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## Founder's son, 86, drives truck for 86-year-old firm

Kind of England

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The truck: A 5-year-old Freightliner rigged with a special 600-horsepower motor, an 18-speed automatic transmission and showing 225,000 miles on the odometer.

The driver: Gene England, age 86, blessed with a younger face, eyeglasses that correct his vision to 20-20, and body as trim as his truck, even after seven decades and 4 million miles behind the wheel.

Actually, the mileage is just a guess. England is not sure how far he's traveled since obtaining a driver license when he was 14. What is certain is he's by far the oldest long-haul driver at C. R. England Inc., a Salt Lake City trucking giant that runs refrigerated trucks coast to coast and into Mexico.

"Why do people golf or ride a horse? I fell like I'm kind of doing something worthwhile. Whatever the [reason] is, there's some profit in it," England said.

England is twice as old as the typical over-the-road driver. Because of a shortage of drivers, the average age of truckers has grown to 43 years. Although the largest segment of drivers is between the ages of 55 to 64, the numbers drop off rapidly when drivers reach 65, according to the Advanced Center for Transportation at Clark College in Washington.

England also may be one of the most prosperous truckers in America. Until the early 1990s, he and brother Bill ran C. R. England, the company their dad established in 1920. As the brothers aged, they gradually transferred control of the business to their sons and grandsons. Today, C. R. England is a \$544 million business with 2,900 trucks and 2,900 employees. It's reportedly the biggest hauler of refrigerated cargo in the country.

Here's another way Gene England sets himself apart. Most of the company's trucks are painted red. England's rig is white, "King of England" painted on his door. The passenger door says "Queen of England," in honor of wife, June, who goes along for the ride.

"Strangely enough, she's as comfortable on these trips as she is at home. And she'd rather be with me," England said.

A few days ago, the couple got home from an eight-day run to Laredo, Texas; Pascagoula, Miss; and Dallas. An average day was 500 miles, with time out for fuel stops and food.

The journey to Laredo was to haul cargo to an England distribution center in the south Texas town. The Pascagoula run was for business, too, but of a different kind. When he gave up running the company, England felt unmoored. So he and Bill established a business inside C. R. England that supplies cars to the company for sales and recruiting projects.

## **Founder's son cont.**

It also furnishes vehicles to drivers who buy them through a payroll-deduction plan. The benefit sometimes needs a bit of arm-twisting to make it work.

"There are occasions when drivers default, and that may be the reason I needed to get to Mississippi," England said.

"He's an 86-year-old repo man," said Dan England, the company's chairman of the board and Gene England's son.

"And I don't carry a gun," Gene England said.

England is 14 years older than the next oldest driver on C. R. England's payroll. That doesn't concern Chad England, who runs the company's safe driving and recruiting programs. His grandfather has passed a battery of tests for vision, hearing, cognitive function and strength. When Gene England is home, he walks 2 miles a day, and when he's on the road, he and June split meals in order to keep their weight down.

Earlier this month, he underwent a road test administered by an automotive technologies instructor at Utah Valley State College.

"Not to our surprise, nor to dad's surprise, he came through just fine," Dan England said.

Gene England isn't eager to give up driving. He attributes his passion for trucks and driving to his father, Chester, who put Gene to work at an early age, but always made him feel like a partner.

"I'll drive as long as I feel like I'm safe, and that requires a certain amount of judgment," he said.

"I hope I have the sense to recognize if I'm not capable. So it won't be easy. I've got to stay on the ball."

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About C. R. England

The Salt Lake City trucking company runs refrigerated trucks coast to coast and into Mexico  
2,900 trucks, 4,400 trailers, 2,900 employees and 1,600 independent drivers.

Reportedly the nation's biggest hauler of refrigerated cargo