

Lafarge Pouring Praise On New Eaton® UltraShift® PLUS Transmissions

During the development and testing phase of its new UltraShift PLUS transmissions, Eaton Corporation partnered early on with roughly 25 trucking firms. One of the more important partners was the Western Canada operations of Lafarge Canada Inc.

“That’s because,” explains Michael Holahan, Eaton’s program manager for the new family of automated transmissions, “the trucks that are being used there are operating in extremely severe environments and carrying much heavier payloads than what is normally seen in the U.S. So getting a passing grade from Lafarge was very important to us.”

Listening to Lafarge’s Colin Pinkerton, who has been in the forefront of the evaluation, it would appear that the new transmissions have, indeed, passed all the tests, perhaps even with an A-plus grade. Pinkerton is a professional engineer and Equipment Manager for the greater Calgary, Alberta area. He’s also been a member of the Lafarge North America Truck Team since 1994.



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*–Colin Pinkerton
Equipment Manager, Lafarge Canada Inc.,
Calgary, Alberta, Canada*

“We were contacted early on by Eaton to serve as a customer partner and provide feedback,” says Pinkerton. “We took delivery of our first unit last year and were initially very impressed. Eaton continued to work with us until we had a unit ready for the field. Once that happened, Eaton continued to provide on-site support.

“They have been a great partner, and even went so far as to come back to us at one point and add important updates to the clutch and software when we were already very impressed with the performance. In effect, they took a perfectly good product and made it even better.”

Testing was conducted under a variety of varying terrains. One vehicle in the

Vancouver, British Columbia area had to negotiate a 6.5 percent grade on an urban street, with several traffic lights for more than one kilometer (0.8 miles) shortly after exiting the ready mix plant while hauling payloads as heavy as 46,500 kg (102,500 pounds). Lafarge also has vehicles operating in Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg with similar payloads. In total, Lafarge’s Western Canada operations now have 14 units in service, 11 of which must also contend with the harsh winter weather conditions of Canada’s Prairie Provinces.

Pinkerton conducted his own hands-on evaluation on three separate occasions at the Eaton Proving Grounds in

Marshall, Mich. He cited the transmissions' low-speed maneuverability as being especially impressive.

"The curb and gutter work that we are able to accomplish in low-low hold mode was outstanding," adds Pinkerton. "Operating at less than one mile-per-hour, we were capable of pouring 55 to 60 feet per minute. That's very important to us, as that type of performance really improves our overall efficiency and will definitely help us operate more profitably."

Of course, no new product on a commercial truck – regardless of its potential to improve a fleet's bottom line – is going to be successful if does not get an approval stamp from the men and women who operate the vehicles. Fortunately, Pinkerton reports that their drivers are also giving the UltraShift *PLUS* an A-plus grade.

"The reviews have been positive across-the-board," he says. "They love the Hill Start Aid feature when operating on steep grades, and they have been especially enthusiastic with the transmissions' intuitive capability to skip-shift precisely when it needs to do so. We have had virtually no negative feedback from our drivers."

The two-pedal design of the Eaton automated transmissions also lends itself to safer operation when compared to manual transmissions, believes Pinkerton, and noting that Lafarge has never purchased a new ready-mix truck with an automated transmission prior to the Eaton project.

"With safety being a top priority here," says the 37-year trucking industry



veteran, "we like the fact that our drivers do not have to worry about shifting the UltraShift *PLUS* transmissions. Because they are now keeping both hands on the wheel and both eyes on the road, our drivers are now capable of being much more attentive to driving the truck instead of constantly having to be concerned with shifting gears."

Eaton's Holahan notes that in addition to the 14 test units in western Canada, the Lafarge organization has been testing an additional 40 UltraShift *PLUS* transmissions throughout the U.S. and Canada since June 2007. Pinkerton notes that others are being evaluated at Lafarge operations in Georgia, Maryland, eastern Canada and the western U.S.

"But the transmissions working in western Canada have been working under the severest conditions," adds Holahan. "Because of that, the input that we have received from those locations has been invaluable."

All 54 of the Lafarge test units are UltraShift *PLUS*VMS (Vocational

Multipurpose Series) transmissions. The UltraShift *PLUS*VMS transmissions feature an ultra-low gear reduction to enhance low-speed maneuverability for efficient curb pouring and other mixer jobs like those typically encountered at Lafarge. They feature 11 forward and 3 reverse speeds, with a 36:1 overall ratio that provides a world-class combination of low-speed control and highway efficiency.

All of the UltraShift *PLUS* fully automated transmissions feature new automated clutch technology and intelligent shift selection software that employs grade sensing, weight computation, and driver throttle command to make smart launch and shift decisions for more efficient, safe and profitable vehicle performance.

Full production is expected to begin in the first quarter of 2010. Pinkerton, for one, would appear to be looking forward to the official debut.

"It will definitely be our transmission of choice with our next new truck order," concludes Pinkerton.

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