

# Australasia's amazing

Story by Faye Lougher • Photos by Al Mabin Photography.

**Where you find your niche in transport can be as varied as the industry itself. Alice Mabin's book *The Drover*, about Australia's largest cattle drive, turned out to be such a success that people started asking what her next project would be.**

Everyone was saying, 'oh, Alice, you've got to write another book, what's your next book on?' and I was looking at them like 'what do you mean, what's my next book about? I'm not doing another book, this was never planned in the first place!'"

The comments got Alice thinking about what she'd do next, but finding an idea that would top *The Drover* was difficult.

"You have to do something you're 100 percent passionate about because your life revolves around it for however long it takes to complete it. I wasn't having any brain waves, and then I got hit by a truck – literally! I got hit. By. A. Truck!"

Alice was travelling behind an ambulance on the highway and just over a rise, an accident had just happened.

"The ambos pulled over to help, and I slowed down and looked in my rear vision mirror, trying to decide if I was going to stop and help, and all I could see coming at me was a truck. Backwards! He locked up, spun around – how he missed the accident and the ambulance I don't know – but he took me out instead.

"I had enough time to grab my dog and say 'hold on, it's going to hurt!' So that's how the idea was born, a truck drove into the back of me!"

Alice and her dog were uninjured but her car was written off.

"It was a pretty horrible day I choose not to remember too often, but it's pretty much the only way I've been able to get people to connect with the whole story, because they look at me and go 'well, where's your past in transport?'"

Instead of being put off trucks, Alice started thinking about how people take them for granted.

"People don't stop to realise that everything in our daily lives is delivered on the back of a truck; the only time we hear about trucks in the media is when something goes wrong. I thought people needed to have a bigger appreciation of the importance of transport."

During her research Alice discovered there was a lot of

# Alice

history on the transport industry, but very little that connected the general public to the role it played in our lives today.

"I wanted this to be contemporary, so I invited more than 500 businesses across Australia and New Zealand to be part of the book, and all of them said no. I think because I was a girl, because I didn't have a transport-related background, and because I'd been hit by a truck, they thought I had an ulterior motive. They treated me like the media."

Alice eventually got transport operators on board, from owner-drivers to family-run businesses to global corporations, and published *The Drover*.

"I did 130,000 kilometres to put it together, and about 30,000 of that was hitchhiking. Right at the beginning I couldn't get anyone involved, so I decided to completely immerse myself in their lives and hitchhiked right around Western Australia and the Northern Territory. I had a blast, learnt to drive a road train, a triple, did quite a few ks! I learnt to double-clutch and everything, it was good fun."

Many people have a stereotype in mind when they think about truck drivers, and Alice says that's what *The Drover* tried to address.

"People think truck drivers are out to kill us, but they also want to get home alive to their families. All these drivers are after is some appreciation and gratitude and acknowledgement for what they do. The drivers say 'it's about time someone brought out something that is positive for our industry'. You see people puff their chests out and they're proud of what they do, so it's lovely. It's not about the fame for these people, it's about what transport means for the industry."



Alice with a copy of the *The Drover*, a book celebrating the people in the Australasian trucking industry.

PHOTO: FAYE LOUGHER

"It's not about who's got the biggest and best trucks, who carts the furthest, who has been in the game the longest, or who's in the Hall of Fame. It really is about a group of people who believed in my project and wanted to be part of it."

"We ended up with about 110 truck businesses in the book. The one rule I set for the whole project was that no two businesses in the book are featured carting the same thing. So every single one of them is doing something different, and they all become the face of that facet of transport."

Like her first book, *The Drover* was also self-published, but Alice says she needed to find new distribution channels for the book.

"People loved the romance of *The Drover*, but with *The Drover*, they thought 'this isn't going to sell because I don't like it'. It was their own personal opinion that decided whether they stocked something or not, not how big the industry was and



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## Alice's background

A kiwi born in Hawke's Bay, Alice did a Bachelor of Science at Otago University and planned to study veterinary medicine in Palmerston North. When the rules around cross-crediting changed, she decided to go farming instead, and worked on stations in the South Island.

After seeing a job advertised in Australia, she packed her bags and arranged for her dogs to join her.

"I worked in the Riverina in Australia, and while I was there I broke my leg and the doctor said I wouldn't be able to farm again. I sold my dogs and was applying for all sorts of jobs at stock and station firms, because I wanted to stay in agriculture. I couldn't get a job, and it was right about the time the recession was really starting to kick in."

That was when Alice received a phone call from Pfizer New Zealand, offering her a job. She came home and worked in the Taranaki/Manawatu for a few years, before being given the opportunity to return to the South Island.

"I spent 18 months down there, and then decided I wanted to go to Canada. I thought 'if I found myself on my deathbed tomorrow, would I be satisfied with what I'd

done?' and my answer was no. I thought there's more to life than doing this, there's so much to see. So I quit my job, booked a seat to Canada, and off I went."

Alice did some contract work for Pfizer in Canada, and just before her visa expired was offered a job with Pfizer Australia.

"I worked for them for near-on three years in Australia and again, got to a point in my life where I'd succeeded so much the only place for me to go to progress my career was head office, and I didn't want to move to Sydney. So I decided to quit. Again!"

While still employed, Alice had studied photography, journalism and marketing. After she left her job she heard of a large cattle drive happening in Australia.

"It turned out to be the biggest cattle drive in more than 100 years. I went out for a day to take some photos and ended up staying for the rest of the journey."

Alice's experiences on that drive were published as *The Drover*, a five-times Australian best seller and also an international best seller. In 2015 Alice won the Asia-Pacific Entrepreneur of the Year.



## Reader competition

Alice has kindly let us have a copy of *The Driver* to give away to one lucky reader.

So here's what you have to do. Identify the companies in the photos taken from some of the Kiwi content in the book, shown in these pages.

Send your entries to [editor@nztrucking.co.nz](mailto:editor@nztrucking.co.nz)

All correct entries go in the draw. Competition closes on 31 May.



To purchase the book visit: <http://thedriverausnz.com/>

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how many people were truck drivers. We've had to go through truck dealerships and places that are related to transport."

Alice says all the businesses that sold *The Driver* ended up also selling *The Drover*.

"The truck drivers were a different demographic to what that was aimed at, but so many of them come from farming backgrounds and driving came before driving."

Alice says it's hard to state which book she enjoyed writing the most.

"*The Drover* was very mentally and physically challenging because of the heat and the long days, but logistically it was nothing compared with doing *The Driver*. I wrote a blog post, I think I called it '30 days in the life of Alice', and in 30 days I did all of Tasmania, finished all of Victoria, did half of New South Wales, went back to Queensland, drove to Darwin, hitchhiked back from Darwin, flew back to Sydney to do a photo shoot at the airport, flew from Sydney to Cairns, borrowed someone's car and drove all the way back to Brisbane,

trying to get things done! I look back at it and go 'how on earth did I make that happen? How on earth did I get all of that done?'"

New Zealand drivers are interested in the Australian content – Alice says they've either been over there and driven trucks or they want to or know people who have – while the Australians love looking at the kiwi chapter because of the truck combinations.

Alice has been asked if she thinks writing the book would have been easier if she were a man, and thinks it may have been as she would not have had to prove herself.

"One of Australia's most prominent radio announcers said to me 'if you'd come to me at the beginning of this project, Alice, I would have told you that you were wasting your time, you'll go broke trying to do that, it's impossible. But look at it, you've done it, you've achieved the impossible'. And I said 'I'll take it as a compliment, thanks mate!'" □



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