

Avalon Transport in high gear despite recession potholes

Acquires increased traction following its acquisition by Gulftainer



The 50,000 sq. ft. sprawling yard in Dubai's industrial district housing the offices and maintenance facilities of Avalon General Land Transport, named after the legendary island in the Arthurian legend, is a beehive of frenzied activity and bustle. Above the din of clanking metal and quite literally sparks flying forth from welding equipment, a posse of around 20 mechanics work feverishly to repair and fix a line-up of massive trucks and trailers awaiting their turns to be serviced.

Inside the quiet, cool confines of the Avalon Transport offices The Link met the youthful, animated and confident Ravi Punjabi, the company's Managing Director, for an exclusive chat. "I set up Avalon Transport in 2004 initially with 4 trucks and 10 trailers after working for 10 years with a shipping company. By the year end of the year 2004, we had already increased our fleet size phenomenally to 18 trucks and 30 trailers. Although I had a local partner as was required by law, I then owned 100 % of the company and managed the operations with a close-knit team, many of whom still continue to work for Avalon," he recalls wistfully as he remembers the early days of the company. "Thereafter we continued to grow from strength to strength year-on-year and

there was no looking back," he added as he reminisced the heady years of the boom times.

"In 2009, a remarkable development marked a turning point for Avalon Transport," continued Punjabi. "Well-established Momentum Logistics part of the Gulftainer Group acquired 51% stake in the company. The fact that we merged with a leading organization within the region is a ringing endorsement and a vote of confidence in our abilities to deliver and perform. This is also reflected in our prized clientele comprising blue chip corporate accounts," he asserted.

"Avalon Transport merged with Gulftainer in April 2010. I believe it was a good fit and in many respects we complement each other. There clearly was synergy in the partnership as we leveraged strengths and assets for mutual benefit. Momentum Logistics acquired 51 % of the company and I retained the remainder 49% and I, report to a very co-operative and supportive Board of Directors," he adds assuredly.

The acquisition by Gulftainer provided a new surge to Avalon Transport. "Prior to the merger, we had 48 trucks and 74 trailers. Presently, twenty months on, we have 103 trucks and 170 trailers. Even if we are not a mega player yet, we certainly

are a continually growing player with big plans for the future. This level of growth could only be possible because of our affiliation with Gulftainer which provides us the tailwind that propels us into new territories," observes Punjabi.

Today, Avalon Transport trucks comprising curtain side, box, flat-bed, roller-bed trailers, reefers, car carriers and pickups ply the roads across the UAE, GCC and the Levant. The transporter specializes in cross-border transport and is the second biggest asset owned company



in this segment for the region. The company now has a separate section for the transport of refrigerated cargo which it established in the post-Gulftainer era and presently with 75 reefers is the largest provider of trucks for this sector. Avalon Transport is also a major provider and deploys trucks 24 X 7 X 365 for movement of cargoes and trans-shipments within the UAE airports in Dubai, DWC, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah. The company employs 180 staff, mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

Almost 90-95 % of the company's truck sorties is scheduled business. "In the aftermath of the financial downturn, our ad hoc component has almost vanished

and now our business is almost entirely planned and scheduled although we still do the occasional provisional business as and when demanded by our clients," he admits.

Is Punjabi intimidated by the intense competition in this field and the fallout of the financial meltdown? "Avalon Transport has been able to hold its own thanks to our committed and dedicated team coupled with our expansive fleet and available resources. The competition and economic will only result in weeding out the marginal and peripheral players and bring about the much-needed stability and leveling-off in the market place," retorted an unfazed Punjabi. 2012 continues to be an exceptional year and by the time the year closes the transporter will have added 30 trucks to its fleet strength this year alone. All of the company's trucks are fitted with GPS systems and temperature-control sensors that can be monitored by the head office and even clients using modern-day software.

The serpentine queues and long tailbacks of trucks at border posts particularly at the Al Ghuwaifat boundary post on the UAE-Saudi Arabia border is certainly a matter of grave concern. The outstanding issues need to be resolved according to Punjabi, it is everybody's interests. "It is very important to keep traffic flowing and streamlined and avoid bottle-necks which only cause delays and upsets delivery schedules and free flow of business," opines Punjabi. The introduction of rail lines (Etihad Rail)



and growing infrastructure in sea ports and airports across the GCC will only facilitate increased business and be in the best national and regional interests and welcomed by the business and transport communities in the region according to Punjabi.

Punjabi also gives high marks to his employees who he credits for the success and growth of the company which functions under three broad divisions—operations, finance and maintenance. "My staff have been loyal to the company. I provide them autonomy and encouragement and they are rewarded for performance," he noted.

Punjabi has ambitious plans for the future and plans to boost his fleet levels to between 200 and 250 trucks within the next 3 years. "With an encouraging and supportive board, a great team and a clear vision for the future, we hope to expand our operations across the GCC particularly Saudi Arabia and make Avalon Transport a major player in the transport industry in the region," he avers. With Punjabi in the driving seat, it is only expected that there will be more Avalon trucks in the region's highways in the future.

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