

Becoming a Lady Flatbedder

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There are more and more women entering into flatbedding as more solo women drivers enter the industry. Flatbedding is a constant challenge both physically, intellectually and mentally.

The job description for a flatbedder is:

Must be able to lift 75 to 100 lbs above shoulder level, be agile enough to be able to climb loads, have understanding of load placement, securement, and DOT regulations concerning flatbeds, endure working in extreme weather conditions, have good common sense and judgment, be able to adjust driving style to individual loads.

Women drivers face discrimination at some level on the road, but the fact that there are few lady flatbedders and that one is in steel mills and job sites where testosterone is in over abundance, one has to have a thick skin and the ability to roll with the flow. The loaders and such you will be working with are not used to dealing with women drivers and one must be able to stand one's ground at times.

Pulling flats for 6 yrs both team and solo, was probably the most enjoyable years in trucking for me. I learned a whole new way of doing things and found the comadery with other flatbedders that I had thought gone in the industry. Flatbedders will usually help out another flatbedder if asked.

The main complaint I have heard about women drivers is that we cannot do 'all aspects of the job'. One day, in a busy load yard, I saw another female flatbedder getting her load put on the deck. I noticed that she hadn't gotten any chains and binders ready or her tarps out. As soon as the loader was done, she climbed in her truck, and a few minutes later came out with daisy dukes and a halter top on. She went and stood by her trailer. It wasn't a whipstitch of time before she had four male drivers over chaining and tarping her load while she stood back and watched. Were the guys stupid for doing it? Sure, and she might of thought she got the job done at no cost but did she?

When one of us does something like the above woman, it perpetuates the myth that we are weak and incapable of doing the job properly. Furthermore, it further widens the gap in our acceptance as equals by our brother drivers, shippers and receivers. Thus if you are going to flatbed...do the job.

A few things specific to lady flatbedders that need to be known. Steel dust embeds in pores and looks like blackheads. No matter how good a pair of leather gloves you wear, calluses will build up, use good facial cleansers and face and hand creams to battle the dirt, calluses and weather damage. Long nails are a hazard to your hand's health...keep your nails short. You will be working around steel, oil and other various staining materials that you haul. Tarps, straps, chains, and binders are rusty and dirty and you will be constantly handling them throughout the day. Wear good serviceable clothing that is stain resistant and can take repeated washings. Good fitting leather gloves and work boots are mandatory. Finally, a lot of the mills and job sites you will be going to do not have restroom facilities. Carry a porta potty or a sealable container for those times.

Women make great flatbedders. If you decide to pull flats, ask for help when you need it, always add that extra strap or chain even if you don't think you need it, and always, when you hear a shouted 'look out' move first and find out why later.