The Dart Network Offers Kenworth T680s in Lease-to-Own Program

A Hot Commodity – Company has a Waiting List Wanting the T680s

EAGAN, Minn. – Phil Marston, vice president of Highway Sales Inc., a truck finance vendor to Dart Transit Company and the Dart Network, was expecting the Kenworth T680 to be a popular truck in Highway Sales’ lease-to-own program for Dart owner-operators. But he had no idea how popular.

“I was blown away,” he said. “We have a waiting list – drivers are lining up to get the T680. I’ve been here for 21 years administering the program and I can’t remember this much demand for a truck. It’s been unbelievable.”

According to Marston, Highway Sales – working with Dart and its nearly 2,000 drivers, more than 1,300 of which are owner-operators – purchased 150 Kenworth T680s through Rihm Kenworth in St. Paul, Minn. The first T680 with 76-inch sleeper went to Vincent Sykes, who has been driving a truck for 32 years, the last 11 contracted to Dart.

“When I heard they were putting Kenworth T680s into the program, I told Phil that I wanted to be the first to get the truck,” said Sykes. “I’ve had several trucks through Dart and it’s been a great program for me. I can’t tell you how nice this Kenworth drives. Plus, the fuel economy I’m now getting is so much better. It’s made the decision a perfect one.”

Highway Sales reviews trucks on an annual basis, then decides which to offer in the lease-to-own program. Don Oren, chairman of Dart, is directly involved in that process.

“We get input from a variety of people in our organization – as well as drivers,” said Oren. “Our company is all about the driver and I was convinced that the Kenworth T680 would be a popular truck – and that’s certainly happened. The T680’s driver comfort aspect is a step above what we had before. It’s just a beautiful truck. It maintains Kenworth’s image and combines the latest in aerodynamics. That’s saying a lot – drivers want that image.”

The company’s first T680 with a 76-inch sleeper went to veteran driver Vincent Sykes. A truck driver for 32 years, Sykes has been contracted to Dart for the past 11 years.

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"It truly is a premium truck and with the driver shortage and difficulty in recruiting drivers, we wanted to offer up a truck that would make them take a closer look at Dart," added Marston. "And, it certainly has – half of those who have signed up for the T680 in our program are brand new to Dart. We’re finding ourselves in a good position. Drivers want to work with Dart and they want the T680."

PACCAR MX-13 Engine

Equipped with the PACCAR MX-13 engine rated at 430-hp and driven through the Eaton® Fuller Advantage™ 10-speed manual transmission, Marston said Highway Sales spec’d the T680s to be fuel-efficient and lightweight. "We want the drivers to be successful. If they’re successful, then we’re successful," he said. "Maximizing fuel efficiency is a big way to improve their numbers. The T680 can get them the fuel economy they’re after. Dart also has a fuel program where the owner-operators can save by using Dart’s network."

"Fuel is important," echoed Sykes. "I’m getting over 8 mpg* with the T680 and that’s a big jump from the mid- to high 6s I was getting with my previous truck. I drive hard and put on more than 13,000 miles a month, so that savings really adds up."

Driver comfort has been a big upside for Sykes as well. "There is plenty of room and storage and the comfort is critical to getting a good night’s sleep," he said. "My wife and grandkids sometimes join me on trips, but I sleep in this truck every night I’m out – and I’ll be gone for a month to six weeks before getting home," he said.

Sykes said there is a litany of improvements since the last time he drove a Kenworth. "The PACCAR MX-13 engine is very quiet and has enough power to easily handle the line-haul I work – from Texas to New Mexico. And the T680 has the new clutch (hydraulic assist) system, which makes shifting gears so effortless. The doors shut so easily – no effort at all, and the windshield is so much bigger. The visibility is just great and there’s more room between the seats, which makes it easy to get back into the sleeper. There is just so much new on this truck. I get a lot of other Dart drivers who want a tour of the truck. They like it too."

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Driver Vincent Sykes is shown with the Kenworth T680.

Marston said they’ll continue to gauge driver reaction to the Kenworth T680. “We couldn’t be happier with how our lease-to-own program has been going since we began operation 31 years ago. I think a testament to our success is how we work closely with drivers in this program. More than half of those drivers are on their second, third or more trucks with us. It’s a program that works.”

Sidebar: Dart: A Pioneer in Working with Owner-Operators

There is a great amount of pride when Don Oren, chairman of Dart Transit, talks about independent contractors. “My dad (Earl) started this company back in 1934, but it really didn’t getting going until the 1950s, when we began securing authorities allowing us to grow. He was a pioneer with the business model of bringing independent contractors to work with us, and it’s been our mainstay ever since. He very much enjoyed working with owner-operators and I do as well.”

According to Oren, who joined Dart in 1953 after finishing college, he and other company managers encourage company drivers to consider becoming owner-operators, when they’re ready. “I love this business model and the entrepreneurial spirit our owner-operators have,” he said. “They are self-motivating people and they have skin in the game and can better themselves if they operate their own equipment. We feel we give them a great opportunity here at Dart – they can learn by being a company driver and if, and when, they’re ready to become an independent businessperson, we provide the support through equipment and programs. It truly is a win-win program.”

About Dart

Founded in 1934 as a family-owned business, Dart Transit Company has grown to become one of America’s largest and most successful truckload dry van carriers. Dart has many operating choices for professional truck drivers. Learn more at www.DartTruckingJobs.com.

About Kenworth

Kenworth Truck Company is the manufacturer of The World’s Best® heavy and medium duty trucks. Kenworth’s Internet home page is at www.kenworth.com. Kenworth is a PACCAR company.

*Individual fuel economy improvement will vary depending on use, road conditions and other factors.