



## Austin Wilkinson renews its 30-driver subscription to the Road Skills Online Professional Development Plan

Austin Wilkinson & Sons Ltd. is a general haulier running a fleet of 30 vehicles out of its depot in Atherton near Wigan. Founded in the 1950s, it is a second-generation family business that has grown organically over the years – based upon an ethos of providing reliable haulage services to its customers. More recently, it has become an owner-partner within the Pall-Ex network providing nationwide palletised delivery services.

As MD James Wilkinson explains, the business recognised it had a problem, “We realised that things were changing out on the road. Today’s drivers have got to be bit more than beef and brawn, they’ve got to have an intelligence to be able to read the road conditions and negotiate the situations they come across.” As a result, in addition to having more experienced drivers passing on their knowledge to trainees, Austin Wilkinson also needed an external provider to improve driving standards and meet the requirements of insurers. So, when long-standing partner Road Skills, suggested its Professional Development Plan for drivers, this was seen as an ideal solution.

James comments, “It’s like advertising, you’re never quite sure of the results or its effect, but if you never do any advertising you never get a phone call. If you never do any training, you never see any improvement and we couldn’t continue as we were with drivers thinking ‘well you’re insured aren’t you?’ These days insurers always ask us about our workforce and how much training they’ve had and the last thing I need is a horrendous claim that ups my insurance costs.”

Discussing how Road Skills Online works for the business, Training Manager, Russell Redford comments, “Some of the older guys are a bit computer illiterate, but we do offer them use of our computer room here to do the training. The good thing about it is they can also access it through their mobile phone, tablet or

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home computer, so that’s a great advantage.” Russell continues, “I tend to do new modules first, then when the guys come to me I know what I’m looking at because I’ve already done the module. That way, if they do have a problem I can say ‘I’ve done that myself and can see where you’re coming from.’”



Russell continues, "I look at the Road Skill's dashboard on a weekly basis to keep track on drivers who are running behind and try to encourage them to get online and do at least one or two modules. The feedback I'm getting from the drivers is positive, they are quite happy with the questions although sometimes they think things can be misleading. What I think is they're not reading the question thoroughly enough and are trying to rush!"

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When it was time for a recent FORS audit, Austin Wilkinson used the Road Skills Online system to demonstrate how it provides ongoing training to its drivers. Russell Redford explains, "We got the system up on the screen and showed the auditor how it works. We also printed off a few certificates as well – the auditor was pleased with that."

From an operational perspective James Wilkinson comments, "The training is all about encouraging our drivers to drive at an economical speed. We want them to anticipate problems at road junctions and traffic lights, and to consider what they're carrying so that it has the least effect on the environment, on the truck and on our maintenance."

### **In summary**

Summarising working with Road Skills, James Wilkinson states, "I think they understand the needs of the industry and the last thing I need is somebody new that is trying to flog us a product that's unresearched. Road Skills have got a good idea of the direction the industry's going in and what employers require. You can only entrust people to train you if you think they understand your needs and what you're trying to achieve. That's why I've worked with Road Skills for 20 years."

**Austin Wilkinson has recently renewed its 30-driver subscription to the Road Skills Online Professional Development Plan. The program features monthly bite-size Toolbox Talks delivered in an accessible format that is available 24/7 on mobile phones, tablets, laptops and desktops. The solution provides management with an 'at a glance' dashboard of all drivers' progress with the ability to export this information as evidence for audits.**