

## Maintaining their pivotal role

Forwarders are still up for the challenge, just as they were in 1971, says Peter Quantrill

The last four decades have seen the freight industry adapt as the consumer has become all-powerful.

BIFA members daily use laptops, PCs, scanning devices and mobile phones with technological prowess and memory capacity that was the domain of science fiction back in 1971. All are now firmly entrenched in a global supply chain that is delivering from Australia to Zaire.

When I started reading *IFW* 40 years ago, I worked in an office that was typical of the business world in 1971: one of my clearest memories was the noise – clattering manual typewriters and telex machines, the continual old-fashioned ring of a telephone bell. The ubiquitous and almost noiseless computerisation that we rely on today, was almost non-existent.

Containerisation, both in sea and air freight was just taking off. Now we have teus as the basic measure of surface freight activity and the ULD as the essential component of air freight.

Even 40 years on, freight forwarding remains, at its core, about the safe, timely and cost-effective movement of cargo for the wider and greater good of the economy. Clearly this mission statement has not changed one iota since I started reading *IFW*.

What *has* changed, of course, is the hardware with which we in the freight forwarding industry deliver this outcome.

While we still move freight in the same quartet of major modes – aircraft, road, rail and shipping – so much has changed for each mode since the early 1970s. I would suggest three main areas have come on since *IFW*'s launch – speed, capacity and traceability.

BIFA members can despatch freight at a pace unheard of in the 1970s. Overnight



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trucking and the growing expressway network throughout much of Europe means freight can truly be moved 24/7 through depots and networks undreamed off then.

I don't have to remind BIFA members and *IFW* readers of the quantum leap in the capacity now afforded throughout the network. Ports and railheads have yards that hold tens of thousands of containers, the world's vast passenger aircraft fleet offers cavernous bellyhold capacity, while the largest boxships afloat offer staggering container loading capabilities.

However, bearing in mind how I started this retrospective, the most incredible changes have been produced in order to adapt the industry to the demands of both the shipper and the consumer.

Of course, when I started reading *IFW*, we could trace cargo once it had set off on its journey. We might know what truck it was meant to be on, what ship it might have been loaded on and that it had arrived, or not, at the consignee's location. Often, though, we