



Fire Engine Red



Jon's Story

My name is Jonathan Keith, my family and I run our farming operation in the hills between Mt Cole and Mt Lonnarch. Among other things I am also the captain of the Elmhurst Rural Fire Brigade, and like all our members we are volunteers. We give up our time to deal with emergencies.

The ERFB has 45 active fire fighters and one appliance, a 22 year old CFA owned 4WD Hino tanker with a 3000 litre tank. This is standard issue equipment for a brigade in our area; most neighbouring brigades have either 2000 or 3000 litre appliances.

This type of appliance can carry a maximum of 6 crew, but can and does perform optimally with a crew of 4. To drive this appliance, the basic requirement is to have a Medium-Rigid truck license, at present only 22 of our fire fighters are qualified to drive it. Again this is about par for a brigade like ours.

Black Saturday

As practically everyone in Australia knows, on February 7th 2009 we had one of our worst fire danger days on record, and some of the most

catastrophic fires and loss of life that Victoria has ever seen. Over the following days CFA strike teams were assembled from all over the state to help fight these fires. As is common practice tankers from alternate towns were used to make up these teams. As it happened Elmhurst was rostered on strike team duty that week, and on February 9th the Elmhurst tanker joined strike team 1613 and travelled to the Yea-Murrindindi complex fires.

Little did we know at that time that the tanker would be away from the district for the following 19 days. In fact I expect that most of the broader community of Elmhurst probably did not even realise that we had no tanker in our station for most of February! Nor did we realise that during that time we would provide 23 personnel who volunteered three days of their time, six of them making two trips.

It was during this period that I experienced my busiest workload as captain. As well as leading the 1613 strike team for three of these days, I spent countless hours at home and at the station on the phone contacting our volunteer members to request their participation.

I was very conscious that had an incident occurred within our brigade area, we had no tanker at our station. It was reassuring to know that we would have been supported by Amphitheatre, Crowlands and Warrak, but of great concern to me was the fact that at best these tankers were at least 15 minutes further away.

As all fire fighters know, it is the initial attack on a fire that has the most impact on its size. This is the problem that all brigades face when their appliances are away at other fires, and it is not a new issue, it is just unusual for the equipment to be away for such a long period.

If Only

If our brigade had a smaller slip-on type appliance, it would mean that we had some form of rapid initial attack on a fire in our patch in the event that our CFA owned appliance is away.

The above story is just one example of why the Elmhurst Rural Fire Brigade for the last couple of years has been applying for CSESP funding from the government to acquire an Ultra Light Strike Tanker.

Opportunity

Unfortunately our applications so far, though well prepared and received by Regional headquarters, have not been successful due to the fact that we need to make a brigade contribution of \$18,000. To date we have not had these sort of funds available, so when Ben & Jane Baker of Wimmera hills winery came forward with their offer to donating the proceeds from the sale of a specially labelled shiraz called Fire Engine Red, I felt that we would be well on our way towards our brigade owned vehicle.

Ultra Light Tanker

The current generation Ultra Light Strike Tankers are 4wd Nissan Patrols with a 600 litre tank, and fully equipped for a crew of two. They were more commonly known as slip-ons, and we as a brigade feel that they are the perfect compliment to the much larger tankers. They can be driven by a suitably trained driver with an

ordinary car license, and are capable of faster response due to their much lighter weight and mobility. Once on scene, they have the capacity to carry out an initial attack on a fire, hopefully suppressing it enough to buy time until the much


larger, slower tankers arrive, all the while being able to providing quicker word-back and establish a control point.



I am looking forward to our next application for CSESP funding as I feel that having the funds up front, the brigade has a very good chance of being successful this time round. One of my goals as captain is to see this venture through, and for the Elmhurst Rural Fire Brigade to have in our station, a brigade owned Ultra Light Strike Tanker.

www.fireenginered.org.au

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