

GOLM FACILITY TRUCK FAMILIARITY DAY

EPISODE ONE DOCKLANDS

1 EXT INDUSTRIAL REDEVELOPMENT SITE. 10.00 SATURDAY FEB 26.

Grey sky, drizzle and wind blowing off the choppy waters of the docks. A concrete roadway slopes down from the padlocked gates. In the far distance, an old six-storey concrete mill with broken windows reached by rough tracks weaving through puddles. In between are brambles and stacked 3-high are rows of concrete interlocking road barriers.

Two BTFS trucks are parked on the left of the ramp, an articulated production office and a grey American 2-way hitched to a 7.5T Mercedes production office. Seven cars arrive and are waved through the gates. Behind them a roundabout and beyond that the perimeter of the City Airport. A young man and woman arrive by foot from the nearby DLR.

Names are exchanged and the arrivals are ticked in ROB'S notebook. They put on their hi-viz tops.

Someone phones to say they are so sorry, there's been a mix-up but they can't make it after all.

ROB introduces the two truck drivers IAN and STEVE to JANE, AURELIA, JEREMY, ANDY, PHIL, ASHA, AMIE, ROSS and ADRIENE.

ROB gives the background to the day's exercise. After once working as a ballet ASM/driver, he has had a licence to drive artics for over thirty years and in 2009 had six weeks to kill between two location management contracts. A BTFS transport captain of old acquaintance suggested he give facility driving a go. This proved highly instructive in many ways, but most importantly it showed how little some unit managers were aware of the manoeuvring requirements of articulated dining buses and towed three-ways. On one BBC sitcom, the unit manager had left the first unit base of the shoot as he had a 'hot date' and only turned back to see us in, when he passed us coming up the road. Opposite the narrow gateway to this disused school a 7.5T truck was parked on the pavement which meant that we had no room to swing out and drive in a straight line through the gateway. We were also queued on the brow of a suburban hill, which 'calmed' many passing drivers and eventually the truck owner was tracked down. Nevertheless, thanks to the narrowness of the gateway and the obstructions that lay beyond, to say that some bodywork got scratched in accessing this site would be a distinct understatement. Amazingly, our egress from this very site and another were blocked by vehicles parked opposite under the very noses of security guards more intent on getting

a tan, chatting up SA's or watching DVDs on their laptops. We were twice so close to being marooned and wrecking the Schedule. Another base was accessed by too steep a slope which grounded most trucks and was abandoned at midnight in favour of a shoppers' car park.

'Other units have based here before' really didn't cut the mustard: you know who you are (your secret's safe with me)!

Lesson over and ROB indicates the area where the trucks are to be driven: who's the first volunteer?

ASHA was up in the seat of that Volvo tractor unit like a hound out of a trap. Others crammed in on the bunk to witness.

Reversing Artics is everybody's favourite challenge. One twitch of the steering wheel or holding the wrong lock too long can mean the back end of the trailer just won't go where you want it to go. Everybody discovers how at first you steer in what appears to be the wrong direction in order to point your trailer where you want it. Then you gradually change lock and follow the trailer to your target. Rounding a corner on the driver's side means that you cannot see how close the blind side of the trailer is to any obstruction. You have to watch the mirrors on both sides and keep the speed low to afford enough observation time. Even old-time knights of the road dislike reversing into spaces on their left because then you are blind on both sides, the left mirrors only showing the huge blank side of your trailer. Observation and judgement is everything. We only tried reversing round a corner on the right: the 'easy' one, so most people got the hang of it.

The two-axled production office with the 2-way trailer was found by everyone to be quite different when reversing round corners. Aside from the driver's seat being closer to the ground, it's all down to the geometry of where axles and wheels are situated relative to each other and the tow-hook.

2 LUNCH BREAK

Warm, dry plus good loos in the café at Thames Barrier Park.

3 AS SC 1

Everybody has had a go by about 3pm and some have left early to get somewhere warm and dry. Yorkie bars are presented for the Group photo. IAN and STEVE decline the photo but are nevertheless applauded for their patience, humour and friendliness. They leave for the BTFS yard in Bristol.

4 CERTIFICATES

EVERYONE is emailed a pdf of an individual GLM Trucking Certificate designed by LEONORA and ROB.

5 END CREDITS

Thanks to Lex at UnitBase for getting us into the Millenium Mills site at no cost, after a previously- arranged site in Surrey changed their mind. Thanks to BTFS for supplying the trucks and drivers in exchange for Affiliate Membership of the Guild.

Thanks to everyone for coming to an event which was gratifyingly over-subscribed. We're going to have another one!