

Truckie's fatal flaws exposed
By Tim Dick and Daniel Lewis
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David Lawler's 18-tonne truck was known to be unregistered more than a month before it smashed into 35 cars on the F3's Mooney Mooney Bridge, killing a grandmother, Ann Parker.

Police and heavy-vehicle inspectors also knew it travelled regularly on the freeway between Sydney and Newcastle.

The Opposition's roads spokesman, Don Page, said last night it was "incredible" that a truck that should not have been on the road went undetected for five weeks.

"Clearly there has been an unsatisfactory systems failure," Mr Page said.

As well as the coronial inquiry now taking place into the fatal accident, Mr Page said there needed to be a fully independent inquiry into truck monitoring and compliance on the state's roads.

Mr Lawler - who has not been charged over the October 22 accident - was also pulled over on September 3 and booked for speeding, but on that occasion police failed to check his number plates, a Channel Nine report said last night.

And in 2001, Mr Lawler was convicted of having number plates calculated to deceive.

The *Herald* understands that on the afternoon of September 13, his truck failed to proceed to a weighbridge at the RTA's Mount White checking station on the F3.

The Volvo truck had registration plates which checks revealed belonged to another truck that had had its registration cancelled in 2000.

A check of safety-camera data revealed numerous sightings of the truck, which suggests it travelled frequently on the F3 between Sydney and Newcastle. Staff at the station then contacted Newcastle police about the truck being unregistered and having false number plates.

On the day of the accident, Mr Lawler's truck was weighed at Mount White but allowed to proceed without any other check because it was within its weight limits.

A short time later, after the truck's brakes seemed to fail, Mr Lawler smashed into the cars, killing Mrs Parker.

Her son, John Lund, told Channel Nine the situation was "pathetic". "I mean, is anyone doing their job at all? I don't understand that. This obviously could've been prevented in so many ways.

"I've had enough emotion going through my body over the past week, but this makes my blood boil. It's disgusting."

An RTA spokeswoman told the *Herald* yesterday that the authority had not completed its investigation of either the truck's or its driver's history or reported to the coroner. It was therefore inappropriate to comment on speculation in the media, she said.

On Wednesday, the Roads Minister, Carl Scully, told Parliament the performance of the RTA's safety systems was clearly something for the coroner to consider, as was the performance of the police.

Mr Page said the technology linking weighbridges with registration data needed to be looked at. "Even if a vehicle's not overweight, if it's not registered, it's not safe," he said. "There's a connection between registration and roadworthiness."

Drugs seized from highway death truck

By KARA LAWRENCE Police Reporter

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POLICE believe tests will show drugs found in the cabin of a truck that caused a fatal pile-up at Mooney Mooney included morphine.

The Daily Telegraph can exclusively reveal police will allege the drug package was recovered from the cabin of David Lawler's rig, which smashed into 35 vehicles and killed 52-year-old Anne Parker on the F3.

It is understood toxicology tests are under way to determine whether Mr Lawler had morphine or any other drug in his system at the time of the crash.

Meanwhile, witnesses at the scene of the accident have described how several number plates were also seized from the unregistered rig's cabin.

A number belonged to vehicles which were unrelated to Mr Lawler.

The Daily Telegraph understands Mr Lawler had previously reported to police that the number plates to his rig had been stolen.

However, police will allege they discovered after the fatal crash that he had kept the allegedly stolen plates.

Plate swapping – an illegal practise – is sometimes used in the long-haul trucking industry to prevent tracking of the truck's movements.

Channel 9 news last night revealed Mr Lawler was the subject of an urgent report written by RTA inspectors well before last Friday's crash.

An RTA confidential report revealed the Volvo truck's number plate VWF 556 was in fact registered to a panel van on the Central Coast. The trailer's plate, L88 889, belonged on the back of a box trailer registered in Penrith.

Ten days later Mr Lawlor was directed by RTA inspectors to pull into the Mt White weigh station and inspectors noted anomalies with his load.

He was ordered to pull over for a more detailed inspection but accelerated back on to the F3.

Channel 9 said a report by one of the inspectors revealed that Mr Lawlor's rig again had false number plates, registered to a 1982 model Hino truck.

When *The Daily Telegraph* visited Mr Lawlor's Merewether home last night a young man, who said he was not Mr Lawlor's son, said Mr Lawlor would not be commenting

