

A trucker's life - On the TNT Asia Road Network



Asian Trucker boards a Scania R 380 and rides along with TNT Express crews on the ARN to experience the life on the road when time is crucial and care for material is equally important



“Wow! This is so cool!” Owen Leed, a friend of mine said, when I told him what I am going to do. Owen is involved in motorsports, but what we had planned had nothing to do with racing. What I lay ahead of me was a trip from Kuala Lumpur’s KLIA to Bangkok and onwards to Laos. On a truck. And almost non stop. The entire trip would span more than 3000 Kilometers and take only from Friday morning to Tuesday morning in the wee hours. Some may say “Yeah, but this is what I am doing everyday!”. And this is exactly the reason why we joined TNT on their Asian Road Network: To see what it is like to be a trucker,

on the road and under pressure to deliver goods on time and with a lot of responsibility for material and people.

Interestingly, TNT has chosen trucks for this “product”. While the truck might be the transport modus of choice in Europe, in Asia this concept is relatively new, but is fast growing in recognition and acceptance. Obviously, man and machine are subjected to a lot of stress and the pressure is high when it comes to delivering on time. Picking the right truck is key to success.



Arriving at the TNT warehouse in Kuala Lumpur

A good team is the most important

The stats for the ARN look impressive. However, perhaps the most important part is putting it all together. Selection of the drivers is crucial. It is Friday morning, 6:30 and I am meeting with the first team of TNT drivers. Suppayah Vyravan and Ser Yock Hian will be taking me to the border of Malaysia and Thailand. They have just arrived from Singapore. The ride was smooth and they arrived on time. Just after customs clearance they dock at the TNT warehouse right next to the airport and start unloading. Every step is well practiced and one can see the precision with which the team is working.

Stoppers are applied to the wheels: Safety first! "It is no wonder that we are all working in a team and that we help each other. All of us are part of a profit sharing scheme. TNT allows us to perform and that will be recognised at the end of the year" Vyravan explains. The trailer is loaded and a picture is being taken. This picture will be sent up to the next warehouse to

ensure that the load taken on and unloaded is identical. This photo also serves as evidence in case of damages to the goods

Before the journey continues, the supervisor calls for a briefing. During this briefing the team will report on any issue during the past sector they have driven, what lies ahead and what the load they carry consists of. During this briefing, a number of documents are signed. Drivers have to sign off on the vehicles being road-worthy having inspected them upon arrival. While watching this, it becomes clear that these drivers have more to do than just simply transporting good. They are also responsible for the condition the vehicle is in. Further, they are also brand ambassadors for TNT. Everyone is wearing the same uniform. Spotless ones at that one has to add. If anyone is still thinking that driving a truck is for those that have no education or are not suited of "real work" will have an awakening here.



Unloading at KLIA



Scania R380 and their drivers - The workhorses on the ARN

TNT has put a total of 14 drivers onto the ARN for Malaysia and another 14 for Thailand. In Malaysia, Scania sold 6 R 380 to move the goods, in total 12 R380s had been purchased. Together with 14 trailers across the two countries, these trucks are the workhorses on the ARN. The trucks are all identical, right down to the Michelin Tires. "We have had a lot of discussions about these things with Scania. The tires were recommended as the best ones for this application and you will see them on all the trucks we use on the ARN" I am being told.

Climbing up to the cabin, it becomes obvious why these trucks have been chosen: There is a lot of space and the passenger seat can easily compete with any passenger car. The suspension of the seat is something I will be grateful for over the next days. The Scania on the ARN are exclusively double-sleeper cabs. While one driver pilots the truck, the other one sleeps. After some 4 - 5 hours they swap and after a refreshing sleep in the back of the cabin, the new driver is well rested and alert.

This system has two main advantages. Firstly, the drivers are not pushed to the limit when driving. A steady rhythm of driving and resting ensures that they are fit to manage the vehicle. After a certain time driving, both drivers will rest for a full 9 hours. "In the Singapore hub we have a special area where drivers can shower and sleep. it is almost like a hotel" I am being told while we set the wheels in motion. Secondly, a truck in motion is more difficult to hi-jack and steal the load. Given that TNT is an express delivery company, every minute counts.

Everything is planned to the smallest detail

All vehicles are equipped with GPS and the route is predetermined. So are the stops that the drivers are allowed to take. As soon as we leave the compound, even opening the door of the truck will trigger an alarm and the control centre will call in to check what is going on. Toiled breaks are predetermined along the way. Cameras monitor the inside and outside of the truck, nothing escapes the control centre. The route is planned in such a detail that TNT has worked out which roads offer the best compromise between number of toll gates and waiting time at these stations. Should any delay happen, the drivers have to radio ahead to inform the colleagues about the delay. This may result in goods being reloaded / redistributed or offloaded.

While the two drivers follow their routine, I am watching, taking in what is needed to get the goods across borders. The truck rolls along at a steady speed and our drivers are constantly checking the mirrors. A lot of signalling takes place, even if the truck only moves out a foot or so to overtake a motorbike. As we go up the hills around Ipoh, a lot of space is given for other motorists to weave in and out of the convoy of trucks that have formed. This is nothing you learn in driving school.

Vyrvan is actually retired, having piloted trucks for some 33 years in four different companies. "I love this job and with the new generation of trucks like this one, it is actually fun! So, why not?" he tells me. "We do some seven or eight trips, then we have days off. In total we have 14 days annual leave" Vyrvan goes on. Apparently, TNT is one of the few companies that provide drivers with full benefits and bonus. At the same time, drivers that are not working as part of the team or are careless will find themselves quickly removed from the ARN.



Trucker Tucker

Near Taiping we have the first slightly longer break. We stop to have food and change drivers. As we near the border, it starts to rain. The drivers are now on full alert with decreased visibility and motorists that weave in and out of their lane, obviously not as aware of the dangers of driving in rain as our TNT drivers are.

One night in Bangkok

Some 500 Kilometres later we pass Alor Star and we reach the border to Thailand (Bukit Kayu). While I could use the bed now, this was just the first part of the ride that takes me in one go to Bangkok. We arrive and take a rest while we are waiting for the Thai crew to arrive.

Here the prime movers are being swapped as they cannot go across the border while the trailers continue their journey to Bangkok intact. TNT is the only operator in Asia to deploy integrals for cross border operations. The second team, both Thais, will be taking me to Bangkok in a 18hour ride that will go from here to the TNT warehouse near the old airport - non-stop. As we drive along the East-Coast of Thailand, the sun sets and the two drivers follow the same modus operandi as their colleagues before. Fully briefed and rested, they head up north. The roads are remarkable good. However, there are no lights along most parts of the highway.



First stop on a long trip

The drivers have to be very aware as in some parts of the country people simply ride their mopeds with the entire family of four without light against the traffic. Thongchai Sawat-Oon and Javoon Prasarnwong are experts too and the ride is smooth. If you thought you could make up some time, forget it: the speed limiter is set to 85 km/h. There goes the perception that truck drivers are all little Schumachers.

We stop every 2 hours. Windscreens are being cleaned, tire pressure checked and the vehicle is being inspected. At no time will the vehicle be completely abandoned.

There will always be one driver with the vehicle. "Standard procedure across the entire ARN". I am hungry, but someone don't feel like having locust for breakfast. Following another recommendation from Scania, the trucks on the ARN exclusively use Shell diesel.

As we pass Hua Hin, I am now awake for some 30 hours. The drivers work like clockwork and again, every work-step fits. A final change of driver and we are on our last stretch to Bangkok where we are greeted with slight traffic jam. After unloading the truck is being washed at the yard. The supervisor explains that



Thai Team taking me to Laos

he insists that this is done on the TNT premises, so that he can be sure that the truck is spotless. Again, these drivers are brand ambassadors. TNT Thailand is also very proud of the fact that they are the 2010 Scania Driver competition.

Good roads, good relationships

After a night's rest, I am back to the TNT warehouse near Dong Muan, the old airport. A different team meets me to go to Laos. This time, a contractor is handling the transport. They are, just like the TNT drivers, operating according to the same strict regulations imposed by the transporter. Under monthly review, they follow the exact same SOPs and the equipment is the same when it comes to monitoring the trip. GPS is installed and a sign on the back of the trailer let's potential crooks know that this is Fort Knox on wheels. The northbound route sees three scheduled departures weekly, which are supplemented as demand dictates. It started as some byloads and has since grown into full container-loads. If you expect bad roads, you are in for a surprise. Surprisingly, only the first hour out of Bangkok is a rough ride. After that, the highway is smooth and well maintained. The usual drive / sleep routine kicks in and as we eat up kilometres, the sun sets. It takes 12 hours to cover the 700 kilometres.



Breakfast not for me

Arriving at the TNT border office to Laos the next morning, the customs seals are broken, goods unloaded and new cargo taken onboard. A final check and the truck is heading across the border. Obviously, the truck is a familiar sight as the border officials greet us with friendly waves. In no time are we across the border. At the bottom of the Friendship Bridge II is a roundabout that feeds vehicles into the right lane as Laos has

left hand drive. Just behind the border, the container will be swapped using a crane and within 30 minutes the truck is back to the border and ready to make the journey back to Bangkok. By the time I am back I have covered over 3000 kilometres in less than 4 days. Just before we got back to Bangkok, a convoy of party buses overtakes us. These had been positioned at a truck stop a few kilometres behind and the passengers were having a party.



The Asia Road Network has operating routes that connect Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and China. It furthermore connects seamlessly to TNT's global air network offering a wide range of multi-modal delivery services from and to Asia.

With a road network that spans 5,000 kilometres (!!) and over 125 cities, this superior express delivery capability offers many benefits. Via the Asia Road Network, TNT offers clients a transparent all-inclusive pricing. The service is cheaper than air freight and much faster than sea freight. Offering you greater flexibility to control and manage your costs.

Hard work for man and machine

There is little in terms of "Trucker-Romantic". The journeys are governed by time pressure and the need to keep a strict routine. Obviously, with some 20 tonnes in motion and other motorists just driving "like its their grandfather's road", truckers need to be fully aware and alert all the time. Representing a global brand also means that they have to behave accordingly and cannot just drive wild west style. After a few hours it becomes clear that this job isn't easy. Yes, the trucks may have improved and you don't need to double-clutch and wrestle the steering wheel, but it is still a demanding job. But surely, the TNT crew can do it.

As for the trucks, such a long ride clearly shows what matters: choosing the right vehicle and preventive care and maintenance. With TNT's reputation at stake, it would be fatal if a truck would break down in the middle of the trip. For long parts of the ride I did not see any workshops, sometimes not even villages. If one has to bring in a repair team or tow-truck, it will be very troublesome.

I am back to Kuala Lumpur now, but I took a flight to go from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur. While this might be faster, the scheduling and precision, care and attention to detail reminded me of the ride along the ARN.

The Asian Road Network

Cheaper than air and faster than by sea is the promise that TNT offers. What exactly is the ARN? The Asia Road Network is a day definite road delivery network in Asia. Through this network, TNT can provide the fastest secure door-to-door, customs-cleared express delivery by road.

TNT's Road network runs under strict security - monitored and controlled by live Security Command Control Centre, operational 24/7. Our high quality trucks are secured by global positioning satellite for easy tracking. Our dedicated and experienced drivers are security trained and operate on a point-to-point schedule. You can rest assured that your delivery is in safe hands.

FEATURES	BENEFITS
Integrated door-to-door service	One point of contact for all your shipments
Cheaper than air freight	Significant cost savings
Faster than sea freight	Short transit times - Singapore to Bangkok in just 3 working days
Transparent pricing	Allows you to control and manage your costs
Scheduled service	Allows you to accurately plan and forecast consistently and with full reliability
GPS and enhanced security system	Know your goods are protected 24/7
Track and Trade	Real time visibility of your shipments to give you total control

Above all, TNT is committed to Transported Asset Protection Association's (TAPA) freight security requirements certification throughout its international delivery network. TNT's ARN is also the first operator globally to achieve TAPA TSR (truck security regulations) for an international cross border network. The TAPA FSR certification, an industry recognized standard, provides you with the confidence that we have the established freight security requirements in place to give you peace of mind.

Asian Trucker would like to wholeheartedly thank the entire TNT ARN team that has worked hard to put this trip together. In July we will send Devindran Ramanathan to Hanoi to cover the journey from Vietnam to Hong Kong.

Scania R 380 - The hero of the story

Model	R380 LA6x2 MNA with Opticruise (CKD)
Type	Forward Control, Right Hand Drive, 6X2
Capacity	Front Axle Weight, Max 7,500 kgs Rear Axle Weight, Max 20,000 kgs Gross Vehicle Weight, Max 27,500 kgs
Axle Distance	3,100 mm
Engine	SCANIA DC12 17, six-cylinder in line, 4-stroke, liquid cooled, direct injection diesel engine with exhaust driven turbocharger and intercooler of "air to air" type. Equipped with EMS and unit injectors type PDE. Swept volume 11.7 litres. Max output 380 hp (279 kW) at 1900 rpm. Max torque 1900 Nm at 1 100-1300 rpm. Emission level EURO 3. FMS - Fleet Management System (Preparation) Heavy duty cooling system. Mechanical temperature controlled fan. White smoke limiter. Noise level 84 dB(A), according to ISO 362.
Gearbox	Scania GRS905 1 2-speed range-splitter, synchromesh gearbox with fitted with Opticruise gear system.
Opticruise	System for "Automatic Gear Shifting" on manual gearboxes. The clutch pedal only needs to be used when starting and stopping the vehicle. In automatic mode the system selects the most suitable gear, and shifts when it considered it necessary. The Scania Opticruise is also equipped with downhill speed control and Hill Mode gear shifting which is used for climbing hill of more than 5% gradient.
Steering Axles	SCANIA AM740/N. Rigid beam of I section, drop-forged, tempered alloy steel.
Drive Axles	SCANIA AD1300/TAG AXLE AS900. Pressed steel housing with magnetic oil filter plug. Central gear R780 with final gear ratio 3.42 : 1 c/w Differential Lock.
Wheels	Ten (10)wheels rim size 9.00" x 22-5" c/w one spare wheel.
Tyre	295/80R 22.5 Radial Highway pattern (Tubeless type)
Fuel Tank	200+ 200 litres aluminium tank c/w lockable fuel cap
Steering	Fully adjustable 4-spoke safety hydraulic power steering.
Brakes	Direct acting full air brakes with independent circuits for front, rear, parking-emergency and trailer circuits. Spring type parking brake acting on two rear wheels * Exhaust brake, foot switch operated. * Automatic slack adjuster. * Air Drier * Load Sensing Valve * ABS, Anti-lock Brake System * TC- Traction Control * APS- Air Processing System
Suspension	Front - Heavy duty parabolic leaf spring (2x32) suspension c/w shock absorbers and Anti Roll Bar. Rear - Heavy duty Air suspension of 2-bellow type c/w shock absorbers and Anti Roll Bar.
Electric System	24 volts with two 12 volts batteries connected in series capacity 180 Amp/H and Alternator 80 Amp/H.
Instrumentation	Long curved dark grey dashboard with all instruments and controls within easy reach from driver. Trip computer with engine hour meter. Tachograph, 1 day, 2 drivers, km/h, SIM, rev. recording. Cruise control, with switches in steering wheel. Speed limiter: Max speed 85 km/h.
Cab exterior	* 4-point mechanical suspension of cab * Tinted windscreen * Electric window winders, driver and passenger side * Spherical mirror driver and passenger side * Mirrors with air deflectors
Cab	SCANIA CR19N Sleeper Cab. Cab structure in welded steel with galvanized sheet steel panels. Front parts and mudguards are manufactured from non-corrosive compound materials. Cab Is approved according to the Swedish Road Traffic Safety Board. The cab is heat and noise insulated. With laminated windscreen glass. Door windows of tinted type. External sun visor, cab heating and defroster system. Roof and wall panels with textile. Door panels with textile.

