

WELL, BLOW ME DOWN

Words and photographs by Dean Evans



A Cargo Floor and Razor Power Tarp in a custom truck make working life a lot easier for NZ's Mulch Man, and its eco-friendly mulch-spreading operations.

“We can blow certain products up to 100 metres.” It’s an interesting claim, but to Mulch Man’s Simon Green, it’s all part of the job of spreading mulch around the North Island of New Zealand.

“She’s a good blower,” he adds. “It’s like a big supercharger. When we first started we had six-inches (150mm) hoses, which could get a bit nasty and throw you on your back... so we’ve gone down to five-inches (125mm),

which gives the guys a bit more control spreading the mulch. That way we can run the trucks a bit slower, so we don’t have to run full air, and it’s a lot less volume.”

This is just one evolution of a truck design that has seen Mulch Man become one of the key providers of eco-friendly mulch around Auckland the New Zealand’s north and south islands.

Started by Mark Ross a decade ago, Mulch

Man was a two-man, one old truck operation, and purchased by Gary Edwards of Mulch Blowers in 2012, has evolved into a company with 10 employees, including Operations Manager Simon, a fleet of utes and seven trucks including a tipper, five blower trucks and the latest addition to its fleet, a custom-built 2017 Isuzu 530 mulch spreader, using a Cargo Floor System on the bottom below and a Razor power tarp up top.



A typical load of pallets and wood used to make mulch.



Aptly named ‘Money’ on the hose. He’s also pictured on the truck.

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“Mulch is made from all sorts of things,” explains Simon. “But we use three different types: wood chip mulch, crushed up from pallets and old wood; Treescape provides us with a lot of arbour mulch, and we’ve also got a straight fresh pine woodchip, which doesn’t have a lot of nutrients, but is a good long-lasting coverall. We also blow soil blends.

“The mulch holds the moisture content in the ground: a good layer of mulch - around 100mm thick over new planting - can last up to three years, and the plants really thrive on it with all the nutrients in it.”

Mulch Man’s mulch supply is processed and sourced from associate business partner Reharvest Timber Products, from the same yard in Papakura, Auckland, home for the three companies that form the operation: Reharvest, Mulch Blowers and Mulch Man. Loading the mulch is made substantially easier by a Razor Top Runner power tarp, which enables safe and easy access as the

press of a button.

Recalls Simon: “We saw them on Taylors Bros Transport, on their truck and trailers, and they have massive units. It’s so easy: you can sit in the truck and press a button, rather than climbing on top and rolling a tarp over: we’re using it 3-4 times a day. There’s one switch on the body behind the cab, and the remote control. We’re very happy with it.”

The tarp rolls from side to side via the sliding motor mounted on the leading top edge of the trailer, and in less than 60 seconds, the entire load is either open or closed, the tarp even tensioning itself.

Doing such a unique style of work required a customised solution, so this new truck was Simon and Gary’s own design.

“We built it ourselves here in NZ,” says Simon. “We’ve been doing it for that long, we’ve got a lot of knowledge - we told Transfleet Trailers what we wanted: it’s a 40 cube aluminium body on it for longevity, as opposed to fibreglass bodies; it has a rotary

valve on the back, lots of hydraulics and a split-shaft PTO, so everything’s driven off the 530hp motor.”

Using a conveyor belt in the previous truck had its limitations of feeding the mulch, so this new Transfleet body truck uses the Cargo Floor System supplied by BPW Transport Efficiency, the moving floor system being ideal for even and consistent mulch distribution, as it continually feeds the blower without the need for a person to be up or around the truck monitoring or fixing blockages, also crucial for worker safety.

Explains Simon: “The Cargo Floor System keeps the load flowing to the back - with health and safety a big issue these days you can’t get in the truck or on the truck when you’re working, so the Cargo Floor moves the load to the back of the truck, where the levelling bars and augers drop the product into the blower.” All this happens within the truckbody so all the moving parts are

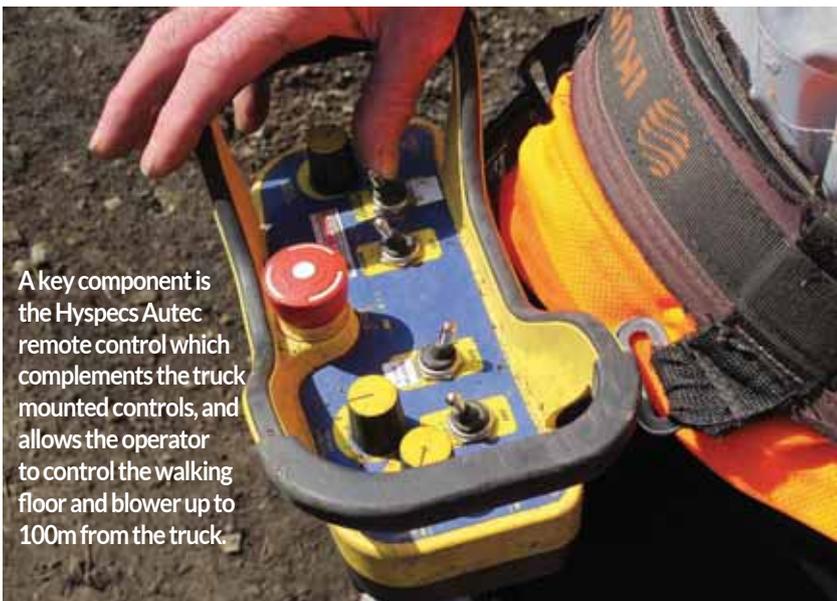


Inside the almost empty body, with the walking floor feeding the mulch into the levelling bars and rear augers and dropping into the blower motor.





The Razor Top Runner power tarp easily operates via the switch behind the cab, or a wireless remote, and takes less than 60 seconds.



A key component is the Hyspecs Autec remote control which complements the truck mounted controls, and allows the operator to control the walking floor and blower up to 100m from the truck.



The Hyspecs control unit for all the mulching gear, blower and walking floor.

internal, making it safe to move around the truck while in operation.

We joined Mulch Man on site in Auckland to cover some areas and large mounds of construction dirt, for an ecologically sound solution to prevent run-off, particularly important during NZ's wet winters. On site, long hoses carried by the support ute hook up to the blower's outlet, and provide access to areas away from where the truck is parked, with the job effectively becoming a two-man operation.

Hose man, Mulch Man's aptly named 'Money' - whose image also features on the side of the truck - hooks up the long hose to the output of the Roots rotary lobe blower, which feeds the mulch out of the back of the trailer at a speed assed by controller, Rodney, who has

the wireless remote on a belt.

This Autec remote was also a special project, developed and fitted by Hyspecs. Along with all the truck's hydraulics and plumbing, and of course the truck mounted controls, Hyspecs developed an Autec remote control, which allows complete and wireless control via the hip unit, up to 100 metres away from the truck.

Today, Rodney's near the truck, continually watching Money and how much product is being ejected, while carefully listening to the product pass through the blower, and adjusting both the moving floor pushing product into the blower, and sometimes backwards, and the speed of the blower ejecting it, a constant balancing act easily managed by a few switches and dials and

Rodney's skilled ears.

Within minutes, the dirt's quickly covered with a top layer of mulch, accompanied by the whirring of the blower and the tink of the mulch passing through the rubber hose. It's all very quick and, after stepping on the mulched ground, very effective.

Adds Simon: "We do a lot of motorway work, the big batters on motorways, new housing sites and sediment ponds around construction sites. We just park the truck on the nearest, solid surface." Playgrounds and landscaping are also big business for Mulch Man.

And with this new truck, making two rigid eight-wheelers on the road, Mulch Man is better equipped than ever for spreading the word and work of mulch blowing. 