



# UPwardly MOBILE

Story Steve Vermeulen



*Above:* The third-generation Prendergast in transport, Brendan says he's much more logistician than truckie  
*Left:* Most of the company-owned trucks are Hinos

**IT'S AN UTTERLY PREDICTABLE PLAY ON WORDS AND ONE HE WILL** cringe at reading, but Brendan Prendergast really is a man on the move.

Born in the small central Otago town of Hyde and raised in Invercargill, Prendergast is managing director and co-owner – along with his wife Jo – of MOVE logistics.

MOVE – yes, it's supposed to be written in capitals – is a Christchurch-based transport and third-party logistics specialist that, despite boasting some heavy-hitting clientele and a 32-truck fleet across Christchurch and Auckland, is probably seen by most as a relative newcomer to the industry.

In fact, MOVE can trace its roots back two decades. For the majority of that period however it was operating as Pascoe Transport: The name was changed a year after Prendergast took the

helm in 2005. But let's get to that after a brief history lesson.

To understand why the name change – and, more importantly, where MOVE is heading – it does help knowing a little more about its dynamic MD who, when we speak, is in Auckland for a couple of days greasing the wheels of industry; pitching to potential new clients and attending corporate fishing trips. That sort of thing.

We had arranged to meet in Brendan's hotel foyer at 7.30am, but a faulty elevator sees him arrive one minute late – needlessly apologising for his tardiness. He also seems relieved that I (as a potential uppity media type) have noticed the “out of order” sign on the culprit lift.

This is testament to the importance he places on perception in business – and how organised he is. Despite the relatively early start he looks decidedly more awake than I: Obviously 25 years at

*Right:* MOVE opened an Auckland operation two years ago, with 12 trucks and 30 staff  
*Below:* Company trucks deliver liquor...and anti drink/driving messages



the sharp end of New Zealand's transport industry has furnished the man with superior hotel room ironing skills. In his perfectly pressed attire, he's ready for a day spent meeting some of MOVE's bigger Auckland-based clients. Up in the hotel room he even has a hand-luggage cooler bag for his catch on that corporate fishing trip; this is a guy who thinks ahead.

He is the third generation of his family in the transport/logistics business: Grandfather William formed Prendergast Transport in Hyde in the 1920s – passing the business on to Brendan's Dad Frank in the '50s. It was sold in the 1960s and continues today as Cook's Transport.

His rise through the industry has seen him in several roles since he started in admin with a significant hometown company, Freight Haulage, in 1984: "June 5th 1984, to be precise," Prendergast recalls – displaying his exceptional ability to remember specific dates... along with correctly spelling the names of former colleagues and employers, spelling them out letter by letter as they're mentioned.

"In 1986, Freight Haulage became part of the TRANSPAC, T-R-A-N-S-P-A-C, group of companies and in 1987 I was transferred to Christchurch as their South Island administration manager. The 25th of April that was. That's ANZAC day, that's an easy one to remember!"

Forecasting the writing on the wall, he resigned prior to the collapse of the Australian-owned TRANSPAC in December 1987 and left the transport sector for a field sales role at Moore Business

Forms. This four-year tenure was Prendergast's first foray into sales and perhaps more importantly whetted his thirst for business development.

But the world of business forms and computer stationery proved only a mediocre substitute for the diversity that transportation and logistics offers and, understandably, a return to what he knew best was inevitable.

It came by way of the well-known Frew family business, servicing greater Canterbury – a rewarding period Brendan recalls fondly and credits much of his current success to.

"Even back then things in the industry were tight and I used to joke that they put the Frew in frugal," he chuckles.

"Nah, honestly they're a great bunch of blokes. I worked for Owen Frew, one of the three Frew brothers. He was a great mentor for me and certainly it was a great training ground.

"I worked for Owen for seven years and we covered all aspects of road transport – from rural and livestock through to container cartage, to metro freight, to linehaul, bulk flour transportation, log cartage....you name it. It was very diverse and my role was commercial manager – effectively general manager. I learned a hell of a lot there."

In 1997 Brendan had the opportunity to take a small shareholding in relatively small third party logistics enterprise, Southern Distribution Centre (SDC). In charge of business development, he and company principal Robbie Pheloung (and thank god he spelt



Typical mid-city working environment for one of the company's Auckland fleet

that one out) grew the business considerably.

SDC's clientele in the early 2000s read like a who's who of NZ bluechip business as the pair picked up major corporate contract after major corporate contract – Griffins Foods, Carter Holt Harvey, Cerebos Greggs and Lion Nathan among them.

“All the clients were equally important, but Lion Nathan became SDC's largest customer by revenue. It was a big part of the business.”

After a period of time Lion Nathan introduced SDC to Toll Holdings, which then went on to purchase the company. Brendan stayed with the Australian-owned enterprise for another couple of years, before moving on in late 2004.

Prendergast had spent most of the previous 20 years in transport and logistics – unaware that the company he'd eventually own was undergoing its own meteoric rise.

Back in '87, when Brendan's career was still in its infancy, Christchurch local and “old-school” transport operator Bob Pascoe was forging his future – based on spongy, but delicious foundations!

Says Pascoe: “I was offered a crumpet run for over half of Christchurch, or what they called the west side of Christchurch. That was distributing Golden Crumpets from their factory in Bulls. I'd start at 4.30 in the morning and, depending on the day, I'd be all done between 10am or one in the afternoon and have the rest of the day for myself.”

“In those days, no one wanted to take regular freight to Bromley

or Addington – just from here (Christchurch) to Dunedin or to Auckland. I realised there was a niche market, so I went in there and delivered my crumpets. Pretty soon things got too busy, so I sold the crumpet run to my brother in law and started doing freight from there.”

The crumpet run had only required a van and Pascoe Transport's first truck came in the only-slightly-larger form of a 1.5-tonne Daihatsu. According to Pascoe, it turned out to be quite the trendsetter – and not just because the following addition to the Pascoe fleet was also a Daihatsu (this time a three-tonner).

“I reckon we must have been one of the first operators to put a mural on our truck. We had a big airbrushed mural for Englefield bathroomware on the side of ours.

“Back in those days, I hadn't seen anyone else doing it. Course, everyone does it now. But I still reckon we were one of the first.”

At this stage the business was run from hired office space at ICI, which came in handy as Pascoes had the contract to deliver Dulux paints and horticultural products all over Christchurch. Wanting to focus on the development of the company, Bob set himself a goal and promised wife Gaye that he'd be in the office fulltime inside of five years or he'd flag the business. The goal was achieved and things began to take off for the Pascoes.

“Carter Holt got us under way,” explains Bob. Its work prompted the company to shift from the ICI premises into the old International Harvester site on the corner of Blenheim and Curletts Roads.

“At the time this was probably the largest warehouse in



In addition to the explosive expansion, Brendan and his wife also seized the opportunity to purchase GV's share of the company last year and have bravely continued with credit crunch-defying growth

Christchurch – 4000 square metres. That's where we used to store the newsprint for Carter Holt and Tasman. It would come in by rail, we'd store it and dispatch it around town."

When the time came to shift up another gear, Pascoe Transport moved to the purposebuilt premises in Shands Rd, Hornby that remain MOVE's headquarters – picking up several national contracts that have also carried over since the 2005 sale to Brendan...namely The Warehouse, Carter Holt Harvey and Tasman Pulp and Paper (the latter since purchased by Norske Skog).

From a single van delivering crumpets, Pascoe Transport had been built up into a tight-knit, 20-strong team (including Bob and Gaye) with an eclectic fleet consisting of 12 vehicles – a mix of owner/operator and company owned. They ranged from three-tonne "runabout" to linehaul B-train – and everything in between.

Bob Pascoe felt that the Auckland market was there for the taking – but he and Gaye were about ready to wind down: "After 17-odd years we decided it was a good time for us to get out. We didn't really want to take on more debt to take it national – to go to that next level. Brendan's young enough to do that and we thought 'hell, we've had a pretty good stint out of it.'"

Bob's far too much of a bloke to mention it, but you can sense an underlying feeling of loss when he talks about the company...which has seen a few staffing changes along the way and, of course, no longer bears his name. Nevertheless, he has no doubt that it's in the right hands.

As he says of the Brendan Prendergast-run company: "He's a different identity now. He's away and things have really taken off from where we were, that's for sure. We catch up for a cup of coffee now and then. Everything's been amicable. You know, it's

been a real pleasure to see the company grow."

And that brings us back to the plush lounge area of Prendergast's hotel suite at Auckland's Viaduct Harbour. Where MOVE's head man is showing a chink in his mega-memory armour.

"So, I left SDC in late 2005. No wait – it's 2009 now isn't it? I left SDC in late 2004."

Pascoe Transport came onto Brendan's radar and the initial purchase was undertaken in the form of a joint venture between Brendan and a company called GV International Freight.

"We were looking for a domestic third party logistics business to complement GV's international freight-forwarding operation," he explains – a sip of the morning coffee kick-starting that memory again.

"And effective of 31 March, 2005 we owned and ran Pascoe Transport. Ironically it had 18 staff – which was the same size SDC was when I joined it. It had a good core of solid customers, a good team of people and a good facility in Hornby. So it was the ideal platform to grow from."

The question about the need to switch the name from Pascoe to MOVE does need asking: If Pascoe Transport was such a well-respected jumpoff point for Prendergast and GV, surely there was a hesitancy in the culling of such an established brand. So why the name change to MOVE?

"We didn't have any hesitation in changing the name really. We changed it after 12 months, which was always our strategy. The reason for that was firstly because there were no longer any Pascoe family members involved. And, secondly, it was branded and perceived as a transport business, whereas we saw our future in the logistics sector rather than straight transport.



*Opposite page:* MOVE's sixth Christchurch warehouse, covering 7000 square metres and with a 13,000-pallet capacity, will be in full use by year's end  
*Above:* MOVE trucks devoted to Lion Nathan Liquor deliveries in Auckland, pictured at the Newmarket brewery

"We respected the brand and there was a value in the brand, but we thought – if we managed it correctly – we could make the transition. We didn't lose any customers along the way, that's for sure. People became accustomed to the new name very quickly, which is good."

Brendan's drive is obvious and considering the rapid growth MOVE has experienced since 2005 the new name is particularly apt: Big things have happened quickly. Brendan and his GV partners acquired a second Christchurch warehouse in August '05, five months after taking ownership. They added a third in July '06.

In 2007 MOVE entered the Auckland market with 12 new trucks – as with the Christchurch operation, they're a mix of owner/driver and company vehicles – and 30 new staff.

In addition to the explosive expansion, Brendan and his wife also seized the opportunity to purchase GV's share of the company last year and have bravely continued with credit crunch-defying growth.

"It was a very amicable step. The reason for it was that I could see the direction our business was taking was that – while we were going to partner with GV and we still do for certain parts of our work – MOVE was becoming more and more a strong domestic operation. I felt the time was right for me to step up.

"Andrew Tillby, one of the GV guys, fortunately accepted the challenge to remain on MOVE's board of directors – along with myself and well-respected Christchurch businessman Lance Ryan."

MOVE now has six Christchurch warehouses – the latest "jewel in the crown" a 7000 square metre site with a capacity to store 13,000 pallets at Sir James Wattie Drive in Hornby now beginning to be occupied by customer products and staff. The warehouse will be completed and in full swing by year's end – and an

Auckland warehouse is likely to be added to the company's facilities before 2010.

But don't think that Prendergast may have bitten off more than he chew: Thanks to the strong relationships built from his days at SDC and Toll, he's secured custom from Bluebird Foods, Goodman Fielder, Fonterra and Lion Nathan. Combined with the three big contracts from the Pascoe days, these seven firms are responsible for 95% of MOVE's business – the revenue from these contracts helping to offset the expansion costs.

"We've probably exceeded my expectations as far as the amount of good, sustainable growth we've had in the business – and by sustainable I mean that the key customers and MOVE are committed to each other for fairly lengthy periods of time. Sometimes up to five years.

"Yeah, I think our original plan has gone pretty much to target or better. There are things I had hoped to happen and we're ahead of that. We're ahead of the plan."

Even ahead of expectations, that plan must've been a real doozy! Prendergast estimates that MOVE has grown sevenfold over the last four years.

His past networking may have got him a foot in the door with the likes of Lion Nathan, but it's been the strength of MOVE's contract warehousing and logistics model that has won these contracts. The warehousing and logistics side of the business now equates to 50% of the income, versus out-and-out transport. But it's growing faster than the transport area of the business.

"Our warehousing operations are pretty diverse – managing anything from the traditional unloading of palletised containers through to the unloading of bulk containers, receiving product



*Above:* New Christchurch warehouse is the tallest building of its kind in the South Island, at up to 12.1m – allowing racking to tower up to eight levels high  
*Right:* Two identical DAF tractor units do deliveries to “the Red Sheds” out of The Warehouse’s Rolleston distribution centre in the mornings, then drop the B-trains and cart skeletal container trailers from Lyttelton to Rolleston in the afternoons. They replaced truck and trailer units – allowing better utilisation, less truck movements at Rolleston and better management of delivery costs



off-truck, container cartage from the port and the loading of export dairy containers using slip-sheeters.”

Stock management is obviously an integral part of any successful logistics operation and MOVE has several integrated management software solutions. Brendan also proudly points out that the company is an early adopter of everything high-tech.

“We have a degree of technology around the operations. Most of it up to now has been customer-owned, with a line from their server into our warehouse so we operate on their technology.

“But we also have an internet-based warehouse management system for our small to medium customers called MCI. Through the site they can see what’s happening with their goods, what we’re holding, what we’ve shifted and what we’ve sent to which customers.

“One of the more exciting things to happen on the technology front for us in recent times has been the development of our Consolidated Despatch System, or CDS – technology that drives

the load planning and despatch of our Lion Nathan volumes. It’s the brainchild of our IT & commercial manager Dave Snell and has provided us with significant efficiency (and relationship) gains with our customer.”

Following on from this, MOVE has formed its own technology business – Logitek Holdings. Says Prendergast: “Logitek is tasked with the ongoing development of logistics-based solutions, including web-based tracking of equipment such as pallets, kegs, crates etc and gives us a definite competitive jump.”

But if you want to talk cutting edge, you want to talk the new sites in Hornby and (before long) Auckland. Significant work and resources have been invested to ensure that these warehouses are benchmarks within the industry.

“I don’t want to use the phrase state-of-the-art, that’s a bit old hat. What’s a state-of-the-art phrase for state-of-the-art? It’s very highly specified, purposebuilt and targeted largely at our food,



*Top & above left:* Picture graphics were pioneered by MOVE forerunner Pascoe Transport, remain a key part of the imaging on the trucks working for Lion Nathan  
*Above right:* Early days for MOVE, as the rebranding of the mixed fleet began

grocery and FMCG customers. It's export dairy standard, has things like high speed automatic doors and is very tall – 12.1 metres tall at the knee of the building.

“That means we’ll be housing product in our racking system up to seven levels high and we will use the latest in high-reach fork trucks from Crown Equipment.”

Then of course there’s the transport fleet – a diverse blend of vehicles, the majority of them efficiently tracked by Navman GPS systems. There’s a number of tail-lifts and anything from small 4x2s right through to 8x4 truck and trailer combinations, doing mostly metropolitan work.

The uniform two-tone paint scheme on all the vehicles imparts a premium look, which Brendan believes is essential: “Good imaging is supremely important. Having watched a lot of companies fail over the years, I’ve noticed you can almost predict when a transport firm isn’t doing well by the state of their fleet.

“I think you just need to look at a firm like Mainfreight. Why has it been so successful? Well, obviously there are a lot of reasons why:

They’re a smart business...but when was the last time you saw a Mainfreight truck that was anything but top-rate presentable?

“We spend a lot on our brand and our fleet – as with our warehousing – from a presentation point of view, because we’re proud of what we do.”

Naturally, there’s a healthy mix of brands among the owner/drivers, but MOVE’s most recent company purchases have all been Hino 500 series, based around the growing of its Lion Nathan business.

The move towards Navman GPS-equipped vehicles also played a part in developing MOVE’s valuable relationship with Lion Nathan and has continued to prove itself as a worthwhile investment. A lot of what MOVE delivers is high value and relatively tradeable products, so being able to accurately see where the trucks are, or have been, is important.

“MOVE trusts its staff – it’s not about that. It’s about the level of integrity in our delivery that we can offer our customers – and it’s supported by our drivers. They believe it gives them credibility. It’s



“We will start doing Auckland container cartage – it’s a super-competitive, hard-nosed side of the industry, but I see it as something we can offer our customers”

also a good tool to assist in dispute resolution.”

Additional to the security benefits, Navman’s software package provides valuable supporting data for MOVE’s own payroll and accounting systems – allowing the firm to accurately monitor truck operating hours, distances travelled, road speed and Road User Charges calculations. It all makes for improved transparency and efficiency.

Since entering the Auckland market, MOVE’s noted distinct differences in operating costs between its North Island and South Island trucks.

Says Prendergast: “In Auckland there’s a more significant labour cost for us, because of the city’s traffic situation. Our labour cost per kilometre is high, because it takes a lot longer to travel that kilometre.

“But also the mix of the fleet within our business is quite different. In Auckland we have our owner/driver group and we have quite a different work base. We don’t do any container cartage in Auckland, for example, whereas we do in Christchurch.

“But as our business grows I see Christchurch and Auckland becoming much more aligned. We will start doing Auckland container cartage – it’s a super-competitive, hard-nosed side of the

industry, but I see it as something we can offer our customers.

“My objective is to provide as much of the supply chain as we can. That covers not just warehousing and deliveries to customers but also container cartage, customs clearance, technology...the whole nine yards.”

After a couple of hours chatting with Brendan it’s not just his business acumen that impresses – it’s his all-round knowledge of the transport game. Nationally of course, but also internationally – since that’s where much of MOVE’s business model has come from.

The transition from a straight transport supplier to third party logistics has been integral to the business’ success and while Brendan says the company is not exactly bulletproof, the push for outsourced logistics – as seen in Europe and the States – seems to have insulated MOVE from the recession to some degree.

A shortage of skilled drivers and warehouse staff in NZ though, is a problem that needs to be addressed for the industry as a whole.

“It not the industry’s fault, but it’s my personal view that we’re in a fairly open industry. It’s not hard for someone to enter the transport game (warehousing’s a bit different because of the level of investment required) with say a \$45,000 truck. And it’s



*Opposite page, bottom left:* Reels of newsprint, handled for customer SMART Logistics, are stacked in a MOVE warehouse  
*Opposite page, right:* Timber products stored for Carter Holt Harvey – one of three big MOVE customers already with the operation in its Pascoe Transport days  
*Above:* MOVE is on the verge of expanding its Auckland operation

easy enough to get your Goods Service Licence these days.

“Often these people aren’t really aware of the pitfalls of pricing work and owning a small business and their only marketing plan is to be cheaper than the incumbent. What that can do is help breed a lowest-price mentality – accidentally. So, consequently industry rates haven’t really changed in 10 years or so.

“There are plenty of great people driving – don’t get me wrong. But we need to get more of those great people. I don’t think the opportunity is really there at the moment.”

And what does Brendan see for the future of freight logistics?: “I think it’s a happening industry. NZ’s well behind global percentages of manufacturers that outsource their logistics task and MOVE is a very, very small company in an industry that’s just getting started. I’m positive we’ve got things to do and, touch wood, the ball will bounce our way.”

If it does, you know that the people at MOVE will run with it too, as Brendan is all too happy to point out: “Probably our key strength at MOVE is our team. We’ve got great people and I can say that with my hand on my heart. We’re very proud of our team.”

In the very short period of time I spend with him, I’ve come to

believe that Brendan Prendergast is a pretty genuine guy like that. Perhaps this has been the secret to his success.

He’s got a strong Kiwi can-do attitude that has seen him and the company accomplish an awful lot already – from humble, yet ambitious beginnings in Christchurch....to becoming a burgeoning force in Auckland’s transport and logistics scene. But he’ll be the first one to pat everyone else on the back before himself.

Given that MOVE is on the verge of expanding in Auckland – and that may potentially overtake the southern operation, I’m curious (and aware I sound like a typical JAJA) and so I ask if he would contemplate running MOVE from Auckland.

“Our two daughters are grown up and have left home, so Jo and myself are reasonably fluid with what we’re doing. But hey, in two years time we might still be the same size we are now, which would be fine.

“But if it came to where we grew another 50% in Auckland, we’d still have a sizeable operation in Christchurch, so I’d still have a need to be down there. That’s how I’d rationalise it.”

So, like I said, he’s a man on the move....while keeping true to his roots. Brendan Prendergast is also a good bloke – and that, refreshingly, isn’t going to change. **TD**