



Behind the Wheels Podcast Transcription

BONUS Episode 4

Rollin with Mack Lovin

ANNOUNCER

You're listening to Behind the Wheels with Doug Mason, Dave Walters, and Mike Yagley. This is a show where we talk about heavy truck and medium duty axle ends. Doug, Dave, and Mike bring close to 100 years of experience and expertise in the transportation business.

Join us once a month to learn new things about axle ends. Sponsored by Alcoa® Wheels, the global leader in aluminum wheel innovation.

MIKE YAGLEY

Well, hello, welcome to another episode of Behind the Wheels. I'm Mike Yagley.

DAVE WALTERS

I'm Dave Walters.

MIKE YAGLEY

And this is another special episode of Behind the Wheels. Today, we're going to be interviewing Jamie Hagen, also known as Mack Lovin. Big guy in the trucking community. We reached out to him through our roving reporter, Raluca Pascu. She's also our producer. We wanted get a feel for what's going on out there in the field. Hey Dave, you're closer, much, much closer to the fleets than I am, what are you hearing from the fleets? How are they doing with the lockdown, with the safety, and how's this whole pandemic affecting them as far as what you're hearing?

DAVE WALTERS

I mean, the ones that I've talked to, I mean, they put a lot of safety regulations into their drivers, and they really take this so serious. I mean, it's really changed the world of trucking, and there's no longer the contact, a lot of electronic billing, and a lot of non-contact. And we've all had to change our lives in this pandemic, and hopefully this is a great episode to give you an insight from a real owner/operator that's out there experiencing this every day.

MIKE YAGLEY

Fantastic. I'm really interested to hear what Jamie has to say. I'm looking forward to this one. Without any more waiting list let's hear from Jamie. This is Raluca Pascu from Alcoa Wheels talking with Jamie Hagen, owner/operator.



1616 Harvard Ave. Cleveland, OH 44105

| 1-800-242-9898


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RALUCA PASCU

Welcome to the Behind the Wheels podcast. I'm Raluca Pascu, and today is May 1st, 2020. And our guest is Jamie Hagen. Jamie is a respected trucking professional, owner of Hell Bent Express, and today he is also called a frontline worker, first responder, and a hero to many as we battle in the war against the COVID-19. And Jamie, on behalf of the team here at Alcoa Wheels, I wanted to personally thank you for your sacrifices that you've made to really keep America moving, and thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. We wanted to talk to someone that has a firsthand experience as a small operator during this pandemic. With that, Jamie, please tell us a few things about yourself, and then I want to hear, first, what is life on the road like these days for you? And some examples of the impact the pandemic is having on you and your operation. I want to hear the good and bad. I hope there's some positive things happening out there, as well.

JAMIE HAGEN

Well, thank you. We use the term professional loosely here. Been in the trucking industry my whole life. My dad was a truck driver/farmer, so ingrained into me, like most kids here in the Midwest. And I started driving when I was 16, so I've been in it a while now, over 30 years. Some of the things that I've seen, I guess, in these recent times, a lot of things have changed, obviously, over the last 30 years, but the biggest thing I've seen change is some of the techniques or the procedures that a guy has to use doing things anymore. I'd like to see people wrap their head around the safety aspect of this, and we can all get back to work. I'd love to have my business not fail because of it. I've lost 40% of my business, and I'm in the food industry as well. It's just people aren't ordering food like they used to. They say the people now do more at home, obviously, then restaurants and stuff, so just how food is being made or sold has changed. So, it's created this whole influx in the business. Strange times.

RALUCA PASCU

So one would think, I thought, "Wow, lucky for those guys that haul food these days." I thought things would be the opposite, but I guess I had a misconception on that. So, you have seen changes on the way supply chain has shifted things for you guys and the way people changed behavior. It's true. I just ordered some plants myself. I'm going to grow some tomatoes and cabbage and you name it on my deck.

JAMIE HAGEN

Well, I do a lot in the... I'm a food grade tanker hauler, so I'm like a main ingredient hauler. Some of the businesses that we go to have seen an increase, and then some I've seen a decrease. A lot of places that we go to, we haul fructose, so sodas have taken a hit, candy obviously, a lot of your stuff that you would have bought going to a convenience store, probably. Stuff like that. Potato chips. You know what I mean? They're the guys that took the bigger hit, I think. And this is just an assumption, because I've seen the loads that I would have done to them decrease. So yeah, I think people are eating more like what can you make at home kind of stuff. Most of that stuff you would get from a reefer or a drive in. You know what I mean? Versus a guy like me in the, like I said, main ingredient tanker hauling industry.

RALUCA PASCU

When you talked about safety, what exactly you had in mind? Can you expand on that?

JAMIE HAGEN

What I've seen now at a lot of shippers and the receivers, A, not letting drivers into their facility at all. Being in the food grain industry, obviously, there was plenty of protocols to a food safety. In other words, they didn't just let you in the plant without like, say, a hair net or a beard net or anything like that. Or even clean hands. It's just, they limited your section. Now, they won't let you in at all. Now, they want you to call them in advance. They'll meet you outside. A lot of the situations where they even have hand washing stations now, and like a driver's lounge in the sense that they have a tent.

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So, before, you used to come into their facility, and maybe you'd sit in that area with some chairs and some vending machines and a bathroom. Now, they have a Porta John outside with a hand washing station and a tent. You know what I mean? So, they're keeping you outside and they're staying inside, and you're limiting your exposure. A lot of the places I used to have to sign the bill of lading, now they electronically sign it for me. You know what I mean? They're just limiting the human to human interaction, which now that we're looking at it and saying it, it's actually, in a way, of speeded up the process. It's made it less lengthy, and it's more convenient and it's safe. Maybe this is something we probably should have been doing all along, especially in the food industry. That's definitely a positive, but I think you're going to start seeing more of that. We're changing how we do business.

RALUCA PASCU

Yeah. Yep. Well, some of these changes that came out of this bad situation, I see, and just on a personal front, I'm probably going to be able to order more online. I don't need to drive every time I want to get something. Or maybe my employer will say, "Hey, go ahead. Work from home. We don't have to congest the traffic. So, a lot of these forced us to learn something valuable that can be helpful to us once we put this coronavirus behind us, so that's a good example. I hope that continues for you guys. Tell me about... I'm always curious. I'm sitting home, I am in a bubble, how is traffic for you guys? There was definitely a change in congestion once the stay-at-home orders were in place. Is that still the case? Are you seeing a little bit of change? People are out and about more?

JAMIE HAGEN

Not that I've counted cars or anything, but there's more people out and about than there was when this first whole stay-at-home order came into play. Still, the traffic has really been amazing. As a truck driver, all I can say is it's made my life a lot easier, mainly in large cities, obviously. In my part of the world here in South Dakota, I haven't seen much of any change, but then again, there's not that many people out here. But when you, say, go through Chicago, like I did on a daily basis, now there's almost no traffic, backups of any kind. You can go right through the Dave Ryan and never even hardly touched the brake. You can almost set the cruise control and go right through town. Whereas, before, on any given moment, not even rush hour, there was plenty of backups.

JAMIE HAGEN

So, it's made my job faster, more efficient. It's made my life easier from that standpoint. That's what I was hoping to see is change through this all, even safety, but even like in this aspect, like you said, does it change people working from home? And we weren't going to do that change because it was just more convenient to do it the way we've always done it. But now that we're forced to change, it makes people see it in a different light and maybe good things will come of it. You know what I mean? More efficiencies and more safety. You know what I mean?

RALUCA PASCU

More productive. More safety. Yes. Yes.

JAMIE HAGEN

Yeah. If we end up, this summer, going back to business as usual, I would imagine that gas stays cheap. The roads will just be congested again. But just the productivity in that standpoint, it's...

RALUCA PASCU

I know you guys are getting so much attention right now. It's sometimes almost like I hope it stays and it continues, because you guys don't just stop or start helping when bad things happen. You guys are always doing the work that you do to get stuff for us on the shelves. I mean, I don't know what would happen if all truckers would stop hauling

JAMIE HAGEN

That was my biggest fear. You know what I mean? Was having a conversation with my wife about this, I said, "Really, my biggest fear is if the COVID spread throughout the trucking industry," which wouldn't take much. You know what I mean? We all use the same spots. We all go to the same truck stops. I'd love to see those figures from these travel plazas, how many thousands of drivers in a day come through there? You know what I mean? How many they serve. Could be a crazy number. Because just from sitting there an hour, you see hundreds of guys come through, or drivers, I should say, plenty of females out there as well. So, my fear was like, "What happens if it spreads like wildfire through this industry and guys are just sick? Or the ultimate sacrifice, what does our nation look like at that point?"

JAMIE HAGEN

Legitimately, I've never needed a pat on the back from people. This is my job. I do it because I want to. But it's nice getting the pat on the back. But my fear has always been, because I see how trucking is the lifeblood, it's legitimately how America works. Other countries, trucking isn't such a big thing because people grow things locally, they do things locally. Their economy is based on what is there now. I mean, living in South Dakota, nothing's made here. You know what I mean? We make corn and cows. You know what I mean? That's what we make here. Everybody else makes something else, so we bring in industry here and we take agriculture out. That's our trade off. I told my wife, I said, "If it were to stop," you know what I mean? "Within days you would see shortages. In weeks, there would be nothing."

JAMIE HAGEN

Once that vacuum starts and how hard it would be to get it back online. I mean, you see it, obviously, when there's a hurricane and things get destroyed and you got to have FEMA come in, and they literally got to start throwing just water at people and supplies and just trying to keep people alive. And I said, "Now, imagine that on a nationwide scale and you couldn't keep up with it." That my biggest fear throughout all of this. People staying at home, we could limit it, but these guys and gals couldn't.

RALUCA PASCU

Correct.

JAMIE HAGEN

That worst case scenario happen.

RALUCA PASCU

Yeah. No, no. It's scary. It's a scary thought. It's worse than we could possibly imagine. I don't know. You take things for granted, but if that should happen, that'd be just really a disaster. So, what do you do? How do you keep yourself safe, Jamie? What do you do? What do you see other people do? There's a lot of opinions. Gloves, no gloves. Put the mask, no mask. Wash your hands. Or how do you keep yourself safe?

JAMIE HAGEN

Well, there's definitely a lot of opinions.

RALUCA PASCU

Yes.

JAMIE HAGEN

But what I'm doing is, I got a mask. I started with an N-95 mask because nobody was wearing masks, and now I've moved to a cloth one that I purchased online. And I wear that pretty much everywhere. I'm hoping that that becomes the standard throughout the summer and fall here. Hopefully, there'll come a day where we can stop wearing them. But I just figured at this point, we just need to try it. We tried the stay-at-home and everybody not doing anything, and now we're going back to work.

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But I started wearing the mask. I didn't wear gloves. I did have hand sanitizer. I limited what I would touch. I'd always use my sleeve of my jacket or long sleeve shirt or whatever to grab a handle, but to get out of a truck stop, let's say, I would use my elbow to push the door open. I just tried to limit what I touch. Certainly tried to limit touching my face, but we all know is virtually impossible. You just be driving down the road in your eye itches or you got an itch on your nose, next thing you know, you're touching your face. You're like, "Oh no."

JAMIE HAGEN

First thing I do is immediately after, let's say, fueling, I would walk in and wash my hands. Thank the Lord, a lot of male bathrooms don't have doors. I feel sorry for the gals because you guys do have doors, for the most part. So, I wouldn't have to touch a door. I never had to touch a urinal. You know what I mean? All these things, you don't have to touch, thankfully. So, I was like, man, legitimately, I don't really have to touch all that much stuff other than the fuel pump. Thank the Lord, too, again, these apps that these travel centers have developed, all I have to do is touch my phone now. Activate the pump, I get out, I touched a nozzle, put that in, and that's it. And I've always worn gloves for that because diesel fuel is really hard to get off your hands once it's on there. Take your gloves off, put them away, go inside, wash your hands.

JAMIE HAGEN

If you do get something to eat, most of them are full service these days. You know what I mean? They'll hand you your coffee. They'll hand you your stuff. Use a credit card, use my knuckles to touch the pad. You know what I mean? You get in line with somebody, you stay back, you try not to talk to them because that was the thing. You know what I mean? Talking to somebody. Like I tell people, it's your humidity, the water that came from you is what caused the infection to spread. So, it's like, you try not to talk to people and you just try to nod or give the Vulcan live long and prosper sign to people.

RALUCA PASCU

Yes. Definitely changes of behavior. We have to... And I think you guys are going to be a good example because you've done it enough.

JAMIE HAGEN

A lot of drivers I see on social media talking about how they're not going to wear a mask, it's a free country, and they have a right to not wear a mask. And I said, "Well, that's true." I said, "I don't think the government should mandate it in any way." I don't think the government should be like, "Hey, let's make our people wear this." I think there should be guidelines. But I also think businesses, since they're private, could mandate it. And the one driver I was speaking to about, he's like, "Well, that's not right." I said, "Well, there is a sign that says, 'No shirt, no shoes, no service,' at most businesses. Isn't there? And that's because some people would come in topless and barefoot, wouldn't they?" So, I think it's just a moral obligation.

RALUCA PASCU

I think. So, it's this social contract we... Yeah.

JAMIE HAGEN

I mean, we literally could mitigate in and slow this down without having to stay home, I think, just with mask. Everybody's just been digesting information like crazy, right? You're watching the news, you're reading things, you're seeing things, and I think the most common thing has been, like I said, it's a person's humidity. It's our moisture, the water droplets from our mouth that is really spreading it. So, I'm like, "Well, if you could cover your mouth, what comes out of your mouth doesn't fall on the floor or on the shopping cart or anything that you touch then. So, how easy would that be to really bring those numbers down?"

JAMIE HAGEN

And like you said, I see people all the time not wearing masks, and obviously, I'm not going to say anything, it's their choice, but it would make me feel better because it is legitimately, if we all wore masks, we could slow it down. But when one person doesn't, my mask doesn't stop anything. You know what I mean? It's just a piece of cloth. It's just there to retain moisture coming out of my mouth. That's it. I'm just hoping, once we all start doing it, it becomes more socially acceptable.

RALUCA PASCU

Socially acceptable. Yeah. And it takes [crosstalk 00:17:00]

JAMIE HAGEN

People will adapt with it.

RALUCA PASCU

I think so. Take time. It's something new. Just like smoking used to be cool. You'd be smoking in a restaurant, and then second-hand smoking. It's probably still debated by those that still smoke. And I don't have any opinion about that, but it will take time to change the culture that we have. Because you look at the Asian cultures, they wear the mask out of respect when they're sick. They put on the mask, they don't want to spread the germs around. They don't wear it to protect themselves. So, it will take time, but I'm thinking I have two kids and they constantly bring germs from school, school shuts down the middle of the flu. Right? Because they have to go to disinfect for days. If this could help us even help with the flu, normal flu season by... I mean, heck many of us have just learned how to properly wash your hands during this.

JAMIE HAGEN

Yeah. Right.

RALUCA PASCU

It's like, nobody did that. Who washed their hands for 30 seconds?

JAMIE HAGEN

Maybe that's something that helps us all in the future. You know what I mean?

RALUCA PASCU

In the future. I hope so.

JAMIE HAGEN

[Crosstalk 00:18:13] more productive. Well, as an employer, I look at productivity lost. Anytime somebody's sick and they have to stay home, how much money do you lose? Even then, they're not getting paid, I'm not getting paid. And that's fine, we've come to accept that, but maybe we, going forward, with just some of these guidelines are going to help us all not lose as much time off the job in the future.

RALUCA PASCU

I agree. And for office environment, we have to mentality of, "I got to go in the office. I'm fine." Because you get three more people sick, and you take it home, give it to your family, and here we go. That's how it all starts. I hope these things will somewhat shape the way we think about our safety and each other.

RALUCA PASCU

So, you have four trucks, you said, right? Now you have four, because you just bought one. So, are you still able to keep your guys employed? They're still running shipments? How are things going from... I know you've said you lost, what, 70% you said?

JAMIE HAGEN

40%.

RALUCA PASCU

40%. 40%.

JAMIE HAGEN

So, I mean, everyone's keeping busy, they're staying employed and moving. It's just, we're not running five days a week or six days a week, so to speak, because I was somewhat regional from that aspect, servicing customers in our area. It's just cut back to where you're running three days. Instead of getting 2,500 to 3,000 miles a week, now we're doing 1,500 or just 1,800, 2,000 miles. You know what I mean? It's reduced.

RALUCA PASCU

Yes.

JAMIE HAGEN

Having good weeks and bad weeks, some weeks we'll work all week, and then the next week, you work one day. It's just spotty like that, which is not normal for spring. Spring, for my industry, is usually really productive. We really kick into high gear, and all summer long, we're just wide open, busy, busy. Kind of shocking.

RALUCA PASCU

Yeah. It's just been a very difficult situation for everyone around the world. That's just a reality, and there's no playbook, there's no recipe. I think we're just going to have to do our part. Right? It's the attitude. What do you think from that perspective, do you hear people talk about that? I mean, you just went and got a truck because it was definitely a good opportunity for you, but do you think the people will be confident enough to go out and buy trucks and move forward instead of holding tight and wait? What do you think?

JAMIE HAGEN

Just a couple of nights ago, I was sitting down with my salesman that I use to buy trucks from, and him and I were having this conversation. I said, "I suppose you just been sitting around with nothing to do." And he's like, "Honestly," he's like, "I've been business as usual." He goes, "I've been talking to customers, and customers still need trucks." He goes, "We're still moving, we're just not moving as much. Prices have come down, definitely, on used trucks. That's created an opportunity where people want to purchase them."

RALUCA PASCU

Wow. Very interesting. So, do you think more people will enter the industry because of this?

JAMIE HAGEN

Well, that's definitely a possibility. I think you're going to see people move how they do business or even how they live their lives. Like you were talking about earlier with the pickup and deliveries, you know what I mean? Amazon's adding all these drivers to deliver goods. I think there's going to be plenty of new opportunities for that. So, you're going to see delivery vehicles and stuff, that they're going to be in huge demand, so you're going to see that industry take off.

JAMIE HAGEN

Over the years, if you look back at America, you've seen how like some businesses go out of business and the new ones enter, and then people just adjust to that. And I think there's definitely an opportunity where you see some of these restaurants might close because people won't be going out like they used to, maybe, potentially, and you'll see waitresses and waiters end up being delivery people, where they deliver your goods or deliver the food. I think the trucking industry is going to change from that aspect, too. I think you're going to see a lot more things going to warehouses. You know what I mean? I think the model is going to adjust.

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RALUCA PASCU

Yes. Yeah. So, that's great because my last question was, how do you see the future in trucking? We've been focusing on future of trucks from electric to autonomous, self-driving, and it just seems like either are those things are somewhat on hold and we'll see a completely different outcome or focus as a result of this pandemic. I'm just even thinking, my 12-year old asked like, "Why can't they just deliver with drones?" I'm like, "Well, okay."

JAMIE HAGEN

Someday.

RALUCA PASCU

Someday.

JAMIE HAGEN

Someday we'll be able to get that down to a fine science. Right?

RALUCA PASCU

Yes. Yes.

JAMIE HAGEN

And that might be what happens. You know what I mean? To mitigate the human contact, that might actually be what happens if we start automating more things. We'll have to just wait and see.

RALUCA PASCU

Correct. Jamie, I know you are a busy, busy guy. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today. I just wanted you to tell us where people can follow you. Yeah, I know you you have a great amount of network on social, and people sometimes engage with you. Where can they find, and if you don't mind tell them just the handle for the app?

JAMIE HAGEN

Well, you can find me on Twitter and Instagram @hellbenhagen, and I'm on Facebook, just my name, Jamie Hagen. On LinkedIn, as well. I spend a lot of time on social media simply because of the free time out there with truck drivers at night, and over the years, one of the things that has changed a lot, it has been that social aspect. We used to just be held up in those cabs all by ourselves, and now we have a community that we can communicate with and learn from. And I think that's what's really changed the trucking industry this last decade, is the ability to gain more information, and we can all change. Very positive things.

RALUCA PASCU

That's great. Very positive things, indeed. And we love seeing those interactions. We're now somewhat part of that conversation where, before, we could not join your conversations when you had them on CB, radio. And it's just the greatest thing we think that we're able to be part of what you do. Thank you for being out there. And once again, stay safe, and let us know if you need anything. We're here to help.

JAMIE HAGEN

Will do. Thank you.

RALUCA PASCU

Thank you, Jamie. Take care. Have a great day.

JAMIE HAGEN

You too.

RALUCA PASCU

Bye.

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