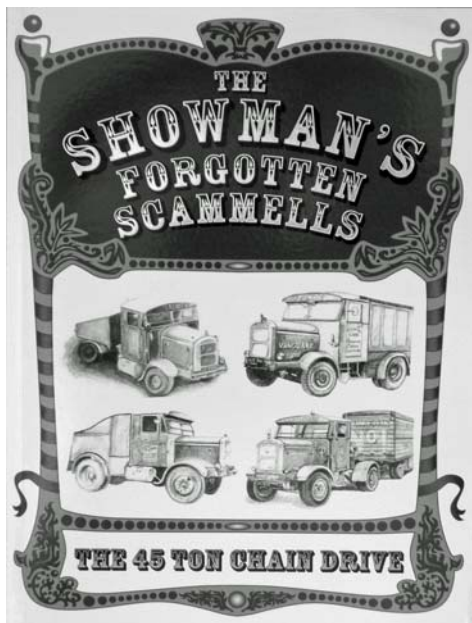


“The Showman’s Forgotten Scammells” “The 45 Ton Chaindrives” by Kay Townsend

a review by Jim Wells



This newly published book tells the story of the ten 45 ton chaindrive tractors supplied new to fairground showmen after WWII. Although supplied at around the same time as the Showtracs, the chaindrives are less well known - hence the title of the book. The author of the book is Kay Townsend, the granddaughter of Richard Townsend a showman from Weymouth, Dorset and an active member of the fairground community

After WWII the Townsend family were looking to replace one of their steam engines, and in 1946 bought one of the ten chaindrives new: BJT 726, later to receive the name Vanguard. It was driven from Watford to Dorchester by Kay’s uncle, Marshall

Herbert who was only allowed to depart after a session on the practice pad. He found the experience of driving the Scammell so bad that he vowed never to drive her again. Whether he relented, Kay does not tell us, but Vanguard was used until the end of the 1972 season.

Vanguard, pictured here leaving Sherborne in 1972, was very much part of Kay’s early life. As a child, Kay rode in her as she pulled the fairground loads, and was especially pleased to have the job of pulling the engine stop when they arrived. Kay admits to “getting a bee in her bonnet” in her teens after Vanguard had been retired and was in storage, sheeted over in a shed in the Townsend Family yard. She decided that the old Scammell needed a clean. Kay and a friend removed the sheeting, scrounged buckets, sponges and rags from the family and friends who shared the yard and set about cleaning her. Whether she was cleaned again I do not know, but Vanguard remained in the ownership of Richard Townsend’s descendants until she was sold in 1989.



Kay’s cleaning story doesn’t feature in the book, but plenty of others do - about Vanguard and the other nine Scammells - their successes, their failings, and the part they played in life on the fairgrounds. Many (perhaps even most) of them have never appeared in print before, and they are all well sourced, from the owners, drivers and people who worked with them. Kay is at pains to stress that this book does not contain recycled material from existing sources, and she has gone to considerable efforts to contact and talk with the people involved, who have all had the chance to

check the material. As well as the stories, the book is liberally sprinkled with photographs drawn from the collections of showmen and enthusiasts from Devon to Darlington (and many places besides), many of which have also not previously been published. Where photographs could not be sourced, drawings have been commissioned and verified as accurate by the former vehicle owners.



Others of the ten were owned by such well known fairground families as the Studts who owned two, Harniess (who also owned two), the DeVeyes who operate as Anderton and Rowland and ran the chaindrive alongside one of their Showtracs. “Earl Beatty” is pictured above at the Sherborne Pack Monday Fair in 1969.

Both of the Harniess chaindrives have survived. DDT 107 has been owned by showman Jack Schofield since 1972, and was retired from road use around 1996 and is now used as a yard shunter. DDT 32 is now owned by Brian Freer and has been restored as a ballast tractor. Amongst the trips to rallies, she has also been to the Netherlands and taken the groom and best man to a family wedding



Other families were Heal of Bristol - whose vehicle is pictured winching an ERF 8 wheeler from the mud at Taunton - and Whitelegg, whose lorry, Dreadnought, has not survived, but fortunately several pictures do exist - she is shown below heading towards Plymouth in 1958.

Is this book recommended?

Absolutely! At around ninety pages, with individual chapters on all ten of

the chaindrives and dozens of pictures, including those reproduced here, it is a great read. As Kay implies, the chaindrives have existed in the shadow of the Showtracs. This book goes a long way to correcting this.

And finally, if you own a chaindrive, or one of the successor types, I'm sure Kay would love to ride in the cab again. I suspect that she would jump at the chance to try driving too, if offered the opportunity!

Kay has very kindly made **signed copies** of “The Showman’s Forgotten Scammells.”

available to Register Members by post for £14.95, including P&P. Please contact Carol Cooper.

