

In great demand

The market for pilot car escorts and operators continues to climb upwards as the industry evolves.

Pilot cars are often the unspoken heroes of transports big and small. Key players in many travel plans, operators and their vehicles are responsible for vessels, equipment and a variety of other important cargo arriving safely and adhering to all regulations.

ACT surveyed four insiders as they weighed in on the future of the market, evolution of the industry and safety tips for staying accident free. Participants in our forum include Louis Juneau, president, Nova Permits & Pilot Cars, Randy Starnes, business development manager, Kenco Bucket Trucks, Patricia Auvil, president, Northwest Pilot Car Association and Kaye Greene-Smith, owner, Pilotcarz4U, LLC.

HOW DO YOU CHARACTERIZE THE MARKET FOR PILOT CARS?

JUNEAU: The market for PEVO's [Pilot Escort Vehicle Operators] is definitely



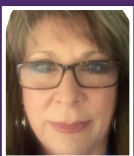
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Technology and certification are several hot button trends and issues in this important sector.

in good health. To the detriment of state officials, the goods being transported don't seem to grow smaller which means that more and more PEVO's are required. We have seen one state and one province thus far passing new regulation where PEVO's with a special certification can act in lieu of law enforcement when piloting OS-OW. I'm positive that we will see more states and provinces adopting such regulations which in turn will create even more business for the pilot car industry.

STARNES: 2020 will be a solid year – particularly for the pilots who are a cut above. I see those who educate themselves on regulations, supply the right equipment and know how to use it in high demand. Professionalism will shape the industry into what it should be.

AUVIL: There is an ever-increasing demand/need for good, trained (certified) pilot escort vehicle operators. Too often, it is extremely difficult to find this type of pilot escort. Meaning pilot escorts with all the requirements of the various states they may be traversing to cover the loads. With that said, I believe the market for pilot car operators to be in great demand! Not only has the number of oversize loads moving increased but so have the sizes of these loads. As the safety for all involved in the movement of such loads, the traveling public and the infrastructure is also of utmost importance.

GREENE-SMITH: In asking my Pilotcarz4u group, we believe the pilot car market

is at an all-time high. It's been great for those who have worked hard and smart. I believe 2020 will be awesome for our industry. While it is an election year, I feel our president has held our economy together well. He has given our banks and corporations incentives to let go of money which in turn allows our economy to soar. Government subsidies encourage strong business leaders to grow their businesses. The pilot car industry as a whole had a record-breaking year last year. January this year has carried over with those same results, and I see 2020 being even stronger than 2019.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN THE PILOT CAR BUSINESS IN TODAY'S MARKET?

JUNEAU: Insurance is definitely a challenge as we are facing more and more companies leaving the Pilot Escort Vehicle Operators to dry or charging them very high premiums. It's actually the same challenge for smaller trucking companies. Certification and reciprocity are also challenging. More states and provinces contemplate the idea of joining others in adopting certification. I personally still believe that even the actual certification programs are not quite satisfactory but are better than nothing. You could sit in a classroom, pass the exam and be ready to go the next morning to pilot an OS-OW. Here at NOVA, we have an in-house certification program but more importantly, we have a ride

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RANDY STARNES, Business Development Manager, Kenco Bucket Trucks

along program. We never let a PEVO accompany an OS-OW on its own until we are confident that they can perform to our standards.

STARNES: Complacency. A pilot isn't simply a vehicle being driven around with blinking lights. Pilots serve a very important role. Successful shippers and carriers who know this, benefit. Their projects run smoother-on time with no incidents. A solid pilot team is instrumental in accomplishing this goal. They are important to driving profitability on any project.

AUVIL: Insurance for one. Pilot commercial vehicle policies have increased at such a rapid, unaffordable rate to the extent some pilots have hung up their hard hats, so to speak. There is also the multitude of demands various trucking companies have put on pilots for insurance coverage requirements other than the commercial auto policy. I, for one, am in a state with an extremely high fuel tax, a state where there are only a mere few insurance companies that will insure a pilot escort vehicle and a state that is considering a “pay per mile” tax. Washington State is also one of the too few states that require a pilot to be certified which is another expense the majority of other states pilots to not have to absorb.

GREENE-SMITH: Affordable insurance is always an issue. Pilot car companies cut corners to save money. Although not required, Pilotcarz4u carries Errors and Omissions in the event that one of our dispatchers or pilot car companies makes a mistake. In addition, we carry the million dollar general and professional liability coverage. With that said, we have been accident free for our 25 years in business. A lot of trucking companies look for the least expensive pilot car company to run

their loads thinking they will make more revenue until there is an accident or issue and the escort isn't covered. At that point they realize they've lost what they made. In addition to insurance, we feel better technology is needed as well as nationwide licensing and uniformity on a federal level. Also, I find the states are changing laws and wording rules and regulations unclearly as well as failing to train their own agencies on “their true meaning” of their new rules and laws.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO SEE EVOLVE IN THE PILOT CAR INDUSTRY IN THE FUTURE? TECHNOLOGY, CERTIFICATION, ETC.

JUNEAU: Well, I sure hope that one day we'll have ride along programs and tier levels as some PEVO do not wish to become Lead PEVO, do height pole or even run surveys and traffic management plans. Technology is already there to assist PEVO's run surveys to determine vertical and width clearances. Hopefully with more certification will come higher standards in regard to vehicle types and equipment that are required.

STARNES: Both- I am excited to see an interest in laser technology for running surveys. I would consider carriers who see the value to be the leaders in their field. I would also applaud the early adopters in the pilot industry. They worked very hard to bring this science and it's benefits to the attention of the carriers. Certification and continued efforts for consistent requirements between the states would elevate the pilot car industry.

AUVIL: Certification! While certification is only the beginning of the knowledge necessary to provide pilot escort services, it is also the window to safety which is of the utmost importance to all as I previously stated. Technology would definitely be advantageous to the pilot industry as well. A good “in vehicle” mapping/routing program, such as what Pro Miles has made available at the state permitting level, would be a helpful tool for pilots to utilize as reference along their routes. One must acknowledge that a pilot cannot be expected to know or have memorized each and every back road or turn as many of us work not only in all the forty nine states (I haven't been to Hawaii yet!) but all the Canadian Provinces. Along with certification comes rules and regs for pilots. Compliance is a real issue. To that, if a pilot is not in compliance, why should a ticket go to the trucking company?

GREENE-SMITH: While we would rather not have the government dictating and

making demands in our industry, we would like a more uniformed industry in state to state regulations, harmonizing on the equipment needed for our industry keeping in mind that we are the pilot car and not the truck driver of an 18 wheeler, and home state certifications meaning the state you live in reciprocates with every state vs having certifications in every state or hold five or more state certifications to be a certified pilot car owner. The technology world is wide open for this industry.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INSIGHTS ON SOME OF THE BEST PRACTICES FOR PREVENTING ACCIDENTS?

JUNEAU: Pre-trip briefing or also called tailgate meetings that should take place prior to departure to make sure that the load is actually reflecting what it is permitted for by measuring it. Ensuring that the height pole is properly set at required height. Reviewing the route and identifying possible low bridges and decide and agree on how to proceed are some of the best practices. To leave ego's at home could be another one but that's not always easy to teach.

STARNES: Continue to share information with each other. At Kenco, we worked very hard in 2019 on a guide titled “Know Your Roll.” This piece folds like a road map down to 3 by 5 inches to be conveniently carried in any vehicle and is meant as a reference for the transport supervisor, the driver, our crews and the civilian and uniformed Escorts. This piece has been met with great enthusiasm from the shipper, carriers and state and local authorities. Openly sharing resources in our industry creates an environment for everyone to excel.

AUVIL: Certification, continuing education, communication, planning, knowledge, know your route, call your route, pre-trip meetings, minimize distractions, rest, readiness, health and know your limits!

GREENE-SMITH: With such population growth, there are more and more vehicles on the road. First, we need to make it our mission to educate the public. Secondly, we must never be complacent in protecting our loads because we have done this job for so many years or we have run this route hundreds of times. Pay attention! Always drive defensively. Look for potential risks. Make sure your pilot car is trained and certified. Ask for credentials. Have pre-trip meetings with everyone involved. Measure the load. Use common sense. Get there safely. ■