

[Manufacturers use 2020 challenges to improve, prepare]

Trailer Output Report



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Photos: Stoughton Trailers

Trailer manufacturers use 2020 challenges to improve, prepare

BY TBB STAFF

Truck-trailer manufacturers anticipated an industry slowdown in 2020 after the transportation equipment markets set records in 2018 and 2019. But no one was expecting a global pandemic and the widespread shutdowns that threw the economy for a loop, disrupted the supply chain, and prompted employers to revamp processes to protect the labor force from the spread of COVID-19.

So the run of five years in a row during which the Top 25 trailer manufacturers built more than 300,000 trailers ended with 2020. Still, even with the challenges, 2020 marked the tenth consecutive year that trailer output has exceeded 200,000 units.

The Top 25 trailer manufacturers built 211,807 trailers in 2020, down 34% from the 322,341 units built in 2019.

The four largest trailer builders, each having built more than 50,000 trailers the year before, slipped to fewer

than 40,000 each in 2020, shipping a total of 159,489 trailers, or 66% of the Top 25 total.

The trailer totals reported here should not be compared directly with other domestic surveys that do not include Canadian and Mexican trailer plants. This survey does not attempt to report on the many small trailer manufacturing plants scattered throughout North America, so the total trailer build is somewhat larger than the Top 25 numbers.

This *Trailer/Body BUILDERS* survey is made by contacting a member of the management team at each company

The order reflects reported production volume for calendar year 2020.

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Top 25 North American Truck-Trailer OEMs				
Rank	Manufacturer	2020	2019	% change
1	Wabash National Corp.	36,400	55,700	-35%
	Dry vans—29,850; Refrig vans—3,150; Flatbeds—1,350; Tank trailers—2,050 <i>Also built 235 converter dollies</i>			
2	Hyundai Translead	34,739	66,097	-47%
	Dry vans—31,511; Refrig vans—3,052; Flatbeds—176 <i>Also built 2,400 container chassis, 834 converter dollies</i>			
3	Great Dane	34,500	50,500	-32%
4	Utility Trailer Mfg.	33,850	51,911	-35%
	Refrig vans—17,488; Dry vans—14,869; Flatbeds—1,493			
5	Vanguard National / CIMC USA	12,013	17,010	-29%
	Dry vans—10,013; Refrig vans—2,000 <i>CIE Mfg also built 16,145 container chassis</i>			
6	Stoughton Trailers	11,000	16,750	-34%
7	MANAC	7,000	8,200	-15%
8	EnTrans International	6,053	7,760	-22%
9	Pitts Enterprises	4,435	4,865	-9%
10	MAC Trailer	4,170	6,284	-34%
11	Timpte Inc.	3,275	2,952	11%
12	Premier Trailer Mfg.	2,426	1,407	72%
13	Fontaine Equipment Co.	2,422	6,908	-65%
14	XPO Logistics Mfg.	2,021	1,770	14%
	<i>Also built 350 converter dollies, 21 truck bodies</i>			
15	East Mfg. Co.	2,018	3,249	-38%
	Flatbeds—768; Dump trailers—854; Refuse trailers: 396 <i>Also built 62 truck bodies</i>			
16	Strick Trailers	2,000	2,300	-13%
	Dry vans—1,900; Logging and flatbeds—100 <i>Also built 400 converter dollies; Cheetah Chassis built 1,900 container chassis</i>			
17	Kentucky Trailer	1,968	2,645	-26%
	<i>Also built 549 truck bodies</i>			
18	Felling Trailers	1,960	1,793	9%
	<i>Also built 3,342 light-duty trailers</i>			
19	Fruehauf de Mexico	1,836	2,708	-32%
20	Trail King Industries	1,750	2,434	-28%
	<i>Also built 717 light-duty trailers</i>			
21	Reitnouer Inc.	1,525	3,963	-62%
22	Talbert Mfg.	1,269	1,272	0%
23	Tremcar Inc.	1,089	1,321	-18%
24	Western Trailer	1,087	1,258	-14%
25	Doepker Industries Ltd.	1,001	1,517	-34%
Totals		211,807	322,574	-34%



Wabash National Corp. shipped 36,400 new trailers in 2020, a 35% decline compared to the year before.

The total includes 29,850 dry freight vans; 3,150 refrigerated van trailers; 2,050 tank trailers; and 1,350 flatbeds. Wabash also shipped 235 converter dollies, not counted in the rankings.

"Freight rates remained at strong levels for carriers throughout the peak season and it continues to remain elevated into 2021," Wabash President and CEO Brent Yeagy said in the discussing the company's fourth-quarter earnings. (For complete coverage, see Page 38.) "We mentioned on our last call that the availability of labor could be a headwind as we look to ramp our operations in 2021. While I believe this to remain true, I do want to call out that we were able to successfully hire approximately 600 new employees across our business during the fourth quarter.

"While it is early to talk about 2022, we believe structural changes occurring across the industry as a result of asset imbalance, forthcoming regulations with a new administration in Washington, and the further pace of supply chain disruption brought on by the current pandemic will positively impact our revenue outlook beyond 2021."



Hyundai Translead of San Diego, Calif., built 34,739 truck-trailers in 2020, down 47% from 2019.

The total includes 31,511 dry freight vans; 3,052 refrigerated van trailers, and 176 flatbed trailers.

Hyundai Translead also built 2,400 container chassis and 834 converter dollies, not counted in the rankings.

Trailer production numbers are reported by Hyun Jin Noh, senior strategic planning specialist, Hyundai Translead. Trailers are built at the company's plants in Mexico.



Great Dane Limited Partnership built 34,500 trailers in 2020, a 32% decrease over the previous year.

"We entered 2020 knowing that the market was slowing down. Obviously, like everyone in our industry, we didn't see COVID coming and we adjusted quickly as our customers held off on order trailers," said Chris Hammond executive vice president of sales. "As we entered the early fall, we saw much more demand for vans and reefers and immediately began to ramp up. We see flatbeds starting to improve as well so we have begun those ramp ups. 2021 will be a much higher volume year for Great Dane and all trailer OEMS."



Utility Trailer Manufacturing Co. produced a total of 33,850 trailers, down 35% from record production in 2019. Of that, 17,488 were refrigerated trailers, 14,869 were dry van trailers and 1,493 were flatbed trailers.

"2020 and the global pandemic was indeed a challenging year for the trailer market." Brett Olsen, marketing manager, said. "In 2019, Craig [Bennett, senior VP, sales and marketing] had predicted that it would be slower than the previous few years, but I don't think he had what we saw in mind when he said that. The market literally fell off a cliff when the government mandated shutdowns."

"Although most economists were predicting a U-shaped recovery, it turned out to be a very V-shaped recovery, with trailer demand rebounding like a superball. So much so, that by December, all of our plants were back up to the pre-pandemic shutdown production levels. Still, that hole in the middle of the year resulted a significantly reduced production total for 2020."



Vanguard National Trailer Corp./CIMC USA produced 12,013 trailers in 2020, a 29% decrease from 2019.

This includes 10,013 dry freight vans produced at its headquarters plant in Monon, Ind. and its newer plant in Trenton, Georgia.

Vanguard also built 2000 refrigerated van trailers at its Monon plant and its West Coast plant in Moreno Valley, Calif.

CIE Manufacturing built 16,145 container chassis at its facilities in South Gate, Calif., and Emporia, Va. These are not counted in the rankings.



Stoughton Trailers LLC produced 11,000 units in 2020, a 34% decrease from the prior year. This total includes dry vans, grain, livestock, and refrigerated trailers.

"Stoughton took advantage of the slower trailer market during COVID by investing significantly in technology/automation including robotic systems for welding and material handling, laser metal processing systems as well as vast improvements to production facilities, grounds and security," Bob Wahlin, president and CEO, said. "Despite obstacles, we were also able to gain additional large fleet business and expand our dealer network. We answered the challenge of keeping our employees safe and productive as the pandemic drove the need for safety enhancements."

"With a robust order backlog, Stoughton Trailers is positioned for a very strong 2021. Our throughput and efficiency will improve as we ramp up hiring, bring our newest equipment online, and our strategic partner opens a galvanizing facility adjacent to our factory."



MANAC Inc of Saint-Georges, Quebec, built 7,000 trailers in 2020, down 15% from 2019.

"Overall, given everything that's gone on, we find it a good year," Charles Dutil, president of MANAC, said. "The output was impacted by a COVID-inflicted

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temporary shutdown in the spring, and then a subsequent few weeks to get back to par. But we had a strong finish and expect a good 2021.”



EnTrans International reports shipments 6,053 truck-trailers in 2020. This is a 22% decrease or 1,723 fewer trailers than were shipped the previous year, according to Jake Radish, senior VP of sales and marketing.

EnTrans shipments include tank built by Heil Trailer International of Athens, Tenn. and Polar Tank Trailer of Holdingford, Minn., as well as heavy-haul trailers built by Kalyn Siebert of Gatesville, Texas.

The company is owned by American Industrial Partners, a middle-market private equity firm.



Pitts Enterprises dba Dorsey Trailer and Pitts Trailers built 4,435 trailers in 2020, a 9% decrease which JP Pierson, president of Pitts Trailers, considered “not too bad,” given the COVID-19 challenges.

“Demand is as strong as we’ve ever seen it. Most of my lines have tremendous backlog on them. I’m working on new staffing options along with more automation and process improvement,” Pierson said.

Along with robotics, that includes a “seven-figure” investment in a laser cutter to be installed later this year.



MAC Trailer Enterprises of Alliance, Ohio, built 4,170 trailers in 2020, a 34% decrease over 2018 production.

In addition to multiple manufacturing facilities around Ohio, MAC builds tankers in Haslet, Texas and flatbeds in Davis, OK. The company Beall brand tankers from Wabash National at the end of 2020.



Timpte Inc. in David City, Neb., in 2020 built 3,275 hopper trailers for hauling grain and other bulk materials, an increase of 11% from 2019.

“In the last six months of 2020, after the shock of COVID wore off, our market took off like a rocket,” President Dale Jones said. “The third and fourth quarters were fantastic. We have a very strong backlog going into 2021.

“We’ve had a few challenges with the supply base being able to keep up, and we are having those challenges, again, moving into 202—especially as it relates to pricing going up and availability of enough aluminum



and steel. The second biggest challenge is we need to hire people. We’ve been hiring on a steady basis since late May of 2020, and d we’re still hiring today: If we had 50 people walk in the facility today that could work the shop floor and were qualified, we would hire every one of them.”



Premier Trailer Mfg. Inc., in Visalia, Calif., built 2,426 trailers in 2020, a 72% increase over the year before.

“2020 was a year of significant change and unprecedented growth for Premier Trailer Manufacturing.” GM Michael McGinn said. “In a year where COVID-19 protocols and new procedures were implemented to safeguard our team members, Premier did not miss a beat.

“In addition to expanding our production of 22-ft long ‘hopper’ bottom dump trailers, Premier experienced increased production and demand for 24-ft flatbeds. Premier trailers are used for a variety of agricultural commodities from nuts, grains, citrus, grapes, and tomatoes to name a few.

“In 2021, in celebration of our 25th anniversary, Premier will introduce a new line of lightweight chassis to the flatbed segment. We also anticipate moderate increases in the hopper segment to meet the continued growth of the nut industry.”



Fontaine Trailer of Birmingham, Ala., manufactured 2,422 trailers in 2020, down 65% from 2019.

“2020 was likely going to be a ‘correction’ year for platform demand, even without the impact of COVID,” Fontaine Commercial Platform President Alan Briley said. “On a positive note, much of the dealer inventory that was amassed in 2018 and 2019 was consumed during 2020. Business in early 2021 has been much stronger than the last 18+ months and we are confident that it will be a much stronger year for flatbed demand.”

XPO Logistics

XPO Logistics Trailer Mfg. in Searcy, Ark., built 2,021 units in 2020, a 14% increase over 2019.

This includes 1,300 28-ft. trailers and another 175 liftgate units; and 400 48-ft units plus 146 liftgate units, according to Paul Reed, manufacturing senior director.

XPO also built 21 van bodies and 350 converter dollies.



East Mfg. Co. of Randolph, Ohio, built 2,018 mainly aluminum trailers in 2020, down 38% from 2019.

This total includes 858 dump trailers; 768 flatbeds; and 396 refuse transfer trailers. East also built 62 truck bodies that are not counted in the trailer total.

"Our order activity picked up in Q4 2020 and continues significant improvement in Q1 2021," said Chris Cooler, vice president of sales and marketing.



Strick Trailers built 2,000 truck-trailers in 2020, a 13% decline from the year before. This includes 1,900 dry freight vans built in Strick's van plant in Monroe, Ind., and 100 logging and flatbed trailers built as Evans Trailers in Strick factories in Sumter, S.C., and Berwick, Pa.

Strick also built 1,900 container chassis as Cheetah Chassis in its Sumter and Berwick plants. Strick also built 400 converter dollies in its Monroe and Berwick factories, according to Ben Katz, marketing manager.

"It would be an understatement to say that was 2020 was challenging. We took every step possible to provide a safe and fulfilling work environment so that we could continue to produce trailers for our customers," Katz said. "For 2021, we are currently seeing strong demand, especially for dry vans and container chassis. We are rapidly increasing production and I would anticipate higher production numbers in 2021 from where they were in 2020."



Kentucky Trailer of Louisville, Ky., built 1,968 trailers in 2020, a decrease of 26%, and 549 truck bodies.

"Similar to most businesses, Kentucky Trailers' 2020 production totals were negatively impacted by the global pandemic," COO Gary Parker said. "Particularly, Kentucky Trailers was impacted by a significant pause in orders in the April-May timeframe. Moving and Storage customers in particular paused to see how events would develop."



"Kentucky Trailer's approach to social distancing was to implement additional shifts of production, spreading the staffing over 7-day operations with two shifts per day. These strategies now position Kentucky well with a greater capacity and available production spots that are generally favorable to the overall market."



Felling Trailers Inc. of Sauk Centre, Minn., built 1,960 trailers with a 10K or larger axle in 2020, a 9% increase over the previous year, Patrick Jennissen, vice-president of sales and marketing, reports. It built 3,342 light-duty trailers.



Fruehauf de Mexico built 1,836 truck-trailers in 2020, an 8% decrease over 2019, reports Don Brown, USA Commercial Director.

Fruehauf de Mexico has been building trailers at the same plant 20 miles north of Mexico City for over 50 years. It is located on the Via Jose Lopez Portillo in the satellite city of Coacalco de Berriozabal.



Trail King Industries in Mitchell, S.D., built 1,750 truck trailers in 2020, a decrease of 28% from 2019. They also built 717 light-duty trailers with axles of less than 10,000-lb capacity.

"COVID hampered production in the second half of the year," CFO Gene Astolfi said. "We do anticipate a

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better 2021, but how much of an increase will be determined by what happens with the commodities pricing, as we see it skyrocketing.”



Reitnouer Inc., Birdsboro, Pa., built 1,525 trailers in 2020, a 62% decline from 2019.

Bud Reitnouer, company president, he attributed the decline to overall business uncertainty due to the pandemic.

“The overall market was fairly apprehensive. A lot of big fleets held off on their normal buying for 2020,” Reitnouer said. “But we are seeing rebound, so we’re really optimistic for 2021. I feel that business is going to be good for the next couple of years because, with the COVID shutdowns, there’s a lot of pent-up demand for products. All the manufacturing sectors were shut down; in almost any item you need to order, it’s six to eight months for delivery. That should bode well for recovery.”



Talbert Mfg., Rensselaer, Ind., built 1,269 trailers in 2020, about breaking even with 2019.

Troy Geisler, VP sales and marketing, continues to be optimistic for the coming year, at least through the election.

“I consider this a success considering COVID-related disruptions,” Geisler said. “Talbert is blessed with a healthy backlog to the start of 2021. It is far too early to see how 2021 will end with demand.”



Tremcar Inc., Montreal, Quebec, built 829 trailers and 296 tankers in 2020, with the total Tremcar production of 1,089 units down 18% from the year before, Melanie Dufresne, director of marketing and communications, reports.



WESTERN TRAILERS

Western Trailer in Boise, Idaho, built 1,087 trailers in 2020, a 14% decrease over the previous year’s production.

“We are ramping up for a much better year, with lots of activity so far,” Todd Swanstrom, Western Trailer’s engineering manager, said.

DOEPKER

Doepker Industries in Anaheim, Sask., built 1,001 truck-trailers in 2020, down 34% from the previous

“COVID definitely affected the number of trailers we manufactured through the first six months, but we really saw things take off from the middle of July through the end of the year,” Devin Leonard, vice president of sales and marketing, said. “As of today, orders look pretty solid for the coming year. Backlog is to the point we would’ve seen two or three years ago.

“There are some challenges in acquiring labor, and rising prices—steel in particular—definitely is a challenge we’re dealing with right now.” ■