

## BOYD BROTHERS USING 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY TECHNOLOGY TO FULLEST

Airline and military pilots have been using them for many years, but Clayton, Alabama-based Boyd Brothers Transportation has joined the cutting-edge technology and recently installed a state-of-the-art Driving Simulator to supplement and enhance its safety and operations programs. Based at the service center in Birmingham, AL, the simulator boasts the power of multiple computer hard-drives, a surround-sound audio system, force feedback steering controls and three flat-screen monitors. These systems work together to provide the driver a sense of sitting in the cab of a truck, and driving in the real world.

The Boyd Training and Safety department invested in this technology in a continuing effort to offer drivers driving strategies that they can use in the trucks to improve safety and enhance performance. Jason Bagley, a former Boyd driver-turned-trainer oversees driver training in the simulator. As a driver enters the cockpit, he sits in an actual tractor seat (complete with air-ride controls) and has a full 180-degree view, which even includes simulated mirror reflections to the rear. The controls and dash can be changed by the trainer to look like any road-tractor that is necessary. The engine and operating specs of the simulated tractor have been programmed to match Boyd's equipment so the driver can "feel" how his Boyd tractor would respond.

Each driver is put through a series of driving scenarios which have been fully customized and can be changed on-the-fly by altering weather (rain, snow), light (sunset, glare), wind (calm, hurricane), as well as traffic and pedestrians. The trainer also has a stand-away driving console which he can use to "drive" a second vehicle in each scenario. Each mechanical system of the simulator can also be varied so a driver can "feel" a steer-tire blow-out or even a catastrophic loss (brake-failure down a mountain, even a roll-over). The point of this tool is to help drivers learn new concepts for 21<sup>st</sup>-century driving. The challenges of driving a big rig are much different today than 30 years ago. Gone are the days when a responsible company can take a chance on a new driver with little-or-no training. Each new driver spends time during Orientation practicing the needed safety and operations skills that are needed now, and in the future.

The driver is taught the safety issues that he will need. This instruction is followed by time behind-the-wheel in the simulator practicing the safety techniques (at this point, only safety is the focus). Once safety concepts have been learned, the driver goes through the same "course", but training efforts are now spent teaching operational economies. For instance, drivers are taught how to use the physics of the truck (how acceleration, speed control, and space management effect fuel-use) to improve fuel economy. The driver doesn't "pass" until he has demonstrated complete ability to operate safely while also achieving the required standard MPG fuel economy (currently set at 6.9 MPG!).



Jason Bagley, Simulator Trainer

a stressful situation for an untested driver. Perfecting safe-driving techniques is absolutely key to operating a successful trucking company in today's world. This equipment allows Boyd to practice changing scenarios to improve safety.

The training doesn't stop there, however. Boyd Brothers uses this equipment to increase awareness of issues as they arise. Winter-driving tips aren't just talked about, they are practiced. The trainer will alter the driving scenario so the driver drives into a "snow-storm". Without the simulator, drivers have this happen for the first time in a loaded tractor-trailer. Too often, his lack of experience in foul weather leads to an accident. Using the simulator, driving techniques are honed in the safety of the training room. Driving down a mountain with freezing brakes and black-ice waiting at the bottom is

There is no secret that today's society has become more litigious, even needlessly so. Being proactive in the investment of this simulator is convincing evidence that Boyd Brothers is committed to highway safety, without the threat of litigation. This approach should be the standard in the industry, and is likely to take the notice of insurance companies who are on the lookout for safe carriers. Another growing concern is drowsy-driving. The simulator employs an integrated camera focused on the driver to record "fixed stare" driving, which is often the precursor to drivers becoming fatigued and sleepy.

With every new driver cycling through the simulator and each present driver having the opportunity to spend time in it twice a year to hone skills and prepare for seasonal driving changes, Boyd Brothers continues to be among the leaders in the trucking industry.

Boyd Brothers Transportation is a flatbed carrier based in Clayton, AL, and has service centers in Birmingham, AL, Cincinnati, OH and Greenville, MS.