

# How cool is that

Inbound logistics manager **Neil Horner** on why and how fresh food manufacturer Bakkavor started using reefer trains for UK imports

Putting a full-load of cut salad leaves worth thousands of pounds on an unproven reefer rail service from Italy probably sounds like a mad idea. However, at Bakkavor, delivering improvements often means being creative. Our business manufactures fresh prepared foods and there are times in the year when the fresh ingredients we require can only be imported.

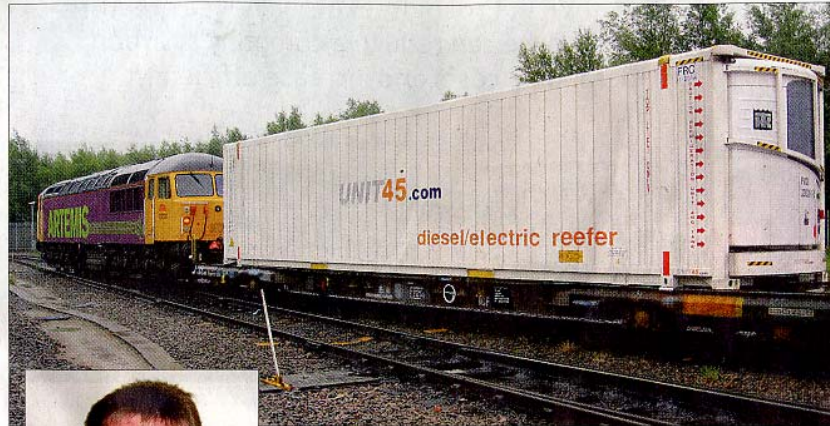
In Europe, we source predominantly from Spain and Italy and, with around 6,500 loads by road a year, the scale is substantial.

Time is critical, as we have to be able to guarantee the freshness and quality of the ingredients used in the products we make. While we have relied on the frequency and flexibility of road solutions over the past 15 years, we have been actively exploring alternative ways to reduce the environmental impact of our international supply chains.

The idea of using reefer trains came from an accidental conversation.

In 2007, a guy from CMA CGM said: "You should talk to this bloke I know about trains."

Once I had stopped laughing, I agreed. I had visions of Bakkavor's highly perishable products parked in sidings for days on end, so the first meeting with DB Schenker was a real eye-opener.



DB set about educating me and six weeks later we ran our first blocktrain between Tilbury and Wakefield.

In 2008, we started looking seriously at using reefer trains for our European imports. Accepting that rail would never match the ultimate flexibility of a truck, we needed to understand our minimum requirements as well as the potential issues we could face.

Key requirements included absolutely guaranteed chill chain integrity; a "day-one for day-three" service; and a load time to suit the product harvesting cycle (most of our imports being fresh produce).

The issues we identified varied depending on the defined route, for example, Spain was complicated by the change in track gauge and both Italy and Spain were historically susceptible to delays.

Moving reefer containers on rail is nothing new. However, unlike normal sea freight reefer containers, the rail wagons required to move the 45ft high-cube, pallet-wide reefer boxes (representing one road vehicle-equivalent load) generally have no power generation required for refrigeration. Our challenge, therefore, lay with finding a unit which was completely self-sufficient for the entire journey.

Though still relatively scarce, a number of companies can now provide gauge-cleared multimodal reefer containers, Unit 45 and SOR Iberica being two examples. Purpose-built for multimodal operation, these units have cooling plant, power generation and sufficient onboard fuel for the likely transit time.

These units address the requirement for chill chain integrity, as they are fully tracked and report temperature data

throughout the journey via internet-based alerts and reports.

This left us with the requirement for strict transit and collection times. We spent an unbelievable amount of time trying to find services which offered acceptable timings and when we found a rail service which worked, we still had to persuade terminals to operate more flexibly.

From Italy, we settled on a service provided by Norfolkline. It has a very strong record of overall transit time reliability and proved it could manage the required timings.

In Spain, Bakkavor is supporting the new Stobart-DB Schenker direct service.

It is absolutely vital that as an industry we find reliable, carbon-efficient alternatives to refrigerated road freight. The 6,500 refrigerated loads imported by Bakkavor from Spain and Italy represent a tiny fraction of the UK's total.

Bakkavor is committed to developing rail services as an alternative and we need terminals, operators and equipment manufacturers to be as passionate about innovation as us. ●