



PORTLAND MARKET REPORT

(Continued from page 4)

WET STOCKING CONTAMINATION IS JUST BECOMING A JOKE

December Update

SC: Of course – but you just manage these things don't you? Quite a few elves complain of over-work and stress at this time of the year. But my answer is always the same; "you've got the whole year to recover or go on your holidays, so let's get our heads down and just do this thing". Either that or "I'm The Claus – now get back to work!"...Ho-ho-ho...I love saying that one.

Portland: Woah big fella...nice one! (Portland tries to give SC the *High-Five* but is ignored). Right – back to the interview. What about the administrative side of the operation? How has that been this year?

SC: Well there's no doubt that this area of the business is getting more burdensome. Although we've made some progress on the WTD (Working Tinsel Directive), HMRC (Her Majesty's Revenue for Christmas) are really giving us the run around when it comes to RDCO (Registered Dealers in Christmas Orders) regulations. Particularly when it comes to Wet Stocking Contamination, which is just becoming a joke. How anyone thinks that you can deliver to circa 1.5bn children and not leave some traces of wrapping paper or ribbon from a previous stocking is just beyond me. And are any of our customers worried or complaining? Course not. They understand – unlike HMRC...

Portland: But aren't there only two RDCO certificate holders in the whole world?

SC: Yeah – me and Krampus down South. That being said, I think Cousin Krampus is really having a much tougher time. Remember that he is dealing with all the bad boys and girls and they receive coal and cinders in their stockings. So whilst he has fewer deliveries to make than me (most boys and girls are good – or at least they are at Christmas time), the coal dust just gets everywhere and so contamination of stockings is common-place. And remember, these are the kind of families who do complain – so HMRC are all over him. Threatening to shut him down in fact and open a new "bad child" delivery franchise at Xscape in Castleford. There's even talk that the contract will be awarded to Claus Enterprises up here in the North Pole, but I wouldn't touch that one with a barge pole – imagine the damage to our "good child" brand. If I was absolutely forced to do it and the

numbers stacked up, then I'd outsource the whole lot to Wincantons or Turners or someone like that.

Portland: Are there any other areas of compliance that cause problems?

SC: Well we have a dedicated team of pixies for Sleigh Maintenance (looking after things like safe-loading passes) and the Fairy Support Crews make sure the Sleigh is never above permitted weight limits once we're in the air. But by far the biggest problem we have is with drink driving. Last year between me and the 9 reindeers, we consumed 140m shots of sherry, whisky and rice wine and quite frankly, we were absolutely steaming. Just where the M6 meets the Howgill Fells in Cumbria, we were pulled over by the police and I genuinely thought it was game over. Prancer was all over the place – telling the copper that he loved him and how he was his best mate. Then Donder grabbed the other copper's hat, put it on sideways and started oinking. Thank goodness for Rudolph who had already found out that both the police officers had children. He stepped in quick as a flash and offered to take a couple of selfies and after that we were left to go on our way. He's an absolute pro that reindeer – best in the business.

Portland: Goodness, so the hype around Rudolph really is justified. Changing tack, what about supply?

SC: Absolute doddle to be fair. Normally at this time of the year, we have some major issues in the sourcing of presents. Demand from girls and boys around the world invariably outstrips supply and that not only pushes our costs up, but also makes sourcing the raw materials extremely tough. Not so this year. The world is quite simply awash with presents.

Portland: Is this to do with the boom in Present Packing?

SC: Absolutely, the Prackers in the USA are pumping out more presents than ever and OPEC (Organisation of Present Exporting Countries) is matching the Prackers gift for gift. Whichever way you cut it, we're in for an absolute bumper present harvest this Christmas.

Portland: What about the environment Santa? There seems a great deal of concern around

what's happening to the ice caps.

SC: Yeah. Well it's a genuine concern. Only last week on a landing practice, Dasher, Dancer and Rudolph all came off the end of the runway and went crashing through the melting ice. Rudolph was under for a good minute or two and we were only able to locate him because of his giant red conk. Worse than that, Dancer is lame and I've had to draft in a new reindeer called Keith to cover for him. Excuse my language, but it's going to totally screw up the scan and flow of the "Night before Christmas" Poem...

Portland: What's the solution to this thinning ice problem?

SC: Well, we need to work out some kind of compromise. I've lived up here for well over 1,000 years and signs of climate change are everywhere. But at the same time, we can't stop Christmas can we? Back in the day, I had to deliver presents to about 1m children and most of the toys were fairly simple affairs. Last year, we made over 1.5bn deliveries ranging from electric go-karts all the way through to computer equipment and remote-controlled helicopters; a growing population needs presents and I'm here to deliver them. But we do really need to look at how these presents are sourced because we can't keep doing the same thing and think that, that's a satisfactory solution. We need a balanced present portfolio.

Portland: Thought provoking stuff Mr Claus and probably not a bad place to end the interview. Just one more question though; how do you do it each year?

At that point Mrs Claus entered the room and – politely but firmly – ended the interview.

Happy Christmas from everyone at Portland.



For more pricing information, see page 22

Portland Fuel Price Protection
www.portland-fuel-price-protection.com