

# Bendix aids hands-on truck driver

Lisa Roberson  
The Chronicle-Telegram

Barry Owens is not your typical truck driver.

Sure, he can haul freight and crisscross the country with the best of them, but he is also paralyzed from the waist down, due to an accident that crippled him almost 25 years ago. He is completely wheelchair-dependent.

But one local company has stepped up to help him, retrofitting his tractor-trailer with the latest air disc brake technology at no cost.

Bendix Commercial Vehicle System saw more than just a handicapped truck driver looking for a handout in Owens, said Ron Plantan, principal engineer. In Owens, Bendix saw an experienced driver who would not only benefit from the air disc brake technology, but also appreciate it as an added safety feature on his 1998 Freightliner.

"He has a great story," Plantan said. "He loves trucking, had an accident, but got back into the truck. How many other guys who have gone through what he has still have the courage to get back in a truck?"

"He's an inspiration to others, but more importantly he is a treasure for us. There are not too many guys out there who know as much about trucking as Barry."

To succeed at his job, Owens, 47, said, he has to look for the



CHUCK HUMEL / CHRONICLE

Truck driver Barry Owens has logged almost 2 million miles since a trucking accident left him paralyzed. He learned to drive a rig with hand controls.

best technology available. He has not traveled more than 2,000,000 miles as a paraplegic by short-changing himself.

"I think this brake system is going to be the wave of the future," Owens said. "In 10 years, I think all trucks are going to have these brakes."

That may be so, Plantan added. In the next few years, a government regulation requiring all tractor trailers to operate with a stop time closer to passenger vehicles will go into

effect and Bendix's air disc brakes are right in line with that technology.

They provide a loaded commercial vehicle with a stop distance that is more than 30 percent shorter than conventional drum brake technology.

They are also easier to maintain and hold up longer under constant use.

Safety is very important to Owens.

Hauling freight is all he knows, and is a profession he

has chosen to stick with despite his own accident, as well as watching his father die behind the wheel of a tractor-trailer when he was 12.

"There were a lot of things I could have done after my accident, but I knew I could keep driving if I set my mind to it," said Owens, a native of Moscow, Tenn.

"I don't claim to be Superman. I just do what I can do. I'm just trying to make a decent living for my family."

## BUSINESS BRIEF

### Judge blocks flight attendants strike

U.S. District Judge Victor Marrero said he will issue an injunction to allow time for him to examine the case.

as the United States grapples with fierce competition from globalization.

Globalization has shrunk the

That has benefited some workers, but has hurt those left behind in the changing worldwide economic landscape.