

Making the Bulldog Shine



It's only four inches high, yet it's recognized all over the world. Cast in metal, it's chrome-plated and polished to perfection. It's the gleaming Mack® bulldog, standing proudly upon every Mack truck hood. Whether it's on a 1993 CH rolling along I-80 in West New Jersey, or a 1972 DMM-EX mixing cement at an Alberta job site, or on the flat face of any of the thousands of MRs on duty throughout the country, this icon of American industry remains a familiar sight to millions. It is perhaps most familiar, however, to Leroy Smith.

Nearly 70 years ago, Alfred Fellows Masury was Mack's chief engineer, vice president and assigner of 115 company patents. He also produced what may be the most enduring corporate image of the 20th century. Masury designed and patented the bulldog radiator mascot that has been riding on the front of all Mack trucks since 1932. When Leroy Smith began working for a busy, gritty, lower-Bronx plating company 33 years later, little did he know that he, too, would play a part in the Mack bulldog heritage.

His Daily "Grind"

Every day, Monday through Friday, Leroy Smith, 64 (pictured at right), leaves his home in Brooklyn, NY, at 5:45 a.m. He hops on the first of three subways that eventually bring him to Victoria Plating Company, Inc., on Tiffany Street in the Bronx—just in time for the 7:30 a.m. start of his workday.

Since 1965, Leroy has made this same journey at the same time to do the same task—hand-polish the Mack bulldog ornaments. At a rate of up to 270 per day, for about 200 working days each year for almost 33 years, company owner and president Charles Antmann calculates that Leroy has polished more than 1,750,000 bulldogs. "He is the hardest-working person I have ever known," Antmann said,

"and he works with tremendous dedication, craftsmanship and pride."

Jeff Higdon, vice president and Mack's contact at Victoria Plating, agreed. "I've been here 15 years, and I continue to be impressed by Leroy's work ethic. He's never been late and he never misses work," Higdon explained. "Leroy will be eligible to retire next year. We don't want him to go—he just may be irreplaceable."

There are 52 employees at Victoria Plating, and most of them are from the Bronx. According to Higdon, nearly 25 percent of them have more than 20 years with the 51-year-old company. Turnover is low, and there



is a spirit of cooperation and commitment noticeable throughout this union shop. At the facility, customer products are plated with nickel, chrome, copper, gold, brass and electro-black through a multi-staged chemical process. With nearly 200 customers, "business has been good," Higdon said.

Buffing & Polishing

Clad in his work clothes, dust mask and work gloves, Leroy is reluctant to sit and discuss his personal life. In reflecting upon his upcoming retirement, he smiled, proclaimed he's ready, but said, "I like work, and I like earning money. Getting motivated is easy—I just get up and get going!"

But when he's polished his last bulldog, Leroy knows what he wants to do. "I've been in Brooklyn for the last 42 years, but I'm going to retire to Salisbury, North Carolina," he said. "North Carolina is my home. I might fish or I might travel. I just don't know."

Because Leroy's been hand-polishing Mack bulldogs for the past

33 years, there can't be too many that haven't been expertly twisted and turned around the buffing pads at his work station. The finished bulldogs are distributed to Mack plants in Macungie, PA, and Winnsboro, SC, to six Mack U.S. parts-distribution centers and even to Renault V.I. in France. Leroy thinks that's pretty impressive. "Whenever I see a Mack, I wonder: 'Did I polish that dog?' I feel proud," he said. "I like Mack trucks. With that dog, they really look good. If I ever hit the lottery, I'd buy me one truck and just drive it and enjoy looking at it!"

A Show of Appreciation

Mike Warfield is the unit manager for materials at Mack's assembly operations in Winnsboro. He learned about Leroy when Jeff Higdon visited the facility in June 1998. "As word of his productivity and dedication spread through the plant," Warfield said, "people became really interested in Leroy. Everyone who heard the story came away impressed—eager to do

something that would convey their best wishes."

Later that month, more than 500 of the plant's 800-plus employees signed two giant cards for Leroy. Employee groups responsible for mounting the bulldog to the hood and then attaching the hood to the truck on the production line posed for photos. The cards and photos were sent to Leroy in July. In addition, he received a personal note from Michel Gigou, Mack president and chief executive officer, as well as several gifts from the Mack Trucks, Inc. corporate store.

A little embarrassed by all of the excitement, Leroy quietly returned to where he is most comfortable—his spot at the polishing wheel in the middle of the busy, noisy finishing area of the plating shop. After all, he has bulldogs to shine.

It has been said that life imitates art. That's certainly true at Victoria Plating, where Leroy Smith, a modest, industrious man, has become more like the Mack bulldog than he may realize—a symbol of strength, reliability and tenacity. P&SF