

Pros and Cons of Pulling Various Types of Trailers

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As a professional driver, I see these as the pros and cons of pulling various types of trailers.

I. Refrigerated vans (“reefers”)

- Pros:
 - You can get some really good coast to coast miles, especially with produce coming from California.
 - Reefers can haul almost anything: refrigerated and dry goods.
 - With a generic trailer and company name, no one knows just exactly what you may be hauling in that box.
 - Many reefers are air-ride; those can be a joy to pull.
 - You will be moving when others are sitting because you can haul almost anything.
 - Securing the load is easy. Put two load bars in. Close the doors and you’re gone.
 - No matter how bad the economy gets, food still has to be shipped. People have to eat.
- Cons:
 - The refrigerator unit can be very noisy behind your cab and may make other drivers that you park next to very upset! (FWIW, when I pulled a reefer, the unit just stayed on rather than cycle on and off; I had no problems sleeping in front of one.)
 - When the unit goes out and your strawberries start to grow those pesky whiskers! Supermarkets don't like to see that!
 - You might have to wait at some distributors quite a while to get unloaded.
 - You may have to axle out a heavy load.
 - Sweeping out the trailer can be a real bear. However, 99.9% of the time if the floor needs cleaning, you take it and have it washed out, which is real easy.
 - You must remember to check unit and fuel.

II. Flatbeds:

- Pros:
 - Drivers do not hand unload their freight!
 - There might not be a lot of backing; I see a lot of places where a flatbed just pulls in and they can unload him right where he is.
 - You might have some oversized loads; depending on your perspective, oversized loads can be either a lot of fun or a headache.
 - The potential for hauling HazMat on flatbeds is very small but does exist.
- Cons:
 - The types of freight hauled on a flatbed sometimes require drivers to maneuver in tight spaces, like construction sites.
 - The potential for hauling oversized loads (which require greater skill to haul).
 - Most flatbed loads must be strapped and tarped, no matter the weather: wind, rain, snow/ice, 100 degree temperatures, you get the idea.
 - Do you really want to climb WAYYYY up there on top of your trailer?
 - High, strong winds can carry you and your tarp off!
 - It’s a pain to fold tarps in winter weather.
 - In places where a lot of flatbed freight goes in but reefer freight goes out, you may have to sit and wait on a load.

III. Dry vans:

- Pros:
 - Many drivers with dry vans enjoy “drop and hook” loads. Drop an empty; hook up to a loaded trailer and vice versa. Off you go!
 - Some types of freight, like produce, aren’t hauled in dry vans. No strawberries, no whiskers from spoiling!
 - Smooth, level wooden floors usually make sweeping out dry vans a breeze.
 - No loads are tarped or strapped down; just close the doors, seal the load, and go.
 - You won’t have to worry about extra weight from a reefer cabinet or fuel tank underneath.
 - When using a generic trailer and company name, your load’s identity is more protected and secure.
 - Some dry vans are air-ride; those can be a joy to pull. (Personal note: My company has definitely been heading this way, based on my recommendation.)
- Cons:
 - You might have to sit awhile in a dock waiting to get loaded or unloaded.
 - You might have a fair amount of HazMat to haul, depending on your company.
 - Heavy loads must be axled out, especially on a 53' trailer. Since dry vans can carry more weight than the reefers, their loads can be heavier.
 - A shipper may reject a trailer with wooden walls depending on the commodity being shipped.
 - Fighting to close warped doors on old ragged-out trailers is a pain.
 - When delivering directly to stores, loading and unloading times may be by appointment only, and may take awhile.
 - Leaf spring trailers will “beat you to death,” compared to the comfort of air ride trailers.

IV. Tankers

- Pros:
 - Drivers do not hand unload tankers; they just hook up a hose and let ‘er flow!
 - There is no need to slide trailer tandems because they are immovable.
- Cons:
 - Tanker drivers haul LOTS of HazMat.
 - The potential for a rollover is huge because of the “slosh factor.”
 - Because liquids are unloaded (drained) by gravity vs. being loaded under pressure, unloading usually takes much longer than loading.
 - Hoses that are exposed to the weather can become extremely dirty.
 - There is always a potential for leaks, which can result in big fines.

Some of these ideas are based on what I have personally experienced in pulling dry vans, reefers, and tankers.

Listen to what other drivers say about their experiences in hauling different types of trailers. Feel free to ask them why they pull what they pull and then make your decision.

All the best to you as you complete school and come out here into the wonderful world of professional driving!