



# Sailing the trade winds with Alligator Transport

Text: MATT SHEA / Photos: Cedric Vrolant

*How UD Trucks is helping one of Singapore's most trusted transport companies navigate uncertain times in the city-state.*

The array of products says it all. Biomedical supplies. Electronics. Food. Wine. Milk powders. Polymers. Resins. Alligator Transport's deputy managing director Robin Loh lists them off quickly, efficiently, without need for notes. After all, every day he's at the center of it all, shifting everything by the container load.

It's a trucking company story typical of Singapore, a place long defined by trade and the exchange of goods. But the city-state is also changing rapidly, and Loh's business isn't immune. No longer is it the

busiest port in the world — Shanghai now shifts more containers a day than Singapore — and the pace of change in trade across Southeast Asia has spooked even Singapore's firmest believers.

Loh laughs when he compares his business to a viking ride at the fair ground. "It swings so much from month to month," he says. "We'll have a good few months in electronics and then suddenly another industry is booming.

"The Singapore docks are relatively quiet. But then so is Hong Kong ... Vietnam is

going OK. Malaysia is extremely quiet. Opinions are mixed on Indonesia. It's very hard to get an overall picture of what's going on in the region right now."

It wasn't always like this. Loh talks about when he first joined the family business. Fifteen years ago things were a lot easier to predict, but Alligator was still in a period of relative infancy. Loh says it was almost as if he was starting a new company. "I was working in business development. When nobody knows who you are, it's a pretty tough job," he laughs.



Loh was just 22-years-old at the time, recently returned from studying logistics at Curtin University in Western Australia. Convincing new clients to let Alligator shift their goods around Singapore was an uphill task. They needed to know your previous experience, to see what you could handle.

But Loh had soon added a small cadre of businesses to Alligator's existing portfolio. And in the trucking industry, trust begets trust. Business begets business.

Alligator was also ahead of its competition with its adoption of technologies such



UD trucks are very popular in Singapore for a reason; they are just very reliable, very good trucks.

**Robin Loh**  
Deputy Managing Director  
Alligator Transport



# ESCOT transmission

## Improving the efficiency of fleet management



With their fuel efficiency, reliability and ESCOT-V transmission, Quon make the fleet manager, Eric Kahiming's job easier. "Having the automatic, it standardizes the way drivers handle the trucks. It makes them drive properly," he says. "With a manual truck operating in a metro environment like Singapore, you're looking at a clutch change after six months. Our oldest automatic Quon is three years, and we haven't had to do a clutch change on any of them."

## Navigating Singapore with an automatic



Sin Joo knows about driving trucks in Singapore. Having worked the wheel in the city-state since 1989, he knows just about every road on the island. "Back when I started there was no power steering, no technology," he says. "On the docks or in loading bays, you'd be using two hands on the wheel, wrestling to manoeuvre the trucks. Now, it's much easier." Like many drivers, Sin was initially reluctant to

adopt the automatic gearboxes of new Quon, but the ESCOT-V soon made him a convert. "It is better," he says. "I'm not having to work clutches constantly, cutting down on wear and tear. "It helps in the city where you have to stop and brake a lot. It's just less effort behind the wheel. And it adds up," he says. "I do ten trips to the port a day. I'd say one of those is down to saving time and effort with the automatic."



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as GPS. "It's compulsory now," Loh says. "Back then it was just an option. It was costing us something like SGD8,000 (USD5,882) a month on a three-month contract. But it was worth it, particularly when it came to insurance."

Now, Alligator counts major companies such as Sumitomo, Kintetsu World Express, XPO Logistics and Shankar Freight among its customers. "We basically now handle all kinds of goods," Loh says. "So our typical customer is very different to, say, ten years ago."

One of the major changes is more European customers. They're interested in Alligator's skill with biomedical supplies and food products, but also in finding a one-stop shop for trucking and forwarding — something Alligator can provide in partnership with its sister companies, Astro Pacific and Cathay Shipping and Freight Services.

"They're coming to a market they don't know very well," Loh says. "So they're interested in those kinds of solutions. In the past we might have been more relaxed about a client using just one of our businesses, but these days it's about integrating those services together."

Talking to Loh, this becomes a theme: A

single-minded focus on client requirements. Alligator runs 39 prime movers, including 22 Quons, making it a medium-sized trucking company by Singapore standards. But that gives Loh and his team the flexibility to focus on servicing their customer's specific needs.

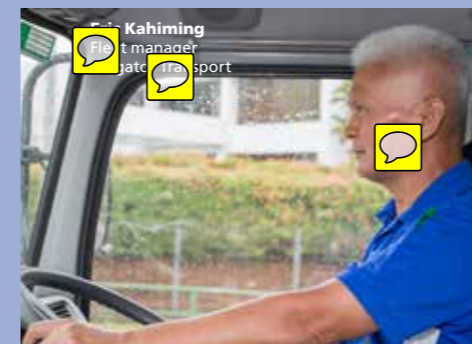
"There are only so many clients you can take care of properly," Loh says. "We could tell them the sky's the limit but it's more important to do the job properly. There's a lot of business knowhow involved."

It's that client focus that gives Loh confidence despite the uncertainty in the wider market. Provide a service that meets a client's requirements and they will call again. It's as simple as that. "We've proven our reliability in terms of service over and over again," he says. "That's what we need to keep doing. We need to have a feel for the market but you can't do too much about it. You've just got to stay relevant, keep your equipment relevant. That's why we've grown even though the market is down."

The focus on reliability is also why Alligator has such a productive relationship with UD Trucks. Despite absorbing a new company, well over half the company's prime movers are Quon GK 17 420s. "Eighty percent of our purchases are Quons," adds Loh.

Every day, Loh's fleet of Quons makes hundreds of runs back and forth from the port to customers all over the island. The 4x2 trucks, with their tighter turning circle, fuel efficiency and prized ESCOT-V automatic transmission, are ideal for companies like Alligator operating in Singapore's busy metro environment.

"They're just very reliable," Loh says. "It's key. But then you hardly need me to tell you that. Look around: they're very popular in Singapore for that reason. They're just very good equipment."



**Eric Kahiming**  
Fleet manager  
Alligator Transport

## A solid shield for more uptime

Although Robin Loh may think of reliability when it comes to UD trucks, for fleet manager Eric Kahiming it's something else upon which Alligator has built its own business: service. "After-market support," he says, "With UD, if there's ever a problem, it gets diagnosed and fixed quickly. So the trucks spend minimal time off the road. UD knows its own product. Other brands, it can take them days just to find the problem."