

Blame women!

Your drivers' other halves are delivering a double-whammy against traditional attitudes in the industry that is partly causing the growing shortage of good drivers, says Kirsten Tisdale.

“ Women have a lot to do with the current driver shortage.

Yes, really, women are partly to blame – specifically working women.

The typical young driver of 20 to 30 years ago was a traditional sort of man. He didn't expect his wife to go out to work, particularly if there was a young family to care for. He expected, and was expected, to bring home the bacon, and he didn't mind working long hours to do so. Household chores and bringing up children was women's work, and he didn't particularly want to get involved.

Since then, life has changed. Women have gone out to work in greater and greater numbers, until today it is more usual for women to work than not.

Unfortunately, the impact of a larger working population, combined with expectations of much better standards of living, has led to a situation where one person's earnings are no longer considered enough for a family to live on. So the average family now requires the wife to bring in some cash – whether she likes the idea or not.

That need for two breadwinners means that the man of the house now has to be able to play his part in the family and home – whether he likes the idea or not. The traditional man can't exist any more.

At the same time, the demands on our industry have got tougher and tougher: 24/7; JiT; low margins; traffic



jams; and a hostile public. In this atmosphere, mere mention of family-friendly work patterns is enough to make the average over-worked transport manager reach for the sick bag.

But we need to take employees' requirements for flexibility and less anti-social hours seriously, to make today's driving job attractive to the modern family man. The driver shortage will only get worse if we don't.

Drivers' attitudes to working hours broadly split them into two groups – older and younger drivers. Sheila McCul-

lough at Skills for Logistics in Scotland has figures to prove it – visit www.skillsforlogistics.org and download the Driver Retention Report free of charge from the bookshop section, if you want details.

Older drivers – those traditional men of 20 to 30 years ago – still form a large proportion of our driver force. They have been prepared to work long hours and have, I suspect, often been happy to have a good excuse that keeps them out of the house.

But even some of this group no longer want to work the long hours; they no longer

have a mortgage or children at home and no need to maximise their earning from driving. Some, working for respectable companies, are only really hanging on in there for their pensions.

Younger men want, and need, to be more involved in family life than the older group ever were. But women going out to work have a double-whammy effect, because the man of the house is much more aware of other employment opportunities.

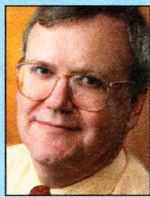
The man is aware of how long his wife works, what sort of hours she does and what she earns. Increasingly often, it's more than him and nothing like as hard or anti-social.

With the Working Time Directive coming hard up the back straight, we stand to lose drivers from both age brackets unless wage levels are maintained.

Although the opt-out may be removed at some point, right now workers can opt out if they work in a factory, in the warehouse, in the garden centre or driving a white van, but they won't be able to opt out as truck drivers. We need to make it worth their while staying.

There's a joke about recruitment in Swindon, where the manager has to ask the driver what hours he wants to work. It doesn't seem so funny any more.

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ROADWORKS

Road	County	Junction	Reason for delays	Finishing
A367	Somerset	Midford Road and Churchill Bridge gyratory	Roadworks	10/02/04
M23	West Sussex	J11 Pease Pottage (A23/A264)	Lane closures/bridge work	16/02/04
A26	East Sussex	Southerham Roundabout and Cuilfail Tunnel	Bridge maintenance work	11/03/04
A1	Notts	Newark Bypass (A17/A46/B6166)	Resurfacing work	15/03/04