



"When it is time for an order to begin production, all of the components are cut out and marked for that job and they are all kept close to the build bay so you are not constantly walking components like chassis rails through other jobs in progress, which makes for a safer workplace as well," Mick says.

Despite not talking about his age too much, Mick says things have changed in trailer construction.

"In the old days weight was not an issue, and we were never too concerned about making the trailers too flexible, in fact we used to build them like a German tank," he says.

But over the years the biggest evolution in design has been the reduction of tare weight,

which in turn presents challenges of twist and flex in the frame and chassis.

"Now, the focus is payload and efficiency, we are now going so far as looking at the type of bearing grease we use."

Matching the suspension with the trailer frames is another area where the company has had considerable success. O'Phee offers a unique frame to suspension match that results in light tare, high performance, high stability, low maintenance and reduced tyre wear.

The choice of tyres supplied with an O'Phee trailer is also a consideration, with the company offering Bridgestone as the default option.

"The actual tyre will vary depending on the application, but we do investigate tyre life and rolling resistance to offer the customer the best all-round performance and economy we can," says Mick.

While there is plenty of discussion and negotiation with suppliers about the next phase of development, O'Phee says there is still some trial and error when it comes to finalising a new design.

"We have had to change our factory structure and processes to become smarter, and deal with the challenges we face," he says. "Factory size is not everything, good teams and processes can also provide savings and efficiencies in what we do."

Sometimes the company can suffer from "city syndrome", O'Phee says, which can have a big impact on costs and how they operate in the modern age.

"We need to have water saving plans in place, adhere strongly to EPA regulations, which is fine and are all part of running a business in today's world, unfortunately these are all issues that a small or country manufacturer does not face," he explains.

As an example, O'Phee says they are in regular contact with their paint supplier which is constantly reviewing

its own processes to ensure they are environmentally friendly.

"We are always looking for paints that will last longer, but there are also issues of ensuring they are not giving off nasty by-products," he says.

When it is time for a trailer to be painted, O'Phee Trailers use a high-tech paint booth built inside its service and repair facility.

"We designed this unit so that it draws air in from the atmosphere," O'Phee says. "It is heated to a constant temperature and also has the moisture removed to aid the paint drying process."

The booth also uses large extractor fans to draw the air out via multi-stage filters, to ensure there are no chemicals or paint molecules left when the exhaust air is allowed back into the environment.

"We do our best to make sure everything we do is controlled and to be environmentally responsible, while continuing to offer a quality product to our clients," he says.

Regulatory impacts also stretch beyond environmental issues, O'Phee says, and can also cover materials handling strategies.

"In the past we could buy a single 25-litre drum of paint, and that would be perfect for a single trailer, but then the weight limits were reviewed and we could not get that size anymore. It meant we had to look at one large and one small drum per job, with a bit left over, which can then impact your costings," he says.

Being available to customers when they are needed is also important, O'Phee says, which is why mobile phone numbers and e-mail addresses are published.

"It is a fast-moving world, people want answers immediately, and I think they appreciate being able to ring the owners if necessary when they have a question or concern." ■

