

These three Autocars have a total of 144 years of rough service between them. All were purchased new by John F. Noons, Inc. From left, a 1974 single-axle dumper, powered by a wailing 6-71 Detroit; a 1970 DC-103 tandem dumper with a 350 Cummins; and a 1969 DC-93 tandem tractor, carrying its original 250 Cummins.

REAL STEEL

New England's John F. Noons, Inc., takes the adage 'newer's not always better' to heart. Its fleet of vintage iron still outworks newer trucks.

By Dick Callaway

PHOTOGRAPHS
LINDA NOONS-ROSE



It's not every day in our world of constant change that one finds a thriving third-generation family business. Nor are companies common that do everything from hauling sand, stone, and hot mix, to moving an occasional house, to building septic systems stem-to-stern, to grinding up trees for mulch.

Less common still in today's throwaway culture are 73-year-old companies that operate trucks whose average age is nearly half that of the company. John F. Noons, Inc., of North Truro, Mass., near the tip of Cape Cod, operates a fleet of vintage Autocars, plus a GMC of equal age and a similarly venerable International. A lone Peterbilt is, at age 13, the baby of the group.

The fleet includes one hardy 48-year-old survivor that has suffered a snapped front axle pushed back to its fuel tank and has landed on its roof twice, yet still purrs along in its daily routine as though nothing had ever happened.

Jeff Rose, who runs the Noons company today, is a personable man who seemingly can do almost anything that a repair or restoration job requires and is no stranger to 15-hour days. At age 60 he is not a great deal older than his oldest truck. Jeff maintains there is no modern truck capable of matching the record of endurance that his oldsters can boast.

"I prefer steel to plastic," he explains.

Jeff's equally hard-working wife Linda is the grand-

daughter of the firm's founder and owns the company today with her sister Debra. Linda manages the business end of the operation with the assistance of Jean Bagley, who runs the office day-to-day.

Linda's grandfather, John F. Noons, was the son of a Portuguese fisherman, Joseph Noons (born Joaquim Nunes), who immigrated to America around the turn of the 20th century. In 1903, Joseph bought the first piece of the 69-acre parcel that is the company's home today.

Joseph's son, John F., went into business in 1930, hauling various commodities with a pickup truck. He developed into a talented entrepreneur who succeeded in several business ventures. In 1946, just after World War II, he began to expand his father's land holdings and started to operate dump trucks, hauling sand for making Sakrete from the Cape Cod dunes to the railhead for shipment to Martin Marietta at Rockland, Maine. Soon he was operating scrapers and dozers for building development roads while clearing lots for new homes.

After John's death in 1979, his son Donald (Ducky) Noons ran the business for another 25 years. No one is sure now how Ducky got his nickname, but Jeff guesses it was derived from "Donald Duck."

Ducky Noons was a friendly, outgoing man who knew everybody in town and, like his son-in-law, could build or repair anything. He worked long hours but is best remem-

bered as a man who was never too busy to help others. Jeff expresses his gratitude for all that Ducky taught him.

Ducky Noons died in 2005. At that point, Linda and Jeff's primary responsibility became running the Noons company. They had been helping out with the business for some time but had also been running the road for 25 years, at first hauling everything from toothpaste to oversize loads then, in 1986, forming their own company, J&L Enterprises, which they owned up until 2014.

J&L started out hauling garbage; Linda and Jeff then mortgaged their house to buy a metal baling machine and signed contracts with several neighboring towns to recycle and haul away metal waste. Their baler could compress two large refrigerators into a block two feet square, Jeff says.

From around 1980 all the way up to 2005, Linda drove her own 1973 Peterbilt 352 COE with a 400 Cummins. She states that even today, if she were to go back on the road, she would prefer driving a cabover.

John F. Noons, Inc., still operates one Peterbilt, a 2006 378 conventional tractor with a 475-hp C15 Cummins. This, along with a huge A-35 Volvo used in the company's sand pit, is the only heavy-duty truck Noons owns that might be considered modern. (A 2005 Ford F-350 and a 2017 F-550 with 3- and 5-yard dumps are also members of the pack.)

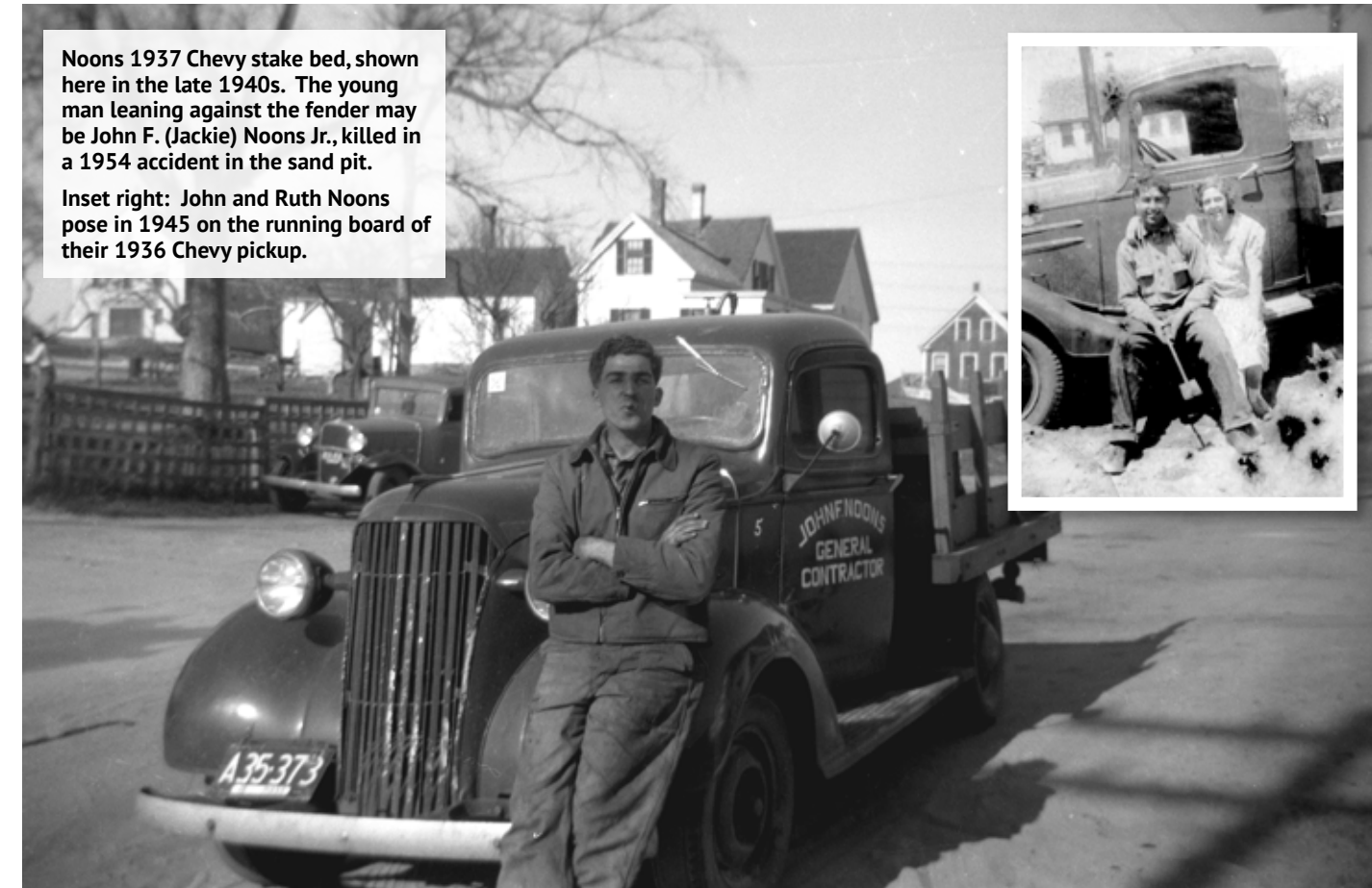
The Pete puts in about 10,000 miles a month hauling stone from Taunton and Sandwich, Mass., onto the Cape, >>



John F. Noons (1912-1979). Entering the trucking business for himself at age 18, he also owned the Amoco service station shown here and the High Noon Motel across U.S. 6-A from it. The "No Lead" label on the pump and the 36 cents per gallon price suggests this was around 1970, the year no lead gas was introduced.



Linda and Jeff with their four-legged children, Honey and Reising, and the 1969 DC-9364 Autocar that the four of them have taken to shows nationwide.



Noons 1937 Chevy stake bed, shown here in the late 1940s. The young man leaning against the fender may be John F. (Jackie) Noons Jr., killed in a 1954 accident in the sand pit.

Inset right: John and Ruth Noons pose in 1945 on the running board of their 1936 Chevy pickup.

Vintage fleet with its back to Cape Cod Bay. From left, 1971 Autocar 10-wheeler (*sans* body, currently in shop for refurbishment), 1974 Autocar single-axle dump, 1970 Autocar tandem dumper, 1969 Autocar tandem tractor, 1985 GMC General tandem dumper, 2006 Peterbilt tractor, and 1974 Autocar tractor, shown with snow plow. Not shown is a 1986 Autocar DK-64-F, currently undergoing restoration.

Right: One of several out-of-service Autocars in the Noons boneyard. It could be awaiting resurrection or merely the opportunity to be a parts donor.



Donald (Ducky) Noons (1938-2005). Ducky ran the company for over 25 years. He always worked hard, but was never too busy to help others.

typically grossing around 94,000 lbs. Jeff counts it a good truck that makes a valuable contribution to the business, but contends it wouldn't stand up to the sustained punishment that his older steel-cab Autocars have in their long, rough-duty careers of hauling sand and rock to construction sites or delivering hot mix asphalt anywhere there is a road to be built or paved.

The Noons dumper fleet includes five Autocars ranging from 33 to 49 years old and are operated on a regular basis, plus one 50-year-old Autocar that could be put into service on a moment's notice. That truck, a like-new DC-9364-T, is the one that Linda and Jeff often take to shows.

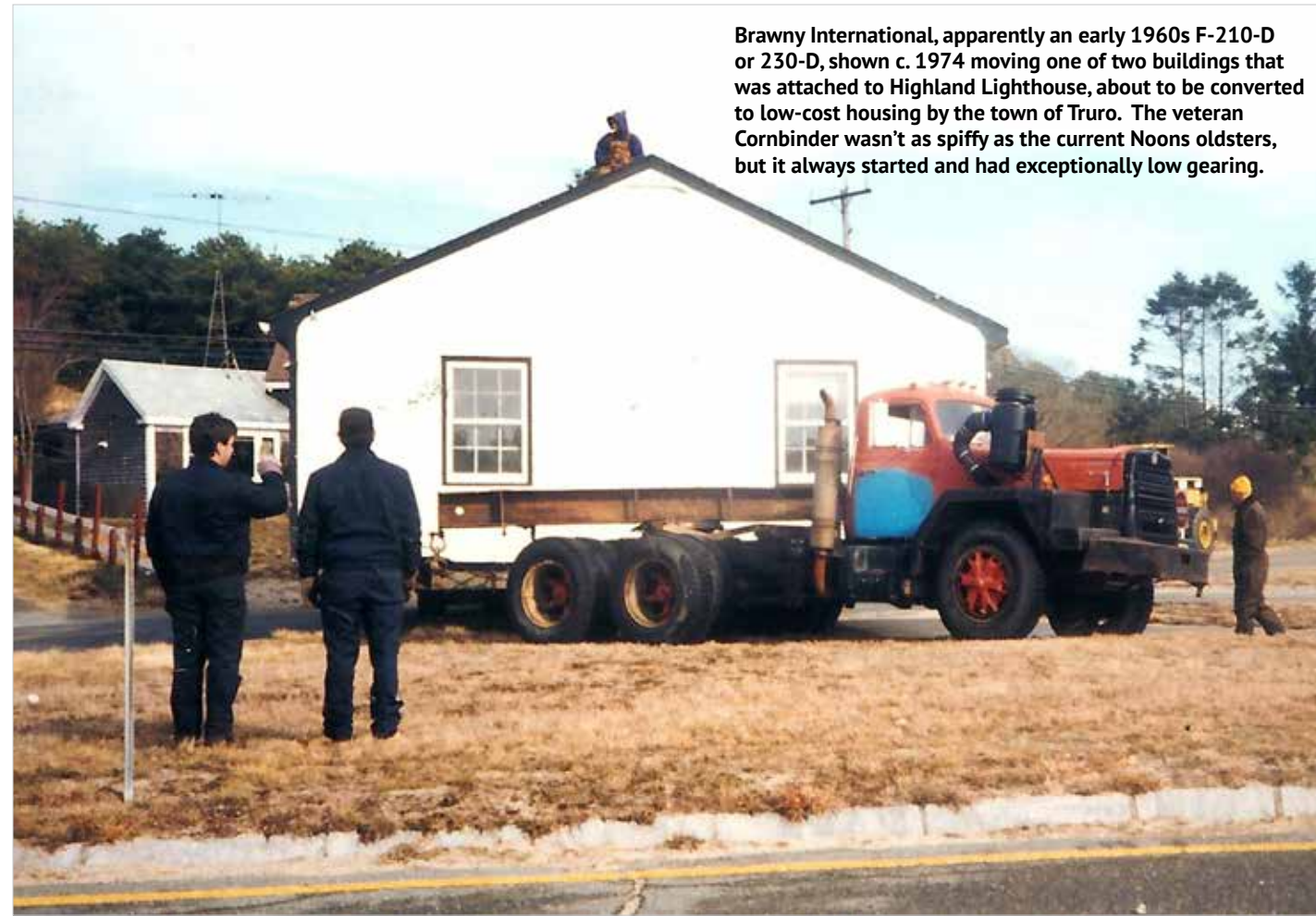
In 2013, the two of them, along with their two yellow labs, Honey and Reising, drove across the country in their Peterbilt camper, pulling a 42-foot Schertzer trailer with the Autocar aboard, to attend the AHS National Convention and Truck Show in Yakima, Wash. The truck has also visited national shows in Springfield, Mo., and York, Pa.

The well-traveled "show truck" has an interesting history. Purchased factory-fresh by Noons in 1969, it came with an NH-250 Cummins and an RTOO (double overdrive) RoadRanger. For the past 20 years, it has been Jeff's personal project truck.

At one point, its 250 was replaced with a 400 that was put aside for safekeeping. (Nothing that might be useful is ever thrown away in the Noons' method of operation.) No sooner was the deed done than Ducky asked if the truck wouldn't be worth more with its original engine. When Jeff allowed that it would, Ducky had it pulled back into the shop for a second transplant.

Next in line is a 1970 DC10364 10-wheeler with a 350 Cummins, 13-speed RoadRanger, and a 16- to 18-cubic-yard body. This 49-year-old truck is partnered with a driver not half its age, Jeff's 23-year-old nephew Nate Brintnall, a fourth-generation contributor to the company's fortunes. As a toddler, Nate sometimes sat on Jeff's lap and helped him drive trucks. Nate says "Ole 70" is a "cool truck" and he likes the way he looks in it.

The truck was given a frame-off overhaul 14 years ago. Its original 250 was boosted to 270 hp with the addition of a turbo-charger, and later exchanged for the 350. Some years before that, its factory red paint was re- >>



Brawny International, apparently an early 1960s F-210-D or 230-D, shown c. 1974 moving one of two buildings that was attached to Highland Lighthouse, about to be converted to low-cost housing by the town of Truro. The veteran Cornbinder wasn't as spiffy as the current Noons oldsters, but it always started and had exceptionally low gearing.



Above: One of the early '70s Autocar tandems being loaded on the job. This is the only photo in the collection where a truck looks even slightly dusty, but these are working trucks, after all.



Left: This '74 Autocar tractor with a 290 Cummins is usually assigned to snowplowing duties, but can still haul loaders and other heavy equipment in warmer weather.

Youngest Noons driver, 23-year-old Nate Brintnall, is assigned to this 49-year-old Autocar. Nate also operates the snow plow in winter.



Oldest driver, George Morris, is 88 and first went to work for Noons some 70 years ago. Fighting retirement—and his doctor—he has slowed down some in the last year, but still works “whenever I damn well please.”



placed with a coat of black, now the standard Noons livery. All except the firewall, that is; it remained red.

When the driver asked why, he was told that it was like the roots of dyed hair—some of the original color was bound to show through somewhere.

A 1971 DC-10364 was bought new by Linda’s grandfather. Built as a tractor, it was converted to a 10-wheel dumper with a 14-yard body. Its original 335 Cummins, backed by a 5-speed main box and a 4-speed auxiliary, was swapped out for a 350 and a 13-speed double overdrive Fuller. This is the truck that in 2008 sustained a fractured front axle in an altercation with a car.

Its 88-year-old driver, George Morris, goes back with Noons for more than 70 years. Long-term personnel are as important to the company’s success as long-term equipment.

The 1974 single-axle dump sings a different tune with its 6-71 Detroit, screaming all the while as it slogs its way through Provincetown, Mass., its insistent tones ricocheting off the buildings that line the old town’s narrow streets. Jeff can recall hearing the 2-cycle Jimmy’s piercing cry from as far away as seven miles!

Purchased originally by Linda’s father, this truck is often used for towing equipment behind its 10-yard dump box. Like all the Noons’ Autocars, it carries its weight on

a double frame with the complete assemblage running on double-reduction rears, of up to 65,000 lbs for the tandems.

Another 1974 tandem, a DC-9964-T tractor with a 290 Cummins and a 13-speed double overdrive gearbox, is employed primarily as a snow plow but sometimes hauls equipment in the warmer months. Snow plowing is just one more field of endeavor that keeps the Noons company busy.

Last, though not least, in the well-seasoned Autocar fleet is a 1986 DK-64-F tractor with a 5x4 and a 400 Cat now undergoing restoration. Jeff bought this truck in Colorado just last year and drove it home to New England without a hitch.

He marvels that it had not one speck of rust anywhere aside from a half-inch spot under the throttle pedal. It will accumulate no more, even on salty Cape Cod, since it’s garaged every night with the rest of the working fleet.

This completes the active Autocar roster, at least for now. Jeff likely could put more trucks into service if needed. Eight to ten other Autocars presently sit idle in various states of repair, and it’s obvious Jeff enjoys restoring and updating trucks as much as he enjoys heavy hauling.

A 1989 ACL (Volvo) Autocar, once slated to join the fleet, was sold after being spurned by the drivers, who apparently preferred the traditional Autocar cab and long, straight hood to the Volvo cab and sloping nose. This truck

was nicknamed the “kangaroo truck” by the drivers for the bouncing motion of its spring-mounted cab.

Not to be ignored among the Autocar array are a triple-framed 1985 GMC General, a short-nose dumper with a Big Cam 400 Cummins and an 8-speed transmission, and a 1992 International 4900-series sewage tanker with a DT-466 engine and 8-speed transmission.

What are Noons’ plans for future equipment? Stick with a winner.

“These trucks could last *another* 50 years,” adds Jeff Rose. “You can’t buy trucks like this today.”

He tells of a conversation he recently had in which the subject of modern power trains and their numerous expensive-to-replace sensors came up.

“My ears and my foot are all the sensors I need,” Rose asserted.

Jeff seems not to be the only Northeastern operator with similar views. Whether it’s typical Yankee frugality or merely the hard-headed realization that vintage steel is sometimes the best steel, the region’s tradition of “newer’s not always better,” seems destined to continue. 📄

Author Dick Callaway extends his thanks to Linda and Jeff Rose for the time, help, and material they provided for this article.



They’re not all Autocars. This 1985 triple-frame GMC General (above) can take punishment with the best of them. The 2006 Pete is a great road tractor, but Jeff says it wouldn’t stand up for long to the rough treatment often meted out to the older steel cab trucks.

