RECOVERY race

Invited by DigiCore, Sally Assheton-Smith, assistant editor of *FOCUS on Transport and Logistics* magazine, headed for Wesbank Raceway to experience the tracking capabilities of the company's world-class systems first hand

As the chopper blades sliced through the air, a mini whirl-wind seemed to coax my passage towards the awaiting helicopter, and while the pilot negotiated the bird into the air, I took a moment to replay the day's events in my mind.

In association with the Road Freight Association's Truckers' Day, which was held at Wesbank Raceway on October 22, 2005, DigiCore performed a mock truck hijacking. As a representative of *FOCUS on Transport and Logistics* magazine, I was invited to participate under the guise of a suspected criminal. The goal of the exercise: to test the capabilities of the company's technologically advanced tracking and recovery equipment.

The three unusual suspects – myself, the driver, and one of DigiCore's technicians – piled into the specified truck. The plan was to head out of the raceway for approximately 30 minutes, in whatever direction took our fancy. The technician would then contact the control room, pretending to be the concerned owner of the vehicle, and report the so-called theft.

When the time limit lapsed, the technician's role was to locate the C-track unit in the dashboard and disconnect the GSM tracking device – a task he performed like a true criminal in the making! Although DigiCore's highly advanced equipment can pinpoint a vehicle's position to within 10 metres, my obvious question was: "How does DigiCore pursue the vehicle without GSM?" Ah, now that's a secret that this service provider is reluctant to share! And, I don't blame them one bit – this is just the type of innovative thinking that gives DigiCore the edge on its competitors. No wonder the South African Insurance Association (SAIA) and the Vehicle Security Association of South Africa (VESA) have given DigiCore's entire product range and supporting infrastructure the thumbs up.

While DigiCore staff at Wesbank Raceway put their advanced computer equipment to work tracking the vehicle, we continue to speed away. To make the chase even more challenging for the recovery team, the would-be hijacker made a sudden and dramatic change to our travel route. But this did not deter DigiCore in the least, and, within minutes, the chopper was hovering overhead and the ground crew was hot on our heels, ordering the driver to pull to the side of the road.

Keeping it real, the ground crew held us at (unloaded) gunpoint. The realistic nature of the scene drew the attention of two undercover cops, who were more than willing to offer their assistance in what they deemed to be a very serious offence. Thankfully, the situation was explained before I went into cardiac arrest, and, after the adrenalin rush had subsided, I was escorted to the awaiting helicopter.

The chopper returned me to DigiCore's Truckers' Day stand. There I had the chance to heap praises on DigiCore's system and backup staff, before a bevy of onlookers. But I did a little more than that – I put pen to paper and signed up for C-Track Secure myself, knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that my pride and joy would be in safe hands.

Above: The technician locates the tracking unit in the dashboard and disconnects the GSM.
Right: The DigiCore ground crew performs a mock arrest of the so-called suspects.

C-TRACK
drives down UK costs

Thames Water, the largest water and wastewater services supplier in the UK, has achieved substantial reductions in fuel consumption following the installation last year of a vehicle tracking and fleet management system across approximately 1 200 fleet vehicles. The solution, utilising DigiCore's C-track system as part of a wider efficiency programme, has

As part of a wider efficiency programme, Digicore's C-track system has cut Thames Water's fuel usage by almost ten percent.

enabled Thames Water to cut fuel usage by almost ten percent, equating to 161 000 litres of diesel fuel.

In addition, significant environmental benefits have also been realised as a result of these fleet savings, with a reduction in carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions of approximately 429 tons. Thames Water is committed to achieving best practice in environmental management, and this CO_2 cut forms part of its drive to minimise greenhouse gas emissions.

Last year, Thames Water selected DigiCore to develop a telematics-based vehicle tracking and fleet management solution that would support the company's ongoing efficiency programme through the optimisation of its fleet operation. C-track – Digicore's response to the Thames Water challenge – is a sophisticated fleet management system that adopts the latest technology to provide a comprehensive real-time vehicle management tool. This proven solution provides vital information about mobile assets and workforce, and offers a scaleable mobile solution that meets the complex needs of car, van and commercial vehicle fleet operators.

To date, the C-track solution has been installed in approximately 1 200 vehicles operated by the company's service engineers. It is designed to allow Thames Water to increase productivity, reduce overheads and achieve tangible operating efficiencies.

RELIABLE rentals

DigiCore's C-track has raised safety and customer service levels at Woodford Vehicle Rentals in Pinetown, while simultaneously ensuring a decrease in vehicle abuse, fuel consumption and accidents.

Pinetown-based Woodford Motors, trading as Woodford Vehicle Rentals, does more than its name suggests. Over and above commercial vehicle rentals, the company also provides transport, distribution and other logistics-related services.

Only five years old, Woodford already harbours a fleet of 150 commercial vehicles, from bakkies to heavy trucks. A year ago, the company decided to trial DigiCore's C-track system. "We started on a trial basis, and the system sold itself. It has given us complete control of our fleet, and we couldn't do without it today," reports director, Owais Suleman. The system has been fitted to 50 vehicles – particularly those used for distribution and provided under rental contracts that include a driver. Suleman is determined to fit C-track into every new vehicle that enters the fleet.

"C-track has allowed us to eliminate driver abuse, as well as helping us to avoid hijackings," Suleman attests. He details a recent case where a driver reported that he was being followed, and, via the tracking system, Suleman was able put a private

security company on the vehicle's trail. "When the hijackers pounced, the security company was able to cut them off, allowing our vehicle and cargo to escape," he declares. "I also know that even if we had failed to prevent the incident, I would have been able to immobilise the vehicle from a remote location. The C-track system has assisted us in a number of other panic situations too," he adds.

Fuel consumption levels have also benefited from the installation of C-track, as has Woodford's accident ratio. "We are able to provide much better service as a result of the management capabilities of C-track. When a customer enquires about the whereabouts of a vehicle, I am no longer dumbstruck – I have the information the client needs in front of me," continues Suleman.

"The system is excellent; I can't see any operation running professionally without it," says Suleman. And it is not just the product, but also DigiCore's service that has made an impression. "The service we have received has been fantastic, both during office hours and after hours," he concludes.

on TARGET

Bulk liquid transporter, Javelin Transport, installed DigiCore's C-track about three years ago, and has seen great returns from better visibility – most notably, easier planning and management.

Javelin Transport stables 48 workhorses in its yard, all of them hauling bulk liquids. Three years ago, the company installed the first C-track system in a vehicle, aiming to improve fleet management in the operation. Now, the entire fleet benefits from the DigiCore solution. "C-track is fitted to every single one of our trucks, and will be installed into every new vehicle as the fleet expands," confirms Debbie Kimmear, head of productivity at Javelin.

Clearly, Javelin has not been disappointed by the system's performance. "C-track improves security by preventing drivers from straying off route into dangerous areas, and provides convenience because we no longer have to constantly phone the drivers to check their progress – we can simply see it on the tracking system. We can also provide our customers with on-time information about the delivery process. In a fleet of this size, that is essential," Kimmear continues.

"It's actually brilliant – really great," she concludes, "It's a wonderful system that makes life far easier."

C-track ALERT

Since 1992, Alert Trokke has been furnishing the Gauteng province with its range of reliable and robust heavy commercial vehicles for the rental market. Using DigiCore's C-track system, this Pretoria-based company has ensured that the capital investment represented by its fleet remains in safe hands.

"About one-and-a-half years ago we were looking around for a comprehensive fleet management system. Following a good deal of research from our side, we settled on DigiCore. It was the only company to offer us exactly what we were looking for at a competitive price," remarks Gert Stols, owner of Alert Trokke. "I am very satisfied with DigiCore and the service that they have provided to us. We have fitted the system to 20 percent of our fleet, and I can say that we have had absolutely no problems. It has saved us a great deal of cost as well as boosting our productivity."

C-track is fitted to every one of Javelin Transport's 48 workhorses.

Municipal management

C-track assists the Ilembe District Municipality in managing its social services and utility infrastructure along the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal

Drive through Stanger on the north coast's buzzing vacation route and you will be an unwitting guest of the Ilembe District Munipality, which is responsible for community development, water and sanitation services, and disaster management in this sunny seaside region.

The municipality uses a fleet of 88 vehicles – eight water tankers and scores of bakkies – to support its duties in the area, and has installed C-track to optimise fleet management and prevent driver abuse. Currently, the system is fitted to 48 vehicles, including four of the tankers. "Some of our vehicles are very old and installing C-track in a depreciated truck would not be a sound investment," notes Johan van der Merwe, transport officer for Ilembe District Municipality "However, we will be fitting the system to a further 10 vehicles within the next two months," he adds.

"There have been a number of benefits to installing the DigiCore fleet management system," says Van der Merwe. "Our accident rate has diminished, and vehicle abuse has decreased because the guys know we are monitoring their acitivities. If driving behaviour does not meet our standards, we print out the tracking report and hand it to the manager of the driver in question, demanding an explanation. We have also had great success with traffic fines as a result of the C-track system. There were previously problems with fleet vehicles exceeding the speed limit, but because of the record kept by C-track, drivers can no longer contest the claims of their traffic fines. We simply compare the speeding ticket with the tracking report, and come to a conclusion that cannot be argued over. Drivers now have to pay their own fines," reports Van der Merwe. He is also happy to report that the only vehicle hijacked since his appointment at the municipality was recovered with the help of C-track.

"DigiCore's staff are always helpful, and really know their product," says Van der Merwe. "I am pleased with the performance of the system, and am looking into the benefits of DigiCore's latest GPRS technology," he concludes.

Supercharged management

The next time you casually flick on a light switch, spare a thought for TSI Vegetation Management – the company that prevents power failures by clearing the bush below Eskom powerlines. In turn, TSI uses C-track to ensure driver behaviour does not short-circuit its operational goals

"When we brought in a new fleet of LDVs, DigiCore came in to demonstrate the C-track product, and provided some demos," says Frikkie van Rooyen, asset manager at TSI Vegetation Management. That was around the turn of the millennium – the perfect way to enter a new era. Now, all 250 of the outfit's vehicles are fitted with C-track, and the aim is to install the system in every new fleet vehicle. "We are definitely satisfied with the product's performance," reports Van Rooyen.

"Our main motivation for using the system is the fleet management side," he continues. "We are able to monitor after-hours driving – fleet vehicles are for business purposes only and not for personal use. We can also keep track of speeding and excess idling, which occurs mainly in winter, when drivers sit in stationary vehicles with the heater on." When accidents do occur, the company is able to establish driver responsibility by generating a report and drawing conclusions from vehicle activity during the relevant time period. And, due to the positive effect of the C-track system on driving behaviour, TSI Vegetation Management has benefited from reduced fuel costs. "Through the tracking system, we limit driving speed to 100 km per hour," says Van Rooyen. "As a result, fuel consumption has gone down since we installed the systems in 2000."

Although the company did not install C-track specifically for recovery tracking purposes, it has managed to recover several vehicles with the help of the system. And when it comes to after-sales backup, Van Rooyen is a happy man. "I really can't complain about DigiCore's service," he concludes.

consolidating SECURITY

Where the security of vehicles and cargo is concerned, DigiCore can save the day, as Pretoria-based haulier, Consolidated Freight North, has discovered.

If it were not for Consolidated Freight North, there would be far fewer vehicles on our roads today. The company transports motor vehicle components for the motor industry, consolidating the cargo at all the major centres and then distributing the parts to various vehicle manufacturers.

In 1999, Consolidated Freight North decided to buy into a fleet management and tracking service to ensure the security of its cargo. "Vehicle security was our motivation – we carry high-value products and it is essential that they be kept safe," reports Lance Robertson, managing director of the company. "We compared the different systems that were available, and DigiCore came out on top," he continues.

It was a good investment – three vehicles have been hijacked since, and all of them were successfully recovered using C-track. "The system has been fitted to all 115 vehicles in our fleet, and to the three additional vehicles we recently purchased," notes Robertson. He is thrilled with DigiCore's product, and lists a number of benefits he has seen. "We are able to monitor the vehicles' routes, and the time taken to complete deliveries," he says. "This allows us to provide incontrovertible evidence to clear our name if anyone along the supply chain misrepresents the facts about turnaround time and delays. Sadly, falsehoods about the time of pick-up and drop-off are not uncommon. But nobody can argue with the fleet management system's report."

Consolidated Freight North is fortunate to employ some of the best drivers in South Africa. "Luckily, we haven't experienced a history of vehicle abuse, so the system has not had an enormous impact on driver behaviour," says Robertson. Nevertheless, he monitors speed, revs, unauthorised stopping and any movement outside of designated areas. Dedicated on-site staff keep an eye on the tracking system to ensure that nothing goes unnoticed. And DigiCore's support has made a great impression in recent years. "In the last three years, service has been excellent," adds Robertson.