

CRAWLING THROUGH THE ICY FOREST

Icy, narrow, hilly roads, and a total mass of 76 tonnes. The transportation of timber through Finland's forests is a demanding task for both drivers and vehicles. But with Volvo's I-Shift with crawler gears, Saku Simpanen and his team can take on both hilly terrain and bad conditions.





It is the middle of winter and the snow on the trees is so thick it causes all the branches to droop, while a constant twilight fills the brief daylight hours. The headlights of Kuljetus S. Simpanen's Volvo FH16 combination timber truck pierce through the mist and surrounding white forest.

As Saku Simpanen drives deeper into the woods, the roads become so small and narrow that they have not even been given names. Some are as slippery as ice rinks. Dotted at regular intervals alongside the road are wooden towers for hunting elk. During winter, elk are a common sight in the region, but right now they remain hidden in the forest.

Saku checks the in-vehicle computer to see where his next load will be collected from. It is his second assignment for the day, having already delivered a load of logs at dawn to the local sawmill in Keitele, Northern Savonia in central Finland. Saku has been traversing the roads in this region since he was 10 years old and knows every hill and bend. As a young boy he used to ride in his father's Volvo truck, and by the time he started school he already knew that this would be his profession. He joined the family business in 1998 and went on to take the reins in 2006.

"Driving and motoring are my passions. This industry is probably in my blood, too. My father, Seppo, was a transportation business owner, and it was natural for me to follow in his footsteps," he explains.

Today, together with his wife Jaana-Riitta, he owns Kuljetus S. Simpanen – a company that specialises in the transportation of timber. They have been together for 20 years, and joint business owners for almost ten years. Saku is the managing director and driver, whilst Jaana-Riitta takes care of the financial administration and transport planning aspects. In addition, the company also employs another five drivers.

Saku's latest Volvo FH16 is equipped with I-Shift with crawler gears, which improves the vehicle's starting ability in challenging conditions. The rest of the truck has also been specified with great attention to detail. Both the tractor and the trailer have full air suspension; the bunks used for keeping timber in place are automated and are operated by



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remote control; and the crane can be operated from inside a heated cab. Underrun protection, which is not compulsory for timber trucks in Finland, has also been installed.

"I have an almost perfect timber truck. If God made a better one, he kept it for himself," says Saku smiling.

In his view, one of the greatest advantages of the crawler gears is that they ensure the truck can always start moving, even when transporting large

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SAKU SIMPANEN,
OWNER, KULJETUS S. SIMPANEN OY



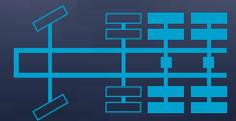
TRUCKS:

Volvo FH16 750 8x4 Tridem
VM 2016



Driven, km:
38,000

Volvo FH16 750 8x4 Tridem
VM 2014



Driven, km:
415,000

Volvo FH16 750 8x4 Tridem
VM 2013



Driven, km:
475,000

The average mileage per year, km:

150,000



Trucks are replaced
on average every 4 years.



Major load:
timber.



loads. “The reverse gear is at least as good as the forward gears. It allows us to reverse and turn in a very precise and controlled way.”

The crawler gears are just one example of Saku’s aspiration to always stay at the forefront of technical developments in the industry. When the maximum permitted mass for combination vehicles rose to 76 tonnes in Finland in 2013, his Volvo was one of the first trucks in the country to undergo a modification inspection in accordance with the new mass allowance.

“I constantly want to progress and develop new things. To do this, I need strong support,

such as reliable trucks, bodywork and cranes. Almost 50 years of collaboration with Volvo has helped us achieve success,” he emphasises.

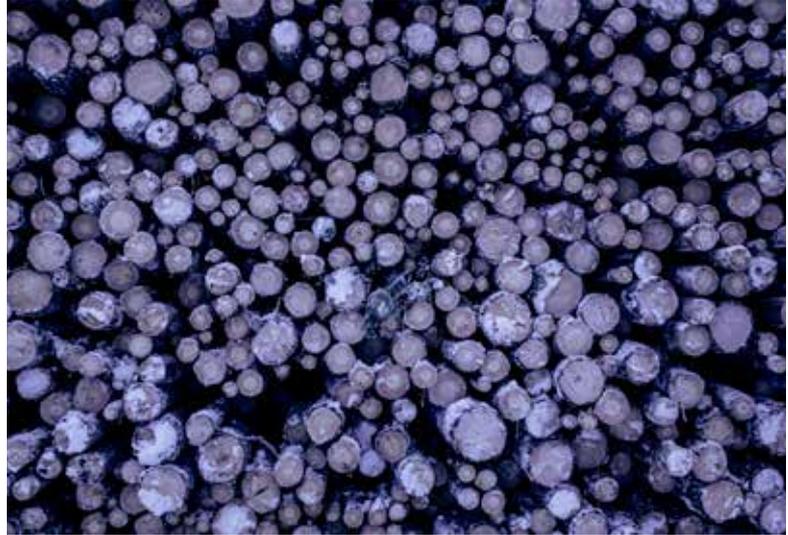
After 15 minutes of navigating twisting forest roads, Saku is close to his collection point. He is now so remote that the road back is not even shown on the map. As the Volvo FH16 draws to a stop at a crossroads, he places a warning triangle on the ground to tell others that there is a timber truck up ahead. This is vital, since the roads are so narrow that vehicles cannot give way or go around each other.

At a T-junction, Saku spreads a mixture of

salt and sand. The Volvo FH16 climbs up a hill and down again on the other side to reach the turning point. He turns the truck around and pulls to a stop beside a steep pile of logs. He climbs out of the truck cab and into the crane cab, before lowering the support legs.

The crane’s claw is like an extension of Saku’s hands. When necessary, he levels the pine logs by lifting them upright and knocking one end of the bundle against the ground. First the truck is loaded, then the trailer, and the stacks are secured with automatic bunks. When the trailer’s first stack is complete, it is moved to the

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Before the actual production process begins, the logs are measured and sorted according to length and thickness.

rear with the help of hydraulic cylinders.

Once the truck and trailer are fully-loaded, Simpanen gets behind the wheel. The I-Shift turns on the crawler gears automatically when it detects the heavy load – these situations are where the crawler gears work best, and the Volvo FH16 steadily makes its way to the top of the hill, despite its 76-tonne weight.

“Since a lot of the driving we do is on small forest roads and through hilly terrain, we need a lot of power. The Volvo with crawler gears offers a good overall package for transporting wood and it includes all the factors we need: power, a comfortable drive and safety.”

Saku drives the familiar route back to the Keitele sawmill, located 20 km away, where he joins the queue before unloading the logs onto a wide conveyor belt when his turn comes around. This is where most of Kuljetus S. Simpanen's deliveries end up, and the company's trucks will call into the sawmill on average ten times a day. The sawmill has only a 20-minute window within which the trucks must be on site.

Before the actual production process begins, the logs are measured and sorted according to length and thickness. Next, the sawmill's forklifts transport the sorted logs to their own piles in the storage area. But by the time this is underway, Saku has already left to collect his next load. At this pace, he can complete a further three loads before the end of his shift. ■

KULJETUS S. SIMPANEN OY

- *Head office:* Pielavesi, Säviä village.
- *History:* Seppo Simpanen founded the company in 1968.
- *Current owners:* Saku and Jaana-Riitta Simpanen, since 2006.
- *Staff:* Two owners, five drivers.
- *Sector:* transportation of timber in the Northern Savonia area.

FLEET:

- Volvo FH16 750 8 x 4 tridem, 2016 model
- Volvo FH16 750 8 x 4 tridem, 2014 model.
- Volvo FH16 750 8 x 4 tridem, 2013 model.
- Five timber trucks through a subcontractor network, three of which are Volvos.
- *Other Volvo Trucks services:* Dynafleet, Gold Service Contract, have taken part in Volvo Trucks' driver training.
- *Major customers:* UPM, Keitele Forest.



According to driver Tiia Lintunen, the crawler gears make it easier to start from standstill on steep hills and soft surfaces: “The Volvo is easy to drive, allowing me to negotiate my way through even the most challenging of sites.”