

# Propane Clipper 'Sales' Through Tough Situations

Even a cursory Internet search for propane highway accidents results in numerous news accounts that draw attention to the inherent danger drivers face daily while delivering product to customers. The issue of driver safety was calamitously exemplified about a year ago when a New Jersey driver was killed in a rear-end collision while working behind his truck.

Features that help ensure driver safety, and the integrity of the tank cargo in the event of an accident or rollover, highlight the design of Amthor International's (Gretna, Va.) Propane Clipper LPG delivery truck.

The Clipper's rear canopy extends over fittings and equipment, protecting them from inclement weather and impacts during accidents. The canopy also shields the driver from the weather.

The notched rear bumper Amthor manufactures, which is attached to the chassis frame for increased strength, also protects the driver from rear-end collisions when he is working with equipment underneath the canopy. In addition, the Clipper features an internal piping system, so if there is an accident, the enclosed piping won't be disturbed.

Al Stillwaggon, president of Weaver Gas (Newburgh, N.Y.) and a member of the National Propane Gas Association's Education, Training and Safety Committee, has five Clippers in his fleet and he said he plans to purchase a sixth this year.

"Normally with every truck that's built, with some exceptions, the pipe comes out of the pump and goes under the truck in the chassis area and comes up in the back," Stillwaggon said.

"Now, if you get into a real wreck that pump is going to be hurt. The pipe itself will be hurt, but not with the Amthor because they have taken the pipe and run it through the tank and out the back. Without a doubt [the Department of Transportation (DOT)] is going to say that's the way to go eventually."

He added that the Clipper's sturdy rear bumper means that even if the truck is struck from behind by another vehicle, "the truck may move but the bumper won't," providing the driver additional protection when he's working outside the vehicle under the canopy. "That bumper saves lives," Stillwaggon said.

The truck's durability was severely tested last year,

Stillwaggon said, when a Clipper owned by a New York company was forced off the road in icy conditions and plunged down a 40-ft embankment. Not only did the load stay intact despite two rollovers and an impact from a tree, but the driver emerged bruised but otherwise unhurt.

Stillwaggon stressed that the Clipper, even with its enhanced features, isn't any longer than a regular bobtail. "They're easy for the driver to take care of," he said. "On a regular truck the hose reel and meter are outside, out in the open, and they're a mess. Everything on the Clipper is clean. Everything is closed in."

Another feature of the Amthor Propane Clipper is its inverted hose reel manufactured by Hannay Reels (Westerlo, N.Y.), which allows the driver to pull the hose on an angle

using less exertion. Amthor also offers a remote rewind feature that allows the driver to carry a remote control on his belt. A push of a button on the remote automatically rewinds the hose.

Another company, Allen's Oil and Propane (Vincentown, N.J.) will soon add a third Clipper to its 10-truck fleet, said dispatcher Doug Allen. "I'd recommend this truck to anyone,"

he said. "Unlike other trucks where the meter and controls are outside where they get wet and corroded, everything on the Clipper is under the canopy and protected."

He added that every time his company begins shopping for a new bobtail, he pushes for an Amthor Clipper purchase instead. "The hose reels out easily, Allen said. "You don't have to tug and drag on it, and you're not going to tear up your hose as easily. The truck is great."

Butch Amthor, president of Amthor International, said drivers, insurance companies, and DOT "love the design of the Clipper." He noted that on a traditional bobtail, the delivery driver stands with his back toward traffic at the rear of the truck. However, the Clipper's design positions the driver sideways under the canopy, behind the bumper during roadside deliveries, which protects him from oncoming traffic.

Amthor added that the Clipper costs only about \$600 more than a conventional bobtail, and that the idea for the canopy arose from his company's fueloil truck design. "The competition knocks it because they say it looks like an oil truck," he said, "but Clipper drivers aren't dealing with a reel full of snow and a meter sticking out in the open."—John Needham

