

Aerodynamics beat rising fuel costs And improve stability and visibility

Specialist fleet operator Displayco is a designer and manufacturer of display and advertising materials that handles its own distribution via a fleet of seven rigid pan techs, mainly on the Melbourne-Sydney and Sydney-Brisbane routes. Their first trials of Airtabs in 2000, showed a fuel consumption improvement of 2.7% and that "was enough for me to make the decision to fit-out our fleet then and there," said Denis Walker, Managing Director. "But to be honest now that we've used Airtabs for some years, the big improvement in stability at highway speeds, the better rearward visibility in the wet and the cleaner tail lifts would have been good enough reasons themselves to take on Airtabs."



Airtabs are small plastic or vinyl vortex generators that fit around the trailing edge of the typically square and flat back of a truck or trailer. The Airtab product assists with turbulence and drag by addressing basic aerodynamic theory.

Chris Binks (pictured above) was sceptical at first but kept an open mind.

Chris Binks drives for Ballarat Refrigerated Transport from Melbourne to North Queensland, and Melbourne to Brisbane fortnightly. His refrigerated B-Double has had Airtabs since 2000. Chris was due for replacement trailers in July 2004, so a trial proposal was formulated where Chris would run the new trailers for three months without Airtabs, and then with, recording fuel consumption thoroughly. The results showed a 2.4% decrease in fuel consumption. "I wasn't surprised at all," said Chris. "I was relieved to be back to running with Airtabs and immediately noticed the reduced effort in driving. The trailers weren't 'waddling', I wasn't fighting the effect especially in cross winds and I was spending far less time cleaning, particularly the B-trailer fridge motor in the gap."

Denis from Displayco also speaks from experience as it's not unusual for him to be behind the wheel on the Hume or Pacific Highways. "Cross winds in particular can really make driving our pans a tough task and reducing that turbulence at the rear makes the driving far more comfortable. I also like the way we can see clearly behind us in the wet instead of dealing with that swirling mass of grimy spray. I can't understand why anyone wouldn't fit Airtabs if they're doing highway work. I look at them now as safety devices that also pay back real money."

With fuel prices rocketing, it's apparent this is food for thought for all truck operators.