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Hauling Hogs

Transporter specializes in reuniting motorcycles and their owners

Motorcycle owners tend to be passionate about their bikes. Just ask Ken Durik, part owner of Daily Direct, a 16-year-old trucking firm that specializes in hauling motorcycles.

"We get calls from owners wanting daily updates on their bikes," Durik says. "Our biggest challenge is making the customers feel comfortable and accommodating their needs."

With 10 specially equipped Volvo trucks, Durik hauls about 6,000 motorcycles a year. Durik's business has taken off in recent years due to the popularity of motorcycle rallies and the sale of bikes over the Internet. Daily Direct is currently in the process of a \$4.5 million expansion, adding 30 semi trailers by the end of the year, and 10 more in 2005.

"For a biker wanting to go out to a meet like Sturgis, [S.D.], the trip out can eat up most of your vacation time," Durik says of the popular Black Hills motorcycle rally, taking place this year Aug. 4-10. "We'll deliver your bike to the event and you don't have to deal with weather or wear and tear on the way."

Last fall was Durik's busiest, thanks in large part to Harley-Davidson's 100th Anniversary celebration, which brought 300,000 bikers to Milwaukee over Labor Day. Durik started taking reservations to get bikes to that event a year in advance.

Adding to Durik's business is the explosive growth of motorcycle sales over the Internet. It used to be, you'd buy a motorcycle from a local dealer, or hear about a used bike for sale by a fellow bike enthusiast.

"There's lots of buying and selling now on eBay and online classifieds," Durik says. "We step in and make it easy for a buyer to get a bike from anywhere."

Durik's secret to safely transporting motorcycles across country is surprising. Most bikes are not crated, but strapped down in customized furniture trailers, using 4,000-pound test nylon straps. Each trailer can hold about 34 bikes, although for full-dressed Harleys or BMWs, the number might be as low as 28. For smaller sport bikes, like a Buell or Honda, each trailer could fit as many as 50 bikes.

Part of Daily Direct's expansion includes the establishment of hub-and-spoke facilities in 14 cities across the U.S. Phase I, this past spring, included opening facilities in Nashville, Denver and Kansas City. The facilities will enable Daily Direct to haul a motorcycle from Seattle to Miami in 14 days.

Because Durik is a biker himself, he understands the concerns of motorcycle owners at all stages of transport, including loading and unloading.

"Every single driver that drives our trucks rides bikes, so he understands how owners feel," Durik says. "They're all into bikes. Even in our office, some of the girls ride, so they share that passion with the customer."

Daily Direct's trailers are custom-made by Wabash Trailers of Green Bay, Wis., and cost about \$80,000 a piece. Each trailer has a second deck and a rear hydraulic lift gate, to ease unloading of motorcycles.

"Considering a driver might make six or eight stops a day, we wanted to make this as easy and fast as possible," Durik says.

Durik has ridden motorized bikes since he was 8. His father founded Daily Direct in 1988, mainly trucking beer bottles to Miller Brewing Co. One day, Durik was at his favorite Harley dealership when the owner was complaining about the difficulty of getting motorcycles shipped to Daytona for Bike Week. Figuring he could help, Durik started hauling Harleys for the dealer. Business snowballed and in 1998, Durik bought the company from his father and made bikes the focus. The company has also hauled snowmobiles, jet skis and has even transported a motorized wheelchair. Currently, Daily Direct is owned by Durik, Jeff Lloyd and The Bulk Companies.

Next time you're on the highway, don't be surprised to see one of Durik's Volvos. They sport an eye-catching blue and black paint job striped by white, and chances are the driver is making plans to get out of the driver's seat and back in the saddle of his own motorcycle soon.

Daily Direct

Trucks: Volvo 670s and 660s

Engines: Cummins

Transmission: 13-speed

Added features: Translucent roofs in trailers; rear hydraulic lift gate; fridge, freezer and TV prep kit in cab

Contact: Find out more at www.haulbikes.com or by calling (888) HAUL-BIKES