

Western Star sleepers continue to be built in Canada

By James Menzies
KELOWNA, B.C. – It's common knowledge Freightliner LLC has begun producing Western Star tractors at its Portland manufacturing plant, but a very important component of those trucks continues to be built right here in Western Canada.

Canadian Commercial Vehicles (CCV) is responsible for building each and every Western Star sleeper box, using an advanced, lightweight honeycomb panel construction which the company says is lighter, more durable and quieter than sleeper boxes made of traditional materials.

Edison Reis, engineering and quality assurance manager with CCV, says the sleeper boxes built at the company's Kelowna manufacturing plant are about 850 lbs lighter than other sleepers on the market.

The company is currently building about 12 per day which are then shipped to Portland to be added to the truck.

When the sleeper boxes leave CCV's Kelowna plant, they are equipped with only a bunk base – the upholstery, cabinets and other creature comfort items are all added in Portland. The primary advantage of the honeycomb panel construction (which was originally designed by Western Star itself) is obviously the weight savings, which allows owner/operators or fleets to save fuel and increase payload.

"We don't have fasteners like nuts and bolts or welds and that's what helps us make it so light," explains



LIGHTWEIGHT: CCV continues building Western Star sleepers at its Kelowna, B.C. plant. They are about 850 lbs lighter than some other sleepers.

Reis, noting glue is used to attach the pieces providing a seamless finish and stronger uniform surface stability.

He is quick to add the durability is not compromised, but enhanced.

The honeycomb sandwich panels are also used in the floors of Western Star cabs and the rear walls on the company's daycabs to protect against outside temperatures and noise.

"Using the honeycomb composite that we have within the panel, we have better soundproofing and the insulation factor is also higher so it's quieter inside," says Reis.

Some truckers have reported being able to idle less than with trucks equipped with traditional sleeper boxes, since the boxes better retain heat in the winter and coolness in the summer. Since Western Star production was moved to Portland, each of the sleeper boxes has had to be trucked substantially further than when the company and CCV were neighbours in Kelowna, but Western Star is still pleased with the service they've

received in their four-year relationship.

"CCV has been building sleeper compartments for our trucks that are an integral part of our air suspended cabs. We demand the tightest of tolerances and their quality work is second to none," says J. Tomlinson of Western Star Trucks. "As the quality assurance engineer responsible for CCV, I found their production processes and staff could react very quickly to any concern we had. People were

dispatched to the factory quickly and without question when we identified a concern. This allowed us to have a seamless start up with a new supplier for a critical piece of our product."

In fact, Reis says Western Star has found the quality of the work CCV has delivered to be more than 80 per cent better than its previous, U.S.-based supplier. Now, CCV is beginning to get some recognition outside the trucking industry. The company has been nominated for a 2004 B.C. Export Award and a Kelowna Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Award.

CCV was also a top-three finalist for the Okanagan Science and Technology Council's recent Most Promising Emerging Technology Company of the Year Award.

The company has also seen sales figures jump 107 per cent from 2002 to 2003, now amounting to more than \$7.3 million.

For more information about CCV, visit www.ccvbc.com. □