



# Road tour de France

The cab is Waldemar Nesner's workplace, kitchen, living room and bedroom. From Monday to Friday, Nesner has six square meters to live in. For ten years he has been trucking Wörwag products to customers in France. In that time, he has covered one million kilometers. A road trip midway between trucker lore and hard labor.

By Michael Thiem; photos by Toby Binder



**Evening: Nesner has already parked his truck in position for the night.**

“Coffee and smokes, a real trucker’s breakfast. You eat later.”

Waldemar Nesner



The plastic jar of instant coffee is labelled *Jump start*. That would help. After all, it is only five in the morning. Silence pervades La Suzannerie rest area, nearly 30 kilometers (20 miles) north of Le Mans. Wisps of fog waft over the A28 and Nesner’s truck. The cab’s burgundy curtains are still drawn, but the 51-year-old truck driver is already sitting behind the wheel and measuring out the coffee powder. Then he opens a drawer and switches on the electric kettle. Nesner finishes shaving before the steam whistles. He pours the water into a thermos cup, adds six sugar cubes and briefly stirs. Every move is rehearsed. Including reaching for the the cigarettes. “Coffee and smokes, a real trucker’s breakfast” grins Nesner. “You eat later.”

Nesner loves his job. For ten years, he has been travelling through Normandy weekly to deliver Wörwag paints to automotive sup-



**Hygiene on the road: Nesner shaves in the driver’s seat, mirror propped up against the steering wheel.**



**At night, not all trucks look gray: With its yellow painted plastic parts, the cab shines in the dark.**



gine at work." It is a 460-hp engine. The maximum load is 24 tons. It takes several minutes before reaching the maximum permitted speed of 80 kilometers (50 miles) an hour when there is a heavy load on board. Nesner switches to cruise control and lets it roll—one man, his truck and the road. "If I sound the two horns on the roof, you'd think a ship was entering the harbor," he grins.

#### Nesner knows every inch of road

His weekly Tour de France is nearly twelve hundred forty-five miles long. And he always drives it in his yellow truck. The cab paint of his Mercedes Actros reflects the first rays of sunlight that appear on the horizon. Yesterday he already delivered to four customers. Today four more are on the list. Most of the time it is wet paint, sometimes powder coating. Wörwag sent almost 1,400 tons to France last year. 230 of them were driven by Nesner.

Next station: Vire, a town in the region of Lower Normandy. When planning a route, Nesner sticks to the suggestion given by his navigation system, which not only takes into account overhead clearance, but also restrictions for the transport of dangerous goods. Some roads are therefore off-limits, including many country roads and narrow towns. In the meantime, Nesner rarely needs the GPS. He knows every kilometer of the road.

The route goes to Vire via Alençon and Flers. The D 962 country road is hilly, and keeps passing fields of crops and the typical Norman stone houses with their picturesque façades. The next destination is located in a small industrial park. Nesner knows the logistics man there, and it is a quick stop. Ten minutes later, both pallets of liquid paint are unloaded and the journey continues. →

pliers. 100,000 kilometers (62,140 miles) a year. Behind the wheel he feels independent: "I don't have to take my breaks when the siren goes off." Unsurprisingly, *The death instinct* by Jacques Mesrine is one of his favorite books. It is an autobiography by the French public enemy number one of his time, written in a Parisian prison. It describes a life unfettered by the conventions of bourgeois life. Nesner is not a rebel, but pursues his own path. Since 1987, he has worked as a long-haul trucker, the last sixteen years at Schäfauer in Bietigheim-Bissingen, a family business that regularly delivers for Wörwag.

The tattoos on his right forearm date back to his time in the navy. Two gold earrings twinkle in his left ear. He traveled the world as a young man. Today, he finds nothing more enjoyable than to drive a 40-ton truck along the highway, to step on the gas and "hear the en-



**WOLFGANG FRITZ, at Wörwag since 1997. As Head of Customer Labs, the trained paint lab assistant oversees the coatings for plastic add-on parts for commercial vehicles. "Lightweight designs are in surprising demand for trucks. Cutting weight reduces fuel consumption and increases the payload. This also saves trips."**



**Nine hours a day on the road: On behalf of Wörwag, Nesner has already traveled one million kilometers.**

**Slowing down: Leisure time after the end of the shift is spent in the parking lot.**



**Delivery service: In France, up to nine Wörwag customers await new goods every week.**



→ It's 172 kilometers (107 miles) to the Bolleville rest stop. The many miles of road offer plenty of time for reflection. "Usually I am planning the weekend. This Saturday, for example, I'm going to assemble the awning for my trailer." Then he turns on the radio. At the steering wheel he likes to listen to chansons, he says with a laugh. "It's not really my music," admits the man who somewhat resembles and is a fan of actor Tommy Lee Jones. At home, Deep Purple, AC/DC, Iron Maiden and Motör-

**"I don't cook, otherwise I would have to do dishes."**

Waldemar Nesner

head albums occupy his shelves. A particular treasure is the original double album of the British rock band Led Zeppelin that went with the concert film *The Song Remains the Same*.

After two hours on the A84, A13 and A29 through the Calvados metropolis Caen and across the impressive Pont de Normandie, Nesner reaches the Bolleville rest area. After four and a half hours at the wheel, he is required to take a 45 minute rest. After that he can drive an equal period which adds up to a nine-hour shift. Nesner is looking forward to a shower.

#### Efficiency apartment in a truck

He keeps all the food supplies he needs for a week in the refrigerated storage compartment. Spartan but tasty: farmers bratwurst, tzatziki, palatine liverwurst and pickles. Sometimes he buys a fresh loaf of French

## Bigger payload thanks to SMC

The daughter of the transport operator Jörg Schäfauer chose the colour for the paint of Nesner's cab. Wörwag's bright Mercedes-yellow is integral to the image of the freight-forwarding company from Bietigheim-Bissingen. The plastic body parts are not only eye-catching, but also light. The shipper can add the weight saved to the payload.

The secret is a composite material called Sheet Molding Compound (SMC), which is only about one-third of the weight of steel. SMC is composed of a thermosetting reaction resin and glass fibers. It is delivered in sheet form.

In the production of SMC parts, air pockets sometimes arise, which may later outgas and damage the paint surface. To prevent this, Wörwag has developed a special primer coat called barrier primer W321. It forms a solid layer that significantly reduces outgassing from the material.

bread. But usually he has enough brown country bread from his home in Bad Urach, just under an hour's drive from Stuttgart. "I don't do any cooking, otherwise I would have to do dishes afterwards," laughs Nesner. The cold storage compartment also has room for his evening beer.

But that will have to wait. After forty-five minutes he is on the road again taking the A29 towards Abbeville. Final sprint. The last customers receive their products—on time! In ten years, the only long delays were due to a two-day driving ban caused by a snow storm and a road blockade by French farmers.

#### The night in the bunk

Only a few kilometers are left before he will have to stop driving. At the rest stop in St. Quentin, Nesner scans the parking lot with a trained eye for a spot where his truck will be at a slight angle—to elevate the head of the bed slightly. If that is not possible, he keeps a four-inch high wooden wedge with him. The seven-zone cold foam mattress behind the seat measures 250 times 70 centimeters (three by eight feet). It is where Nesner can decompress. At 6 p.m. he calls his wife Monika. They phone for at least half an hour. They have come to terms with his multi-day tours around Europe. In November, they'll celebrate their silver wedding anniversary.

Slowly the parking area fills up with other trucks. Contact to other truckers is rather rare. Their paths cross, but in this case the path is not the goal. Nesner draws the curtains early and turns on the laptop, he pops in a DVD, and watches another episode of the television series *Vikings*. A welcome distraction as the days on the road don't provide much variety. Towards 10 p.m. the truck lights go off. Seven hours to go until *Jump start*. ■