

ARKANSAS TRUCKING CHAMPIONSHIP



*Technician
Tests*

Water bottles, electrolyte-filled drinks, snacks and cooling towels were passed out to attendees and participants to ensure everyone was hydrated and healthy. Despite the heat, spirits were high. Tom Merrill, a veteran truck driver in the business for 42 years and a third-time participant at the ATC, loves competitions and looks forward to them every year. "I love to compete. I'll outrun you to the office if you want," Merrill said with a grin, despite just finishing his pre-trip inspection in the energy-draining heat. Merrill is an example of what this competition means to drivers.

COMRADERY IS EVERYTHING

Sweat drips off of concentrated brows, truck doors slam shut, conversations are heard, laughter echoes and the sun beats down from above on the exhausted but thrilled drivers below at the Arkansas Trucking Championship (ATC) of 2022.

Due to COVID-19 hitting in 2020, the ATC has not been held for two years, making this year its return. It was held at the Convention Center in Rogers, AK this year with the Arkansas Trucking Association hosting it as it does annually. The summer sun heat may not have made it the most comfortable time, but truckers "trucked" on with their pre-trip inspections, technician tests, skill courses and written exams.



*Pre-Trip
Inspection*

"I love this here. I'm doing everything I can to make sure I get back here," Merrill stated. He highlighted that to return every year, one has to not be in any accidents or hit anything that could potentially disqualify them. "What this championship does is make you a better driver when you're back at your workplace," he said confidently. There lies one of the main purposes of this whole event: to keep truck drivers, safe drivers. However, there is more to this championship than the competition itself.

The desire to perform the best was certainly there but sportsmanship never faltered. Truck drivers would joke with one another in the "bullpen" while waiting for their turn and would ask how someone did after they finished a test. Rookies were the ones to jest with the veterans and even vice versa. Various ages and demographics were present at the event in community with one another.

Even though the energy and interactions between the competitors were mainly amusing, veterans also ensured they passed on their advice and tricks of the trade to the next generation and newcomers. "You do everything you can to remind them of things to help them...even though they're gonna beat you," said Merrill with a chuckle in the end. Despite the rookies teasing the generations before them, they appear to respect the experienced drivers such as Merrill and listen to their advice with an open mind.

Merrill commented on this comradery saying, "One takeaway would be getting to see the same people, just the comradery of the competition." One could tell by the exhausted smile on his face just how much the community of this event means to him and all truck drivers.



*Tom Merrill
after his pre-
trip inspection*





The relationship among fellow drivers is what resides at the heart of these championships. If one loses to another, they will cheer on the winner. No amount of sweat, heat or jesting will hold back the smiles of truck drivers at these championships.

Written by Sky Seaman (2022)

Photos by Sky Seaman



*Clean & colorful
trucks bordered the
outside events*

*Written Exam
portion was held
inside*

