



Heartland Catfish Moves its Private Fleet into Kenworth T680s, Saves More than 2 MPG in Fuel Economy

ITTA BENA, Miss. – With a deep southern drawl, Dennis Jones smiled and said: “Whoever designed this truck, sure knew what they were doing.”

Those aren’t idle words from a truck driver who has spent 40 years behind the wheel of every truck brand except one. Known as “Pops” by his fellow drivers and management at Heartland Catfish, Jones is old school turned new school. “The Kenworth T680 can do that to a driver,” he said.



With a fleet of 22 Kenworth T680s, Itta Bena, Miss.-based Heartland Catfish has converted its fleet of high-hood trucks into a fleet of T680s that are not only making drivers smile, but accountants as well. The aero model has gained the company 2.3 in mpg over its previous long-nose, which means a fuel savings of more than \$2,000, per truck, per month. That’s more than a \$44,000 monthly cut in the cost of fuel for the fleet.

In business since the ’70s, Heartland Catfish began processing its own catfish nearly 20 years ago with a state-of-the-art processing plant, which today can process up to 325,000 pounds per day. The company outsourced its trucking for the first two years after the plant opened, and then started its private truck fleet in 1998 to have more control over frozen and refrigerated deliveries. Heartland Catfish hauls its product throughout much of the United States – delivering to fish distributors as well as large retail chains, such as Cracker Barrel. When coming back from California, the company typically backhauls tomatoes.

“One of our owners used to drive trucks and he had an affection toward the long-nose cowboy truck with lots of chrome,” said James Sorrels, Heartland’s director of transportation. “They’re certainly a beautiful truck and we ran those until two years ago when we made the corporate decision to be more efficient. What we gave up in nostalgia has more than paid off in reducing costs. At the same time, it’s given our drivers something special to drive.”



From left are driver Dennis Jones of Heartland Catfish and James Sorrels, Heartland Catfish director of transportation.

The move to the Kenworth T680 began when Sorrels and Jones team drove two different truck models for two-day trips. “Going into the evaluation, we had an open mind – ‘may the best machine win,’ ” said Sorrels. “And clearly, the T680 was the winner. MHC Kenworth (Memphis) brought us the T680, equipped with a 76-inch sleeper and the PACCAR MX-13 engine for power. Pops and I split driving duties and the first thing we noticed was the 13-liter engine (rated at 455-hp). It had as much power and torque as our 15-liter engine. So, we were happy with the power. But what really swayed us was how quiet the truck was and the visibility out the front and sides.”

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“And how it drove,” added Jones. “I didn’t think they could build a truck that could drive like this. The other truck we drove was like your standard fleet truck. The T680 is a driver’s truck. I like everything about it – including how much room there is between the seats, all the headroom, and how the sleeper is laid out. There is plenty of storage – just a real comfortable truck. If I had to go out on my own, this is the truck I’d buy for myself.”

“Our T680s aren’t lacking for amenities. We spec’d them out with the Diamond VIT package with refrigerator, TV package, rotating table, plus added microwaves,” said Sorrels. “All the T680s have the 76-inch sleepers, except for two with 52-inch mid-roof sleepers. The mid-roofs are needed so the trucks can go under an overhead water supply that is used to fill the compartment where we house the live catfish.”

As Heartland Catfish’s first driver, hired back in 1998, Jones said he plans to stay on with Heartland until he retires. “I’m not going anywhere,” he said. “The company treats us right and James (Sorrels) is always there, night or day, if we need him. The company is family-oriented and when it comes to equipment, we know James wouldn’t want us to drive anything that he wouldn’t want to drive himself. He knows us and appreciates us – showing that with the new T680s and how they’re spec’d. That matters and is another reason why drivers don’t leave the company.”

“The only ones who do leave are the ones who retire,” added Sorrels, who memorizes every one of his drivers’ cell phone numbers.

For Heartland Catfish, the Kenworth T680 is the fuel-efficient and driver friendly truck that helps drive their successful business.

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