



Owner-Operator's Business  
Association of Canada  
Association professionnelle des  
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the  
director's chair*

## Sorry, what did you just say?

Mercy sakes alive, how trucking's vocabulary has changed. Think back to the '70s and '80s when CB slang was all the rage. They even made movies based just on the lingo. "10-4 good buddy, I've gotta get outta here, my comic book's catching up to me. I'm on the back door, easing on down the boulevard doin' the ole double-nickel. Watch that smokey in the rocking chair! Catch me later."

A few of you old generation truckers will know what all that means. Today's drivers would be more likely to say something like "My ELD's pinging, I'll have to get off the road and give up my downspeeding for the day. My DIC says I'm in the sweet spot, but my DPF wants a regen, so I guess I had better hit the remote diagnostic button. I'm pulling into the travel centre. Facebook me later."

While the old lingo was culturally driven, promoting the image of the rough and tough independent trucker and the lifestyle that supposedly went with it, today's truck jargon is mostly technology driven, and to a great extent, furthered by the product marketing people. I have yet to hear a driver utter the words downspeed or driver-centric.

During the various press conferences at the Mid-America Trucking Show recently, one presenter after another spouted terms like downspeeding, driver-centric, uptime, information centres and performance assistants for drivers, or some variation on those themes. Packages was another popular word, usually related to aerodynamics or idle reduction, which were invariably linked to another off-heard buzzword: fuel efficiency.

The old CB slang was certainly more colourful, but it was apt to leave outsiders scratching their heads. What do comic books and rocking chairs have to do with trucking? Indeed. But what the heck is downspeeding? Or a re-gen? Or uptime, for that matter?

For the as yet uninitiated, downspeeding is

a term used to describe lowering engine rpm at highway cruise speed in order to improve fuel economy. It's an extension, of sorts, to the gear-fast, run-slow concept. OEMs promote downspeeding, which allows 80,000-lb trucks to cruise down the highway at 65 mph at a fuel-sipping 1,150 rpm.

That just wasn't possible back in the good old days when engines routinely ran at 2,100 rpm or higher at highway speed – with flames shooting out the stacks, along with tons of black smoke and all that other nasty stuff.

It's truly remarkable what engineers have been able to accomplish over three decades. They have roughly halved the engine speed and nearly doubled fuel efficiency. For that, I can put up with a few funny new words.

But what's with uptime? Just about every truck and engine maker at MATS was talking about uptime. Mack Trucks is even building an Uptime Center at its Greensboro, NC headquarters. Did we worry about uptime back in the old days? It used to be the downtime we looked forward to – before the 34- or 36-hour-reset rules put an end to long weekends.

Uptime – or the time the truck is running and making money – was something we took for granted not that long ago. Now it's a selling feature?

Trucks have seen an upsurge in onboard technology in recent years and a corresponding increase in system faults that can sideline a truck. It's troubling that an \$18 sensor can precipitate a \$1,000 tow bill to get the problem fixed. The truck would probably run just fine except that said sensor has breached – maybe – some emissions parameter. I guess that's part of the price we pay for nearly doubled fuel efficiency and exhaust that's cleaner by several orders of magnitude. Still, it would be nice if the truck could be allowed to find its way to a shop before throwing up the white flag.



Joanne  
Ritchie:  
OBAC  
executive  
director

Another term that has me puzzled is driver-centric. The marketing folks are usually talking about cab interiors in this instance. Maybe it's just me, but I'd sort of expect a cab to be driver-centric, that is, designed and engineered for comfort, ease of use, and occupant safety.

There are certain things about the driver compartment of my Volkswagon Jetta TDI wagon that are anything but driver-centric, like the fact that if something falls down under the seat it cannot be retrieved with anything less than a very long pair of the longest-nose pliers on the planet. Or that nothing will stay on my dashboard when I accelerate the car.

I guess if I had a driver information centre in the car, some sensor would tell me where that dime went, or that I was accelerating too fast and thereby wasting fuel. These info centres for drivers are a product of the digital age if ever there was one. Given that there's little a driver can do to thwart the engine computer's wishes, I guess it's useful to get feedback from that same computer that you're doing everything right. It's kind of a digital pat on the back, and a useful one at that, if it further improves fuel efficiency.

I suppose we had better get used to all this new terminology. Trucks are becoming more like airplanes every day, and we all know how much aviation loves its buzzwords and acronyms. With GPS-controlled engines and transmissions, driverless trucks, and platooning just over the horizon, the term convoy has a whole new meaning in 2014. Yeah, Buddy.