

Unimog drivers "inexperienced"

by Amy Milne

Inexperience and poor training are to blame for the four fatal accidents involving Unimogs in the past three years, says a Westport Unimog owner.

In the latest crash, Private Meredith Simms, 18, from Upper Hutt was killed when the Unimog in which he was a passenger plunged off a corner on State Highway 1 at Weld Pass, between Seddon and Blenheim on Wednesday afternoon.

The 18-year-old driver, who was thrown clear, is recovering in Burwood Hospital, Christchurch, where he remains in a stable condition. It is understood he may have suffered spinal damage as a result of the accident.

Westport veteran Unimog driver and owner of Out-West Tours, Mickey Ryan has two Unimogs, a 1300 and a 1700, which he uses to take passengers on off-road adventure tours.

Mr Ryan said the accidents were giving a "very good vehicle" a bad name.

"It really pisses me off to be honest, because I get people now that say 'Oh these Unimogs, I don't know, they're dangerous aren't they?' There's nothing wrong with them."

He said the frequency of Army-driven Unimog accidents clearly showed army drivers were inexperienced and that was a reflection of inadequate training.

"I'm actually quite disgusted because the mines have got Unimogs... All the tourist industries have got them, farmers have got them, you don't hear of any accidents with any of theirs. It's just the army, no one else," he said. "Obviously the training in the army

is definitely not up to scratch."

He believed the army was also letting recruits who were too young drive.

"I know you've got to start somewhere but I think they're starting too young and they're not getting the thorough training they used to have."

"If they haven't got the staff to train them, recruit some of the staff from the tourist industry, the mining industry or anywhere else, that are driving them (Unimogs) all the time to train them (drivers) properly."

Mr Ryan learnt to drive Unimogs while in the army in 1969.

"We had an instructor with us all the time and he was very strict and if you put your foot near a clutch or anything wrong or over speeding you were charged (penalised)."

Trainees also had to thoroughly understand the mechanics of the vehicle before being allowed to drive it.

The introduction of New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) unit standards to industry training places, including the army, had also lowered the level of practical training, he said.

He noted that most of the army Unimog fatalities had happened while the trucks were travelling on main roads or heading downhill.

"Which tells me they're either in the wrong gear or going too fast and relying on their brakes," he said.

The army said the driver of the vehicle in the latest fatality was fully qualified to operate it. The vehicle was returning to Burnham Military Camp after a 10-day operationally-focused exercise in the Marlborough region. The exercise involved 15 vehicles.

Coal stockpile gets nod

by Jamie Shaw

The Buller District Council (BDC) has given the go-ahead for a private mining company to create a 90,000 tonne coal stockpile site near Deadman's Creek, Fairdown.

Brookdale Mining also wants to create a 60,000 tonne coal stockpile and loadout facility on Coates Street, near North Beach, although that consent application remains on hold.

Brookdale owner Robert Griffiths could not be reached for comment today.

Council's regulatory services manager Terry Archer said the Fairdown consent had only been issued within the past day, after a hearing was held late last month. He did not know whether anyone had yet appealed council's decision.

BDC originally put the resource consent application out to limited public consultation in February.

It received six submissions from affected parties, four of whom opposed the stockpile citing coal-dust pollution, noise, traffic and water quality. It also received feedback from seven interested parties opposed to the coal stockpile for the same reasons.

An affected Fairdown resident told The News today she was concerned about how the resource consent process had been handled.

Marja Kneepkens said that by the time the BDC had put the consent out to limited public consultation, the West Coast Regional Council had already grant-

ed Brookdale consents for water discharges.

She also felt the BDC's limited public notification had been too limited.

"They identified a small number of adjacent land-owners and invited them to have input and yet Deadman's Creek is a big recreational area for whitebaiting and so on."

"I think there is an awful lot of interested parties who would have appreciated having some input...who were never given an opportunity because it wasn't public notified," Ms Kneepkens said.

The stockpile site is a 15.5ha area immediately to the south-west of Deadman's Creek, about 300m back from State Highway 67. The area is also expected to include a truck turnaround area and a series of stackers and conveyors.

Mr Archer said Brookdale's application for the North Beach stockpile and loadout facility was still on hold as council sought more information from the company.

Council set the North Beach request aside at its May meeting after hearing from several members of the public, including pony club representatives and members of the public, worried about the impact of Brookdale's proposed operation. Several asked why the company wanted to truck coal to Westport when it could rail directly to the wharf.

Brookdale proposes up to 40 truck-and-trailer movements a day to the North Beach site, each truck carrying up to 30 tonnes of coal.



Judo chop: Local judoka Scott Bade spars with Westport North School student and aspiring judoka Solly Boyer. Bade, 16, was back at his former school today to tell students about his judo career which has taken off in the past 12 months. Last month he won a gold medal at the Oceania Judo Championships in Tahiti and was subsequently selected to again represent New Zealand at the Junior Judo World Championships in the Dominican Republic this October. Bade said support from the Solid Energy Sports Trust and the Phoenix Lodge had made much of his success possible.

West Coast leads New Zealand growth

by Lee Scanlon

For the second time this week, economists have recognised the West Coast as a nationwide economic leader.

The National Bank's Regional Trends survey, out today, puts the West Coast first equal with Gisborne on 3.7 per cent economic growth in the year to the end of June. The Coast and Gisborne are New Zealand's two smallest regional economies. Their growth is almost double the national average of 1.9 per cent.

The Coast easily outstripped other South Island regions: Southland 2 per cent, Otago 1.8 per cent and Canterbury 1.9 per cent.

The survey confirms the latest ASB/Main Report which labels the Coast as "the place to be" for the third consecutive quarter.

National Bank economist Steve Edwards said the Coast had consistently outstripped national growth rates for three years.

"The last few quarters it has been extending its lead on the national average. So certainly, it has been doing very well and it's top of the table - or joint top of the table."

He predicted the national economy would begin to slow as a result of the Reserve Bank tightening interest rates. When people refinanced their mortgages, they would realise they had to pull in their belts, he said.

But growth had been steady for the last three quarters, so the impact might be a "soft-landing" rather than negative growth.

"The indicators are pointing towards that. That will be reflected over most of the regions."

The strength of the West Coast's primary industries, including new projects like Oceana Gold's Reefton mine, would help insulate the region from any nation-

wide downturn, Mr Edwards said.

About 55 people are currently employed on the mine site and Oceana expects to employ a further 94 staff in December, when the mine opens. Some locals have predicted the mine could boost the town's population as much as 700, to about 1700.

Quarterly rise

In quarter to the end of June the Coast's economy rebounded 0.9 per cent - that's almost double the nationwide rise of 0.5 per cent and over four times the South Island's 0.2 per cent rise.

All but five of the 14 regions surveyed recorded increased economic activity in the quarter. Waikato led the way, rising 1.8 per cent - its largest quarterly gain since 2003. Hawkes Bay had the biggest fall, down 1.6 per cent.

The Coast had the second biggest rise in retail sales (0.7 per cent) and residential dwelling approvals (3.5 per cent). Nationwide, dwelling approvals fell 2.4 per cent.

The Coast's new car registrations and commercial motor vehicle registrations outpaced national figures. New car registrations fell 8.9 per cent, 2 per cent less than the national fall. The decrease reflected rising petrol prices, Mr Edwards said.

Commercial motor vehicle registrations rose 0.8 per cent, compared to a 3.2 per cent fall nationwide. On the negative side of the equation, the Coast recorded the largest decline in house sales (down 5.6 per cent from 178-168) and the second largest drop in farm sales (down 12 percent from 42-37).

The average house price for the quarter was \$172,000, slightly less than the \$177,000 quoted in the ASB report for the 12 months ending June and the \$179,000 in Quotable Value's figures for the same period.

Solid Energy boss "outraged"

Solid Energy's (SE) chief executive Don Elder says he's "outraged" anyone might believe claims Solid Energy is acting illegally at its Stockton mine.

Save Happy Valley Coalition claimed this week that SE was rushing to destroy the habitat of rare land snails at Stockton mine before the courts could rule whether the coal miner's actions were legal.

Dr Elder said today Solid Energy was legally entitled to mine at Stockton. "This has been law forever."

Media coverage of the coalition's claim had given "unwarranted credibility to people whose avowed intention was to break the law, if necessary, to do a lot

of economic damage to companies like us".

He likened the claim to someone suggesting a driver with a legal driving licence was driving illegally.

The coalition last month lodged Environment Court proceedings to try and stop SE from mining 5ha of snail habitat at Stockton.

In April, SE received ministerial permission to move a population of Powelliphanta Augustus snails from part of the Stockton ridge so it could mine up to \$400 million worth of coal. SE has found about 170 snails at Stockton to date.

Theft video on Internet

Greymouth, Aug 17 NZPA

A Greymouth store owned by Westport businessman, Brent Oldham, has gone global in its attempt to catch a day-time shoplifter.

Since IT@Work had security footage of the theft uploaded to video.google.com and set to the theme music of the Pink Panther, the website has had almost 400,000 hits worldwide.

The \$1895 Hewlett Package laptop without battery or charger was taken from the store around 11.30am on July 28.

While security cameras in the shop caught the theft on film, staff were not aware of it until later in the afternoon.

Branch manager James Graham said a friend put the footage on the Internet and when he first saw the 2-1/2 minute film clip with the accompanying sound track he was pleased.

Since the video had been on the Google site, figures from last night show 395,396 people from around the world have viewed it.

On August 6, it was the second-highest downloaded video on the global site.

Mr Graham said a mere 5 percent of the hits were from New Zealand, with most interest coming from places such as Brazil, Amsterdam and Canada.

"Cyber trippers" can view the video at video.google.com and search for "laptop theft".

WCDHB pleased

The West Coast District Health Board (WCDHB) says it's extremely pleased with aspects of its performance in the latest Health Ministry benchmark report.

The report ranked the board highly among New Zealand's 21 DHBs for seeing patients urgently in its emergency departments and for staff turnover, but poorly for patient satisfaction, efficiency and finances.

Board spokeswoman Vikki Carter said it was pleased with the emergency department results.

"We are one of only seven DHBs to have met the triage one and two standards, which means that the most urgent cases are being seen quickly and efficiently. The DHB missed meeting the standard for triage three by just 0.6 of a percent, which is still an excellent result."

The report showed the WCDHB's staff turnover of 3.09 per cent was one of the lowest of any DHB in the quarter. Ms Carter said those results were excellent and part of an overall trend for the board. "Recruitment and retention of staff remains one of the DHB's highest priorities and the fact this figure has continued to improve over four quarters is extremely positive for the DHB."

The report's findings on good staff stability and low sick leave rates (the lowest in New Zealand) were also good news, she said.

The report found patient satisfaction was 85 per cent - the third lowest among DHBs - but noted that the WCDHB received only 14 valid survey returns from the 300 forms posted to inpatients. It said the poor response from inpatients made analysis difficult.

Ms Carter said the WCDHB was also worried about the response and would be looking at ways of improving it to gain more reliable statistics.

The WCDHB was among the poorest performers for resource utilisation and performance to contract, but Ms Carter said the board still scored over 90 percent.

Bands ready to rock

Two West Coast bands are in with a chance of making it big as they aim for a place in the Smokefreequest national finals.

Di-Di-Di-Disco from Westland High School and The Thrill from Greymouth High School are two of the 47 teenage bands from 23 regions right around New Zealand preparing for what could be the key to their music career.

The bands have a shot at winning the national final in October, which offers a first prize of \$10,000 worth of music gear, recording time and, potentially, recognition by the music industry.

But before they do they have to put together a music video of their band performing 15 minutes of their own original material. If they impress the judges they could be one of the 12 bands or soloists selected to be recorded for a music compilation that will be released later in the year.

However, if they really stand out, they could be one of the top six bands or soloists announced in mid-September for the finals in October.