significant changes. Trucks had always been purchased in the past but over time this had led to the fleet comprising models of differing ages from multiple suppliers.

“We always purchased our trucks but the older ones were not always looked after properly,” says Darren Willetts. “It was time for a change and when we looked at suppliers we came across Atlet. Their salesman was excellent and very honest with us. Everything I asked for was delivered.”

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Before selecting Atlet, Pedigree Wholesale made a thorough investigation of the market. This included taking new and old trucks through an on-site evaluation to assess how they would perform at the beginning and end of their projected lifetimes.

“I am interested in where we are going to be in five years,” says Darren Willetts. “I need trucks that last and do what the supplier says they will.”

Atlet worked with Pedigree Wholesale to understand its requirements. A fleet replacement programme was proposed, starting in 2008. Because it kept detailed records of truck operations Pedigree Wholesale realised that there was very little difference between the monthly cost of ownership for outright purchase and contract hire. Putting the trucks that are used intensively - order pickers and powered pallet transporters - onto contract hire made economic and practical sense, although larger trucks have been purchased outright. This suited the business model and provided a high degree of protection against unexpected servicing and maintenance costs because this is now covered by Atlet’s monthly hire charge. The previous system of a call-out charge and hourly rate for service operations had made it very difficult for Pedigree Wholesale to predict and manage its costs.

“This is a massive plus point because we don’t want to call a service engineer and then get a bill a week later,” says Darren Willetts. “It’s saving us on repair and maintenance bills over the old trucks.”

The fleet at Gamston has been replaced steadily to meet operational and business requirements. It currently comprises seven Atlet Tempo PPL order pickers, two Piccolo PLL powered pallet transporters and two Forte UNS reach trucks. Pedigree Wholesale also selected one of the new Atlet Balance diesel counterbalance trucks for yard work and vehicle loading thereby eliminating the need for the warehouse trucks to operate outside. Warehouse fleet size has been cut by three as a result of the changes. This has contributed to the lower service costs and reduced the need for parking space, battery charging facilities and other ancillary facilities which can now be put to better use. Fleet operations are also more efficient because all the new trucks are used throughout the nine hour daily shift without spare units sitting around as in the past.

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The trucks have sophisticated diagnostic features that highlight any issues immediately. Operators also check them regularly and report any defects to managers. Atlet provides service on a call-out basis and its local engineer is located in the area which means that response can be very quick. Routine inspection and maintenance is completed at times convenient to Pedigree Wholesale and the Atlet engineer uses technology, expertise and understanding of the operation to pre-empt any emerging problems before they impact on the warehouse operation.

“Downtime is non-existent and the first breakdown happened when the truck had been here for 18 months,” says Darren Willetts. “We never need to contact Atlet because they call me when they need to come. The engineer is only four miles away.”

The new fleet represents a major investment for Pedigree Wholesale to the company was keen to use the opportunity to encourage its employees to take greater responsibility. The first part of this approach was to make the staff more aware of the investment costs so that they understood the value of the equipment they are using. This in itself helped to instil a more responsible attitude. Pedigree Wholesale also decided to use the trucks’ PIN access system which requires a driver to enter their unique identification code before the truck can be operated. Information retrieved from the on-board computer can then be used to see who was operating a truck at any given time.

“We are very conscious of encouraging our employees to be more responsible and to understand the investment we have made,” says Darren Willetts. “We have also found that because staff know we don’t own all the trucks they feel they should look after them better.”

Managers and operators have been impressed by a number of the ergonomic features on the trucks. On the reach truck for example the mini steer wheel makes it much easier to control movements. The buttons to activate the various functions can be pressed using one hand without moving. The tilting seat and see-through mast make it much easier to see the load and racking, even at the highest levels. A buzzer warns the driver when the forks are lowered below a predetermined level and this feature has helped to reduce spills and damage caused when pallets catch on the truck’s legs. Pedigree Wholesale says there have been no spills since the trucks were delivered.

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“Atlet was very switched on to health and safety,” says Darren Willetts. “For example, the order pickers come as standard with a reversing beacon and the wheels go into the correct position on a pallet very easily. If the guys hadn’t liked the first one we wouldn’t have bought any more.”

The main warehouse stocks 10,000 lines and the satellite depots have between 700 and 1500 to serve more than 2000 customers in pet shops, aquatic and garden centres. Deliveries are made each day to the satellite depots using a combination of colour coded cages and full pallets. Operations are well organised and efficient with all picking and other stock movements managed with a voice system. Picking takes place at first, second and third level using the order pickers with the reach trucks handling replenishment and full pallet movements. Powered pallet transporters handle items between picking areas and the loading bay. Yard work is now undertaken with the new Atlet Balance.

Although Pedigree Wholesale operates each of its sites autonomously they have all been encouraged to evaluate and eventually standardise on Atlet trucks. This has already led to a number of Atlet trucks being delivered to the other warehouses and the feed mill.

“Over the past two years we have built a strong relationship with Atlet . We’re investing in warehouse trucks so that we can deliver the best possible service to our customers,” says Darren Willetts. “We’ve gone from strength to strength and achieved some very positive outcomes and are trying to encourage all sites to standardise.”

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