



Jim Smith, 94, took a ride of a lifetime in a new Kenworth log truck. He went with Gary Bullock on Thursday up forest roads to pick up a load of logs and bring them back down. EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

*Smith checks off his bucket list with ride-along in truck*

**By Emily Mentzer**  
The Itemizer-Observer

WILLAMINA — The first step into Siletz Trucking's log truck was about 3-feet off the ground, nearly to Jim Smith's waist, but he was determined and eager to take a ride in the beast.

The 94-year-old put his cane on the floor of the cab — nearly at shoulder-height — got his foot on that step and hoisted himself up as best he could.

Siletz Trucking Assistant Truck Boss Gary Bullock helped support Smith and get him into the passenger seat safely.

"That was a big step," Smith said.

"We'd have gotten you up there, even if we had to use a lift," Bullock said, smiling.

Thursday morning was the day Smith got to check off the final item on his bucket list. The former log truck driver got a ride-along with Bullock in a brand new log truck.

"The last time I drove a log truck was August 1941," Smith said. "Of course I was pretty young back then. I didn't want to drive anything else. I just wanted to drive a log truck."

Smith, who lived in Monmouth for 60 years before

moving to an assisted living home in Forest Grove, started driving a truck when he was just 8, taking hay and wood from the fields in an old 1918 International.

When he was 14, he took a job for his dad, who owned a small sawmill near Tiller.

"The truck I drove was a Chevrolet 1939, under-powered as you would suspect," Smith said. "They didn't haul such big loads."

Back then, Smith had to bundle up a coat behind him on the seat just to reach the pedals.

"What was interesting was the trucks did not have any power brakes or power steering," Smith said. "You had to brace yourself to steer sometimes."

The new Kenworth Bullock took him in had all the bells and whistles, including cruise control.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me in my old age," Smith said afterward. "It was so good. The big difference comes in the heavy-duty equipment, 750 horsepower, power steering, power brakes, 23 forward speeds, and you sit up way up high in those cabs."

All that horsepower made it feel like the truck wasn't carrying anything, in spite of the 96,000-pound load,



Jim Smith, 94, listens with amazement as Gary Bullock describes the capabilities of the rig they are about to ride in. EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Smith noted. "The truck just handles like it isn't there," he said. "It does such a good job. It was so much safer. The old rigs that we drove... were just an accident waiting to happen."

The ride was made possible by Siletz Trucking, Hancock Forest Management and Gahlsdorf Logging.

Leon Fischer, president of Siletz, said he was happy to help make Smith's dream a reality.

"It's not something we do every day, but this is kind of a special thing, the guy being 94," he said.

Greg Ellis arranged the

ride for Smith. They met years ago in the Monmouth-Independence Rotary Club.

"Jim's been in the community for years," Ellis said. When he said he wanted to ride in a new log truck, Ellis knew he could help make it happen.

"I knew he was in his 90s and thought, if we're going to do this, we better get it done," he said.

Smith said the ride was the cherry on top of a "great, long life."

"That was it," he said. "That was the one thing I hadn't accomplished yet."



Gary Bullock helps Jim Smith get up the tall steps to the cab of Siletz Trucking's Kenworth semi. Smith later said it was harder to climb in than he expected. EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

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Carol Infranca is an award-winning print and broadcast journalist and business communicator. A previous newspaper reporter in California and TV reporter in Nevada, she used her talents to promote tourism for northern Nevada at the Convention & Visitors Authority. Starting her own boutique marketing and public relations firm in 2000, Carol is now a fulltime Oregonian and an Authorized Local Expert for Constant Contact since 2013.

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