



T. FRENCH & SON CALLS ON BFGOODRICH MAGIC TO GET MERLIN BACK ON THE ROAD

STOKE-ON-TRENT, UK, October 24, 2024 — Cumnock-based haulier T. French & Son has added a very special vehicle to its fleet in the shape of a steam-powered Foden named Merlin.

The business traces its roots back to 1967, initially supporting Scottish farmers before moving into coal haulage, and the Foden, which is shod on 40x8 16-ply BFGoodrich Silvertown Vintage Tyres, pays homage to this and general British engineering excellence.

Tom French Junior, Director at the family firm, explains: "Merlin would originally have had solid steel wheels with a rubber bond providing road grip. However, a previous restoration added pneumatic tyres. When we took ownership, we knew from firsthand experience that BFGoodrich were the only tyres for the job. It's an excellent product."

The 1928 Foden C-type generates a modest 4hp from its steam engine, Merlin, and locomotion comes from a 3-speed chain drive. Well-known on the show circuit, the restored wonder is road legal.

The Foden started life as a left-hand drive 6-wheeler tar sprayer and was exported from new to Trinidad, where it was put to work by mining company Trinidad Lake Asphalt. Eventually it made its way home to the UK and was part of the Saunders Steam Collection for a time.

Merlin was ultimately sent to the scrap yard where its boiler with horn plates was cut off and sold on to be used for soil sterilising. However, it was saved for preservation and reconstructed using original Foden parts by Russell Kingan of Dumfries. In 1988, Merlin was acquired by Vincent Allen in County Durham, who stripped it down and undertook a meticulous restoration.

Displayed at vintage rallies – a new firebox and front tube plate was fitted in 2006 – it was sold to the late Bruce Nicol of William Nicol in 2008. After Nicol's death in 2023, his collection of vintage vehicles was auctioned off.

"Dad [Tom French Senior] has collected vehicles for more than 30 years. We have an extensive collection of agricultural tractors, mainly Massey Ferguson, and vintage trucks including a 1958 Bedford F type, 1969 Albion Reiver, Leyland 'two-pedal' Beaver, and several classic Volvos including the F7 and F10, so Merlin will feel right at home here," adds French.

T. French & Son runs a mixed fleet of Volvo and Renault agri-bulk tippers supported by powder tankers. It serves customers in the animal feed, agricultural and food and drink sectors.

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BFG/011/24