

CE ready to test the water

Angelo Scorza profiles Chemical Express, a Naples-based tank container pioneer, set up with a small haulage fleet in 1979 by the now retired Salvatore Romano

Salvatore's sons, Vincenzo and Ciro, understood that haulage had an intermodal future and in 1995 bought the first tank container. In 2013, management repackaged the transport activities within the new Chemical Express Srl (CE).

Current CEO Giuseppe Avallone represents the third generation and has set the new company's mission to be 'the transport of tanked liquid chemicals on behalf of third parties'.

Carried goods range from standard commodities to highly specialised products with high added value. These include dangerous goods, handled under the class labels 3-4.1-5.1-6.1-8-9.

As well as transport, CE offers other services. These include the rental of the company's own tank containers and the transport of cargoes under controlled temperature. The latter is achieved by the use of self-regulating vehicles or by warming the cargo at specialised service stations by means of damp or hot water.

"The added-value marking out our services is the ability to meet their needs by always looking for the best solution even within strict deadlines. This builds up business relations and makes of us true logistics partners for our customers," explains Avallone.

The fleet has 100 road trucks. These are equipped with the most advanced anti-pollution controls, active and passive safety systems and satellite tracing. The fleet



is wire connected to allow real-time communications with drivers and vehicles have a compressor or pump for the self-standing unloading of cargoes. There are 140 chassis variations, including tilting units for very viscous products and ultra-light trailers that are certified for dangerous goods and separate unloading.

The fleet also includes 110 road tanks of varying capacity, with insulated stainless steel and up to three warmed compartments for dangerous goods. The fleet includes 1,200 tank containers (both ISO and swapbodies) - 300 tank containers are leased with the 900 remaining owned.

2014 turnover was €25 million with an increase forecast for 2015. There are now 86 employees in the company.

CE's headquarters are on a 16,000sq metre site close to the commercial port in Naples and its network includes a large warehouse

in Novara, Northern Italy and an office in Valencia, Spain.

The company offers its services across all European countries with the main markets being France, Spain, Germany, the Benelux, and, of course, Italy.

"We do not set ourselves specific boundaries as we always have a range of services to offer with varied transport modes in order to reach the destinations our customers ask for" says Francesco Mattozzi, account manager.

In 2014, CE handled 440,000 tons through 22,000 shipments. "Recently intermodal shipments exceeded road ones. According to our general view, we first proposed intermodal shipments to our customers because of intermodal's smaller environmental impact, better safety and reduced overall costs. The safety is improved by reducing the number of vehicles needed".

The customer portfolio is varied. "Alongside chemical giants like BASF, BP, Repsol, Gazprom Neft and Grace, you find smaller companies which we service with the same commitment" Mattozzi says.

A company's growth depends on its ability to invest. "For a transport company, fleet renewal and growth are essential. We are delighted that for a number of years we have been able to pursue an expansion strategy, which was confirmed this year by the acquisition of 15 Euro VI road tractors and 25 lightweight trailers. The latter, by reducing the tare, enabled an increase in carried load which, in turn, allowed sensible cost reduction for customers".

CE buys its tank containers from both European and Chinese

manufacturers such as Van Hool and CIMC. For many years the company has been investing in the fleet renewal, especially as to swapbodies. The long delivery gaps suggest that its competitors are doing the same.

"Swapbodies are the most flexible and versatile element of our fleet for a number of reasons: they can be carried by different transport modes; they have a high volume capacity for very light products (with specific gravities of less than 1); a dangerous goods classification label (L4BH) and compartments allowing partial loading without compromising stability (which is a necessary feature for dangerous goods)" points out Avallone.

"Our company is fully autonomous on the market both domestic and international. This year is an important one as we won new important customers and developed trades, especially with Eastern Europe. We will probably enter international trades with deepsea shipments and food and beverage shipments (the latter with a dedicated fleet)", he discloses.

The need for warehouses and production plants to keep stocks at a low level has increased requests for just-in-time services' Load slots can be allocated just 24 hours in advance through the company's website and deliveries are collated by the minute.

"In Italy, the number of rail operators is increasing, which has enhanced competition on the market" notes Mattozzi.

For a road transport company the drivers' behaviour acts as a visiting card for customers at loading points and terminals.

"Unfortunately, not all drivers are professional and competent



Giuseppe Avallone, CEO of Chemical Express

enough to perform their duty," remarks Avallone, "but CE is very strict and selective and, in order to hire, we mandatorily require the dangerous goods permit with specialisation for tankers, the knowledge of Italian language (for foreigners) and of at least one other language (English, French, German) as this is often essential to access some loading points.

"We set up a training programme encompassing all facets of dangerous goods transport including rests' timing, safe drive, and cargo handling in specific conditions and environments".

Although based in southern Italy - and therefore far from the 'core Europe' tank container trade lanes - CE does not face any competitive disadvantage. "In order to be closer to our customers, we have travelling personnel living in all Italian regions and in several European countries, precisely with the goal of adequately covering the territory and to be personally in touch with

our customers," says Avallone.

CE mainly uses rail for its intermodal transport so transit timing is well-defined. "Strikes - which are becomingly worryingly routine in a number of European countries - and climate can seriously affect the transport schedule," says the CEO, who also notes that "the market is getting increasingly competitive as competitors become more commercially aggressive.

"In any case, we are confident that our strong business ties with our customers and a high service quality, together with our flexibility and constant technological update, will help us to keep our market share.

"In such difficult economic conditions, you must pay attention to the credit rating of your customers to guarantee a suitable cash flow."

CE is a member of the European Petrochemical Association (EPCA) and the European Chemical Transport Association (ECTA).