



MAGGIE, MAGGIE,

In the first of a new *T&D* series on classic trucks, **Dave Young** looks at the history of the mighty **Magirus-Deutz** in the UK and discovers there was much more to it than a lot of hot air, its reliability and low running costs contributing to its demise...

Which truck marque built the Trans-Siberian Railway, much of Milton Keynes, had a reputation for ruggedness and reliability, was sold all over the world and yet is no longer in production? Not sure? Here's another clue: the engine lacked certain parts usually considered essential. Mechanics might search in vain for the radiator, head gaskets, cooling fan, drive belts or a water pump. The answer is, of course, Magirus-Deutz, an illustrious example of solid German engineering that was eventually swallowed almost whole by the Italian multinational Iveco.

The man who began it all, Herr Conrad Magirus, hailed from Ulm, in the same area of Germany where a strong engineering tradition also spawned such family names as Bosch, Kassbohrer, Liebherr; oh, and Albert Einstein. During the late 19th century Magirus built fire engines, the firm producing its first truck – for the army – in 1916. In 1938 the firm was bought by Deutz, which naturally began installing its own technologically advanced, air-

cooled engines into Magirus chassis, again for a military contract – a winning combination that continued for almost half a century.

Post-war, and still fitting fire-fighting equipment to other makers' chassis, Magirus-Deutz enlarged its truck range, naming various models after planets, Jupiter, Saturn and so on; all with the distinctive logo based on the triple spires of Ulm Cathedral and marketed across four continents.

UK SUBSIDIARY

Strange as it may seem, during 1967 Seddon offered air-cooled Deutz engines in a few export models and, according to the late Pat Kennett, *TRUCK* magazine founder and author of a book on the firm's history, in around 1970 a fully fledged subsidiary, Magirus-Deutz UK, was set up at Winsford under MD Frank Tinsdale.

At this time the company was competing with a recent influx of European trucks – today there are just seven volume truck builders in Europe – to a home market dominated by British

manufacturers. In 1970 those in the UK market for a new wagon might choose any of these Continental imports or, if blindly loyal, an AEC, Leyland, ERF, Foden, Guy, Seddon or Atkinson – the latter pair not yet co-joined.

To compete, Magirus-Deutz UK adopted an innovative marketing technique. It approached long-established and well-respected haulage concerns; Pitters of Southampton, with a 100-year history dating back to the horse and cart era, being a typical example. The company was offered a seed vehicle to run for free. In comparison to British makes, this vehicle proved extremely reliable, quickly establishing confidence in the product.

Other operators, or so the theory went, witnessed the newcomer in Pitters livery and thought, 'if they've got one, it must be okay'. Next followed an offer to become a franchised dealer. The haulier could buy chassis at wholesale prices and choose whether to put them on its fleet or sell them locally.

Although Magirus-Deutz sold well in the UK for a decade, certain factors



MAGGIE!

stalled its potential growth. According to marque historian Roland Sparling (see panel on page 64), 'the product was excellent, technologically strong and simple; fewer parts on the engine meant fewer bits to go wrong'.

However, more controversially, Roland believes that the Magirus-Deutz was 'too advanced', reliability and low running costs making it hard for dealers to profit in the aftermarket through servicing and spares sales.

FUNCTIONAL BUT SPARTAN

Self-confessed 'obsessional enthusiast' for the brand though he is, Roland concedes that the Magirus cab – in interior size pitched midway between the Volvo F86 and 88 – had its limitations, being functional but spartan.

'On nights out, drivers felt a bit inferior,' says Roland. 'Operators and owner-drivers loved them,' he adds, 'employed drivers less so. The "Maggies" were 100% reliable and had few breakdowns but Volvos were quicker.'

Finally, when Iveco took over Magirus at the start of the 1980s, the product increasingly became little more than badge engineering. In some cases Magirus chassis were fitted with, horror of horrors, a water-

cooled lump, the name Deutz being jettisoned and the principal selling point squandered.

Another fundamental problem for UK sales was the lack of a full CV range. After early assembly experiments in the UK, everything was subsequently imported and there were no right-hand drive derivatives of many models.

In at least one case, a little lateral thinking surmounted this obstacle. The British lightweight 8x4 tipper was then unknown in Europe, where owners preferred heavier 6x4s.

Consequently Frank Tinsdale built an 8x4 chassis out of bits and took it to Magirus-Deutz's ULM HQ to show the bosses. Suitably impressed, they began producing RHD models – known as the 'Tinsdale tipper' (more formally the 232D30) – with forward-control cabs, these becoming a major seller in the UK. Murphy's employed them on construction of the M8, Toby Taylor used Maggies for most of the Milton Keynes groundworks and the larger-than-life (in every sense of the phrase) George Webb had a fleet of high-sided-bodied examples hauling fly ash, but would only deal directly with the firm's MD.

Roland Sparling, whose ingenuity was often called upon to satisfy unusual customer

Top: Little four-pot 90F7, a popular 7.5-tonner. Wheels is a London hire firm

Above: Mix of large and small Boyes (Southampton) flatbeds; all had Fiat-derived cabs

Below: Big Maggie posed on unopened stretch of M27. Salesman Roland Sparling is at wheel



Maggie man: Roland Sparling

Anything you want to know about Maggies? Then Roland Sparling's undoubtedly your man. His excellent website, www.magirusdeutz.co.uk, is packed with pictures, technical details and a history of most of the models sold here. Essential net surfing for any lorry fan, this is one of the best 'amateur' websites we've seen at T&D.

A former Magirus-Deutz salesman for Pitter Commercials, he was apprenticed with British Leyland at Cowley, working in R&D at the body plant producing panels for the likes of the Marina and Maxi. 'Unlike most salesmen I understand geometry, weight distribution and phrases such as torsional stiffness. Some truck salesmen just look at trucks as a source of income; I appreciate the engineering,' he tells T&D.

Roland first sold trucks for a Ford dealer before an approach by Michael Pitter ('the last of the business gentlemen', he says) to work in a new Magirus-Deutz dealership in Southampton.

ENGINEERING BACKGROUND

Roland's background as an engineer quickly came in handy to help Pitters plug some mighty gaps in the Magirus-Deutz range. The drivers of customer Chris Hobbs told him of the many drawbar units they'd seen operating over the water. At the time this was a rare configuration in the UK, since it was only a few years previously that the law had been amended to remove the requirement for a driver's mate, or 'trailer man'.

Chris wanted a drawbar to service a specific Continental contract but no RHD model was available. 'All right, we'll make you one,' said Roland, who had 'a 232 chopped in half and stretched', adding an extra 80-gallon tank for good measure.

'You can't do that,' said everyone, including the trailer builder. Fortunately the project proved a success, albeit unique. As further testimony to Roland's talents he also designed the LTS logo.

Photos from this period resemble stills from the TV serial *Life on Mars*. A younger, slimmer Roland with Jason King moustache and dodgy flares ferries planeloads of potential customers on visits to the German factory where, all wide ties, camel-coloured overcoats and shoulder-length hair, they bought 'a tipper each'.

'I've got air-cooling in the blood,' explains the man who once sold a Guy Big J4T (if you've ever driven one, you'll understand why that's impressive). Ford, where he began and ended his truck-selling career, gains Roland's praise for a training regime he reckons 'the best in the business'.

Eventually, as the Magirus star waned and he became disenchanted with Iveco, a Ford dealer lured Roland back to sell Cargos. For a brief two years in the 1980s some heavier GVW models were



equipped with a Deutz 200 V6; 'the engines were stronger than the trucks', reflects Roland wryly. Shortly afterwards, unhappy with a culture of dodgy dealing but not without regret, he permanently abandoned the truck sales game.

LABOUR OF LOVE

Currently, the semi-retired Roland's Magirus-Deutz tribute website – 'a labour of love, I make nothing from it' – receives emails from all over the world; 50,000 hits a month, from Burma to Bhutan.

'Best truck ever built,' he says wistfully, looking at a picture of a V10-engined Maggie dump truck. It seems many people share his view, particularly in South Africa, one of Magirus-Deutz's largest export markets and where many examples remain hard at work. Those posting on Roland's site seek parts, information or contact with other enthusiasts and, with the aid of a scanner and Google translator, Roland burns the midnight oil trying to help. His home office contains what must be the biggest – apart from the official Maggie museum – collection of catalogues, specifications and blueprints anywhere.

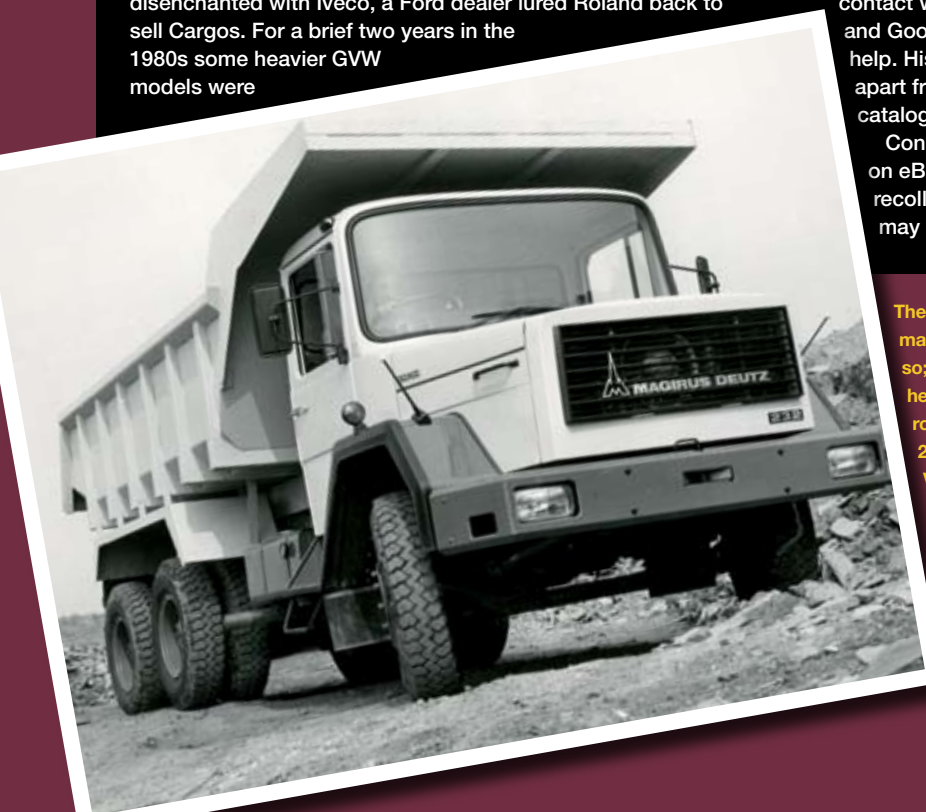
Constantly adding to this treasure trove from purchases on eBay, Roland is keen to hear from T&D readers with recollections or memorabilia to contribute. The Maggy's era may have ended but the memory lives on.

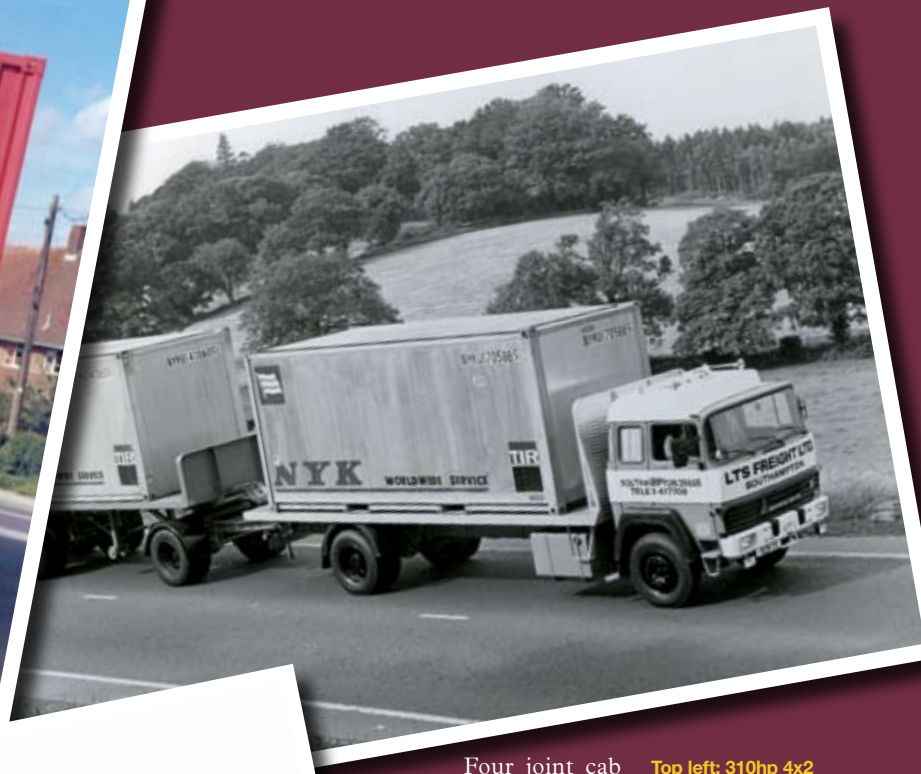
The best truck ever made? Roland thinks so; a 24-tonne, 6x4, heavy duty on/off-road tipper with 228hp air-cooled V8 lump and ZG constant-mesh 'box, planetary reduction rear hubs, exhaust brake; unladen weight was 7.5 tonnes

requirements, even designed a skeletal sub-frame version with Twistlocks, able to take either an alloy tipper body or a short shipping container, and sold 20 of these day-cab 8x4 rigid to McGregor Cory to fulfil a strange and specific contract. His inventive approach to truck specification was also employed in designing a unique RHD drawbar outfit capable of carrying two 20-foot boxes.

SLOW UK DEVELOPMENT

Although tremendously successful with its on/off-road bonneted range of tipper





“Reliability and low running costs made it hard for Maggie dealers to profit in the aftermarket”

chassis in both 6x4 (V8) and 6x6 (V10) guises, Magirus-Deutz was slow in developing a 6x4 conventional cab tipper for the UK, despite Roland managing to sell one converted from a tractor unit. The same difficulty applied to 16-tonne chassis (then the maximum gross vehicle weight for a two-axle rigid), these eventually appearing in the UK too late and with a turbocharged inline six-cylinder engine and Fiat cab.

Lower down the weight range Magirus-Deutz enjoyed greater British sales successes. The Brescia-built 90F7

7.5-tonner (no HGV licence was then required), four-pot-powered and with an OM chassis and Fiat cab, rapidly proved popular with fleets, who found it both reliable and economic to operate. (This was one of the first trucks I drove professionally, on an airfreight contract. Thirty years later I discovered Roland that was the salesman...)

All British Maggie chassis had ZF gearboxes – range-change synchromesh transmissions in tractors and six-speed constant-mesh ‘boxes in tippers.

Magirus was involved in the Club of

Four joint cab design and production project with Volvo, Saviem (also an early DY drive) and Daf. Think Volvo F7-style cab, in production for almost a quarter of a century, and appearing with Renault and, in the US, Mack badges.

Russia bought an incredible 10,000 bonneted Maggies to work on the Trans-Siberian Railway project. In

temperatures down to -50°C the lack of water-cooling was a major plus factor; although ironically heaters had to be employed to restore the engine oil’s viscosity. South Africa and South America were massive Maggie markets too, the trucks thriving in searing heat and tough terrain.

AIR IS COOL

However, it was the mighty Deutz air-cooled units, including a 14.7-litre V10 engine, that really made the Maggie’s reputation. Roland claims a colossal V12 19-litre version was produced, taking him around the company test track at a comfortable 80mph – although possibly only producing a modest, by today’s standards, 340hp.

Some Maggies are believed to remain working off-road in the UK and there may be a recovery vehicle or two out there somewhere but, unless any *T&D* reader knows better, although Deutz still makes engines and Magirus produces fire-appliance bodywork, this fondly remembered manufacturer has sadly become a historical footnote. ■

Top left: 310hp 4x2 Pittier demonstrator with sleeper cab. Interior spartan in comparison with Swedish rivals

Above: Special for Continental work; stretched 38-tonne tractor with Fromco A-frame drawbar trailer, designed by Roland Sparing

Left: Top-weight late '70s 32-tonne day-cab artic; part of massive BRS nationalised fleet