

Rolling to market

The venerable hand-truck now has some six-wheeled competition.

Throughout the country, the increasing dominance of chain stores is changing the face of beer delivery. Many wholesalers are faced with making bulk deliveries, and moving the beer with hand-trucks has become too labor-intensive. In response to this, some years ago a few North Carolina wholesalers began making C-store deliveries using grocery stocking carts. The carts carried a lot of beer, and could roll right in the store's door.

The experiment attracted notice in the trade. "We saw this going on, and became pretty interested," says Harry Davidson, beer segment manager for Magline, the Michigan-based hand-truck manufacturer. "These wholesalers had picked up some productivity using the off-the-shelf stocking carts, but the carts weren't proving as durable as necessary for this application. But we thought this idea had a lot of merit, so in 2001 we got involved."

For starters, Magline bought some super-market stocking carts, and took them apart. "We sort of reverse-engineered a new cart design," Davidson says. "We knew we had to build these carts stronger than the stocking carts to withstand the stresses in a truck. The bed of a trailer moves, and this puts pressure on carts carrying 1000-1200 pounds. Over time, this cart will sag, parts will wear out, and the cart will become hard to push."

Magline's new carts employed unitized construction specially designed to handle stress and weight. "Our engineers designed a five-box frame with horizontal and vertical cross members, and extrusions to maintain shape," Davidson says. "It had bolted running gear for easy replacement, and a solid deck."

Early on, Magline sent groups of engineers to watch the carts in action. "We found that the carts really improved efficiencies for anyone



On the pick-line at Great Bay Distributing in Largo, FL. Driver/Salesmen and warehouse personnel load cases of Budweiser and Bud Light onto Magliner CRDS carts.

doing reasonable volume through coolers in places where the coolers are readily accessible," Davidson notes. "The carts don't work for certain urban tavern accounts, where cargo has to go up steps, and in rural areas with dirt or gravel parking lots. But they excel in many C-store and bulk applications."

In Magline's tests, use of the carts in their intended application cut account service time in half. "The carts are pre-loaded in the warehouse," Davidson says, "so the biggest saving for a driver is not spending time picking that order. It eliminates a lot of work time around the truck in the parking lot."

With one cart carrying the load in, a driver can make one trip instead of five, Davidson notes. "They can roll the cart in and check-in the stock," he says, "There is no need for rehandling."

Weight on the Ground

Improved ergonomics has been another benefit of the six-wheeled carts. "There was a great story at a wholesalership in Kentucky," Davidson says. "The guys had disbanded their

bowling team because they were just too damn tired at the end of the day. After they started using the rapid delivery carts, most drivers were finishing a couple of hours earlier, and they reinstated the team."

Davidson points out that the carts put less burden on drivers, since all the weight is on the ground. "A hand truck takes some athleticism," Davidson says. "The driver takes weight on the shoulders, arms and back. With the cart, the driver is just pushing it, so he can use the big muscles in his legs instead. There is much less potential for strain and injury."

Given reduced delivery times, Davidson says companies can realign responsibilities. "In many of the operations where we've deployed the carts, we've seen some realignment of responsibilities," Davidson says. "The loads are pre-picked, so there is more warehouse work. But more importantly, the carts allow drivers to become salesmen. It can also make qualified guys available for sales jobs."

Davidson says the south has been the strongest market for the CRDS, but they are

now in use all over the country. One user is Great Bay Distributors, the number two Anheuser-Busch house in Florida.

“We’re in a huge C-Store market,” says Chuck Poetter, Great Bay’s vice president of sales. “For example, we deliver to 51 Seven-Eleven stores, and 55 Hess stores. We carry a lot of C-store weight. We were using side-loader trucks and break-downs, but we were looking to improve efficiencies.”

The company ordered some Magline CRDS carts, and began to test them in their market. “After testing them, we had some design suggestions, and Magline was very responsive,” Poetter says. “The original carts were wider, but we put in a request for a cart the width of a case of beer.”

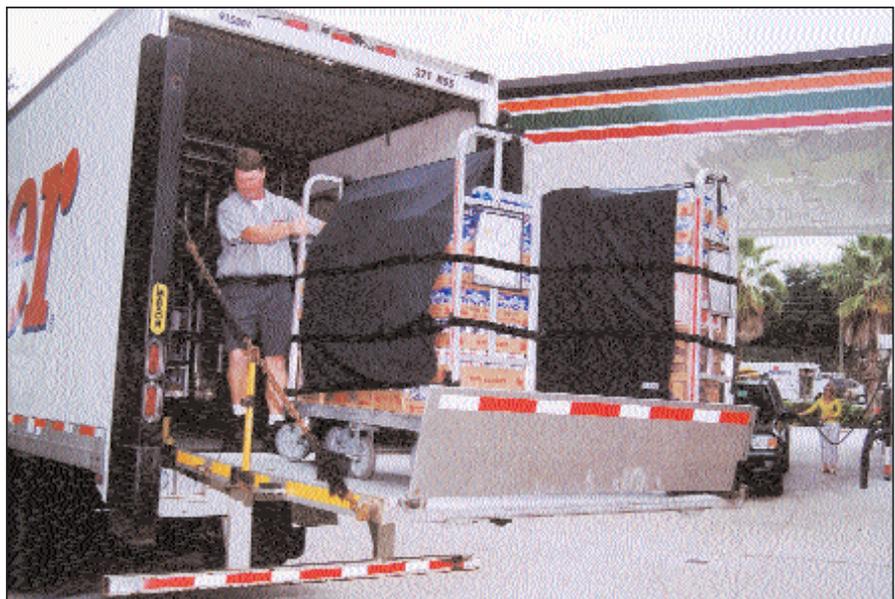
Great Bay also evaluated some competitive units, but found them wanting. “We looked at other carts, but they were wider, and they had plastic wheels, so we had some issues,” Poetter says. “Magline was willing to make the adjustments we needed, and that clinched it.”

Initially, Great Bay bought 100 Magline carts to serve its 7-11 accounts. Pre-loading the carts in the warehouse took some additional time, but once that was done, Great Bay began to reap savings. “Our warehouse people get there at 12 for a 6:00 departure. It only takes them an hour to load a truck, figuring about 1100 cases to a truck. We deliver at night, so the savings comes when our people can roll the carts right in. They don’t have to spend a lot of time in the parking lot, and they don’t have to double-stack, they just roll it in.”

Poetter says the system works well for Great Bay. “We’ve had good experience with the efficiency and durability of this system,” he reports. “We did a lot of homework before purchasing these carts, and it paid off. They are as sturdy as the breakdowns and they haul the same amount of beer. They average 33 cases of mixed bottles and cans on a cart, or 40 cases of just cans.”

Poetter says Great Bay is currently evaluating expanded cart use. “We’re a very large wholesaler, so we have to make sure the efficiencies are there,” he says. “We’ll send a team to wholesalers that are using the carts. We’ll watch them work, see how they do things, and figure out what will work for us.”

As it stands, Chuck Poetter is optimistic about future CRDS deployment. “So far, we haven’t found any drawbacks to this system,” he says. “My people love it, and my customers love it. Our eventual goal is to go 100% cart.” ■



Top photos: Carts are loaded on the pick-line, and then staged for loading, as driver/salesmen clip tarps over the loaded carts. In the bottom photo, Great Bay driver/salesman Bill Love unloads CRDS carts at a 7-11 account.