

Living



ISLANDER PHOTOS BY EARL BRECHLIN

Bar Harbor trucker Bob Mace has kept his venerable L8000 Ford dump truck on the road for more than 27 years. He estimates it is closing in on having travelled the equivalent of 40 trips around the Earth.



This bug deflector, given to Bar Harbor trucker Bob Mace by coworkers, suggests that after 27 years on the road, his truck probably doesn't run as fast as it did when new.



This Old Truck

Dump truck aiming for one million miles

By Earl Brechlin
ebrechlin@mdislander.com

Bar Harbor driver Bob Mace's truck gives new meaning to the expression high mileage.

For the last 27 years, this independent contractor has driven his stalwart L8000 Ford dump truck over area roads carrying sand, gravel, rock, loam — you name it — to construction sites, highway projects and backyard gardens. The odometer on the dusty and cracked dashboard stopped working when it hit 328,000 miles. "Of course, that was about ten to 15 years ago," Bob reported with an air of classic understatement.

As close as he can tell, the truck now has at least 850,000 miles and may be closing in on one million. That's equal to nearly 40 trips around the globe at the equator. Most of that distance has been racked up just 20 miles at a clip on trips between Mount Desert Island and borrow pits in Lamoine. A bit of quick math on the back of an envelope suggests his truck has travelled across the Trenton Bridge nearly 50,000 times. The total

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— Bob Mace

amount of material carried comes to more than 300,000 cubic yards. That's enough to fill Boston's Fenway Park to the roof, once — and half way again.

And in all those trips, he's never gotten a traffic ticket or had a major accident.

Bob purchased his first truck used from Dick "Tater" Gray when he worked at Blanchard and Gray Construction. "He always gave me good advice. He was a really good guy," Bob recalled.

"I bought this truck in 1987 at Whited Ford in Bangor," Bob explained. "I got it brand new, and she's only had one owner — me."

Of course, keeping a work truck on the road that long doesn't come without some attrition. "She's on her fourth motor," he said admitting he's opted for a little more power with each successive install. Although the frame, cab and much of the running gear remain intact, he's also had to replace the dump body itself as the plate steel wore through from being abraded by coarse materials over the years.

During the last 27 years, there have been brakes to re-new, hydraulic seals to fix, headlights to change and more than 300 oil changes. Much of that work he's done himself.

The truck has a total of ten or more tires each year. Complete Tire in Ellsworth keeps the size he needs in stock even though there are few vehicles of that model left on the road.

All the rough ground he drives over, coupled with tight maneuvering takes a toll. Bob estimates that with flats, road damage and just plain wear and tear, he's gone through nearly 400 tires over the years. "If you get 8 to ten months out of them, you're

doing good," he added.

Bob has driven trucks his entire life. He worked for the town of Bar Harbor for 15 years and then signed on with excavation contractor Blanchard and Gray before going out on his own. He's also worked with his brother's excavation firm.

In addition to working directly with smaller contractors and homeowners, Bob also has worked as a contract driver with all the major construction firms in the area including Goodwin's and Nankervis. In recent years, he has been kept busy by MacQuinn Construction of Bar Harbor and Lamoine. "They've been real good to work with," Bob said.

Along with every manner of material, from dirt, to asphalt pavement, to granite blocks, Bob also has taken his truck to just about every town in Hancock County and many farther afield. He even worked one job that involved driving his fully-loaded truck onto a barge so that it could be ferried out to a job site on one of the Cranberry islands. "It needs to be fairly calm. The conditions need to be just right," he said.

In addition, during the slower winter months when demand for hauling slows down, Bob plows driveways for around 40 properties on MDI. Driving truck isn't just routine maintenance such as oil changes and lube jobs, which he does after getting home in the late afternoons. Sometimes in the winter months, he's outdoors in the elements working on the truck late into the night. "When you work for yourself, your day doesn't

end at 4," he said. While he may slide behind the same steering wheel every day, one thing that has changed over the last 27 years is the volume of traffic on the area's main roads. Not a day goes by that someone in a small car doesn't whip out in front of him or cut too quickly into his lane. Most drivers, he said, don't realize how difficult it is to stop a large, heavy vehicle moving at highway speeds. "After a while, you get to know where the trouble places are," he said.

He said that the ability to drive defensively just comes with the territory. "You do this long enough, and you can just about predict when someone is about to do something stupid," he explained.

A few years ago, Bob switched out the bug deflector on the hood from one that simply said "MACE" to one customized by fellow construction workers. It now says "Snail's Pace Trucking." "None of us moves as fast as we used to," he joked.

Bob has no plans to retire any time soon. He enjoys what he does and the L8000 is far from giving up the ghost. "I'm 71 and she's 27," he said with a laugh. "I've met a lot of really nice people over the years," Bob said. "I'm healthy, and I'd like to go another four years, but as far as the truck goes, I guess it all depends on maintenance. I'm not sure which one of us will need to retire first."

