



Contact Jim with your comments, questions and opinions at editor@pumper.com.

Jim Kneisel
Editor

▶ Stacy Creech's 2023 Classy Truck of the Year is an effective rolling billboard for his company.

When told his truck was named the 2023 Classy Truck of the Year, Stacy Creech couldn't help but chuckle reflecting on how much septic service trucks have changed since his parents bought a 1987 Ford F-700 in 1987, paying \$36,000. The stakes are much higher now as Creech spent \$354,000 for his winning rig, a 2023 Kenworth T880S from Integrity Tank carrying a 4,500-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater steel tank and National Vacuum Equipment blower.

The latest truck in the Creech's Plumbing fleet, of course, is far more capable than the smaller vacuum trucks of days gone by. Chock full of convenience features and handy tools, it would be considered the Swiss army knife of wastewater service trucks. And its good looks and outstanding graphics make it a marketing monster, drawing the attention of potential customers as it drives down the roads around Wilson, North Carolina.

"My wife (Sheryl) went to school for marketing and she taught me about the importance of branding. That truck is my billboard," Creech says. "Branding is really important. I see a lot of guys with multiple trucks and nothing looks the same. All of our stuff looks the same so when [the public] sees the trucks, they automatically relate them to us."

Last year marked at least the third time Creech has entered the Classy Truck contest, and maybe the third time is a charm, as the saying goes. Competing with a formidable collection of monthly Classy Truck winners submitted by *Pumper* readers over the past year, it was selected the winner in a poll of our readers and a committee of COLE Publishing editors. Kudos go out to owners of all of the featured trucks, each who received a Classy Truck vinyl to proudly display on their rigs.

FULLY PACKED

Dressed in bright Kenworth Red Effect paint and with bold lettering and a partial wrap, the truck is powered by a 455 hp PACCAR MX-13 engine tied to an Allison Automatic 4500 RDS transmission. It utilizes a National Vacuum Equipment 4310 blower to provide vacuum and pressure. The truck has many

Big, Red and Reliable

The 2023 Classy Truck of the Year was custom-built to tackle tough septic service tasks. And it's pretty, too!

By Jim Kneisel



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STACY CREECH

appearance accents and driver comfort features, including air-ride, two-tone leather upholstery, remote keyless entry, Samsara GPS and dashcam.

The truck carries an onboard jetter and washdown system from Pumptec, a remote control system installed by Imperial Industries, and dual toolboxes that house a Crust Buster tank agitator head, a Hathorn inspection camera, RIDGID locator/sonde and other diagnostic and repair tools. The goal is to provide effective septic and grease pumping, as well as any other inspection or operations and maintenance tasks technicians identify on a service call.

"We're not a pump-and-run company. We do pumping and diagnostics; we're there to do inspections," Creech explains. "That pump truck is equipped enough to perform O&M and make an educated evaluation of what needs to be done. There's more on the truck than a shovel and a probe."



 Stacy, left, Sheryl and Hunter Creech are shown with their Classy Truck winner.

A desire for service diversification has driven many truck design decisions as Creech has worked in collaboration with owner Chad Davis at Integrity Tank, the company formerly owned by Lely Mfg. and located just seven miles down the road from Creech Plumbing, Integrity, and Lely before that (where Creech's parents, grandparents and brother worked with industry pioneer, the late Hank Vanderveen) have built about a dozen vacuum trucks for the family.

"All of my trucks are custom-built. When [Davis] is building the truck, I go down every couple of weeks if we tweak something, make changes or do something to it. I can go right down to the shop and do that," he says. "I have talked to other truck builders who are really good at what they do, but logistically there is no way I could be as involved as I can being here in town. That's kind of hard to beat."

What features on the big red Kenworth should other pumpers consider the next time they build out a new service truck? Here are a few items to consider:

Choosing Kenworth?

When he built his first truck, Creech wanted to look at a Peterbilt. But at the time, he found the doors didn't open as wide and it was harder to get in and out of the cab. He found the Kenworth more accommodating at the time and stuck with the T880 as the chassis for both of his large pumpers and his dump truck. Since then, Peterbilt and Kenworth (both built by PACCAR) have morphed into very similar packages, but he wanted to remain brand-consistent.

"Now I have a fleet of Kenworths and I've had very good luck with them. They're going to run the same engine package and there's not much difference between them," he says. "The truck is really well equipped and they ride really good."

Blower vs. vane pump

Creech has become a proponent of blower technology for his pumping trucks. He admits the blower versus vane pump debate is a hot one for pumpers — old-schoolers sometimes prefer the familiar pumps that they can often maintain and service in-house, while others prefer the performance capabilities and cleanliness of the blowers. Creech said he recognized the benefits of blowers when his family bought their first one from National Vacuum Equipment.

"I grew up with vane pumps and I know all about vane pumps," he says. But when he worked with his first blower, an NVE 4307, he saw that it was neat and clean housed in an aluminum box. "The blower didn't use consumables, so we didn't have to worry about filling it up with oil and constantly blowing oil bypass on the customer's driveway."

The war of words "comes down to CFMs. The blower is best at recovery, so it recovers faster," Creech explains. "If you're pumping empty hoses and it's slurping, or you have long hoses or a deep tank, I think a blower definitely outperforms a vane pump. But if you stick [the hose] in a bucket of water at the same elevation, I don't know. It's tit-for-tat who's going to win that battle."

Remote control system

The newest truck is Creech's first to have a remote control system for many functions, including activating the blower and toggling from vacuum to pressure, turning on the jetter and operating the rig's trio of intake valves. Because Integrity didn't have the ability to add the remote system at the time, Creech paid \$12,000 to have the truck shipped to Imperial Industries in Wisconsin, which installed the third-party remote system for about \$15,000. He would consider retrofitting his second septic pumper with the remote if it could be done locally. He has had a remote system on a Spartan hydrojetter since 2016.

"With the larger trucks, we sometimes pump a great distance from the septic tank. Sometimes we pump from the road (200 or 300 feet away) so it saves a lot of time just not having to go back and forth to the truck. I don't think I'd build another (truck) without one," he says. "It's not brand-new technology, but it's newer to the septic pumping market. I think moving forward, as technology gets more affordable, you'll see it will be a standard item before much longer."

Going automatic

Creech's family has a broad and deep reach in North Carolina, operating several wastewater-related companies. He grew up learning to drive 10-speed manual, but eventually his parents bought an Allison Automatic and there's been no turning back. Since 2015 he's settled on the Allison 4500 for the bigger trucks and his dump truck and they've held up great. "Throughout the day there's less wear and tear on the driver, you're getting places quicker, the fuel economy is about the same or better. It was no question at all," he says.

Do you have a Classy Truck?

Would you like to see your latest septic service truck splashed across the pages of *Pumper* magazine? We're always on the lookout for new or refurbished vacuum trucks for our monthly Classy Truck feature. To enter the contest for 2024, send a few photos of your truck — showing everything bumper to bumper — along with your contact information to editor@pumper.com. We'll reach out to you to collect more information about your favorite truck.



 Hunter Creech returns a hose to the Classy Truck of the Year.

Reusable graphics

About 20 years ago, Creech's established a relationship with Sign Zoo out of Florida, a company that was specializing in helping service companies in the trades build a positive brand. Sheryl worked with designers to create distinctive graphics showing a hose and flowing water running from the hood to the back of the tank on their vacuum trucks. The graphics are kept on file and can be scaled to fit the smaller vacuum trucks and service vans, maintaining a consistent look across the fleet. The company prints out the graphics and sends them to a closer installer, Danny Roof, who comes to Creech's to apply the vinyls. "They know the look we are going for and we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We don't have to pay to have someone redesign the graphics every time," Creech says.

KEEPIN' IT CLEAN

Creech said his shop isn't big enough to park the company's four vacuum trucks and a dump truck inside. So he makes sure each of the trucks is washed weekly and taken care of by the crew of 12. They wash the trucks, blow-dry them to eliminate water spots, wipe down with microfiber cloths and frequently hit them with spray wax for a mirror finish.

"I'm a firm believer that if you keep your trucks clean and they appear neat, then you're attracting a client who says, 'Well, they take care of their stuff, so I can trust them to take care of mine.'" Conversely, Creech says he is leery of hiring contractors to work at his own home if they're not properly maintaining their equipment.

"If they don't care anymore about their image than that, then I don't think they're going to care about my house," he says.

Creech, who's company spun off from his mother, Myrtle's, pumping company 27 years ago, is 49 years old and has worked in the industry his whole life. Myrtle, now 74, still drives a pump truck. The future of Creech's Plumbing is up to Creech's son Hunter, 23, if he wants to continue in the family business.

"He's next in line in the driver's seat," Creech says. "At this point I could sell or retire. But if he chooses to carry it on, then that's what we're going to do."

Until that time, customers will see Creech happily rolling down the road in his Classy Truck. **P**